Dietrich of Apolda, O.P.

THE LIFE OF SAINT ELIZABETH OF HUNGARY, IN EIGHT BOOKS

Vita sanctae Elisabeth

From the Latin printed in the Thesaurus monumentorum ecclesiasticorum et historicorum, ed. J. Basnage, vol. IV (Amsterdam, 1725)

English translation

Contributed to Mind of the Church by a friend of the library who wishes to remain anonymous

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About this translation

Saint Elizabeth of Hungary was born in 1207, the daughter of King Andrew II of Hungary. At the age of four she was sent to the court of the Landgrave of Thuringia, in central Germany, to be brought up as the future wife of his son Louis. They were married in 1221, when she was fourteen and he twenty, and by every account they loved each other deeply. Elizabeth gave herself to prayer, penance, and above all to the poor and the sick, with her husband's full support. In 1227 Louis died of fever in southern Italy on his way to the crusade. Elizabeth, a widow at twenty, left the court, made a vow to give up the world, and moved to Marburg in Hesse. There she built a hospital and spent her last years nursing the sick with her own hands under the stern direction of her confessor, Master Conrad of Marburg. She died on the night of 16–17 November 1231, at twenty-four. Miracles were soon reported at her tomb, and Pope Gregory IX declared her a saint in 1235. Her feast is kept on 17 November.

The author. Dietrich (in Latin, Theodoricus) of Apolda was a Dominican friar of the convent at Erfurt in Thuringia, the same country in which Elizabeth had lived. He was born at Apolda, near Weimar, about 1228, and entered the Order of Preachers as a young man, about 1247. He also wrote a life of Saint Dominic, the founder of his order. He tells us in his Prologue that he began this book in 1289, "the fifty-ninth year after the passing of blessed Elizabeth," when he had been forty-two years in the Order. He was then about sixty, and his eyes were growing dim. He finished it in the 1290s, by about 1297.

Why he wrote it. By Dietrich's time there were already several short accounts of Elizabeth: the letter of Conrad of Marburg to the Pope (the *Summa vitae*), the sworn testimony of her four handmaids (the *Libellus de dictis quatuor ancillarum*), the records of the canonization, and some sermons. But, as he complains, they were brief and scattered, and they took for granted names, places, and dates that later readers no longer knew. So Dietrich set out to write a full, orderly life. He used the older writings, often word for word, and added what he learned from chronicles, from letters, and from "very old and truthful persons" whom he went out to question. He also gave a whole book to Elizabeth's husband, Louis, whom Thuringia remembered as a good and pious prince.

The result was the most complete and the most widely read life of Saint Elizabeth in the Middle Ages. Many manuscripts of it survive, and it was soon translated into German and other languages. Most of the famous stories about her come to us through Dietrich: the cloak given to a beggar and returned from heaven, the faint before the crucifix, her eviction from the Wartburg, the visit of the Hungarian count who found the king's daughter spinning wool, the little bird that sang to her before her death. (The well-known "miracle of the roses," in which bread she was carrying to the poor turned to roses, is a later legend and is not found here.) Dietrich writes as a preacher and a lover of his subject. He enjoys Bible phrases, rhyming sentences, and exclamations of wonder. Now and then he passes on a tale he cannot check, such as the old story of the magician Klingsor in Chapter 1. But he is honest about his sources. And because he had read the eyewitness accounts and talked with people who remembered her, much of what he tells rests on good testimony.

How the work is arranged. Dietrich divided the work into eight short books. Book One tells of Elizabeth's birth and childhood; Book Two, her married life; Book Three, the virtues of her husband Louis, and her care for the poor during the great famine; Book Four, his departure on crusade, his death, and her sufferings as a widow; Book Five, the return of his bones and the attempts to make her marry again; Book Six, her renunciation of the world and her hospital at Marburg; Book Seven, her charity, obedience, and prayer; and Book Eight, her death, her canonization, the raising of her relics in 1236, and her miracles.

The Latin text. This translation was made directly from the Latin text printed in the *Thesaurus monumentorum ecclesiasticorum et historicorum, sive Henrici Canisii Lectiones antiquae*, edited by Jacques Basnage, volume 4 (Amsterdam, 1725), pages 116–152. Basnage reprinted the edition first published by Henricus Canisius in his *Lectiones antiquae* (Ingolstadt, 1601–1604), which Canisius made from two

manuscripts, from the monasteries of Rebdorf near Eichstätt and of Saint Mang at Regensburg. The chapter titles are those of the printed text. Basnage's own footnotes, which are often scornful of the saint, and the marginal notes of the old edition are left out.

About this translation. The translator has tried to keep close to Dietrich's meaning while writing plain modern English. He quotes and echoes the Bible constantly, often without saying so; the notes point out the main passages, using the familiar chapter numbers of modern Bibles. The notes also explain names, places, and customs, and give dates where they help. The notes are the translator's.

Prologue

Here begins the prologue to the book on the life of blessed Elizabeth.

When I had begun to search out the life and ways, the death and the miracles of blessed Elizabeth, certain writings about these things were brought to me: namely, the little book composed of the sayings of her four handmaids, and also the letter that Master Conrad of Marburg wrote to the lord Pope Gregory the Ninth about her life, death, and miracles.[1] In them is found a truth that is pure and simple and in harmony with the faith. Yet I confess that in them my desire was not satisfied. For in them the persons, their families, names, ranks, and offices are not set down; nor are the different provinces, places, and times described, nor the names of the things that belong to a history. These things the writers left out because at that time they were very well known to them, although now they would be necessary for us.

How, then, will what is incomplete satisfy the reader? Nor is there any joining together there of matters that belong to the same subject; everything is set down scattered, just as it came to the memory of the person telling it. For these things were written down under the oath of those who told them, in the way that the statements of witnesses are usually taken.

I also read a sermon of Brother Otto of the Order of Preachers, a most learned and devout man, which begins, "A valiant woman"; and another sermon by someone else, which begins, "To the glory and honor."[2] In these I found some of her deeds briefly mentioned.

I looked through the chronicles written by various authors as well, wishing to find what I was seeking. Then, since I did not find where the foot of my desire might rest,[3] I visited monasteries of monks and of nuns, I went to cities, castles, and towns; I questioned very old and truthful persons; I sent letters, searching in all these things for the completeness of this history and the truth of what was done.

In the year of the Lord's Incarnation 1289, the fifty-ninth year after the passing of blessed Elizabeth, I began to write in praise of these things. I set aside very little of what I had in writing; but what was unarranged and scattered I arranged; what was out of order I put in order; what was not divided I divided; and what was unpolished I adorned as well as I could. I inserted and added many things, and fitted them to the subject as I thought suitable, stating the ranks, names, and offices of the persons, the names of the places, and the times.

Some things I set down word for word, just as I found them in the writings; some I also changed; and gathering things of every kind into one, I compiled this little work.

I testify before God and his elect angels[4] that I have put nothing in this little book except what I could obtain from the writings of trustworthy authors, and what I learned from religious persons who were very truthful.

I heard some remarkable miracles which I was afraid to write down because those who told them were doubtful witnesses.

I also thought it most fitting (and I have done so) to record something about the goodness of the most illustrious prince Louis, Landgrave, the husband of this same blessed Elizabeth, who was the most faithful promoter and helper of all her good works. For the needs and the course of the history demanded this.

So, at the urging of certain honorable and devout persons, I, Dietrich, priest, the least brother of the Order of Preachers, wrote the present little work when I had completed forty-two years in the Order.

I thought it all through in my own mind, writing everything down alone and rewriting a great deal again and again with my own hand, though my eyes were growing dim.

I have divided it into eight little books because of the great amount of material, so that its length would not cause weariness; and yet the material has not yet been fully set out as its dignity would require.

For apart from a very few, I have passed over countless miracles, all of which were done at her tomb and elsewhere through her merits. From these alone a work as long as the one written here could certainly have been put together and written.

Finally, I confess that I, who am unworthy, have set out these lofty and great works of grace in a rough and half-finished way. I wish and hope that someone will come after me who, reading these things with compassion, will correct and improve them with a more learned style and more graceful eloquence.

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[1] These are the two oldest sources for Elizabeth's life. Conrad of Marburg, her confessor, sent his short account (often called the *Summa vitae*) to Pope Gregory IX in 1232. The *Libellus de dictis quatuor ancillarum*, the "Sayings of the Four Handmaids," gathers the sworn testimony of her serving women Guda, Isentrud, Elizabeth, and Irmgard, taken for her canonization in 1235.

[2] "A valiant woman, who can find?" (Proverbs 31:10). The Dominican Otto's sermon is otherwise unknown; Dietrich used both sermons as sources.

[3] An echo of Genesis 8:9, where the dove sent out from the ark "found no place where her foot might rest."

[4] 1 Timothy 5:21.

The Contents of the Eight Books

The first little book contains the state of blessed Elizabeth's maidenhood before her marriage.

The second, the holiness of her marriage and some of her famous deeds.

The third, the virtues and the greatness of the illustrious prince Louis, Landgrave, her husband.

The fourth, his pilgrimage and death, and what blessed Elizabeth suffered after his death.

The fifth, the bringing back of his bones to Thuringia, and what his widow did after his burial.

The sixth, blessed Elizabeth's move to Marburg and her change from worldly dress.[1]

The seventh, the outstanding perfection of her virtues and the very great humility of her works.

The eighth, her most devout death, her most solemn canonization, her most glorious translation, and the great abundance of her miracles. For all of which may praise and glory be to the Most High Trinity, for ever and ever. Amen.

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[1] The Latin printed here says "Martburg," but the move described in Book Six is to Marburg in Hesse. Dietrich's copyists often confuse Marburg with the Wartburg, the castle above Eisenach, and with Conrad's surname "of Marburg."

Book One

Chapter 1. The nobility of her parents, and how her birth was shown from heaven

Here begins the first book of this work, the Life of Saint Elizabeth.

At the time when Philip, Duke of Swabia, brother of the Emperor Henry, and Otto, son of Henry, once Duke of Bavaria and Saxony, had both been chosen by the princes in a disputed election, and were contending dangerously and with open war over which of them should hold the summit of the Roman Empire,[1] there was in Germany a very illustrious prince, Hermann, Landgrave of Thuringia. He was a vigorous man, fierce against his enemies, and a cousin of Ottokar, King of Bohemia. Supporting first one and then the other of these emperors, and provoking them by turns, he angered them both and stirred them up to war against himself.

In his palace and household there were six knights, not of low birth, of excellent talent, virtuous and honorable in their ways, and supreme composers of songs, who vied with one another in displaying their art.[2]

At that time there lived in the regions of Hungary, in the land called Seven Castles,[3] a certain nobleman, rich, with a yearly income of three thousand marks. He was a philosopher, trained from his earliest years in letters and worldly studies, and learned as well in the sciences of necromancy and astronomy. This man, named Master Klingsor, was brought to Thuringia by the will and pleasure of the princes to judge the songs of the knights just mentioned. One night, before he had gone in to the Landgrave, he was sitting in Eisenach in the courtyard of his lodging and gazing at the stars with great attention. Those who were present asked him to tell them if he had seen any secrets, and he answered: “Know that tonight a daughter is born to the King of Hungary. She will be called Elizabeth, and she will be holy. She will be given in marriage to the son of this prince, and all the earth will rejoice and be lifted up at the proclaiming of her holiness.”

See! He who foretold the mystery of his Incarnation through the soothsayer Balaam[4] foretold through this man the name and the birth of his chosen handmaid Elizabeth.

At that time Andrew reigned as king in Hungary, a man renowned for wealth and power.[5] His wife, named Gertrude, was the daughter of the most noble Duke of Carinthia.[6] Just as the Lord had shown beforehand, she bore a daughter, the glory of her family, who, reborn in Christ, received the name Elizabeth. This was in the year of the Lord’s Incarnation 1207.

Not long after, by the will of God, that chosen one, the holy Elizabeth, while she was still at her mother’s breast, was betrothed to Louis, the firstborn son of Prince Hermann, a boy of excellent character.[7]

So in the fourth year after Elizabeth’s birth, Landgrave Hermann sent solemn and noble envoys of both sexes to Hungary to bring the king’s daughter to Thuringia. The chief of these were Count Meinhard of Mühlberg, the nobleman Walter of Vargula, and the lady Bertha, widow of Egelolf of Bendeleben.

They set out with a large escort and household and abundant baggage, as the excellence of such great nobility required. They were received with the highest honor by the princes, prelates, and great men through whose lands and borders they passed, both on the way there and on the way back. When they came to the king’s castle called Pressburg,[8] they were received joyfully and royally.

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[1] The double election of 1198. Philip of Swabia (brother of the Emperor Henry VI) and Otto of Brunswick (son of Henry the Lion) each claimed the German crown until Philip was murdered in 1208.

[2] This is the famous “Contest of the Singers on the Wartburg” (*Wartburgkrieg*), a legend about the poets at Landgrave Hermann’s court, among them Walther von der Vogelweide and Wolfram von Eschenbach. Wagner later used it in his opera *Tannhäuser*.

[3] Transylvania, called in German *Siebenbürgen*, "Seven Castles." The printed Latin has a misprint here (*voaxtur* for *vocatur*, "is called").

[4] Numbers 24:17: "A star shall rise out of Jacob."

[5] Andrew II, King of Hungary (reigned 1205–1235).

[6] Gertrude of Andechs-Merania. Her father was Berthold, Duke of Merania, a family with great lands in Carinthia and Bavaria. Dietrich calls him Duke of Carinthia.

[7] Louis (Ludwig) IV, Landgrave of Thuringia (1200–1227). He was in fact Hermann's second son; the elder, Hermann, died young.

[8] Pressburg is the present-day Bratislava, capital of Slovakia.

Chapter 2. How Saint Elizabeth was brought to Thuringia, and the goods brought with her

Now King Andrew was a quiet and good man. But the queen was a virtuous and strong woman, who, joining a man's spirit to a woman's thinking, managed the business of the kingdom and provided what was needed for sending her daughter. When royal gifts had been given to the envoys and everything had been made ready, and they were hastening to set out, the queen presented her daughter to those noble escorts of the bride. The child was wrapped in gold and silver and silk and laid in a silver cradle. The queen said:

"Tell your lord to be of good heart and well, and I will heap great riches upon him, if the Lord gives me life."

With her daughter she also sent many great and varied vessels of gold and silver, most precious crowns, and ornaments, rings and necklaces, many sets of clothing, and a silver tub for her daughter's bath; bedding and coverlets, all of silk; purple cloth and many silken fabrics; with countless other precious furnishings.

Besides this she added a sum of a thousand marks in money, and other things too, promising more if she should live.

Never had such things, so beautiful, so precious, and so many, been brought to Thuringia or seen there as the queen sent with her daughter. For she rejoiced and took pride in the marriage that had been arranged for her daughter with such a prince.

When the envoys returned to Thuringia they were received magnificently. And the king's daughter, still a little child, was placed beside the boy who was her bridegroom, and a kind of figure of the marriage to come was carried out. She was brought up with all care, as was right and fitting.

After this, in the third year after Elizabeth had been brought away, the queen her mother was cruelly killed by great men and nobles of the kingdom who had wickedly plotted her death.[1]

Having touched on these things first, we shall now, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, go on to write in order about the life and ways, the miracles and works, and the passing in death of Elizabeth, the most blessed daughter and handmaid of God, telling in her praise the deeds we have come to know.

[1] Queen Gertrude was murdered in 1213 by Hungarian nobles who resented the influence of her German relatives at court.

Chapter 3. Her wonderful infancy

The Lord our God is wonderful in his saints and holy in all his works;[1] dwelling in his chosen ones, he works wonders in them. For he makes no distinction of age in time or of sex in the body, but according to the decree of his unsearchable wisdom he accomplishes in them the works of his unspeakable mercy.

So with the help of him without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy,[2] the illustrious and blessed Elizabeth, while still a little child, not yet capable of deceit or using reason, already showed the image of the perfection that was to come in her. She would often throw herself down before the altar and press her lips to the floor; she made many genuflections and, with her hands folded and her eyes raised, she turned her mind

to heavenly things as well as she could. Even when playing with girls of her own age, she used to move toward the chapel by hopping. And when she could not go in, she at least honored its threshold and walls with kisses. Measuring herself against girls of her own height by lying down on the ground, she was looking for an occasion to make prostrations, as she afterward admitted.[3] In the very games that suit childhood, she placed her hope of winning in God. She gave a tenth of her winnings to poor little girls, along with other small gifts, and by these she bound them to say the Lord's Prayer and the Angelic Salutation.

Let the working of God be recognized in these things. For since the infancy of human nature usually runs, alas, through many kinds of stain, by what help, I ask, were these things done in so small a body, if not by the help of the Holy Spirit? Marked by these and other first signs of a holy character, she reached the ninth year of her age, in which the lord Hermann, father of her bridegroom, died.[4]

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[1] Psalm 68:35 and Psalm 145:17.

[2] From the Collect of the Third Sunday after Pentecost (in the old Missal): "O God, protector of those who hope in you, without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy..."

[3] A child's game: the girls lay down on the floor to see who was taller, and Elizabeth used it as a hidden way of bowing down before God. "Venias" in the Latin means prostrations made in prayer or penance.

[4] Landgrave Hermann I died in April 1217.

Chapter 4. Her innocent and holy girlhood

As Elizabeth grew in body, so she grew in grace and virtue. In all her ways she thought of God and kept him before the eyes of her mind. She called on him faithfully and named him sweetly; she directed all her senses and her actions alike toward him; she turned away from the care and adornment of the body and from the vanity of the world. Every day she offered God her vowed prayers as a sacrifice. When sometimes she had not finished them and was made to go to bed, she would complete them lying awake, mindful of the Lord upon her bed.[1]

Then, seeing how all Christians, by the honor of their devotion, provided themselves with the patronage of the Apostles, she was kindled with a loving desire; and since she loved chastity, she wished to have John the Evangelist, the guardian of virginity, as her patron.

So after a humble prayer she came with the others to the choosing with a lowly heart. And behold, by the will of God, just as she had longed and prayed, the Apostle she desired came to her the first time, the second time, and the third.[2] She embraced him lovingly with all devotion and honored him with every loving effort, so much that whatever was asked of her in the name of this Apostle, whether to forgive injuries or to grant favors, she never refused, but granted it at once with cheerful generosity.

The simple girl made holy the Sabbath day by the purity of her conduct.[3] On Sundays and feast days she took away something of the adornment of her body, knowing that God is honored not by the brightness of clothes but by the humility of minds. And so on these days, before noon, out of reverence for God, she would not put on gloves, nor would she have her sleeves sewn tight.[4] Every day too she strove to break her own will by denying herself something. So in childish games, when good luck pleased her, as it usually does, she would hold herself back and say, "Now that I am winning best, I will stop for God's sake."

In dances too, after going around once, she would say, "One round is enough for me for the world; the rest I will give up for the name of Jesus Christ."

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[1] Psalm 63:6.

[2] A custom of the time: the names of the twelve Apostles were written on slips or candles and drawn by lot, and each person honored the Apostle drawn as a special patron.

[3] Exodus 20:8. Dietrich means the Lord's Day and feast days, as the next words show.

[4] Fashionable ladies had their long sleeves sewn closely around the arm each day, and wore gloves as a mark of rank.

Chapter 5. How her goodness increased

Agnes, her bridegroom's sister, a beautiful girl, and Elizabeth, the virgin devoted to God, were growing up and being brought up together, and they were dressed alike. Once, when they were suitably arrayed and crowned with gold and jewels, as was the custom, they went to church followed by Hermann's widow, the lady Sophia,[1] and took their places. At once Elizabeth took the crown from her head and laid it beside her, and she did not put it back on her head until the divine office was over. When her mother-in-law, wondering at this, spoke to her about it, she answered: "Far be it from me to appear crowned with proud display in the sight of God and of my King Jesus Christ, whom I see crowned with thorns, I who am a worthless thing of clay."

Even then love had wounded her tender heart, and the sword of the Lord's Passion had pierced her delicate soul;[2] and she tried so hard to make herself like him in his lowliness.

At that time there were certain powerful counselors at court who envied her holy deeds. They hurt her with bitter, insulting words and troubled her tender heart with impudent mockery. And her mother-in-law herself, and her bridegroom's sister, who were taken with the honors of worldly pride, were very far from the ways of the humble Elizabeth. In the midst of them all, like a lily among thorns,[3] the innocent Elizabeth, flowering and growing, was pricked by their thorns; but she spread around her the fragrant sweetness of humility and patience.

So, bearing their reproaches with gentleness, she bowed her head and did not walk in great things;[4] but her talk was with the poor, and her company was always with the maids and serving women.

Who would not be astonished at so great a gift of grace and such works of virtue in the little body of one so young? What do you think she will be when grown up, who is such as this in childhood? What, do you suppose, will the fruit taste like, whose scent is so fragrant in the spring blossom? Surely she who has sent her root downward will bear fruit upward;[5] she will bear much fruit, she will do many good works, and greater works than these she will do;[6] and from the fruit of her hands she will plant a vineyard,[7] putting forth branches of merit and clusters of grace, with the wine of everlasting sweetness.

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[1] Sophia of Wittelsbach, Hermann's second wife and the mother of Louis and Agnes. She later became a nun.

[2] Luke 2:35, Simeon's prophecy to Mary: "A sword shall pierce your own soul."

[3] Song of Songs 2:2.

[4] Psalm 131:1.

[5] Isaiah 37:31.

[6] John 14:12.

[7] Proverbs 31:16, from the praise of the valiant woman.

Chapter 6. What she patiently endured as a young girl

When the years of her childhood had passed, as innocently as they were humbly, and she had begun to reach the threshold of youth, the devotion of her mind grew within her through the Spirit; but outside her a strong trouble rose up through the malice of the world.

For when she had come to the age of marriage, she suffered open persecution from the relatives, kinsmen, vassals, and counselors of her bridegroom, who were bound rather to love her and serve her. This was after the example of the Savior, against whom the wicked returned evil for good and hatred for love.[1]

They plotted, in vain, to have her rejected and sent back to the king her father, because she had brought less dowry than was fitting. They argued that a richer dowry and better alliances could be obtained through the

daughter of some nearer prince.

The lady Sophia herself was busily working to have her joined to a community of nuns in some religious convent.

Amid all this Elizabeth, an exile from her father's house and a pilgrim in this world, seeing that she was held in contempt, groaned from the depths of her heart and fled to the Lord. She laid her trouble before him and submitted herself in all things to the ordering of God's goodness.

As was her habit, she was glad of the company of the maids and serving women and worked alongside them in their service, so much that her mother-in-law said to her scornfully: "Elizabeth, you ought to have been counted not among ruling princesses but among serving maids."

In these and other insults from the rich and scorn from the proud, Elizabeth's heart kept its trust in the Lord; and he did not fail to help in good time the one who trusted in him. For by his secret inspiration he turned the heart and affection of the prince her bridegroom so powerfully toward love of the exiled king's daughter, that in the solitude of their secret and mutual love he spoke sweetly to her heart, saying good words to her, words of comfort.[2] Indeed, from the beginning he had been used, whenever he came back from anywhere, to honor her with gifts he had brought and to comfort her with embraces.

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[1] Psalm 109:5.

[2] Hosea 2:14 and Zechariah 1:13.

Chapter 7. The doubt that arose about the marriage of blessed Elizabeth

Because of various persuasions and the different counsels of wicked people, some began to doubt whether Elizabeth's marriage would take place. But there were in Thuringia certain just and noble men who reasonably opposed the schemes of those people. Among them was the knight Walter of Vargula, a good man, who had been sent to Hungary by this prince's father and had brought blessed Elizabeth to Thuringia.

Once, coming up to her bridegroom as he was riding out in the open country, he said privately, "If it please you, my lord, let me speak to you, and tell me what I ask." The kind prince said to him, "Speak with confidence, and I will tell you whatever is proper for you to know." "Then," said the knight, "I beg you, my lord, what have you decided to do about the king's daughter? Will you take her as your wife, or send her back to her father?" Then the prince pointed to a great mountain that stood before his eyes and said: "Truly, if this mountain that you see were gold from its foot to its top, I would far more easily despise it than refuse to marry Elizabeth. Let others think what they will and say it in vain; I love Elizabeth, and I put nothing before marriage with her." Then the knight said, "My lord, I ask you to let me tell her this." And he said sweetly, "Tell her, and give her as a sign what I shall send her." And taking from his purse a double mirror that he carried with him, set in a bronze frame, with plain glass on one side and on the other side an image of the Crucified, he gave it to the nobleman. When the holy maiden received it carefully from that nobleman, she showed the joy it gave her with a most delighted laugh.

Chapter 8. The marriage of Louis the Landgrave with Elizabeth

After this, when it pleased the Lord to look upon Elizabeth, despised by the wicked, and to comfort her in her affliction, he scattered the counsels of the great, rejected the persuasions of the powerful, and inspired and strengthened the prince. And he, making his wish known, stopped the mouths of those who spoke against it and of those who spoke wickedly. From then on no one dared to oppose Elizabeth's marriage, by word or by counsel.

For she was the one whom the Lord had prepared for him in marriage.[1] Against his good pleasure the folly of human malice could say nothing, and human cunning could not overcome those whom God's providence had joined.

Look now at this happy young man and chaste bridegroom, who in making his marriage did not stand in the counsel of the wicked,[2] did not go after gold, and did not put his hope in treasures of money;[3] knowing that a good wife is a good portion, given properly by the Lord to a good man for good deeds.[4] Consider more closely the mind of this chaste young man, who sent his bride a gift that did not lure her to wantonness but rather moved her to grace: a most precious image of Christ crucified.

So in the year of the Lord's Incarnation 1221, Louis, the renowned Landgrave of Thuringia, took as his wife the lady Elizabeth, a chaste virgin, the noble and excellent daughter of the King of Hungary. By the will of God a faithful man was joined to a faithful woman, a holy man with a holy woman, an innocent man with an innocent woman. And having received a marriage not so much of the flesh as of the spirit, they loved each other in the charity of the Lord more than can be believed.

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[1] An echo of Genesis 24:14 and 24:44, where Rebecca is "the one the Lord has appointed" for Isaac.

[2] Psalm 1:1.

[3] Sirach 31:8.

[4] Sirach 26:3.

Book Two

Chapter 1. The holiness of Saint Elizabeth's marriage

Here begins the second book of this work, the Life of Saint Elizabeth.

Between them marriage was held in honor and the marriage bed was undefiled,[1] not in the heat of desire but in the chastity of holy married life. For the holy young wife, newly married, wore down her body with many vigils, rising every night to pray, while her husband sometimes slept, or else pretended not to notice.

Many times, when she rose with his consent, he took pity on her tenderness and asked her not to afflict herself without measure. To guard against this, the most chaste young man would hold her hand in his own while she prayed, urging and begging her to lay her tired limbs down to rest after her vigils.

Great indeed was the devotion of this young woman, who rose in the night from the bed of her earthly husband and sought Christ, whom she loved as the true husband of her soul.[2] And surely no less was the faith of the husband, who did not stand in the way of such a wife, so great a wife, but rather encouraged her, and tempered her too great fervor with gentle wisdom. So, moved by the sweetness of this chaste love and companionship, they could not bear to be apart from each other for long, or far away.

So the lady often followed her husband over rough roads and no small distances, and through harsh weather, led by a love that was pure rather than fleshly. For the chaste presence of her modest husband was no hindrance to his most devout wife in praying, in keeping vigil, or in doing good in other ways. The good man rejoiced with her in the Lord over her holy ways, and was a faithful encourager.

The handmaid of God burned with such fervor to keep vigil in prayer that she gave her serving women a charge, telling them to wake her for prayer by pulling her foot, so that she would not grow dull with sleep.

Once it happened by mistake that the venerable Isentrud pulled the foot of her husband while he slept. He woke, and understanding his wife's devotion, bore it patiently. So, waking and rising, she kept vigil untiringly; and it often happened that, praying long on a rug in front of her husband's bed, she fell asleep there. When her maids scolded her for this, she answered: "Though I cannot always pray, still I will do this violence to my flesh, that I tear myself away from my bed for a while."

She fled the pleasures of the flesh, and so, as far as she was allowed, she avoided a soft bed and the most private intimacy with her husband. Though she loved him with deep, heartfelt love, she still lamented with sorrow that she had not been worthy to keep the beauty of the flower of virginity. And this innocent and modest young woman chastised her flesh with many blows and tore it with harsh scourging.

At first she used to take the discipline in secret on the days of Lent and on other Fridays, while showing herself cheerful before people.[3] Later, growing stronger and advancing in grace, she would rise from her beloved husband's bed and have herself scourged hard and very often by her maids in a private room; and returning to her husband's bed, she showed herself bright and cheerful.

Truly happy married couple, in whose life together such purity, and in whose speech such modesty, was found! In them the love of Christ put out concupiscence, devotion reined in wantonness, fervor of spirit shook off sleepiness, prayer guarded conscience, and charity gave them the power and the joy of doing good.

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[1] Hebrews 13:4.

[2] Song of Songs 3:1: "On my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loves."

[3] To "take the discipline" is to scourge oneself, or to be scourged, as a penance; a common devotion in the Middle Ages, which the Church never required of lay people.

Chapter 2. How she sat at the prince's table

At table, too, against the custom of other great ladies, she used to sit at his side, keeping the fellowship of marriage, although she suffered some inconveniences from this. For Master Conrad, to whom she had bound herself by a vow of obedience with her husband's consent, had commanded her not to eat of any goods that had not been justly obtained.[1] Three of her serving women joined her in this abstinence and asked the prince for permission to do so.

He kindly agreed and said: "I would gladly do this myself, if I did not fear the slander and scandal of others. But with the Lord's help I will soon order my state of life differently."

So the lady Elizabeth provided for herself and her household from the goods that had been set aside especially for her as her dowry. But sitting at the prince's table before the knights and servants, she would break bread and other food and move it here and there, and pretend to eat. Because of this abstinence she often suffered great want; contenting herself with only five little cakes made with honey, or usually with bread alone, she went hungry and thirsty amid the many dishes and courses. She was more troubled by her maids' want than by her own.

So she would inquire carefully of the officials and stewards of the court, and when she found that, for the time being, there was drink that was lawful, she said to her maids, "Today you shall drink." Sometimes it was food that was lawful, and she said, "Now you shall eat." And when she knew that both were lawful, she would clap her hands with joy and say cheerfully, "Today it goes well with us: we shall eat and drink."

Her good and gentle husband, knowing his wife's devotion, would warn her whenever he knew that anything doubtful had been served, so that her tender conscience would not be troubled by it. Because of this unusual and singular way of life, the lord and lady endured many reproaches from their own people, with great patience. And though the lady abstained in this way from what was unlawful, she still worked with all her strength to have satisfaction made to those who had suffered force or injury.

Let every sex and age take note, and wonder, and imitate how this king's daughter, abstaining at the prince's table amid so many feasts, rejected delicacies, and in the bedchamber of a husband she loved so much did not seek the pleasures of the flesh.

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[1] Conrad forbade her food that came from unjust taxes or from goods seized from the poor. This rule is described in Conrad's own letter and in the *Sayings of the Four Handmaids*.

Chapter 3. How, visited by God, she advanced still further

When Almighty God wished to raise his handmaid Elizabeth, already marked by the outstanding practice of virtues, to still higher things, it happened that on a certain great feast she came down from the Wartburg castle with her mother-in-law and a large company, dressed in most precious clothes, adorned with many necklaces and jewels, and crowned with a golden diadem, and went into a church in the town below. Raising her eyes, which she always used to direct toward the cross when entering a church, she looked at the image of the Crucified. Considering him naked and crowned with thorns and fastened with nails, she was pierced to the heart; coming to herself, she began to meditate and said within herself: "Look, your God hangs naked, and you, a useless creature, are covered with precious clothes. His head is pierced with thorns, and your head is wreathed with gold." Overcome with this compassion, she fell down as if lifeless. The bystanders were alarmed at the sight and lifted her up and carried her to the door of the church to get cool air; and laying her down, they sprinkled her face with holy water that was at hand. Inspired by God through this visitation, she resolved from then on to put aside all ornament in which she did not see some necessity. And she kept this resolve all the days of her life.[1]

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[1] The church is usually said to be that of St. George in Eisenach, at the foot of the Wartburg.

Chapter 4. How she restrained worldly dress

From then on this most devout woman cared still less for her own body. Although she had been born and brought up in royal houses and had always lived in them, yet for love of her Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ, whom she had seen on the cross and carried in her heart, she thought little of all worldly finery and despised it as dung.[1] She would not use colored veils, painted head-coverings, very tight sleeves, hair-bands and silk ribbons woven into the hair for ornament, long trailing gowns, or other vain excesses. She knew that the desire for such things draws filth into the mind.

Avoiding altogether excess and costliness in dress, she often wore wool, or a hair shirt, even when she was covered over it with garments of gold or purple. She always went about in modest dress suited to the Christian religion, as far as her rank as princess allowed. She preached this same thing by word and example to worldly ladies who came to her, binding them by her earnest requests at least to give up the vanity of the world in some one thing. And when she could not get them to greater things, she held them back at least in the smallest things by her prayers and advice, giving and sending them patterns they could use without harm to good morals.

In this way the faithful handmaid of Christ, zealous for souls and a lover of godliness, drew many women away from many vanities, and by her preaching even led some to a vow of continence. These things, and others like them, she wonderfully did against the appetites of youthful folly while she was still a young woman newly married, urged on by the love of Christ[2] and with his grace working with her.

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[1] Philippians 3:8.

[2] 2 Corinthians 5:14.

Chapter 5. How she used to behave in her husband's absence

This holy woman, pleasing her husband in all things, thought always not of the things of the world but of the things of the Lord.[1] The heart of her husband trusted in her; for she did him good and not evil all the days of her life.[2] Compelled by the business of his principalities, he would often go away and stay for long periods of time in distant regions. When she could not follow him as he went, she would put away her fine clothes as soon as he was gone, change her head-covering, and put on humble dress; she behaved devoutly and religiously, like a widow. She refused to please the world; passing the nights in vigils, genuflections, prayers, and scourgings, she waited for her beloved's return. But when she learned that the good prince whom her soul desired was returning, she would dress herself fittingly and royally. For she said: "I put these ornaments on my body not for the desire of the flesh or pride of mind, but purely for the love of Christ, so as to take away any occasion of displeasure and sin, so that he may love me alone in the Lord with lawful married love; and so that we may hope together to share eternal life from him who made marriage holy as a sacrament."

In this way the wise and devout woman kept unbroken faith with her husband in their married life: when he was away she kept herself blameless and devoted to God, and when he was present she showed herself gracious, lovable, and kind.

Nor did she lack that chief good of marriage, by which she received a blessing in her children. For God endowed her with a good dowry,[3] making her womb fruitful with most noble offspring, so that she was spared the reproach of barrenness and enjoyed the comfort of children.

She bore a son named Hermann, who succeeded his father as Landgrave of Thuringia. She bore also a daughter whom the Duke of Brabant married; and another daughter, who, remaining a virgin, served God in the convent of Altenberg, where she is still today the lady abbess of the nuns.[4]

When the days of her purification were completed,[5] this most Christian mother laid aside the pomp that women given to the world usually display, dressed herself in wool, and, taking the little child she had borne in her arms, went out barefoot, quietly and in secret. She went down the hard, rocky path of the steep descent from the castle to a distant church, carrying her baby in her own arms after the example of the Virgin Mother, and she presented him to the Lord upon the altar with a candle. Then, returning to the castle, she used to give her tunic and cloak to some poor woman.

[1] 1 Corinthians 7:32–34.

[2] Proverbs 31:11–12.

[3] Genesis 30:20.

[4] Hermann II (1222–1241); Sophia (1224–1275), who married Duke Henry II of Brabant; and Gertrude (1227–1297), abbess of the Premonstratensian convent of Altenberg near Wetzlar, honored as Blessed Gertrude. Dietrich wrote these words while Gertrude was still alive.

[5] Luke 2:22. Forty days after a birth, mothers came to church to be "churched," in imitation of Mary's Purification.

Chapter 6. How she used the freedom the prince granted her

The wise and devout prince saw that the illustrious lady directed all her intention to God. Meeting her wishes in love, and inviting her to works of mercy, he gave her free leave in everything that concerned the work and honor of God. She did not misuse the freedom she had been given for worldly things, but gave herself with all her strength to things that lead to salvation. Devoting herself to almsgiving and works of mercy for the poor, she exercised herself day and night in the commandments of the Lord,[1] and did all the works of charity with the greatest cheerfulness and a steady face.

For once, while dressed in her royal splendor, she secretly took in a sick beggar, horrible to look at, who suffered from a disease of the head. Laying his head in her lap, she cut his matted hair with her own holy hands, and washed the sick man's head in a hidden corner of her garden, wishing to avoid being seen by people. Yet when her serving women came upon her and scolded her, she only laughed. Nor did she busy herself, like other great ladies, with dainty, fine, or delicate things; but putting her hand to strong things,[2] the king's daughter took hold of the spindle and spun wool with her serving women; and having cloth woven from it, she gave it as clothing to religious men, the Friars Minor.[3]

She also sewed clothes with her own hands for poor people, and for needy catechumens as well; and having them baptized, she lifted them from the sacred font herself, so that, as their godmother, she might do good to them more freely.[4] She often visited and comforted poor women in childbirth, so that by seeing their misery she might stir herself to mercy and compassion. However far away their houses were, and however muddy or rough the road, she visited them. Going into their wretched huts, not shrinking from the filth, she brought them what they needed and comforted them, hoping to receive a reward for the labor of the road, for the compassion of her heart, and for the generosity of her gift.

[1] Psalm 1:2; Psalm 119.

[2] Proverbs 31:19 in the Latin Bible: "She has put out her hand to strong things, and her fingers have taken hold of the spindle."

[3] The Franciscans, who had come to Thuringia in 1224, during Elizabeth's lifetime. Saint Francis himself died in 1226.

[4] By becoming a godparent she entered a spiritual kinship with the newly baptized and their families, which gave her a recognized reason to help them.

Chapter 7. The desire for holy poverty with which she burned

Among the other gifts of God's graces with which this blessed woman shone, there is one even more to be wondered at: the desire for evangelical poverty, sweetly kindled in her heart by the Holy Spirit, burned there strongly. For although she was powerful and honored with princely rank and the service of great men, and

outwardly overflowed with riches and an abundance of worldly goods, yet within herself, poor in spirit,[1] she longed for beggary above all these things. So, pouring out words from the desire of her heart, she often talked with her maids about poverty. And because the heart's desire cannot be without some deed, before her maids in the palace she took off her fine clothes, put on a cheap cloak, covered her head with a poor cloth, and walked before them like a poor woman. Going about in this way, as if she were a prophetess with a heart that foresaw her own future, she said to them: "This is how I shall go about when I suffer misery for my God." And so it came to pass, as what follows will show. At the time when she did these things she was blooming in body with the flower of youth, and in her works with the strength of virtue; but the flower of worldly glory had fallen and withered in her heart.

[1] Matthew 5:3.

Chapter 8. A miracle shown from heaven

One day, because she sought glory only from within, God, the King and lover of the humble, wonderfully adorned her outwardly as well.[1] At one time a number of great men and nobles, sent by her father the King of Hungary, had come to the Landgrave, and she did not have clothing suitable to her rank. The prince said to her: "I am sorry, sister, that you lack clothes worthy of these nobles who are here, and that I have no time to provide you with finery." She answered: "Do not think much of this, my dearest brother; I have resolved never to glory in clothing."[2] Then, when she was called into the presence of those nobles, the Lord put glory and great beauty upon her. For behold, a great sign appeared in heaven,[3] and that holy woman was seen by the eyes of all dressed in garments of hyacinth blue, adorned with most precious pearls. Her husband, astonished and wondering at this, asked her about it, and she said, smiling devoutly: "The Lord knows how to do such things when he wishes."

[1] Psalm 45:13 in the Latin Bible: "All the glory of the king's daughter is within."

[2] Husband and wife call each other "brother" and "sister" throughout, an affectionate and devout way of speaking among Christian spouses at the time.

[3] Revelation 12:1.

Chapter 9. The generosity of Saint Elizabeth

The virtue of generosity, the glory of great persons and the special ornament of noble ones, shone in this king's daughter as a gracious privilege. It was impressed on her heart not so much by the nobility of her royal birth as by the kindness of grace poured in from above. So she showed it not out of vanity for passing praise but out of the charity of an inward compassion. For compassion grew with her from her infancy, and came forth with her from her mother's womb,[1] moving her heart at every sight of the wretched. So, once, at a great feast, when a crowd of nobles had gathered to the prince at the Wartburg, and they had assembled in the great hall for the banquet and were waiting for the king's daughter, the prince's wife, to arrive, it happened that she was delayed in this way. As she was going toward the palace, a beggar lying below the stairs called to her with persistent cries to have pity on him. Looking down from the stairs at the poor man, she said, "I have neither the time nor the gift with which to help you now." But he cried out more and more to be given something. Then she took off the precious mantle she was wearing and gave it to the man who was crying out. He folded it up with wonderful speed and went away. Now the steward, standing before the prince in the sight of all the nobles, said: "Let my lord judge now whether it is reasonable that his beloved wife, our lady, should this time delay his banquet and hinder the festivity of so many nobles. For just now she has clothed a poor man, giving him her cloak." Then the most gentle prince, smiling sweetly, left with the company of nobles to call his wife. Finding her in her room, he said to her, "Will you come and dine with us, my dear?" She said, "I am ready, dearest brother, as you wish." And he said, "Where is your cloak?" And she said,

“Look, it is on the rail.” A little maid ran and found on the rail the mantle she had given to the poor man, brought back from heaven. Dressed in it, the heavenly woman went in to the banquet. So the heavenly Father clothed his lily Elizabeth as not even Solomon in all his glory could be arrayed.[2]

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[1] Job 31:18.

[2] Matthew 6:28–29.

Chapter 10. How reverently she used to attend the solemn celebration of Mass

She was drawn to the divine offices and the sacraments of the Church with most devout affection and in a most Christian manner. In all things showing herself a servant of God, she went to church very devoutly, with reverence and fear; and hurrying ahead of her maids to the church, she would make genuflections in secret.

From her youth she was accustomed always to be present at the holy mysteries of the Mass with the greatest humility. For seeing with the eyes of faith the unspeakable excellence of the Sacrament, and looking at the littleness of her own condition, during the Office of the Mass she loosened and lessened, lowered, or entirely removed the outward ornaments of her body, of her head, breast, arms, fingers, and other parts.

She was especially careful to show this humility at the reading of the Gospel, during the Canon, and at the time when the Lord’s Body and Blood are offered and received by the priest. For she burned toward this Sacrament with the fervor of her whole being, wondering in great amazement at that most dear condescension and most condescending love.

So one day, while this most holy woman was praying intently during the Canon, her hands folded beneath her cloak, and was moved with burning love toward Christ, a heavenly light shone around her. There was standing nearby a good priest of holy life, praiseworthy for his reputation and devotion. God opened his eyes, and at the moment of the consecration of the Lord’s Body he saw her face lit up by God with very great brightness, like the sun sending out rays of light; so that this wonderful light upon her body was a witness to the wonderful light within her mind.

The brightness of that heavenly light shining around her was such and so great that, with bodily light overshadowed, he could not look at her with bodily eyes because of the divine splendor. The man was greatly amazed and glorified his God. Afterward he told what he had seen, to the praise of him who does wonderful things.

Chapter 11. How she kept the holy seasons and celebrated the feasts

She kept religiously and carefully the holy observances established by the Church. She passed the time of the Lenten fast by devoting herself to prayers, abstinence, and almsgiving, and also by chastising her own body with many blows. And the feasts in which the blessings of our redemption are remembered: who can worthily tell with what veneration she adored them, with what love she embraced them, with what devotion she received them, with what faith she kept them?

Hear what she did. On the day when the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, the king’s daughter, making herself like the King who on that day rose from supper and laid aside his garments,[1] took off her precious clothes after noon and put on the clothing of devout common folk, walking humbly and wearing shoes tied to her legs.[2] Who ever heard such things of a king’s daughter? On that day, moreover, as an imitator of Christ, she always used to carry out the solemn *Mandatum* for the poor:[3] she washed the feet of twelve poor people, giving each of them twelve pennies, cloth for clothing, and a loaf of fine white bread.

Once, besides, on that same day she gathered many lepers, washing their feet and hands and kissing their ulcerous and horrible sores, and she prostrated herself most humbly at their feet. After that, wherever she found such people, she would sit with them and comfort them, urging them to patience; and she shrank from them no more than from the healthy, giving them alms abundantly.

Having spent that holy night[4] in prayer, and having conceived a feeling of devotion and humility from the memory of the Lord's Passion, in the morning she said to her maids: "Today is a day of humiliation; I do not want you to show me any reverence." And humbling herself and becoming like the poor, she arranged in her lap, as poor people do, a great many little bundles of flax, a small vessel full of incense, many small wax candles, and not a few coins. Mingling in this way with the common people, she went barefoot to the altars of the various churches; and after making genuflections at each one, she offered a small bundle of flax and incense with a little candle. And bowing humbly, she went away.

Passing through the streets, she gave out coins generously to the poor. She went along like this, jostled like one of the people. She was criticized for the smallness of her offering, since a princess and lady ought to offer great things; but she preferred simplicity to show, because her offering came not from stinginess but from humility. And God accepted her sacrifice made in the spirit of humility.[5]

On the Rogation Days,[6] when some people, acting against the decrees of the saints, adorned themselves in precious and delicate clothes, this princess and king's daughter, dressed in wool and barefoot, followed most devoutly the procession of the Cross and the relics of the saints.

And when she went to hear the word of God, this disciple of Christ, a most noble woman, always used to place herself among the very poorest women at the places of preaching, knowing that seeds scattered in the valleys spring up and grow abundantly into a rich harvest.

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[1] John 13:4. This is Holy Thursday.

[2] That is, rough peasant footwear bound on with thongs, instead of the fine shoes of a lady.

[3] The *Mandatum* is the washing of feet on Holy Thursday, named from Jesus' words, "A new commandment (*mandatum*) I give you" (John 13:34).

[4] The night between Holy Thursday and Good Friday.

[5] Daniel 3:39 (in the Song of Azariah): "In a contrite heart and a humble spirit let us be accepted."

[6] The days of prayer and procession before the feast of the Ascension, when the litanies were sung and blessings asked on the crops.

Book Three

Chapter 1. The famous deeds of Landgrave Louis, the husband of Saint Elizabeth

Here begins the third book of this work, the Life of Saint Elizabeth.

Here it is fitting to add a book about Louis, the glorious prince of the Thuringians, so that, just as he was found worthy to share blessed Elizabeth's life in this world, so now he may not be left without a share in the proclaiming of her praise. For he was the sweet supporter, the faithful encourager, and the effective helper of all her good works. But who can tell his virtues? Who can describe the strength of his mind, or the beauty of his body? He was of middle height and very well proportioned, with a gracious, calm face, showing, as they say, the image of one "fairer than the sons of men."[1] There was no one who did not linger at the sight of his lovable face. He was modest in his senses and pure in his flesh.

One day he was standing at a window watching people dancing below. Someone standing by him pointed out one of the women leading the dance and said, "If you wish, my lord, I will see that you enjoy her embrace." Then the prince grew very angry and said, "Be silent, and never again bring such things to my ears, if you wish to keep my favor and friendship." Put to shame by this chaste man, the wretched, shameless fellow trembled in astonishment and fell silent, rebuked. Besides this, Louis was sweet in speech, gentle in manners, steady and manly in spirit, and vigorous and agile in the exercise of arms.

[1] Psalm 45:2.

Chapter 2. How he frightened a lion

There was a lion kept at the prince's court.[1] One morning it happened that the prince, rising from his bed with only a linen garment thrown over him and with slippers on his feet, met the lion coming toward him in a rage. He raised his fist at it and threatened it, rebuking it in a manly way. At once the beast laid aside its fierceness, threw itself down at the man's feet, and fawned on the angry man by wagging its tail. When the beast had at last been driven back with torches, though with difficulty, the prince sharply rebuked its keeper. I think this deed should be credited not so much to his courage as to his faith.

[1] Princes kept lions and other wild beasts as a sign of their greatness.

Chapter 3. The excellence of his character and his rule

No lie was found in his mouth,[1] and his speech was "Yes, yes; no, no."[2] His words were most faithful and true, and everyone believed them as if they had been confirmed by an oath. Toward all women he was respectful and modest; to his knights he was generous and kind; with those of his household he was friendly and cheerful; to barons and nobles he was worthy of honor; to princes and great men he was a man to be admired; and to everyone in general he was approachable, easy to deal with, and lovable. And to sum it all up, he feared God, loved him, and served him.

Every day the divine mysteries were solemnly celebrated in his presence, and there he always stood devoutly and adored his God with reverence. Before him were beauty and cleanliness, in his deeds magnificence, and in all his household good order. No one dared to presume to do an unlawful act or speak an immodest word; and if anyone presumed to do so, he was severely beaten. Because of this, as health flows from the head to the members, so goodness flowed down to all those under him. For in those days the nobles were truthful, the knights peaceable and faithful, content with their wages, and the rest of the people humble and quiet. For the prince did judgment and justice,[3] and so there was then peace and truth and an abundance of all good things,

and everywhere people lived in security. In those days the province of Thuringia was exalted and famous, a people pleasing and devout, made illustrious by the name of so great a prince and renowned for the merits of Saint Elizabeth.

[1] 1 Peter 2:22; Revelation 14:5.

[2] Matthew 5:37.

[3] Jeremiah 23:5.

Chapter 4. The chastity of this prince

Among the other marks of virtue in which he flourished, chastity and modesty shone in him especially. Once, when urgent business had taken him to the distant land of a certain prince, a close kinsman of his, he was received solemnly, with honor and great friendship. When, after the feasting and plentiful delicacies, he went to rest, some shameless people put a young woman into his bed. The chaste man knew it beforehand, and said privately to that noble knight, his dear Walter of Vargula: “Carefully take this woman away from my bed, and give her a mark of silver at once. For truly I tell you, even if I did not shrink from the crime of adultery in this deed, I still would not want, in such a case, to sadden my Elizabeth.”

Behold a new and wonderful Joseph, who for the sake of faith refused the crime of adultery that was offered to him.[1]

[1] Genesis 39:7–12.

Chapter 5. How he refused to commit adultery

There was in Thuringia a knight rich in wealth, who had a beautiful wife, but she was childless; and the cause of the childlessness lay not in her but in a defect of her husband. Grieved that his wealth would pass to heirs outside his family, the knight coaxed his wife into agreeing to get him an heir through adultery. So the foolish man went to the prince of the land with great fear and said to him: “My lord, I pray you to listen kindly to what I say, and to keep it carefully secret.” When the prince gave him confidence to speak, the wretched man, fearful and trembling, poured the shameful idea of his mind into those chaste ears, saying that he would think himself blessed if he could have an heir to his possessions from the very high blood of such a person. Then the prince, being modest and good, despised the man’s wicked wish from the bottom of his heart, but agreed to it in words, sparing the shame of the man who was begging him. A day was set for his coming, and they parted. Then the wise prince ordered his physicians to prepare an effective medicine for that man’s ailment, as if it were needed for himself. They thought the prince was ill and prepared an effective medicine. Taking it when it was ready, the prince hurried to the appointed place. He was welcomed joyfully as a dear guest and was given a delicate meal. Then, sitting with them, he brought out the medicine and offered it to the knight to eat. The poor man, soon feeling its power in himself, took the prince aside and said to him: “I beg you, my lord, be pleased to go back as you came; for I feel in myself a strength that I have never felt before.” The Landgrave said to him: “Do not think that I came to commit adultery, but chiefly for this: to rescue you from this disgrace and to free your wife from dishonor.” Now the Landgrave had come alone, leaving his huntsmen; for this man was one of the ministerials who held wooded lands.[1] O truly excellent and most good man, who for a friend’s sake was willing to be thought deficient himself, and who strove, in a way, to preserve another’s good name at the cost of his own!

[1] Ministerials were knights of unfree origin who served a great lord. This man held forest land, so the Landgrave could visit him while out hunting without anyone wondering.

Chapter 6. The mercy that blessed Elizabeth showed tirelessly to the poor in a time of famine

In the year of the Lord 1225, when Louis, Landgrave of Thuringia, was setting out for Apulia to the Emperor Frederick, to the court at Cremona,[1] a severe famine arose throughout Germany. It lasted almost two years and killed many people with hunger. Then the merciful Elizabeth, moved with compassion for the wretched, gave away as alms to the poor all the grain gathered in her granaries. To some, that is, to many, she gave each day only as much as their need required; and however much she gave, by God's gift it was enough for the one receiving it for that day.

Below the very high castle of the Wartburg, where she was then living, she also set up a hospital, in which she placed the sick and the weak and very many who could not wait for the general distribution of alms. In spite of the height of the mountain, she visited them several times every day, satisfying the desire of each of them in food as well as drink. She fed with her own hands some of the most repulsive and weak among them, made the beds for some, carried others on her shoulders, and did many acts of kindness.

And although she could not bear any foul air anywhere else, yet the stench of the sick, even in summer, which her maids could hardly endure, and only with grumbling, she bore without any disgust. Cheerfully handling them, she wiped their faces with her head-veil, wiping away saliva and spittle and the filth of mouth and nose. Besides these, she brought up poor little children in that same house, showing herself so sweet to them that they all called her mother; and when she came into the house, they would run to her and crowd around her, sitting beside her like her own children. Among them she loved especially those who had scabs, the sick, the weak, the dirtiest and the most deformed, stroking their heads with her hands and laying them in her lap.

[1] The Emperor Frederick II held a diet at Cremona in 1226. Louis spent most of 1226 in Italy with the emperor.

Chapter 7. Some miracles that God showed through her

But God, the lover of mercy, showed the work of his greatness in small things. Once this nurse of the poor was riding on horseback from the town up to the castle, carrying in her own cloak little clay pots, glass rings, and other toys for children, fitting presents for her sick little ones. All of them fell from the very high, steep rock. But though they struck against the stone, by the merit of the one carrying them they all remained whole and unbroken, and she gave them out to the children for their comfort.

Besides this, out of the whole crowd of the poor she chose the poorest and weakest; and having them placed in front of the castle, she gave out the leftovers from her table with her own hand, taking much from herself and her maids so as to give it to the poor.

One day, after the alms had been given, she shared out among them all the remains of the drink, a small amount left in a jug. When she had divided it among them all, it seemed hardly lessened at all; but as much appeared afterward as there had been before.

Not only in that hospital did she give the benefits of charity generously to all who asked, but in all the lands of her husband's rule she freely used up all the revenues of his four principalities, emptying them for the feeding of the poor, and spending them on their support.[1]

Whatever the world thinks precious and great, she put aside, selling the ornaments of her body to feed the members of Christ. For them she chose what the world looks down on, when she sat down to milk, to satisfy a poor man who wanted milk. For them she took into her lap what the world shrinks from in disgust, when she handled and washed the horrible and dirty sick with her own hands.

In that same hospital she had placed twenty-eight sick poor people, so arranged that when one died another immediately took his bed. For one sick man who was troubled about his debts, she paid what he owed and set his anxious conscience at rest.

And nine hundred poor people were fed every day in her sight by her servants with the comfort of her alms.

When she had fed the multitude in this way until the harvest, she gave shirts, shoes, and sickles to all who were able to work, so that from then on they might feed themselves by their own labor. To those who could not work she gave little garments bought in the market. All of these she gladly gave out with her own hands. And saying goodbye to them as they went away, she gave each of them gifts. When the money ran out, she gave the poor women veils and other silken gifts, saying: “I do not want you to use these for vanity, but to sell them for your needs; and work at honest labor as far as you can.” Among these, when she gave one woman shirts, shoes, and an overgown, the woman was so overjoyed that she cried out that there had never been such joy in the world; and falling to the ground from too much joy, she was thought to be dead. When the blessed woman saw this she was afraid that she had been the cause of her death.

For the burial of poor people who died, she made shrouds with her own hands; and handling them and touching them with her hands, she was careful to attend their funerals humbly. She cut a large, very white linen veil of her own into pieces and used it all for burying the dead. And she would not let the bodies of rich people who died be wrapped in new linen and shirts, but in old ones, urging that the better things be given to the poor.

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[1] The four principalities: the landgraviate of Thuringia, Hesse, the county palatine of Saxony, and the march of Meissen, which Louis then governed as guardian of his nephew.

Chapter 8. The Landgrave’s return from the Emperor

These and many other famous works of devotion and mercy she carried out with a devout mind and a tireless heart, with her husband’s help; for by his consent and encouragement she was led to do every good work and to give alms. When, after many months, the Landgrave returned from the Emperor, the whole land rejoiced and welcomed its prince gladly with joy beyond measure. His mother and brothers rejoiced especially, but the lady Elizabeth was happier than them all. When the stewards and managers complained to the prince about her excessive pouring out of alms, the most kind man said: “Let her do good, and give whatever she wishes for God’s sake; only keep the Wartburg and the Neuenburg under my rule.”[1]

In these three things the Lord declared his good pleasure, as Holy Scripture bears witness, saying: “In three things my spirit is well pleased, which are approved before God and men: the harmony of brothers, the love of neighbors, and a man and a wife who agree well together.”[2] For the glorious prince lived with his own brothers sweetly, fairly, and kindly, and showed a devoted and helpful charity to all others, and most of all to the needy and the poor.

How good and sincere was the harmony of this blessed man with his chosen wife, the witness of this writing shows clearly.

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[1] Neuenburg castle at Freyburg on the Unstrut, the Landgraves’ other great fortress.

[2] Sirach 25:1–2.

Chapter 9. The venerable Master Conrad of Marburg

At that time there were among the bishops and priests certain just and perfect men, by whose example and teaching Almighty God was then upholding his Church. Among them Master Conrad of Marburg shone in Germany like a bright star. For he was learned in knowledge, pure in conduct, and evangelical in life; rich in

teaching, zealous for the Catholic faith, and a very powerful opponent of heretical wickedness. He would not have riches, temporal possessions, or Church benefices; content with a simple, modest, and humble clerical dress, he was grave and mature in his ways and stern in appearance; kind and gracious to good Christians, but just and strict in judging the wicked and the faithless.[1]

He preached throughout all Germany by apostolic authority, and a countless multitude of clergy and people followed him. Everyone feared him as a holy and just man, some out of love, others out of fear. The lord Louis the Landgrave honored him and held him in such esteem that he entrusted to him the granting of all the benefices whose right of patronage belonged to the Landgrave.[2] He also agreed that the lady Elizabeth, his wife, should make a vow of obedience and continence into the hands of this man, keeping safe the law and rights of marriage. This was done in the city of Eisenach, in the convent of the nuns of Saint Catherine. So the holy woman kept a strict and humble obedience for God's sake, as she had vowed.[3]

Once it happened that the Master called her to a sermon, but she did not come, because she was held back by the Margravine of Meissen, her husband's sister, who had arrived unexpectedly.[4] So the servant of God sent her word that because of this disobedience he would no longer take care of her. But she came in haste the next day and asked to be received back into his favor. When this serious and stern man refused, the king's daughter threw herself humbly at his feet and obtained pardon. But he punished her maids more severely with blows. So for two years, while her husband was alive, she showed him obedience, and after his death far greater obedience.

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[1] Conrad of Marburg (died 1233) was a learned priest and a papal preacher of the crusade, and later a fierce inquisitor against heresy in Germany. His harshness made him many enemies, and he was murdered in 1233. Dietrich, like the other early writers, presents him with great respect.

[2] That is, the right to choose the priests for the parishes and churches in the Landgrave's gift.

[3] Her vow of continence meant that if her husband died before her, she would not marry again.

[4] Jutta, Louis's sister, widow of Margrave Dietrich of Meissen.

Book Four

Chapter 1. How the husband of Saint Elizabeth took the cross to help the Holy Land

Here begins the fourth book of this work, the Life of Saint Elizabeth.

At last, in the year 1227, there came about a general crossing to the Holy Land, in which Frederick, the Roman Emperor, was also to sail across.[1] By order of the Supreme Pontiff the Cross was being preached for the help of the Holy Land. Then many archbishops, bishops, and princes, and other faithful of Christ, kindled with zeal for the faith against the enemies of Christ, were signed with his Cross, to fight faithfully against the heathen. Louis, the excellent prince, Landgrave of the Thuringians, a most Christian man, after taking careful counsel with the venerable father lord Conrad, Bishop of Hildesheim,[2] was signed with the Cross by him in the name of Jesus Christ. Wishing to keep it hidden until the right time, he did not at once fasten the sign he had received to his clothing, as was the custom, so that his wife, who loved him with the tenderest affection, would not see it and be troubled with anxiety about his coming absence. But at last she found it while she was opening his purse, which hung on his usual belt; and overcome with amazement, she was dismayed. The most gentle prince soothed her sorrow with godly counsel and sweet words.

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[1] This was the crusade that the Emperor Frederick II had long promised. The army gathered at Brindisi in the summer of 1227.

[2] Conrad II, Bishop of Hildesheim (1221–1246), who also preached the crusade. He is not the same man as Master Conrad of Marburg.

Chapter 2. How he said farewell to his people and departed

Then, when he had set his land in order and arranged his principalities, he visited the houses of monks and nuns, receiving their blessing and commending himself to their prayers. Then, coming to Schmalkalden, a town of his domain, he found there those dearest to his heart, whom he had ordered to gather there, for he would not leave without saying goodbye to them. Bidding them farewell with sorrow, he entrusted his children and his wife to his brothers; and kissing his mother as a son, he could hardly speak to her for the grief of his heart.

Their inmost hearts were stirred, their hearts were trembling,

As each one fell upon another’s neck,

Seeking kisses which they scarcely won

For the crowds that pressed upon them.

The mother holding her son, the wife her husband,

Pull him this way and that, and hold him back unwilling;

His brothers and his knights, as though he were in fetters,

Hold him fast, and will not let him go free.

There was the greatest tumult in the army

When they saw the faces of their dear ones change.

All wept alike, the old man and the grown,

The crowds and the knights, the learned and the simple.

Ah, who would not lament to see them weeping,

So many honorable nobles, so many different peoples,

Saxons together with Thuringians coming there

To see their comrades going away?

In a loving struggle they all strove together

Over who could hold him back the longest.

Some clung to his neck with their arms, some

To his clothes, nor could he answer anyone.

At last, freeing himself from the hands of his own,

Companion of the great and of the pilgrims,

He mingled at last with the company of the crusaders,

Never again to see the land of the Thuringians.[1]

So the prince of peace mounted his horse, with many barons, nobles, knights, squires, and very many other faithful of Christ, and bidding farewell to the land and to the people who remained, they set out on pilgrimage toward the end of the month of June in the name of the Lord, praising him with hearts and voices.

There was then the greatest sadness, great mourning and lamenting, pitiful cries, a flood of tears with anxious groaning and wailing. But there was also a devout spirit there, and the pleasing voice of those blessing God. O holy rejoicing mixed with turbulent sorrow! There weeping and lamenting were joined to song, while parents were parted from their children and husbands from their wives for the love of the faith.

[1] In the Latin these lines are rhymed verse, four lines to each rhyme. They may come from an older poem about Louis's departure.

Chapter 3. How blessed Elizabeth went some way with her husband

The most faithful wife followed her dearest prince, her most loving husband, not from far off but close by, with a most sorrowful heart, as he went on pilgrimage beyond the borders of Thuringia; and, alas, she would never see him again. Then, when it was time for her to turn back, the power of love and the pain of parting held her, and drove her, against all reason, to go on a day's journey further. But even this going on was not enough; unable to bear the parting, she went on still further, completing the journey of a second day.

What does this mean? Surely the bond of love and the force of grief made her wish to go further and further. Yet the love of the Creator, strong as death,[1] broke through the delays of affection. At last they parted from each other, encouraged by Rudolf the Cupbearer.[2] What groans do you suppose there were, what sighs, what sobs, what tears, what stirring and pounding of the heart, where such a hard and violent tearing apart, so bitter and violent a separation came between them! Yet they withdrew, and parted from each other.

O unbearable and most bitter parting, in which comfort was hidden from the eyes of all who looked on! O how great was the mourning and lamenting of everyone, and especially how great the lamenting of the lady and of the young women returning with her!

The lord went on rejoicing like a giant to run his course;[3] the lady returned weeping like a widow, with tears upon her cheeks.[4] Putting off her festive clothes, she put on the dress of widowhood; sitting alone, the lady of nations, the princess of provinces,[5] she turned wholly to God, adding even better works to the good works that had gone before.

[1] Song of Songs 8:6.

[2] Rudolf of Vargula, the Landgrave's cupbearer, a close friend of Louis.

[3] Psalm 19:5.

[4] Lamentations 1:1–2.

[5] Lamentations 1:1.

Chapter 4. Where the Landgrave began to have a fever

So when everything had been well arranged, Louis, Landgrave of Thuringia, Prince of Hesse and Saxony, Count Palatine, set out with the greatest joy and gladness, choosing to go into exile from his land for the love of Jesus Christ, so that he might deserve to be received by him in the heavenly homeland.

So, passing in peace and quiet through Franconia, Swabia, and Bavaria, and across the Alps through Italy, Lombardy, and Tuscany, he came into the Kingdom of Sicily, where the Emperor Frederick received him with joy beyond measure in the city called Troia.[1] Going on with him all the way, they came at last to Brindisi.

From there, after the Nativity of blessed Mary ever Virgin, they began to sail with all the strength of the army and the rest of their following. But before they boarded ship, the Emperor and the Landgrave enjoyed conversations together on the island of Saint Andrew. There, alas, that most refined and gracious prince Louis began to be troubled a little by fevers. Nevertheless, going aboard separate galleys and commending themselves to Christ with prayers, they left the harbor of Brindisi. They entered the city called Otranto, where they found the Empress, and the Landgrave visited her and greeted her with due honor.[2] And now his body was more sharply troubled by fevers; so he went back to the ship and took to his bed.

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[1] Troia, in Apulia. The Emperor's "Kingdom of Sicily" included all of southern Italy.

[2] Otranto, at the heel of Italy; the Latin text prints the name in a garbled form. The Empress was Isabella (Yolande) of Brienne, heiress to the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Chapter 5. His last hours

Seeing that he was in danger of death, he sent for the Patriarch of Jerusalem and received from him the Sacrament of Holy Anointing; and to carry out this solemn office the Patriarch took as his assistant the Bishop of Santa Croce.[1] When the anointing was finished, they gave him the viaticum of the most holy Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he received with Catholic faith and sincere devotion. And so this most Christian man, an exile and pilgrim for the name of Christ, signed with Christ's Cross, returning from the pilgrimage of this present life to his homeland, fell asleep in the Lord on the third day before the Ides of September.[2]

Some of his men, who had gone ahead by ship, heard the very sad news of his death and were deeply troubled; and from unbearable grief of heart there arose very great weeping and wailing, so that the sea itself seemed to tremble, shaken by the voices of the mourners crying out pitifully and lamenting.

"Alas," they said, "O lord, alas, renowned one, how we are left exiles in a foreign land without you! How we have lost you, the light of our eyes, the leader of our pilgrimage, the hope of our return! Woe to us!"

Yet sailing back, they buried the body of their beloved prince, wrapped fittingly and securely, celebrating a solemn funeral. Nevertheless, they completed the journey of pilgrimage that they had undertaken.[3]

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[1] The Patriarch was Gerold of Lausanne. The bishop's see is not certain. The printed Latin here has a damaged word.

[2] 11 September 1227.

[3] His body was buried for the time being at Otranto. Book Five tells how his bones were brought home.

Chapter 6. How the death of her husband was announced to blessed Elizabeth

The messengers returned to Thuringia bringing the sorrowful news of the untimely death of the most devout and illustrious prince. Wise and good people took care that this unhappy and lamentable news should not be brought to the ears of his widow by anyone's untimely or foolish telling; and it seemed that this could and should be done more suitably by the dead man's mother, the lady Sophia. Taking with her some noble and discreet ladies, she came to her daughter-in-law at the Wartburg, and was received by her with reverence and kindness. When they had sat down, the mother-in-law said to her daughter-in-law: "Be brave, my dear daughter, and do not be troubled at what has been done by God's ordering to your husband, my son." Understanding these words of her mother-in-law to be about her husband's captivity, and not at all about his death, she answered with confidence: "If my brother is held captive" (for that is what she used to call him), "he can be set free with the help of God and of our friends." Her mother-in-law said to her, "He is dead." Then she clasped her hands together over her knees and said in the deepest sorrow: "The world is dead to me now, and everything pleasant in the world." As soon as she had said this, she suddenly rose up weeping and ran swiftly the whole length of the palace. For she was beside herself, and she would have run on and on if a wall had not stopped her. Those who were present came up and drew her away from the wall she was clinging to. The eyes of all were flowing and wet with tears over the death of so lovable a husband, and in pity for so wretched a widow. The comforter had been taken far away, and all comfort was gone.[1] Yet he was present who takes up the orphan,[2] the inward comforter of widows, the Holy Spirit, comforting the widow's heart, lifting up the mourner and gladdening her with the sweetness of grace.

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[1] Lamentations 1:16.

[2] Psalm 146:9.

Chapter 7. How she was driven out of her castle, and patiently endured poverty

Not long after, some vassals of the dead prince, who were supposed to guide his young brother Henry,[1] forgetting the fear of God and justice, and their own honor and good conduct, persecuted the one whom God had struck, and adding to the pain of her wound,[2] they cast her out of the castle and out of all her possessions. So the king's daughter came down from the heights, weeping and sad, with her people, down the slope of the mountain to the town below the castle. Taken in with her people at the house of an innkeeper, she remained there that night with great joy of spirit. At midnight she rose and went to Matins at the church of the Friars Minor, asking them to sing the angelic hymn, that is, the *Te Deum laudamus*, glorying in her troubles[3] and giving thanks to God.

And since no one dared to take her into his house, she fled to the Lord with her serving women; she went into the church and stayed there a long time, sitting. And when her little children were brought down from the castle in the bitter cold, she did not know where to turn with them, or where to lay their heads.[4]

So, driven by necessity, she went into a priest's house, feeding herself and her people poorly enough by pawning her belongings. In that town there was a man who was hostile to her, who had a dwelling with many buildings and a great many rooms. When she entered it by order, she was forced to live in a cramped place with all her household. Her host and hostess and their household showed her not the kindness of charity but many hardships of hostility.

So, going out from there, she said goodbye to the walls that had sheltered her from the rain and cold, saying: "I would gladly bless the people, if I had a reason to do it." And she went back to the filthy hovel where she had been before, since she could not have any other dwelling in that town.

Alas for the unexpected and unhappy changes of things! Alas for the false and empty happiness of this world! Look, she who could live in palaces and command others is now forced to beg for lodging, and cannot

get it. O astonishing and unsearchable dispensation of God! She who used to feed the children of the poor like a mother and nourish them like a nurse is now, pressed by want, forced to send the children of her own womb far away from her to different and distant places to be fed. And so, living there in poverty, she took from her own mouth the little that she could have and gave it to the poor.

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[1] Henry Raspe, Louis's younger brother, who took over the government of Thuringia. Later he was briefly elected German king against Frederick II (1246–1247). Historians still debate how far Elizabeth was "driven out" and how far she left the Wartburg by her own choice; Dietrich follows the dramatic version.

[2] Psalm 69:26.

[3] Romans 5:3.

[4] Matthew 8:20.

Chapter 8. How an ungrateful old woman pushed Saint Elizabeth into the mud

At that time there was in that place a poor old woman who was sick. Elizabeth helped her poverty with alms, her sickness with medicines, and her old age with comforts. There was a narrow way where, because the mud was deep, stones had been laid for those who passed by. There this old woman met her benefactor, of whom we have spoken; and not wishing to give way to her, the low-born woman pushed against the noble one, the insolent against the gentle, the woman who forgot kindness against the merciful one. So the handmaid of God fell down into the deep mud, and all her clothes were soiled. Bearing this with great gentleness and patience, she got up laughing heartily, and washed her dirty clothes with joy in the river, and her patient soul in the blood of the Lamb.[1]

All these things came upon her, yet she did not forget God and did not act wickedly;[2] but the more her troubles abounded, the more her consolations abounded,[3] through many divine revelations by which she was often visited, by day and by night, while she was at prayer.

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[1] Revelation 7:14.

[2] Psalm 44:17.

[3] 2 Corinthians 1:5.

Chapter 9. The divine consolations and revelations given to her

At that time, during the days of Lent, the handmaid of God was once present at the celebration of Mass as usual. Burning with the fervor of devotion, kneeling and leaning against the wall, and raised above herself in mind and spirit, she kept her eyes fixed on the altar in contemplation for a very long time.

That noble and devout woman Isentrud, who was closer to blessed Elizabeth than all the others, noticed this. Later, finding a good moment, she pressed her with many requests to reveal the vision she had seen while the saving Host was being offered. The happy Elizabeth answered her: "What I came to know there by the Lord's revealing, it is not good to tell to people. But I do not want this to be hidden from you: that my soul was filled with the sweetest joy, and I saw wonderful secrets of God with the inner eye of my mind."

When she had come back from church to her humble lodging, she took only a very little food. After eating she was very weak, and sweat broke out on her; so, sending the others away, the handmaid of God lay down, as if to rest, in the lap of Isentrud, keeping her eyes fixed on the place opposite her. After some time, her face grew bright, she was filled with great gladness, and a sweet and joyful smile appeared on her lips. After a long while, she closed her eyes, and tears without number flowed from them like streams. And again, after a short pause, she opened her eyes and her face appeared glad as before, and the smile was on her lips as before. And so, as has been said, weeping with her eyes closed and smiling with them open, by turns, she continued in contemplation until the hour of Compline, dwelling more in joy than in sorrow.

After this long gazing she broke out into these loving words: “Yes, Lord, you wish to be with me, and I wish to be with you, and I do not wish to be separated from you.” The venerable Isentrud, in whose lap she lay during this revelation, heard these words and, wondering greatly, begged most earnestly to have this mystery opened to her. The humble Elizabeth, preferring to stay hidden, refused to tell it. But at the prayers of the friend who loved her and whom she loved, she answered: “I saw heaven opened, and my most sweet Lord Jesus bending down to me and comforting me in the various distresses and troubles that surrounded me. When I saw him, I rejoiced and smiled. But when he turned his face away as if to go, I wept. Then he took pity on me and turned his most serene face toward me again, saying: ‘If you wish to be with me, I wish to be with you, and I never wish to be separated from you.’ And I answered him, saying: ‘Yes, Lord, you wish to be with me, and I wish to be with you; and I never wish to be separated from you.’”

O happy and firm covenant, and faithful betrothal! O truly pleasing humility of this woman, to whom the supreme excellence of majesty bent down! O burning love, to whose sight the presence of the Godhead offers itself! O sincere devotion, which the flowing in of sweetness consoles! O how blessed the distress to which the heavenly immensity is opened and lies open! This treasure, once found, she tried to hide completely, so that the wind of vanity would not scatter what the grace of holiness had gathered.[1]

[1] Matthew 13:44: the treasure hidden in a field.

Book Five

Chapter 1. Blessed Elizabeth and her people come, through the care of the Bishop of Bamberg, to Bamberg and Pottenstein

Here begins the fifth book of this work, the Life of Saint Elizabeth.

After this a noble and devout woman, the Abbess of Kitzingen, blessed Elizabeth's aunt in the flesh, her mother's sister,[1] took pity on her great poverty and want. She had her brought to her with honor and then took her to the lord Bishop of Bamberg. He was the uncle of God's handmaid,[2] and he received her kindly and reverently and treated her with every honor and charity. But the venerable man, knowing that the Apostle says, "I want the younger widows to marry and bear children,"[3] was thinking of placing her in marriage with someone. And this did not escape her.

Her serving women, who had made a vow of continence together with her, feared the bishop's power, and spoke to her about it, complaining and in tears. She comforted them, and answered steadily with a heart full of trust: "God, who sees into hearts and knows what is hidden, knows that the vow of continence I made while my husband was living came from a pure and simple heart and from faith unfeigned.[4] And so, trusting in his mercy, I know that it is impossible that he should not guard my chastity against every human plan or violence. For I did not make a conditional vow, 'if it should please my friends and relatives,' but a vow that was willing, absolute, and free, to keep the most perfect chastity after the death of my beloved, to the glory of the Creator. And if anyone should dare, against the freedom of marriage, to give me to a husband against my will, I will refuse in my heart and speak against it with my words. And if I could find no other way to escape it, I would secretly cut off my own nose with my own hands, so that every man would shrink from me, so shamefully disfigured." Then the bishop ordered that the handmaid of God, with her serving women, should be taken with a fitting escort to the castle called Pottenstein,[5] to stay there until he should give her to a husband.

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[1] Mechtild of Andechs-Merania, abbess of the Benedictine convent of Kitzingen in Franconia.

[2] Ekbert of Andechs-Merania, Bishop of Bamberg (1203– 1237), brother of Elizabeth's mother, Queen Gertrude.

[3] 1 Timothy 5:14.

[4] 1 Timothy 1:5.

[5] A castle of the Bishops of Bamberg in the hills of Franconia, south of Bayreuth.

Chapter 2. How the bones of her dead husband were brought home

So she went, sad and unwilling, for the bishop's intention regarding her had become known to her. Then, fearful and trembling at the danger, she fled to the Lord, and with tearful prayers she commended her chastity to his keeping. And God heard her voice according to his mercy, and turned her mourning and sadness into comfort, her grief into joy. For behold, suddenly a messenger came from the bishop, calling her back to Bamberg. For when that most illustrious Louis, Prince and Landgrave of the Thuringians, had died in Apulia, the nobles and honorable men who had set out with him took care of him; wrapping his body in fitting and strong cloths, they buried it with honor. When their pilgrimage was finished, the body was dug up and stripped of its flesh by careful boiling. When this was done, the bones appeared whiter than snow.[1] These were placed and enclosed in very clean chests, reverently covered, and carried on the back of a pack animal.

Being devout Christians and most faithful lovers of their lord, they also set over them a silver cross adorned with jewels. All along the road of their return, in whatever city or town they stopped for the night, they placed the bones in the church and had prayers and vigils kept all night by devout and faithful people. In the morning, after Mass had been celebrated and they had made an offering, they set out, doing the same in other

places.

And in every city or town that had a cathedral or conventual church, they left in it the purple cloth with which, out of respect for the place, they had covered the bones, for the repose of the dead man's soul. O what a funeral! O most faithful and most noble men, who carried out such funeral rites! Of which of the emperors or princes, or even of the saints, do we read that they had such a funeral?

[1] It was a common custom then, when a great man died far from home, to separate the bones from the flesh so that they could be carried home for burial.

Chapter 3. How the bones were received at Bamberg

When they drew near to Bamberg, they announced the coming of the remains to the Bishop of Bamberg. Then the bishop called for Elizabeth, God's handmaid, the dead man's widow, the daughter of his sister the queen, so that she might go out to meet them and receive the remains of her former husband. In his wisdom he arranged, for the honor and comfort of God's handmaid, that all the nobles and more distinguished persons should be at her side as she went to meet the funeral, and should support her so that she would not faint. So the glorious bishop went out with a venerable multitude of religious and of the clergy of the city to meet this great funeral, singing prayers and mournful chants. The bells rang out, the people came streaming together from every side, and the crowd of religious and clergy, singing heavenly hymns, escorted the remains all the way to the cathedral church. For it is a wholesome and holy thing to pray for the dead.[1]

[1] 2 Maccabees 12:46.

Chapter 4. What Saint Elizabeth said to God there over the bones

When the remains had been placed there, the chests were opened before the venerable widow, and the bones were uncovered. What grief and what love were then in her heart, only he can know who knows the hearts of all the children of men. I think her grief was renewed; her heart was moved within her; her bones trembled, when she saw the frame of the body she had once loved broken apart, and the bones scattered and separated. And overwhelmed with such great sorrow, she remembered God, and, taking heart again, she said:

"I thank you, Lord, that you have fulfilled for your handmaid the great desire I had to see the bones of my beloved, and that you have deigned in your mercy to comfort my afflicted and desolate soul. I do not begrudge you him, though I loved him with all my heart, since he offered himself to you, and I offered him to you, for the help of your Holy Land. You know, O God, that I would have put his longed-for presence, so very dear to me, before all the delights and joys of this world, if your goodness had granted him to me. And I would have chosen to live in need and beggary all the days of my life, if only it had been your good pleasure that I might enjoy his company. But now I commit him and myself to the ordering of your will. For even if I could, I would not call him back to life against your good pleasure, not for the least hair of my head."

When she had said this, she held back the floods of her tears and fell silent. Leaving the church, she sat down in a little meadow, and asked that the noble pilgrims from Thuringia who had brought back the prince's remains, precious to her heart and more desirable than gold, should come to her. When they came in, that royal lady rose reverently and humbly to meet them; and receiving them with a calm face, she had them sit beside her and spoke kindly to them, telling them, among other things, of the injuries and troubles she had suffered.

Chapter 5. How they returned from Bamberg and came to Thuringia

After this the bishop discussed carefully and faithfully with these nobles the recovery of her dowry, and the arrangement of a suitable and honorable provision and support for her. They promised the bishop that they would arrange for her, as their lady, everything that justice and honor required. Otherwise the bishop would not have entrusted her to them to be taken back. So when the promises had been received, and the funeral rites had been celebrated with due reverence and devotion, they received the bishop's blessing and said farewell. The one party went home; the others returned to Thuringia with the widowed lady and the bones of the dead prince, on a journey that was prosperous, though mournful.

The news of this was brought to Thuringia, and the land was moved, and there was great mourning and lamentation among them all. Counts, nobles, and knights came out to meet them, and from the cities, towns, and villages a countless multitude, rich and poor, men and women. When they came to the monastery of Reinhardsbrunn, a devout community of monks and a large gathering of clergy went out to meet them; receiving the remains of this great funeral with fitting devotion, they led them in with the customary prayers and tearful chants.

Chapter 6. How the bones were laid in the tomb of his fathers

At last, when the vigils, prayers, and almsgiving, the solemn Masses and offerings, and everything that belongs to the honor of a funeral and the salvation of a soul had been carried out duly, devoutly, and solemnly, they laid those noble remains with reverence in the tomb of his ancestors. Present there were the lady Sophia his mother, the lady Elizabeth his widow, and Henry and Conrad, the prince's brothers.[1] There was mourning and sorrow there, and he alone knew the sadness of them all who alone sees sorrow and grief.

He died in the year of the Lord 1227, on the third day before the Ides of September, in the Kingdom of Sicily, in the city called Otranto. His bones were brought back, as has been said, and in the following year he was buried in the monastery of monks of the Order of Saint Benedict called Reinhardsbrunn.[2] There may he rest in the peace of God. Amen.

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[1] Conrad, the youngest brother, later became a Knight of the Teutonic Order, and its Grand Master (died 1240). He played a large part in building the church of Saint Elizabeth at Marburg.

[2] Reinhardsbrunn, near Gotha, was the family monastery and burial place of the Landgraves of Thuringia.

Chapter 7. The dead man's brother is rebuked for having driven Saint Elizabeth out

After this great funeral and burial had been carried out with fitting rites, as has been said, and everyone had gone home, those honorable men and leading knights who had gone out of the land on pilgrimage with the prince of happy memory, and had brought back his bones with reverence and buried them with due honor, took thought for his widow, the lady Elizabeth, whom they had taken under their protection. Remembering the promise they had made to the Bishop of Bamberg, they went to Henry, the dead man's brother.

These are their names, always to be kept in honored memory: Rudolf the Cupbearer of Vargula, Leutolf of Berlstedt, Hartwig of Erfa, and Walter of Vargula, men endowed with all wisdom and outstanding in honor.

The first of them, namely Rudolf the Cupbearer, spoke in this way to the young prince, while the others stood by and those who were present had been called in:

"We have heard, and our minds are troubled, and shame has covered our faces, because such dishonor and such wickedness have been found in such a man. Ah, my lord, what have you done? Your brother's widow, so full of sorrow, the most noble daughter of a king, whom you ought to have comforted and honored, you have without cause irreverently driven out of her home and possessions as if she were a disgraceful woman; and you have left her to beg in poverty. Your brother's orphans, whom your guardianship ought to have

guided, had to be separated from their mother and sent far away because of want. Where was your brotherly love then? What could the weaker sex, a desolate widow, an afflicted woman and an exile, have done? And in the end, what harm could a holy woman have wished to do? Alas! You have angered God, you have dishonored your own person, you have brought shame on Thuringia, you have lessened your good name; and truly it is to be feared that God's vengeance will come upon the land unless you make amends by appeasing so blessed a woman."

Those present marveled that this most steadfast man spoke so boldly to the prince. But truly, tested virtue rightly rebukes the foolish. The young man was stunned as he said this, and dissolving into tears, he wept greatly, saying:

"I am very sorry for what has been done. And so, that I may find favor in her eyes, I will do everything that my sister Elizabeth desires; and I am ready to carry this out as far as I can, according to your judgment."

The Cupbearer answered: "This, my lord, is altogether required of your fairness, if you wish to escape the anger of God and to repair what has been harmed."

Chapter 8. How Saint Elizabeth despised the pomp of the powerful

When these men reported this to the illustrious lady, she answered:

"I do not want castles, cities, and towns, or lands in which one has to be entangled and distracted. But in place of these, for what is owed to me by right on account of my dowry, I ask that I be given, by my brother's favor, what I may freely use, keep, and spend as I wish, for the salvation of my dead beloved, and for my own."

When the venerable woman said this, she was seeking the things that are above, not the things that are on earth.[1] The aim of her mind was carried toward contempt of passing things, toward desire for eternal things, toward alms for the poor and mercy for the needy.

When these matters had been settled, to be carried into effect, the men said farewell to everyone with grace and tears, commended them to the grace of God, and returned to their own homes.

And as long as the venerable Elizabeth was pleased to stay with her brother-in-law, he held her in respect, and had her treated kindly and with honor. But she, full of God, knew that such comforts and grandeur of princes and the rich usually come from the hardship and oppression of the poor. So she withdrew, choosing rather to be afflicted with the people of God,[2] and to be counted among the common folk, than to share in royal delights. And so it came about that she lived in poverty as before, and was pressed by want.

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[1] Colossians 3:1–2.

[2] Hebrews 11:25, said of Moses.

Chapter 9. The contempt she suffered from the nobles of Thuringia

When the nobles and great men saw that she spurned and refused the world and the glory of the world, they despised her, so much that they would not deign to see her or speak to her. They mocked her and slandered her in many ways, calling her mad and foolish because she threw away the riches of the world. She bore their insults and abuse with so glad a heart and so cheerful a face in the Lord, that they reproached her with rejoicing as if she had forgotten her husband's death, when she ought rather to be mourning. Poor wretches, they did not know that she had a joy that is not given to the wicked.[1]

Clearly she rejoiced, not because she had forgotten the death of her earthly husband, but because she remembered Christ, the Bridegroom of eternal life. She rejoiced in troubles, knowing that they are sent to those who love God. She rejoiced and gave thanks, because for the sake of her vow of chastity she had been

found worthy to suffer insult from the lovers of the foulest pleasure. For if she had wished to marry, she would have found the best things of this world and the highest ranks, riches, and delights of this present life. But she, counting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of the Egyptians,[2] chose the Cross for the joy set before her, despising the shame.[3]

Yet all who loved godliness and judged rightly held her in veneration, and she was precious in their eyes. For the lord Pope, Gregory the Ninth, comforted her by apostolic letters; putting before her the examples of the saints and promising her eternal life, he exhorted her kindly and like a father to persevere in chastity and to be steadfast in patience, and he took her person and her goods under the special protection of the Apostolic See. He also commended her very carefully by his letters to Master Conrad, a devout priest and a man approved before God and men, and appointed him as her defender.[4]

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[1] Saint Augustine, *Confessions* 10.22: "There is a joy that is not given to the wicked, but to those who serve you freely, whose joy you yourself are."

[2] Hebrews 11:26.

[3] Hebrews 12:2.

[4] In 1228 Pope Gregory IX entrusted Conrad of Marburg with the protection of Elizabeth and her rights.

Book Six

Chapter 1. How Saint Elizabeth longed to serve God in extreme poverty

Here begins the sixth book of this work, the Life of Saint Elizabeth.

The handmaid of God, turning away from all present and earthly things and wishing to please and cling to God alone, wisely consulted the man we have mentioned, who had received apostolic authority over her, about how to order her state of life.

Weighing in her mind the perfection of the monastic life and the solitary life of a recluse, and also the merits and rewards of other states of life, she chose in her heart, above them all, complete poverty and public begging, by which she would ask from door to door for what she needed to live, for the name of the Lord.

When she asked Master Conrad with tears and great humility for his consent to undertake this, the wise man rejected her indignantly and severely, taking thought for a woman's humility and weakness.

Seeing that the priest would not grant what she asked, in her fervor to obey the counsels of the Gospel she said to him: "I will undertake something in which you cannot oppose me, and from which you cannot hold me back, father; for I know that I must not go against the Lord's counsels."

So when the days of the Lord's Passion before Easter were being kept, the disciple of Christ was in a town of hers in which the Friars Minor, religious men whom she herself had settled there, were living. On Good Friday, when the altars stood bare in memory of the mystery of the Savior who hung naked for us on the naked Cross, in the presence of Master Conrad and some of these friars, she laid her holy hands upon the bare altar in a certain chapel and renounced her own will, her parents, her children, her relatives, and all such pomp, as an imitator of Christ. She stripped herself and made herself entirely bare, so that, bare herself, she might follow him who was bare, in the footsteps of poverty and charity.[1] And when she wished to renounce her possessions as well, the devout and wise Master Conrad held her back, wishing her husband's debts to be paid, and alms to be given to the needy, from what she could have by right of her dowry.

[1] "Naked to follow the naked Christ" was a well-known saying of the Church Fathers, especially Saint Jerome. This act took place on Good Friday, 24 March 1228, probably in the Franciscan chapel at Eisenach.

Chapter 2. Her move to Marburg

After this, fearing the turmoil and deceit of the world, she left Thuringia, where she had lived gloriously with her husband, not long afterward, and followed the Master to Marburg. When she arrived there, she could not stay there suitably because of the persecution of some who were hostile to her, and so she went to a village in the country.[1] And so as not to be a burden to anyone, she went into an abandoned farmyard; and since she could find no better place there, she took shelter under the stairway of a building with a fireplace, protecting and shading herself with leafy branches. There she prepared food as well as she could, giving thanks to God. She bore with joy the heat of the sun, the stormy blasts of the wind, and the smoke that hurt her eyes very much. Meanwhile, in the town of Marburg, a little house was built for her of clay and wood, a humble dwelling; and she went into it and lived there with her people in all humility and patience.

[1] Traditionally Wehrda, just north of Marburg.

Chapter 3. How she obtained from the Lord contempt of the world

Master Conrad, who by the Apostolic commission had taken her into his care to teach and guide her, and who was concerned for her progress in salvation and holiness, urged her to despise temporal things and to

look down on everything earthly. The handmaid of God, considering that she could not do this by her own strength, turned to the Lord and obtained by prayer what she desired. For when she had poured out a devout prayer to the Lord, she said familiarly to her dear serving women:

“The Lord has heard my prayer. And see, all the worldly possessions and riches that I once loved I now count as dung. Even the dearest little children of my womb, whom I used to embrace with the tenderest love, I now look upon as if they were strangers; God is my witness. I have offered them to him and entrusted them to him; let him order things for them and fulfill the good pleasure of his will. In the slanders of people, too, and the backbiting of the wicked, and in being despised, I rejoice and am glad. I love no creature, but only the Creator of all.”

O lofty soul, which could not be bent down by desire for things, nor by the sweetness of children, nor by the bitterness of insults! O how pure the prayer and how sincere the devotion that deserved to obtain such abundance of grace! O singular charity, which was strong enough to carry out in deed so great a virtue!

Chapter 4. How she founded the hospital at Marburg

And because charity, wherever it fills the mind, is used to working great things, she began to build a hospital, where she could gather the sick members of Christ, and in them serve Christ the Lord himself. And to make herself free and fit for serving, she threw off the weight and pomp of worldly clothing, and the king’s daughter humbled her body, showing herself in the person of a servant, as a handmaid of Christ. So she received from the hand of Master Conrad a humble and lowly habit, dark in color and cheap in value.[1]

Her dearest attendant Guda, a most devout girl and most faithful serving woman, was clothed in a habit like hers. Elizabeth, the handmaid of God, devoted herself constantly to prayer, and carried out works of charity and mercy. Those whom poverty, weakness, or sickness had pressed down more than others, and those whom their devotion recommended more, she gathered into her hospital and served them most humbly in her own person.[2]

When Master Conrad saw that she was seating such wretched and despised people at her table, he rebuked her. But she, thinking back on her former life, said to him that in this way she must cure opposites by their opposites; and she declared that from such people she received a special grace.[3]

So the wise man, understanding that the disciple of Christ wished to climb to the summit of the highest perfection, strove to remove everything that he thought might hold her back from this purpose, and to apply whatever he believed would help her. So, little by little and one by one, he sent away from her all her former household, in whom she had found pleasure and comfort; and she let each of them go with grief and groaning. At last he sent away from her the venerable lady Isentrud, whom she especially loved, and she parted from her with great heaviness of heart and endless tears. Last of all he sent away Guda, who had been with her from childhood and whom she loved most especially, and she left her with many tears and sighs. So the holy priest deprived the handmaid of God of the comfort of all human company, so that the steadfastness of her obedience might be made known, and that she might have full freedom to cling to God alone.

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[1] A plain gray habit, such as the lay penitents wore. For this reason she is honored as a patron of the Third Order of Saint Francis, although she did not join a religious order in the strict sense.

[2] The hospital of Saint Francis at Marburg, founded in 1228– 1229. After her death the Teutonic Knights took it over and built beside it the great Gothic church of Saint Elizabeth, where her shrine still stands.

[3] A saying of the old medicine: a sickness is cured by its opposite. Her former pride and luxury would be healed by humble company.

Chapter 5. The poorness of her food and clothing

So poor little Elizabeth remained alone, left to God alone, living in great humility and poverty, kept alive by the poorest food and covering. For she prepared with her maids food that was tasteless and unsalted, since she had neither the skill nor the ingredients to cook. Because of her great poverty she was content with beans, or common vegetables, often boiled in plain water. And when this same wretched food of hers tasted burnt because she had neglected it, she bore her maids' scolding for it with joy. If she could sometimes have anything pleasant, she took it from her own mouth and gave it to the poor who were staying in her hospital. She also used to earn her living by the work of her hands, like a hired working woman. She did not know how to spin flax; but she spun wool that was sent to her from the convent of nuns at Altenberg, and taking less pay than she should have, she supported herself on it as well as she could. So much has been said about her food.

What shall we say about her clothing? Her clothes were cheap and rough. Her cloak was gray in color, and because it was short it was lengthened with cloth of another color. She had the sleeves and the tears in her tunic mended with cloth of another color. Taking cheap and worthless rags of every color, gathered from anywhere, she would repair with her own hands, as well as she could, the damage done by the kitchen fire; and mending the old rips in her worn garment with an unskilled needle, she stopped them up with cheap rags.

Chapter 6. The great poverty that she endured

At that time it happened that the powerful King of Hungary, the father of this poor little Elizabeth, sent a solemn messenger, a count named Pama,[1] with a large escort, to call his daughter Elizabeth back to his land. The glorious and rich king had heard that his daughter was living almost like a beggar, deprived of all comfort. The count came with his people to the town of Marburg and found his lord the king's daughter sitting at her distaff and spinning wool. Crossing himself in amazement, he cried out, saying: "Has anyone ever seen a king's daughter spinning wool?"

The nobleman tried to persuade her to return to her father and to the kingdom from which she came. But she preferred the poverty of Christ to the royal riches and treasures of her father, and exile for the Lord's sake to her native soil; and she could not be persuaded to go back to the land of her birth with her father's messengers.

So they went back to their own country; but our working woman sat down again at her distaff and took up her spindle, earning her living with her hands. She worked at this so eagerly that often, even when weak and sick and lying in bed, she would spin wool. And when a maid took the distaff from her hands to make her rest, so as not to be completely idle she would prepare wool with her hands for future spinning, by pulling it and teasing it apart. And she dealt so honestly with those for whom she spun that once, when Master Conrad called her from Marburg to come to Eisenach, she sent back to the nuns of Altenberg, along with some wool, the payment she had received from them but had not yet earned, so as not to keep anything beyond what she was owed.

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[1] The printed Latin reads *Pamam*; Canisius noted that his manuscripts also give *Paniam* or *Pantam*. The count is not otherwise known for certain.

Chapter 7. How friendly she was in daily life

Who can tell how sweetly and humbly she lived with her maids and her household? For from childhood to the end of her life, her company and her conversation were with simple and humble people and with the poor. And at last, after she had changed her dress, she would not let her maids, who were themselves very poor and of low birth, call her "lady," but only by her plain name, as equals or inferiors were usually called. She used to cook with them and eat with them, making them sit at the table beside her and eat from the same dish with her. One of them, named Irmgard, amazed at such a display of humility, said to her one day: "You, my lady,

are piling up merit for yourself in us, but you pretend not to see our danger: we may grow proud because we eat with you and sit at your side." To this the handmaid of the handmaids of Christ said, "Then you must sit in my lap," and she made Irmgard sit in her lap. And so she lived with them, friendly and kind, easy to deal with and gentle, full of sweet and cheerful words, which were nevertheless rich in usefulness.

For she could not bear anyone to say words of vanity, or of indignation and anger, in her presence. And if ever such a word was spoken before her, she would at once correct it with gracious authority, saying: "Where is the Lord now?" For the Lord is used to showing his presence to those who speak of him.[1]

[1] Compare Luke 24:15 and Matthew 18:20.

Chapter 8. Her tireless works of mercy

She also went with her maids to the houses of the poor, having bread, meat, flour, and other food carried with her. Giving these to the poor with her own hand, she carefully looked to their beds and clothes as she visited them. Secretly selling gold rings, silken veils, and other worldly gifts, she gave the money to the needy. And whatever the poor desired, she took the greatest care to provide for them. Once, when a sick man longed for fish, wishing to satisfy him and calling on her provider, the Lord Jesus Christ, she hurried to a spring that had no fish in it at all, to draw water. And as soon as she came back to the hospital she found enough fish in the vessel, and fed the sick man.

The Almighty was pleased to show many miracles through her during her life, which she, who cherished humility, tried to hide. Her mother too, who long before had been wretchedly killed by the Hungarians, appeared to her in her sleep, on bended knees, and said:

"My beloved daughter, pray for the pains that I am still suffering, because I lived carelessly; for you can."

Elizabeth woke up, rose weeping, prayed devoutly, and fell asleep again. Her mother came to her again and, giving thanks, declared that she had been set free, saying that Elizabeth's prayer would help all who called upon her.

Among her other works of mercy, Elizabeth, the servant of Christ, took care of a paralyzed boy who had lost both his parents and suffered from a constant flow of blood. Sometimes six times a night or more, as his sickness required, she would carry him in her holy arms and wash away the filth with her own hands.

When he died, she took in a leprous girl. Hiding her in her house, she did every service of charity for her, so that the holy woman, a king's daughter, humbly gave herself not only to feeding her, making her bed, and washing her, but even to taking off her shoes.

When the Master took this girl away, she took in a poor little boy with scabs, who had no hair on his head, to care for him; and she looked after him by washing him and treating him, though I do not know from whom she had learned it.

Besides this, Elizabeth, the most humble of the handmaids of Christ, serving her own servants, would wash the pots and dishes, and clean and handle the pans and other kitchen vessels with her own hands. And so that she could do this lowly and servile work more freely, she would send her little maids out of the house at such times. When they came back, they very often found her doing it, or having done it.

Now let me speak to you boldly, O noble and holy woman: What is this, Elizabeth? What are you doing, king's daughter? Why do you soil yourself with these low things? You were brought up in scarlet;[1] why do you embrace the dunghill? Why do you despise palaces and love huts? Answer me, I pray you.

"Do not wonder at the works I do. It is not I who do them, but the grace of God dwelling in me.[2] What I do are not low things but the wonders of God. They are not defilements but medicines for the soul. Beware of

calling dung what makes hearts holy. I have despised the palaces of the world, for I have sought the kingdom of heaven. I have chosen the life that I thought most despised; and if there were one more despised, I would choose it before all as the dearest. For by the narrowest way one goes to the widest glory."[3]

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[1] Lamentations 4:5: "Those who were brought up in scarlet have embraced dunghills."

[2] Compare 1 Corinthians 15:10 and Galatians 2:20.

[3] Matthew 7:14.

Book Seven

Chapter 1. Blessed Elizabeth turns her whole dowry into money to give to the needy

Here begins the seventh book of this work, the Life of Saint Elizabeth.

After the death of the most illustrious prince of happy memory, Louis, Landgrave of Thuringia, his widow, the venerable Elizabeth, led a poor life for some time, as has been said, and bore hard want with great cheerfulness and patience. At last, through Master Conrad, whom the lord Pope Gregory the Ninth had given her as her defender, the handmaid of God received a settlement from the lord Henry, her husband's brother. For this Henry was a kind man, and quite submissive and devoted to Master Conrad.

And when the faithful and wise steward had received it, she did not dig in the earth, nor hide her lord's money in a napkin, but gave it to the bankers and put it out at interest.[1] For this most true disciple of Christ, taught by the counsels of the Gospel, obeyed and sold all that she had.[2] In exchange for the immovable property of her dowry she asked for and accepted movable goods, knowing that she herself would be moved on by death, and striving to gain by movable things what is eternal and unmoving. And according to the Gospel saying, intending to give to the poor, she ordered by proclamation that a multitude of the poor should be called together from all around the town of Marburg, for twelve miles. And so that it would be open to everyone and this gift of generosity would be shut off from no one, a fixed place and day was named for all who wished to come.

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[1] Luke 19:20–23 and Matthew 25:18, 27, the parable of the talents.

[2] Matthew 13:46 and 19:21.

Chapter 2. Her great almsgiving

So at the place and day appointed there came together from every side a countless multitude of men and women: the poor, the weak, the blind, and others in need. Strong men and servants were present to keep the crowd from disorder and to arrange the throng in their places in good order. And to hold back the boldness of the rough crowd and the foolish greed of the needy, a rule was made, with a penalty set: if anyone left his place, or, wronging the others, dared to take alms a second time, he would suffer the shame of having his hair cut off. Besides this, faithful and capable persons had been appointed to carry out this distribution. There was also a large crowd who had come to see what was being done. In the midst of them all stood the glorious and renowned queen, with a calm face and a joyful heart, showing mercy with gladness and giving with simplicity.[1] With her skirts tucked up, she moved among the wretched, the comforter of the wretched. The prince's daughter rejoiced in the army of the poor. This generous hostess was glad among the strangers and orphans, giving and distributing as she had purposed in her heart, not with sadness or under compulsion, knowing that God loves a cheerful giver.[2]

So when such treasures had been distributed among so many thousands of poor people, namely five hundred marks in one day, they went back to their own places, praising the Lord in his handmaid Elizabeth.

But that night the weaker and more sickly ones stayed behind in the corners and along the hedges of the hospital. When the merciful friend of the poor saw them, she gathered them together. She ordered a long fire to be made in front of them and bread to be given out, and the feet of some to be washed and anointed, and six Cologne pennies to be given to each, great and small alike. Then their hearts were filled with joy and their tongues with gladness, and they began to sing.[3] When she who had given them this joy heard it, she rejoiced with those who rejoiced.[4]

Tell me, I pray you: which of the emperors, kings, or princes, or even of the saints, ever poured out such abundant alms on so many thousands of poor people in one day and in one place? Truly, in this privilege of grace no one has been found like her; and so, not without reason, the whole Church of the saints will tell of her alms.[5]

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[1] Romans 12:8.

[2] 2 Corinthians 9:7.

[3] Psalm 126:2.

[4] Romans 12:15.

[5] Sirach 31:11 (in the Latin Bible): “The whole Church of the saints shall declare his alms.”

Chapter 3. The conversion of a girl

On that same day, when the generous alms of five hundred marks were given out, it happened that a girl with very beautiful hair was brought before the lady Elizabeth for judgment, as one who had broken the rule that had been laid down. When she saw the beauty of her hair, she ordered it to be cut off at once. When this was done, the young girl began to cry out loudly. Some who were there said that she had been punished though innocent: she had come not to receive alms but to visit her sick sister. The lady Elizabeth said to them, “It has been done for her good: with this hair she will not go to dances any more.” When the girl had been called and had come before her, she asked her whether she had ever had the intention of a better life. The girl answered, “I would have served the Lord long ago in the habit of religion, if the beautiful brightness of my hair had not delighted me so much.” See how her hair weighed her down! Truly she would have perished, hanged like Absalom by her most beautiful hair,[1] if the Lord had not cut it off through his handmaid Elizabeth. When she heard this, Elizabeth, the lover of chastity, said: “Then I am more glad that your hair has been cut off than I would be if my son were raised to the Roman Empire.” O word of grace, royal speech, flowing from the fountain of the most sincere charity! So the most devout lady took her in; and the girl, changing her worldly dress, served in the hospital for the rest of her life.

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[1] 2 Samuel 18:9.

Chapter 4. How Master Conrad trained Saint Elizabeth in breaking her own will

After this, the handmaid of God took care to spend the rest of the money she had received for her dowry on similar works of charity and mercy. Her heart was opened wide, her hand was open to the needy, and her palms were stretched out to the poor.[1] So she was used to giving to the wretched and needy, not sparingly and little, but generously and much. When Master Conrad found this out, fearing that she would not have enough for herself, he forbade her too great pouring out and lavishness, since she kept nothing at all for herself, but gave everything most generously to the poor. He had also given her certain stern women as companions, through whom she suffered much oppression and restraint with patience for Christ’s sake. These women, being harsh toward her and watching what she did, often reported her to the Master for not keeping obedience, because she gave something to the needy, or begged others to give.

When she was accused by them in this way, she often suffered many blows from the Master, so that he even struck her in the face; and yet she had longed to bear such blows in memory of the blows the Lord received.[2]

In hard and difficult things she kept a willing and most ready obedience. For when the Master called her, she came at once, without delay, to places however far away. When her dearest and closest friends, the lady Isentrud and Sister Guda, came to visit her, she did not dare give them anything, not even food, nor even greet them, without permission.

And in her works of mercy to the poor she showed the readiest obedience. For when she was forbidden to give more than one penny to one poor person, she gave one at a time what she was not allowed to give all at once. Then the giving of money was forbidden her, but bread was allowed. But as she had obeyed about money, so she obeyed in giving out bread. At last she was ordered not to give whole loaves but only pieces of bread. In all these things her obedience was exercised and her mercy was spurred on. When she was forbidden to give alms, she would bathe lepers and other filthy sick people. She herself was faint with the feeling of pity, tormented within by the pain of compassion.

[1] Proverbs 31:20.

[2] Matthew 26:67 and John 18:22.

Chapter 5. Saint Elizabeth's zeal for the souls of the sick

But the just man, seeing that in her fervor of spirit she did not care for herself and counted all earthly things as dung, feared that her noble and delicate body might be infected or harmed by the contagion of disease. So he kept her from close dealings with such people, and forbade her even to touch and kiss their sores. For toward the horrible, the stinking, the wretched people whom everyone loathed, she was carried by a force of the Holy Spirit unheard of for ages and astonishing, with an incredible and wonderful eagerness to stay with them, to touch them, and to care for them. The servant of God also forbade her lavishness and her immoderate generosity in almsgiving, which kept nothing back for her own needs.

He did not think it right to allow such a person to take from her own mouth and waste away by giving to others. Divine inspiration had taught her mind this way of acting, and had decided that it should be tempered in this way by his servant.

Yet she kept on serving and working in the hospital. She made beds for those who had been bathed, laid them in their beds, and covered them, saying to her maids: "How good it is for us that we bathe and cover our Lord like this!" One of them said to her, "It may be good for you, my lady, with these people; I do not know whether it is so good for the others."

O wonderful thing, worthy to be remembered! No writing tells of any of the saints who handled the uncleanness of the filthiest sick people with serving hands so diligently and so familiarly, and who labored so tirelessly in all the works of mercy until death. Rightly, then, before the Father of mercies, a special privilege of glory shines on her, whose tender mercies are over all his works.[1] For she was careful to help all the faithful not only with bodily comforts but also with spiritual encouragement.

She lovingly warned people not to neglect having their little children baptized. She most effectively led the sick, by words and deeds, to ask for and receive the sacraments of the Church. Once she urged a poor woman to go to confession, but got nowhere, for that wretched woman lay there sleepy and lazy. The kind lover of souls beat her with rods, and having roused her with blows from the sleep of negligence, brought her to confession. Always intent on these and other works of devotion, she was pleasing and acceptable to the divine majesty; she displeased the lovers of the world, and even seemed blameworthy to some devout people; but now she shines like the sun among the saints.

[1] Psalm 145:9.

Chapter 6. How some who were ungrateful to Saint Elizabeth could not go on their way

For a poor woman who was near to giving birth, Elizabeth, the nurse of the poor, ordered a lodging to be provided, with every comfort in it. When the infant was baptized she wished it to be given her own name,

Elizabeth. She visited the mother every day, blessing her and feeding her lovingly and tenderly for almost a whole month. At last the woman received from her benefactress a cloak and the shoes that Elizabeth had taken off her own holy feet, and veils, bacon and flour, and twelve Cologne pennies, and the child wrapped in sleeves that she had ordered to be taken from the fur coat of one of her servants. In the evening she said goodbye to her kind lady; and early in the morning she went away with her husband, leaving the child behind. Before Matins the merciful Elizabeth said to her maid, "Take the spices and medicines I have to that poor woman, so that she may use them and grow strong." The maid went and found the child without its mother. When the most devout lady heard this, she said, "Go quickly and bring the child here, so that it is not neglected." When the child was brought, she entrusted it to the wife of a certain knight to look after, and sending for the judge of the town, she ordered the child's mother to be looked for along the different roads. When she was not found, the maid said to the lady Elizabeth, "Pray to God to show us the child's mother," for she was very much afraid of Master Conrad's anger. And the lady said: "I do not know how to ask for anything except that the will of the Lord be done." And behold, a little later the husband came back, threw himself down, and asked forgiveness. And the woman was brought back and begged pardon for her ingratitude and offense. Both of them openly confessed that they had not been able to go on, and had come back as if forced. And what had been given to the ungrateful woman was taken away from her.

The cloak was given to a devout young woman, who soon vowed to serve the Lord in chastity. The shoes were given to a widow; but the merciful Elizabeth took pity on the woman and ordered other shoes to be given to her. And she took back her child and went away.

See now clearly how grace triumphs over nature and prevails over it greatly. Do you not see that this woman, filled with grace, embraced the children of others in God, and, renouncing the children of her own body, forgot them? For her own little baby, a year and six months old, she had sent far away from her, so that she would not embrace him with too much affection, fearing that because of him she would be held back from her spiritual exercises.

Chapter 7. The wonderful power of Saint Elizabeth's prayer

Having told what the merciful and kind Elizabeth did to relieve the needs of her neighbors and the wretched, like a careful and hard-working Martha, let us now turn our mind and our pen to consider the spiritual graces and divine gifts with which God adorned her, and what the Holy Spirit granted to her merits. For the rest of peaceful contemplation comes before the labor of just action.[1]

Our contemplative, of whom we mean to speak, gave herself to the humblest works and toiled at the most devoted labors; and when she was free of them, she gave herself to very frequent and very pure prayer. And the power of her prayers was so great that it was felt not only spiritually but even in the body.

Once a noble lady, Gertrude of Leimbach, came to visit her, and with her a young man named Berthold, dressed in worldly fashion. Elizabeth, who looked down upon the world, called him to her and said to him: "You seem to be living very carelessly. Why do you not serve your Creator?" The young man answered: "O my lady, I beg you to pray for me, that the Lord may give me his grace to serve him." And she said, "Would you like me to pray for you?" And he said, "I would indeed." And she said: "You must make yourself ready for God's grace by praying too, and I will gladly pray for you." At once she knelt down in a suitable place in the monastery at Werde, where she was at the time, and began to pray for the young man. And the young man was praying earnestly some distance away. When both had prayed for some time, the young man began to cry out in a loud voice, saying, "O lady, stop praying!" But she prayed more fervently. Then the young man began to shout louder, saying, "O lady, stop praying, for I am fainting!" For the young man was burning with great heat; he was sweating and steaming, and throwing his arms and his whole body this way and that like a madman. Then the lady he served and two of blessed Elizabeth's maids ran to him and held him, and they found him all on fire, and his clothes soaked with sweat. He cried out again and again, and at last said,

"In the name of the Lord, I beg you to stop praying, for I am being consumed by fire!" And the women who were holding him could hardly bear the heat with their hands. But as soon as the prayer stopped, he cooled down.

This marvel happened the year before the death of God's handmaid; and the young man, drawn in this way, entered the Order of Friars Minor. This happened quite often to others too for whom she prayed to the Lord. Learn with what fire of love she burned, which by its heat dries up the flow of worldly desire and kindles love for eternity.

[1] The story of Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38–42) was the usual picture of the active and the contemplative life.

Chapter 8. Her most devout reverence for the sacred mysteries and for relics

She was present at the divine mysteries and services with all reverence, attentive in body and in mind. She also honored the deeds and feasts of the saints with devout reverence; and embracing their holy relics with fitting and tender love, she used to honor them devoutly and reverently in the Christian way with burning candles and lighted incense. The money that she brought to the altar in the Catholic manner, out of reverence for God and the saints, she earned by the work of her own hands. Once, keeping God in her mind, she came to some religious who had vowed poverty; and seeing in their church carvings that had been expensively gilded, she said to about twenty-four people who were standing around her: "You would have done better to spend this money on your food and clothing, since we ought above all to keep the truth of these images written in our hearts." And when someone spoke in her presence about a beautiful image, she answered, "I have no need of such an image; for I carry its truth in my heart."

Chapter 9. The grace of contemplation in which she long remained

Often, when she was free from works of mercy and alone, the handmaid of God gave herself to prayer, or rather to contemplation, most devoutly, with her eyes, hands, and heart lifted up to God. She shed tears very abundantly, yet she never distorted her face as people who weep usually do. The tears flowed as from a spring, while her face remained most serene and joyful. For she was glad and most joyful even in trouble, so that she never seemed to suffer distress. There shone in her a lovable way of life, humble action, lowly dress, holy affection, sincere thought, a clean heart, a good conscience, a pure and simple understanding, unfeigned faith, unconquered hope, perfect charity, a spotless life, and unbroken contemplation.

Do not disbelieve or wonder at the things you hear; for all of them are clearer than daylight. For she was caught up into ecstasy, out of herself; and in her case the rapture did not come rarely, nor did it last only a short while, but very often and for a long time; indeed, it lasted for several hours. Comforted and taught in that divine light, she understood and learned where such perfection comes from. For from there flows into human weakness the power to live wisely, bravely, temperately, and justly in this mortal life.[1] And there she was found worthy to receive visits from angels, visions, and words spoken to her, and many revelations by day and by night; but she hid them with all care.

She saw the Lord Jesus himself face to face, accompanied by a multitude of saints, comforting her by speaking to her most kindly and strengthening her by appearing to her. For this reason, when she came from her secret contemplation, her face was seen to shine with a wonderful brightness, and rays like those of the sun seemed to come from her eyes. For her face became radiant while the Lord looked upon her. And those who were worthy to see her brightness marveled greatly.[2] And when, as has been said, she was caught up in the spirit for several hours, afterward she would remain for a very long time without being fed by any bodily food, or by very little. For she was fed within by the invisible food of the mind.

Many other things could and should have been said about this woman; but in everything we must avoid length, the mother of boredom. For hardly anyone will be able to tell fully the nobility of her birth, the humility of her life, the holiness of her ways, her contempt of the world, her patience in adversity, her generosity in almsgiving, and the effects of her wonderful works and virtues. These things have been touched on briefly, in a few words, for the good of the Church, so that Jesus Christ, her Bridegroom, may be praised in her, who is blessed for ever.

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[1] The four cardinal virtues: prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice (Wisdom 8:7).

[2] Compare Exodus 34:29–30, where Moses' face shone after he had spoken with God.

Book Eight

Chapter 1. How Saint Elizabeth foretold her death

Here begins the eighth book of this work, the Life of Saint Elizabeth.

When blessed Elizabeth was about to pass from the hardships and labors of this world to the glory of eternity, the Lord appeared to her in a vision and called her, speaking sweetly to her: “Come, my beloved, into the dwelling prepared for you from eternity.” At that very time the man of God, Master Conrad, a priest of the town of Marburg, fell ill and was tormented by a serious sickness. And Elizabeth, the handmaid of God, the comforter of the sick, went in to visit him. While they were talking together, the sick priest asked her: “My lady and daughter, how do you plan to order your state of life after my death?” Then the handmaid of God, giving no answer about the priest’s death, foretold to him without any doubt her own death, which she knew beforehand by the revelation of the Holy Spirit. And behold, on the fourth day after these words, the handmaid of God fell into the sickness in which, taken from this light, she lost death and entered eternal life.

Chapter 2. The illness of blessed Elizabeth

When the handmaid of God had been ill for twelve days and more, one of her maids, who had the same name as she,[1] was sitting one day by the bed where she lay, and heard a most sweet voice, as if within her throat. After a little while, turning toward the maid (for she had been lying turned toward the wall), she said: “Where are you, my dear?” The maid answered, “Here I am,” and added, “O my lady, how sweetly you sang!” She asked the maid whether she had heard anything. And she said, “Yes.” Then Elizabeth said: “I tell you, a little bird sang to me most joyfully between me and the wall. Stirred by its sweetness, I had to sing too.” On the third day before her death, she ordered all worldly people to be kept away from her, and she would not let even the nobles, who often came to visit her, be brought in. When she was asked why she shut out those who came, she told those sitting around her how things stood with her: “I wish to meditate on the last strict examination of the Judgment, and on my almighty Judge.” After this, on the Sunday next before the Octave of Saint Martin,[2] after Matins had been sung, the priest we have mentioned heard her confession. But her clean heart and pure conscience recalled nothing that had not already been cleansed many times by true sorrow. O happy conscience, which would not put off its penance until the last hour of life!

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[1] Elizabeth, one of the four handmaids whose testimony is preserved in the *Libellus*.

[2] The Octave of Saint Martin is 18 November; the Sunday before it in 1231 was 16 November. She died during the following night.

Chapter 3. Signs of her outstanding devotion

When her confession was finished, the priest asked what she had decided should be done with her property and belongings. She answered: “Everything that I have seemed to possess for a long time now has belonged to the poor.” And she asked the Master himself to give it all to them, except the poor tunic in which she wished to be buried. She made no will: for Christ’s sake she would have no heir.

Nor did she think about the pomp of a funeral and solemn rites, seeking instead the testament of peace, the unfading inheritance,[1] the robe of immortality, the company of angels, and a dwelling in heaven. When she had dealt with these and similar matters with the Master, about the hour of Prime the venerable sacraments of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ were brought to her, which she had longed for with full faith and complete devotion.

With what sincere affection, with what purity of mind, with what great desire of heart and spiritual joy she received this sweet and inward banquet, I think no one can judge except him whom she was found worthy to receive in it as her companion on the road, her food for the journey,[2] and her guide on the way on which she

was going. Yet the signs of devotion that appeared outwardly and visibly to people were the surest proofs of the grace within. For then she remained most devout through the whole day until the evening, as one who had been made a sharer of the heavenly table and had been filled with the purest wine of the Blood of life, which is Christ. On that day the word of truth was often on her lips; and opening her mouth with wisdom, she spoke of the best things she had heard in sermons, pouring forth good words from her heart;[3] and the law of kindness was heard on her tongue.[4] Out of the abundance of her heart[5] she spoke of how the Lord Jesus deigned to comfort those blessed sisters, I mean Mary and Martha, when he raised their brother Lazarus. And speaking of how he wept with them as they wept, and shed tears over the dead man,[6] she poured forth the memory of the abundance of the Lord's sweetness, in feeling and in deed.

Some religious persons who were present, hearing these words, and kindled with devotion by the grace poured upon her lips,[7] melted into tears and wept. To them the holy one of God, who was now going toward death, recalled the sweet words of the Lord's own mouth when he was going to his death, saying: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves."[8] When she had said this, she fell silent. A wonderful thing! Then most sweet voices were heard in her throat, without any movement of her lips. And when those sitting around her asked her what this was, she asked them, "Did you not hear some people singing with me?"

Here no believer may doubt that she heard the sweet and soothing harmony of the hosts above the heavens, who were waiting for her departure, and that she sang with them so sweetly, singing the glory of the Lord with them. Then from dusk she lay as if exulting and rejoicing, and showing signs of outstanding devotion, until cockcrow. When the crowing of the cock was near, as one already secure in the Lord, she said to those sitting with her: "What would we do if the devil, the enemy of the human race, should show himself to us?" A little after saying this, she cried out in a loud and free voice, as if driving the demon away: "Away, away!"

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[1] 1 Peter 1:4.

[2] The Latin plays on the word *viaticum*, the Holy Communion given to the dying, which means "provision for the way."

[3] Psalm 45:1.

[4] Proverbs 31:26.

[5] Matthew 12:34.

[6] John 11:33–35.

[7] Psalm 45:2.

[8] Luke 23:28.

Chapter 4. The last breath of Saint Elizabeth

When the first cockcrow was heard, Elizabeth said: "Now the hour is near in which the Virgin gave birth to the Lord." And she said to those present: "Now let us speak of God and of the child Jesus; for midnight is near, when Jesus was born and was laid to rest in the manger, and by his almighty power created a new star, which no one had ever seen before." Speaking in this way she was most joyful, as if she were not sick. For she said: "Though I am weak, I feel no trouble or pain from any sickness." Saying this, she most devoutly commended to God all who were sitting with her. And so, all that day and night, as has been said, lifted up to God with the holiest affections of her mind, and set on fire in spirit with most divine words and conversations, at last she came to rest rejoicing; and as if sweetly falling asleep, she bowed her head and breathed her last.[1] And so, a stranger to the pain of death, with the angels and the choirs of saints coming to meet her and accompanying her, she flew away to the starry kingdom. Then her servants who were present, and other most devout women, laid out the holy body with reverence and dressed it in the tunic, as she had wished. Then it was carried by the religious, the clergy, and the people to the chapel, with hymns and prayers and many tears.

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[1] John 19:30. Saint Elizabeth died at Marburg during the night of 16–17 November 1231, at the age of twenty-four. Her feast is kept on 17 November.

Chapter 5. The funeral rites held for the holy body

When her death became known, Cistercian monks and other religious and clerics, and rich and poor as well, came devoutly from every side to such a holy funeral. Very many, raised high by the power of faith, cut off hairs from her head, others her fingernails, others small pieces of her clothing, and kept them as relics. Great was the grief and weeping of the poor, devout the mourning of all, and greatest of all the lamenting of the sick, as if she had been the mother of them all.

Because the people's devotion demanded it, the holy body was left above the ground until the fourth day, in the midst of the crowd and of those singing psalms. For it was not a horror but an honor, not loathsome but lovable, to see this dead body, which showed no sign of death at all except paleness alone. There was a kind of softness in the flesh, as though she were alive, and it bent gently this way and that, as those who touched it wished. And because this most holy little body was not, is not, and will not be a foul stable of vices, but was, is, and will be a storehouse of divine gifts and an alabaster jar of virtues and graces,[1] there came from it not the hateful foulness of a stench to sicken those present, but a wonderful delight of the sweetest fragrance, which refreshed minds and delighted the senses. Who would not long to be near so fragrant a body? Whom would the sight of this most pure flesh not delight?

[1] Mark 14:3.

Chapter 6. The venerable and tearful burial of Saint Elizabeth

At last, on the fourth day, after Masses had been celebrated most devoutly and solemnly, they committed to burial that most pure balm contained in its little vessel, laying a most precious jewel beneath a humble stone. Again there was a most abundant flood of tears from many. There was weeping and wailing. Sorrow for sin was poured into hearts; the devout were kindled to prayer; and all together raised the voice of praise and thanksgiving. These things took place at Marburg, a town of Hesse, in the chapel of the hospital for the poor, which this noble king's daughter, the outstanding handmaid of Christ, Saint Elizabeth, had built at her own expense.

Many abbots were present, and religious men, and a multitude of people, whom the forethought and wish of the clergy had arranged to gather there, carrying out the rites of so glorious a funeral with all Christian devotion and solemn reverence. In the year of the Lord's Incarnation 1231, in the month of November, on the fourth day after her death, she was laid in the earth, while her soul passed to a rich and abundant rest. May the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who is blessed for ever, bring us there through her prayers. Amen.[1]

On the day after this burial, a monk of the Cistercian Order came to the tomb, calling with full faith on the Lord Jesus Christ in blessed Elizabeth. He was freed through her, the comforter of the sorrowful, from a wound of the heart and a sickness of the mind from which he had suffered in torment for forty years and more; and he confirmed this by oath.

Another man came, a nobleman of illustrious blood and of high rank in the Church, who was entangled in horrible vices and labored wretchedly and shamefully under the weakness of the flesh. Overwhelmed with horror at the foulest sins that pressed upon him, he often went for help to confession. But after the safest harbor of confession, the storm of temptation would rise again, and slipping back into the depths of foulness, he would sink in hopeless ruin. Polluted, unclean, and wallowing in the filthy dirt of sin like a pig in the mire,[2] he came with great devotion to the tomb of Saint Elizabeth, the lover of purity. Pouring out rivers of tears with deep contrition of heart, he gave himself to prayer, not carelessly but for a very long time and with

strong fervor. Nor did he stop until his prayer came before the Most High and his cry entered into his ears.[3] Truly, at the prayers of his beloved Elizabeth, the Lord received the prayer of the poor man in his trouble; and he felt a certain grace of spiritual consolation poured into him, by which he could from then on resist the urgings of vice. Afterward he declared this in confession, with solemn assurance, to the venerable Master Conrad of Marburg: that from then on the goad of fleshly weakness was so put out in him that a strong temptation never again seized him as it had before; there was none, or only one so slight that he resisted it very easily.

Likewise, for others who were puffed up with the spirit of pride, or driven by the goads of anger or envy, or held back by the bridle of stinginess or greed, or taken up with any other movements of the spiritual vices, blessed Elizabeth, the uprooter of vices, when devoutly called upon, cleansed away the filth of their vices and by her merits, through the grace of God, obtained for them the working of virtue. These are the most glorious miracles. By them not only the illnesses of the body but the sicknesses of character are healed; by them not bodies that will die, but the soul that will live for ever, is cured. Being worthier and stronger, because they are spiritual and make the inner man holy, these rightly hold the first place.

There are, to be sure, other miracles, given as a sign not to believers but to unbelievers,[4] granted for the healing of the outer man, with which our heavenly physician, most blessed Elizabeth, shines without ceasing. For at her tomb, through the help of her merits, sight is given back to the blind and hearing to the deaf, the lame walk, the mute speak, prisoners escape their fetters and prisons; the paralyzed, the epileptic, and the deranged are cured; those possessed by demons are set free; the dead rise; lepers are cleansed;[5] and people coming in crowds, in all kinds of misery, receive the help they longed for. We keep the full account of these for a more suitable time, adding only this: that there, whatever anyone asks with due humility, he receives; what he seeks with eager faith, he finds; and to one who knocks with persevering devotion the door of grace is opened,[6] by the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever and ever.[7] Amen.

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[1] By tradition she was buried on 19 November, and for centuries her feast was kept on that day.

[2] 2 Peter 2:22.

[3] Psalm 18:6 and Psalm 88:2.

[4] 1 Corinthians 14:22.

[5] Compare Matthew 11:5.

[6] Matthew 7:7–8.

[7] Romans 9:5.

Chapter 7. The miracles sent to the Apostolic See

When Almighty God, to make known the merits of his handmaid Elizabeth, multiplied the signs of his power in the place where her body rests, two altars were built in that chapel by the faithful in her honor. The venerable lord Siegfried, Archbishop of Mainz, dedicated them on the feast of Saint Lawrence, at the request of the devout man Master Conrad, preacher of the word of God, just as he had clearly been told in a revelation.[1] The preacher instructed the countless people who had streamed together from every side that those who had received any grace of healing through the merits of God's handmaid Elizabeth should present themselves to the Archbishop early the next morning, to prove faithfully by witnesses what had been done for them by the grace of God. So a large crowd came together. And the Archbishop of Mainz had the proofs written down and confirmed with his seal and those of other prelates, to be sent to the Apostolic See.

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[1] Siegfried III of Eppstein, Archbishop of Mainz (1230–1249). The dedication took place on 10 August 1232.

Chapter 8. The examination of the miracles

So the most holy father, Pope Gregory the Ninth, after a careful examination of the miracles of most blessed Elizabeth sent by the venerable Siegfried, Archbishop of Mainz, relying also on mature and wise counsel, and above all with the ordering providence of the Holy Spirit, his guiding mercy, and his prompting grace, decided that blessed Elizabeth should be enrolled on earth in the list of the saints, since, written in the book of life, she rejoices with them in the kingdom of eternal happiness.

So when everything that was to be read about the holiness of blessed Elizabeth's life and the glory of her miracles had been read before everyone, the kindled devotion of the multitude cried out with one voice and most ardently for her canonization.

Chapter 9. The solemn canonization of Saint Elizabeth

Then, in the presence of venerable men, namely the Patriarchs of Jerusalem and Antioch, and many reverend fathers, archbishops and bishops, and very many other prelates, with a countless multitude of clergy, religious, and people, after a festive procession, on the great feast of Pentecost, on the seventh day before the Kalends of June, he canonized that happy and blessed Elizabeth. He gave her a great name, like the name of the great ones who are in heaven,[1] numbering and naming her among the saints; he invoked her among the saints and ordered her to be entered in the catalogue of the saints. And he decreed in writing, commanding that the day of her holy passing should be reverently kept every year with devotion by the universal Church among the feasts of the saints. O happy and most devout woman, whom the height of apostolic authority, together with so many holy fathers and wise men, most rightly and most reverently raised to that summit of honor, than which the Church Militant has no greater dignity! And behold, her lot is among the saints, and she is counted among the children of the Most High.[2]

This Office of Canonization was carried out at Perugia, in the convent of the Brothers of the Order of Preachers, in the year of the Lord's Incarnation 1235, on the sixth day before the Kalends of June.[3] An altar was set up there in her honor, which the same Supreme Pontiff Gregory, honoring it with loving devotion, endowed with an indulgence of thirty days, mercifully granting it to those who come there and pray each day. The friars of that convent also keep the feast of blessed Elizabeth very solemnly, and devoutly celebrate the office both by night and by day to the melody of the office of their father Saint Dominic.

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[1] 2 Samuel 7:9.

[2] Wisdom 5:5.

[3] Pentecost in 1235 fell on 27 May, which is the sixth day before the Kalends of June. The "seventh day" in the paragraph above is a slip in the text.

Chapter 10. The translation of blessed Elizabeth

The Most High, who lifts up the humble,[1] went on to magnify his humble handmaid Elizabeth. Visiting with still greater favors her holy body, which had been buried in weakness[2] and was much visited and celebrated because of its many miracles, he would no longer allow it to lie hidden in a lowly place; but for his own praise he willed to raise the poor one from the dust and the needy one from the dunghill.[3]

So after the solemn canonization carried out by the most blessed Pope Gregory the Ninth, the Holy Spirit inspired the hearts of the faithful to raise the bones of her who reigns with Christ from the humble tomb and to move them to a worthier place, more fitting for such great holiness. So on the day set for the announced translation of the most holy body, there came together a countless multitude of bishops, princes, nobles, prelates, religious, clerics, and people of both sexes. Then, when the earth had been dug and the tomb opened, there came out, not the stench of decay and the loathsomeness of corruption that is usual with tombs, but the fragrance of holiness and purity, which edified and gladdened those standing by. Then religious and devout men appointed for this task came forward and lifted the most holy bones from the earth with great

devotion and reverence, placing them in a lead coffin, which was closed and faithfully sealed with the seals of the bishops.[4]

[1] Luke 1:52.

[2] 1 Corinthians 15:43.

[3] Psalm 113:7.

[4] The translation took place at Marburg on 1 May 1236.

Chapter 11. The desire of the people

Those who were present waited and longed, crowding around with devout desire, wishing to see, embrace, and kiss those holy bones, the instruments of the Holy Spirit, from which so many gifts of holiness flowed.

O holy earth, consecrated by so great a deposit, guardian and witness of so great a mystery! Happy is the age of this time, to which such a treasure has been opened, and so great a gift of grace has been shown! Truly a treasure beyond price, in which the poor man may find what helps him, and the rich man has what delights him. There the sinner finds pardon; there the sick man, if he asks, finds medicine. O earth of a most holy little body, of such weight before the Lord and of such power among men, that it gives sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, walking to the lame, life to the dead, and to all the grace of healing! Let the madness of heretical wickedness tremble, and let the faithlessness of Jewish blindness waste away.[1] The faith of Elizabeth has shown the one to be mad; the miracles show the other to be blind. Let the merely natural wisdom of this world be silent, which this woman, foolishly wise and wisely foolish, has put to shame.[2] The angels often visit the place of her burial, the peoples seek it, the great men look upon it, and the Roman Empire has bowed down to see it. For who would not run after the sweet fragrance of such perfumes?[3] The ointments of virtues drip everywhere, the spices of graces give off their scent; and from the body of Elizabeth, as it flowers, the loveliness of faith grows green again; and as the warm breath of the Church blossoms anew, her garden overflows with fragrance.[4] Whom would the beauty of such holy newness in a woman not draw? Whom would so new a form of holiness not attract?

[1] Dietrich here uses the harsh language toward heretics and Jews that was common in the Middle Ages. It is translated as it stands; the Church today rejects such contempt for the Jewish people (Second Vatican Council, *Nostra Aetate*, 4).

[2] 1 Corinthians 1:20–27 and 2:14.

[3] Song of Songs 1:3.

[4] Song of Songs 4:16.

Chapter 12. The great persons who were present, and their offerings

There was present also the most glorious Frederick, then Emperor, surrounded by his princes and knights, who in her honor offered a golden crown as a token of royal dignity.[1] Henry the Landgrave, too, the illustrious prince of the Thuringians, with his brother Conrad and his mother the lady Sophia, and other nobles, men and women, crowded around the little bed of Elizabeth's tomb, so rich in miracles, reverently honoring it with fitting offerings and prayers. Besides these, the renowned lord Siegfried, Archbishop of Mainz, the archbishop of the diocese, with his suffragan bishops, and the venerable fathers the Archbishops of Cologne and Trier, with many other bishops, carried out with reverence the most solemn joy of this holy translation.

From different nations, peoples, and tongues there was gathered there so great a multitude as could hardly ever have been gathered in one place in the lands of Germany, or ever will be in the future. And there was so abundant and overflowing a wealth of offerings that it could not easily be counted.

[1] The Emperor Frederick II attended barefoot and in a gray penitent's robe, and placed a gold crown on her relics. Gregory IX had excommunicated him for failing to go on crusade, but he had been reconciled with the Church in 1230.

Chapter 13. A consideration of God's working in this matter

It is good to look at the wonderful and lovable order of the mercy of the divine majesty in this work. See: she who rejected the glory of the world, and in this life refused the company of the great, is magnificently honored by the dignity of the papal office and by the service of the imperial majesty. And she who in this world chose the lowest place, who sat on the ground and slept in the dust, is now lifted up on high by the hands of kings and princes.

And she is carried with the highest honor to a place higher than which the Church Militant has none. For she rises above every summit of earthly glory, made like the saints in glory.[1] All the rich among the people entreat her favor, kings offer gifts, and princes bring presents; the great bow down before her, and all nations serve her.[2] And rightly so; for she sold all that she had and gave it to the poor; she became a poor little woman, and counting all her wealth as nothing, she bought for herself this priceless pearl of eternity.[3]

[1] Sirach 45:2.

[2] Psalm 45:12 and Psalm 72:10–11.

[3] Matthew 13:45–46.

Chapter 14. The holy oil that flowed from the bones of Saint Elizabeth

Beyond all these great and glorious things by which God exalted her in the assembly of the people and among her own neighbors, the divine generosity went on to glorify his saint among the chosen of the people with a rare and glorious miracle.

For when, on the following day, the coffin was opened in which the bones of the most holy body had been placed and sealed with the seals of the bishops, they found the coffin abundantly moistened with the blessing of a heavenly dew. That flowing came truly from the right hand of Almighty God. The Lord Jesus Christ, bringing forth the liquid of a healing oil, commanded it to flow from those most holy bones. And the holy flow of that liquid was not small but abundant, pouring forth the memory of the most abundant sweetness. A wonderful fragrance came from it, as from a broken alabaster jar of precious ointment.[1] For these bones had been worn down in many ways by the wearing of spiritual exercises, and broken by mortification. They had been the instruments of the anointings of the Holy Spirit, and now they have become a fragrant alabaster jar. This healing flow and fragrant dripping was afterward clearly seen by the faithful who looked on, proved by the witness of their own eyes. For from those holy bones drops of holy liquid stand and drip, like dew coming down on the grass or the herb;[2] and when these drip down or are wiped away, others, very fine, gradually form again, like sweat breathing out from the pores of a body.

O truly worthy and fitting miracle, in full harmony with reason! For Elizabeth is a beautiful and fruitful olive tree,[3] noble in the fragrance of virtues, flowering with anointing, fruitful with the shoots of peace, and endowed also with a rich abundance of light, healing, and nourishment. In the house of God, which is the Church, she bore most sweet and wholesome fruits. For anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power,[4] carrying out her works in gentleness, she carefully kept the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.[5] By the example of her holy life she gave medicine to sick minds, and by the grace of healing to sick bodies. She fed many thousands of the poor with her bread, and filled the whole Church with the light of signs and wonders. Rightly, then, is she adorned with the miracle of this sweetly flowing liquid, the oil of the fragrant olive: she whose holiness, so splendid in its purity, shines out excellently, soothes gently, satisfies abundantly, and gives off its fragrance richly.[6]

Many other countless miracles have been found and proved, of which we make no special mention now; but touching on a few briefly, we have thought it right to note them in general terms.

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[1] Mark 14:3.

[2] Deuteronomy 32:2.

[3] Jeremiah 11:16 and Psalm 52:8: “I am like a green olive tree in the house of God.”

[4] Acts 10:38.

[5] Ephesians 4:3.

[6] Olive oil served for light, for healing, and for food. Dietrich uses all three to sum up Elizabeth’s life.

A Short Epilogue on the Miracles

As Elizabeth, the chosen and most blessed handmaid of God, shone in her life with wonderful signs of power, so from the day of her blessed passing until the present she shines in various parts of the world with glorious wonders and miracles, as the power of God glorifies her. For through her merits remedies are given to the blind, the mute, the deaf, and the lame, to those with dropsy, to the possessed, and to lepers, to the shipwrecked and to captives; and help is given in all sicknesses, needs, and dangers. And through the many dead, sixteen in number, whom she has wonderfully raised to life,[1] the greatness of the power of the Most High, who makes his saint wonderful, is made known to the faithful. To him be honor and glory through endless ages. Amen.

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[1] The sworn records of miracles sent to Rome for her canonization include several children and adults said to have been brought back to life at her intercession.