

ST. GERTRUDE, VIRGIN,

ABBESS OF NIVELLE.

SHE was daughter of Pepin, of Landen, mayor of the palace to the French Kings of Austrasia, and younger sister to St. Begga. She was born in 626. Her father's virtuous palace was the sanctuary of her innocence, and the school of her tender piety. Being pressed to marry, she declared in presence of King Dagobert: "I have chosen for my spouse him, from whose eternal beauty all creatures derive their glory, whose riches are immense, and whom the angels adore." The king admired her gravity and wisdom in so tender an age, and would not suffer her to be any more disturbed on that account. Her mother, the blessed Itta, employed St. Amand to direct the building of a great nunnery at Nivelles, in Brabant, for Gertrude. It is now a double chapter of canons and canonesses. The virgin was appointed abbess, when only twenty years of age. Her mother, the blessed Itta, lived five years under her conduct, and died in the twelfth year of her widowhood, in 652. She is honoured in the Belgic Martyrologies on the 8th of May. Gertrude governed her monastery with a prudence, zeal, and virtue that astonished the most advanced in years and experience. She loved extreme holy poverty in her person and house; but enriched the poor. By assiduous prayer and holy meditation she obtained wonderful lights from heaven. At thirty years of age, she resigned her abbey to her niece Wilfetrude, and spent the three years which she survived, in preparing her soul for her passage to eternity, which happened on the 17th of March, in 659. Her festival is a holyday at Louvain, and throughout the duchy of Brabant. It is mentioned in the true Martyrology of Bede, &c. See her life written by one who was present at her funeral, and an eye-witness to the miracles, of which there is an account in Mabillon, and the Acts of the Saints. See also Rivet, Hist. Liter. t. 4. p. 39. An anonymous author much enlarged this life in the tenth century, but the additions are of small authority. This work was printed by Ryckel, abbot of St. Gertrude's, at Louvain, in 1632. See Hist. Liter. t. 6. p. 292. Also La Vie de S. Gertrude, abbesse de Nivelles, par Gul. Descœuvres, in 12mo. at Paris, Ann. 1612. Consult likewise Dom Bouquet, Recueil des Hist. de France, t. 2. p. 603, &c.