

OCTOBER XVII.

ST HEDWIGES, OR AVOICE, DUCHESS OF POLAND, W.

From her exact life extant in Surius, and D'Andilly, *Saints Illustr.* See also Chromer, *Hist.* l. 7, 8; Dlugoss, *Hist. Polonica*, l. 6 et 7, and F. Raderus, *Bavaria Sancta*, t. 1, p. 147.

A. D. 1243.

THE father of this saint was Bertold III. of Andechs, marquis of Meran, count of Tirol, and prince (or duke) of Carinthia and Istria,* as he is styled in the Chronicle of Andechs, and in the life of St. Elizabeth of Hungary.(1) Her mother was Agnes,

(1) See Lazius and Raderus, t. 3, *passim*.

* Chromer, (l. 7,) Baillet, and some others, style him Duke of Carinthia, Marquis of Moravia, &c. But Moravia, which, as appears from Bertius, (*Rerum German.*) was at that time possessed by another family, is substituted by mistake for Meran. The town of Meran, situated near the castle of Tirol, from which that name was afterwards given to the county, was a famous principality created before the reign of Frederic Barbarossa; by failure of heirs male, its dominions were afterwards divided between the Venetians, the dukes of Bavaria and Austria, the lord of Nuremberg, and other neighbouring princes. The castle of Andechs (now called the Holy Mountain, on account of the great number of saints' bodies there interred) is situated opposite to Diessen, (probably Strabo's Damasias,) now famous for a monastery of Regular Canons of St. Austin, in part of the ancient Vindelicia, now in Bavaria. The most religious and illustrious family of the counts of Andech is famous in the Martyrologies of Bavaria and Austria for the great number of saints it has produced: as, B. Rathard, a most pious priest, who first built the church of St. George at Diessen, in the reign of Lewis Debonnaire, in 850. Batho, now called Rasso, count or governor of Eastern Bavaria or Austria, celebrated for his extraordinary piety and devotion, a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, many religious foundations, and several glorious victories over the barbarians, who from Pannonia invaded the eastern and southern provinces of Germany. He died on the 17th of June, 954. St. Otho, bishop of Bamberg, who, by his zealous preaching and missions, converted a considerable part of Pomerania to the faith. He died on the 5th of July, 1189. (See his life written by one who was his contemporary, in Canisius, *Antiq. Lect.* t. 2, and Gretzer, l. de Sanctis *Bambergenibus*.) This saint was son to Bertold II. count of Andechs. His sister St. Mechtildes was abbess of Diessen. (See her life by Engelhard, abbot of Lanchaim, in Canis. *Lect. Antiqu.* t. 5; also *Chronicon Andecense*, et *Chronicon Hirsaugiae*.) St. Hedwiges and St. Elizabeth of Hungary (Nov. 19) are of this family. Bertold III. is called by some authors, marquis, by others, count of Maran; the title of margrave or marquis, for a governor or prince of marshes or frontier provinces, was at that time seldom made use of.

daughter of the count of Rotletchs. St. Hedwiges had three sisters and four brothers. Her eldest sister, Agnes, was married to Philip Augustus, king of France; Gertrude, the second, to Andrew, king of Hungary, by whom she had St. Elizabeth; the third was abbess of Lutzingen in Franconia. As to her brothers, Bertold died patriarch of Aquileia, and Elebert, bishop of Bamberg: Henry and Otho divided between them their father's principalities, and became renowned generals. St. Hedwiges, by a distinguishing effect of the divine mercy in her favour, was from her cradle formed to virtue by the example and lessons of her devout mother, and of those that were placed about her. In her infancy she discovered no marks of levity, and all her inclinations were turned to piety and devotion. She was placed very young in the monastery of Lutzingen, in Franconia, and only taken thence, when twelve years old, to marry Henry, Duke of Silesia, descended of the dukes of Glogau in that country; to which match she only consented out of compliance with the will of her parents. In this state, by the fidelity with which she acquitted herself of all her respective duties towards God, her husband, her children, and her family, she was truly the courageous woman described by the wise man,⁽¹⁾ who is to be sought from the utmost boundaries of the earth: making it her study in all things only to please God, and to sanctify her own soul and her household, she directed all her views and actions to this great end. With her husband's free consent she always passed holydays, fast-days, and all seasons of devotion in continence. She bore her husband three sons, Henry, Conrad, and Boleslas; and three daughters, Agnes, Sophia, and Gertrude. After the birth of her sixth child, she engaged her husband to agree to a mutual vow of perpetual continence, which they made in presence of the bishop of the place; from which time they never met but in public places. Her husband faithfully kept this vow for thirty years that he lived afterwards; during which time he never wore any gold, silver, or purple, and never shaved his beard; from which circumstance he was surnamed Henry the Bearded; and so he is constantly called by Dlugoss, Chromer, and other Polish and German historians.

(1) Prov. xxx. 10, &c.

The nobility of Greater Poland having expelled their Duke Ladislas Otonis, conferred on Henry that principality in 1233. Hedwiges endeavoured by all the means in her power to dissuade him from accepting that offer; but was not able to prevail. Henry marched thither with an army, and quietly took possession of that and some other provinces of Poland, and though Boleslas the Pious was Duke of Cracow and Sendomir, both he and some other lesser princes of that country stood so much in awe of Henry's superior power, as never to dare to have any contest with him. From that time he is styled Duke of Poland. Out of partial fondness he was once desirous to leave his dominions to his second son, Conrad; but Hedwiges supported the cause of Henry, which was that of justice. The two brothers, with their factions, came to an open rupture, and notwithstanding their mother's desire to reconcile them, a great battle was fought, in which Henry entirely routed his younger brother's army, who died soon after in retirement and penance. This happened several years before the death of their father, and was one of those crosses by which the duchess learned more bitterly to deplore the miseries and blindness of the world, and more perfectly to disengage her heart from its slavery. Whether in prosperity or adversity her whole comfort was in God, and in the exercises of religion. The duke, at her persuasion, and upon her yielding into his hands her whole dower for this purpose, founded the great monastery of Cistercian nuns at Trebnitz, three miles from Breslaw, the capital of Silesia; upon which he settled the town of Trebnitz, and other estates, endowing it for the maintenance of one thousand persons, of which, in the first foundation, one hundred were nuns; the rest were young ladies of reduced families, who were to be here educated in piety, and afterwards provided with competent portions to marry advantageously in the world; or, if they were inclined to a monastic state, they were at liberty to profess it in this or in any other nunnery. This building was begun in 1203, and was carried on fifteen years without interruption, during which time all malefactors in Silesia, instead of other punishments, were condemned to work at it, and the severity of their servitude was proportioned to their crimes. The monastery was finished, and the church dedicated in 1219. The duchess practised in her palace greater austerities than those of

the most rigid monks, fasted and watched in prayer, and wherever she travelled, had always thirteen poor persons with her, whom she maintained, in honour of Christ and his apostles, waiting upon them herself upon her knees at table, where they were served with good meat, before she took her own coarse refection. She often washed the feet and kissed the ulcers of lepers, and having an extreme desire to hear that amiable sentence from Christ at the last day: *I was in prison and you visited me, &c.*, she exhausted her revenues in relieving the necessitous. The simplicity which she observed in her dress whilst she lived with her husband, showed, that if respect to him and his court obliged her to wear decent apparel, she was yet an enemy to vain or gaudy ornaments, which amuse a great part of her sex, and much more to all decorations and artifices of dress, with which many ladies study to set themselves off to advantage: a certain mark of vanity, or a pleasure they take in themselves, and a dangerous desire of pleasing others. This passion, which banishes from the breast where it reigns the spirit of Christ, and his gospel, cherishes the root of many vices, and without design spreads snares to entangle and destroy unwary souls, cannot find place in one whose conduct is regulated by, and whose heart is penetrated with, the spirit of Christian modesty.

St. Hedwiges, after her separation from her husband, carried her love of humility and penance much further in this respect, and wore only clothes of plain grey stuff. Her desire of advancing in perfection put her upon leaving the palace with her husband's consent, and fixing altogether at Trebnitz, near the monastery, often retiring for some days into that austere house, where she lay in the dormitory, and complied with all the penitential exercises of the community. She wore the same cloak and tunic summer and winter; and underneath a rough hair shift, with sleeves of white serge, that it might not be discovered. She fasted every day, except Sundays and great festivals, on which she allowed herself two small refectations. For forty years she never ate any flesh, though subject to frequent violent illnesses; except that once, under a grievous distemper in Poland, she took a little, in obedience to the precept of the pope's legate. On Wednesdays and Fridays her refection was

only bread and water. With going to churches barefoot, sometimes over ice and snow, her feet were often blistered, and left the ground stained with traces of her blood; but she carried shoes under her arms, to put on if she met any one. Her maids that attended her to church, though well clad, were not able to bear the cold, which she never seemed to feel. She had a good bed in her chamber, but never made use of it, taking her rest on the bare ground: she watched great part of the night in prayer and tears, and never returned to rest after matins. After compline she prolonged her prayers in the church till very late; and from matins till break of day. At her work, or other employments she never ceased to sigh to God in her heart as a stranger banished from him on earth, and returned often in the day to the church, where she usually retired into a secret corner, that her tears might not be perceived. The princess Anne, her daughter-in-law, who usually knelt next to her, admired the abundance of tears she saw her frequently shed at her devotions, the interior joy and delights with which she was often overwhelmed during her communications with heaven, and the sublime raptures with which she was sometimes favoured. The same was testified by Herbold, her confessor, and by several servant-maids. At her prayers she frequently kissed the ground, watering it with her tears, and in private often prayed a long time together prostrate on the floor. She continued in prayer during all the time it thundered, remembering the terrors of the last day. Her tears and devotion were extraordinary when she approached the holy communion. She always heard mass either kneeling, or prostrate, with a devotion which astonished all who saw her; nor could she be satisfied without hearing every morning all the masses that were said in the church where she was.*

That devotion is false or imperfect which is not founded in humility and the subjection of the passions. St. Hedwiges always sincerely looked upon herself as the last and most ungrateful to God of all creatures, and she was often seen to kiss the ground where some virtuous person had knelt in the

* Whence this distich:

In solâ missâ non est contenta ducissa;

Quot sunt presbyteri, tot missas optat haberi.

church. No provocation was observed to make her ever show the least sign of emotion or anger. Whilst she lived in the world, the manner in which she reprimanded servants for faults, showed how perfectly she was mistress of herself, and how unalterable the peace of her mind was. This also appeared in the heroic constancy with which she bore afflictions. Upon receiving the news of her husband being wounded in battle, and taken prisoner by the Duke of Kirne, she said, without the least disturbance of mind, that she hoped to see him in a short time at liberty and in good health. The conqueror rejected all terms that could be offered for his freedom; which obliged Henry, our saint's eldest son, to raise a powerful army to attempt his father's rescue by force of arms. Hedwiges, whose tender soul could never hear of the effusion of Christian blood without doing all in her power to prevent it, went in person to Conrad, and the very sight of her disarmed him of all his rage, so that she easily obtained what she demanded. The example of our saint had so powerful an influence over her husband, that he not only allowed her an entire liberty as to her manner of living, and exercises of piety, but began at length, in some degree, to copy her virtues; observed the modesty and recollection of a monk in the midst of a court; and became the father of his people, and the support of the poor and weak. All his thoughts were directed to administering justice to his subjects, and making piety and religion flourish in his dominions. He died happily in 1238: upon which melancholy occasion all the nuns at Trebnitz expressed their sense of so great a loss by many tears and other marks of grief. Hedwiges was the only person who could think of the deceased prince with dry eyes, and comforting the rest, said: "Would you oppose the will of God? Our lives are his. We ought to find our comfort in whatever he is pleased to ordain, whether as to our own death, or as to that of our friends." The serenity of mind, and composure of features, with which on that occasion she urged the unreasonableness of an ungoverned grief, and the duty of resignation to the divine will, showed, still more than her words, how great a proficient she was in the virtues which she recommended, and how perfectly the motives of faith triumphed in her soul over the sentiments of nature. From that time she put on the religious

habit at Trebnitz, and lived in obedience to her daughter Gertrude, who, having made her religious profession in that house when it was first founded, had been before that time chosen abbess. Nevertheless, St. Hedwiges never made any monastic vows, that she might continue to succour the necessitous by her bountiful charities.

One instance will suffice to show with what humility and meekness she conversed with her religious sisters. Out of a spirit of sincere poverty and humility she never wore any other than some old threadbare castaway habit. One of the nuns happened once to say to her: "Why do you wear these tattered rags? They ought rather to be given to the poor." The saint meekly answered: "If this habit gives any offence I am ready to correct my fault." And she instantly laid it aside and got another, though she would not have a new one. Three years after the death of her husband she sustained a grievous trial in the loss of her eldest most virtuous and most beloved son Henry, surnamed the Pious, who had succeeded his father in the duchies both of Greater and Lesser Poland, and of Silesia. The Tartars with a numberless army poured out of Asia by the north, proposing nothing less to themselves than to swallow up all Europe. Having plundered all the country that lay in their way through Russia and Bulgaria, they arrived at Cracow in Poland. Finding that city abandoned by its inhabitants who carried off their treasures, they burnt it to the ground, so that nothing was left standing except the church of St. Andrew without the walls. Continuing their march into Silesia they laid siege to the citadel of Breslaw, which was protected by the prayers of St. Ceslas or Cieslas, prior of the Dominicans there, and the barbarians, terrified by a globe of fire which fell from the heavens upon their camp, retired towards Legnitz. Duke Henry assembled his forces at Legnitz, and every soldier having been at confession, he caused mass to be said, at which he and all his army received the holy communion.(1) From this sacred action he courageously led his little army to fall upon the enemy, having with him Miceslas Duke of Oppolen in Higher Silesia, Boleslas, Marquis of Moravia, and other princes. He gave wonderful proofs both of his courage and conduct in

(1) Chromer, l. 6; Dlugoss. l. 7, ad an. 1241, p. 677

this memorable battle, and for some time drove the barbarians before him : but at last, his horse being killed under him, he was himself slain not far from Legnitz, in 1241. His corpse was carried to the princess Anne, his wife, and by her sent to Breslaw, to be interred in the convent of Franciscans which he had begun to found there, and which she finished after his death. The grandchildren of our saint were preserved from the swords of these infidels, being shut up in the impregnable castle of Legnitz. St. Hedwiges herself had retired with her nuns and her daughter-in-law, Anne, to the fortress of Chrosne. Upon the news of this disaster she comforted her daughter the abbess, and her daughter-in-law the princess, who seemed almost dead with grief. Without letting fall a single tear, or discovering the least trouble of mind, she said : " God hath disposed of my son as it hath pleased him. We ought to have no other will than his." Then, lifting up her eyes to heaven, she prayed as follows : " I thank you my God, for having given me such a son who always loved and honoured me, and never gave me the least occasion of displeasure. To see him alive was my great joy : yet I feel a still greater pleasure in seeing him, by such a death, deserve to be for ever united to you in the kingdom of your glory. Oh, my God, with my whole heart, I commend to you his dear soul." The example of this saint's lively faith and hope most powerfully and sweetly dispelled the grief of those that were in affliction, and her whole conduct was the strongest exhortation to every virtue. This gave an irresistible force to the holy advice she sometimes gave others. Being a true and faithful lover of the cross, she was wont to exhort all with whom she conversed, to arm themselves against the prosperity of the world with still more diligence than against its adversities, the former being fraught with more snares and greater dangers. Nothing seemed to surpass the lessons on humility which she gave to her daughter-in-law Anne, which were the dictates of her own feeling and experimental sentiments of that virtue. Her humility was honoured by God with the gift of miracles. A nun of Trebnitz who was blind, recovered her sight by the blessing of the saint with the sign of the cross. The author of her life gives us an account of several other miraculous cures wrought by her, and of

several predictions, especially of her own death. In her last sickness she insisted on receiving extreme unction before any others could be persuaded that she was in danger. The passion of Christ, which she had always made a perpetual part of her most tender devotion, was the chief entertainment by which she prepared herself for her last passage. God was pleased to put a happy end to her labours by calling her to himself on the 15th of October, 1243. Her mortal remains were deposited at Trebnitz. She was canonized in 1266 by Clement IV., and her relics were enshrined the year following.(1) Pope Innocent XI. appointed the 17th of this month for the celebration of her office.*

The constancy of this saint at the loss of friends proceeded not from insensibility. The bowels of saints are so much the more tender as their charity is always more compassionate and more extensive. But a lively apprehension of eternity, and of the nothingness of temporal things makes them regard this life as a moment, and set no value on any thing in it but inasmuch as God, his love or holy will, and our immortal glory may be concerned in it. Lewis of Granada tells us, in the life of the venerable servant of God, John of Avila, that the marchioness of Pliego, when she saw her eldest son delight in nothing but in retirement and devotion, used to say, that no other pleasure in this world can equal that of a mother who sees a dear child very virtuous. The same author mentions another lady of quality, likewise a spiritual daughter of that holy man, who,

(1) Dlugoss, Hist. Polon. l. 7, pp. 781, 783, t. 1.

* Another St. Hedwiges, daughter of Lewis king of Hungary, (who was also elected king of Poland,) was chosen sovereign queen of Poland, in 1384, and was eminent for her immense charities to the poor, her liberality to churches, monasteries, and universities; her humility and aversion to pomp or gaudy apparel; her meekness, which was so wonderful that, in so exalted a station, she was utterly a stranger to anger and envy. She read no books but such as treated of piety and devotion; the chief being the Holy Scriptures, Homilies of the Fathers, Acts of Martyrs and other Saints, and the meditations of St. Bernard, &c. She married Jagello, grand duke of Lithuania, in 1386, on condition he should be baptized, and should plant the faith in his duchy, which became from that time united to Poland. She died at Cracow in 1399. On her miracles see Dlugoss, (l. 10, p. 160,) Chromer, and other Polish writers who gave her the title of saint, though her name is not inserted in the Martyrologies.

when she lost her most pious and beloved son, said she was not able to express her joy for having sent so dear a saint before her to heaven. If our grief on such occasions is ungoverned, we have reason to fear that our faith is weak, which makes such slender impressions on our souls.

ST. ANSTRUDIS, COMMONLY CALLED AÜSTRU,
V. ABBESS AT LAON.

SHE was daughter of the virtuous and noble couple, Blandin-Boson and St. Salaberna, who founded the abbey of St. John Baptist at Laon, in which St. Salaberna, with the consent of her husband, took the religious veil, was chosen abbess, and is honoured among the saints on the 22d of September. Anstrudis faithfully walked in her steps, and after her death, though with the utmost repugnance, succeeded her in the abbacy. By a scrupulous observance of monastic discipline in the least points, a tender and affectionate care in conducting her sisters in the paths of Christian perfection, a most profuse charity to the poor, and her constant application to prayer, she was a true model of sanctity. No exterior employments interrupted the union of her heart with God, or her sweet attention to his holy presence. Except on Sundays and on Christmas day she never took any nourishment but at one moderate refec-tion she made in a day at three o'clock in the afternoon, and on fast-days after sunset. Her watchings in devout prayer often kept her the whole night in the church, except that she took a little rest in an uneasy seat before the church door; then returned again to her devotions before the altar. Her sanctity was to be approved and made perfect by the trial of afflictions, in which true virtue is always purified and improved, but that which is weak or counterfeit betrays itself, as a building which wants a firm foundation, or a great tree which has not shot its roots deep into the earth is easily blown down by storms. The saint's pious brother Baldwin was treacherously assassinated, and she herself terrified with outrageous threats by Ebroin. That tyrant, however, was at length softened by her intrepid constancy, and approved virtue and innocence, and of a per-secutor became her patron and friend. Pepin, when Mayor of the palace, declared himself her strenuous protector. She died