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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IN GOD'S GARDEN: STORIES OF THE
SAINTS FOR LITTLE CHILDREN ***





SHE SLEPT CALMLY AND PEACEFULLY UNTIL SHE DREAMED A DREAM.

IN GOD'S GARDEN STORIES OF THE SAINTS FOR LITTLE CHILDREN

BY AMY STEEDMAN

WITH SIXTEEN REPRODUCTIONS
FROM ITALIAN MASTERPIECES



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TO MY MOTHER

ABOUT THIS BOOK

There is a garden which God has planted for Himself, more beautiful than any earthly garden. The flowers that bloom there are the white souls of His saints, who have kept themselves pure and unspotted from the world.

In God's garden there is every kind of flower, each differing from the other in beauty. Some are tall and stately like the lilies, growing where all may see them in their dress of white and gold; some are half concealed like the violets, and known only by the fragrance of kind deeds and gentle words which have helped to sweeten the lives of others; while some, again, are hidden from all earthly eyes, and only God knows their loveliness and beholds the secret places where they grow. But known or unknown, all have risen above the dark earth, looking ever upward; and, although often bent and beaten down by many a cruel storm of temptation and sin, they have ever raised their heads again, turning their faces towards God; until at last they have been crowned with the perfect flower of holiness, and now blossom for ever in the Heavenly Garden.

In this book you will not find the stories of all God's saints. I have gathered a few together, just as one gathers a little posy from a garden full of roses. But the stories I have chosen to tell are those that I hope children will love best to hear.

Let us remember that God has given to all of us, little children as well as grown-up people, a place in His garden here on earth, and He would have us take these white flowers, the lives of His saints, as a pattern for our own. We may not be set where all can see us; our place in God's garden may be a very humble and sheltered spot; but, like the saints, we may keep our faces ever turned upward, and learn to grow, as they grew, like their Master, pure and straight and strong—fit flowers to blossom in the Garden of God.

'Saints are like roses when they flush rarest,
Saints are like lilies when they bloom fairest,
Saints are like violets, sweetest of their kind.'

LIST OF STORIES

	PAGE
SAINT URSULA,	1
SAINT BENEDICT,	16
SAINT CHRISTOPHER,	29
SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA,	41
SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO,	54
SAINT AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY,	62
SAINT CECILIA,	71
SAINT GILES,	79
SAINT NICHOLAS,	84
SAINT FAITH,	97
SAINT COSMO AND SAINT DAMIAN,	102
SAINT MARTIN,	110
SAINT GEORGE,	119
SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI,	128

LIST OF PICTURES

SAINT URSULA, She slept calmly and peacefully until she dreamed a dream,	<i>Frontispiece</i> AT PAGE
Ursula stood on the landing-place, the first	

to greet the Prince,	8
By Vittore Carpaccio at the Accademia, Venice.	
SAINT BENEDICT,	
A little demon seized the robe of the young monk,	22
A terrible storm began to rage,	28
By Lorenzo Monaco, Uffizi, Florence.	
SAINT CHRISTOPHER,	
The child upon his shoulder seemed to grow heavier,	38
By Titian, Doge's Palace, Venice.	
SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA,	
The Holy Child placed a ring upon her finger,	46
By Benozzo Gozzali, Uffizi, Florence.	
SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO,	
The child had digged a hole in the sand,	60
By Sandro Botticelli, Accademia, Florence.	
SAINT CECILIA,	
A crown of lilies and roses in each hand,	74
She taught them about the Lord of Heaven,	78
By Spinello Aretino, S. Maria del Carmine, Florence.	
SAINT NICHOLAS,	
He showed his daughter the gold,	86
He went to the harbour where two ships lay,	90
By Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Accademia, Florence.	
SAINT COSMO AND SAINT DAMIAN,	
But Cosmo turned and walked away,	104
An angel guided them with loving care,	108
By Fra Angelico, Accademia, Florence.	
SAINT GEORGE,	
Saint George rode straight at the monster,	124
By Vittore Carpaccio, S. Georgio Maggiore, Venice.	
SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI,	
Then the Pope took the little poor brothers under his protection,	136
He chanted the Gospel at the first Christmas mass,	140
By Giotto, Accademia, Florence.	

[1]

SAINT URSULA

Once upon a time in the land of Brittany there lived a good king, whose name was Theonotus. He had married a princess who was as good as she was beautiful, and they had one little daughter, whom they called Ursula.

It was a very happy and prosperous country over which Theonotus ruled, for he was a Christian, and governed both wisely and well, and nowhere was happiness more certain to be found than in the royal palace where the king and queen and little Princess Ursula lived.

All went merrily until Ursula was fifteen years old, and then a great trouble came, for the queen, her mother, died. The poor king was heart-broken, and for a long time even Ursula could not comfort him. But with patient tenderness she tried to do for him all that her mother had

done, and gradually he began to feel that he still had something to live for.

[2]

Her mother had taught Ursula with great care, and the little maid had loved her lessons, and so it came to pass that there was now no princess in all the world so learned as the Princess Ursula. It is said that she knew all that had happened since the beginning of the world, all about the stars and the winds, all the poetry that had ever been written, and every science that learned men had ever known.

But what was far better than all this learning was that the princess was humble and good. She never thought herself wiser than other people, and her chief pleasure was in doing kind things and helping others. Her father called her the light of his eyes, and his one fear was that she would some day marry and leave him alone.

And true it was that many princes wished to marry Ursula, for the fame of her beauty and of her learning had spread to far distant lands.

Now on the other side of the sea, not very far from Brittany, there was a great country called England. The people there were strong and powerful, but they had not yet learned to be Christians. The king of that land had an only son called Conon, who was as handsome as he was brave. And when his father heard of the fame of the Princess Ursula he made up his mind that she should be his son's wife. So he sent a great company of nobles and ambassadors to the court of Brittany to ask King Theonotus for the hand of the Princess Ursula.

That king received the messengers most courteously, but he was very much troubled and perplexed at the request. He did not want to part with Ursula, and he knew she did not wish to marry and leave him. And yet he scarcely dared offend the powerful King of England, who might be such a dangerous enemy.

[3]

So to gain time he told the messengers he would give them their answer next day, and then he shut himself up in his room and sorrowfully leaned his head upon his hand as he tried to think what was best to be done. But as he sat there thinking the door opened and Ursula came in.

'Why art thou so sad, my father?' she asked, 'and what is it that troubleth thee so greatly?'

'I have this day received an offer for thy hand,' answered her father sadly, 'and the messengers are even now here, and because they come from the King of England I dare not refuse their request, and yet I know not what answer to give them when they return in the morning.'

'If that is all, do not trouble thyself, dear father,' answered Ursula; 'I myself will answer the messengers and all will be well.'

Then the princess left her father and went to her own room that she might consider what answer might be wisest to send. But the more she thought the more troubled she became, until at last she grew so weary that she took off her crown and placed it as usual at the foot of her bed and prepared to go to rest. Her little dog lay guarding her, and she slept calmly and peacefully until she dreamed a dream which seemed almost like a vision. For she thought she saw a bright light shining through the door and through the light an angel coming towards her, who spoke to her and said:—

[4]

'Trouble not thyself, Ursula, for to-morrow thou shalt know what answer thou shalt give. God has need of thee to save many souls, and though this prince doth offer thee an earthly crown, God has an unfading crown of heavenly beauty laid up for thee, which thou shalt win through much suffering.'

So next morning when the messengers came into the great hall to receive their answer, they saw the Princess Ursula herself sitting on the throne next to her father. She was so beautiful, and greeted them so graciously that they longed more than ever that their prince might win her for his bride.

And as they listened for the king to speak, it was Ursula's voice that fell on their ears. She began by sending her greeting to the King of England and to Prince Conon, his son, and bade the messengers say that the honour offered her was more than she deserved, but since their choice had fallen upon her, she on her side was ready to accept the prince as her promised husband, if he would agree to three conditions. 'And first,' went on Ursula, leaning forward and speaking very clearly and slowly, so that the foreign ambassadors might understand every word, 'I would have the prince, your master, send to me ten of the noblest ladies of your land to be my companions and friends, and for each of these ladies and for myself a thousand maidens to wait upon us. Secondly, he must give me three years before the date of my marriage so that I and these noble ladies may have time to serve God by visiting the shrines of the saints in distant lands. And thirdly, I ask that the prince and all his court shall accept the true faith and be baptized Christians. For I cannot wed even so great and perfect a prince, if he be not as perfect a Christian.'

[5]

Then Ursula stopped speaking, and the ambassadors bowed low before her beauty and wisdom and went to take her answer to their king.

Now Ursula did not make these conditions without a purpose, for in her heart she thought that surely the prince would not agree to such demands, and she would still be free. But even if he did all that she had asked, it would surely fulfil the purpose of her dream, and she would save these eleven thousand maidens and teach them to serve and honour God.

Ere long the ambassadors arrived safely in England, and went to report their mission to the king. They could not say enough about the perfections of this wonderful princess of Brittany. She was as fair and straight as a lily, her rippling hair was golden as the sunshine, and her eyes like shining stars. The pearls that decked her bodice were not as fair as the whiteness of her throat, and her walk and every gesture was so full of grace that it clearly showed she was born to be a queen. And if the outside was so fair, words failed them when they would describe her wisdom and learning, her good deeds and kind actions.

The king, as he listened to his nobles, felt that no conditions could be too hard that would secure such a princess for his son, and as for the prince himself his only desire was to have her wishes fulfilled as quickly as possible, so that he might set sail for Brittany and see with his own eyes this beautiful princess who had promised to be his bride.

[6] So letters were sent north, south, east, and west, to France and Scotland and Cornwall, wherever there were vassals of England to be found, bidding all knights and nobles to send their daughters to court with their attendant maidens, the fairest and noblest of the land. All were to be arrayed in the finest and costliest raiment and most precious jewels, so that they might be deemed fit companions for the Princess Ursula, who was to wed Prince Conon, their liege lord.

Then the knights and nobles sent all their fairest maidens, and so eager were they to do as the king desired, that very soon ten of the noblest maidens, each with a thousand attendants, and another thousand for the Princess Ursula, were ready to start for the court of Brittany.

Never before was seen such a fair sight as when all these maidens went out to meet the Princess Ursula. But fairest of all was the princess herself as she stood to receive her guests. For the light of love shone in her eyes, and to each she gave a welcome as tender as if they had all been her own sisters. It seemed a glorious thing to think they were all to serve God together, and no longer to live the life of mere pleasure and vanity.

As may well be believed the fame of these fair maidens spread far and near, and all the nobles and barons crowded to the court to see the sight that all the world talked about. But Ursula and her maidens paid no heed to the gay courtiers, having other matters to think upon.

[7] For when the soft spring weather was come, Ursula gathered all her companions together and led them to a green meadow outside the city, through which a clear stream flowed. The grass was starred with daisies and buttercups, and the sweet scent of the lime blossoms hung in the air, a fitting bower for those living flowers that gathered there that day.

In the midst of the meadow there was a throne, and there the princess sat, and with words of wonderful power she told her companions the story of God's love and of the coming of our Blessed Lord, and showed them what the beauty of a life lived for Him might be.

And the faces of the listening maidens shone with a glory that was more than earthly, as they with one accord promised to follow the Princess Ursula wherever she might lead, if only she would help them to live the blessed life so that they too might win the heavenly crown.

Then Ursula descended from her throne and talked with each of the maidens, and those who had not yet been baptized she led through the flowery meadow to the banks of the stream, and there a priest baptized them while the birds joined in the hymn of praise sung by the whole company.

But all this while the Prince Conon waited with no little impatience for news of Ursula. He had been baptized and joined the Christian faith, he had sent the companions she desired, and now he waited for her to fulfil her promise.

[8] And ere long a letter reached him, written round and fair in the princess's own handwriting, telling him that as he had so well fulfilled her conditions, and was now her own true knight, she gave him permission to come to her father's court, that they might meet and learn to know each other.

It was but little time that Prince Conon lost before he set sail for Brittany. The great warships made a prosperous voyage over the sea that parted the two countries, and came sailing majestically into the harbour of Brittany, where the people had gathered in crowds to see the young prince who had come to woo their fair princess.

From every window gay carpets were hung, and the town was all in holiday, as Ursula stood on the landing-place, the first to greet the prince as he stepped ashore, and all that Conon had heard of her seemed as nothing compared to the reality, as she stood before him in her great beauty and welcomed him with gentle courtesy. And he grew to love her so truly that he was willing to do in all things as she wished, though he longed for the three years to be over that he might carry her off to England and make her his queen.

But Ursula told the prince of the vision that had come to her in her dream, when the angel had said she must first go through much suffering, and visit the shrines of saints in distant lands. And she told him she could not be happy unless he granted her these three years in which to serve God, and begged him meanwhile to stay with her father and comfort him while she was gone.



URSULA STOOD ON THE LANDING PLACE, THE FIRST TO GREET THE PRINCE.

[9]

So Ursula set out with her eleven thousand maidens, and the city was left very desolate and forlorn. But the pilgrims were happy as they sailed away over the sea, for they were doing the angel's bidding, and they feared nothing, for they trusted that God would protect and help them.

At first the winds were contrary and they were driven far out of their course, so that instead of arriving at Rome, which was the place they had meant to go to, they were obliged to land at a city called Cologne, where the barbarous Germans lived. Here, while they were resting for a little, another dream was sent to Ursula, and the angel told her that in this very place, on their return, she and all her maidens would suffer death and win their heavenly crowns. This did not affright the princess and her companions, but rather made them rejoice that they should be found worthy to die for their faith.

So they sailed on up the River Rhine till they could go no further, and they landed at the town of Basle, determined to do the rest of their pilgrimage on foot.

It was a long and tedious journey over the mountains to Italy, and the tender feet of these pilgrims might have found it impossible to climb the rough road had not God sent six angels to help them on their way, to smooth over the rough places, and to help them in all dangers so that no harm could befall them.

[10]

First they journeyed past the great lakes where the snow-capped mountains towered in their white glory, then up the mountain-road, ever higher and higher, where the glaciers threatened to sweep down upon them, and the path was crossed by fierce mountain-torrents. But before long they began to descend the further side; and the snow melted in patches and the green grass appeared. Then followed stretches of flowery meadow-land, where the soft southern air whispered to them of the land of sunshine, fruit, and flowers.

Lower down came the little sun-baked Italian villages, and the simple, kindly people who were eager to help the company of maidens in every way, and gazed upon them with reverence when they knew they were on a pilgrimage to Rome.

Thus the pilgrims went onward until at length they came to the River Tiber and entered the city of Rome, where were the shrines of Saint Peter and Saint Paul.

Now the Bishop of Rome, whom men call the Pope, was much troubled when it was told him that a company of eleven thousand fair women had entered his city. He could not understand what it might mean, and was inclined to fear it might be a temptation of the evil one. So he went out to meet them, taking with him all his clergy in a great procession, chanting their hymns as they went.

And soon the two processions met, and what was the amazement and joy of the Pope when a beautiful maiden came and knelt before him and asked for his blessing, telling him why she and her companions had come to Rome.

[11]

'Most willingly do I give thee my blessing,' answered the old man, 'and bid thee and thy companions welcome to my city. My servants shall put up tents for you all in some quiet spot, and ye shall have the best that Rome can afford.'

So the maidens rested there in quiet happiness, thankful to have come to the end of their pilgrimage and to have reached the shrines of God's great saints. But to Ursula an added joy was sent which made her happiness complete.

For the prince, whom she had left behind, grew impatient of her long absence, and the longing for his princess grew so strong he felt that he could not stay quietly at home not knowing where she was nor what had befallen her. So he had set out, and, journeying by a different route, had arrived in Rome the same day as Ursula and her maidens were received by the good bishop.

It is easy to picture the delight of Conon and Ursula when they met together again, and knelt land in hand to receive the Pope's blessing. And when Ursula told him all that had happened and of the angels whom God had sent to guide and protect them, the only desire the prince had was to share her pilgrimage and be near her when danger threatened. And his purpose only became stronger when she told him of the vision she had had in the city of Cologne.

[12]

'How can I leave thee, my princess,' he asked, 'when I have but now found thee? Life holds no pleasure when thou art absent. The days are grey and sunless without the sunshine of thy presence. Bid me come with thee and share thy dangers, and if it be, as thou sayest, that it is God's will that thou and all these maidens shall pass through suffering and death for His sake, then let me too win the heavenly crown that we may praise God together in that country where sorrow and separation can touch us no more.'

And Ursula was glad to think that, through love of her, the prince should be led to love God, and so granted his request and bade her companions prepare to set out once more.

The Pope would fain have persuaded them to stop longer in Rome, but Ursula told him of her vision, and how it was time to return as the dream had warned her. Then the Pope and his clergy made up their minds to join the pilgrimage also, that they too might honour God by a martyr's death.

Now there were in Rome at that time two great Roman captains who were cruel heathens, and who looked upon this pilgrimage with alarm and anger. They commanded all the imperial troops in the northern country of Germany; and when they heard that Ursula and her maidens were bound for Cologne they were filled with dismay and wrath. For they said to each other:

'If so many good and beautiful women should reach that heathen land the men there will be captivated by their beauty and wish to marry them. Then, of course, they will all become Christians, and the whole nation will be won over to this new religion.'

'We cannot suffer this,' was the answer. 'Come, let us think of some way to prevent so great a misfortune that would destroy all our power in Germany.'

[13]

So these two wicked heathen captains agreed to send a letter to the king of the Huns, a fierce savage, who was just then besieging Cologne. In it they told him that thousands of fair women in a great company were on their way to help the city, and if they were allowed to enter all chances of victory for his army would vanish. There was but one thing to be done and that was to kill the entire band of maidens the moment they arrived.

Meanwhile Ursula and her companions had set sail for Cologne, and with them were now Prince Conon and his knights and the Pope with many bishops and cardinals. And after many days of danger and adventure the pilgrims arrived at the city of Cologne.

The army of barbarians who were encamped before the city was amazed to see such a strange company landing from the ships. For first there came the eleven thousand maidens, then a company of young unarmed knights, then a procession of old men richly robed and bearing no weapons of any kind.

For a moment the savage soldiers stood still in amazement, but then, remembering the orders they had received in the letter from the Roman captains, they rushed upon the defenceless strangers and began to slay them without mercy. Prince Conon was the first to fall, pierced by an arrow, at the feet of his princess. Then the knights were slain and the Pope with all his clergy.

[14]

Again the savage soldiers paused, and then like a pack of wolves they fell upon the gentle maidens, and these spotless white lambs were slain by thousands.

And in their midst, brave and fearless, was the Princess Ursula, speaking cheerful words of comfort to the dying and bidding one and all rejoice and look forward to the happy meeting in the heavenly country. So great was her beauty and courage that even those wicked soldiers dared not touch her, and at last, when their savage work was done, they took her before their prince that he might decide her fate.

Never before had Ursula's beauty shone forth more wonderfully than it did that day when she stood among these savage men and gazed with steadfast eyes upon the prince, as one might look upon a wild beast.

The prince was amazed and enchanted, for he had never seen so lovely a maid in his life before, and he motioned to the soldiers to bring Ursula nearer to him.

'Do not weep, fair maiden,' he said, trying to speak in his gentlest voice, 'for though you have lost all your companions you will not be alone. I will be your husband, and you shall be the greatest queen in Germany.'

Then most proudly did Ursula draw herself up, and her clear eyes shone with scorn as she answered:

'Does it indeed seem to thee as though I wept? And canst thou believe that I would live when all my dear ones have been slain by thee, thou cruel coward, slayer of defenceless women and unarmed men?'

[15]

And when the proud prince heard these scornful words he fell into a furious rage, and, bending

the bow that was in his hand, he shot three arrows through the heart of Princess Ursula and killed her instantly.

So the pure soul went to join the companions of her pilgrimage and to receive the crown of life which the angel of her dream had promised her, and for which she had laid down her earthly crown as gladly as when in her peaceful home she laid it aside before she went to rest.

[16]

SAINT BENEDICT

It was in the year of our Lord 540 that Saint Benedict was born at Spoleto in Italy, and he was only a boy of sixteen on the night when our story begins.

Such a cold night it was. Piercing wind swept over the mountains, whistling through the pine-trees and hurrying on to the great city of Rome that lay in the plains below. It was cold enough in the city where the people could take shelter in their house and sit warming their hands over their little pots of fire, but out on the bare hillside it was even worse. For the icy breath of the winter wind, which had come far over the snow, swept into every nook and corner as if determined to search out any summer warmth that might be lingering in a sheltered corner.

And there in a cave high up among the rocks, a boy sat listening to the wind, and thinking of many things, as he tried to wrap his worn old cloak closer round him.

[17]

He was a tall thin lad, with sad dreaming eyes and a face already sharpened by want and suffering. The cave in which he sat had little in it, except a heap of dried leaves which served him for a bed, and it was difficult to imagine how any one could live in so dreary and comfortless a place, so far from any other human being.

But he was thinking of a very different home, as he sat shivering in the cold that night. Only a year ago he had lived in a beautiful palace, where everything was pleasant and warm and bright. His father was the lord of the country around, and he, the only son of the house, had everything that he could want. They were all proud of him, he was so clever and brilliant, and as soon as he was old enough he was sent to study in Rome, that he might become a great lawyer.

There the boy's eyes saw a different scene—the great city of Rome, where all was gaiety and pleasure, where all pleased the eye, the ear, and the taste, but where, alas, so much wickedness dwelt as well. He had tried to shut his eyes to things he did not wish to see, but day by day the sights and sounds around him, the talk of his companions, and the things they thought so pleasant had become hateful to him. And one day he had stolen secretly away from Rome, leaving everything behind, determined to go away into a desert place and live alone. This it seemed to him was the only way of truly serving God, to learn to deny himself in everything and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

[18]

A tender smile came over the boy's face as the next picture rose before his eyes. True he had left all and gone into the wilderness, but love could not so easily be left behind, and his old nurse had found out a way of following him, and would not be denied the pleasure of serving him and caring for his wants; even begging food, from door to door, that she might prepare a dainty meal for him.

It had been very pleasant, but its very pleasantness had warned him that he must deny himself still further. So he had once more stolen away, when his old nurse was asleep and had hidden himself in the cave among the rocks of Subiaco. Here he was indeed alone, and the only food he had was a little bread which a kind old hermit gave him daily, and his only drink the clear water of the mountain streams.

And here he seemed to live with God alone, seeing no one but the kind old hermit who brought him his daily bread. He was happy and peaceful, never ceasing to pray for those who in the busy world might forget to pray for themselves.

But this night the thoughts of past days were troubling him. And as he sat there listening to the wind he began to long for the things he had left behind. One beautiful face especially grew clearer than the rest, and smiling upon him beckoned him back to the pleasures and comforts and earthly joys he had put away from him.

[19]

With a cry he sprang to his feet and rushed out of the cave. For a moment he felt as if his feet must carry him down the steep mountain-side, over the plain and back to the beautiful city; and then he stood still, and with a prayer for help to overcome this temptation of the Evil One, he threw himself into a thicket of thorny briars that grew by the side of the cave. There he rolled over and over until he was torn and bleeding; then slowly returning to the cave he lay down upon his bed of leaves, peaceful and contented. The evil thoughts had fled, the face that tempted him had vanished, and Satan was conquered.

So Benedict began his life of self-denial and solitary prayer. Years passed by and in spite of the loneliness of the place and the few people who ever passed by that way, it began to be known that one of God's saints lived in the mountain cave. The shepherds who fed their flocks on the

lower hills would bring him little offerings of milk or cheese and ask his blessing, or perhaps a prayer for one who was sick. And gradually people began to call him their saint of the mountain, and to come to him for help in all their troubles. Thus the fame of his goodness spread wider and wider, until a company of monks who lived some way off sent and besought him to come and live with them and be their head.

Benedict was grieved to think of leaving his little cell which he had grown to love, and the simple mountain people, who so often came to him in their need. But he thought this was a call he ought to obey, so he sorrowfully set out and journeyed many miles till he came to the convent of the brothers.

[20] It was all very strange to him after the stillness of his mountain cell, and he could not accustom himself to hearing voices all day long and to seeing so many faces. Still he strove to do his duty and soon made many changes in the convent life. He told the brothers plainly that there were many comforts they must put away, and above all that they must eat less and work more.

Now the brothers did not like this at all, and they began to repent that they had asked so great a saint to come and rule over them, for he made their rule so hard and strict, that few of them cared to keep it.

Then one day a strange thing happened. The brothers were all dining together, and Benedict was silently eating his portion, his thoughts far away in the little mountain cell at Subiaco, when some one touched his arm and offered him a cup of wine. Benedict turned and looked searchingly into the brother's face, and then with upraised hand made the sign of the cross over the cup. Instantly it fell broken to the ground, and the wine was spilt upon the floor, for there had been poison in the cup, which the holy sign had destroyed.

Then Benedict looked round at the company of brothers, who sat with downcast eyes, ashamed and silent, and, without a word, he rose and left them. He returned, alone as he had come, back to his mountain home, where instead of human voices there was the song of the birds, where the wild flowers looked at him with pure, friendly faces, and even the wild animals did not count him their enemy and would do him no harm.

Here he hoped once more to live quite alone, but one by one men came and built huts close to his cave, that they might be near so great a saint, and before long there was a great company living around him.

[21] Benedict's fame had spread even to Rome, and two of the Roman nobles sent their sons to be taught by him. One was only five years old and the other twelve, and it seemed a hard life for such children. But Benedict cared for them and watched over them, and they loved him as if he had been their own father.

And after all life was very pleasant on the mountain-side, when the sun shone and lessons and prayers were over. They could play among the pine-trees and chase the goats over the rocks, and when the sun grew too hot creep back into the cave to rest. In spring there were the first flowers to hunt for, and they would come back with eager hands filled with violets and mountain anemones. And in autumn there were nuts and berries to be gathered, which they laid up like young squirrels for their winter store.

And among the daily duties there was nothing they liked so well as to go down to the lake to fetch water, when the mountain springs had run dry. One day it was the little one's turn to do this, and as he was leaning over, his foot slipped, and he fell into the lake, and before he could utter a cry the water closed over his head.

At that very moment Benedict, who was kneeling in prayer on the hill above, saw a vision of the boy's danger, and hastily sent the elder lad down to the lake to help the child.

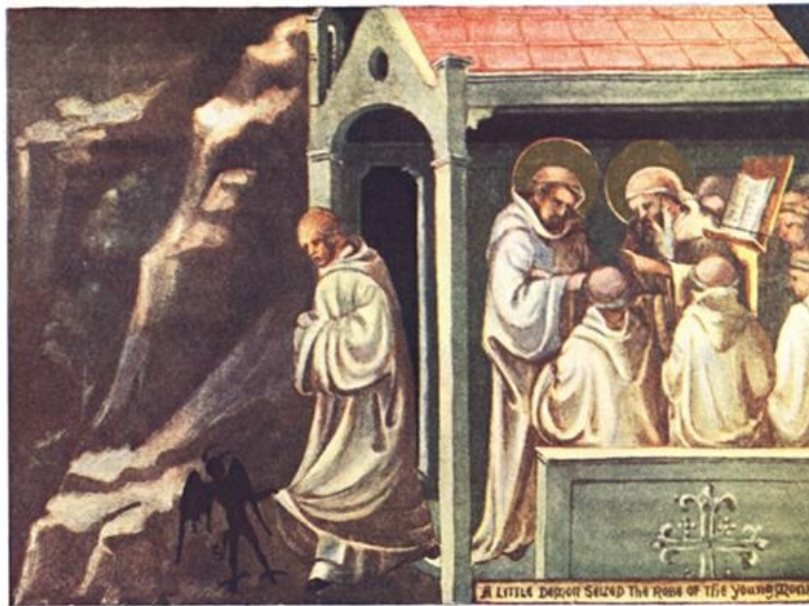
[22] He never stayed to question why he was sent, but sped down the mountain-side, and without a moment's delay threw himself into the lake, hoping to be able to reach the little dark head that had risen above the water for the last time. And lo! he found that the water grew firm beneath his feet, and he walked as if he was on dry land, and lifting the child, carried him safely ashore.

When Benedict saw that so many other hermits had taken up their abode on the mountain, he determined to form them into a company of brothers, and give them a rule to live by, and by and by they built a little chapel where they could meet for daily service.

Now, strangely enough, every evening at the hour of prayer, one young monk became restless and uneasy, and would steal silently out of the chapel and disappear down the hillside. None of the brothers could think what made him do this; but night after night the same thing happened just when prayers were about to begin. All were troubled and disturbed, till at last they went to Benedict, and asked him what it could mean. Then the saint promised to watch, and that very evening he saw what no other eyes had seen.

Into the chapel came a little demon black as coal, and he seized the robe of the poor young monk, and dragged him out of the door. And though the demon was so tiny he was stronger than the monk, and easily led him swiftly away out of sound of the chapel bell.

[23] Then Benedict followed, and touching the monk with his rod, bade the demon begone and trouble him no longer. And after that the young monk stayed in the chapel with the rest, and the demon was seen no more.



A LITTLE DEMON SEIZED THE ROBE OF THE YOUNG MONK.

It seemed as if Benedict must always suffer from the malice of evil brothers, who disliked his strict rule; and even in his own mountain home the danger followed him. This time the poison was put into a loaf of bread; but Benedict knew that it was there, and while the wicked monk who offered it to him watched with evil eye, hoping to see him eat it, he turned to a wood near by, where a young raven sat. 'Come hither,' said Benedict, holding out the loaf towards the raven, 'come hither, and take this bread and carry it where the poison that is hidden within can do no harm.'

And the story tells us that the raven instantly obeyed, and carried off the loaf. And ere long Death, more powerful than the raven, carried off that wicked monk, so that the poison which lurked in his evil heart could no longer do harm to any one.

It troubled Benedict greatly about this time to hear that not very far off on Monte Cassino there was a heathen temple where the people worshipped false gods, and were living in darkness and sin.

It seemed terrible that such a thing should be suffered in a Christian land, so Benedict made up his mind to go himself and force the people to listen to him.

[24] It was a strange contrast to see him in his coarse, poor robe and thin wan face standing preaching among the crowd of gay pleasure-seekers, who cared for nothing but eating and drinking and making merry. They could not understand why any one should choose to be poor, and suffer pain and hunger for the sake of any god.

But as Benedict taught them day by day, the majesty of his face and the solemn notes in his voice forced them to listen half unwillingly. Then, as they began to learn about the true God, they saw that the gods they had worshipped were false, and they pulled down their temple, and built two chapels on the place where it had stood.

Here, too, Benedict built the first great monastery which was called after him; and after this the brothers began to be known by his name, and were called Benedictines.

But the Evil One saw with great rage that Benedict was taking away his servants, and destroying his temples, and he tried in every way to hinder the work. Once when the workmen were trying to raise a stone they found it impossible to move it, though they worked hard all day. At last, in despair, they besought Benedict to come to help them.

As soon as he came he saw at once what was the matter, for on the stone sat a little black demon laughing at the efforts of the workmen; knowing they could never move the stone while he chose to sit there.

'Get you gone, messenger of Satan,' cried Benedict.

And with a howl of rage the imp fled, and the stone was lifted easily into its place.

[25] Upon a certain day, not long after the monastery was built, as Benedict was praying in the chapel of the convent, one of the brothers came to tell him that a great company of soldiers were coming up the hill, and at their head was Totila, king of the Goths, who had sent a messenger to ask the saint to receive him.

Benedict, who cared little for earthly kings, was yet too courteous to refuse any such request, so he went out to where the company was gathered on the mountain-side.

The rough soldiers stood with heads uncovered, and from their midst came one who wore a crown and sandals of gold and a kingly robe. He knelt before the saint, and said in a loud, clear voice:

'I, Totila, king of the Goths, have come to crave thy blessing, father, for thy fame hath spread even to the wild north country where I reign.'

The brothers, crowding behind Benedict, eager to see these curious strangers, were surprised to hear no answering words of welcome fall from the lips of the saint. And still more surprised were they when Benedict pointed an accusing finger at the glittering crown that shone on the king's head, and said:

'Why dost thou bear upon thy head the sign of royalty which belongs not to thy station? And why have thy lips framed this deceit? Go to thy master, and bid him come to me in truth, and think not that I could mistake a servant for a king.'

[26] And to the amazement of all, the real king, who had disguised his armour-bearer to test the power of the saint, came quickly forward, and with no royal robe or golden crown, knelt low before the saint, confessing all, and praying to be forgiven. He was sure now that this was indeed a servant of God, and he listened humbly while Benedict reprovved him for his many sins, and warned him of the fate that awaited him.

And so the years passed on, bringing much honour and earthly renown to him who had once lived a lonely boy upon the wild mountain-side.

Things had changed since those early days. He could no longer live quite alone as he had once loved to do, for the world had followed him even into the wilderness. But his heart was as pure and his purpose as strong as when he was a lonely boy seeking only to serve God.

Perhaps the one great pleasure of his earthly life was the yearly visit he paid to his sister Scholastica, who had for many years come to live near him. She had formed a little company of nuns, who strove to live as the brothers were living, working and praying and denying themselves all earthly pleasures.

And as it was a great delight to Benedict to visit his sister, so to Scholastica the day of his coming was the happiest day of all the year. The only thing that grieved her was that the golden hours of that bright day seemed to fly faster than any other, while she listened to his words of counsel and advice, and told him all her troubles.

[27] As it drew near the time for one of these yearly visits, Scholastica began to long for her brother as she had never longed before. Something told her that these bright summer days were to be the last she should spend on earth; and the longing to see and talk to her brother grew almost more than she could bear.

And when he came the hours slipped past even faster than was their wont, and before she could realise it the time had come for him to go. There was so much still to say, and she needed his help so sorely, that she prayed him to wait a few hours longer. But Benedict was persuaded that it was his duty to set off, and duty to him ever came before all else. He gently told her it could not be; that he must return to the brothers that night.

But while he spoke, Scholastica was not listening to his words, nor heeding what he said. With her whole heart she was praying God that He would grant her this one request, and prevent her brother from leaving her so soon.

And as she prayed the light suddenly died out of the sky, great clouds arose and, before Benedict could set out, a terrible storm began to rage. The thunder pealed overhead, the hail came down in a blinding shower, and it was impossible for any one to leave the shelter of the house.

Thus God answered the prayer of Scholastica, filling her heart with thankfulness. And afterwards the heart of Benedict was also filled with gratitude, for not many days later he saw in a vision the soul of his sister flying like a white dove up to heaven's gate, and he knew he should see her on earth no more.

[28] Benedict had lived a long, hard life, eating but little, suffering cold, and denying himself in all things. But though his spirit only grew stronger and brighter as time went on, his body was worn out, and at last he prepared to lay it aside, as men lay aside the worn-out robe which has grown thread-bare.

And as he had longed to live alone, so, when death came, he prayed to be carried to the little chapel, and there to be left before the altar alone with God. Thus Benedict the Blessed went home at last, leaving his tired body in God's house, while his spirit returned to God who gave it.



A TERRIBLE STORM BEGAN TO RAGE.

[29]

SAINT CHRISTOPHER

Long ago in a far distant land there lived a boy called Offero. He was taller and stronger and braver than any of his companions, and he was called Offero, which means bearer, because he could carry the heaviest burdens on his broad shoulders, without stooping under their weight. His was the grandest kind of strength too, for it was not only strength of body, but strength of heart and soul besides.

As Offero grew into manhood he began to tire of being first only in games and play, and he longed to use his strength for some real end, feeling sure there was work in the world waiting for his hand.

Sometimes as he strode across the olive-clad hills, and felt the wind in his hair, and drew in great breaths of life and strength, he would see before him a dim vision of some great purpose, ever beckoning him on, and in his ear a voice would sound, that bade him use his strength only for the highest.

Night and day Offero thought upon the vision, and it seemed to him that its meaning was that he should go out into the world and do a man's work. And, since for him the highest meant strength and fearlessness, he vowed that he would search until he found the bravest and strongest king and would take service only with him.

[30]

So Offero set out and, after many weary wanderings, he came to the gates of a great city. Here, in a palace built of alabaster, lived one whom the people called the greatest king on earth. He had more soldiers and horsemen and chariots than any other monarch, and the banner of crimson and gold that floated over the palace roof, had never been lowered in the face of any foe.

But Offero scarcely noticed all the glitter and splendour of the palace, or the crowd of waiting men. He was only eager to see the king, whom every one said was as brave and strong as a lion. No one stopped him as he strode on. Even the royal guards at the palace door stood back to let him pass. He was dusty and travel-stained, and his armour was dull and dented by many a hard blow, but there was that in his walk and in his eyes, and the grasp of his great hand upon his sword, that made every one fall back to let him pass.

The king was seated upon his throne making wise laws for his people, when Offero entered the audience hall. Straight to the steps of the throne he went, and kneeling there placed his sword at the king's feet and offered to be his true servant. For a moment the king looked in wonder and astonishment at this giant, and the great sword that stretched along the widest step of his ivory throne. Then with a look of pride at the strength of the man kneeling at his feet, he bade Offero rise and use his sword henceforth only in the king's service.

[31]

So Offero became the king's servant, and not one of the king's enemies could stand against him. Wherever there was danger to be met or fighting to be done, there he was ever to be found, and he made his master's name more feared and honoured than that of any other monarch in the world. His work filled all his time and thoughts, and the vision he had seen grew so dim that it had nearly faded from his memory, when one night a minstrel came to the court.

This minstrel had a harp of gold and his fingers woke the sweetest music from the golden strings, but sweeter than all was his voice as he sang of brave deeds and mighty battles, the wisdom of the wise and the courage of the strong.

The heart of Offero was charmed by the music as he sat idly among the rest of the courtiers, listening in the great audience chamber.

But as the minstrel sang, Offero noticed that the king looked disturbed and once or twice made a strange sign with his hand when a certain evil name was repeated in the song. It almost seemed to Offero as if at such times a look of fear came into his eyes.

Waiting behind the rest when the minstrel was gone, Offero looked gravely into the king's eyes and said:

'My liege, wilt thou tell thy servant, why thou didst make that sign upon thy forehead and what the look that came into thine eyes may mean—thou who fearest no man?'

Then the king answered Offero saying:

[32] 'That sign is the sign of the cross, and I make it upon my brow whenever I hear the name of Satan, the Evil Spirit, because I fear him, and because that sign alone can protect me from him.'

And Offero bowed his head, and standing there before the king he answered sadly:

'Fare thee well, O my king, for I may not serve thee longer. I have promised only to serve the greatest and one who feared nothing, so I must e'en seek this Evil Spirit. If thou fearest him, must he not be more powerful than thou?'

So Offero went sorrowfully out of the king's presence, and away from the splendid court and the fair city. And as he went the vision which of late had faded from him grew clearer, and seemed to beckon him on and on. And the voice that of old sounded in his ears spoke to him once more, so that his heart became light and his purpose grew strong.

Now after many days of toilsome wanderings, Offero came at last to the skirt of a great dark wood. The pines were so thick that never a sunbeam could pierce through their tops, and the trunks of the trees could only just be seen ghostly grey in the everlasting twilight that reigned there.

Deeper and darker grew the wood as Offero went on, until he came to the darkest part of all, and there he found the Evil Spirit and his court.

Offero could see nothing clearly in the gloom, but one great shadow stood out, bigger and stronger than any of the other shadows that flitted about, and on its brow was the outline of a kingly crown.

[33] 'What seekest thou here?' asked the Evil One, in a deep strong voice, like the roar of distant thunder.

'I seek to serve the greatest and strongest king on earth, and one who knows no fear,' answered Offero.

'Then is thy quest ended,' said the shadowy king, with uplifted head and proud gesture, 'for I indeed am the greatest king of all, and I know not what that word fear meaneth.'

So Offero became one of the servants of the King of Evil, and his work was heavy and his wages light. But that seemed but a small matter to him, if only he had indeed found the highest.

Time passed on until there came a day when the Evil One rode out with all his servants and Offero at their head. And as they passed out of the wood they came to a cross set up by the wayside. It was only a rough cross of wood, standing out clear against the sky, the grass beneath worn by those who had knelt before it, and a bunch of wild flowers laid at its foot by some grateful hand. But when the eye of the Evil One fell upon it, he shuddered and, turning quickly round, plunged back into the wood, followed by all his servants. And Offero saw he was trembling from head to foot.

'Stop,' cried Offero, barring his way, for he was not afraid even of the great Shadow upon the fierce black horse. 'I would fain know what this meaneth, ere we go further. Didst thou not say thou wert stronger than all and feared nothing? and lo! thou tremblest like a child before a piece of crossed wood.'

[34] 'It is not the cross I fear,' answered the Evil One, 'but Him who once hung upon it.'

'And who is He that you should tremble at the very thought of Him?' asked Offero. 'Is He a greater and stronger king than thou?'

'He is greater, and He is stronger,' answered Satan, 'and He is the only one I fear.'

Then Offero rode away from the dark wood and the evil company, out into the sunshine and light. And as he looked at the blue sky, and felt the warmth of the blessed sunshine once more, the vision seemed to rise again before his eyes, ever beckoning him onward, and in his ear the same voice sounded, bidding him seek on, until he should indeed find the highest.

Far and near did Offero wander, asking all he met if they could tell him where he might find the Christ—this man who once hung upon a cross and who was greater and more powerful even than Satan, the King of Evil. And some said one thing and some another, but no one could aid him in his quest, until at last in his wanderings he came to a little hut in the midst of a desert.

Here a holy man dwelt, with no living soul near him, serving God day and night.

Most gladly did he welcome Offero, but gladder still was he when Offero eagerly asked him the question that had been upon his lips so long:

'Good hermit, canst thou tell me where I may find the King called Christ, He who once hung upon a cross, and who is stronger even than the King of Evil?'

[35] 'That can I,' answered the hermit, 'for He is the Master whom I serve, and in His name thou art welcome indeed.'

And taking Offero into his hut, the hermit gave him food and made him rest. Then in the cool of the evening, when the red sun was sinking behind the belt of distant palm-trees, and a mellow glow turned the sands of the desert into grains of gold, the hermit sat without the hut and told the wonderful Christ story to the listening ears of the giant who lay upon the ground at his feet.

Never had Offero heard words like these before. Even the vision had not prepared him for this. With all his soul in his eyes he listened. Filled with wonder was he at the thought that the King of all heaven should have deigned to come to earth in the form of a little helpless child. But as the hermit went on and told of His power and majesty, His infinite compassion for the weak and helpless, His courage and fearlessness in the face of His foes, ending with the great sacrifice of the cross, Offero sprang to his feet, and grasping his sword in his hand, he raised it to heaven and vowed he would be Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end, and would fight under no other banner but His, the King of Heaven and Earth.

The hermit was startled as he looked at the gleaming sword, upheld by that strong arm, and in his calm, kind voice, he said:

'My son, the Lord Christ seeketh not to be served as an earthly king. His soldiers fight not with earthly swords, but with the weapons of prayer and fasting.'

[36] 'But, father,' said Offero, 'how can I fight with weapons I know nothing of? If He has given me this great strength, surely there must be a way that He would have me use it in His service.'

Then the hermit was troubled, for he saw that Offero must needs serve Christ in some other way.

All night he pondered, and in the morning he bade Offero come with him, and together they journeyed forth for many days until they came to the banks of a river. There the hermit stayed his steps.

It was a very deep and dangerous river and, because there was no bridge across it and the current was strong, many travellers lost their lives in trying to ford it.

This the hermit told Offero, and bade him stay and watch there, so that he might help those who wished to cross, and save the lives of those who might otherwise perish without his aid.

'And in helping others,' said the hermit, 'thou wilt be helping Christ, and it may be He will accept thy service, and will one day come unto thee and take thee for His servant.'

[37] So Offero built a hut on the river bank, and pulling up a palm-tree that was growing there, he used it as a staff to lean upon when he waded through the deep water. He was so tall and strong that no matter how high the river rose he could always wade across it. He was ever ready to help the weary footsore travellers, and often when they were too weak to stand against the current, even with the support of his strong arm, he would take them up upon his broad shoulders and carry them safely across.

For a long time did Offero live in his little hut on the river-bank, doing his work well, in the hope that his Master might come to him as the hermit had promised. But weeks and months went by, and still the King did not come, and Offero began to fear that He never would pass that way.

Then one night a terrible storm began to rage. The wind howled round the lonely little hut, and the waters roared as they rushed past in the darkness.

'I need not watch to-night,' thought Offero, 'for no one will seek to cross the river in such a storm as this.'

But as he sat listening to the roll of the thunder and the clashing of the hail on the roof, he fancied he heard, above the noise of the storm, a little voice crying outside and a faint knocking at the door.

It sounded like the cry of a child, and Offero hastily rose up and, unbarring the door, looked out. For a moment he could see nothing in the thick darkness and blinding rain, but presently he heard the cry again, sounding quite close to where he stood, and looking down he saw something small and white, and heard the little voice sounding clear above the storm:

'Kind Offero, wilt thou carry me across the river to-night?'

[38] Then Offero saw it was a little child who was standing out there upon the threshold—a child who looked up at him with pleading eyes, his golden curls lying wet against his cheek, and his little white robe drenched with the driving rain.

Very tenderly Offero stooped down and lifted the little one in his kind, strong arms, and asked

him how it came that he was out alone on such a stormy night.

'I must cross the river to-night,' said the child in his soft, clear voice, 'and the water is deep and I am afraid. I saw thy hut and thought perchance one might dwell here who would help me.'

'That will I gladly do,' said Offero, as he felt the little arms clinging round his neck. 'The night is dark, and the river runs high indeed, but thou art such a tiny child, I shall scarcely feel thy weight. I will place thee high upon my shoulder, so that the water may not reach even thy feet.'

So Offero took his great staff in his hand, and placed the child upon his shoulder and stepped down into the roaring flood.

Higher and higher rose the water, stronger and stronger grew the current, as Offero waded on. Never before had his strength been put to such a test. And not only did the torrent threaten to sweep him off his feet, but the child upon his shoulder seemed to grow heavier and heavier with every step, until he could scarcely stagger on under the tremendous weight. But on he went, fighting for each step. And now he was past the worst and into the shallower water beyond. Putting forth all his remaining strength, with one last great effort he struggled up the farther side and with a sigh of relief he climbed upon the bank, and gently set the little child upon the grass.



THE CHILD UPON HIS SHOULDER SEEMED TO GROW HEAVIER.

Then Offero stood looking at him in great wonder and astonishment and said:

'How is it that thou, who seemest but a feather-weight, hast yet become heavier than any burden I ever bore in all my life before?'

And as Offero spoke, the child looked up into his face, and lo! a strange light seemed to shine round the golden head, and his white robe became bright and glistening as the light. And the wonderful look of majesty in those eyes drew Offero down to his knees. And as he knelt there, scarce daring to lift his eyes before that wonderful gaze, he heard the sweet, clear voice of the little child again, and knew it for the same that had guided him since the vision of his boyhood.

'No wonder that I seemed to thee a heavy burden, for I bear upon my shoulders the sins and sorrows of the whole world. I am Christ, whom thou hast sought to serve. I came to thee in the form of a little helpless child, that I might prove thee, if thou wert indeed my faithful servant. And because thou hast been faithful in helping others, thou shalt be counted worthy to enter my service, and I will give thee the new name of Christopher, because thou hast borne Christ upon thy shoulders. Take now thy staff and strike it into the earth, and thou shalt know by a sign that I am indeed thy King.'

Then the light faded away, and the child was gone. But where Christopher struck his staff, behold, it took root and budded out into leaves of tender green.

And Christopher knelt on there in the darkness with a great joy in his heart, for he had seen the face of his King, and had found his Master at last. He knew that his search was ended, and that henceforth he would serve only the highest. And all the trouble and perplexity had vanished away, for he understood now that in ministering to others he would always be serving his King,

even if the work seemed but small and mean.

So Christopher learned to be Christ's true soldier and servant even unto death, and because he fought manfully under His banner unto his life's end, he is called a saint. His old name of Offero has been long forgotten, and we know him only by that new name which the Christ-child gave him that stormy night, and call him Saint Christopher.

[41]

SAINT CATHERINE OF SIENA

As the years pass by Father Time makes many changes in the busy town and quiet country, but there are some places he seems to have forgotten or passed over so lightly that they look very much the same to-day as they did hundreds of years ago.

One of these places, which Time has dealt so gently with, is in the heart of Italy, built high upon a hill. It is a town whose towers and palaces and steep, narrow streets are little changed from what they were five hundred and more years ago, when Catherine, the saint of Siena, was born there.

To-day if you climb the steep winding road that leads up to the city, and make your way through the gates and along the steepest of the narrow streets, you will come to a house with a motto written over the door in golden letters—'Sposæ Christi Katharinæ domus,' which means 'The house of Katherine, the bride of Christ.' And if you go in you will see the very room where Saint Catherine used to live, the bed of planks on which she slept, her little chapel, and the rooms which her brothers and sisters used.

[42]

It all looks just as it did when Benincasa, the dyer of Siena, lived there with his wife Lapa. They had more than twenty children, but each one was welcome, and when at last Catherine and a twin sister were born, there still did not seem one too many. The little sister lived only a few days, and perhaps that made the parents love Catherine all the more, and it was not only her own family who loved her. She was the favourite of all the neighbours, and however busy they were they would always find time to stop and talk to her as they passed. It was not that she was very beautiful, or even very clever, but she had a way of making every one feel happy when she was near them, and she had the sunniest smile that ever dimpled a baby's face. It was like a sunbeam, lighting up everything near it, and it shone in her eyes as well, so that ere long the people found a new name for her, and called her 'Joy' instead of Catherine.

As soon as she could walk alone, Catherine would wander away, sure of a welcome at every house, and though at first when the other children cried, 'The baby is lost again!' the mother would be anxious, she soon ceased to mind, and only said, 'She is sure to be safe somewhere.'

And safe she always was, for every one would stop work to look after her as she toddled along, and wherever she went Joy carried the sunshine with her.

[43]

It happened that one afternoon when Catherine was about six years old, her mother sent her and an elder brother, Stephen, to carry a message to a house some way off. It was a beautiful evening, and as the children went hand in hand down the steep street and up the hill towards the great church of Saint Dominic, Catherine stopped a moment to look at the sunset. She always loved beautiful colours, and to-night the little fleecy clouds were all touched with crimson and gold, like fairy islands in a pale green sea, more beautiful than anything she had ever seen.

Stephen did not care for sunsets. He was much more anxious to be home in time for supper, so he ran on alone, calling to Catherine to follow quickly.

Catherine did not seem to hear his voice or to notice that he was gone, but stood there with eyes fixed on the sunset, her face shining, and her hair like a halo of gold round her head.

It was not the evening sky she was looking at, but a vision of heavenly beauty. For there among the rose-pink clouds she saw the Madonna seated upon a throne and holding in her arms the infant Christ. It was no longer the poor Madonna of the stable, but the Queen of Heaven, her dazzling robe blue as the summer sky, and a jewelled crown upon her head. Only the same sweet mother-look was there as when she bent over the manger-bed. There are no words to tell of the beauty of the Christ-child's face. Catherine only knew that as He looked at her He smiled and held up His little hand as if in blessing, and that smile drew her heart to His feet.

Then suddenly Catherine's arm was roughly shaken and her brother asked her impatiently at what she was gazing.

'O Stephen,' she cried, 'did you not see it too? Look!'

[44]

But the vision had faded, and the grey twilight closed in upon the two little figures as they went slowly home, the boy vexed with his loitering sister, and she sobbing with disappointment to think that the window in heaven was shut, and that she might never again look within.

As Catherine grew older, she never forgot the vision she had seen, or how the hand of the Christ-child had been stretched out to bless her. And it made her think often how she could best

please Him, so that some day He might smile on her again.

Catherine had heard a great deal about the good men who went to live in deserts to be alone with God,—how they lived in caves and had scarcely anything to eat, and how God would sometimes send the ravens to bring them food. Now she was always fond of wandering, and the idea of living in a desert seemed a beautiful way of serving Christ. She had never gone beyond the walls of the town, and all outside was a new world to her; so she was sure if only she could pass through the city gates, she would soon find her way to the desert, where there would certainly be a cave ready for her to live in.

So one day Catherine set out very early in the morning, carrying in her pocket a small loaf of bread, just in case the ravens should forget to come to a little girl-hermit.

[45] In those days it was not safe to live outside the city walls, and there were no farms nor houses to be seen as Catherine slipped through the gates and began to find her way down the hillside, among tangled briars and over rough stones. Soon her feet grew very tired, and everything looked so forlorn and wild that she was sure this must be the desert at last, and there, too, was a little cave in the rocks waiting all ready for her.

It was very nice to creep in and out of the hot sunshine into the cool shade, and to rest until the sun went down. But as night came on and she knelt to say her evening prayer, she began to think of home, and the kind mother waiting there, and she knew she had done wrong to come away, even though she had meant to serve God.

Very quickly she left her cave, and as she ran home her feet seemed to fly over the ground. The desert had not been so very far away after all, and she reached the house before her mother had begun to grow anxious, but she never again wandered away to live a hermit's life.

As Catherine grew older she loved to listen to the stories of the saints, and there was one she was never tired of hearing. It was the life of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, the saint whose name she bore.

[46] This young queen was said to be the wisest and noblest of all the saints, and when her courtiers wished her to marry, she said she would only marry a prince who was perfect in every way. Such a prince was of course impossible to find, but one night a poor old hermit had a vision in which the Madonna came to him and told him that our Blessed Lord, the only perfect Man, would accept the love of the young queen's heart and the service of her hands. And when the queen knew this her joy was great, and that very night the Virgin mother came to her in a cloud of glory surrounded by angels bearing crowns of lilies, and in her arms was the Holy Child, who smiled on the queen and placed a ring upon her finger, as a sign that she belonged to Him.

The more Catherine thought about this story the more she longed that Christ would accept her heart and service too. And one night in a dream He seemed to come to her, just as He had come to the other Catherine, placing a ring upon her finger and bidding her remember that now she had given her heart to Him.

Thus it was a great trouble to Catherine when she was told by her parents soon after this that she was old enough to begin to think of marriage. She said she did not wish to marry at all. But this only made her parents angry with her, especially when one day they found she had cut off all her beautiful golden hair, thinking to make herself so ugly that no one would want her for his wife.

'Very well,' said her father, 'if thou wilt not marry as I bid thee, then shalt thou do the house-work and be our servant.'

[47] He expected this would be a great punishment, but Catherine was glad to have hard work to do, and did it so well and cheerfully that her father began to feel his anger melt away. Then it happened one day that in passing her room he looked in, and there he saw her kneeling with clasped hands and upturned face, and eyes in which the peace of heaven shone, while around her head was a bright light that took the form of a snow-white dove resting there.



THE HOLY CHILD PLACED A RING UPON HER FINGER.

From that moment he ceased to be angry with Catherine, and said all should be as she wished, for surely the dove was a sign that God accepted her prayers and approved of what she did.

So she was allowed to have a little room which she made into a chapel where she could be alone to think and to pray. She wanted to learn to conquer herself before she could serve Christ in the world, and for three years she lived almost entirely alone, praying in the little chapel, struggling to overcome her faults and to grow strong to resist temptation.

But in spite of all her struggles evil thoughts would come into her heart, and it seemed impossible to keep them out. It was easy to do right things, but so terribly difficult to think only pure and good thoughts. She knew that Satan sent the wicked thoughts into her heart, but the hardest trial of all was that Christ seemed to have left her to fight alone—He seemed so very far away.

At last one night, as she lay sobbing in despair, suddenly the evil thoughts left her, and instead she felt that Christ was near and that He bent tenderly over her.

'Why, oh why didst Thou leave me so long, dear Lord?' she cried.

'I never left thee,' His voice said quietly.

'But where wert Thou, Lord, when all was so dark and evil?' she humbly asked.

[48] 'I was in thy heart,' replied the voice; 'didst thou not hate the evil thoughts? If I had not been there thou wouldst not have felt how black they were, but because I was in the midst they seemed to thee most evil, and thus I gave thee strength to cast them out.'

So Catherine's heart was filled with peace, and she learned to love Christ more and more, and to deny herself in every way, sleeping on bare planks with a log for her pillow, and eating the things she cared for least.

It was not that she thought these things good in themselves, but she felt she must use every means to make her heart pure and fit to serve her Master.

And before very long Christ spoke to her again in the stillness of the night, and told her she had lived long enough alone, that it was time now to go out into the world and help other people to grow good too.

When Catherine thought of the busy, noisy life which other people led, compared to the quiet peacefulness of her little cell and chapel, she was very sad, and thought she had offended God that He was sending her away from Him to mix with the world again. But His voice sounded in her ears once more, and told her it was not to separate her from Himself that He sent her out, but that she should learn to help others.

'Thou knowest that love giveth two commandments—to love Me, and to love thy neighbour. I desire that thou shouldst walk not on one but two feet, and fly to heaven on two wings.'

[49] So Christ spoke to her, and Catherine with fearful heart prepared to obey, only praying that He would give her strength to do His will. And after that her life was spent in doing good to others.

The smile that used to lighten her face when she was a little child had still the power of bringing peace and gladness to all, as she went amongst the poor, nursing the sick, helping every one in trouble, and teaching people more by her life than her words to love God.

And as, when she was a baby, they called her Joy, so now again they found a new name for her, and she was known as 'the child of the people.' In every kind of trouble they came to her, even asking her to settle their quarrels, so that she was the peacemaker as well as the helper of the

whole town.

There was one special reason why people loved Catherine, and that was because she always saw the best that was in them. She knew there was good in every one, no matter how it was dimmed or hidden by the evil that wrapped it round. Where other eyes saw only evil temper or wicked spite, she looked beyond until she found some good that she could love. Every day she prayed to God that He would help her to see the beauty in each soul, so that she might help it to get rid of the sin that dimmed its beauty. And so, because she looked for good in every one, all showed her what was best in themselves, and for very shame would strive to be all that she thought them.

[50] Catherine had joined the Dominican sisterhood and wore the white robe and black veil, but she did not live in a convent as other sisters did. Every morning when the sun began to gild the towers and roofs of the city, passers-by would see her leave her home and walk up the steep street towards the church of Saint Dominic where she always went to early mass.

Strangers must have wondered when they saw the men uncover their heads as she passed, as if she had been a queen instead of a poor sister clad in a coarse white robe and black veil. But if they had caught sight of her face perhaps they would have understood, for her eyes seemed as if they were looking into heaven, and the holy peace that shone in her smile made men feel that she lived in the very presence of God.

One morning as she was going to church as usual in the first light of dawn, her thoughts far away and her lips moving in prayer, she was startled by the touch of a hand upon her robe and the sound of a voice asking for help. She turned to look and saw a poor man leaning against the wall, haggard and pale, and so weak that he could scarcely stand.

'What dost thou want of me?' asked Catherine pitifully.

'I only ask a little help for my journey,' the poor man said; 'my home is far from here, and the fever laid its hand upon me as I worked to provide bread for those I love. So I pray thee, lady, give me a little money that I may buy food to strengthen me before I start.'

[51] 'I would gladly help thee,' answered Catherine most sorrowfully, 'but I am not a lady, only a poor sister, and I have no money of my own to give.'

She turned as if to go on, but the eager hand still held her cloak and the man begged once more.

'For Christ's sake help me, for indeed I need thy help most sorely.'

Then Catherine stood still. She felt she could not leave him so. There was nothing at home she could part with, for that very morning she had given away all the food that was in the house. Her father and mother were good and kind, but she must not give away the things they needed. Sorrowful and perplexed, her hand felt for the rosary which hung at her side, for in every trouble she ever turned in prayer to her dear Lord. Then as her fingers touched the beads, she suddenly remembered that here was at least one thing which was her very own—a small silver crucifix which she had had since she was a child, and which she had touched so often as she prayed that it was worn smooth and thin.

Still it was silver and would buy the sick man a meal, and she quickly unfastened it from the rosary and put it into his hand. The man's blessings followed her as she went, and though she had parted with the thing she loved best, she counted the blessings more precious than the gift.

And as she knelt in the dim church, after the mass was over, God sent a heavenly vision to reward His servant.

[52] Catherine thought she stood in a great hall filled with things more beautiful than words can tell, and in the midst stood our Blessed Lord, holding in His hand the most beautiful thing of all—a cross of beaten gold, set with jewels of every hue sparkling so brightly that it almost dazzled Catherine's eyes as she looked.

'Dost thou see these shining gifts,' He asked, 'and wouldst thou know whence they came? They are the noble deeds which men have done for My sake.'

And Catherine kneeling there with her empty hands could only bow her head and say: 'Lord, I am only a poor sister, as Thou knowest, and have nought to give Thee. The service I can offer could not find a place among these glorious gifts.'

Then it seemed as if Christ smiled upon her, and holding out the golden cross He asked: 'Hast thou not seen this cross before, Catherine?'

'No, Lord,' she answered, wondering, 'never before have mine eyes beheld anything so lovely.'

But as she gazed upon it, her heart was filled with a sudden gladness, for in the midst of the gold and jewels, in the heart of the glorious light, she saw the little worn silver crucifix which she had given to the poor man that morning for the love of Christ.

And as the vision faded there rang in her ears the words she knew so well: 'Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me.'

As time went on the fame of Catherine spread to other towns, outside Siena, and when there

[53]

were disputes between the great cities of Italy they would send for Catherine, and beg her to act as peacemaker, and she helped them all just as she did her own poor people of Siena. Even the Pope came to her for advice.

In the midst of all this busy life Catherine fell ill. Her love for Christ was so real, and her sorrow for His sufferings so great, that she prayed that she might bear the pain that He had borne. We do not know how our Lord granted her request, but in her hands and feet and side appeared the marks of nails and spear.

All her sufferings she bore most patiently, but her heart was glad when the end came.

The same vision that had smiled on her that summer evening when she was a child, appeared in the sunset sky again, this time never to fade away, as Catherine, the bride of Christ, was led by the white-robed angels up to the throne of our Lord.

[54]

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO

The story of the life of Saint Augustine is different from almost every other saint story, because it is taken from his own words and not from what has been said about him. He wrote a wonderful book called *The Confessions of Saint Augustine*, and in it we find all that he thought and did from the time he was a little child.

Augustine was born in 354 in the northern part of Africa, which then belonged to Rome, and was one of the richest countries in the world. His mother, Monica, was a Christian, but all her prayers and loving care could not keep her son from evil ways. He is often called the prodigal saint, because he wandered very far astray for many years into that far country of the youngest son in the parable; living in the midst of the sins and evil pleasures of the world, until he learned to say, 'I will arise and go to my father.'

And so Augustine's story comforts and helps us when we feel how easy it is to do wrong, and how we fail every day to do the good things we meant to do. There are so few days we can mark with a white stone because we have really tried to be good, and so many days we are glad to forget because of the black cross that stands against them. And yet, who knows but, if we fight on to the end, we too may be saints as Augustine was, for he won his crown through many failures.

[55]

The story, in Augustine's own words, begins from the time when he was a very little baby, not from what he remembers, but from what he had learned as he watched other babies in whom he saw a picture of himself.

First of all Augustine tells of the tiny baby, who does nothing but sleep and eat and cry. Then the baby begins to laugh a little when he is awake, and very soon shows clearly his likes and dislikes, and kicks and beats with his little hands when he does not get exactly what he wants. Then comes the time of learning to speak and walk.

After that Augustine begins really to remember things about himself. For who could ever forget the trial of first going to school? Oh, how Augustine hated it, and how hard it seemed to him! The lessons were so difficult and the masters were so strict, and he loved play so much better than work, and when he went back to school with lessons unlearned and work undone, the result was of course that he was whipped. It did seem so unjust to him, for he could not see the use of lessons, and the whippings were so sore. And in his book he tells us how it made him say his first prayer to God—'I used to ask Thee, though a very little boy, yet with no little earnestness, that I might not be whipped at school.'

Augustine could not see the reason why he should be forced to stay indoors and learn dull, wearisome lessons, when he might be playing in the sunshine and learning new games, which seemed so much more worth knowing. How those games delighted him! He was always eager to be first, to win the victory and to be ahead of every one else. But then followed the whipping at school, and the little sore body crept away and sobbed out the prayer from his little sore soul.

[56]

He did not understand how it could all be meant for his good. We never quite understand that till we have left school far behind.

I wonder if we all wrote down just exactly what we felt and did when we were little children, whether we would have as many things to confess as Augustine had? There are some faults which no one is very much ashamed to own because they don't seem small and mean and pitiful. But who would like to confess to being greedy and stealing sweet things from the table when no one was looking? Who would care to own that he cheated at games, caring only to come out first whether he had played fairly or not? Yet this great saint tells us he remembers doing all these mean things and looks back upon them with great sorrow. He warns other little children to kill these faults at the very beginning, for he knows how strong they grow and how difficult to conquer, when the mean child grows into a man whom no one can trust.

As time went on and he grew to be a big boy he went further and further astray. When he was little he stole things to eat because he was greedy or because he wanted to bribe other little boys

[57]

to sell him their toys, but now that he was older it was out of mere pride and boastfulness that he took what did not belong to him. He thought it grand and manly to show off to other boys how little he cared about doing wrong.

Augustine tells us that in a garden near his house there was a pear-tree covered with pears neither sweet nor large. But just because it belonged to some one else, and he thought it fun to steal, he and his companions went out one dark night and robbed the tree of all its fruit. They did not care to eat the pears, and after tasting one or two threw all the rest to the pigs. There was no particular pleasure in this he allows, and he would never have done it alone, but he wanted the other boys to admire him and to think he was afraid of nothing.

And so years went on and Augustine grew up into manhood, and it seemed as if his evil ways would break his mother's heart. Through all his sin and foolishness she loved him and prayed for him but he paid no heed to her, and wandered further away into that far country, wasting all he had in living wildly and forgetting the God he had prayed to when a child.

One day when Monica was weeping over this wandering son of hers and praying for him with all her heart, God sent a comforting dream to her which she never forgot. She thought she saw herself standing on a narrow wooden plank, and towards her there came a shining angel who smiled upon her as she stood there worn out with sorrow and weeping.

[58] 'Why art thou so sad, and wherefore dost thou weep these daily tears?' asked the angel.

'I weep over the ruin of my son,' answered the poor mother.

Then the angel bade her cease from grieving and be at rest, and told her to look and see that on the same narrow plank of salvation where she was standing Augustine stood beside her.

His mother told Augustine of this dream, and though he only laughed at it, it seemed to sink into his heart and he remembered it many years after. And to Monica it came as a breath of hope, and comforted her through many dark days. For she was sure that God had sent this dream to tell her that in the end she and her son would stand together in His presence.

But though Monica believed this she never ceased to do all that was in her power to help Augustine. And once she went to a learned bishop and begged him to talk to Augustine and try what he could do. But the bishop was a wise man and knew that by speaking he would do more harm than good, for Augustine was proud of his unbelief and had no longing in himself for better things. But Monica did not see this and could only implore the bishop to try, until the good man grew vexed with her and said at last, 'I cannot help thee in this matter, but go thy way in peace. It cannot be that a son of such tears should perish.'

And these words comforted Monica, as the dream had done, and made her sure that in the end all would be right.

[59] The good bishop spoke truly, for after many years had passed Augustine began to be weary of his own way and to look for a higher, better life. He longed to turn his face homeward, but now he had lost the way, and for long he sought it with bitter tears.

At last, one day, he felt he could bear the burden of his evil life no longer. His sins felt like a heavy chain dragging him down in the darkness, and there was no light to show him which way to turn. Taking a roll of the scriptures he wandered out into the garden and there, as he wept, he heard a voice close by chanting over and over again 'Take, read.' He thought it must be some game that children were playing, but he could remember none that had those words in it. And then he thought perhaps this was a voice from heaven in answer to his prayer, telling him what to do.

Eagerly he took the holy writings in his hand and opened them to read, and there he found words telling him what sort of life he should lead. In a moment it all seemed clear to him. His Father was waiting to receive and pardon him; so he arose and left the far country and all his evil habits and turned his face to God.

And then he tells how he went straight to his mother—the mother who had loved and believed in him through all those evil days, and he told her like a little child how sorry he was at last.

[60] Then, indeed, was Monica's mourning turned into joy, and so at her life's end she and her son sat hand in hand, both looking up towards the dawning heaven; he with eyes ashamed but full of hope, and she with tears all washed away, and eyes that shone with more than earthly joy.

When his mother at last died and left him alone, Augustine did not grieve, for he knew the parting was not for long. All that was left for him to do now was to strive to make good those years he had wasted, and be more fit to meet her when God should call him home.

And so it came to pass that this great sinner became one of God's saints and did a wonderful work for Him in the world. He was made Bishop of Hippo, and was one of the most famous bishops the world has ever known.

There is one legend told of Augustine which has comforted many hearts when puzzling questions have arisen and it has seemed so difficult to understand all the Bible teaches us about our Father in heaven.

They say that once when this great father of the Church was walking along by the seashore,

troubled and perplexed because he could not understand many things about God, he came upon a little child playing there alone. The child had dugged a hole in the sand and was carefully filling it with water which he brought from the sea in a spoon. The bishop stopped and watched him for a while and then he asked:

'What art thou doing, my child?'

'I mean to empty the sea into my hole,' answered the child, busily going backwards and forwards with his spoon.



THE CHILD HAD DIGGED A HOLE IN THE SAND.

[61] 'But that is impossible,' said the bishop.

'Not more impossible than that thy human mind should understand the mind of God,' said the child, gazing upwards at him with grave, sweet eyes.

And before the bishop could answer the child had vanished, and the saint knew that God had sent him as an answer to his troubled thoughts, and as a rebuke for his trying to understand the things that only God could know.

[62]

SAINT AUGUSTINE OF CANTERBURY

It was market-day in the great city of Rome, and the people were busy buying and selling and shouting, just as they do to-day with us, when market-day comes round. But there was a great difference between this Roman market and ours, a difference which would have seemed to us strange and cruel. For instead of sheep and oxen, or green vegetables from the country, they were selling men and boys, and even little maidens. There in the great market-place, with the sun beating down on their bare heads, they stood, looking with dull, despairing eyes, or with frightened glances at the crowds of buyers and sellers who were bargaining around.

Suddenly a hush fell on the crowd, and a stately figure was seen crossing the square. People stood aside and bent their heads in reverence as Gregory passed by, for he was Abbot of a great monastery in Rome, and was much beloved even by the rough Roman soldiers. He walked swiftly as if he did not care to linger in the market-place, for it grieved his gentle heart to see the suffering of the slaves when he could do nothing to help them.

[63] But suddenly the crowd seemed to divide in front of him, and he stopped in wonder at the sight which met his eyes. It was only a group of little fair-haired English boys who had been captured in the wars, and carried off to be sold as slaves in the Roman market. But Gregory had never seen anything like them before. All around were dark-eyed, swarthy-faced Italians, or darker-skinned slaves from Africa, and these boys with their sunny, golden hair, fair faces, and eyes blue as the sky overhead, seemed to him creatures from a different world.

'Whence come these children, and what name do they bear?' asked the bishop of a man who stood beside him.

'From a savage island far over the sea,' he answered, 'and men call them Angles.'

Then the kind bishop looked with pitying eyes upon the beautiful children, and said to himself, as he turned to go: 'They should be called not Angles, but angels.'

The sight of those boys, so strong and fearless and beautiful, made Gregory think a great deal

about the little island of Britain, far away across the sea, from whence they had come. He knew the people who lived there were a fierce, warlike race, having a strange religion of their own, and that very few of them were Christians. But he knew, too, that though they were hard to conquer, and difficult to teach, still they were a people worth teaching, and he longed to win them to the side of Christ and to show them how to serve the true God.

[64] In those days people in Italy knew very little about that far-away island, and it seemed to them as difficult and dangerous to go to England as it would seem to us if we were asked to go to the wildest part of Africa. True there were no lions nor tigers in England, but the tall, fair-haired giants who lived there were as savage as they were brave, and might be even worse to deal with than the wild beasts of other lands.

So it may well be believed that when Saint Gregory, who was now Pope of Rome, chose forty monks and sent them on a mission to this distant island, they were not very anxious to go, and set out in fear and trembling.

But at their head was one who knew no fear and who was willing to face any dangers in the service of his Master. This man was Augustine, a monk of Rome, whom Gregory had chosen to lead the mission, knowing that his courage would strengthen the others, and his wisdom would guide them aright.

It took many long days and nights of travel to reach the coast where they were to find a ship to carry them across to Britain, and before they had gone very far, the forty monks were inclined to turn back in despair. From every side they heard such terrible tales of the savage islanders they were going to meet, that their hearts, never very courageous, were filled with terror, and they refused to go further. Nothing that Augustine could say would persuade them to go on, and they would only agree that he should go back to Rome and bear their prayers to Saint Gregory, imploring him not to force them to face such horrible danger. If Augustine would do this they promised to wait his return and to do then whatever the Pope ordered.

[65] They had not to wait many days, for Augustine speedily brought back the Pope's answer to their request. His dark face glowed and his eyes shone with the light of victory, as he read to them the letter which Saint Gregory had sent. There was to be no thought of going back. Saint Gregory's words were few, but decisive. 'It is better not to begin a work than to turn back as soon as danger threatens; therefore, my beloved sons, go forward by the help of our Lord.'

So they obeyed, and with Augustine at their head once more set out, hardly hoping to escape the perils of the journey, and expecting, if they did arrive, to be speedily put to death by the savage islanders.

Perhaps the worst trial of all was when they set sail from France and saw the land fading away in the distance. In front there was nothing to be seen but angry waves and a cold, grey sky, and they seemed to be drifting away from the country of sunshine and safety into the dark region of uncertainty and danger. Nay, the island, whose very name was terrible to them, was nowhere to be seen, and seemed all the more horrible because it was wrapped in that mysterious grey mist.

But though they did not know it, they had really nothing to fear from the island people, for the queen of that part of England where they landed was a Christian, and had taught the King Ethelbert to show mercy and kindness. So when the company of cold, shivering monks came ashore they were met with a kind and courteous welcome, and instead of enemies they found friends.

[66] The king himself came to meet them, and he ordered the little band of foreigners to be brought before him, that he might learn their errand. He did not receive them in any hall or palace, but out in the open air, for it seemed safer there, in case these strangers should be workers of magic or witchcraft.

It must have been a strange scene when the forty monks, with Augustine at their head, walked in procession up from the beach to the broad green meadow where the king and his soldiers waited for them. The tall, fair-haired warriors who stood around, sword in hand, ready to defend their king, must have looked with surprise at these black-robed men with shaven heads and empty hands. They carried no weapons of any sort, and they seemed to bear no banner to tell men whence they came. Only the foremost monks carried on high a silver cross and the picture of a crucified Man, and instead of shouts and war-cries there was the sound of a melodious chant sung by many voices, yet seeming as if sung by one.

Then Augustine stood out from among the company of monks and waited for the king to speak.

'Who art thou, and from whence have come these men who are with thee?' asked the king. Methinks thou comest in peace, else wouldst thou have carried more deadly weapons than a silver charm and a painted sign. I fain would know the reason of thy visit to this our island.'

[67] Slowly Augustine began to tell the story of their pilgrimage and the message they had brought. So long he spoke that the sun began to sink and the twilight fell over the silent sea that lay stretched out beyond the meadow where they sat before his story was done.

The king bent forward, thoughtfully weighing the words he had heard, and looking into the faces of these strange messengers of peace. At length he spoke, and the weary monks and stalwart warriors listened eagerly to his words.

'Thou hast spoken well,' he said to Augustine, 'and it may be there is truth in what thou sayest. But a man does not change his religion in an hour. I will hear more of this. But meanwhile ye shall be well cared for, and all who choose may listen to your message.'

Those were indeed welcome words to the company of poor tired monks, and when the kindly islanders, following their king's example, made them welcome and gave them food and shelter, they could well echo the words of Saint Gregory in the Roman market: 'These are not Angles but angels.'

And soon King Ethelbert gave the little company a house of their own, and allowed them to build up the ancient church at Canterbury, which had fallen into ruins. There they lived as simply and quietly as they had done in their convent in Italy, praying day and night for the souls of these heathen people, and teaching them, as much by their lives as their words, that it was good to serve the Lord Christ.

[68]

And before very long the people began to listen eagerly to their teaching, and the king himself was baptized with many others. The chant which the monks had sung that first day of their landing no longer sounded strange and mysterious in the ears of the islanders, for they too learnt to sing the 'Alleluia' and to praise God beneath the sign of the silver cross.

Now Augustine was very anxious that the Ancient British Church should join his party and that they should work together under the direction of Pope Gregory. But the British Christians were not sure if they might trust these strangers, and it was arranged that they should meet first, before making any plans.

The Ancient British Church had almost been driven out of the land, and there were but few of her priests left. They did not know whether they ought to join Augustine and his foreign monks, or strive to work on alone. In their perplexity they went to a holy hermit, and asked him what they should do.

'If this man comes from God, then follow him,' said the hermit.

'But how can we know if he is of God?' asked the people.

The hermit thought a while and then said:

'The true servant of God is ever humble and lowly of heart. Go to meet this man. If he rises and bids you welcome, then will you know that he bears Christ's yoke, and will lead you aright. But if he be proud and haughty, and treat you with scorn, never rising to welcome you, then see to it that ye have nought to do with him.'

[69]

So the priests and bishops of the British Church arranged to meet Augustine under a great oak-tree, which was called ever afterwards 'Augustine's oak.' They carefully planned that the foreign monks should arrive there first, in time to be seated, so that the hermit's test might be tried when they themselves should arrive.

Unhappily, Augustine did not think of rising to greet the British bishops, and they were very angry and would agree to nothing that he proposed, though he warned them solemnly that if they would not join their forces with his, they would sooner or later fall by the hand of their enemies.

Greatly disappointed Augustine returned to Canterbury and worked there for many years without help, until all who lived in that part of England learned to be Christians.

And Pope Gregory hearing of his labours was pleased with the work his missionary had done, and thought it fit that the humble monk should be rewarded with a post of honour. So he made Augustine Archbishop of Canterbury, the first archbishop that England had known. It was a simple ceremony then, with only the few faithful monks kneeling around the chair on which the archbishop was enthroned, but Augustine's keen, dark face shone with the light of victory and humble thankfulness, for it seemed a seal upon his work, a pledge that the island should never again turn back from the faith of Christ.

[70]

And could those dark eyes have looked forward and pierced the screen of many years, Augustine would have seen a goodly succession of archbishops following in his footsteps, each in his turn sitting in that same simple old chair, placed now in Westminster Abbey and guarded as one of England's treasures.

And he would have seen, too, what would have cheered his heart more than all—a Christian England venerating the spot where his monastery once stood, and building upon it a college to his memory. And there he would have seen England's sons trained to become missionaries and to go out into all the world to preach the gospel, just as that little band of monks, with Augustine at their head, came to our island in those dark, far-off days.

But though Augustine could not know all this, his heart was filled with a great hope and a great love for the islanders who now seemed like his own children, and he was more than content to spend his life amongst them.

And when his work was ended, and the faithful soul gave up his charge, they buried him in the island which had once seemed to him a land of exile, but which at last had come to mean even more to him than his own sunny land of Italy.

[71]

SAINT CECILIA

It was in the days when cruel men killed and tortured those who loved our Blessed Lord that, in the city of Rome, a little maid was born. Her father and mother were amongst the richest and noblest of the Roman people, and their little daughter, whom they called Cecilia, had everything she could possibly want. She lived in a splendid palace, with everything most beautiful around her, and she had a garden to play in, where the loveliest flowers grew. Her little white dress was embroidered with the finest gold, and her face was as fair as the flowers she loved.

But it was not only the outside that was beautiful, for the little maiden's heart was fairer than the fairest flowers, and whiter than her spotless robe.

There were not many people who loved our Lord in those dark days. Any one who was known to be a Christian was made to suffer terrible tortures, and was even put to death.

But though Cecilia's father and mother knew this they still taught their little daughter to be a servant of Christ and to love Him above all things. For they knew that the love of Christ was better than life, and worth all the suffering that might come.

[72] And as Cecilia grew into a stately maiden every one wondered at the grace and beauty that shone out of her face. And every one loved her because she loved every one. She was always ready and willing to help others, and she specially cared to be kind to the poor. In the folds of her gold embroidered dress she always carried a little book which she loved to read. It was the book of the Gospels, and the more she read and heard of Christ, the more she longed to grow like Him. She could not bear to think that she wore fine dresses, while He had been so poor and suffered so much. And so, underneath her soft, white robe she wore a harsh, coarse garment made of hair. And when it hurt and rubbed her sorely, the pain only made her glad, because she wore it for Christ's sake.

Some say the meaning of her name Cecilia is 'Heaven's Lily.' And that name certainly suited this little Roman maiden. For as God plants the lilies in the dark earth, and presently they grow up and lift their pure white cups to heaven, so Cecilia seemed to lift her heart above the sins and sorrows of the world, where God had planted her, and to turn her face ever heavenwards.

And the poor people whom she helped and cheered with her kind sympathy loved to look at her, for the peace of paradise shone in her eyes, and it seemed to bring heaven nearer to the poor souls.

[73] As soon as Cecilia was old enough, it was arranged that she should marry a young Roman noble called Valerian, and this made her very unhappy. She had so hoped to belong only to Christ, and this Valerian was a pagan who knew nothing of the Lord whom she served. But she knew that her guardian angel would watch over her and keep her from all harm, and so she obeyed her father's and mother's wishes, and was married to the young Roman noble.

When Valerian had taken Cecilia home and all the guests had gone, and they were left alone together, she told him that, though she was married, she belonged first of all to Christ, and that her guardian angel, who never left her, would guard and protect her from all danger.

'Wilt thou not show me this angel, so that I may know that what thou sayest is true?' asked Valerian.

'Thou canst not see the heavenly messenger until thou hast learnt to know my Lord,' answered Cecilia.

And as Valerian eagerly asked how he should learn to know this Christ, Cecilia told him to go along the great Appian Way, outside the walls of Rome, until he should meet some poor people who lived in the Campagna. And to them he should say:

'Cecilia bids you show me the way that I may find the old man, Urban the Good.'

So Valerian started off and went the way Cecilia directed. And the people guided him as she had promised, until they came to a curious opening in the ground, down which they told him he must go if he wished to find Pope Urban.

This opening was the entrance to a strange under-ground place called the Catacombs.

[74] There were miles and miles of dark passages cut out of the rock, with here and there a little dark room, and curious shelves hollowed out of the walls. It was here that many poor Christians lived, hiding themselves from those who would have put them to death. And the little shelves were where they buried the bodies of poor Christians who had died for Christ.

It was here that the old Pope, Urban the Good, lived, and he welcomed Valerian most gladly, knowing why he had come. He began at once to teach him all that he should know—how God was our Father, and Jesus Christ His Son, our Saviour. And as Valerian listened to the strange, wonderful words, the love of God shone into his heart, so that when the old man asked:

'Believest thou this?'

He answered with all his heart:

'All this I steadfastly believe.'

Then Urban baptized Valerian, and by that sign the young Roman knew that he was indeed a Christian, a servant of Christ.

All the world looked different to Valerian as he walked back along the Appian Way to Rome. The flat, low fields of the Campagna, fading away into the ridges of the purple Apennines, seemed almost like the fields of paradise, and the song of the birds was like the voice of angels. He scarcely thought of the dangers and difficulties that were before him, or if he did it was only to feel glad that he might have anything to bear for his new Master.



A CROWN OF LILIES AND ROSES IN EACH HAND.

[75] And when he reached home, and went back to the room where he had left Cecilia, he found her there waiting for him, with a glad welcome in her eyes. And as they knelt together they heard a rustle of wings, and looking up they saw an angel bending over them, with a crown of lilies and roses in each hand. These he placed upon their heads, and to Valerian he said:

'Thou hast done well in allowing Cecilia to serve her Master, therefore ask what thou wilt and thy request shall be granted.'

Then Valerian asked that his brother, whom he dearly loved, might also learn to know Christ.

And just then the door opened, and the brother whom Valerian loved so much came in. He, of course, only saw Valerian and Cecilia, and could not see the angel, or even the wreaths of heavenly roses. But he looked round in astonishment and said:

'I see no flowers here, and yet the fragrance of roses and lilies is so sweet and strange, that it makes my very heart glad.'

Then Valerian answered:

'We have two crowns here, which thou canst not see, because thou knowest not the Lord who sent them to us. But if thou wilt listen, and learn to know Him, then shalt thou see the heavenly flowers, whose fragrance has filled thy heart.'

So Valerian and Cecilia told their brother what it meant to be a Christian. And after the good Urban had taught him also, he was baptized and became God's knight. Then he, too, saw the heavenly crowns and the face of the angel who guarded Heaven's Lily.

[76] For a while the home of Valerian and Cecilia was like a paradise on earth. There was nothing but happiness there. Cecilia loved music above everything. Her voice was like a bird's, and she sang her hymns of praise and played so exquisitely, that it is said that even the angels came down to listen.

But before long it began to be known that Valerian and his brother helped the poor Christians, and the wicked governor of the city ordered them both to be seized and brought before him. He told them that there were but two ways before them: either they must deny that they were Christians, or they must be put to death.

But God's knights did not fear death, and they went out to meet it as if they were on their way to a great victory. And when the soldiers wondered, and asked them if it was not sad that they should lose their lives while they were still so young, they answered that what looked like loss on earth was gain in heaven—that they were but laying down their bodies as one puts off one's clothes to sleep at night. For the immortal soul could never die, but would live for ever.

So they knelt down, and the cruel blows were struck. But, looking up, the soldiers saw a great pathway of light shining down from heaven. And the souls of Valerian and his brother were led up by angel hands to the throne of God, there to receive the crowns of everlasting glory which they had won on earth.

[77] And so Cecilia was left alone. But she did not spend her time grieving. Gathering the people and soldiers around her, she taught them about the Lord of Heaven, for whose sake Valerian and his brother had so gladly suffered death. And it was not long before she also trod the shining pathway up to heaven and met the ones she loved.

For the governor was not satisfied with the death of Valerian and his brother, but ordered Cecilia to be brought before him.

'What sort of a woman art thou, and what is thy name?' he asked.

'I am a Roman lady,' she answered with grave dignity, 'and among men I am known by the name of Cecilia. But'—and her voice rang out proudly as she looked fearlessly into those angry eyes—'my noblest name is Christian.'

Then the enraged governor ordered that she should be taken to her house, and put to death in her bath. But the boiling water could not hurt her, and she was as cool as if she had bathed in a fresh spring.

This made the governor more furious than ever, and he ordered that her head should be cut off.

But even after she had received three strokes from the sword she did not die, but lived for three days. And these days she spent in quietly putting her house in order and dividing her money among the poor, ever singing in her sweet voice the praises of God.

And so at the end of three days God's angel came and led Cecilia home, and all that was left of her on earth was her fair body, lying like a tired child asleep, with hands clasped, gently resting now that her work on earth was done.

[78] And in Rome to-day there is a splendid church built over the place where Cecilia's house stood. Some day if you go there, you will see her little room and the bath in which the boiling water could not hurt her. You will see too, a beautiful marble figure lying under the altar, and you will know exactly how Cecilia looked when she left her tired body lying there, and went up the shining path to God.



SHE TAUGHT THEM ABOUT THE LORD OF HEAVEN.

SAINT GILES

It was in the beautiful land of Greece that Saint Giles was born, very far away from the grey northern city, whose cathedral bears his name. His parents were of royal blood, and were, moreover, Christians; so the boy was brought up most carefully, and taught all that a prince should know.

He was a dreamy, quiet boy, and what he loved best was to wander out in the green woods by himself, with no companions but the animals and birds and flowers. He would lie for hours watching the birds busily build their nests, or the rabbits as they timidly peeped at him out of their holes. And soon all the woodland creatures began to look upon him as their friend, and even the wildest would come gradually nearer and nearer, almost within reach of his hand; and they seemed to listen when he talked to them, as if they could understand what he said. One thing they certainly did understand, and that was that he loved them and would do them no harm.

[80]

Saint Giles could not bear to see anything suffer, and his pity was great for all those in pain; and often he would mend a bird's broken wing, or bind up a little furry foot that had been torn in a trap; and the birds and beasts always lay quiet under his hand, and seemed to know that he would cure them, even though the touch might hurt.

It happened that one day, when Saint Giles was kneeling in church, he saw a poor beggar lying there on the cold, stone floor. He had scarcely any clothes to keep him warm, and his face had a hungry, suffering look, which filled the heart of the saint with pity. He saw that the poor man was ill and trembling with cold, so without a moment's thought, he took off his own warm cloak and tenderly wrapped it round the beggar.

The warmth of the cloak seemed to bring life back to the poor chilled body, and when Saint Giles had given him food and wine, he was able to lift himself up, and to bless the kind youth who had helped him.

And when the people saw what had happened they thought Saint Giles had worked a miracle, and cured the man by his wonderful touch; for they did not realise that all kind deeds work miracles every day.

It did not please Saint Giles that people should think he possessed this miraculous gift of healing, and he had no wish to be called a saint. He only longed to lead his own quiet life and to help all God's creatures who needed his care. But the people would not leave him alone, and they brought to him those who were sick and lame and blind, and expected that he would heal them.

[81]

It is true that many needed only a little human aid, and the food and help which Saint Giles gave them would soon make them well again; but there were some he could not help, and it wrung his heart to see their pleading eyes, and to watch them bring out their little store of hard-earned money, eager to buy the aid which he so willingly would have given had he been able.

So at last Saint Giles determined to leave his native city, for he had been all alone since his father and mother had died. He wished to escape from the anxious crowds that refused to leave him in peace; but first he sold all that he had and gave it to the poor of the city, an act which made them surer than ever that he was one of God's saints. Then he sailed away across the sea to a far-off country.

There Saint Giles found a lonely cave in which an old hermit lived. 'Here at last I shall find peace and quietness,' said he to himself, 'and men will soon forget me.'

But even here ere long his friends found him, for his fame had spread across the seas. So once more he set out and went further and further away, by paths that few had ever trod before, until in the depths of a green forest he found another shelter, a cave among grey rocks overgrown with lichens, and hidden by the sheltering boughs of the surrounding trees. Saint Giles had always loved the woods and this was just the home he had longed for. A clear stream flowed not far off, and his only companions would be the birds and beasts and flowers.

[82]

Early in the morning the birds would wake him with their song, and the wild creatures would come stealing out of the wood to share his meal. And his silent friends, the flowers, would cheer and help him by their beauty, and remind him of God's garden whose gate would one day open for him, where he would wander in the green pastures beside the still waters of Life for evermore.

But of all his companions the one Saint Giles loved best was a gentle white doe, who came to him as soon as he settled in the cave. She seemed to have no fear of him from the first, and stayed with him longer and longer each time, until at last she took up her abode with him, and would never leave him, lying close to him when he slept, and walking by his side wherever he went.

This peaceful life went on for a long time and it seemed as if nothing could disturb its quiet happiness. But it happened that one day as Saint Giles was praying in the cave, and his companion, the white doe, was nibbling her morning meal of fresh grass by the banks of the stream, a curious noise was heard afar off. It came nearer and nearer, and then shouts of men's voices could be heard, the sound of horses galloping and the note of the hunter's horn. Then came the deep baying of dogs, and before the startled doe could hide, the whole hunt was upon her. With a wild halloo they chased her across the greensward and through the trees, and just as

she disappeared into the cave, one of the huntsmen drew his bow and sent an arrow flying after her. Then they all dismounted and went to see what had become of the hunted doe, and soon found the opening into the cave. But what was their surprise, when they burst in, to find an old man kneeling there. He was sheltering the terrified doe who had fled to him for refuge, and an arrow had pierced the kind hand that had been raised to shield her.

The huntsmen were ashamed of their cruel sport when they saw the wounded hand of the old man and the trembling form of the white doe as it crouched behind him, and they listened with reverence to the hermit's words as he spoke to them of man's duty towards God's dumb creatures.

The King of France, who was one of the hunting party, came often after this to see Saint Giles, and at last offered to build him a monastery and give him all that he could want; but the old man begged to be left alone in his woodland cave, to serve God in peace and quietness. So there he lived quietly and happily for many years, until God took him, and he left his cave for the fairer fields of paradise.

People loved the thought of this peaceful old saint who dwelt in the woods and was the protector of all sorrowful and suffering creatures, and so they often called their churches after Saint Giles, especially those churches which were built in the fields or near green woods.

The surroundings of many of these churches are to-day changed. There are no fields now round his great cathedral church in the old town of Edinburgh; but the poor and sick and sorrowful crowd very near to its shelter, and the memory of the pitiful heart of the gentle old saint still hovers like a blessing round the grey old walls.

SAINT NICHOLAS

Of all the saints that little children love is there any to compare with Santa Claus? The very sound of his name has magic in it, and calls up visions of well-filled stockings, with the presents we particularly want peeping over the top, or hanging out at the side, too big to go into the largest sock. Besides, there is something so mysterious and exciting about Santa Claus, for no one seems to have ever seen him. But we picture him to ourselves as an old man with a white beard, whose favourite way of coming into our rooms is down the chimney, bringing gifts for the good children and punishments for the bad.

Yet this Santa Claus, in whose name the presents come to us at Christmas time, is a very real saint, and we can learn a great deal about him, only we must remember that his true name is Saint Nicholas. Perhaps the little children, who used to talk of him long ago, found Saint Nicholas too difficult to say, and so called him their dear Santa Claus. But we learn, as we grow older, that Nicholas is his true name, and that he is a real person who lived long years ago, far away in the East.

The father and mother of Nicholas were noble and very rich, but what they wanted most of all was to have a son. They were Christians, so they prayed to God for many years that he would give them their heart's desire; and when at last Nicholas was born, they were the happiest people in the world.

They thought there was no one like their boy; and indeed he was wiser and better than most children, and never gave them a moment's trouble. But alas, while he was still a child, a terrible plague swept over the country, and his father and mother died, leaving him quite alone.

All the great riches which his father had possessed were left to Nicholas, and among other things he inherited three bars of gold. These golden bars were his greatest treasure, and he thought more of them than all the other riches he possessed.

Now in the town where Nicholas lived there dwelt a nobleman with three daughters. They had once been very rich, but great misfortunes had overtaken the father, and now they were all so poor they had scarcely enough to live upon.

At last a day came when there was not even bread enough to eat, and the daughters said to their father:

'Let us go out into the streets and beg, or do anything to get a little money, that we may not starve.'

But the father answered:

'Not to-night. I cannot bear to think of it. Wait at least until to-morrow. Something may happen to save my daughters from such disgrace.'

Now, just as they were talking together, Nicholas happened to be passing, and as the window was open he heard all that the poor father said. It seemed terrible to think that a noble family should be so poor and actually in want of bread, and Nicholas tried to plan how it would be possible to help them. He knew they would be much too proud to take money from him, so he had

to think of some other way. Then he remembered his golden bars, and that very night he took one of them and went secretly to the nobleman's house, hoping to give the treasure without letting the father or daughters know who brought it.

To his joy Nicholas discovered that a little window had been left open, and by standing on tiptoe he could just reach it. So he lifted the golden bar and slipped it through the window, never waiting to hear what became of it, in case any one should see him. (And now do you see the reason why the visits of Santa Claus are so mysterious?)

Inside the house the poor father sat sorrowfully watching, while his children slept. He wondered if there was any hope for them anywhere, and he prayed earnestly that heaven would send help. Suddenly something fell at his feet, and to his amazement and joy, he found it was a bar of pure gold.

'My child,' he cried, as he showed his eldest daughter the shining gold, 'God has heard my prayer and has sent this from heaven. Now we shall have enough and to spare. Call your sisters that we may rejoice together, and I will go instantly and change this treasure.'



HE SHOWED HIS DAUGHTER THE GOLD.

[87]

The precious golden bar was soon sold to a money-changer, who gave so much for it that the family were able to live in comfort and have all that they needed. And not only was there enough to live upon, but so much was over that the father gave his eldest daughter a large dowry, and very soon she was happily married.

When Nicholas saw how much happiness his golden bar had brought to the poor nobleman, he determined that the second daughter should have a dowry too. So he went as before and found the little window again open, and was able to throw in the second golden bar as he had done the first. This time the father was dreaming happily, and did not find the treasure until he awoke in the morning. Soon afterwards the second daughter had her dowry and was married too.

The father now began to think that, after all, it was not usual for golden bars to fall from heaven, and he wondered if by any chance human hands had placed them in his room. The more he thought of it the stranger it seemed, and he made up his mind to keep watch every night, in case another golden bar should be sent as a portion for his youngest daughter.

And so when Nicholas went the third time and dropped the last bar through the little window, the father came quickly out, and before Nicholas had time to hide, caught him by his cloak.

'O Nicholas,' he cried, 'is it thou who hast helped us in our need? Why didst thou hide thyself?' And then he fell on his knees and began to kiss the hands that had helped him so graciously.

[88]

But Nicholas bade him stand up and give thanks to God instead; warning him to tell no one the story of the golden bars.

This was only one of the many kind acts Nicholas loved to do, and it was no wonder that he was beloved by all who knew him.

Soon afterwards Nicholas made up his mind to enter God's service as a priest. He longed above all things to leave the world and live as a hermit in the desert, but God came to him in a vision

and told him he must stay in the crowded cities and do his work among the people. Still his desire to see the deserts and the hermits who lived there was so great that he went off on a journey to Egypt and the Holy Land. But remembering, what God had bade him do, he did not stay there, but returned to his own country.

On the way home a terrific storm arose, and it seemed as if the ship he was in must be lost. The sailors could do nothing, and great waves dashed over the deck, filling the ship with water. But just as all had given up hope, Nicholas knelt and prayed to God to save them, and immediately a calm fell upon the angry sea. The winds sank to rest and the waves ceased to lash the sides of the ship so that they sailed smoothly on, and all danger was past.

Thus Nicholas returned home in safety, and went to live in the city of Myra. His ways were so quiet and humble that no one knew much about him, until it came to pass one day that the Archbishop of Myra died. Then all the priests met to choose another archbishop, and it was made known to them by a sign from heaven that the first man who should enter the church next morning should be the bishop whom God had chosen.

[89]

Now Nicholas used to spend most of his nights in prayer and always went very early to church, so next morning just as the sun was rising and the bells began to ring for the early mass, he was seen coming up to the church door and was the first to enter. As he knelt down quietly to say his prayers as usual, what was his surprise to meet a company of priests who hailed him as their new archbishop, chosen by God to be their leader and guide. So Nicholas was made Archbishop of Myra to the joy of all in the city who knew and loved him.

Not long after this there was great trouble in the town of Myra, for the harvests of that country had failed and a terrible famine swept over the land. Nicholas, as a good bishop should, felt the suffering of his people as if it were his own, and did all he could to help them.

He knew that they must have corn or they would die, so he went to the harbour where two ships lay filled with grain, and asked the captains if they would sell him their cargo. They told the bishop they would willingly do so, but it was already sold to merchants of another country and they dared not sell it over again.

'Take no thought of that,' said Nicholas, 'only sell me some of thy corn for my starving people, and I promise thee that there shall be nought wanting when thou shalt arrive at thy journey's end.'

[90]

The captains believed in the bishop's promise and gave him as much corn as he asked. And behold! when they came to deliver their cargo to the owners, there was not a bag lacking.

It is said, too, that at the time of this famine there was a cruel innkeeper in Myra who was wicked enough to catch little children and pickle them in a great tub, pretending they were pork. It happened one day as Nicholas was passing the inn-door that he heard the voices of children crying for help. He went in very quickly and made his way to the cellar whence the cries had come. There he found the poor children, and not only rescued those who were alive, but by his prayers he brought to life those who had already been killed and cast into the tub.

Another time there were two men in Myra who had been unjustly condemned to death, and it was told the bishop how greatly they stood in need of his help. No one ever appealed to Nicholas in vain, and he went off at once to the place of execution. The executioner was just about to raise his sword, when Nicholas seized his arm and wrenched the sword away. Then he set the poor prisoners free and told the judge that, if he dared to deal so unjustly again, the wrath of heaven and of the Bishop of Myra would descend upon him.



HE WENT TO THE HARBOUR WHERE TWO SHIPS LAY.

[91]

There are many other stories told about the good bishop. Like his Master, he ever went about doing good; and when he died, there were a great many legends told about him, for the people loved to believe that their bishop still cared for them and would come to their aid. We do not know if all these legends are true, but they show how much Saint Nicholas was loved and honoured even after his death, and how every one believed in his power to help them.

Here is one of the stories which all children who love Saint Nicholas will like to hear.

There was once a nobleman who had no children and who longed for a son above everything else in the world. Night and day he prayed to Saint Nicholas that he would grant him his request, and at last a son was born. He was a beautiful child, and the father was so delighted and so grateful to the saint who had listened to his prayers that, every year on the child's birthday, he made a great feast in honour of Saint Nicholas and a grand service was held in the church.

Now the Evil One grew very angry each year when this happened, for it made many people go to church and honour the good saint, neither of which things pleased the Evil One at all. So each year he tried to think of some plan that would put an end to these rejoicings, and he decided at last that if only he could do some evil to the child, the parents would blame Saint Nicholas and all would be well.

[92]

It happened just then to be the boy's sixth birthday, and a greater feast than ever was being held. It was late in the afternoon, and the gardener and porter and all the servants were away keeping holiday too. So no one noticed a curious-looking pilgrim who came and sat close to the great iron gates which led into the courtyard. He had on the ordinary robe of a poor pilgrim, but the hood was drawn so far over his face that nothing but a dark shadow could be seen inside. And indeed that was as well, for this pilgrim was a demon in disguise, and his wicked, black face would have frightened any one who saw it. He could not enter the courtyard for the great gates were always kept locked, and, as you know, the porter was away that day, feasting with all the other servants.

But, before very long, the little boy grew weary of his birthday feast, and having had all he wanted, he begged to be allowed to go to play in the garden. His parents knew that the gardener always looked after him there, so they told him he might go. They forgot that the gardener was not there just then.

The child played happily alone for some time and then wandered into the courtyard, and looking out of the gate saw a poor pilgrim resting there.

'What are you doing here?' asked the child, 'and why do you sit so still?'

'I am a poor pilgrim,' answered the demon, trying to make his harsh voice sound as gentle as possible, 'and I have come all the way from Rome. I am resting here because I am so weary and footsore and have had nothing to eat all day.'

'I will let you in, and take you to my father,' said the child; 'this is my birthday, and no one must go hungry to-day.'

But the demon pretended he was too weak to walk, and begged the boy to bring some food out

to him.

[93] Then the child ran back to the banquet hall in a great hurry and said to his father:

'O father, there is a poor pilgrim from Rome sitting outside our gate, and he is so hungry, may I take him some of my birthday feast?'

The father was very pleased to think that his little son should care for the poor and wish to be kind, so he willingly gave his permission and told one of the servants to give the child all that he wanted.

Then as the demon sat eating the good things, he began to question the boy and tried to find out all that he could about him.

'Do you often play in the garden?' he asked.

'Oh yes,' said the child, 'I play there whenever I may, for in the midst of the lawn there is a beautiful fountain, and the gardener makes me boats to sail on the water.'

'Will he make you one to-day?' asked the demon quickly.

'He is not here to-day,' answered the child, 'for this is a holiday for every one and I am quite alone.'

Then the demon rose to his feet slowly and said he felt so much better after the good food, that he thought he could walk a little, and would like very much to come in and see the beautiful garden and the fountain he had heard about.

So the child climbed up and with great difficulty drew back the bolts. The great gates swung open and the demon walked in.

[94] As they went along together towards the fountain, the child held out his little hand to lead the pilgrim, but even the demon shrunk from touching anything so pure and innocent, and folded his arms under his robe, so that the child could only hold by a fold of his cloak.

'What strange kind of feet you have,' said the child as they walked along; 'they look as if they belonged to an animal.'

'Yes, they are curious,' said the demon, 'but it is just the way they are made.'

Then the child began to notice the demon's hands, which were even more curious than his feet, and just like the paws of a bear. But he was too courteous to say anything about them, when he had already mentioned the feet.

Just then they came to the fountain, and with a sudden movement the demon threw back his hood and showed his dreadful face. And before the child could scream he was seized by those hairy hands and thrown into the water.

But just at that moment the gardener was returning to his work and saw from a distance what had happened. He ran as fast as he could, but he only got to the fountain in time to see the demon vanish, while the child's body was floating on the water. Very quickly he drew him out, and carried him, all dripping wet, up to the castle, where they tried to bring him back to life. But alas! it all seemed of no use, he neither moved nor breathed; and the day that had begun with such rejoicing, ended in the bitterest woe. The poor parents were heart-broken, but they did not quite lose hope and prayed earnestly to Saint Nicholas who had given them the child, that he would restore their boy to them again.

[95] As they prayed by the side of the little bed where the body of the child lay, they thought something moved, and to their joy and surprise the boy opened his eyes and sat up, and in a short time was as well as ever.

They asked him eagerly what had happened, and he told them all about the pilgrim with the queer feet and hands, who had gone with him to the fountain and had then thrown back his hood and shown his terrible face. After that he could remember nothing until he found himself in a beautiful garden, where the loveliest flowers grew. There were lilies like white stars, and roses far more beautiful than any he had ever seen in his own garden, and the leaves of the trees shone like silver and gold. It was all so beautiful that for a while he forgot about his home, and when he did remember and tried to find his way back, he grew bewildered and did not know in what direction to turn. As he was looking about, an old man came down the garden path and smiled so kindly upon him that he trusted him at once. This old man was dressed in the robes of a bishop, and had a long white beard and the sweetest old face the child had ever seen.

'Art thou searching for the way home?' the old man asked. 'Dost thou wish to leave this beautiful garden and go back to thy father and mother?'

'I want to go home,' said the child, with a sob in his voice, 'but I cannot find the way, and I am, oh, so tired of searching for it!'

[96] Then the old man stooped down and lifted him in his arms, and the child laid his head on the old man's shoulder, and, weary with his wandering, fell fast asleep and remembered nothing more till he woke up in his own little bed.

Then the parents knew that Saint Nicholas had heard their prayers and had gone to fetch the

child from the Heavenly Garden and brought him back to them.

So they were more grateful to the good saint than ever, and they loved and honoured him even more than they had done before; which was all the reward the demon got for his wicked doings.

That is one of the many stories told after the death of Saint Nicholas, and it ever helped and comforted his people to think that, though they could no longer see him, he would love and protect them still.

Young maidens in need of help remembered the story of the golden bars and felt sure the good saint would not let them want. Sailors tossing on the stormy waves thought of that storm which had sunk to rest at the prayer of Saint Nicholas. Poor prisoners with no one to take their part were comforted by the thought of those other prisoners whom he had saved. And little children perhaps have remembered him most of all, for when the happy Christmas time draws near, who is so much in their thoughts as Saint Nicholas, or Santa Claus, as they call him? Perhaps they are a little inclined to think of him as some good magician who comes to fill their stockings with gifts, but they should never forget that he was the kind bishop who, in olden days, loved to make the little ones happy. There are some who think that even now he watches over and protects little children, and for that reason he is called their patron saint.

[97]

SAINT FAITH

Among the many martyrs who long ago gave up their lives, rather than deny their Master, we love to remember one little maid—a child-martyr and saint. We do not know a great deal about her, for she lived so very long ago, but what we know makes us love and honour her, and speak her name with reverence.

Faith was the name of this little maiden, and her home was in France, in the pleasant country of Aquitaine. Her parents were rich and noble, and she was brought up carefully, and taught to be courteous and gentle to every one. But she did not need much teaching, for her nature was sweet and pure, and her face was fair, with the beauty that shines from within.

The town in which little Faith lived was called Agen, and lay at the foot of a high rugged hill, which seemed to keep guard over it. It was a quiet little place, and most of the people who dwelt there were Christians, living happily together with the good bishop at their head.

But one day a heavy cloud of dust was seen rolling along the highroad that led over the mountains to the city gates. And messengers came running breathlessly into the town, warning the people that a great company of soldiers was marching towards them. It was thought they had come from Spain, and the news spread like wildfire through the town that Dacian, the cruellest governor of all that country, was riding at their head.

[98]

In fear and trembling the people waited. They stood in little knots, talking under their breath of all the evil this man had done; or shutting themselves into their houses, they scarcely dared to look out at the windows. And soon the great company came sweeping in, swords clattering and armour glittering in the sunshine, rough soldiers laughing carelessly as they rode past the frightened faces. And at their head a cruel, evil-looking man who glared from side to side, as if he were a wild beast seeking his prey.

Doubtless it pleased him to see how every one trembled before him, and he smiled scornfully to think how easy a task it would be to teach these Christians to deny their God and drag their faith in the dust.

And soon the reason of his coming was known to all, for he ordered it to be proclaimed in the market-place, that every Christian who refused to sacrifice to the heathen gods should be tortured and put to death. And to make his meaning quite plain, the soldiers spread out all the terrible instruments of torture, so that men might know exactly what lay before them if they refused to deny Christ.

But in the night the terrified Christians stole silently out of the town, and climbing the high hill that overlooked the city, they hid themselves in the great caves among the rocks.

[99]

Scarcely any one was left behind: even the good bishop was afraid to stay and face the danger, and it seemed as if Christ would have no one to fight on His side against the evil company.

But when morning came, and the furious Dacian discovered that every one had fled, he sent his soldiers to search and bring any who might remain hidden in the city, that he might wreak his vengeance on them.

And among the few that were left they brought to him the little maid Faith. She was only a little child, but she did not know what fear meant.

'You cannot hurt me,' she said, looking at the cruel, angry faces around her, 'because I am not yours, but God's.'

And then she signed herself with the sign of the cross, and with bent head prayed:

'Lord Jesus, teach my lips to answer their questions aright, so that I may do Thee no dishonour.'

Then Dacian looked in anger at the child standing there with clasped hands and steadfast eyes, and asked her roughly:

'What is thy name?'

'My name is Faith,' the little maid replied with gentle courtesy.

'And what God dost thou serve?' asked the cruel governor.

'I am a Christian, and I serve the Lord Christ,' replied the child.

'Deny Him, and sacrifice to our gods,' thundered the governor, 'else shalt thou endure every kind of torture, until there is no life left in thy young body.'

[100] But Faith stood with head erect and hands clasped tight together. Not even the ugly instruments of torture could frighten her.

'I serve the Lord Christ,' she said, 'and you cannot hurt me, because I am His.'

Such a little maid she was, standing there among those rough, cruel men, offering her life gladly for the faith of her Master. Such a few years she had spent in this bright world, and so many stretched in front, holding pleasures and promises in store. And now she must give up all, must put aside the little white robe and golden sandals, and take instead the robe of suffering, and go barefoot to meet the pain and torture that awaited her.

And though they scourged her, and made her suffer many cruel torments, they could not bend her will, nor break her faith. Indeed it seemed as if she did not feel the pain and anguish.

And God stooped down, and gathered the little faithful soul into His bosom. And when the people looked, the child was dead.

But in the cave among the mountains that very day the bishop sat, sad and troubled.

[101] He was gazing away across the plain to where the town lay half hidden in the mist, thinking of those faithful few who had chosen to stay behind. And suddenly the mist broke in front, and a vision stood out clear before him. He saw the child Faith being scourged and tortured; he saw the flames leaping around her, and then, as he looked again, lo! her head was encircled with a golden crown set with precious stones, each jewel sparkling with light. And from heaven a white dove came gently flying down, and rested on the child's head, while from its wings a soft dew fell that quenched the flames.

And as the vision faded, the bishop bowed his head in his hands and wept. The thought of what this child had dared to endure for her Master, while he had shrunk from suffering aught for His sake, filled his heart with shame. He could not stay there in safety while any of his people might suffer as she had done.

So that night he returned to the city to help and comfort the few remaining Christians. Before long he too was called upon to suffer death for his Lord, and many others gave themselves up, led by the example of little Faith.

Some say that even the rough soldiers were touched by the child's death, and many became Christians. They began to think that such a religion was worth living for, if it could teach even a child to die so bravely.

And so, though she lived such a short time on earth, she did a very wonderful work for God, and we call her now Saint Faith, thinking often of her as we read these words:

'A little child shall lead them.'

[102]

SAINT COSMO AND SAINT DAMIAN

It is difficult sometimes to learn a great deal about the saints who lived a very long time ago. So few people knew how to read or write in those old days, and the only way they had of remembering and handing on what was interesting was to tell it to their children; then these little ones, when they were grown up, would repeat it again to other little children, and so the stories were not forgotten.

But sometimes one thing would be left out and sometimes another, or different people would add wonderful stories of their own, which would become part of the true story. And so, when at last these histories come to us, we find we have lost a great deal, and perhaps not gained very much.

The two saints, to whose story we are going to listen to-day, are of this long-ago time, and the history of their lives has almost faded from men's memories. But whoever happens to go to

Florence, that city of flowers, where the old Medici family has left its mark on every corner, will see the portraits of our two saints wherever they go. For the old painters loved to tell the saint-stories in their own beautiful way, and to-day the little dark-eyed Italian children can read them without books, for they are told more plainly and far more beautifully than in any written story.

[103]

Cosmo and Damian were brothers, and were born in Arabia three hundred years after Christ. When they were quite little boys their father died, and they were left alone with their mother. She was a Christian, and taught her boys, as soon as they were old enough to understand, that though they had no earthly father, God was their Father in heaven. She told them that the great King of Heaven and Earth called them His children, and he who could do a mean or cruel act, or stain his honour by an untruthful word, was not worthy to be called a King's son. And because they were noble she taught them that they must do noble deeds, bravely defend and protect the weak, and help those who could not help themselves.

So the boys grew up straight and strong in mind and body. Their bitterest punishment was to feel that they had done anything unworthy of their King, and although they often made mistakes and did wrong thoughtlessly, they never went far astray since God's honour was their own.

Their mother was rich, for their father had had great possessions, but there were so many poor and suffering people around their home that it was almost impossible to help them all. So the boys learned early to deny themselves in many ways, and often gave up their own dinner to the starving poor. In that land there was a great deal of sickness and suffering, and this was a great trouble to Cosmo and Damian. They could not bear to see people in pain, and be unable to help them. They often thought about this, and at last determined to learn all about medicine, and become doctors, so that they might at least soften suffering when they could not cure it.

[104]

After years of patient study they learned to be very clever doctors, and their kind hearts and gentle hands soothed and comforted those who were in pain, even when skill could do nothing for them.

They visited rich and poor alike, and would take no money for their services, for they said it was payment enough to know they had been able to make the worlds suffering a little less.

And it was not only people they cared for, but God's dumb creatures too. If any animal was in pain, they would treat it as gently and carefully as if it had been a human being. Indeed, they were perhaps even more pitiful towards animals, for they said:

'People who can speak and complain of their ills are greatly to be pitied, but these dumb creatures, made by our King, can only suffer in silence, and surely their suffering will be required at our hands.'

It ever seemed strange to these great men that boys who would scorn to ill-treat a younger child, or take mean advantage of a weak one, would still think nothing of staining their honour by ill-treating an animal, infinitely weaker and smaller, and less able to protect itself. It was one of the few things that raised the wrath of these gentle doctor saints.



BUT COSMO TURNED AND WALKED AWAY.

[105]

Now it happened that a poor woman who had been ill for many years heard of the fame of the two young doctors, and sent to implore them to come to help her. She believed that though her illness seemed incurable these good men might heal her.

Cosmo and Damian were touched by her faith, and they went at once, and did for her all that their skill could devise, and, moreover, prayed that God would bless their efforts.

To the wonder of all, the woman began to grow better, and very soon was completely cured. In her great gratitude she offered all that she had in payment to the two doctors, but they told her that they could take nothing. Then she humbly offered them a little bag in which were three eggs,

praying them not to go away from her quite empty-handed. But Cosmo turned and walked away and would not so much as even look at what she offered, for it was a very strict rule with the brothers that they should accept no payment or reward of any kind. Then the woman caught at a fold of Damian's cloak as he also turned to go and begged him, for the love of Christ, to take her little gift.

When Damian heard the name of his Master, he paused, and then took the present and courteously thanked the poor woman.

But when Cosmo saw what Damian had done he was very wrathful, and that night he refused to sleep with him, and said that henceforth they would be no longer brothers.

But in the stillness of the night God came to Cosmo and said:

[106] 'My son, wherefore art thou so wrathful with thy brother?'

'Because he hath taken reward for our services,' said Cosmo, 'and Thou knowest, Lord, that we receive no payment but from Thee.'

'But was it not in My name that he took the offering?' asked the voice. 'Because that poor woman gave it for love of Me, thy brother did well to accept it.'

Then Cosmo awoke in great joy and hurried to the bedside of his brother, and there begged his forgiveness for having misjudged him so sorely. And so they were happy together once more, and ate the eggs right merrily.

In those days there were many pilgrims passing through Arabia, and because the journey was hard and most of them were poor, they often fell ill and came under the care of Cosmo and Damian. One night a poor man was brought in, fainting and fever-stricken. He lay on the bed with his thin, grey face pinched and worn with suffering, and the kind doctors feared that he would die.

All night they sat by his bedside doing everything that their skill could plan to ease his pain, and they only smiled when the poor man said in his faint, low voice:

'Why do you take all this trouble for a poor pilgrim, who has nothing wherewith to repay you?'

'We would not take thy payment if thou hadst all the riches in the world,' answered the doctors, 'for we receive payment only from our King.'

[107] Then when the first pale light of dawn began to steal through the little window, and the doctors anxiously watched the still form lying there, they started with surprise. For the face seemed to change in an instant, and instead of the bed of suffering they saw a cloud of glory; out of the midst of which Christ's face, infinitely tender, looked upon them; and His hands touched their heads in blessing as He said:

'All the riches of the world are indeed mine though I seemed but a poor pilgrim. I was sick and ye visited me, and surely shall ye receive payment from your King.'

Then Cosmo and Damian knelt in worship and thanked their Lord that they had been counted worthy to minister to His need.

But soon the fame of Cosmo and Damian began to be spread abroad, and the wicked Proconsul of Arabia heard about their good deeds. As soon as he knew they were Christians, and helped the poor and suffering, he was filled with rage, and sent and ordered that the two brothers should be cast alive into the sea.

[108] Immediately Cosmo and Damian were seized and led up to the steep cliffs, and the guards bound them hand and foot. Not a complaint escaped their lips, not a sign of fear, as the soldiers raised them on high and flung them over into the cruel sea, far below. But as the crowd above watched to see them sink, a great fear and amazement seized the soldiers, for from the calm blue sea they beheld the brothers rise slowly and walk towards the shore, led by an angel who guided them with loving care until they were safe on land.

In a greater rage than ever, the Proconsul ordered that a great fire should be made and that the brothers should be cast into the midst of it and burnt to death.

But though the fire roared and blazed before Cosmo and Damian were cast in; as soon as it touched them it died down and nothing could make it burn again. It seemed as if God's good gifts refused to injure His servants.

After that they were bound to two crosses and the soldiers were ordered to stone them. But the stones did no harm to those two patient figures, but instead fell backwards and injured the men who threw them.

Then every one cried out that they were enchanters, and it was ordered that to make sure of their death they should be beheaded.

So the work of the two saint doctors was finished on earth, but for many years afterwards those who were ill would pray to these saints for their protection.

There is a legend which tells how a poor man in Rome had a leg which the doctors feared would cause his death. So he prayed to Saint Cosmo and Saint Damian and asked them to help

him in his need. And that night when he was asleep, he saw the doctor saints standing at his bedside in their red robes and caps trimmed with fur. One held a knife and the other a pot of ointment.

'What shall we do to replace this leg when we have cut it off?' asked Saint Cosmo.



AN ANGEL GUIDED THEM WITH LOVING CARE.

[109] 'A black man has just died and been buried near here,' answered Saint Damian. 'He no longer needs his legs, so let us take one of them and put it on instead.'

So they cut off the bad leg and fetched the leg of the black man, and with the ointment joined it on to the living man.

And when he awoke he believed he must have dreamt about the visit of the saints, but when he looked at his leg, behold! it was black and perfectly sound and well. Then they sent and searched for the black body, and on it they found a white leg. So the man knew that the doctor saints had heard his prayers, and had come to cure him.

That is one of the wonderful stories which have grown up round the names of Saint Cosmo and Saint Damian.

While we cannot tell if these things really happened, this we do surely know to be true, that these two brothers, who lived in an age when men were cruel and selfish, spent their whole lives in trying to help those who suffered pain, and then went bravely to death in the service of their King. And though we know but little about them, they have left us an example of patient kindness and helpfulness; and they teach us that as servants of their King we also are bound in honour to protect the weak and help those who suffer, whether they are people like ourselves or God's dumb creatures.

[110]

SAINT MARTIN

It was a cold winter's day in the city of Amiens, and the wind swept along the great Roman road outside the city gates with such an icy blast that the few people who were out of doors wrapped themselves closer in their cloaks, and longed for their sheltering homes and warm firesides.

But there was one poor old man who had no cloak to wrap around him, and no fireside of which to dream. He shivered as the searching wind came sweeping past him, and his half-blind eyes looked eagerly up and down the road to see if any one was coming who might help him in his need. One by one the people hurried past and paid no heed to the beggar's outstretched hand. It was much too cold to stop or to think of giving help, and not even a beggar could expect it on such a day as this. So they left the poor old man hungry and cold and homeless.

Then a young soldier came riding past, but the beggar scarcely thought of asking alms of him, for the Roman soldiers were not the kind of men to trouble themselves about the poor and suffering.

[111]

The old man closed his eyes, weary and hopeless, for it seemed as if there was none to help nor pity him. Then in a moment he felt a warm cloak thrown around his shoulders, and in his ears sounded a kind voice which bade him wrap it close around him to keep out the cold.

Half bewildered the beggar looked up, and saw the young soldier bending over him. He had dismounted from his horse and held a sword in his hand, with which he had just cut his own cloak

in half, that he might share it with the shivering old man.

The passers-by laughed and hurried on, but the soldier did not care if they mocked him, for he was quite happy to think he had helped one who needed help so sorely.

The name of this young soldier was Martin, and he served in the Roman army with his father, who was a famous general. Most of Martin's fellow-soldiers were pagans, but he was a Christian, and served the emperor well, because he served Christ first.

The very night after Martin had divided his cloak with the beggar he had a dream, in which he saw his Master, Christ, among the holy angels, wearing the half cloak which Martin had given away that afternoon. And as he looked, he heard Christ's voice speaking to the angels, and saying:

'Know ye who hath clothed Me with this cloak? My servant Martin, who is yet unbaptized, hath done this.'

Then Martin awoke, and he did not rest until Christ's seal of baptism was set upon his brow, and he felt that he had enlisted truly in God's service.

[112] Now Martin knew that to be God's servant meant doing everything day by day as well as it could be done, and serving his earthly master as faithfully and diligently as he tried to serve his heavenly commander. So it came to pass that for all the fourteen years he served in the emperor's army, he was known as the best and bravest soldier, and one who had never failed to do his duty.

But as he began to grow old, he longed to serve God in other ways, and so he went to the emperor and asked for permission to leave the army.

There was war going on just then, for Rome was ever fighting with the barbarians who came up against her, and the emperor was very angry when he heard Martin's request.

'You seek to leave the army because you fear to fight,' he said scornfully to Martin, who stood silently before him. 'A Roman soldier should scorn to be a coward.'

'I am no coward,' answered Martin and he met with unflinching look the angry gaze of the emperor. 'Place me alone in the front of the battle, with no weapon but the cross alone, and I shall not fear to meet the enemy single-handed and unarmed.'

'Well said,' answered the emperor quickly; 'we will take thee at thy word. To-morrow thou shalt stand defenceless before the enemy, and so shall we judge of thy boasted courage.'

[113] Then the emperor ordered his guards to watch Martin that night lest he should try to escape before the trial could be made. But Martin had no thought of escape, and was ready and eager to do as he had said.

Meanwhile, however, the enemy began to fear that they had no chance against the Roman army; and very early in the morning, they sent messengers to ask for peace, offering to give themselves up to the mercy of the emperor.

So Martin was set at liberty, and no one doubted his courage and faithfulness; since they believed that his faith in God had brought peace, and given them the victory over their enemies.

Soon after this Martin was allowed to leave the army, and he journeyed from place to place telling those who had never heard it before the good news of Jesus Christ.

In those days it was dangerous to go among the mountains unarmed, for robbers and brigands made their home there, and would swoop down on unsuspecting travellers and rob or murder them.

But Martin took no companions with him, and with no weapon but the cross, he climbed the mountain roads defenceless and alone.

One day, as he journeyed, a company of brigands appeared suddenly, as if they had started out of the rocks. They seized him roughly, and one of them aimed a blow at his head with an axe. But before the blow could fall, another robber turned the axe aside and claimed Martin as his prisoner. Then they tied his hands behind him and bound him fast, while they made up their minds which would be the best way to kill him.

[114] But Martin sat calm and untroubled, and seemed to have no fear of these terrible men.

'What is thy name, and who art thou?' asked the brigand who had claimed Martin as his prisoner.

'I am a Christian,' answered Martin simply.

'And art thou not afraid of the tortures which await thee, that thou dost seem so calm and fearless?' asked the robber, wondering at the peaceful look upon the prisoner's face.

'I fear nothing that thou canst do to me,' answered Martin, 'for I am a servant of the great King, and He will defend His own. But I do indeed grieve for thee, because thou livest by robbery and violence, and art therefore unworthy of the mercy of my Lord.'

The astonished robber asked him what he meant, and who this great King was whom he served; so Martin told him the whole story of God's love, and of the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

No words so wonderful had ever been spoken to this brigand before, and as he listened he believed that what Martin said was true. The first thing he did was to cut the rope which bound his prisoner's hands and to set him free; and after that he led him in safety through the mountain passes, until he reached a road that led to the plains below.

Here they parted, and the brigand knelt and asked Martin to pray for him that he might lead a new life. So there was one less robber on that lonely road, and one more Christian fighting the battles of the Lord.

[115] Although Martin loved to dwell in lonely places, he was always ready to go where he was most needed, and so a great part of his life was spent in busy towns. When he was made Bishop of Tours and could no longer live in the solitude he loved, still he strove to be the best bishop it was possible to become, just as when he was a soldier he tried to be as good a soldier as he knew how to be.

Now Martin was growing an old man, yet he was very little changed since that long ago day when he divided his cloak with the poor beggar outside the gates of Amiens. It is said that one day when he was serving at the altar, in all his beautiful bishop's robes, he saw a ragged beggar standing near shivering with cold. At first he bade his deacon give him clothing, but the deacon was too slow to please the kind heart of the bishop, and so he went himself and took off his gold-embroidered vestment and put it tenderly round the shoulders of the beggar. Then as the service went on, and the bishop held up the holy chalice, the kneeling crowd saw with wonder that angels were hovering round and were hanging chains of gold upon the upraised arms to cover them, because the robe Martin had given to the beggar had left them bare.

[116] Now the Evil One looked with great mistrust and disfavour upon Martin, for the good bishop won more souls by his love and gentleness than the Evil One cared to lose. All the preaching and sternness of other good men were not half so dangerous to the plans of the Evil One as the pity and kindness of Martin. So one day the Evil One met Martin and began to mock at him.

'Thy faith is beautiful indeed,' he said scornfully; 'but how long do thy sinners remain saints? They have but to pretend a little sorrow for their sins, and lo! in thy eyes they are immediately saved.'

'Oh, poor, miserable Spirit that thou art!' answered Martin. 'Dost thou not know that our Saviour refuses none who turn to Him? Even thou, if thou wouldst but repent, might find mercy with my Lord.'

The Evil One did not stop to answer the bishop, but disappeared with great swiftness. Later on he returned, as we shall see.

The fame of Martin's life spread far and near, and the rich as well as the poor did him honour. The emperor and empress invited him over and over again to come to their court, but Martin steadily refused, for he loved best to work among the poor.

A time came, however, when he saw that he might do great good if he could persuade the emperor to cease from persecuting the Christians; and so at last he agreed to attend a banquet at the palace and to be the emperor's guest.

Everything was as gorgeous and splendid as possible, for the emperor wished to do honour to the bishop, who was the one man who dared to speak truly to him and not to flatter him with mere words.

[117] But Martin scarcely seemed to notice all the grandeur and brilliance of the entertainment. And when, at the banquet, the emperor took the wine-cup and passed it to his guest, expecting him to bless it and respectfully hand it back, Martin turned quietly round instead, and passed the jewelled cup to a poor priest who stood behind. This he did to show the astonished emperor that in his eyes the poorest of God's servants was to be considered before the greatest ruler upon earth.

It was not long after this that the Evil One again visited Martin. But this time he disguised himself that he might not be known.

It was evening and Martin was praying in his cell, when a bright light filled the place, and in the midst of the light he saw a figure clad in royal robes and with a crown of gold and jewels upon his head. His face was shining and beautiful, so that no one could have guessed he was the Evil One. Martin could only gaze upon him in dazzled silence, for his shining beauty was beyond all words.

Then the Evil One spoke, and the sound of his voice was like music.

'Martin,' he said, 'dost thou not see that I am Christ? I have come again upon earth, and it is to thee that I have first showed myself.'

But Martin still gazed silently at him and answered nothing.

'Martin,' said the Evil One again, 'why dost thou not believe? Canst thou not see that I am

Christ?'

Then Martin answered slowly:

[118]

'It seemeth strange to me that my Lord should come in glittering clothing and a golden crown. Unless thou canst show the marks of the nails and spear, I cannot believe that thou art He.'

At these words, with a horrible thunder-clap, the Evil One disappeared, and Martin saw him no more.

Years passed, and Martin lived a long and useful life; but he was growing weary now, and when God's call came, he gladly prepared to enter into his rest, and to leave the world where he had laboured so long and faithfully.

The night that Martin died he was seen in a vision by one of his friends who loved him more than all the rest. The saint's robe was shining white and his eyes were like stars and, as the friend knelt and worshipped, he felt a soft touch upon his head and heard a voice that blessed him ere the vision faded.

And so Martin finished his earthly work, and went to hear from his Master's lips the gracious words: 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'

[119]

SAINT GEORGE

Every nation has its own patron saint whom the people love to honour, and who is looked upon not only as their protector in war and peace, but as a model of all that is best and highest and most worthy to be copied in their own lives.

Ever since the days of the Crusades, when our lion-hearted King Richard went to fight the infidels in the Holy Land, the special saint whom England has delighted to honour has been Saint George. 'For Saint George and Merrie England' rang out the old battle-cry; and the greatest honour which our kings can bestow—the Order of the Garter—is really the Order of Saint George, and bears upon it the picture of his great adventure. And when you have heard the story of Saint George you will not wonder that England took him for her special saint, and as an example for all her sons to follow.

Saint George was born far away in Cappadocia, in the year 303 A.D. His father and mother were nobles of that country and were also Christians, although they lived under the rule of the heathen Emperor Diocletian.

[120]

Saint George's father, who was a soldier, was often away in the service of the emperor. So it was the mother who had most to do with the care and training of their only son. It must have been, then, from her that the boy learned that gentle reverence towards all women, which made him their protector and champion all his life.

When he was seventeen, he too became a soldier like his father, and the shining sword, which he then buckled on, was kept all his life as stainless as his honour. He never drew it in a wrong cause, but held it as a trust given to him to defend the right and protect the weak and helpless.

Now in the same country there was a city called Selem, whose people had once been as happy and prosperous as any in the land, but which was now the most miserable spot in all the world.

The city itself was beautiful with splendid palaces and gay gardens, and the king who ruled there was wise and good. But outside the city wall stretched a grey, sullen-looking lake, half marsh and half stagnant water, and in this gloomy bog there lived a dreadful monster called a dragon. No one knew exactly what he was like, for those who were so unfortunate as to have been near enough to see him plainly had been killed by his fiery breath, which came rolling out from his great yawning throat. He did not seem to walk nor to fly, although he had what looked like wings and huge flat feet, but always moved along with a crawling motion most horribly swift.

[121]

Nothing was safe from this terrible monster. One by one the sheep and oxen belonging to the city were devoured by him, and when the people had no more food to give him, he crawled towards the city, and his dreadful fiery breath warned them that he was coming closer and that they would soon be carried off, one by one, and devoured.

In their despair and terror, the king and all the people agreed to cast lots each day; and it was settled that the one on whom the lot fell should be put outside the gates to feed the monster, so that the rest might live in safety. This was done for many days, and the grief and suffering in that city was terrible to behold. But the darkest day of all was when the lot fell upon Cleodolinda, the king's only daughter. She was very beautiful, and the king loved her more than all else beside, so in his anguish he called his people together, and in a trembling voice, his grey head bowed with grief, he spoke to them:

'She is my only child—I cannot give her up. Take rather all my gold and jewels, even the half of my kingdom; only spare my daughter, the one treasure of my heart.'

But the people were very angry, and would not listen to the king, for they too had lost their children, and it made them savage and cruel.

'We will not spare the princess,' they growled in low threatening tones; 'we have given up our own children, and why shouldst thou withhold thine? Didst thou not agree with us to cast the lots? Why shouldst thou make one law for us and another for thyself?'

[122] And they threatened to burn down the palace and kill both the king and Cleodolinda if she was not given up to them at once.

Then the king saw there was no hope of deliverance, and he promised that in eight days the princess should be ready for the sacrifice. Those were eight sad days at the palace, for all was dark and hopeless there, and the only person who did not give way to despair was the Princess Cleodolinda herself. She spent her time trying to comfort her father, and told him she had no fear, but rather that she was glad to think she was to die to save his people.

So the fatal day arrived when the monster was to be fed, and the princess came out to meet the crowd stately and calm, dressed in her royal robes as befitted a king's daughter. And when she bade farewell to her father, she went forth alone, and the gates of the city were shut behind her.

Now it happened that at the very time that Cleodolinda went out to meet the dragon, and just as she heard the city gates clang heavily behind her, Saint George came riding past on his way to join his soldiers. His shining armour and great spear were the only bright things in that gloomy place; but the princess did not see him, for her eyes were blinded with tears, and even when he galloped up close to her she did not hear him, for the ground was soft and marshy, and his horse's hoofs made scarcely a sound as he rode past.

[123] Slowly the princess walked along the desolate way towards the sullen grey lake, where the monster was waiting for his meal. The path was strewn with bones, and no grass grew for miles around, for the fiery blast of the dragon's breath withered everything it passed over. Cleodolinda never dreamed that help was near, and started in amazement when she heard a kind voice speaking to her, and looking up, saw through her tears a young knight on horseback, gazing at her with pitying eyes. She thought that he had the handsomest, kindest face she had ever seen, and the gentlest and most courteous manner, as he leaned towards her, and asked her why she wept, and wherefore she was wandering alone in this dismal place.

Cleodolinda told him in a few words the whole sad story, and pointed with trembling hand towards the distant marsh, where already a dark form might be seen crawling slowly out of the grey water.

'See, there he comes!' she cried, in sudden terror. 'Ride fast, kind knight, and escape while there is time, for if the monster finds thee here, he will kill thee.'

'And dost thou think I would ride off in safety, and leave thee to perish?' asked Saint George.

'Thou canst do nothing,' answered the princess, wringing her hands; 'for nought can prevail against this terrible dragon. Thou wilt but perish needlessly in trying to save me, so, I pray thee, fly while there is time.'

'God forbid that I should act in so cowardly a manner,' answered Saint George. 'I will fight this hideous creature, and, by God's help and the strength of my good sword, I will conquer him and deliver thee.'

[124] And while he was still speaking, the air was filled with a horrible choking smoke, and the dragon came swiftly towards them, half-crawling and half-flying, his eyes gleaming, and his mouth opened wide to devour them.

With a swift prayer for help, Saint George made the sign of the cross, and grasping his great spear firmly, spurred his horse and rode straight at the monster. The combat was a long and terrible one, and the princess, as she watched from behind a sheltering tree, trembled for the safety of the brave knight, and gave up all for lost.

But at last Saint George made a swift forward rush, and drove his spear right down the great throat of the monster, and out at the back of his head, pinning him securely to the ground. Then he called to the princess to give him her girdle, and this he tied to each end of the spear, so that it seemed like a great bridle, and with it Cleodolinda led the vanquished dragon back towards the city.

Inside the city gates all the people had been weeping and wailing over the fate of the princess, which they feared might any day be their own, and they dared not look out or open the gates until the monster had had time to carry off his victim. So their terror and dismay was great indeed when the news spread like wildfire that some one had seen the great monster come crawling towards the town, instead of returning to his home in the dismal swamp.



S. GEORGE RODE STRAIGHT AT THE MONSTER.

[125] They all crowded, trembling with fear, around the watch-tower upon the walls, to see if the dragon was really on his way to attack the city; and when they saw the great dark mass moving slowly towards them they thought that the end was come, for they could not see Saint George nor the princess, and did not know that she was leading the dragon a vanquished prisoner.

So it was all in vain for a long time that Saint George thundered at the city gates, and demanded that they should be opened. Even when the people saw that the princess was safe and that a knight was with her, while the monster lay quiet at their feet as if half-dead, they still hesitated to open the gates, so great was their terror and astonishment.

But when they were quite sure that the dragon was bound and could do them no harm, they threw open the gates, and every one crowded to see the wonderful sight, still half-doubting if it could be true, and looking with fear upon the great beast which the princess led by her girdle fastened to the spear of Saint George.

Then the king came in haste from his palace to meet his daughter, and never was a morning of sorrow turned into such a day of joy.

[126] Saint George and the Princess Cleodolinda led the dragon into the market-place, followed by the wondering crowd; and there Saint George drew his sword and cut off the head of the hideous monster. Then were the people sure that they were indeed delivered from their great enemy for ever, and they burst forth into wild rejoicings. They would have given all they possessed to Saint George in their joy and gratitude; but he told them that the only reward he desired was that they should believe in the true God, and be baptized Christians. It was not difficult to believe in the God who had helped Saint George to do this great deed, and very soon the king and the princess and all the people were baptized as Saint George desired.

Then the king presented the brave knight with great treasures of gold and jewels, but all these Saint George gave to the poor and went his way; keeping nought for himself but his own good sword and spear, ready to defend the right and protect the weak as he had served the princess in her need.

But when he returned to his own city he found that the emperor had written a proclamation against the Christians, and it was put up in all the market-places and upon the doors of the temples, and all who were Christians were hiding in terror, and dared not show themselves openly.

Then Saint George was filled with righteous anger, and tore down the proclamations in all the public places, and trampled them under foot. He was seized immediately by the guards and carried before the proconsul, who ordered him to be tortured and then put to death.

But nothing could shake the courage of this brave knight, and through all the tortures he bore himself as a gallant Christian should, and met his death with such bravery and calm joy that even his enemies were amazed at his courage.

[127] And so through the many dark ages that followed, when the weak were oppressed and women needed a knight's strong arm to protect them, men remembered Saint George, and the very thought of him nerved their arms and made their courage firm. And boys learned from him that it was a knightly thing to protect the weak, and to guard all maidens from harm; and that a pure heart, a firm trust in good and true courage could meet and overcome any monster, however terrible and strong.

[128] And of all nations it befits us most that our men and boys should be brave and courteous; for Saint George is our own patron saint, the model of all that an English knight should be.

SAINT FRANCIS OF ASSISI

In the sunny land of Italy, high upon hills covered with olive-trees, nestles the little town of Assisi. Such a strange little town it is, with its tall city walls and great gateways, its narrow, steep streets, and houses with wide, overhanging eaves. The road that leads up from the plain below is so steep, as it winds upwards among the silver olive-trees, that even the big white oxen find it a toil to drag the carts up to the city gates, and the people think it quite a journey to go down to the level land below.

Now, it was in this same little hill-town, many years ago, that Saint Francis was born.

They did not know that he was going to be a great saint—this little, dark-eyed Italian baby, who came to gladden his mother's heart one autumn day in the long ago year of 1182, when his father, Pietro Bernardone, was away in France. He seemed just like any other baby, and only his mother, perhaps, thought him the most wonderful baby that ever was born. (But mothers always think that, even if their babies do not grow up to be real saints.) She called him Giovanni at first, but when his father came home he named the little son Francesco, which means 'the Frenchman,' because he was so pleased with all the money he had made in France. So the child from that day was always called Francesco, which is his real Italian name, although we in England call him Francis.

Soon he grew into a happy, daring boy, the leader in all the games and every kind of fun. He was the pride of his father and mother, and the favourite of the whole town; for although he was never out of mischief, he never did a cruel or unkind thing, and was ever ready to give away all he had to those who needed help.

And when he grew older he was still the gayest of all the young men of Assisi, and wore the costliest and most beautiful clothes, for his father had a great deal of money and grudged him nothing.

Then came a sad day when Francis fell sick, and for a while they feared that he must die. But, although he grew slowly better, he was never quite the same Francis again. He did not care about his gay companions, or the old happy life. There was real work to be done in the world, he was sure. Perhaps some special work was waiting for his hand, and with wistful eyes he was ever looking for a sign that would show him what that work was to be.

Walking one day along the winding road, dreaming dreams as he gazed far across the misty plains, catching glimpses of far-away blue mountains through the silver screen of the olive-trees, he was stopped by a poor old beggar, who asked him for the love of God to help him.

Francis started from his day-dreams, and recognised the man as an old soldier who had fought for his country with courage and honour.

Without stopping to think for a moment, Francis took off his gay cloak and tenderly wrapped it round the shoulders of the shivering old man.

He never thought that any reward would be given him for his kind action, but that very night Christ came to him in a glorious vision, and, leading him by the hand, showed him a great palace full of shining weapons and flags of victory, each one marked with the sign of the cross. Then, as Francis stood gazing at these wonderful things, he heard the voice of Christ telling him that these were the rewards laid up for those who should be Christ's faithful soldiers, fighting manfully under His banner.

With a great joy in his heart Francis awoke, and hurriedly left home to join the army, thinking only of earthly service, and longing to win the heavenly reward.

But in the quiet night he heard again the voice of Christ telling him that the service he was seeking was not what Christ required of his soldiers.

Troubled and sad, Francis went back to Assisi and, when he was once more inside the city walls, turned aside to pray in the little ruined church of Saint Damiano. And as he prayed once more he heard the voice speaking to him, and saying, 'Francis, repair my church.'

Now, Francis thought this meant that he was to build up the ruined walls of the little church in which he prayed. He did not understand that the command was that he should teach the people, who make up Christ's Church on earth, to be pure and good and strong.

Francis was only too glad to find that here at last was some real work to be done, and never stopping to think if he was doing right, he went joyfully home and took some of the richest stuffs which his father had for sale. These he carried off to the market, and sold them for quite a large sum of money. Then, returning to the little church, he gave the money to the old priest, telling him to rebuild the walls and to make the whole place beautiful.

But the priest refused to accept the money, for he was afraid that Francis had done wrong in taking the stuffs, and that his father would be angry.

This was a great disappointment to Francis, and made him think that perhaps he had been too

hasty. He was afraid to go home and tell what he had done, so he hid himself for some days. But at last, tired and hungry, with his gay clothes stained with dust, he slowly walked back to his father's house.

And very angry, indeed, was Pietro Bernardone when he found out what his son had done. He did not mind giving Francis money for fine clothes or pleasures of any kind, and he had allowed him to be as extravagant as he liked. But to want money to build up an old church, or to spend in doing good, that was not to be thought of for a moment.

Out he came in a furious rage and drove Francis indoors, and there shut him up in a dark cellar, bound hand and foot, so that he could not escape.

[132] But though his father was so angry, his mother could not bear to see her son suffer, whether he deserved it or not. So she stole down when no one was there, and, unlocking the cellar door, she spoke gently to poor Francis, and listened to all his story. Then she took off his chains and set him free, telling him to go quickly before any one should see him.

Francis had no place to shelter in but the little ruined church, and no friend who would receive him but the poor old priest, so back he went to Saint Damiano, leaving parents and home and comforts behind him.

His father, of course, was terribly angry when he found that Francis had escaped, and he went at once to complain to the bishop, and demand that Francis should be punished and made to give back the money he had taken.

The bishop spoke kindly to Francis, who promised gladly to give back the money which had brought him so much trouble. And there, in the market-place, with all the people looking on, he took off his costly clothes, now all stained and worn, and standing pale and thin, wearing only a hair shirt, he gave clothes and money back to his angry father, saying—

'Listen, all of you. Until this time I have called Pietro Bernardone father, but from this moment I will say no more "my father Pietro Bernardone," but only "my Father which art in Heaven."'

Then the good bishop came quickly up and wrapped his mantle round the poor shivering lad, and gave him his blessing, bidding him henceforth be a true servant of God. A poor labourer gave Francis his rough brown tunic, and the people were moved with pity and would have helped him, for they thought he had been treated very harshly.

[133] But Francis wandered away alone into the world, seeking to do all the things he had most disliked doing, even at one time nursing the poor lepers, and begging his bread from door to door.

Soon, however, he made his way back to Assisi, and to the little ruined church; and began building up the walls with his own hands, carrying the stones on his shoulders, happy and contented to be doing work for God.

And the more he thought of his past life and the wasteful splendour in which he had lived, the more he came to see that to be poor for Christ's sake was best of all.

'If Christ chose to become poor for our sakes,' thought he, 'surely it is but right that we should choose to become poor for His dear sake.'

It seemed to Francis that no one had really loved poverty since the days when our blessed Lord had lived amongst the poor on earth. And he began to think of poverty as a beautiful lady who had been despised and ill-treated all these long years, with no one to take her part or see any charm in her fair face.

For himself he made up his mind to love her with all his heart, to be as poor as his Master had been, and to possess nothing here on earth.

[134] Even his coarse brown habit had been given to him in charity, and instead of a belt he tied round his waist a piece of rope which he found by the wayside. He wore no shoes nor stockings, but went barefoot, and had no covering for his head. And being so truly poor was the greatest joy to him. He thought the Lady Poverty was a fairer bride than any on earth, though her clothes were ragged and her pathway lined with thorns. For along that thorny path she led him closer to his Master, and taught him to tread more nearly in His footsteps than most of His servants have ever trod.

One day when Francis was reading the gospel, Christ's call seemed to sound in his ears just as it did to Saint Matthew of old. He had often read the words before, but that day they had a new message for him: 'As ye go, preach, saying the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, neither two coats, neither shoes nor yet staves.'

Then he knew that Christ did not want him only to be good, but to teach others how to be good, and to look after Christ's poor and sick, always remaining poor and lowly himself. And as soon as he heard the call he rose up, left all, and followed his Master to his life's end.

Very soon other men joined Francis, eager to serve Christ as he did. They all dressed just as Francis dressed, and became quite as poor as he was. Their home was in the plain below Assisi, by the little chapel of Saint Mary of the Angels, which had been given to the brothers. But it was not often that they were there all together, for Francis sent them out to preach to all the world

just as the gospel commanded.

[135]

In spite of their poverty the 'Little Poor Brothers,' as they were called, were a happy, cheerful little company. Francis had just the same gay nature and ready smile as when he was a boy in Assisi, and though he might have to go long solitary journeys on foot, sleeping in caves or in woods, hungry and footsore, he was never sad nor lonely. He seemed to love everything that God had made, and all the animals and birds were his special friends. They were never frightened of him, and when he walked in the woods the birds would come and perch on his shoulder and sing their good-morning to him.

And sometimes Francis would stand still and let them all come round him, and would preach a little sermon to them, telling them how they ought to praise God for His goodness.

'Little sisters' he always called them, and it is said they would listen quietly while he spoke, and then when he gave them his blessing, they would rise up to heaven singing their hymn of praise, just as if they had really understood their little service.

Once when Francis and some of the brothers were returning home, they heard a great number of birds singing among the bushes. And when Francis saw them he said to his companions—

'Our sisters, the birds, are praising their Maker. Let us go into their midst and sing our service too.'

The birds were not in the least disturbed, but continued their chirping and twittering, so that the brothers could not hear their own voices. Then Francis turned to the birds and said—

'Little sisters, cease your song until we have given God our praise.' And they at once were quiet, and did not begin to sing again until the service was over.

And it was not only the birds that loved him, but every kind of creature came to him for comfort and shelter.

[136]

Now this is a story which was told about Francis after he was dead, when people tried to remember all the wonderful things that he had done, and perhaps made them a little more wonderful, out of love of Saint Francis.

Once when the saint was living in the city of Agolio a terribly fierce wolf began to prowl about the town. He carried off everything eatable he could find, and grew so bold that he even seized the children and made off to his mountain den with them. The whole town was terrified, and people scarcely dared go out of doors for fear of meeting the terrible wolf. And though the men hunted him, he always escaped and came prowling down at nightfall again.

When Saint Francis heard this he said—

'I will go out and meet this wolf, and ask him what he means.'

'He will kill you,' cried all the people, and they tried to persuade him not to go.

But Saint Francis set out, taking some of the brothers with him. They went bravely along for a short way, and then the brothers turned back afraid and ran home, leaving Saint Francis alone. And presently he heard a deep growling and the sound of a terrible rush, and the great wolf, with blazing eyes and open mouth, came bounding towards him. But as he came nearer Saint Francis went forward to meet him, and making the sign of the cross, he said: 'Come hither, brother wolf. I command thee in the name of Christ that thou do no more harm to me nor to any one.'



THEN THE POPE TOOK THE LITTLE POOR BROTHERS UNDER HIS PROTECTION.

[137] And then a wonderful thing happened; for, as soon as the wolf heard the saint's voice, he stopped, and then came gently forward, and lay like a lamb at St. Francis's feet. Then Saint Francis talked quietly to him, and told him he deserved to be punished for all the evil he had done, but if he would promise to kill and plunder no more, the people of Agolio would promise on their side to give him food every day. And the wolf rubbed his head against Saint Francis's habit and gently laid his paw in the saint's hand. And always after that the good people of Agolio used to put out food for the wolf, and he grew so good and tame that he went quietly from door to door, and never did harm to any one again.

Whether all this really happened we do not know; but one thing we are certain of, and that is, that Francis loved all living creatures, and they seemed to know it and to love him too.

It was not long before the little band of brothers grew into quite a large company, and Francis went to Rome to ask the Pope, the head of the Church, to give them his blessing, and his permission to live together under their rule of poverty. All the world was astonished at this strange man, in his coarse brown robe, who preached to them that riches were not worth having, and that the greatest happiness was to be good and pure.

[138] At first the Pope would have nothing to do with him. But one night he had a dream, and in his dream he saw a church leaning on one side, and almost falling. And the only thing that kept it from falling quite over was a poor man, barefooted and dressed in a coarse brown robe, who had his shoulder against it and was holding it up.

Then the Pope knew that God had sent the dream to him, and that Francis was going to be a great helper in the Church. So next day he called for Francis and granted him all that he asked, and took the Little Poor Brothers under his protection.

Soon the company grew larger and larger, and Francis sent them all over the country, preaching and teaching men that they should deny themselves and love poverty rather than riches.

Still they always kept the little home at Saint Mary of the Angels, and the brothers returned there after their preaching was ended.

The convent was built close to a wood, and this wood was the place Francis loved best. For he could be quite alone there, to pray and meditate, with no one to disturb his thoughts. And often, when all the other brothers were asleep, he would steal quietly out and kneel for hours under the silent trees, alone with God.

[139] Now there was a little boy at the convent who loved Francis very much, and wanted to know all that he did, that he might learn to grow like him. Especially he wondered why Francis went alone into the dark wood, but he was too sleepy to keep awake to see. It was a very poor convent, and all the brothers slept on mats on the floor, for they had not separate cells. At last one night the boy crept close to the side of Francis, and spread his mat quite close to his master's, and in case he should not wake he tied his little cord to the cord which Francis wore round his waist. Then he lay down happily and went to sleep.

By and by when every one was asleep, Francis got up as usual to pray. But he noticed the cord

and gently untied it, so that the boy slept on undisturbed. Presently, however, the child awoke, and finding his cord loose and his master gone, he got up and followed him into the wood, treading very softly with his bare feet that he might disturb nobody.

It was very dark, and he had to feel his way among the trees; but presently a bright light shone out, and as he stole nearer he saw a wonderful sight. His master was kneeling there, and with him was the Blessed Virgin, holding our dear Lord in her arms, and many saints were there as well. And over all was a great cloud of the holy angels. The vision and the glorious brightness almost blinded the child, and he fell down as if he were dead.

[140]

Now when Francis was returning home he stumbled over the little body lying there, and guessing what had happened he stooped down and tenderly lifted him up, and carried him in his arms, as the Good Shepherd carries His lambs. Then the child felt his master's arms round him, and was comforted, and told him of the vision and how it had frightened him. In return Francis bade him tell no one what he had seen as long as his master was alive. So the old story tells us that the child grew up to be a good man and was one of the holiest of the Little Poor Brothers, because he always tried to grow like his master. Only after Francis died did he tell the story of the glorious vision which he had seen that night in the dark wood, at the time when no one knew what a great saint his master was.

As time went on, Francis grew anxious to do more than preach at home; for Christ's message to him had been 'Go ye into all the world.' He had set out many times, but always something had prevented him from getting far, until at last he succeeded in reaching the land of the Saracens where the Crusaders were fighting. His great hope was that he might see the Sultan and teach him about Christ, so that all his people might become Christians. He had no fear at all, and when every one warned him that he would certainly be put to death, he said that would be a small matter if only he could teach the heathen about God.

But although the Sultan received Francis, and listened to all he had to say, he only shook his head and refused to believe without a sign.

Then Francis grew more and more eager to convince him, and asked that a great fire should be made, and that he and the heathen priests should pass through it, saying that whoever came out unharmed should be held to be the servant of the true God. But the heathen priests all refused to do this, and so poor Francis had to return home, having, he feared, done no good, but hoping the good might follow afterwards.

[141]

These weary journeys and all the toil and hardship of his daily life began to make Francis weak and ill. Many things troubled him too; for the brothers did not love poverty as he did, and they began to make new rules and to forget what he had taught them. But in the midst of all trouble, he remained the same humble servant of Christ, always thinking of new ways to serve his Master.



HE CHANTED THE GOSPEL AT THE FIRST CHRISTMAS MASS.

There was no time Francis loved so much as Christmas. He loved to feel that all living things were happy on that day. He used to say that he wished that all governors and lords of the town and country might be obliged to scatter corn over the roads and fields, so that 'our sisters the larks,' and all the birds might feast as well. And because the ox and the ass shared the stable

with the Holy Child, he thought they should be provided with more than ordinary food each Christmas Eve.

He wished every one to remember how poor and lowly our Lord was on that night when He came as a little child; and so on Christmas Eve he made a stable in the chapel, and brought in an ox and an ass and a tiny crib and manger. In the manger he placed the figure of a baby to represent the infant Christ, and there in the early hours of the Christmas morning, he chanted the gospel at the first Christmas Mass.

It was in the spring of the year that Francis first went to the hermitage among the mountains, which he loved better than any other place. It was a small hut high among the Apennines, among crags and rocks far away from any other place. Here he could wander about the woods, which were carpeted with spring flowers, and hear his little sisters the birds singing all day long.

[142]

And here one day, as he knelt thinking of all his dear Lord had suffered, a wonderful thing happened. The thought of all that trouble and pain seemed more than he could bear, and he prayed that he might be allowed to suffer as his Master had done. And as he prayed, seeing only before him the crucified Christ with nail-pierced hands and wounded side, God sent the answer to his prayer, and in his hands and feet deep marks appeared, as though there had been nails driven through them, and in his side a wound as if from the cruel thrust of a spear.

And so Francis learned to suffer as his Master had suffered, and through all the pain he only gave God thanks that he had been thought worthy to bear the marks that Jesus bore.

Francis did not live very long after this for he grew weaker and weaker, and they carried him back to the old house at Saint Mary of the Angels. There the Little Poor Brothers gathered round him, and he spoke his last words to them, bidding them live always as he had taught them to live, in poverty and lowliness. And when evening came, and the birds he loved so much were singing their vesper hymns, his voice joined in their praise until his soul passed away to the Lord whom he had tried to serve so humbly, and in whose footsteps he had sought to place his own.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IN GOD'S GARDEN: STORIES OF THE SAINTS
FOR LITTLE CHILDREN ***

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