



THE FOUNDLING OF KEMPTEN.

BY THE BARONESS VON GILTA.



IN a summer's morning, about the year 1350, a husbandman in the small town of Kempten, in the Bavarian Alps, set out to his daily work. It was very early, and he was the first astir. A few yards from his house, which was the last in the town, he spied a bundle of ragged clothes by the wayside, and was about to pass it when an infant's cry attracted his attention.

On looking closer, he found the bundle contained a baby boy, only a few days old, who had evidently been deposited there in the hope that someone might find him and take pity on him. The man was poor, and had many little mouths to fill in his humble home; but he could not find it in his heart to pass by the forsaken child; he picked it up, and carried it home to his wife. For many days they talked of the wonderful event, but could find no clue to the babe's parentage, and so little Heinrich, as they called him, was brought up as one of their own children. He was a quiet, thoughtful boy, with a quick ear, and a sweet voice, which soon found favour with the monks of a neighbouring monastery. They trained him to sing in their choir, as long as the fresh bird-like voice remained unimpaired; and they taught him many things besides music—he learnt to cull herbs and simples for their medicines, and would trot by the side of any of the good brothers when they went abroad on their errands of mercy. Later, he lost his voice, and with it the employment he liked so well.

Times were bad, and all his young companions were hard at work, trying to add to the scanty earnings of their parents. As long as the old people lived, Heinrich worked cheerfully at anything that came in his way, and was proud and happy when he too could bring something to swell the common store. But when death broke up the circle in which his youth had passed, he grew melancholy and restless, brooding over his own sad story, and longing to go forth into the world, perhaps with a vague hope that he might find the parents who had cast him out in infancy.

He did not travel very far; only as far as the Arlberg, that great bleak mountain which separates Tyrol from the small province of the Vorarlberg, stretching down to the Lake of Constance. Here he was glad enough to hire himself as a shepherd to one of the farmers in the valley. In summer it was pleasant work, leading the flocks along the mountain side. Heinrich was always fond of his own thoughts, and would lie for hours on the green sward, watching the white clouds sailing across the sky, or the shadows stealing athwart the landscape, and dreaming such beautiful dreams that he never felt the want of human com-

panionship; he would amuse himself, too, by singing over and over again the hymns and chants which the good old monks had taught him, or by making up tunes and songs of his own, rejoicing to find that the singing voice, which he had lost, as he thought for ever, had come back to him again.

There was no established road over the mountain, though it was the only pass from Tyrol to the Lake, and a busy trade for those times was carried on in fine weather. In winter all was still. Snow lay, yards deep, for weeks and months together; no houses were near, no one ventured out then, and cattle sought the shelter of the farm buildings when the first frost proclaimed the approach of winter, and huddled together to keep themselves warm in the short dark days and long chill nights which they dreaded so much. Each year, when spring returned, there were terrible traces of suffering on the rough bridge road over the mountain; bodies of men and horses, and bales of perishing goods, lying beneath the drifted snow, and telling how strong men had struggled bravely against the pitiless elements, till hope gradually died in their hearts, and they sank down in that torpor which is the sure precursor of death. The inhabitants of the valley used to turn out in parties when the thaw came, to collect and bury the bodies of the belated travellers; to them it was as much a matter of course as any other event of their lives which recurred at certain seasons; but to Heinrich it was a painful and perplexing mystery. As he sat on the hillside in the sunshine, he was haunted by the poor creatures struggling through the trackless snow, and dropping, one by one, with no hand near to help them. In the long winter night, the wind, as it howled round the house and shook doors and rafters in its fury, seemed to bear to his ears the groans of men perishing, almost at his very threshold, yet utterly beyond his reach. Night and day, these thoughts were ever with him. In a mind tinged with the mystic piety of those times, they shaped themselves gradually to a fixed purpose; he felt convinced that he, who had never known the love of earthly parents, and who had been separated from every family tie, was called upon imperatively to arise and go forth, bringing succour to the strangers who needed it.

Week after week he pondered, till he could sit still no longer, for a voice within him called on him loudly to begin the good work without delay. But how was he to begin? He had fifteen florins of his own, the wages he had saved ever since he began to work for himself; what could he do with these? The people around him were well nigh as poor as he, and could give no help, even had their sympathy not been blunted by familiarity with the suffering, which to him was so awful, and to them was merely a necessary part of the winter's hardships.

At last he resolved to set out and travel through many lands, seeking for assistance, nothing doubting that God, who had put it into his heart to begin, would help him to

finish the work. Once more he went forth alone. And it seemed, indeed, as if God went with him. Wherever he halted, there was food for him, and shelter at night; no door was closed against him, no ear was deaf to his entreaties; young and old, rich and poor, listened to his tale of sorrow; happy families, clustered round their warm hearth, gave readily to help poor travellers in their need; hard-working men, who knew the miseries of life, added their mite to his store. The shepherd-boy made his way into prouder homes, where high-born ladies listened with tears in their eyes to his sweet plaintive songs; and freebooting barons gave alms for the wayfarers, hoping thereby to wipe off some scores in the heavy reckoning they had been laying up for themselves in their long, long career of violence. On he went; his store increasing daily, and his heart throbbing with faith and thankfulness, which lent fresh eloquence to his poet-tongue. At length, one noble patron led him into the presence of Duke Leopold himself, the flower of German chivalry. He was surrounded by a band of gallant knights, preparing to set out on that campaign against the Swiss mountaineers which ended so disastrously for themselves on the marshy banks of Sempach. Leopold listened kindly to the shepherd's tale, and spoke words of encouragement as he poured into his pouch a gift of truly royal magnificence, and the brilliant cavaliers around him followed his example with an alacrity which rendered all further efforts unnecessary.

Heinrich returned to the Arlberg with considerable sums of money, and began his work at once. On the summit of the pass he built a small stone chapel, dedicated to St. Christopher, patron of travellers, and close to it a goodly hospice, which he endowed with all the funds at his disposal. The brethren who lived there were bound by solemn vows to go out in all weathers to search for belated travellers, to give them food and shelter, and to help them on their way when the roads again were clear. Those who lodged at the hospice were to pay according to their means, but the poor were to be received gratuitously.

For many generations a blessing was on the place, and thousands of lives were saved by the exertions of the Foundling of Kempten. Two hundred years later, a good road over the pass was made by order of the Tyrolese Government. When the danger was removed, the need for the hospice ceased. Busy little towns sprung up at the foot of the mountain, and few ever thought of halting on its summit. The hospice has long since disappeared; two or three peasants' cottages of dark grey stone stand now on its site, and part of the old wall has been built into the modern church of St. Christopher. But the name of Heinrich the shepherd-boy is not forgotten; and truly his was a great and noble work, more worthy of remembrance than the deeds of many a haughty prince whom the world has called famous.