

ST. GERTRUDE'S PLEDGE.

When the holy St. Gertrude was a modest maiden of this world, the name of " Wellbeloved " was most justly bestowed upon her, for all who saw the beauteous girl, acknowledged the charms of her grace and loveliness.

Amongst the most devoted of her admirers was a knight of proud name and heroic deeds who abandoned himself so entirely to the fascinations of the young and gentle queen of his heart, that his mind was diverted from all other duties and occupations. So completely subjugated was he, that he might correctly have been compared to a lion

who suffers himself to be led by the hand of a child.

Gertrude was charitable even beyond all moderation. A virtue that had displayed itself in her earliest childhood, when the little maiden would frequently return from her excursions with no other vestment than her under garment; having bestowed all else that she possessed, upon the poor. In later years, when modesty forbade such a mode of proceeding, her boundless liberality often left her so destitute of money and jewels, that being unable to relieve the distress she witnessed, her days were past in tears. Upon one of these occasions, when she had been applied to by a poor woman whose husband laid dangerously ill, the aforementioned knight was present and modestly offered a jewel for the relief of the supplicant. Gertrude accepted it with eager gratitude, and hastening to the cottage of the afflicted, named the noble donor, and left the inmates overwhelmed with joy.

The readiness with which his gift had been received awakened delicious hopes in the bosom of the knight. A short time however sufficed to convince him, that benevolence and not earthly love was the motive for the maiden's promptitude in obliging him.

Nevertheless, the joy and gratitude, with which she accepted his offerings and hastened immediately with them to the relief of the distressed, afforded him so much happiness, that he unsparringly bestowed upon her the most rich and costly

gifts. These mutual acts of charity awakened in the heart of Gertrude a sincere friendship for the knight. Too artless however to think, that her beautiful form had raised a more ardent flame in the bosom of her friend, she attributed his benevolence to the same motives, which she was conscious actuated herself.

When the maiden had attained her eighteenth year, she communicated to the knight her resolution of retiring from the world to a cloister, and of devoting the rest of her life to the service of our Lord, and his beloved apostle St. John, for whom she entertained a special reverence. Gertrude's manner while making this vow was so pure and angelic, that the knight dared not express his profound sorrow at her resolution, but he nevertheless ventured to inquire if she had no desire to insure the happiness of a lover, and be blessed with the caresses of children. She replied with modest grace but without blushing, that she could never acknowledge an earthly lover; her affections being devoted to St. John, and that she already possessed children as innumerable as the sand upon the sea-shore, — for the poor and afflicted were all her children. The knight feeling that he had no chance of success against such rivals, continued silent, and by a vigorous effort, regained his self-possession.

At length the evil hour arrived and he saw Gertrude depart from the castle of her ancestors to embrace the solitude of a cloister. His sole

happiness now consisted in frequently visiting the beloved maiden, which was not forbidden by the mild rules of the order, and in presenting rich offerings not to her, for that was no longer allowed, but to her convent. Gertrude always rejoiced at these visits and the name of her friend daily ascended to the throne of heaven mingled with her pious orisons. At the same time the noble donor felt in his conscience, that his gifts were less intended to benefit the afflicted, than to afford satisfaction to the adored maiden, whose gratitude gladdened his heart. But alas! the blessing of increase was not destined to shine upon his worldly goods. The stream of his riches rapidly diminished, and ere long, the last drop flowed into Gertrude's convent.

Gloomy despondency oppressed the knight's soul upon this discovery, for he now dreaded, lest he should no longer merit the smile of the beautiful devotee. Saddling one morning his war-horse, he spurred wildly and despairingly over the neighbouring heath reflecting the while, how he might procure the means of preserving Gertrude's favor.

Suddenly, he was roused from his anxious meditation by his horse, starting at the sight of a dark and shadowy thorn-bush. As the gallant animal stood snorting and pawing the earth, a cloven-footed huntsman, arrayed in green, his bonnet surmounted by a cocks feather, issued from beneath the shade and appeared before the knight,

whom he saluted and then courteously entered into conversation.

Indeed, ere many minutes had elapsed the wily huntsman made such progress in the knight's friendship, that he became the confidant of all his sorrows. Having ascertained this, the former suddenly exclaimed : " Cheer up, sir knight, I have a remedy for all thy cares. The treasures of these mountains are mine. There is no miner, who can dig so deep. Behold this parchment—sign it with thy blood, and during seven years thou shalt possess all thy heart coveteth. "

Regardless of his soul's salvation and only thinking of Gertrude's smile, the knight quickly bared his sinewy arm, and with his dagger's point opened a vein. Then taking the cocks feather from the bonnet of the cloven-footed tempter, he signed the parchment with his blood, and having thus abandoned himself to Satan, galloped homewards.

His coffers were now constantly filled with gold, which he expended in costly presents to Gertrude's cloister. Never however did he employ the smallest portion of these dangerous treasures for his own necessities, but lived a life of simplicity and austere self-denial. Months, years, rolled on and Gertrude became Abbess.

At length the fatal day, destined to terminate the career of the poor man's protector arrived. With a sorrowful heart the knight resolved once more to visit his beloved, and at midnight to de-

liver himself up to his infernal purchaser. Having passed some time together he rose to depart and informed her, that he was about to proceed upon a journey and should not again see her for many years. "The Lord's will be done!" replied the pious maiden, "but there is one request which thou must not refuse me." He bowed assent and she continued: "Pledge me thy troth and remembrance, ere thou biddest me adieu. — For I would not have thee forget me, when thou art far away. Drink, I beseech thee, the wine in this goblet is consecrated to my Saint, it will preserve thee from all evil!"

With contrite heart the knight took the cup and drank to Gertrude's remembrance. Then bestriding he dashed his spurs into the flanks of his horse, and galloped towards the heath, where he had sworn to encounter the destroyer. His heart quailed when from afar he now saw the green huntsman, with scroll in hand, standing beside the dreary thorn-bush. Upon this he drew up his rein and rode slowly onwards, his mind occupied with Gertrude's image.

Having nearly reached the spot, the knight was surprised to see the huntsman spring suddenly backwards, and cast away the parchment — wrathfully exclaiming: "There — there — take back thy contract. See! See! she sits behind thee in holy splendour and shields thee from me."

The knight upon this looked around, the hunts-

man had vanished, and nought remained upon the barren plain, but the scorched and rumpled parchment — Having recovered from his astonishment he joyfully sped homeward, where he found all his treasure untouched within his coffers. Gertrude's pledge had hallowed the gold and rescued the knight from the power of the Demon.