THOMAS OF CANTIMPRÉ

The Life of Saint Lutgard

Vita S. Lutgardis

SABBATISMUS

Thomas of Cantimpré (c. 1201–1272)
Vita S. Lutgardis · The Life of Saint Lutgard

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Prologue

To the reverend Lady Hawide, most dearly to be loved in Christ, by divine grant Abbess of Aywières, and to the whole most holy community with her: a brother, by office subprior, but the least of the Friars Preachers, sends greeting, and the same good he wishes for himself.

In the greeting I have set down the office of my person and my Order, though not my own name, so that authority may be lent by the office and the Order, and yet the work that follows may not be cheapened by any hint of my name. It was not only your charity, but that of many monasteries, that urged me on, and with it the most ardent love, altogether singular, that I bore towards her person. I have written, as best I could, the Life of the pious Lutgard, dividing the whole work into three books according to the threefold state of the soul: that of beginners, of the proficient, and of the perfect. The first tells how she began the holiness of her conversion in the Order of Saint Benedict; the second, how she advanced by passing over to the Cistercian Order; and what the Lord deigned to work through her in the eleven years before her death, in her death and after it, the third book will hold and contain as the degree, so to speak, of perfection.

Nor do I believe that for many years past the life of anyone has been written that holds within it so many signal virtues and such privileges of wonders and miracles. If it is asked how I can win my readers' belief in all that I have written, I answer briefly — and let Christ himself be witness and judge — that I received a great many of these things from the lips of the pious Lutgard herself, as her closest confidant, and in these I believe no one will be so rash as to contradict her testimony; the rest I declare that I learned from such persons as would never stray from the path of truth. Many things too, and truly magnificent ones, I have not consented to write, either because they would not be intelligible to the unlearned, or because I found no fitting testimony for them. Since, then, charity believes all things, endures all things (1 Cor 13:7), I ask those into whom God has poured the spirit of his charity to believe what is set before them here, if anything is holy, if anything useful, if anything in accord with the truth; and at the same time to bear patiently with whatever I may have set down less aptly, less learnedly or with too little discretion, though for such faults the ill-disposed reject it more than is just. For it is the mark of good minds, as the most glorious Augustine says, to love in words the truth, not the words. Gold is no less precious for being taken from the earth, nor wine less savoury for being drawn from humble wood. Let not only you, then, but the companies of virgins in all the monasteries of Brabant receive the Life of the pious Lutgard, so that she who was known to all by the

fame of her virtue may become more fully known through the brief account of this little book, and may increase virtue and merit in its readers, who will find the example of virtue set before them. Farewell to your holy and sincere kindness; and may the divine mercy keep you safe, mindful of me in your prayers. Amen.

The Old Division of the Chapters

Book I, Chapter I. Of her birth and childhood.

II. How she was courted by a certain young man, and through a vision of Christ was wholly converted and suddenly set free.

III. How a certain devout and noble lady foretold that she would be like another Agnes.

IV. How a certain knight courted her, and she manfully repulsed him and put him to shame.

V. How the same knight tried to carry her off by force, and she escaped by a miracle.

VI. How she foretold a most grievous misfortune to the knight's henchman, who raged against her.

VII. How she withstood her shame when the people came out to meet her as she returned to Saint-Trond.

VIII. How the Blessed Virgin comforted her when she was afraid at certain words of the nuns.

IX. How Saint Catherine appeared to her.

X. How the whole community saw her raised up into the air.

XI. How a brightness like the sun's was seen at night coming down upon her.

XII. How the Lord, because she felt compassion for the sick, gave her the grace of healing; and afterwards that she might understand the Psalter; and afterwards how, when these were

lost, she obtained the grace of God for as long as she lived.

XIII. How, when she was troubled by anything, she was rapt in spirit and sucked a wondrous sweetness from the Lord's side.

XIV. How John the Evangelist appeared to her in the form of an eagle, and what was shown to her through that eagle.

XV. How Christ appeared to her fastened to the cross, and she kissed his wound.

XVI. How it seemed to her that her hands were dripping with oil.

XVII. How she was consecrated, and how a golden crown was seen being set upon her head; and this two people saw.

XVIII. How perfectly she followed Christ the Lamb.

XIX. How, as she sang, Christ was seen to caress her in the form of a lamb.

XX. How she was made prioress in the monastery of Saint Catherine.

XXI. How Christ put his hand between, when she suffered violence in the kiss of a certain abbot in that same monastery; and how much religious women must shun the kisses of men.

XXII. How she passed from the Order of Saint Benedict to the Cistercian Order.

Book II, Chapter I. How Blessed Mary appeared to her when she feared she would be elected abbess; and how by a miracle she could not learn French.

II. How the Blessed Virgin complained of the grievous wrong of the Albigensians, and how for

this she was bidden to fast for seven years on end on bread and beer, only that the Lord might be appeased towards his people.

III. How she freed Master James of Vitry from a most grievous temptation.

IV. How she freed a certain Simon, Abbot of Foigny, from Purgatory by most vehement prayers made to God.

V. How she wished to be assured about her state, and a radiant young man appeared, in the sight of all, to console her.

VI. How she longed to die, and the wounds of Christ appeared to her, crying out to her on behalf of sinners.

VII. How Pope Innocent III appeared to her immediately after his death.

VIII. How Master John of Lier appeared to her as soon as he had died; and what Christ said to her as she mourned his death.

IX. How it was revealed to her a second time that she should fast another seven years for sinners; and that, as Christ himself offered himself daily to the Father for sinners in the sacrifice of the sacrament, so she too should offer herself to Christ.

X. How a demon appeared to her and said that he had deceived a certain nun; and how that nun was set free.

XI. How certain nuns were freed through her from the demons that dwelt in them.

XII. How a certain nun named Yolande, forewarned by her before her death, appeared after it.

XIII. How her sister appeared to her after death.

XIV. How she was forbidden to receive the Sacrament of the Altar every Sunday.

XV. How a demon appeared to her at the death of a certain sister.

XVI. How demons often appeared to her, and how they feared her.

XVII. How she feared she had not always said the prescribed Hours well, and how for this reason one sent by the Lord set her mind at rest.

XVIII. How a flame was seen coming from her mouth as she sang.

XIX. How, having received the Body of the Lord, she would not go without her meal, but told the Lord to fill a certain frail nun with the remnants of thought; and so it was done and proved.

XX. How that same Elizabeth was cured through her prayer.

XXI. How she longed to suffer martyrdom for Christ, and through that longing a vein burst over the place of her heart and she shed blood in wondrous abundance; and so the Lord told her that for this she would receive the merit of Agnes in her martyrdom.

XXII. How a certain nun, the Lady Mechtild, recovered her lost hearing by the laying on of her finger.

XXIII. How, as she meditated on the passion of Christ, a certain priest saw her in contemplation as though wholly drenched in blood.

XXIV. How by most vehement prayers she converted to the Lord a certain Sir Thimer, a knight and a man of wicked life.

XXV. How she freed a nun from temptations; and how that same nun miraculously obtained what she prayed for.

XXVI. How she foretold to a woman gravely tempted that she was to die on Good Friday.

XXVII. How a certain man, at the mere sight of her, was moved to contrition for his sins, and, making satisfaction, was set free.

XXVIII. How she healed an epileptic.

XXIX. How on the feast of All Saints a multitude of saints appeared to her.

XXX. How Lady Sibylla, weighed down by her service to her, received an answer by a voice at night.

XXXI. How a certain man in despair, as he spoke with her, saw a most brilliant brightness above her, and was comforted.

XXXII. How the Blessed Virgin appeared to her during the canticle "Te Deum laudamus".

XXXIII. How, when she had compassion on a certain poor woman, the Lord said to her: "My portion."

XXXIV. How she shone in many things with the spirit of prophecy; how the name and merit of a certain virgin, Osanna, which for many years had been unknown, were made known through her.

XXXV. How she foretold the return of a certain apostate to his Order.

XXXVI. How she foretold the death of the Duchess of Brabant.

XXXVII. How she told a certain woman of her hidden temptation, and freed her from it.

XXXVIII. How by her prayers she freed a certain man who was troubled in hearing confessions.

XXXIX. How two angels were seen leading her to the altar; and how on another occasion before her death the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist were seen standing at her side, one on either hand.

XL. How she had knowledge of an unknown language to console a certain woman who had fallen into despair; and how the woman was set free through her.

XLI. How, as she wept long for sinners, the Lord appeared to her and wiped the tears from her eyes with his own hand.

XLII. How for five years she was visited daily by angels, and often by the Mother of the Lord or by the apostles; and yet nothing sufficed her but God alone.

XLIII. How she lived in a threefold state; and this was to lie in the threefold bed of the Song of Songs.

Book III, Chapter I. How she became blind eleven years before her death, and thereby gained a more splendid light within.

II. How Jordan of holy memory, Master of the Order of Preachers, appeared to her and said that he was among the choirs of the apostles and prophets.

III. How for the third time she completed seven years of fasting.

IV. How Cardinal James, who had died in Rome, appeared to her on the fourth day as she was rapt to heaven, and said that he had been freed from Purgatory.

V. How she foretold the day of her death five years before.

VI. How in the same year, on the Vigil of the Lord's Nativity, the said Master Jordan appeared to her and told her that her death was at hand.

VII. How in the fourth year before her death, when the nation of the Tartars was raging through many kingdoms and it was feared that it would come through all Germany, she foretold that it would not come, but would turn back.

VIII. How Dom Baldwin of Barbençon, Prior of Oignies, was shown to her after his death.

IX. How she contemplated the face of Christ, according to that word of the Song: My soul melted as my beloved, etc. They found me (Song 5:6–7).

X. How, in the hearing of a nun, a voice came over her: My delight is to be with the children of men (Prov 8:31).

XI. How, one year before her death, Christ asked only three things of her.

XII. How in Eastertide before her death the Lord Christ appeared to her with Mary his mother, and foretold her death to her.

XIII. How fifteen days before her death the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint John the Baptist appeared to her, with certain special friends of

hers who had already died, foretelling her passing; and her most glorious answer as to how she could recognise and distinguish the saints who appeared to her in a multitude.

XIV. How she rebuked the sisters who were in the infirmary, and foretold that after her death the Lord would chastise them; and how this came about.

XV. How a certain friend of hers in the world had sinned grievously, and obtained pardon through her prayers; and how the Lord would do good, for her sake, not to him alone but to all whom she loved, and who loved her and put their hope in her.

XVI. How she died, and what she did in death; and how she said that the heavenly host was in the cloister as death was coming in.

XVII. How the eyes she opened before her death she never closed again; and what some of the sisters felt at her death; and what her face was like in death and after death.

XVIII. How a certain sister had a useless hand, and was healed by touching her body as it was being washed.

XIX. How many years before she had foretold that her little finger should suffice me after her death, I who had coveted her hand; and how miraculously this was fulfilled.

XX. How her body was buried.

XXI. How she appeared to a certain nun, and how she said that she had passed over without Purgatory and had freed many souls from Purga-

tory; and she foretold that another would die, and that one died immediately afterwards.

XXII. How, in the vision of a certain nun, she was seen to have stilled the plague that had come among the nuns as she had prophesied.

XXIII. How a noble girl, Beatrice, was healed by her veil.

XXIV. How Dom Alard, the chaplain, was healed.

XXV. How Oda, the subprioress, was healed.

XXVI. How a certain nun proved her power through lilies laid at her tomb.

XXVII. How Mary of Andenne was suddenly healed of a most violent headache by her veil.

XXVIII. How by her girdle a certain lady was delivered when she was in perilous labour in childbirth; and many other women have experienced the same.

BOOK ONE.

The life of Saint Lutgard in the Benedictine Order

I. Called away from marriage and the love of men, her heart is bound fast by the love of God

The pious virgin Lutgard drew her origin from that once most famous city of Tongres, of a noble mother and a burgher father. Her father, then, loving his daughter most tenderly and wishing her to prosper after the pomp of the world, entrusted twenty marks of silver to a certain merchant while she was still a little child, so that in the meantime, while the little girl was growing, the sum might multiply and the goods of her

dowry be increased against her marriage. The girl, as she grew and came to understand what was being done for her, set her heart on marriage, so far as a child of that age can will anything. But the loving Lord, who foresees what is to come, who calls the things that are not as though they were (Rom 4:17), frustrated the father's plan and disposed otherwise of Lutgard, whom he meant to espouse to himself. For the man who had taken the money set aside for Lutgard to increase it by trade crossed often into England and, coming to grief through various misfortunes, squandered the twenty marks entirely, until only a single mark was left. Yet even this would not have turned the father's intention, or the daughter's brazen forwardness, from their purpose, had not the persistence of her pious mother won over the daughter's mind, now with threats, now with coaxing. For her mother would say to her daughter, and drove it home again and again: "If you choose to wed Christ, I will make ready for you a most honourable monastery, wherever you wish. But if you choose a mortal man, you will have no one but a cowherd." With these words and others like them, then, that excellent woman bent both her husband's wish and her daughter's will towards the resolve of a better state. As long as she lived in her father's house she still wore fine clothes; but she shunned unseemly jests and lovers' talk and all girlish silliness; and, wonderful to say, though she did not yet know the Lord (for he had not yet revealed himself to her in anything), she nevertheless felt within her heart,

when she was alone, something divine, I know not what. And truly, from that time the Lord was preparing in Lutgard a most worthy temple for his dwelling. So, with the help of divine grace, the mother's right over her daughter prevailed; and when she had reached the age of a little more than twelve, she was given over to the service of God in the monastery of Saint Catherine, near the town of Saint-Trond in Hesbaye, among the nuns of the Order of Saint Benedict.

When a young man, mighty in wealth and birth, courted her, she began at times to incline her heart gently to his words. And the young man, watching for his time and place, tried to come secretly by night to the house where the maiden slept. But no sooner had he come near than he was seized by a sudden fear and fled. The devil pressed hard, then, in strange ways, to bend the girl's heart to consent; but in vain, for the Almighty did not allow it. Once, as the simple girl sat talking with the young man, Christ appeared to her in that very form of his humanity in which he had once lived among men; and drawing aside from his breast the garment that seemed to cover him, he showed her the wound in his side, all bloody as though with fresh blood, and said: "Seek no longer the caresses of a foolish love; here contemplate unceasingly what you should love and why you should love it; here I pledge you the delights of all purity, which you shall attain."

Terrified by such an oracle, Lutgard at once fixed the eyes of her heart on taking in what she had seen; and like a meditating dove at the

window where the sunlight enters, she kept her gaze unwavering on the crystal door of the ark that figured the body of Christ. Soon the bloom of her flesh wasted away and her face grew pale, as every lover's does; and, lit within by a splendour from on high, she felt that she had lost the darkness of all vanity. When a certain noble and devout lady saw her one day, she said, in the spirit of prophecy, what I now set down: "You," she said, "as I see, are a good Agnes; and truly you will be another Agnes." Before long the young man came and began to speak again of what he had proposed. And as he stood there gaping, she answered him as the most blessed Agnes once did: "Depart from me, food of death, nourishment of crime, for I have been forestalled by another lover."

But another young man too, a knight valiant in arms, fell in love with Lutgard none the less, though she now clung to God with a purer heart. He courted her for many years, though she resisted him in her heart; at first she turned him away courteously, and afterwards more sternly. And when she saw the knight persisting in his folly, she drove him off that time with scornful words.

The knight, then, smarting at being scorned, pondered what he could do; and it happened that Lutgard, summoned by messengers from her sister, set out on a journey, and the young man met her with a band of henchmen and tried to carry her off. At once the girl leapt from the horse she was riding and wrenched herself by force out

of the young man's hands; and fleeing all night through unknown ways of the woods, under an angel's guidance, she came in the morning to the house of her nurse. When the nurse saw her, she suspected that she had been ravished, and said: "Did that young man take you by force tonight?" "No," she answered. Nor was it any wonder that the nurse suspected this, as we have said; for her servants, seeing the young man come upon them the evening before with a strong band, had fled, and, as is the custom in such cases, had raised the cry against him as a ravisher. And he, frightened by their cries, gave up his pursuit of the maiden and fled. Because of this outcry and flight, then, the innocent girl fell under people's suspicion.

In this event, however, something happened that must by no means be passed over in silence. When the knight had got down from his horse some way off in order to seize her, one of his henchmen was doing him the servant's office of holding the horse. The virgin Lutgard, seeing this man still stubborn in his purpose after the knight's strength had been foiled, cried out to him, not so much cursing as foreseeing: "With the hand with which you hold the reins of the horse of the knight who assails me," she said, "you will shortly do deeds for which you will be put to shame in this world, in the things of time." See then, reader, how quickly and how truly this followed. For when he returned home, with that very hand with which he had held the bridle he soon killed his own wife; and for this he was

driven from his country and deprived of all his goods.

Not long afterwards, returning from her sister's to the town of Saint-Trond, she was riding in with her servants. Hemmed in there by the people, who crowded round her out of curiosity, she began to be weighed down by an immense burden of embarrassment; at once she brought Christ back to mind, and, mastering herself with a strong will, she put up her hand and drew the veil from her face. And she said to Christ: "For us, O Lord most innocent of all, for us, O most beautiful, you were stripped of your garments and bound to the pillar, and clothed in a purple cloak for the mockery of a raging mob; and, crowned with a wreath of thorns, you hung naked on the gibbet. Finding nothing, then, that I can give you in return, I offer you this shame, despised for your sake." A wonderful thing! She had scarcely finished the words when, at the uncovering of her face, the crowd of people went away abashed. And she, returning to the monastery, rejoiced, advancing from that day onward in the Lord's better gifts. [To Brother Bernard, a friar of the Order of Preachers and penitentiary of the lord Pope, she revealed wholly all the secrets of her heart — not, to be sure, as she did to me, since his was a worthier spirit and better fitted to receive them. Yet I believe that she told me this no less fully, unworthy as I was; and I myself agree that long before she had asked the Lord to send her one day a shame in which she might imitate, in her own person, the shame of the Lord's Passion.]

From then on, therefore, cut off from almost all human conversation and comfort, she yearned wholly for the things of heaven. And when some jealous sisters found fault with her stricter life, which they could not imitate, they said: "Leave her alone for now, while her fervour is running its course; later, when it has cooled, you will see her go back, blushing, to the things she now foolishly despises." When Lutgard heard this, she began humbly to be afraid for herself, and to fear with groans that what those older in years were saying of her might perhaps come true. Then the Blessed Virgin Mary appeared to her with a face full of gladness for her and said: "No, dearest daughter, it will not be as you fear; do not dread a relapse. With my care protecting you, you will be made firm unto salvation; neither the practice of virtue nor grace will lessen in you, but from day to day it will ever be heaped up for you unto your crown." A glorious promise indeed, and one to be embraced beyond all words! And yet, when she was sweetly united to the Lord in prayer or contemplation and some pressing business called her away, she would say to the Lord with great simplicity and purity of heart, as though speaking familiarly to a friend: "Lord Jesus, wait for me here; I will come back to you as soon as I am done." Wonderful the simplicity of her endearments! Wonderful the Redeemer's clemency towards her! For she found him ready for her in every place of his dominion (Ps 103:22), ready in every task.

About the same time the most blessed virgin Catherine, protectress and patroness of that monastery, appeared in the greatest glory of brightness to Lutgard as she wept and prayed. When she begged her most fearfully to entreat the Lord for her, Saint Catherine answered and said: "Take heart, daughter, for the Almighty will ever increase grace in you, until by the highest summit of life you attain the highest merit among the virgins." She herself told me this before her death, as she told me a great many other things, when I had bound her by an oath. And so that the word of truth might stand by the mouth of two witnesses (Mt 18:16), Saint Catherine appeared to a certain most blessed woman and said: "Seek Lutgard as your intercessor and mother. She will obtain from the almighty Lord a merit and a place in heaven equal to mine." See then, O you nuns of Aywières, of what great merit was the woman who dwelt among you for forty years; consider how much you have profited through her; weigh more carefully whether you all paid her the reverence she deserved. For I am sure that for those who honoured her she will obtain merit, and for those who neglected her, if they repent, pardon.

So that greater things than these may be both believed and proved of her, I shall relate a most glorious miracle known to many. On the holy day of Pentecost, when the nuns in choir were singing "Veni Creator Spiritus", those who were in the choir saw most plainly that Lutgard was raised into the air two cubits from the ground. Nor is it

any wonder if her body was lifted from the earth towards heaven, since her soul, already raised above the world, possessed heaven according to the Lord's promise: Every place, he says, that your foot shall tread upon shall be yours (Josh 1:3). With the foot of her affection, indeed, she trod heaven, which is beyond space and place; and the heaven she trod with a celibate mind she also reached, as far as was possible, by the movement of her body. Happy Lutgard, then, through so great a miracle, whose body and soul exulted in the living God (Ps 84:3).

And this too, which I now add, was a most solemn miracle. As the Mother of the Lord had promised her, she gave herself ever more perfectly, from day to day, to the Lord as a freely offered holocaust, afflicting her body with fasts and never letting her spirit slacken in prayer. But so that no trace of suspicion might remain in the hearts of the sisters who seemed somewhat jealous of her, Christ adorned his bride with a miracle of this kind. As Lutgard kept up her vigils more and more often, it happened one night that the nuns saw above her, for a great part of the night, a radiance of light brighter than the splendour of the sun. And that light, poured inwardly not only into her but into those who saw it, increased in them the grace of the spiritual life.

She was wonderfully moved by a spirit of compassion towards the sick and the weak, so much so that, with those who suffered, she herself was tormented still more in spirit. God therefore gave her the grace of healing so universally that

if there was a spot in someone's eye, or some other ill in a hand, a foot or other limbs, they were cured at once at the touch of her saliva or her hand. And when, because of this grace, she was overwhelmed by crowds of people who often hindered her in prayer, she said to the Lord: "What is this grace to me, Lord, through which I am so often hindered from giving my time to you? Take it from me — but in such a way that the grace may be exchanged for me into something better." And the Lord said: "What do you want to be given you in place of this grace?" And she said: "I want to understand the Psalter with which I pray, so as to pray with greater devotion." And so it was done. For, as was proved at that time, she understood the Psalter all the more clearly as the light with which she had been enlightened was more radiant. After this, when she found that she was not profiting by this grace as much as she had thought (for reverence for a veiled mystery is the mother of devotion; a thing concealed is sought the more eagerly, and what is hidden is looked upon with greater veneration), she said to the Lord: "What is it to me, an untaught, rustic and unlettered nun, to know the secrets of Scripture?" The Lord said to her: "What do you want?" "I want," she said, "[your heart." And the Lord: "No; rather it is I who want your heart." And she to him: "So be it, Lord, but in such a way] that you mingle the love of your heart with my heart, and that I may possess my heart in you, safe at all times under your protection." [From then on there was an exchange of hearts, or rather a union

of the uncreated and the created spirit through the excellence of grace; and this is what the Apostle says: She who cleaves to God becomes one spirit (1 Cor 6:17).] Pay attention, reader, for I am about to tell of wonders: from that day, as a nurse with a fan guards a little child in the cradle lest the boldness of the flies disturb it, so Christ kept watch at the door of her heart, so that neither temptation of the flesh nor even a shameful thought troubled her mind for the space of a moment. What wonder is that? What is new in it? He is the same who had said of old: He who touches you touches the apple of my eye (Zech 2:12). We are wont to guard our eyes more than our other members. What is new, then, if Christ guarded the soul of the pious Lutgard, which he had likened to the apple of his eye? I have said less than I ought. Any faithful soul is worthier than the eye of Christ's body; for that eye grew dim as he died, and he offered his whole body for the soul as the expiation of its redemption.

About the same time, when she was still very young in body and years, one night about the hour of Matins a sweat came upon her, as heavy as it was natural. As she was resolving in her heart to rest and miss Matins, so as to be stronger afterwards in God's service (for she judged that sweat to be good for her body), suddenly a voice cried out to her thus: “Get up quickly! Why are you lying there? You ought now to be doing penance for sinners who lie in their filth, not indulging your sweat.” Terrified at such a voice, she got up quickly and, Matins having already

begun, hurried to the church. Nor was there any delay. At the very door of the church Christ, nailed to the cross and covered in blood, came to meet her; and loosing from the cross an arm that was nailed to it, he embraced her as she came, and pressed her mouth to the wound in his right side. There she drank in so much sweetness that from then on she was always stronger and more eager in the service of God. Those who, when she revealed it, put this to the proof at that time and long afterwards used to say that the saliva of her mouth tasted sweeter than all the sweetness of honey. What wonder is that? Your lips, O bride, are a dripping honeycomb (Song 4:11); and the honey of Christ's divinity and the milk of his humanity her heart ruminated within, even when her tongue was silent.

II. VARIOUS ECSTASIES AND DIVINE VISIONS. HER PASSING FROM THE BENEDICTINE TO THE CISTERCIAN ORDER

Whenever she was burdened by some trouble of heart or body, she would stand before the image of the Crucified; and when she had gazed at it long with fixed eyes, her eyes closed and her limbs gave way towards the ground, and, like Daniel, the man of desires (Dan 10:11), she could not stand upon her feet; but, fainting utterly, she was rapt in spirit and saw Christ with the wound in his side all bloody; and from it, setting to it the mouth of her heart, she sucked such sweetness that nothing could trouble her at all. So it once happened that, suffering from a most acute fever,

as soon as it reached its crisis on the due day she rose from her bed and went without any difficulty to join the community in choir for the singing.

Then, in remembrance of that eagle of keenest sight — John the Evangelist, that is, who drank the streams of the Gospel from the sacred fountain of the Lord's own breast — an eagle appeared to her in spirit, shining with such brilliance of plumage that the whole world could have been lit by the rays of its brightness. At the sight of it she was stunned with wonder beyond all that can be told, and she waited for the Lord to temper the glory of so great a vision to the capacity of her weak sight. And so it was done. So, beholding the vision in a more tempered manner, she saw the eagle place its beak upon her mouth and fill her soul with the flashing of so ineffable a light that, as far as is possible for the living — for it was said to Moses: Man shall not see me and live (Ex 33:20) — no secrets of the Godhead were hidden from her. For the more the magnificent eagle found the vessel of her heart stretched wide with desire, the more abundantly she drank in that house from the torrent of delight (Ps 36:9). In this I shall bear her a testimony which, I hope, is not mistaken, according to my conscience: that although in ordinary speech she seemed, and was, in a way rough and most simple, yet never from anyone's lips, in the privacy of spiritual conversation, have I met words so sincere, so ardent, so incisive according to the spirit of truth; so much so that I very often thought myself altogether rude and dull at understanding her words.

I still remember the place and the time, and I confess that once I was so stunned at the subtlety of her words that, had that sweet and ineffable wonder held me long, it would surely have driven me out of my mind or killed me outright. But this was not at the time of which I am now writing, but about sixteen years before her death.

There is a town in Hesbaye called Looz; beside the church of this town a certain recluse, very dear to the pious Lutgard for the merit of her life, served the Lord. Lutgard was staying with her for fifteen days; and it happened that after the contemplation of prayer she was filled with such sweetness of spirit that she called the recluse and showed her the fingers of her hand, and, pressing them, said: "See, sister, how the Almighty deals with me: because I am filled within by overflowing grace, even my fingers outwardly, as a sign of that grace, are now dripping as if with oil." And as she said this, like one drunk — and truly drunk — she was carried about the recluse's cell with wondrous gestures and dancing. What wonder? She had been brought by the Bridegroom into the wine cellar (Song 2:4) as his guest; and after she had eaten as one dear — that is, had eaten with toil the bread of penance — and as one dearer had drunk the abundance of graces, at last, as one most dear, she was made drunk; and so, passing all measure, she rejoiced ineffably in the spirit of those who are beside themselves.

Then she began to long to be joined more perfectly, through the ministry of consecration at the hands of a bishop, to Christ the Lord, her one

husband; and the occasion was given when Lord Huard, Bishop of Liège, resolved to consecrate a great number of nuns gathered together. So Lutgard too was brought to be consecrated with the company of virgins; and when the said prelate was binding on their heads a wreath made of bands, as a sign of the virgins' golden crown, and in due order had come to Lutgard, it was seen most plainly by a certain holy and simple man standing by that the bishop set a very great golden crown on Lutgard's head and honoured her singularly above the others. Thinking that everyone saw this, he asked a priest standing by why the bishop was placing a golden crown on the Lady Lutgard alone. The priest, who knew nothing of the matter, laughed at him and said: "Have you got your eyes turned inside out, that you call a golden crown what everyone sees is made of linen?" So the blessed man fell silent and smiled, and took note of a singular merit in Lutgard. Here too the truth had two witnesses, for one of the nuns who were consecrated saw the same thing. Wonders give way to greater wonders.

From then on, cleaving more perfectly to her Bridegroom, she followed the Lamb wherever he went (Rev 14:4). If we proclaim the humble way of Christ, you may see Lutgard following it, so humble that pride never assailed her. If I look at the way of poverty, you may know Lutgard to have been so poor that she gave no thought even to the nourishment of daily bread, though she laboured daily with her hands. If I consider the

way of Christ in mercy and compassion, I have seen nothing in this life more merciful than Lutgard. If I proclaim the way of Christ in tribulation, think of Lutgard's weariness in fasts and afflictions, which will be shown to have surpassed, all her life long, that of all the men and women of our age. If we revere the way of Christ to glory, let us extol beyond compare Lutgard, whose way of life is set in heaven, as may be seen even now. In all these ways Peter followed the Lamb most perfectly, and Mary Magdalene too; yet not wherever he went. But Lutgard, with the companies of virgins as her fellow followers, followed the Lamb by that way of incorruption by which he went before.

But since we have said that Lutgard followed the Lamb in all things, see what the Lamb gave her in return. For it is right that the bridegroom should repay his bride in kind. But see how he repaid her. In the monastery of Saint Catherine, every Friday, at the Vespers of the following Saturday — a day fittingly set apart for the veneration of the most blessed Virgin Mary — when the verse of the responsory was sung (a verse which, for the grace of her devotion, Lutgard alone used to sing), it seemed to her, while she sang, that Christ in the form of a lamb placed himself upon her breast in such a way that he set one foot on her right shoulder and the other on her left, and his mouth upon her mouth; and so, sucking from her breast, he drew out the sweetness of a wondrous melody. Nor could anyone doubt that a divine miracle was present in this singing, since

in that verse alone her voice was heard to be infinitely more lovely than usual. And so the hearts of those who heard were meanwhile wonderfully moved to devotion.

Moreover, since it was not fitting that so great a lamp should lie hidden under a bushel, it was set upon a lampstand (Mt 5:15), so that the brightness of her grace might appear to all. She was elected, then, by the unanimous consent of all, and granted to them as superior — that is, prioress — of the handmaids of God in the monastery of Saint Catherine; for they were not accustomed to have an abbess in that monastery. But because she considered this a very grave injury done to her, from that time on she began to plan a change of place and of way of life.

In the meantime it happened that the Abbot of Saint-Trond, who was the spiritual father of that monastery of Saint Catherine, on his way back from the General Council of the Lateran, was received by the nuns in procession. After praying in the church, he called the whole community to chapter and, as is the custom among simple folk who are none too careful, gave each of them a kiss. And when it came to the prioress Lutgard to give the abbot a kiss, she firmly refused. But as everyone made a joke of it, she was held fast by their hands and, suffering violence, endured it. Yet Jesus, of supreme kindness, so put the hand of his mercy between them that she did not feel in the man's kiss even the taint of a first stirring. Alas! let the devotion of our time blush, more shameful than blind, in which men having the

appearance of piety (2 Tim 3:5) think they may kiss women and virgins with impunity and without offence to divine grace and to the law. They take a defence for their error from the words of the most blessed Apostle Paul where, writing to the Corinthians, he says: Greet one another with a holy kiss (2 Cor 13:12). But this must surely not be understood to mean that men should kiss women; rather, according to Augustine, men should kiss men and women women [with the kiss of holy peace]; otherwise that most circumspect preacher of chastity would have given a most manifest occasion for unchastity; hence he said elsewhere: Abstain from every appearance of evil (1 Thess 5:22). Is that not an appearance of evil, where the touching of bodies is followed by the corruption of souls — and would that it were of souls only! Is it not of bodies too? I am certain that, if it becomes a custom, it will be of bodies too. For if Augustine, the greatest of all Doctors, in the Rule of the Canons forbids a fixed gaze, and commands that for this a man be cast out of the monastic fellowship, because by such a thing anyone, even at a distance from a woman, is corrupted in mind, what penalty would he have decreed for those who conceive the kindling of foulness through the mere kisses of women, where there is certainly a touching of bodies? In the book On the Nature of Things Pliny says that the fish claucius bites baited hooks from behind; and by it are signified those who shun the very act of fornication as they would a hook, but snatch at the softness of pleasure as at the

bait; and while, as lovers of chastity, they despise the foulness of adultery, yet through kisses and unlawful touchings they slip into what is graver. Hence Paul said of such people: God gave them up to a reprobate mind, to do what is not fitting (Rom 1:28). I hold, therefore, by sound reason, that such men are fouler than fornicators, and for this reason blasphemers against the Holy Spirit, since against chastity, enemies of chastity as they are, they pretend to be lovers of chastity. You, then, virgin, bride of Christ, or whoever you are that love chastity, flee such men with Lutgard; abhor the shameful deed. If anyone tries to entice you as if to a holy kiss; if anyone tries to bring his hand near your bosom, your breasts or other parts, give him spittle for a kiss, and meet the man who handles you with your fist; and in this show no deference to a cleric or to anyone's rank: for it is lawful to defend the chastity of the mind even with blows, as one may defend the life of the body. Such a man, I say, you must not think a servant of Christ, but of Satan; not spiritual, but sensual; not a follower of modesty, but in truth the vilest of lechers.

The illustrious Lutgard was a nun in the monastery of Saint Catherine for about twelve years; and there was at that time Master John of Lier, of the diocese of Liège, a man outstanding in all holiness, who, knowing the most perfect resolve of that blessed woman, advised her to leave her place and her office of superior and to pass to the convent of Aywières, of the Cistercian Order. And when she pleaded the difference of

language, since the nuns there spoke French, and would rather have entered a monastery of the same Order at Herkenrode, where the Teutonic tongue was spoken, the Lord said to her: "I will that you go in the end to the house of Aywières; and if you do not, I will forsake you." And a certain most blessed virgin named Christina — whom the venerable James mentions in the Life of Blessed Mary of Oignies, and whose Life we ourselves have also written — driven by the Spirit of God, came to her and broke out in these words: "Why do you delay," she said, "to fulfil what you are commanded by divine inspiration?" And when the pious Lutgard objected the difference of language that we have mentioned — reasonably enough, as far as human judgement goes — Christina, inspired, answered at once: "I would rather be in hell with God than in heaven with the angels without God." Truly she answered well and worthily. For wherever Christ is, there is paradise too; and this because the Truth could not lie, who said to the thief on the cross: Today you will be with me in Paradise (Lk 23:43). For it is certain that on that day the soul of Christ by no means ascended to the empyrean Paradise or to the earthly one, but descended with the Godhead into hell, and with him the soul of the thief, which he had foretold would be with him; and by this he proved, with a necessary argument drawn from the topic of the cause, that wherever he was, there was Paradise. For the presence of Christ makes a place, however hateful, supremely delightful and more wonder-

fully to be desired. For granted that hell cannot, simply speaking, be put on a level with Paradise, still her answer deserved approval; since it is more to be chosen to be in any place whatever with the supreme and uncreated Good than in a place however good, whether the earthly or the empyrean Paradise, with any created good. Rightly, then, strengthened by Christina's words, the pious Lutgard declared herself ready for everything; for it was never hard to persuade Lutgard of anything in which the holiness of a more perfect life could be seen. Obeying, then, the counsels of the said Master, she passed with all tranquillity of mind to the monastery of the Cistercian Order called Aywières, in the land of the Duke of Brabant. When they heard of it, the nuns of Saint Catherine's grieved inconsolably; and Lutgard, learning of their grief, felt compassion for them in their distress. And as she prayed to the Lord for their peace, the glorious Virgin Mary, sweetest consoler, appeared to her and rejoiced with her that she had entered a house and an Order specially dedicated to herself; and as for the house for which Lutgard was praying, she would further it by her prayers both spiritually and temporally. This, beyond any doubt, we see to this very day in that house of Saint Catherine: while the discipline of that Order has grown lukewarm almost everywhere, this monastery flourishes in virtue now more than ever before, and has been more richly increased in temporal goods. And I counsel you, [O community of the nuns of Saint Catherine,] to go on calling upon this mother on

your own behalf, that what she once did for you here on earth she may do the same in heaven. Here let this first book, on what the pious Lutgard did in the Order of Saint Benedict, come to its end, so that we may go on to the second book in a readier order.

BOOK TWO.

Her life in the Cistercian Order

I. Souls in Purgatory helped by a fast of twice seven years. Women harassed by demons set free

Now as the fame of the pious Lutgard's virtue spread everywhere, new monasteries began to be built in the French-speaking lands, and many of them longed to elect her, if only she had learned a little French. When the pious Lutgard learned of this, she was greatly dismayed; and turning to the glorious Virgin Mary, she besought her with tears to avert it. The blessed Mother appeared to her and said: "Do not be afraid at all at this word, for I will set the shield of my protection against it." And see, reader, in what way this was averted, and you will see how pure was the truth of her who answered. She had barely reached the age of twenty-four when she entered Aywières; and yet, such as she was, in the forty years she afterwards lived among French-speaking companions she could scarcely learn enough of the French tongue to ask properly for bread in French when she was hungry. When this became plain to all, Christ's beloved fawn was allowed to rest in the sleep of contemplation; and no one stirred her up or made

her wake to pastoral care until she pleased (Song 2:7); and it never happened that she pleased.

When the most grievous plague of the Albigensian heretics was threatening, the most blessed Virgin Mary appeared to her with a mournful countenance and a darkened face. Lutgard, filled with compassion for her in the vision, asked her with a great cry of heart and voice: "What ails you, most loving Lady, that your face, full of all graces, is so wan and pale?" And the Blessed Virgin said: "See, my Son is being crucified again by heretics and bad Christians; he is being spat upon again. Take up lamentation, then, and fast for seven years on end, so that the wrath of my Son, which hangs over the whole world, may be stilled." From then on, therefore, for seven years on end, Lutgard fasted on bread and beer alone. And see the greatness of the miracle. Often, compelled by obedience, she tried to take a little cooked food into her mouth; but none of it, not so much as a bean's worth, could pass down her throat. And though she herself laboured continually under a wondrous and incredible abstinence, she rejoiced when the community fared better at table; so much so that she would say she felt better for a whole month if the community had once had an abundant pittance. For she knew that what the divine goodness had bestowed on her as a singular gift, for the healing of many, could not be common to all in the showing of grace; and this is said against those who frame toil into a precept (Ps 94:20) and lay it down that all must keep in common what they

themselves, helped by grace or aided by nature, have been able to keep without trouble. [But the more she prolonged her fasts, the stronger she was in body and heart.]

When Master James of Vitry had received the grace of preaching through the prayers of that venerable woman, as he himself relates in the book of the Life of Blessed Mary of Oignies, it came about that he loved a certain religious woman who lay sick in bed, not with a shameful love, but with one too human. Constantly intent, therefore, on comforting her, he was sluggishly neglecting the office of preaching. The pious Lutgard, then, perceiving in spirit the bond on his heart and the snares of the devil, set herself to pray to the Lord for him with many tears. And when she made no headway in her praying and reproached the Lord over it as cruel, the Lord answered: "The man for whom you ask," he said, "is striving against your prayers." Saying this, the Lord put off fulfilling what was asked. When the pious Lutgard saw this, she grew impatient and cried out to the Lord with loud cries: "What is this you are doing, most kind and most just Lord? Either separate me from you, or set free the man for whom I ask, even against his will." A wonderful thing! No delay at all came between the asking and the doing; he was set free utterly and at once, and blessed his Deliverer and his handmaid; and after his deliverance he saw with open eyes the danger which before, blinded by human love, he could not see. Not long after this, the same vener-

able James was elected to the bishopric of Acre, in the lands beyond the sea.

About the same time a certain Simon, a nobleman born in Germany and very well schooled in letters, entered the Cistercian Order and afterwards became Abbot of Foigny; and though he was fervent in desire, he fell upon those under him with a bitter zeal, and was overtaken by an untimely death. Since he had held the pious Lutgard most dear for the holiness of her life, his death left her deeply troubled; and at once, undertaking penances and fasts for him, she asked the Lord to set free the dead man's soul. And as she persisted greatly in her prayers, the Lord answered her: "Be comforted, for for your sake I will do good to him for whom you pray." But she pressed him more importunately, and received a second answer, that the man was soon to be set free. And she said: ["Whatever consolation you wish to give me, give it to that soul in Purgatory." And she added:] "By no means, O Lord, will I cease from weeping, nor will I ever be consoled by your promises, until I see him set free for whom I ask." Nor did the Lord allow her to be troubled any longer, but appeared to her and at once brought with him, there before her, the soul freed from Purgatory, saying: "Be comforted, beloved; see, here is the soul for which you ask." At once the pious Lutgard fell on her face and blessed the Lord for the soul's deliverance. And the soul, exulting and giving praise, gave thanks to the pious Lutgard; and passing on to better things, it entered the heights of heaven in great glory. This

same Simon afterwards often appeared to the pious Lutgard, and among other things told her that he would have spent forty years in Purgatory had not her prayer helped him before the merciful Lord.

Humbly marked also with the spirit of the fear of the Lord, the pious Lutgard feared the Lord as swelling waves above her (Job 31:23), and was afraid of all her works (Job 9:28), as though they were done in doubt. For a long time, therefore, lamenting every day, she prayed the Lord to make her certain even in this present life. Having remained a long while in this desire, one day she heard a voice come to her most clearly: "Be at peace now, dearest, for your life is pleasing to the Lord." For the moment, then, the pious Lutgard rejoiced; but she began none the less to be afraid as before. Again a voice came to her from God and said: "Will you have the Lady Mary of Roavia as witness of your security?" And she said: "No; she is too scrupulous, and would anxiously put off for a long time revealing to me what she knew." The divine voice said to her: "Rest meanwhile, dearest; soon you will be made plainly and perfectly secure." Scarcely four days had passed after this when, behold, a man of striking appearance, unknown to all, came into the parlour where the nuns were sitting together. Greeting them all briefly, he asked that the pious Lutgard be sent for at once. When she came, he greeted her and said in the hearing of all: "The Almighty sends you this message: henceforth live secure, for the Lord is well pleased in you." Having said this, the

young man vanished at once; nor was there any further way to ask where he had come from or who he was. [Not long afterwards a man of most holy life, receiving a divine revelation, came to Aywières and strengthened her with the consolations described above.]

From then on, desiring with a more fervent mind to pass through death to the things eternal, her eye wept daily to the Lord (Job 16:20); and behold, the Lord, hastening to soothe her cries, appeared to her and, laying open the wounds of his hands, feet and side, said: "Look, dearest, and see how my wounds cry out to you: let me not have shed my blood in vain, let me not have suffered death in vain." Seeing and hearing this, the pious Lutgard, wondrously afraid, asked with fear and trembling what the cry of Christ's wounds might be; and she was answered: "By your toil and your tears you will soothe the kindled wrath of the Father, so that he may not destroy sinners unto death, but that through the mercy of God they may be converted and live."

About this time the lord Pope Innocent the Third, after the Lateran Council had been held, departed this life; and no time passed after his death before the Pope himself appeared visibly to the pious Lutgard. When she saw him appear, surrounded by a very great flame, she asked who he was in such a state; and he said: "I am Pope Innocent." And she said with a groan: "How is it that you, the father of us all, are tormented with such punishment?" He answered her: "There are three reasons why I am tormented like this, and

for them I most fully deserved to be handed over to eternal punishment; but through the intercession of the most loving Virgin Mary, to whom I built a monastery, I repented at the end and escaped eternal death. Yet I shall be tormented with the most dreadful pains until the day of the Last Judgement. And this very thing, that I have been able to come to you to ask for help, the Mother of mercy obtained for me from her Son." When he had said this, he suddenly vanished. Lutgard told the sisters of the death and the need of the departed, so that they might come to his aid. And she herself, compassionate at heart for so great an expiation, afflicted herself with wondrous penance for him who had appeared. Note, reader, that we learned those three reasons from the pious Lutgard's revelation; but out of reverence for so great a pontiff we pass them over in silence.

A vision like this in kind, but very unlike it in the matter of expiation, came to Lutgard about the same time. The venerable John of Lier mentioned above had made a pact with Lutgard while he lived, that whichever of them left the world first should appear after death to the survivor. This same John, going to the Roman Curia on behalf of the affairs of the religious women who were being harassed throughout Brabant by their detractors, died when he came near the mountains of the Alps. At once, at the very moment of his death, he appeared visibly to Lutgard as she stood in the walk of the cloister. Believing him to be alive, she beckoned to him with her hand to go

into the parlour, where, that is, she could speak as the Order allowed. He said to her: "I am dead and have passed from this world; and to fulfil God's truth, which by our pact was agreed between us, I have appeared to you after my death." And at once she fell to the ground and asked: "But what is the meaning of the threefold garment you wear, now that you have attained such glory?" And he said: "The garment white as snow signifies the innocence of my virgin flesh, which I kept undefiled from the womb; the red one fitly shows the labours and sufferings that brought me to my death, which I endured a long time for justice and truth; and the blue one, which I wear on the outside, signifies the perfection of the spiritual life." Saying this, he vanished from her wondering eyes. And she told both the vision and the death of the said Master to his sister in the flesh and to other nuns. Yet while the pious Lutgard was weeping for that venerable man, given to God though he was, because he had been taken from her, in the midst of her mourning the Lord answered her in these words: "Why do you weep, Lutgard? And why is your heart afflicted? Am I not better to you than ten sons?" (1 Sam 1:8) Since, as an unlettered nun, she did not understand these words, she had them interpreted; and when she heard their meaning, she mourned the dead man no longer, but blessed the Lord in all things for his death.

Moreover, when the seven years mentioned above, in which she fasted on bread and beer, were completed, it was revealed to her again

that she should fast for sinners in general. This she gladly accepted, and for another seven years she fasted on bread and vegetables only. And the Lord added a vision: rapt in spirit, she saw Jesus, the Prince of our salvation, with his wounds as though fresh and red, standing before the face of the Father and pleading with the Father for sinners. And turning to Lutgard he said: "Do you see how I offer my whole self to the Father for my sinners? So too I will that you offer your whole self to me for my sinners, and turn aside the zeal that is kindled against them for vengeance." The Lord Jesus said this same thing to her almost daily in the sacrifice of the Mass. And that the prayers, fasts and labours of Blessed Lutgard had great power, that most blessed Mary of Oignies bore witness at her death: veiling and binding her head with Lutgard's veil, she was touched by the spirit of prophecy and foretold: "Under heaven," she said, "the world has no more faithful intercessor than the Lady Lutgard, none more effective in her prayers for freeing souls from Purgatory and for sinners. She works spiritual miracles now in her life; bodily ones she will work after her death." How true this is, many have experienced both in her life and after her death; for, as this writing will later bear witness, she does not cease to work.

When a certain most devout nun was being deceived by the devil in revelations which she took to be made to her by God, and the pious Lutgard prayed to the Lord for her, the Lord answered: Give light to those who sit in darkness

and in the shadow of death (Lk 1:79). And since, being unlettered, she did not understand these words of the Lord, she asked a certain nun about them, and so received them with their meaning. As she then besought the Lord more urgently, a demon appeared to her and said: "I am the lying spirit who is deceiving that nun." She said to him: "Go to Brother Simon, who lives in the monastery of Aulne, and tell him the same, so that I may have a witness to the truth." At once the devil obeyed, and Brother Simon came to Aywières. This Simon was a man of God full of the Spirit, and one to whom (as the book of his life testifies) the Lord revealed a great many things. The pious Lutgard and Brother Simon, then, agreeing together according to the Lord's revelation, at once sent for the nun. At once the nun's hands and limbs were drawn together in a most violent rigidity, and her mouth was clamped shut so tightly that it could not be opened even a little with a knife. Those who saw it were seized with a terrible fear; and kneeling in prayer, they besought the merciful Lord in so dire a case. What happened, then? It was by no means fitting that the Lord should be found inexorable to the prayers of so many. And as soon as they rose from their prayer to God, the nun's limbs returned to their former state; she opened her mouth, took food and was strengthened; and from that day forward she was freed from the spirit of deception. And afterwards, as I myself have seen, she was endowed with such privileges of merit in her life that she could be said not only to have been enlightened

in darkness, but also to have enlightened by the example of her conduct many others who were in darkness.

I myself saw a nun of the Cistercian Order who, after being tormented by a demon for many years, was brought to her and set free by the great urgency of her prayers. I saw another too who, harassed in strange ways for many years by an incubus demon, was rescued and cleansed by her prayers. As she herself very often testified to me, that demon which had tormented her was most wicked, and had defiled her body with such filth that, had she not been held back by the utmost violence of prayer, she would many times have given herself up to public harlotry. But once set free through the prayers of the Lady Lutgard, she spent her life in such peace as if the goad of demonic torment had never troubled her. Wonderful indeed, most wonderful, is this permission of our Saviour and Redeemer, that Satan should receive power over a pure body, and a virgin body at that — a power which is exercised not only to defile the flesh, but which can hardly fail to go on to the corruption of the mind and the harm of the soul. What is purer than a bride of Christ? What is purer than a virgin, who is holy in body and spirit (1 Cor 7:34)? And yet we have learned that these things are done to such a one. Nothing remains, then, but to cry out with the Apostle: O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are his judgements, and how unsearchable his ways! (Rom 11:33) We believe, however, that it is by the hidden and just

judgement of God that women are brought to this defilement through an unlawful excess of temptation; how else, we do not see.

A certain Yolande, a black nun in a monastery on the Sambre, given over to the allurements of the world, at the urging of that pious woman fled swiftly to the monastery of Aywières; she was a woman of noble birth and of a most delicate constitution. For her the pious Lutgard besought the Lord with wondrous urgency of prayer to forgive her sins and pour into her the grace of devotion. Nor could Christ refuse what she asked, but he brought the woman to a state of holy life. When she had served the Lord there for many years, she learned of her death by the Lord's revelation, and went to her pious mother, the Lady Lutgard, and said: "Pray the Lord for me most urgently, for the end of my life is now at hand." The pious Lutgard said to her: "Wait for the Lord steadfastly, for I am sure that he will deal mercifully with you and will soon snatch you from the pains you fear. But after your death come back to me; and when you return, first say to me 'Benedicite'; then you shall say the Our Father with the Angelic Salutation, lest the devil, as he is wont, bring in some deception." The nun died, then, as she had foretold, in wondrous fervour of spirit; and not thirty days had passed when, behold, as the pious Lutgard was praying, the dead Yolande appeared to her and, as she had been asked in life, first said "Benedicite" and the other things I have mentioned. The pious Lutgard answered "Dominus", and at once went on: "How is it with you?" And

the dead woman said: "The Lord did not shrink from me for the enormity of my sins, but for your sake I have obtained great mercy." And having said this, she vanished. And Lutgard, with many tears, blessed the divine mercy towards sinners.

Her own sister in the flesh, too, passed from the world to Purgatory; and before her sister's death had been made known to the pious Lutgard, a horrible and lamentable voice suddenly cried out to her in the air: "Have pity, dearest sister, have pity on me, and mercifully grant me the same mercy you have shown to other souls." Prostrate in prayer, she understood that it was her sister's soul asking for the help of prayers; and at once she begged of all that the community would help her with many disciplines and prayers.

About the same time something happened which many held in wonder, and which I now add. For while the pious Lutgard, following the counsel of Augustine, received the Body of Christ every Sunday, she was forbidden to receive the sacraments every Sunday by the Lady Agnes, then abbess, who followed a less discreet counsel. [The pious Lutgard said to her: "I will obey, dearest Mother; but this I foreknow most certainly, that Christ will avenge this wrong in your flesh."] And at once, in vengeance for the deed, the abbess was so afflicted by the Lord with an unbearable sickness that she could not enter the church; nor did the pain cease, growing from moment to moment, until she acknowledged the guilt of her indiscretion and, repenting, lifted the

prohibition from the pious Lutgard. And those also who had sided against her in this affair were either taken from this light in a striking way, or turned to her in a spirit of humility. A worthy zeal of the Bridegroom against the wicked troublers of his bride!

Her spirit was ever borne over the dying with great mercy: she would visit them, admonishing and urging them to the confession of their sins, and promising sure hope to the penitent and, when their penance was done, glory. When, then, a certain sister was in her agony and was tormented by a most painful end, a demon appeared to Lutgard, jeering, and said: "See, I tormented that sister; but when the people came, I could prevail against her no longer." By "the people" he meant the community, which came to commend the sister's soul and by its prayers broke his strength. It is a holy and devout thing, then, to stand by the dying and to help them with prayers against the demons, who ever lie in wait for the heel (Gen 3:15) of our end.

Demons, too, often came to her and announced something deadly or sad; but she would spit at them and drive them off, importunate as they were, with the sign of the Cross. The demons feared her so much that they avoided touching even the place where she prayed, as though it were red-hot iron. And though she understood neither the Psalms nor anything of the Scriptures, yet as she ruminated that psalm, O God, come to my assistance (Ps 70:2), and certain other verses in the Psalter, she would see the demons flee

in wondrous horror and cease from suggesting evil. From this she understood that by the power of words, even words she did not understand, the presence of demons was driven off and their might in temptations broken. [Brother Bernard relates that he heard her say in private that she did not fear the devil at all, nor could he prevail against her in any way by any kind of deceit; but, according to the Lord's promise, she crushed his head (Gen 3:15) — that is, the beginning of his temptations — most mightily with the foot of the virtues.]

II. THE POWER OF HER PRAYER; HER DESIRE FOR MARTYRDOM; HELP GIVEN TO THE TEMPTED AND TO SINNERS, AND TO THE SICK AS WELL

The pious Lutgard, then, longing wondrously for all perfection, began to strive in a strange way to drive from herself every thought whatever while saying the Hours — not only bad ones but good ones too — and, what is impossible in the state of mortal life, to occupy her mind with nothing but what she was saying. And since she could not achieve this at all, she began to trouble herself with great scruples of mind, and to repeat each Hour a second or a third time, as though she had said nothing. She mourned, then, over this unavoidable defect of life, and none of her friends could console her in it. Prayers were made to God for her, that the Lord might free her from this scruple. Nor did the Almighty disappoint them. For, unlooked for, the Lord took possession of

a shepherd as he followed his little sheep, like the prophet Amos, and the loving Father put a word of consolation in his mouth. So the unlettered shepherd, leaving his sheep at once, came thirteen miles to Aywières; and when the pious Lutgard had been called, he said in the hearing of others too: "Thus says the Lord: be tormented no longer by any grief or scruple about saying the Hours; your prayers are pleasing and are gladly accepted in my sight." When the shepherd had said this, he suddenly hurried away, and there was no chance to ask who he was or to learn anything more; afterwards, however, it became known who he [was or] had been. [And the Lord himself also said to her: "Fear nothing any longer, for I will make good this defect in you."] And the pious Lutgard, perceiving that the word had come on both occasions from the Lord's mouth, rested in peace of conscience, and no disordered scruple troubled her about this ever again.

Thereafter it could hardly be believed with what eagerness of spirit she served the Lord in singing the Hours. So one day, as she was singing Vespers in choir, a certain nun who stood on the opposite side of the choir saw with the visible eyes of bodily sight a flame rise from her mouth and pass up into the air on high. At this unwonted sight the girl, timid and terrified, was almost frightened out of her life. When Vespers were over, the pious Lutgard comforted the nun sweetly, and at last, as she was still afraid, said to her: "I do not want you, dearest daughter, to be frightened by this vision, for you must under-

stand that it truly came from God." Note then, reader, that we read of this happening to many, and that the bodily flame seen in them figured the desire of fervent prayer. [Many who were less spiritual wondered how, amid deeds so magnificent, she had been able to trample on human glory. And I answer: she was so full within (as she herself told me) of a spiritual and solid glory that no vainglory from without could trouble her; but the Holy Spirit had fixed her immovable, like a pillar.]

Since Augustine, the greatest of all Doctors, says in the book of The City of God that discretion must always preside over us in all things and, as it were by governing them, distinguish our several wills, we know that the pious Lutgard was strong in the greatest discretion, as is plain from this chapter which I now add. One Sunday, when she had received the saving Sacrament of Christ's Body, and the remnants of thought kept festival (Ps 76:11) in her to the Saviour, so that it was hard for her to go to the table for bodily food, she said: "Lord Jesus, this is not a fitting time for me to be taken up with your delights; go instead to Elizabeth, who cannot go without food for a single hour, and fill her heart; and let me eat and be refreshed." For there was a nun there who suffered from such an infirmity that she had to take food several times by day and several times by night. At the pious Lutgard's word, then, Christ obeyed at once and passed suddenly to that nun, and filled her heart with such sweetness that, contrary to her habit, she

went without bodily food for a long space of time without any discomfort. In this, then, the great discretion of the pious Lutgard may be seen: she would not weaken her body even by a spiritual occupation, judging it more useful to keep it for the many other labours that profit souls than to wear it out uselessly out of season — for all things have their season (Eccl 3:1) — to its own destruction. And this is said against those who, having once or twice tasted the sweetness of the spirit, become their own enemies and cruelly cast off the body; and while by this they reach towards God with a stronger spirit, they destroy the body that was given to help the spirit; and so they let the spirit, made powerless by the destruction of the body, be weighed down by strange miseries. For the corruptible body weighs down the soul (Wis 9:15). Against them Paul, that most experienced Doctor, speaks: No one, he says, ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it (Eph 5:29) — nourishes it, that is, not for pleasure but for sustenance. Abraham, going up the mountain of vision, came back to the ass when the sacrifice had been offered; and Solomon bids us lay a burden on the ass and afterwards give it straw. Let the reader ponder what he should do about these things; we, for brevity's sake, pass on to the rest.

In the case of this same Elizabeth a most unlooked-for miracle took place, which I now add. For, as we have said, she had to eat almost every hour, not only by day but sometimes by night as well; and yet she was so weak that she could by no means stand on her feet, but lay continually in

bed. Since, then, she had recognised more clearly than daylight the power of prayer in the pious Lutgard, she asked her with great earnestness of heart to beseech the Lord for her, that before her death he might grant her the strength to get up and to join the community, so that by this she might serve the Lord Jesus Christ more fully before the end of her life. She agreed, then, to pray to the Lord for her. The Lord answered her in these very words: Arise, arise, stand up, daughter of Jerusalem, who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath (Isa 51:17). When she had told this answer of the Lord, and the occasion of it, to the lettered nuns, they perceived that Elizabeth was to be raised from her bed of sickness and would rise up to a state of health, in which the bonds of her neck (Isa 52:2) were to be loosed and the captivity broken by which the sick in the infirmary must be subject, willing or unwilling, to those who serve them, not only to the gentle, but also to the harsh (1 Pet 2:18). And it was done as the Lord had told her: Elizabeth was raised from the bed of sickness in which she had lain for many years, rose up tirelessly to the burden of the Order, and served Christ the Lord long afterwards in most perfect health.

She considered him who endured such tribulation from sinners (Heb 12:3), and was wondrously kindled to repay Christ in kind and to suffer martyrdom for him. But because the time of martyrdom, like the winter, is past, the rain is over and gone (Song 2:11), Christ prepared for her another kind of martyrdom, a bodily one too.

For it happened one night, after Compline had been said, that she was standing before her bed in the dormitory, occupied in prayer. Behold, the thought of these things came to her, and she began to desire in a wondrous and ineffable way to suffer martyrdom for Christ, like the most blessed Agnes. And when she burned so with this desire that she thought she would die of longing, a vein burst on the outside over the place of her heart, and so much blood flowed from it that her tunics and her cowl were drenched with it. Weakened, she sat down for a little; and at once Christ appeared to her with a face that rejoiced with her, and said: "For the most longing fervour for martyrdom that you had in the shedding of this blood, you will receive in heaven the same merit of martyrdom that the most blessed Agnes received for my faith when her head was cut off; for by your desire you have matched her martyrdom in blood." This agrees with what we set down at the beginning of the first book, where a certain noble and devout lady is said to have told the pious Lutgard, while she was still a young girl: "You," she said, "are a good Agnes, and truly you will be another Agnes." O truly most blessed woman, whom Christ himself, in a time of peace, adorned with the crown of martyrdom! Witnesses of this most glorious deed were two of the nuns, Margaret and Lutgard surnamed Limmos, most devout women, who washed the pious Lutgard's garments after the shedding of the blood. A witness too was the scar of the burst vein, until the day on which her happy soul

passed from this world. A witness, too, was the ceasing of that trouble by which God has tempered pride in the sex of Eve; and she was twenty-eight years old when these things are said to have happened to her.

Mechtild, a noble lady born in the region of Liège, who had left her sons, knights, as her heirs, was serving the Lord at Aywières. Worn out by old age and weakness, she lost her hearing entirely, as commonly follows from these. One day at solemn Vespers, when the nuns were singing in loud voices and one of them made a sign of this to the deaf lady, and she, understanding the sign, was weeping over her deafness, the pious Lutgard came up and asked her by a sign why she was weeping. And she said: "Wretch that I am, why should I not weep, when I am so deprived of hearing that I cannot hear the solemn chant with which God is served?" At once the pious Lutgard, filled with compassion for her as she wept, bowed a little in prayer and rose; and moistening two of her fingers with spittle, she put them into the deaf ears. A wonderful thing! Suddenly the woman heard the blockage of her ears burst within with a crack, and, her ears now fully opened, she could hear at once; and perceiving in so great a miracle the power of the pious Lutgard, she blessed the Lord magnificently.

Whenever, rapt in spirit, she was mindful of the Lord's passion, it seemed to her that she was truly red all over her body, drenched in blood. When a certain religious priest had heard of this in secret, he watched for a fitting time, when

there was no doubt that she would be mindful of Christ's passion in keeping with the season, and set out to see her where she lay in contemplation, leaning against the wall. And behold, he saw her face and hands, which alone were bare, shining as though drenched with fresh blood, and her locks soaked with blood, as with the drops of the night (Song 5:2). Seeing this, he secretly cut off some of them with shears and took them aside; and as he carried them to the light in his hand and marvelled beyond measure in his astonishment, the pious Lutgard came back from the rapture of contemplation to her outward senses, and at once the locks in the amazed man's hand returned to their natural colour. And he, terrified beyond belief at so great a sight, all but fell over backwards. Note, reader, that it is no wonder the pious Lutgard was seen red with blood, for in her life she was very especially one of those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb (Rev 7:14); for the body outwardly took on a likeness of the mind's inward, spiritual consideration.

A certain knight, powerful in birth and wealth, had a daughter who was a nun at Aywières; and since she knew her father to be entangled in various vices, she persuaded him to ask the pious Lutgard for her prayers and to beg her to receive him, as is the custom in such cases, as her spiritual son. She agreed, and set about praying to the Lord for him. And behold, Satan appeared to a certain nun in that same monastery and said: "See, the Lady Lutgard is trying to snatch from my chains the knight Thimer, who has served me

for so many years. Let her be: what she has begun is no work of a short time. But I, if nothing else, will at least make his heart boil in the furnace of poverty (Isa 48:10), and his soul will waste away, as meat is wont to fry in a pan." And you, reader, see what wondrous truth there was in the liar. For although at that time the knight abounded in very great possessions and riches, in a short space he so came down in the world that he spent ready money to the sum of fifteen hundred pounds; and afterwards, his possessions sold, he came to such poverty that in his utmost need he scarcely had bread. Yet in all this he is known to have shown such patience that no one doubted that the pious Lutgard's prayers had stood by the knight. We have seen him a monk at Affligem, the best-ordered monastery of all in that Order, revered by all for his wondrous way of life at such an age, and for his patience. In this and similar ways the pious Lutgard snatched many from the snares of the devil by her prayers, and led them to a more amended state of good life.

A certain girl of the Cistercian Order, burdened with a most grievous trouble of temptations, had seen many years before the pious Lutgard appear to her in a dream, and she was told that she was to be freed by her prayers. Long afterwards, then, she came to her at Aywières and recognised her face, which she had known before only in dreams; and Lutgard, as we have said, freed her by the greatest urgency of prayer from all the trouble of her temptations. Then the girl, having experienced in her own deliverance

the power of the pious Lutgard, asked her to obtain from almighty God by her prayers that she might be able to bear the labours of her Order and to do without eating meat; for the girl had been sickly from childhood and could scarcely do without meat even on fast days. The pious Lutgard objected that the girl was too young for such abstinence; but as the girl most urgently begged that her wish be fulfilled, at last, overcome by her tears, she said: "Go hence; from this day you will have the strength both to do without meat and to keep your Order, and to add whatever more you please." A wonderful and truly astonishing miracle! When the girl had returned to her own house, meat was set before her in the infirmary as usual; but as soon as she looked at it, laid out in the dish in a form most like something shameful, she shrank in horror from the very sight of it, so that, turning her face away, she could not eat at all. And when this had been tried often, she conceived in her mind such loathing for meat that after the pious Lutgard's words she never ate meat again; and not only the labours of the Order, but whatever she chose to bear for the mortification of her body, was most easy for her and caused her no trouble at all. This same girl, by then grown quite old and placed in charge of a monastery as abbess, told me these things with the greatest modesty; but it was the praise of the pious Lutgard that compelled her to tell them.

A certain religious girl named Hespelendis, driven to despair by excessive sadness amid an excess of temptations, asked the pious Lutgard

for the help of her prayers; and when Lutgard had poured out prayers and tears for her abundantly, she answered by the Lord's revelation: "You must take comfort, dearest; for on Good Friday, when after the adoration of the Cross the priest raises the Cross and says, 'Behold the wood of the Cross', you will be freed from every assault of temptation and will attain the confidence of consolation." And so it came about: for at the hour foretold she was set free, and through the confidence of consolation was granted divine grace.

When the venerable John, Abbot of Affligem, had brought a certain man with him to the pious Lutgard, at the sight of her the man was struck, and his face grew troubled. The abbot, wondering at this, said to the man when they had gone some way off: "Did you see that holy woman?" And he, sighing from the depths of his heart, said: "I saw her; and at the sight of her, as at the sight of the divine majesty, I was struck with such horror of my sins that, with the help of her prayers, I shall be delivered from my sins and, God granting it, shall not fall back into them." That it so came about, the said abbot, a man worthy of remembrance, recalls.

A certain woman had an epileptic son named John, for whom she had long grieved anxiously; and it came about that in a dream a word of this kind was spoken to her: "Go to the Lady Lutgard, who lives at Aywières, and your son will be set free through her." When morning came, she went with her son to Aywières and brought the boy to the pious Lutgard. She, first saying a prayer, at

once put her finger into his mouth and traced a cross on his breast with her thumb; and from that day forward she freed the boy from all the trouble of epilepsy.

Once, when the feast of All Saints was being kept, on that very feast a very great multitude of saints appeared to the pious Lutgard in a vision; and the Holy Spirit revealed to her that she was full of the spirit of them all and of the grace of them all. What wonder is that? For if gifts follow the virtues, what gift or grace could she have lacked, who shone full of every virtue?

Once, when the pious Lutgard was ill with bodily weakness, the Lady Sibylla of Gages, who had been wont to serve her most devotedly since she entered the Order, at the prompting of the spirit of wickedness, and almost failing from long toil, grew weary in heart and body; and once she said in her heart: "Why do I labour so in the service of the Lady Lutgard? Never in her life did my mother serve anyone so much; nor does it become me to be given over to such servitude." And at once, that very night, she heard a voice saying to her: "I did not come to serve." When she heard this, she reproached herself severely, and afterwards served the pious Lutgard with the greatest gladness and delight.

A certain man, in despair over the stain of his crimes, was brought to her so that he might at least be comforted by talking with her. At once, when he had sat down beside her and begun to hear her words, he saw above her a brightness beyond all reckoning, surpassing every splendour.

Gladdened by this sight, and strengthened, as well he might be, to hope for pardon, the man went away.

It often happened that, as she ruminated the psalmody, the Holy Spirit revealed to her the power and meaning of the verses. So one night it happened that, as she was saying in the canticle "Te Deum laudamus" the verse "When you became man to set us free you did not spurn the Virgin's womb", the most blessed Virgin Mary appeared to her as if rejoicing with her; and she understood that this verse, by which the Virgin is remembered as having conceived the Son of God, was most pleasing to the most blessed Virgin. Revealing this to me herself, as to a beloved son, she counselled me to bow with my whole body in praise of the glorious Virgin whenever I said this verse. This I have long done and still do, and I urge all who read this to do the same.

Seeing a certain poor woman in great need, she was moved by a wondrous spirit of compassion to do her good; and at once the Lord said to her in spirit: "You read in the Psalm and say to me: My portion, O Lord! I have said that I would keep your law (Ps 119:57). Understand it thus: I am your portion, you have nothing else; and so answer the needy woman: Gold and silver I have none; but what I have, this I will give you (Acts 3:6). Pray for her, then, and you have given her what is yours; and in saying this you have kept my law." Wondrously enlightened within by these words of God, she went to the Lady Sibylla of Gages and told her what the Lord had said

to her. She searched the glosses on that place in the Psalter, My portion, O Lord! I have said that I would keep your law, and found that the Lord had answered Lutgard most clearly in accordance with the gloss. It is plain, then, that the sacred Scriptures have been expounded by the same Spirit by whom they were also written. In the same way, when a certain monk of Affligem was being sent to a most dissolute parish and humbly begged her to pray the Lord for him in so great a danger, she answered him: With longing I waited for the Lord, and he heeded him (Ps 40:2). And he saw this fulfilled so very evidently that he had no doubt at all that the pious Lutgard had answered him by the Spirit of God.

III. THINGS TO COME, THINGS ABSENT AND THINGS HIDDEN MADE KNOWN BY THE SPIRIT OF PROPHECY

It is well known to many, and through many things, that the pious Lutgard shone with the spirit of prophecy. A certain man, a priest by order, coming into the French lands to the monastery of Jouarre in France, was praying by night in a crypt where the bodies of saints rested; and when, against all expectation, he opened the alabaster tomb of a certain woman saint and could not learn her name or merit, he afterwards asked the pious Lutgard to pray the Lord that her name might be revealed. Granting the man's request, she gave herself wholly to prayer, and at once obtained what she asked. For the said saint appeared to her and said: “I am called Osanna, a

virgin, once the daughter of the King of Scotland; brought by a miracle of the Lord to the lands of France, I lived a holy life there; and having died there and been solemnly buried, I was at last forgotten by the people of the place through the neglect of time." When the pious Lutgard told these things to the said man, she added: "I would that the Lord showed you these same things in witness of the truth." And he said: "I am not worthy that such things be shown to me." She said to him: "Though you may perhaps be less worthy, yet she is worthy to have her praises worthily revealed." Without delay, as the pious Lutgard prayed the Lord about this, that same night the virgin appeared three times to the said man in his sleep and showed him that she was called Osanna. He who saw it has borne witness, and we know that his witness is true (Jn 19:35; 21:24).

There was at Parc-les-Dames, near Louvain, a devout nun who inconsolably bewailed her brother in the flesh, a friar of the Order of Friars Minor who had been an apostate for twelve years. The pious Lutgard was asked, then, to pray the Lord for the said apostate, since his sister was thought to be losing her mind for grief. Moved with compassion for them both, she prayed to the Lord, and coming back from her prayer she said: "Let that good girl be told to take comfort with confidence, for her brother will return to his holy Order this year." We learned that this came about, unexpectedly indeed, since he had been entangled in many ways in the affairs of the world. Nor let it trouble readers if some

have fallen away by apostasy from the Order of Friars Minor or from others; for none of these is greater — nor anything like so great — than the very household of Christ, in which eleven good men bore with the faithless Judas, or better than heaven itself, from which angels fell.

About the same time the illustrious Duchess of Brabant, a daughter of the late Philip, King of France, fell gravely ill; and since she had long held the pious Lutgard dear, she sent word to her to pray the Lord for her. Lutgard prayed at once and sent back word that she would by no means rise from her bed, but should prepare herself in all things by confession and await the Lord with the greatest confidence of heart. And soon, as she had foretold, the Duchess died. After her death the Duchess appeared to the pious Lutgard and showed by most certain signs that, through the intercession of the glorious Virgin Mary, whom she had loved wonderfully in life, she was being snatched from the pains of Purgatory beyond her hopes. This I learned and set down from the account of the venerable Margaret, devoted to God, Lady of Velpia. And the same happened in the case of a nobleman, Lord Godfrey, son of Lord Godfrey, castellan of Brussels; she announced his death to the sisters before it was known from elsewhere.

The recluse of the Court of Saint Stephen, feeling in her girlhood a most grievous trouble of temptation, went to the pious Lutgard to ask her prayers. When Lutgard asked what her trouble was, and the girl was afraid to say, the pious

Lutgard said to her: "See, the Lord has revealed to me what you are ashamed to tell"; and saying this, she laid open to the girl the whole state of her heart, which she had been unwilling to reveal even to priests. Having exhorted her to confess, she left her, after the confession of her sins and the amendment of her ways, so perfectly healed and consoled from all her trouble that afterwards she served the Lord with the greatest eagerness and joy of spirit. The same thing, alike in almost every respect, is known to have happened to Brother Weric, a lay brother of Aywières. What wonder is that? For she had with her in spirit him whose eyes are brighter than the sun (Sir 23:19), as was plain in the event which I now add. A certain man had committed a sin in a most hidden place, and was afraid to reveal it to a priest. And behold, not long afterwards, someone in the guise of a pilgrim asked him to wash his head for him, for the remission of the sin he most feared. When he had begun to do so, he found on the crown of the pilgrim's head a most brilliant eye, and cried out: "O man, with an eye on the top of his head, against nature!" The pilgrim said to him: "This is the eye that saw you sinning in secret, and from which no secrets can be hidden." Saying this, he vanished from the wondering man's eyes.

The pious Lutgard was solicitous beyond measure to admonish the priests she knew, very often and with a wondrous grace of speech, to care diligently for the flock entrusted to them, and to free from the servitude of demons the souls that

Christ had redeemed. I myself, unworthy though I am, when I had come young in years to the order of priesthood, before I was yet in the Order of Preachers, was compelled, undeservedly and beyond my strength, to act as the bishop's deputy in hearing confessions. And when I had begun this in great dread of heart, I began, my ears troubled outwardly by what I heard, to be shaken by inward goads of temptation. Seized, then, with the greatest fear and horror, I went to the pious Lutgard as to a most special mother of mine, and, touched with sorrow, opened my burden to her. She, in compassion for me, gave herself to prayer; and returning, said with great confidence: "Go back, son, to your place, and spend on the care of souls the labour you owe; Christ will be with you as protector and teacher, to snatch you mightily from the darts of the enemy in hearing confessions; and, for the want of learning that you fear, he will add a fuller grace." A wonderful thing! And though I am ashamed to speak of myself, yet, to the praise of Christ and his handmaid, I will not keep silent about what happened. From that day, then, for as long as I have exercised the office laid upon me, up to the present — sixteen years have passed in between — I have found the pious Lutgard's prophecy most true in me; although at other times, when I was not occupied in hearing confessions, I have often been tormented beyond bearing. And the more unclean the things I hear, the less I heed them, and the less I am moved in hearing them.

And so that the merit of the pious Lutgard might be shown to certain women at Aywières who perhaps thought of her less worthily than they should, this solemn miracle which I relate took place. She was accustomed every Sunday to be refreshed with the Sacrament of the Lord's Body. And when, as she went to the altar, no one supported her to help her weak body, some to whom it was given to see saw plainly two angels holding her between them and leading her to the altar. In like manner, on another occasion, it was most plainly seen that the most glorious Virgin Mary and blessed John the Baptist accompanied her in attendance; but this was long afterwards, when the time was at hand when she was to pass from this world.

She strove with wondrous solicitude to comfort and strengthen the troubled and the tempted; and truly God himself had given her in this a wondrous grace, so that no one who was tempted or troubled left her without relief. A certain woman, then, utterly despairing of all hope of pardon, came and entered the parlour. The nuns begged her to accept consolation and to put her hope in God, who does not will the death of the sinner, but that he be converted and live (Ezek 33:11). But she kept trying, though in vain, to get away; they held her back, however, and begged her to wait for the pious Lutgard, who, even if she could not speak to console her, being of Teutonic speech, would still pray the Lord for her; for the woman spoke nothing but French. Without delay the pious Lutgard was brought,

and withdrew with the woman to a secluded place; for she perceived in spirit that the woman was troubled beyond measure. All began to wonder and to laugh at how two tongues unknown to each other could meet in conversation. When they had sat there a long while, the woman rose, called back to the fullest confidence of hope; and returning to the parlour she said to the nuns: "Why did you tell me that this most holy lady was Teutonic, when I found her altogether French? For there is no other woman under heaven who could have called me back by her words to the hope of pardon." Nor is it any wonder if for that hour tongues unknown to each other met in conversation, since Lutgard was full of that Spirit who filled the disciples, gathered together in one place, with a diversity of tongues. [Father Bernard relates that he saw her and that venerable man, worthy of God, Master Guiard, Bishop of Cambrai — who knew no Teutonic at all, as she knew no French — speaking together and understanding each other.] I have seen a woman who, on the day of Pentecost, from the third hour until evening, had knowledge of all tongues; but I will not yet make her known, because she is still living.

Afflicting herself long with lamentations for sinners, her face was so bathed every day that, as the prophet Jeremiah says, her eyes seemed to pour forth a fountain of tears (Jer 8:23). This grief, this groaning, was so beyond words to those who saw it that scarcely anyone could look on without grievous sorrow of heart. When,

then, it pleased the Lord of mercies to soothe her in such grief, he appeared to her as she groaned in her weeping; and rejoicing with her that she had long and faithfully pleaded the cause of the wretched, with that very hand which he stretched out on the cross for sinners he wiped the tears from her face, saying: "I will that you be comforted in these lamentations for my sinners; nor will I suffer you to be worn out with weeping any longer: you shall persevere in prayer with a calm fervour of heart, and by this, as once by tears, you shall graciously turn aside the wrath of the Father." This state remained in her unchanged until the day of her death.

After this, five years passed in which (as she herself told me with many tears) she was visited almost daily by the very Mother of Christ, or by the apostles, or by other special saints, besides the continual visits of the angels; and yet in all these her spirit found no perfect rest, until she found him alone, the Holy One of the holy, ineffably sweeter than all, as being the sanctifier of all. And what wonder is that? What is new in it? The pious Lutgard is stirred like the bride in the Song, whose soul melted (Song 5:6): she is wounded, she languishes, she pants, she rises, she seeks through the streets the saints of the new grace, and through the squares the patriarchs of the Old Testament. A little while she passed them by — for he is not far from each one of us (Acts 17:27) — and she found him whom her soul loves (Song 3:4), the gaze of her mind directed higher. So Peter, passing beyond the watchmen of the city

— Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets, even John the Baptist himself, who as the friend of the bridegroom clung more closely to him — found him whom he loved, and said to him: You are the Christ, the Son of the living God (Mt 16:16). Peter found Christ, the Son of God, who was to die; Lutgard found Christ, who rose from the dead and dies no more (Rom 6:9). Peter lost him, denied in his passion; the pious Lutgard found him and held him, reigning in heaven. She held him, I say; she held him indeed; and held him so that she will not let him go (Song 3:4). For the more ardently she sought, the more tightly she holds: happy in seeking, but happier in holding. She held him, and will not let him go. She held him by faith, and did not let him go through any change; but now let us look at the threefold manner of her seeking.

In the Song of Songs three beds are distinguished, according to the threefold state of the soul. The first is where it is said: On my bed by night I sought him whom my soul loves (Song 3:1). The second is that bed of Solomon about which stand sixty valiant men of the most valiant of Israel (Song 3:7). The third is that of which it is said: Our bed is flowery (Song 1:16). The first bed is likened to the state of penance, which is the state of beginners; the second to the state of combat, which is the state of the proficient; the third to the state of the contemplative life, which is the state of the perfect. In the first lies one who is wounded; in the second, one who is weary; in the third, one who is cherished. In

the first, then, that is, in the bed of penance, although she was never wounded by the stroke of any mortal sin, the pious Lutgard sought her Beloved perfectly, when, after the Psalmist's example, night after night she bewailed one by one the sins of her ignorance, most diligently washed the bed of her conscience, and watered her couch with a wondrous abundance of tears (Ps 6:7). In the second bed too, which is that of combat, the pious Lutgard sought her Beloved, when, fighting against the flesh, she subdued it with wondrous abstinence and toil; overcame the world by extreme poverty and humility; and cast down the devil with healing tears and prayer. This bed the sixty valiant men of the most valiant of Israel surrounded, when not only the angels, as we have already written, but the very Mother of Christ, with the hosts of the other saints, protected her. But in the third bed, which is that of rest, the pious Lutgard sought her Beloved perfectly, when she leaned neither on the angels nor on the saints, but rested sweetly through contemplation on the couch of the Bridegroom alone. Hence she could say with Isaiah: For the bed is narrow, so that one must fall out, and a short cloak cannot cover both (Isa 28:20). This bed is called flowery because it is strewn with the springtime abundance of the virtues and the most fragrant sweetness of good repute; and "ours", that is, common to the Bridegroom and the bride alone, in that she could say: My beloved is mine and I am his, who feeds among the lilies (Song 2:16). And this: I am my

beloved's, and his turning is towards me (Song 7:11). What wonder is that?

Love knows no lord; love knows not how to lord it; / however high the lover, he loves only as an equal.

Otherwise she could be called a handmaid, not a bride; but the bride, in the figure of this mystery, was taken in our first parents from the side, not from the foot. So her spirit was absorbed into God, that, like the Queen of Sheba fainting in wonder, she had no more spirit in her (1 Kgs 10:5); but, carried over wholly into God, like a drop of water in a cask of wine, she was mingled with him as one spirit. And this is what Christ, hastening to his passion, asked of the Father for those who would believe, saying: As you, Father, are in me and I in you, so may they also be one in us! (Jn 17:21) But since we have drawn out this book, the second of our work, at length with many and varied matters, useful as we think, let us draw breath in the interval of a short pause, so that we may pass the more gladly to the story of her precious death.

BOOK THREE.

What she did in her last years, in blindness. Her death. Miracles

I. Appearances of Blessed Jordan, Master General of the Preachers, of James of Vitry and of others. The third fast of seven years

Now, then, having faithfully carried the second book to its end, we begin the third as well, on her passing. About the eleventh year before

she departed from this life, she received a kind of prelude both to a most tranquil life and to a happy death. For, like the patriarchs Isaac and Jacob, she was bereft of the sight of both her eyes, and attained the radiance of heavenly light more perfectly than before. For it was not fitting that her mind, adorned within by a most radiant light, should in some way be darkened outwardly by the shadows of this light of ours. For who would doubt that the spiritual edge of the mind is blunted by the images of bodily things, which are known to flow into the mind from outside through the eyes? Blinded, then, outwardly, she was borne inwardly, with her whole mind, in the light. In this blindness the pious Lutgard lamented only this, that she would no longer see her spiritual friends in this life; but Christ in his goodness soon took from her this feeling of wonderful simplicity, and she prayed to see them only in the homeland. And in this chapter Brother Bernard added that, as he heard from her own lips, the Lord had answered her: "Accept patiently the blindness I have sent upon you, for I promise you that I will take you up from the body without Purgatory. And the friends you complain you will no longer see in this life I will keep for you to see in the eternal homeland."

At about the same time, though a little later, Jordan of blessed memory, Master of the Order of Preachers, who had long had the desire to visit the Holy Land, was returning by sea when, by the hidden judgement of God, he was drowned together with a very great multitude of people

and two brothers of the Order. At once a mighty column of light, kindled by God, shone out in the night for the space of five hours, from the highest summit of heaven down to the ship in which he lay drowned; and when the sacred body had been cast up on the shore, a lamp from heaven shone out above it three times, and the fourth time above his companion, Brother Gerald; and so the lamp, returning, was taken up into a cloud. The witnesses of these things were Catholic Christians, schismatic Greeks and Gentiles. One of our brethren described these things plainly, among others, in a sequence that tells of his deeds, saying:

He went to the Holy Land / to visit the brethren there; / but as he came back by sea, / sinking, he began to sing psalms / and to bless Christ, / and so he soon went up to heaven, / as the signs give us to believe. / At once there blazed forth / a mighty pillar of light, / which, as it flashed from heaven, / shone upon his most holy limbs; / and where his soul had passed / it willed all who saw to know. / In a thing most manifest, / when the holy body was cast ashore, / a lamp of heaven flashed out, / which, standing three times over the dead, / shone out a fourth time too / on him whom he had with him. / And so, returning swiftly, / caught up in a cloud, it was seen no more. / The body, wondrously fragrant, / is tended by the faithful. / By Greeks are given, as one, / by Latins and by Gentiles, / praises to Christ with weeping. / And so the truth, magnificently, / stands plain under three witnesses.

We heard these things from brethren of the Teutonic House, who were found worthy to see them with their own eyes. And we have also read these same things attested in a letter of the Prior of the Friars Preachers at Venice.

In that same year, then, on the Vigil of the Lord's Nativity, as Blessed Lutgard was praying from the first hour of the day until the sixth, and felt as it were darkness in her spirit, she began to grow so weary that she broke out in these words: "Lord, what is this that I feel? What is this that I suffer? Surely, if I had some friend in heaven or on earth to pray for me, I would not feel such hardness in my heart." As she was saying this with tears, behold, suddenly, before the eyes of her mind, there appeared a spirit so bright and so glorious that for the greatness of his brightness she did not recognise him. She said to him: "Who are you, my lord?" And he said: "I am Brother Jordan, once called Master of the Order of Friars Preachers. I have passed from this world to glory, and I shine, raised up among the choirs of the apostles and prophets; see, I have been sent to you to console you on this most welcome feast. And you, be secure now of your reward, for you are soon to be crowned by the Lord. And the psalm May God have mercy on us (Ps 67:2), with the collect of the Holy Spirit, which you promised, while I was living and at my request, to say for our Order, keep it faithfully until the end of your life." And when the pious Lutgard asked him about a certain brother of the Order, he answered: "For the obedience he showed me and the love he showed you, God

will soon do him good." Saying this he vanished, and left her in a consolation as great as any she had ever had before. Almost these same things, though in a different manner, the said venerable Father revealed after his death to a brother of the Order; and he showed, in an honourable guise, that he had been placed in heaven in the rank of the exalted prelates. Lutgard had loved this venerable man wonderfully in his lifetime, and he trusted her above all women, so much that he made her mother and nurse of the whole Order of Preachers; and indeed we have seen her devoted and attentive to the brethren above all other Orders; and so every day she rendered God diligent service for them especially.

When the second seven years, which she fasted on bread and vegetables only, had been completed, it was revealed to her again that she should undertake votive fasts a third time, through which God would avert the evil that she most surely feared was threatening the Church of Christ through a certain enemy. From that time, then, until the end of her life she kept up her fasts so continuously that she let not a single day pass without fasting, not even the most solemn day of Easter. She died, as we shall set out more fully later, in the seventh year of this salutary fast. Nor was it without the fruit of her fasting, as we now most surely hope. For she said to me, when I was gravely afraid of the danger I have mentioned — that is, in the year before she departed this life: "You may take comfort, dearest, I trust, regarding him who is called the hidden plotter against the

Church: either he will be humbled by the prayers of the faithful, or he will soon depart this life and leave the Church the peace he was thought to be throwing into confusion." We have not yet seen what she foretold, but we truly trust that it is about to be fulfilled. For of all the things she foretold would come to pass, we have not seen a single one fall to the ground and come to nothing, since they were the words of one who is most fully proved to have drawn them from the Spirit of God.

At about the same time that venerable James, worthy of God, formerly Bishop of Acre and then Cardinal of the Roman Curia, of whom we made mention above, passed from this world at Rome on the vigil of Saints Philip and James. On the fourth day after his death, then — that is, on the feast of the Cross — the pious Lutgard, knowing nothing of it (being, as she was, thirty days' journey from the place, in the region of Brabant), was rapt in ecstasy to heaven, and saw that in that very hour the soul of the said bishop was borne into paradise. The pious Lutgard's spirit, rejoicing with him in heaven, said to him: "O most reverend Father, I did not know you had died; but when did you leave the body?" And he said: "This is now the fourth day; for I have spent three nights and two days in Purgatory." At once she asked in wonder: "And why," she said, "did you not make it known to me, who was still alive, immediately after your death, so that your punishment might be loosed by the prayers of our sisters?" And he said: "The Lord did not wish you

to be saddened by my punishment, but rather, once my Purgatory was over, to be consoled by my deliverance and glorification. And you will soon follow me." When this had been said, the pious Lutgard came back to herself, and with the greatest jubilation announced to the sisters the day of his death, his Purgatory and his glorification. And in this the truth had two witnesses, for the Lord revealed to a brother of the house of the Preachers in Rome, where he was first buried, the same thing we have told of his Purgatory and glorification on the fourth day after his death. [Brother Bernard, for his part, learned from her own revelation that the same had happened to her with several of her close friends:] What could be more evident than this deed? What Jew, what Gentile, will be able by his unbelief to weaken a truth so evident? He had barely died in Rome, and on the fourth day she knew it in Brabant. Let that most vile detractor blush, who said and wrote that those who wrote down the fanciful visions of silly women ought to be regarded as profane. By this he meant to censure the said venerable James, who wrote in elegant style the most blessed life of the blessed woman Mary of Oignies.

In the fifth year before her death, on the third Sunday after the day of Pentecost, the Gospel A certain man gave a great supper (Lk 14:16) was being read in church; and, touched inwardly by the spirit of prophecy, she said to the Lady Sibylla of Gages, to whose care she had been entrusted in all things, as to a more lettered nun: "You

must know, dearest, that on that Sunday when this Gospel is read I shall be carried over, already dead, to the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9)." When she had said this, the Sibylla we have mentioned awaited that Sunday with the greatest expectation, as the coming day of the pious Lutgard's passing. But when that day had come with the turning of that year's season, and she was not seen to die, the said Sibylla, thinking the prophetic vision a fancy, forgot it for a time. But when the fifth year had come round to that same Sunday she had foretold, and the pious Lutgard's dead body lay on the bier, the Gospel we have mentioned was being read in church at the community's morning Mass. On hearing it, the memorable Sibylla remembered what we have told and was astounded; and to the wonder of all she made known how the pious Lutgard had foretold this five years before by the spirit of prophecy.

In the fourth year before her death the most cruel nation of the Tartars burst out of their homelands; they destroyed Greater Hungary in the East and Lesser Hungary in the West, and a very great part of Turkey and of Greece as well, namely Bulgaria and Rescia; they slew the most powerful Duke of Poland and laid waste land and people; and when they had already begun to invade part of Germany, namely Bohemia, there was the greatest fear throughout all France and Germany that they would invade and lay waste these lands as they had others. So Brother Bernard, a friar of the Order of Preachers and

penitentiary of the lord Pope, struck, no doubt, by the fearful rumour, came and asked the pious Lutgard to pray the Lord urgently to turn the scourge of the Tartars away from the borders of Germany. And she said: "It is not just now that I have begun to pray the Lord about this matter; I am already certain that the Tartars will not advance into these lands now." And he received this as if it had sounded from heaven by the voice of God.

About the same time the venerable Baldwin, called of Barbençon, Prior of Oignies, formerly chaplain at Aywières for many years, a most renowned preacher of the word of God, against the counsel of his friends involved himself, less than worthily, in temporal affairs. [Seized by a grave illness, on the day before he died he had the finger of Blessed Mary of Oignies brought to him, and in its presence he said: "O venerable Lady, while you were still living in the body, you promised to help me in the hour of death: help me now, then, O Lady, help me: now is the time." So Baldwin died there, and was buried there at Oignies with fitting veneration. Our Brother Bernard had been present at his funeral rites and obsequies, and as soon as the body was buried he came to Aywières; and on his very arrival, as soon as she had greeted him, the pious Lutgard said to him: "Is Dom Baldwin dead?" And he, amazed at so unexpected, so sudden a question, said: "He is dead, and already buried. What of it, then?" And she said to him: "See, just this moment my Lady Mary of Oignies appeared to me, saying: 'Rise,

rise, make haste, dearest, to pray the Lord, for in this hour the soul of our friend Dom Baldwin is being brought before the divine judgement, to render account to the Lord for what he did and what he left undone.'" See how truthful in your testimony, how faithful in your promise you have shown yourself, O venerable Mary, who, rather than any other mortal, chose to approach the pious Lutgard for the help of her prayers; so that, raised now to the joys of heaven, you might obtain for your dead friend the help of her whom, while still living in the body, you had declared most mighty in freeing souls from Purgatory. Blessed, then, be God in all things, who willed to make known the holiness and merits of his bride by so very evident a testimony]. See then, reader, with what severe judgement they must be examined who, according to Isaiah, beat the sword of the word of God into ploughshares of temporal labours (Isa 2:4), and, instead of lances of invective against sins, now hasten to reap the fruit of a passing peace so as to be free for pleasures.

II. THE MANNER SHE KEPT IN CONTEMPLATION. HER PREPARATION FOR THE DEATH SHE FOREKNEW. HER ILLNESS AND DEATH

Asked by a spiritual and special friend of hers how she was wont to see the face of Christ in contemplation, she answered: "In a moment," she said, "a splendour beyond all reckoning appears to me, and as in a flash of lightning I see the ineffable beauty of his glorification; and if it did not pass swiftly from the gaze of my contem-

plation, I could not bear it and go on living this present life. After this flash an intellectual splendour remains; and when in that very splendour I seek him whom I had seen in a flash, I do not find him." Note then, reader, that this is the same as what is said in the Song: My soul melted when my beloved spoke; I sought him and did not find him; I called and he did not answer me (Song 5:6). What is it for Christ to speak in the soul, but to set before her the riches of his goodness, wisdom and beauty? So that from these the soul may measure how good, how wise with a wisdom she can savour, and how adorned with virtues he must be who could win her love in everlasting charity. Hearing him, then, the soul melts in longing and strives to take hold of him whom she beholds; but because the time of perfect vision has not yet come, she suddenly loses him whom she had as though present, so that she may seek the more diligently the more ardently she loves, and the mind may be made the wider to possess the more often it is renewed to seek. She used to say, moreover, that the eyes of Christ flashed with so radiant a light that, if that light could be poured out over the splendours of the sun, it would darken the sun's rays as the sun does the stars, and infinitely more. And this is what was shown to a certain religious priest who desired to know what it meant to say: His eyes are more beautiful than wine (Gen 49:12): in the holy chalice, where he was celebrating the divine mysteries, the face of Christ was shown to him, and its eyes shone with such splendour of light

that they could have lit up the whole world, even set in darkness, more than a thousand suns. A certain preacher most experienced in the spiritual life, taught by that same Spirit of truth, said that he had never in his life known anyone like the pious Lutgard, passing so perfectly through faith into understanding and affection. And I too bear witness to it, so far as I can partly gather it from the Scriptures and from the account of certain spiritual persons, little man though I am, without experience of such light. [And indeed it could not easily be believed with what longings to see Christ she burned. I myself have sometimes seen her tears over this, so many that hardly anyone could bear them without tears; and it happened, two years before she departed from the world, that our Brother Bernard, coming to Aywières, found her already ill for a month and, through the sacrament of Unction, prepared as it were daily for her departure. For, out of her most ardent desire to see Christ, it had settled in her mind that she was then to pass to the Lord. The said brother, finding no sign of death in her, said to her, as she hung on so great a desire: "It does not seem to me, dearest, that you are passing from this world now." She, turning an anxious face on him, said: "Do not say so, dearest, for I long greatly to contemplate Christ the Lord with unveiled face." And he, smiling: "No, truly, dearest Mother, it will not be now." She, raising her eyes to heaven, said: "If it is not to be now, may his will be done tomorrow. Then I will rise from my bed and receive his body for my comfort."

One day, when the pious Lutgard's soul, inclined to devotion, was being joined more purely to Christ in contemplation, a voice came over her, in the hearing of a most devout nun, saying: My delight is to be with the children of men (Prov 8:31). What wonder is that? What is new in it? Augustine, the greatest of contemplatives, called the faithful and devout soul the paradise of paradises, and rightly: for in the creation of heaven and earth he spoke only a word, and they were made; but in the re-creation of the soul, fallen through Adam's sin, who could reckon how much labour Christ bore for thirty-three years, even to a shameful death? That it was true God and true man who bore these things I do not doubt; but how highly the one must be prized for whom he bore such and so great things, no one will ever be able fully to marvel — above all the one who, repaying him in turn as far as he can, does not cease to fill up in his flesh what is lacking to the passion of Christ (Col 1:24). That Lutgard did this in great measure no one doubts who knew her; no one questions it who reads these pages. In the light of all this, then, what could there have been in our times more delightful to Christ, the Son of God, than Lutgard? If there was, I do not know; God knows (2 Cor 12:2). One thing I know — I believed, and therefore I have spoken (Ps 116:10) — that I do not remember ever having read or heard of any woman like her.

A little more than a year before her death the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to her, applauding her with the face of one who rejoices with her, and

said: "The end of your labour is now at hand; I do not wish you to be separated from me any longer. I ask only three things of you this year. The first is that you give thanks for the benefits you have already received, and in this ask for the prayers of the blessed; the second is that you pour yourself out wholly in prayer before the Father for my sinners; the third is that you long, with open-mouthed desire, to come to me, without any other care." Consider, then, reader, how great was her merit before God, whose mind God occupied with only three cares at the time when the ancient serpent was to lie in wait for her heel (Gen 3:15).

In the Eastertide just before her death the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to her with his glorious Mother, in the greatest glory of brightness. And when the pious Lutgard (as almost always) was lamenting the exile of this present life and her longing for the homeland above, they said to her: "You need not, dearest, be wearied any further from this present time on: the remedy of everlasting peace is already being made ready for you, for your crowning; and we do not wish to wait for you any longer from now on." As soon as she received the Lord's revelation, the pious Lutgard foretold these things, with the greatest fear and exultation, to the often-mentioned Sibylla of Gages; for as she had no one dearer in all things, so she had no one more intimate. And rightly: for, by the instruction of the venerable James mentioned above, she was guided in all things

by the counsel of this same Sibylla, as the more lettered.

Fifteen days before her death the glorious Virgin Mary appeared to her, and the most blessed John the Baptist, whom she loved with a very special love; and they said to her: "Your consummation is now at hand; there remains for you the crown of righteousness (2 Tim 4:8). We do not want you to be here any longer, for all the citizens of heaven are waiting for you." The saints also appeared to her often that year in a great multitude, and foretold to her the departure she was soon to accomplish (Lk 9:31). Some of her special friends, too, who had already gone before, appeared to her, declaring that they rejoiced greatly that she would soon depart and be joined to them. When she had told these things to some of her friends, she was asked how she could tell the saints apart. And she said: "From Christ himself, the Saint of saints, there goes forth a splendour that shines into the soul, and in it I perfectly recognise each of the saints who appears to me." Note, then, reader, that I understand this splendour to be nothing other than the mirror of the Trinity, or of eternity. For, as the book of Wisdom says in its seventh chapter: She is the brightness of eternal light, and the spotless mirror of God's majesty, and the image of his goodness; and though she is one, she can do all things, and remaining in herself she renews all things, and through the nations she passes into holy souls, making them friends of God and prophets (Wis 7:26–27). So when the saints appeared to her, she earnestly

begged them to give thanks to God for her and for the benefits he had bestowed on her.

She had often rebuked the sisters, the nuns in the infirmary, for rendering to God the canonical Hours, divinely appointed, with too little care and too little attention. And when, half a year before her death, she did not see in the others a full amendment, such as befitted the reverence due to God, she said: "I know that after my death the hand of the Lord will punish this fault in the sisters; and then, mindful of my word and of the scourge, they will humbly amend, and the Lord will soon draw back the hand he had stretched out in punishment." With how truthful a spirit these things were prophesied, there is no one who doubts. For as soon as the pious Lutgard had died a blessed death, a grave pestilence at once broke out in the community of nuns, and within a very short space of time fourteen nuns of the most proven virtue died. For I came there at that time, and two sisters, sisters in spirit and in flesh, who passed away within a single moment, I buried in one grave after celebrating Mass for them. And soon after this, when the sick in the infirmary had most fully amended themselves in saying the Hours with care, the Lord mercifully withdrew his hand, as the pious Lutgard had foretold, and the pestilence at once ceased. I beg you, then, O ladies and sisters of Aywières, to observe the pious Lutgard in all her sayings that you are able to observe; cling to the footsteps of her example, and I hope that by her prayers you

will come to the palm; and take as an example in this what I now add.

One of her special friends, a man living in the world, had fallen into grave sin. He made his confession and did penance for the sin, but did not merit to feel in prayer any consolation of pardon. For this reason he was almost falling into the abyss of despair; but coming to the pious Lutgard as to his own mother, he complained to her in heavy grief of what he had done and of what he was suffering for his crime. She poured out prayer for the sinner once, a second time and a third, but received no answer from the Lord, as she usually did. And he felt himself no better in anything. Seeing this, the pious Lutgard wrestled with the Lord in prayer with a wonderful urgency of spirit. At last, when she could not prevail over the Lord, who in his anger held back his mercies (Ps 77:10), she said: "Either blot me out of the book of life, or forgive him this offence" (Ex 32:32). At once, at this cry, the Lord was moved to mercy and said: "See, I have forgiven him, because he trusted in you; and not to him alone, but to all who have hope in you and are loved by you, I will do good for your sake." At these words of God that man at once fully regained the hope of pardon, and by the Lord's favour came to a state more full of grace and more peaceful than before his fall.

Next, then, there follows a day which for her was a day of exultation and praise, but for us and for all who lived by the comfort of her patronage a day of mourning, a day of groaning and of grief: a day, I say, which I, the unhappiest

of all, could neither forestall by my own death, as I had often begged her, nor can follow, left behind more wretched than any orphan. The day came, then — the vigil, namely, of the octave of the Holy and Undivided Trinity — and she took to her bed with a fever, very grave but slow: she, the undivided worshipper of the Triune God. And as the illness grew heavier she was sorely tried. On the following Monday a lay brother of Affligem named William (for she especially loved the brethren of that monastery for their religious observance) went in to visit her, and among other things said: "Would that our lord abbot knew you are so gravely ill!" And she said: "Tomorrow that dearest one of mine will come and see me." At this he fell silent in wonder, thinking the answer past all expectation. And when morning came, as the said venerable abbot was passing within two miles of the place, knowing nothing at all of the pious Lutgard's illness, he said to those who were with him: "Let us go and see the Lady Lutgard, for it is a long time now since I last saw her." So he came to Aywières; and when he had gone in to her, she rejoiced with all her heart, raised herself from her bed and sat up; and holding his hand she said: "I am going now, dearest, and I leave nothing under heaven dearer than you; but know that I have been consoled by the Lord concerning you." When she had said this, the abbot, drawn away to other business, departed; and she remained in great eagerness of spirit until Thursday. On Thursday, then, when she heard the voice of the often-mentioned Sibylla of

Gages coming in, she said: "Sit here beside my heart: see, the cloister is full of the soldiery of the heavenly host; the souls of the blessed are here, and many of our sisters who have gone before us from this world." Saying this, she fell silent; and from then on, through the whole of Friday, she remained with a most gracious countenance, rapt in spirit in the contemplation of God alone. On Saturday, as the hour of death pressed upon her, she opened her eyes to heaven; and, fortified beforehand with the sanctifying sacraments, her happy soul, exulting, flies up to the free air, to the heights, into the midst of the maidens playing on timbrels, with the princes of the heavenly host mingled among the singers (Ps 68:26), in the year of the Lord's Incarnation one thousand two hundred and forty-six, in the month of June, on the sixteenth day before the Kalends of July, in the fourth indiction, in the sixty-fourth year of her age, towards evening, in the reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be honour and glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit through the deathless ages of ages. Amen.

And when the pious Lutgard breathed her last, some of the nuns, to whom this best of gifts was granted by God, were filled with such sweetness of spirit and such joy that they could not contain themselves for amazement, and indeed perceived perfectly that Jesus himself, the prince of our salvation, present in person amid the immense rejoicing of those on high, had called her soul forth to the delights of paradise. It is proper, moreover, to the nature of the dying that in

death they grow dark with a livid pallor; but the pious Lutgard, in sign of her virginal innocence, showed in death a whiteness in her face with the sheen of the lily. As the hour of death drew near, she opened to heaven (as has been said) her eyes, long closed before, and they could not be closed again afterwards, in death or after death; for the very bearing of the eyes showed the way by which her spirit had passed. The skin of her whole body was found by those who handled it to be so soft that under the touching hand it was fully believed to be fine linen, as white as it was smooth; no wonder, for this simple dove without gall had eyes washed with the milk of purity, she who gazed, sitting beside the fullest streams (Song 5:12).

III. HER BURIAL. MIRACLES

So when the lifeless sacred body was being washed, a certain sister who had wholly lost the use of her hand for many years touched the body with that useless hand during the washing, by chance and not on purpose, and was suddenly restored to health, to the full use of the hand for every task. See how suddenly, how plainly, as we said above, the prophetic word of the venerable Mary of Oignies was fulfilled, when, on her deathbed, she foretold of the pious Lutgard: "She works spiritual miracles now in life; bodily ones she will work after death." It was fitting indeed — truly most fitting — that the God whom the pious Lutgard proclaimed by her life to be wonderful in

his saints (Ps 68:36) should show her, too, to be wonderful by evident signs even after death.

Many years before her death I had earnestly begged several nuns and lay brothers that, if it should happen — as, alas, it did happen — that I was not present at the death of the pious Mother Lutgard, they would cut off her hand and keep it for me, for the sake of her sacred memory; and for this I had obtained the permission of the venerable Hawide, abbess of that same place. But it is the nature of women to be unable to keep hidden what ought to be wholly hidden, according to that common proverb:

Keep silent, woman, to be sure — if any woman can;

and so the nuns told the pious Lutgard what I had arranged about cutting off her hand. Not long afterwards, when I had come to Aywières and begun to talk with her, she looked at me with a serious face and said: "I have heard, dearest son, that you are already arranging to cut off my hand after my death; and I wonder very much what you mean to do with my hand." I, then, covered with blushes, said: "I believe that your hand will come to me for the good of my soul and body, if I obtain it, as I intend." Then she, smiling with her face serene, as it always was, and laying the little finger of her right hand on the sill of the window at which we were talking, said: "It will be quite enough for you if you can have this finger after my death." Then I, carried away now more boldly, said: "Nothing of your body, Mother, will be enough for me unless I have the hand or the

head, to comfort me then when I am bereft of you." After this we went on to other talk, I saying nothing of it to anyone, and neither weighing it nor heeding it. So when she had died, while her body, not yet carried into the church, was being kept in the infirmary, a certain Guy, a most devout young man, and another, his companion, both lay brothers, had in mind to cut off the pious Lutgard's hand; but since they did not dare to presume so far, they cut off that same finger of the right hand which she had said would be enough for me, and drew sixteen teeth from her mouth. When I learned of her death and heard that a finger had been cut off, without knowing which of the fingers it was, I said: "Now I shall see more clearly whether the pious Lutgard will be proved truly a prophetess, she who foretold many years ago that the little finger of her right hand would be enough for me." So I came to Aywières and found that very finger cut off, as she had foretold; and I thought anxiously that it was in every way enough for me, and that I would be happy if I could obtain it. Going to the abbess about it, I poured out humble prayers with tears; but to my great grief I soon found the abbess alone unmoved by any entreaty — not, I believe, without the disposition of heavenly counsel: for the Almighty was so ordering things as to prove that I should obtain her finger according to the pious Lutgard's promise, though an unknowing simplicity had refused it. I came to Aywières again a second time and, promising to write the pious Lutgard's Life, I received with immense joy of

heart the gift I had longed for above gold and silver. Nor let any envious person carp at me for this, or judge me worthy of blame, if I embrace with such love the finger of the pious Lutgard, who is not yet canonised: for the most blessed Natalia cut off the arm of the martyr Adrian as soon as he had been slain. The finger of the venerable Mary of Oignies, too, not yet canonised, cut off at her death, was worn for many years hung round his neck as a very great treasure by the former Bishop of Acre of pious memory, afterwards Cardinal of the Roman Curia, who gave it to Pope Gregory IX of solemn memory to wear against the spirit of blasphemy by which he was cruelly tempted. Of Blessed Elizabeth, too, Landgravine of Thuringia, who died lately in our own time, the thumb was cut off at once together with the forefinger. Since, then, this has gone before with such authority in Saint Natalia, in that memorable man Cardinal James, in Gregory, pontiff of the city of Rome, and in many others worthy of belief, no one will judge it a foolish and impious deed in me, unless he is plainly foolish and impious himself.

After this, as her sacred body lay on the bier awaiting burial, the question was raised where such great and solemn relics should be laid to rest. And by divine ordinance it happened that the venerable Abbot of Aulne, by the Order's rule the father and visitor of that monastery, had been there for three days before the pious Lutgard's burial, waiting above all for her passing. When, then, the question was raised where so very precious a treasure should fittingly be entombed,

the abbot answered: "And where," he said, "but in the church, where it may be fittingly visited by all?" Truly he answered in every respect both wisely and worthily, in accordance with what she herself had foretold in her lifetime. For when the nuns at Aywières who were closest to her had asked her in her lifetime what they should do when she was dead, deprived as they would be of the great help of her prayers, she answered: "Take refuge at my tomb; there I will be with you dead, as I was living." How truly, and by what a prophetic spirit, she foretold this, I am sure is unknown to no one who has called on her help with a faithful heart. And where should this more fittingly be done than in the place set apart where she was wont to cleave to God in prayer and contemplation? The abbot's word, then, won the consent of all, and she is buried on the right side of the choir, beside the wall where she used to pray, in a solemn and honourable place. And the said Sibylla of Gages, putting it into verse after the manner of an epitaph, said:

Lutgard shone forth; she led a life without fault; / she dwells with Christ, she whom this stone now covers. / Hungering and thirsting for the things of heaven, she mourned; / now pure day, the Bridegroom's face, has shone on her. / She was the mirror of life, the flower of the cloister, the jewel of her sisters; / in her shone piety, compassion, and the glory of good ways.

Not long after she was buried, she appeared to a certain Elizabeth of Wans, a nun at Aywières, who had formerly been abbess at Saint-Dizier in

Champagne, in France. As she appeared in great glory, Elizabeth asked her: "O sweetest Lady, did you endure Purgatory for any space of time?" And she said: "Not only did I pass to rest without Purgatory, but as I passed by Purgatory I had compassion on those afflicted there and blessed them; and many souls, released from their pains by God's kindness, I brought with me to the delights of paradise." While she was saying this, it seemed to the said Elizabeth that the pious Lutgard said to a young nun named Mechtild, who was still living: "Follow me." Understanding by this that the young girl would follow her through death, Elizabeth offered herself to follow too, saying: "Let me also follow you, sweetest Mother." And the pious Lutgard said: "You cannot follow me now, but afterwards, daughter, you will follow me, your mother" (Jn 13:36). This vision had its effect at once: for the young girl whom the pious Lutgard had invited to follow her died within nine days; but Elizabeth, who offered herself to follow and was not granted to do so, survived.

Moreover, when, according to the pious Lutgard's prophecy, a dreadful plague of death was raging among the nuns of Aywières, one of the nuns saw in a vision many people insolently bursting into the church of the monastery. And when no one had been able to restrain them from their insolence, she saw the pious Lutgard rise from her tomb and drive them all out of the church with the greatest force. At once the blessed vision attains its effect, and the

monastery of Aywières is set free from the insolence of the pestilent contagion.

Each of the nuns hastily carried off whatever they could get of her girdles, wimples, veils and other things, as relics — and truly very great relics. A most noble girl, Beatrice of Roania, a nun, who with her patrimony had most generously raised the monastery of Aywières out of poverty, had on her neck an anthrax, which the physicians call a carbuncle; she put the pious Lutgard's head-veil around her neck, and the perniciously swelling inflammation visibly fled at once. Justly indeed, O pious Lutgard, and worthily in every way you did this, that she whose temporal goods you received in this life should reap your spiritual goods after your death.

Dom Alard, for many years chaplain there, was in great distress with the pain of a swollen thumb; binding relics of the pious Lutgard to the swollen thumb, he soon felt plainly the relief of both pain and swelling.

Oda, subprioress of Aywières, suffering grievously from a swollen hand, bound relics of the pious Lutgard around it and at once felt the remedy of most perfect health.

A nun of the same name, a kinswoman of mine, born in the town of Braine-le-Comte, could not bear the smell of lilies at all because of a weakness of the head by which she had long been troubled; and when lilies were placed at the pious Lutgard's tomb, she shuddered at the very sight; but when she had put just her head in at the door to try whether she could enter, and

noticed no discomfort, she soon went in more confidently, stayed there, approached the tomb, put the lilies to her nostrils, and felt no pain in her head at all. The same nun, prostrating herself one night in the dark at the pious Lutgard's tomb to pray, struck her eye on the sharp iron spike of a candlestick, and at once put her hand over the eye to hold in its ball, which seemed torn from its place, lest it fall out altogether. Overwhelmed by unbearable pain, she said: "What is this that has happened to me, O holy mother Lutgard? Falling down in veneration of you, I have lost my eye, which you should have guarded; and I have brought away harm from the place where I was awaiting a remedy." Saying this, she rose, and within the brief space of a single hour she was fully restored to health, and suffered no weakness or pain.

Mary of Andenne, a nun of Aywières, was tormented by so grievous a pain in the head that she could not rest any limb of her body even for a moment, and rolled about on the ground in her distress; to the wonder of all, who thought she was suddenly losing her mind, she was at once so visibly cured by the pious Lutgard's veil that no pain at all remained in her.

A certain noble lady had laboured very long and very dangerously in childbirth; a girdle made of horsehair, which the pious Lutgard used to wear next to her flesh to mortify her body, was brought, and she laid it on her womb; and to the amazement of all she was delivered without any pain at all, to her own safety and her child's. This

same thing has been proved effective in various places and in various persons.