

Gertruidenberg.

St. Gertrude's delight.

Many years ago there lived in the Netherlands, a young maiden endowed with rare beauty, and, at that time very seldom, full of innocence and piety. A rich proud knight became unknown to the lovely Gertrude, violently enamoured of her, and only first could she convince herself by his zealous wooing, of the deep impression she had made on him, and how strong was his passion. But her serious thoughts did not think of the delights of love, also not for family happiness, and the joys of a worldly quiet life but from earliest youth had the most longing wish, that she might be allowed to pass her days in retirement, in the cloister dedicated to the Holy John. Only a pure heart free from all human weakness, could in early youth, have formed such a resolution; her breast free from every passion, entertained one only inclination, the innocent and humane of charity, and her only grief was, that with her poverty, she could not satisfy this desire. The knights wooing therefore was without result. But allowing him to see and friendly converse with her, his passion was inflamed for the rare, most lovely, blooming maiden, and as if entangled by magical bonds,

he was involuntarily devoted to the object of all his thoughts and the torments of his love.

He was allowed to be her companion, when she visited the huts of poverty in order to satisfy charitable intentions, or to console, where she could not help. He was often witness of her sorrow and her tears, when she was only able to give consolation and hopes; therefore he once ventured, to offer her his well provided purse, which she joyfully and hastily accepted. Now there was no end to these charities, also the knight was not tired of giving. But Gertrude really entered the convent in her 18th year, however much the knight tried to hinder it, and passed a pious still life, divided between prayer and charitable actions. This inclination she was able to satisfy as her admirer sent means to the convent daily for her pious object. Years passed but not the knight's violent love. Property and estates had been sacrificed to gratify this alms-giving, and with deep affliction, he saw the time approach when it would not more be possible, by bringing his gifts to win a sweet grateful smile. In giving the last, he took leave of Gertrude, for a journey as he said, but indeed with the firm resolution, to procure money and property, in some manner or the other. He wandered about the country by night, by untrodden ways, through thorns and moors, full of all sorts of gloomy intentions.

There advanced to him, at midnight, from a thicket, a man of uncomfortable, strange manner, who addressed him in a disagreeable, hoarse voice: „What do you want, knight, that you wander through the forest, at such an inopportune time? Confide it to me, who already assisted many with good advice, and still more by deed. Do you want gold? speak one word and I shall help you, as soon as we agree; as much as it may be, I am master of great treasures. As much as you may use in 7 years I will grant you and your chest shall never be empty. For this I condition a trifle, for such help is worth the trouble. Here I have a parchment, on which a contract is drawn; you can read it by that bog-light. According to this contract you resign yourself to me after 7 long years; however you must, only for form's sake, sign it with your blood; a drop is enough. If agreeable to you we will now arrange all, and to-day in 7 years, you will be here again.“

The deluded, dazzled knight consented and signed. Wildly he hurried from the place, and arrived at home, he found sufficient gold in his chest. Continually he employed his gold for the convent; yet hungered with all his riches, as if there was no other happiness and joy in the world, that to satisfy Gertrude's wishes and receive her thanks.

Meanwhile the 7 years passed and the knight

saw, with anxiety tormenting the day approach which was to be his last, and for the last time see his adored Gertrude. Despairingly he would begin his terrible ride to the thicket, in taking leave of Gertrude under the pretence of a journey, and then go to Hell. Then she begged him to drink under the protection of her patroness St. Johanna, to her felicity and pious memory, as protection against every danger. He took the drink, and as he emptied the beaker, it seemed to him as if he had never enjoyed such a fortifying and exhilarating refreshment. But after taking an affectionate farewell, and in riding to the appointed place, he was filled with gloomy thoughts, and trembling he arrived at the spot. There stood already the frightful unknown waiting for him; but as soon as he saw the knight, he sprang away terrified, raised a fearful howl, and cried, in tearing the contract: „Woe to me, I have no power over you, for behind you, on your horse is riding St. Gertrude, whose felicity you last drunk.“ With these words the Evil-one disappeared, and a pale brimstone vapour filled the air. The knight was released, Gertrude's charity had cured him; but in his habitation he found a great treasure, which in accordance with Gertrude's will, he employed on a charitable object; and in order to be continually worthy of the favour of Heaven, he devoted the rest of his days to the service of God and retired to a cloister.
