

Florence in 1723, in 2 vols. folio, at the expense of Mr. Thomas Coke, afterwards Earl of Leicester.

## AUGUST II.

### SAINT STEPHEN, POPE AND MARTYR.

See the Pontificals, and the works of St. Cyprian, &c.; also Tillemont. t. 11; Orsi, t. 3, b. 7.

A. D. 257.

ST STEPHEN was by birth a Roman, and being promoted to holy orders, was made archdeacon of that church under the holy popes and martyrs St. Cornelius and St. Lucius. The latter going to martyrdom recommended him to his clergy for his successor. He was accordingly chosen pope on the 3d of May, 253, and sat four years, two months, and twenty-one days. Soon after his election, he was called to put a stop to the havoc which certain wolves, under the name and habit of pastors, threatened to make in the churches of Gaul and Spain. Marcian, bishop of Arles (in which see he seems to have succeeded St. Regulus, immediate successor of St. Trophimus), embraced the error of Novatian, and, upon the inhuman maxim of that murderer of souls, refused the communion, that is, absolution, to many penitents even in the article of death. Faustinus, bishop of Lyons, and other Gaulish prelates, sent informations and complaints against him to St. Stephen and St. Cyprian: to the first, on account of the superior authority and jurisdiction of his see; to the other, on account of the great reputation of his sanctity, eloquence, and remarkable zeal against the Novatians. St. Cyprian having no jurisdiction over Arles, could do no more than join the Gaulish Catholics in stirring up the zeal of St. Stephen to exert his authority, and not suffer an obstinate heretic to disturb the peace of those churches to the destruction of souls. This he did by a letter to St. Stephen, in which he says, (1) "It is necessary that you

(1) S. Cypr. ep. 67. Pam. 68. Fello. See Ganpred's *Histoire de Provence*. *Gallia Christ. Nov.* t. 1, p. 552. *Hist. Littér. de la Fr.* t. 1, p. 306. Longueval *Hist. de l'Egl. Gallicane*. Dupin de *Antiqu. Eccl. Discipl.*

despatch away ample letters to our fellow-bishops in Gaul, that they no longer suffer the obstinate Marcian to insult our college. Write to that province, and to the people of Arles, that Marcian being excommunicated, a successor may be provided for his see. Acquaint us, if you please, who is made bishop of Arles in the room of Marcian, that we may know to whom we are to send letters of communion, and to direct our brethren." Though the letters of St. Stephen on this head have not reached us, we cannot doubt but by his order every thing here mentioned was carried into execution; for, in the ancient list of the bishops of Arles published by Mabillon, the name of Marcian does not occur.

An affair of no less consequence happened in Spain. Basilides, bishop of Merida, and Martialis, bishop of Leon and Astorga, had fallen into the crime of the Libellatici, that is, to save their lives in the persecution had purchased for money libels of safety from the persecutors as if they had sacrificed to idols. For this and other notorious crimes Martialis was deposed in a synod, and Basilides was so intimidated that he voluntarily resigned his see. Sabinus was placed in that of Basilides, and Felix in that of Martialis. Basilides soon after repented of what he had done, went to Rome, and imposing upon St. Stephen, was admitted by him to communion as a colleague in the episcopal Order; which was the more easy as no sentence of deposition had passed in his case. Returning into Spain with letters of the pope in his favour, he was received in the same rank by some of the bishops; and Martialis, encouraged by his example, presumed to claim the same privilege. The Spanish bishops consulted St. Cyprian what they ought to do with regard to the two delinquents, and that learned prelate answered: that persons notoriously guilty of such crimes were, by the canons, utterly disqualified for presiding in the Church of Christ, and offering sacrifices to God; that the election and ordination of their two successors having been regular and valid, they could not be rescinded or made null; and lastly, that the pope's letters were obreptitious, and obtained by fraud and a suppression of the truth, consequently were null. "Basilides," says he, "going to Rome, there imposed upon our colleague Stephen, living at a distance and ignorant of the

truth that was concealed from him. All this only tends to accumulate the crimes of Basilides, rather than to abolish the remembrance of them; since, to his former account, hereby is added the guilt of endeavouring to circumvent the pastors of the Church.(1) He lays the blame not on him who had been imposed upon, but Basilides, who fraudulently gained "access to him." We know no more of this affair; but cannot doubt that the pope (whose jurisdiction none of the parties disclaimed) was better informed, and the proceedings of the Spanish bishops confirmed.

The controversy concerning the rebaptisation of heretics gave St. Stephen much more trouble. It was the constant doctrine of the Catholic Church, that baptism given in the evangelical words, that is, in the name of the three persons of the Holy Trinity, is valid, though it be conferred by a heretic. This was the practice even of the African Church till Agrippinus, bishop of Carthage, in the close of the second century, changed it, fifty years before St. Cyprian, as St. Austin and Vincent of Lerins testify; and St. Cyprian himself only appeals to a council held by Agrippinus for the origin of his pretended tradition.(2) St. Cyprian, in three African councils, decreed, according to this principle, that baptism given by a heretic is always null and invalid; which decision he founds in this false principle, that no one can receive the Holy Ghost by the hands of one who does not himself possess him in his soul. Which false reasoning would equally prove that no one in mortal sin can validly administer any sacrament; but Christ is the principal, though invisible minister in the administration of the sacraments; and though both faith and the state of grace be required in him who confers any sacrament, not to incur the guilt of sacrilege; yet neither is required for the validity. St. Cyprian sums up all the arguments which he thought might serve his purpose in his letter to Jubaianus, written in 256. Many bishops of Cilicia, Cappadocia, and Phrygia, having at their head Firmilian, the learned bishop of Cæsarea, and Helenus of Tarsus, fell in with the Africans, and maintained the

(1) S. Cyr. ep. 68, Pam. 67. Fello. See Cenni, Antiqu. Eccl. Hisp. and Dupin, de Antiq. Eccl. Discipl.

(2) S. Cyper. ep. 73, ad Jubaian. n. 3.

same error. All the partisans of this practice falsely imagined it to be a point, not of faith, which is every where invariable, but of mere discipline, in which every church might be allowed to follow its own rule or law.\* St. Cyprian and Firmilian carried on the dispute with too great warmth, the latter especially, who spoke of St. Stephen in an unbecoming manner. If such great and holy men could be betrayed into anger, and biassed by prepossession, how much ought we sinners to watch over our hearts against passion, and mistrust our own judgment! The respect which is due to their name and virtue obliges us to draw a veil over this fault, as St. Austin often puts us in mind, who, speaking of Firmilian, says: "I will not touch upon what he let fall in his anger against Stephen."† The pope, who saw the danger which threatened the Church

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\* Some moderns have made the numbers of those who were engaged in this error with St. Cyprian much greater than the truth. It is false that the Asiatics generally favoured it, which can only be true of some bishops of Cappadocia, and certain neighbouring countries. These are grossly mistaken who reckoned Dionysius of Alexandria, with the Egyptian bishops, among the abettors of this error. Had he been on St. Cyprian's side, he could never have been a mediator between the two parties. St. Austin knew their number when he said: "Are we to believe fifty Orientals, and seventy or a few more Africans, against so many thousands?" See Petitdidier in his Remarks upon Du Pin's Bibliothèque; Tillem. in S. Cypr. § 44.

† "Quæ in Stephanum irritatus effudit, retractare nolo. S. Aug. l. 5, de Bapt. c. 25, p. 158. It is necessary here to make two remarks, First, that none of those who maintained what they called a point of discipline against St. Stephen, ever called in question the supremacy of the apostolic see of Rome, which St. Cyprian strongly asserts in many places of his works; and Firmilian, who in the heat of the contest was inclined to blame St. Stephen's words, calls it boasting that he should maintain the pre-eminence of his see, yet does not deny it, which in the temper in which he wrote he would most certainly have done, if he could have found the least colour for it. "Stephen boasts," says he, "of the rank and eminence of his see, and alleges his succession to the chair of Peter, upon whom the foundations of the church were laid. (Firmil. ep. ad Cypr. inter Cyprianicos, 73.) A second remark is, that the pope never proceeded to pronounce any excommunication or other sentence against these bishops, or they would never have stood out against a censure in which the whole church acquiesced. Nay, St. Austin was willing to persuade himself that they afterwards laid aside their prejudices, and embraced the truth. He often repeats that their eminent labours and charity atoned for this fault. Writing of St. Cyprian, he says: "His charity covered that spot in the whiteness of his holy soul." (l. 1, de bapt. c. 19). And again: "That fault was compensated by the abundance of his charity, and was purged by the axe of his passion." Ib. c. 18.

under the colour of zeal for its purity and unity, and an aversion from heresy, opposed himself as a rampart for the house of God, declaring that no innovation is to be allowed, but that the tradition of the Church, derived from the apostles, is to be inviolably maintained. He even threatened to cut off the patrons of the novelty from the communion of the Church. But St. Dionysius of Alexandria interceded by letters, and procured a respite, as Eusebius mentions.(1)

St. Stephen suffered himself patiently to be traduced as a favourer of heresy in approving heretical baptism, being insensible to all personal injuries, not doubting but those great men, who, by a mistaken zeal, were led astray, would, when the heat of disputing should have subsided, calmly open their eyes to the truth. Thus by his zeal he preserved the integrity of faith, and by his toleration and forbearance saved many souls from the danger of shipwreck. "Stephen," says St. Austin,(2) "thought of excommunicating them; but being endued with the bowels of holy charity, he judged it better to abide in union. The peace of Christ overcame in their hearts."\* Of

(1) Hist. l. 7, c. 5.

(2) L. 5, de Bapt. c. 21.

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\* Nothing can be more unjust than with some Protestants to tax this good pope with pride, haughtiness, and obstinacy on this occasion, in which his meekness, charity, and zeal excited the admiration of the most illustrious fathers of the church.

It is a no less notorious slander of Blondel, Launoy, Du Pin, and Basnage, that St. Stephen fell into the opposite error to that which he condemned, and maintained that any baptism conferred by heretics is valid, even though administered by those who corrupted the form, and entirely omitted the invocation of the three persons of the Holy Trinity. But Eusebius, l. 7, c. 3; St. Austin in many places, as l. 5, de bapt. c. 23, l. 3, contr.; Crescon. c. 3, &c.; St. Jerom, Dial. contr. Lucif.; Vincent of Lerins, c. 9; Facundus Hermian. l. 10, c. 3, &c., unanimously aver, that St. Stephen maintained the apostolical tradition, and the doctrine of the church, which was afterwards solemnly defined and canonized by the great councils of Arles and Nice. It is objected, first, that the bishop Jubaianus, an advocate with St. Cyprian for the rebaptization of heretics, found a letter, in which the baptism of the Marcionites was allowed valid, which the council of Constantinople rejected; because in it the essential form was corrupted. But those heretics might have used at first a valid form, as they often changed both their discipline and their doctrine. Neither does it appear probable that this letter could have been anonymous, had it been written by St. Stephen.

It is urged, secondly, by Du Pin, &c., that St. Cyprian, ep. 73 and 74, understood St. Stephen's decree of the baptism of all manner of heretics, "from whatever heresy they came." But no man's opinion can be

this contest, the judicious Vincent of Lerins(1) gives the following account: "When all cried out against the novelty, and the priests every where opposed it in proportion to every one's zeal, then Pope Stephen, of blessed memory, bishop of the apostolic see, stood up, with his other colleagues against it, but he in a signal manner above the rest, thinking it fitting, I believe, that he should go beyond them as much by the ardour of his faith as he was raised above them by the authority of his see. In his letter to the church of Africa he thus decrees: 'Let no innovation be introduced; but let that be observed which is handed down to us by tradition.' The prudent and holy man understood that the rule of piety admits nothing new, but that

(1) Common. c. 9. See Ant. Sandini's Diss. 7, ad Histor. Pontif. Rom. p. 61; Alex. Herdt's *Discordia concors inter Steph. et Cypr.*

learned from an adversary, who often imputes to him consequences which he condemns. St. Stephen's decree contained only this short determination: "Let nothing be changed, but let the ancient tradition be maintained," as Vincent of Lerins gives it. Nor can he be understood of those heresies which do not observe the essential form; for Firmilian himself sufficiently clears this difficulty by saying that Stephen admitted the baptism of heretics "in which the Trinity of names of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost was invoked," ep. 75, n. 7. He subjoins the following example:—He says that twenty years before this, a certain woman started up in Africa, who, in fits of enthusiasm, pretended to the gift of prophecy, and was so far under the power of the devil that she deceived the brethren for a great while, performed many strange and wonderful feats, and at last undertook to bring on an earthquake; for the devil being a subtle and cunning spirit, says Firmilian, he may sometimes foresee that there will be an earthquake, and then pretend that he will bring it about. He also made this woman go barefoot over frozen snow, in a very cold winter, without receiving any harm. But one of our exorcists, says this author, a man of an approved character, by the importunity of several of the brethren, inspired with the grace of God, withstood the wicked spirit, and proved him to be what he was. This woman had presumed to celebrate the eucharist, and thus to offer sacrifice to the Lord in the usual mysterious rite; she likewise baptized several persons, using the known and proper interrogatories. "Will Stephen approve this baptism," says Firmilian, "because there was no defect as to the article of the Trinity? *Symbolum Trinitatis*. Can the patrons of heretical baptisms proceed so far as to affirm, that the devil himself may confer the grace of baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost?" To this, St. Stephen would have answered, that the woman could not validly confer baptism, if by the influence of the devil or otherwise she was out of her senses; much less could the devil be the minister of a sacrament. This passage in an adversary is a convincing proof that St. Stephen spoke of baptism in which every thing which is required in point of form is observed; and in particular as to the invocation of the Trinity.

all things are to be delivered down to our posterity with the same fidelity with which they were received; and that it is our duty to follow religion, and not make religion follow us; for the proper characteristic of a modest and sober Christian is, not to impose his own conceits upon posterity, but to make his own imaginations bend to the wisdom of those that went before him. What then was the issue of this grand affair, but that which is usual?—antiquity kept possession, and novelty was exploded."

St. Stephen died on the 2nd of August, 257, and was buried in the cemetery of Calixtus. He is styled a martyr in the Sacramentary of St. Gregory the Great, and in the ancient Martyrologies which bear the name of St. Jerom. The persecution of Valerian was raised in the year 257, and in it St. Stephen could not fail to be sought out as the principal victim. The acts of his martyrdom deserve some regard, as Tillemont observes. They are esteemed genuine by Baronius and Berti.(1) This latter shows the exceptions made to their authority by Basnage, to be altogether founded in mistakes. These acts relate that the saint was beheaded by the pursuivants whilst he was sitting in his pontifical chair, which was buried with his body, and is still shown as stained with his blood. The relics were translated to Pisa in 1682, and are there venerated in the great church which bears his name. But his head is kept with great respect at Cologne.

Not only bishops, but all superiors, are Christ's vicegerents, and are bound to be mindful of their charge, for which they will be demanded a rigorous account. How many such live as if they had only their own souls to take care of; yet think themselves good Christians? Few have the light, the courage, the charity, and the zeal necessary for such a charge; and many through sloth, self-love, or a passion for pleasure, company, vanity, and the world, neglect various obligations of their state. It will be a false plea for such to allege at the last day, that they have kept well their own vineyard, whilst they have suffered ~~other~~ under their care to be overgrown with briars and weeds.

(1) Laur. Berti, Diss. Hist. t. 2, p. 170.