

# LIVES

OF THE

## FATHERS, MARTYRS, AND OTHER PRINCIPAL SAINTS.

AUGUST I.

ST. PETER AD VINCULA,

OR ST. PETER'S CHAINS.

From Acts xii; Tillemont, t. 1, pp. 185, 596; Orsi, l. 1, n. 37, p. 58.  
See Jos. Assem. in Cal. Univ. ad 16 Jan. t. 6, p. 84, and Monsacratì,  
Diss. de Catenis S. Petri ad Bend. XIV. 1750.

THE chains and prisons of the saints were the subject of their greatest joy and glory, and the source of the highest graces and crowns. God honoured them in the prince of the apostles with wonderful miracles. It has been related in the life of St. James the Great, that Herod Agrippa, king of the Jews, having put to death that apostle in the year 44, in order to gain the affection and applause of his people, by an action still more agreeable to them, caused St. Peter, the prince of the sacred college, to be cast into prison. It was his intention to put him publicly to death after Easter. The whole church at Jerusalem put up its prayers and cries to God, without ceasing, for the deliverance of the chief pastor of his whole flock, and God favourably heard them. The king took all precautions possible to prevent the escape of his prisoner, as he and the other apostles had formerly been miraculously delivered out of prison by an angel<sup>(1)</sup> St. Peter himself remained, no doubt, in perfect joy, committing himself with entire confidence and submission to the divine disposal. In this tranquillity of mind and entire resignation of himself, he lay fast asleep, on the very night before the day intended for his execution, when it pleased God

to deliver him out of the hands of his enemies. He was guarded by sixteen soldiers, four of whom always kept sentry in their turns; two in the same dungeon with him, and two at the gate. He was fastened to the ground by two chains, and slept between the two soldiers. In the middle of the night a bright light shone in the prison, and an angel appeared near him, and striking him on the side, awaked him out of his sleep, and bade him instantly arise, gird his coat about him, put on his sandals and his cloak, and follow him. The apostle did so, for the chains had dropped off from his hands. Following his guide, he passed after him through the first and second ward or watch, and through the iron gate which led into the city, which opened to them of its own accord. The angel conducted him through one street; then, suddenly disappearing, left him to seek some asylum. Till then the apostle, in his surprise, doubted whether the whole was not a mere vision; but, upon the angel's vanishing, he acknowledged his miraculous deliverance, and blessed the author of it. He went directly to the house of Mary, the mother of John, surnamed Mark, where several disciples were met together and were sending up their prayers to heaven for his deliverance. As he stood knocking without, a young woman going to the door and perceiving it was his voice, ran in and acquainted the company that Peter was at the door; and when she persisted in the thing, they concluded rather it must be his guardian angel, sent by God upon some extraordinary account: until, being let in, he related to them the whole manner of his miraculous escape; and having enjoined them to give notice thereof to St. James and the rest of the brethren, he withdrew to a place of more retirement and security, carrying, wherever he went, the heavenly blessing and life. The next day, when he was not to be found, Agrippa commanded the keepers to be put to death, as supposing them accessory to Peter's escape. This wonderful deliverance is a proof, that though God sometimes allows the wicked to execute their designs, yet when it pleases him, he restrains them, and sets bounds to their wickedness, and that he always watches over his faithful servants. We likewise see, by this event, the power and efficacy of public prayer. The Jewish passover that year fell on the 1st of April; but the Greek Menæa commemorates this miracle

and St. Peter's chain on the 16th of January, in memory of the dedication of a church called St. Peter's chain, in which one of his chains was kept. The Western Church has long kept this festival on the 1st of August, on account of a dedication made on this day of the famous old church of this title in Rome, which has been a place of great devotion.\* It gives a title to a cardinal. Mention is made of priests of this church in the fifth century.†

Such was the veneration of the faithful for the relics of the apostles SS. Peter and Paul, deposited at Rome, that the popes themselves durst not presume to touch, separate, or give away part of the precious remains of their bodies. This St. Gregory the Great often testifies in his epistles.(1) Pope Hormisdas assures us of the same in his letter to Justinian, nephew to the Emperor Justin I., and afterwards his successor, who had begged a small particle of them for a church he was building to their honour at Constantinople.(2) Both these popes testify that it was the custom for the popes only to put down a linen cloth, called *Brandeum*, upon the tomb of the apostles, which being thus blessed was sent and received with the respect due to a relic; and God often worked miracles by these *Brandeums*. Justinian was satisfied with such a relic, and with the reasons of respect for the sacred bodies alleged by the pope. His ambassadors at the same time begged and obtained a small portion of St. Peter's chains, which were kept at Rome with great devotion in the ancient church which is known by that title, at least ever since the fifth century. The popes were accustomed to send the filings of these chains as precious relics, to devout princes, and they were often instruments of miracles. The pope himself rasped off these filings, which he enclosed in a cross or in a golden key, as appears from St. Gregory,(3) who

(1) See Greg. M. l. 3, ep. 30, p. 567, &c.

(2) Conc. t. 4, p. 1515.

(3) L. 3, ep. 30; L. 5, ep. 6; L. 11, ep. 49; L. 6, ep. 23.

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\* The church of St. Peter in *Carcere* in Rome stands over the ancient Roman dungeon, called *Tulliano* from King Tullus Hostilius, who built it; and Mamertino, either from Ancus Martius who enlarged it, or from the neighbouring street Mamertino. St. Peter was prisoner here. It is a double frightful dark cave in a rock. See the history and description in *Venustis Rom. Antiq.* p. 58.

† See Florentinus, Not. in Martyr. S. Hieronymi.

says in his letter to King Childebert,(1) to whom he sent one of these keys, that many persons, out of devotion, hung such keys about their necks as preservatives from dangers. St. Casarius says,(2) that the chains, with which this apostle was bound in his last imprisonment before his martyrdom, were preserved by the faithful, and honoured at Rome in his time. Arator, subdeacon of the church of Rome, who composed a poem on the Acts of the Apostles, in the reign of Justinian, says, that Rome was also enriched with one of the chains with which that apostle was bound by Agrippa at Jerusalem, and from which the angel delivered him. St. Chrysostom affirms the same, and expresses the most earnest desire to have been able to go so far to see and kiss that relic of this great apostle's glorious sufferings.(3) It is said, that Eudocia, the wife of Theodosius the Younger, in 439, brought from Jerusalem two chains with which St. Peter had been bound in that city, and having given one to a church in Constantinople, sent the other to Rome to her daughter Eudoxia, who was married to Valentinian III., and who is said to have built a church on the Esquiline hill, in which it was deposited.(4)

The iron chains of this apostle have been esteemed as more precious and valuable than gold, says St. Casarius.(5) Pagan Rome never derived so much honour from the spoils and trophies of a conquered world as Christian Rome receives from the corporeal remains of these two glorious apostles, before which the greatest emperors lay down their diadems, and prostrate themselves, as St. Chrysostom(6) and St. Austin(7) observe. Among other proofs of the veneration of the primitive Christians towards those sacred pledges, Orsi appeals(8) to the images of SS. Peter and Paul, which are found frequently carved in the ancient cemeteries of Rome, and on many sepulchral urns, which many antiquarians have shown to be more ancient than the persecution of Dioclesian. Eusebius (9) tells us, that he had seen the pictures of these two apostles, which

(1) L. 5, ep. 650.

(2) Serm. 203, in Append.; Op. S. Aug. n. 5.

(3) S. Chrys. hom. 8, in Ephes.

(4) See Baron. ad ann. 439.

(5) Loco cit.

(6) Ib.

(7) St. Aug. ep. 232, alias 42, ad Madaur.

(8) Orsi, l. 2, n. 24, p. 265.

(9) Eus. l. 7, hist. c. 18.

had been preserved down to his time. That of St. Paul agrees with the description given of him in the dialogue entitled *Philopatris*, written about the end of the first century, before Lucian, who was born under Trajan and flourished under Marcus Aurelius.\* It also agrees with that extant in the very ancient, though apocryphal acts of St. Thecla.(1)

The 1st day of August is called by us Lammas-day, softened from Loaf-mass; a mass of thanksgiving for the first fruits of the earth, or of the corn,† being anciently celebrated in England on this day.(2) It was kept with a solemn procession, and was also called the Guild of August. The solemn blessing of new grapes was performed both among the Greeks and Latins, in some places on the 1st, in others on the 6th day of August, and is expressly mentioned in ancient liturgical books, as Cardinal Bona and others take notice.‡

(1) Grabe, *Spicil. t. 1.*

(2) See Hearne on *Rob. of Glouc. t. 2, p. 679.*

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\* Lucian died above a hundred years after St. Paul, and cannot be the author of this Dialogue, as is demonstrated in the notes upon the new edition of Lucian's works, put out at Amsterdam in 1745, and in the learned dissertation of Gesner, surnamed the German Pliny. Not only the style of this dialogue differs entirely from Lucian's manner of writing, but this author tells us he had seen St. Paul, and had been baptized by him.

† In all ancient Saxon books it is called *Hlaf-mass*, that is, Loaf-mass, as may be seen in old Saxon MS. books in the Cottonian and other libraries. This name often occurs in the printed Saxon Chronicle, and is particularly described to be the feast of the first fruits of corn. *Ibid.* ad ann. 921. This etymology is clearly demonstrated by the learned Somner in his *Saxon Glossary*, v. *Hlaf*, and by Francis Junius in his accurate *Dictionarium Etymologicum Anglicanum*, published by Mr. Edmund Lye in 1743. See also Ham's *Resolves*, &c. It was formerly the custom for tenants who held lands of the cathedral of York, to pay on this day a live lamb to that church; but Bailey, Johnson, and others, who derive this name from that custom, or from a supposed offering or tithing of lambs at this time, never consulted the *Saxon Antiquities*, the true etymology of the word, or any competent vouchers.

‡ See Bona de *Rebus Liturgicis*: also for the Greeks, F. Goar's notes on the *Euchologium* and *Constantine Porphyrogenetta*, l. 1, de *Ceremoniis Aulæ Byzantinæ*, c. 78, p. 217, who describes the ceremonies with which the emperor and patriarch went before the vintage from the country palace of Hieria to a neighbouring vineyard with a great procession, where on a marble table, the patriarch blessed a basket of grapes, after which the emperor gave a grape to each patrician, nobleman, and officer among his attendants, &c.; for the Latins, see the notes of Dom Menard on the *Sacramentary of St. Gregory the Great*; and the comments of the Jesuit Azevedo, on an ancient missal of the Lateran basilic, published by him at Rome in 1754.

We owe to God, in a special manner, the first fruits of our lives, and of all our actions, in acknowledgment that he is our beginning and last end. Of this tribute he is extremely jealous, as he expressed in the old law by his rigorous precept of the sacrifice of first fruits. A Christian, to acquit himself of this duty, ought to begin every day, and every undertaking, by fervently renewing the consecration of himself and of all his actions to God, with an humble sacrifice of thanksgiving for his benefits, and an earnest petition of the divine blessing and grace to make a good use of the gifts of heaven.

### THE SEVEN MACHABEES, BROTHERS, WITH THEIR MOTHER, MM.

THE seven brothers, called Machabees, are holy Jewish martyrs who suffered death in the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, the impious king of Syria. The Jews returned from the Babylonish captivity in the first year of the reign of Cyrus,\* and were allowed to form themselves into a republic, to

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\* The ten tribes among the Jews, commonly called the kingdom of Israel, in punishment of their repeated infidelities and obstinate abuse of divine grace, deserved at length to be cast off by Almighty God. In the reign of Phacee, Theglathphalassar, king of Assyria, led away captives the tribes of Nephthali, Ruben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasses that bordered on Syria,\* and placed them in the country about Habor, La-hela, and the river Gozan, in Media.† Seventeen years after this expedition of Theglathphalassar against Phacee, his successor Salmanasar, in the year of the world 3283, before the Christian era 721, took the city of Samaria under Osee, the last king of Israel, and transplanted the residue of those ten tribes into the same country with the former.‡ This Calmet shows most probably to have been Colchis and its borders,§ and that some part afterwards were dispersed into Great Tartary, others into Mesopotamia, and some returned into Judæa after the Jews had rebuilt Jerusalem: for some remains of them are mentioned in all these places. But they no where formed a body politic, nor retained the distinction of their tribes, as some moderns have pretended.

The tribes of Juda and Benjamin, of which the kingdom of Juda consisted, were subdued by Nabuchodonosor, in the reign of Joakim, in the year of the world 3398, before the Christian era 606, the first of Nabuchodonosor, when he began to reign with his father Nabopolassar, who dying two years after, in the year of the world 3400, left to him the entire empire of Babylon. Upon the revolt of Joakim, Nabuchodonosor's general besieged Jerusalem a second time, in 3409, and Joakim being slain, his son Joachin or Jechonias succeeded in the throne; but Nabu-

\* 4 Kings xv. 29.

† 1 Par. v. 26.

‡ 4 Kings xvii. 6; xviii. 10. 11.

§ Dissert. sur le Pays où les 10 Tribus furent transportées.