

## FEBRUARY XIX.

## ST. BARBATUS, OR BARBAS, C.

## BISHOP OF BENEVENTO.

From his two authentic lives in Bollandus, t. 3. Febr. p. 139. See Ughelli, Italia Sacra, t. 8. p. 13.

A.D. 682.

ST. BARBATUS was born in the territory of Benevento, in Italy, towards the end of the pontificate of St. Gregory the Great, in the beginning of the seventh century. His parents gave him a Christian education, and Barbatus in his youth laid the foundation of that eminent sanctity, which recommends him to our veneration. Devout meditation on the holy scriptures was his chief entertainment; and the innocence, simplicity, and purity of his manners, and extraordinary progress in all virtues, qualified him for the service of the altar, to which he was assumed by taking holy orders as soon as the canons of the church would allow it. He was immediately employed by his bishop in preaching, for which he had an extraordinary talent; and, after some time, made curate of St. Basil's, in Morcona, a town near Benevento. His parishioners were steeled in their irregularities, and averse from whatever looked like establishing order and discipline amongst them. As they desired only to slumber on in their sins, they could not bear the remonstrances of their pastor, who endeavoured to awake them to a sense of their miseries, and to sincere repentance: they treated him as a disturber of their peace, and persecuted him with the utmost violence. Finding their malice conquered by his patience and humility, and his character shining still more bright, they had recourse to slanders, in which, such was their virulence and success, that he was obliged to withdraw his charitable endeavours amongst them. By these fiery trials, God purified his heart from all earthly attachments, and perfectly crucified it to the world. Barbatus returned to Benevento, where he was received with joy by those who were acquainted with his innocence and sanctity. The seed of Christianity had been first sown at Benevento by St. Potin, who is said to have been sent thither by St. Peter, and is looked upon as the first bishop of this see. We have no names of his successors till St. Januarius,

by whom this church was exceedingly increased, and who was honoured with the crown of martyrdom in 305. Totila, the Goth, laid the city of Benevento in ruins, in 545. The Lombards having possessed themselves of that country, repaired it, and King Autharis gave it to Zotion, a general among those invaders, with the title of a duchy, about the year 598, and his successors governed it, as sovereign dukes, for several ages. These Lombards were at that time chiefly Arians; but among them there remained many idolaters, and several at Benevento had embraced the Catholic faith, even before the death of St. Gregory the Great, with their duke Arichis, a warm friend of that holy pope. But when St. Barbatus entered upon his ministry in that city, the Christians themselves retained many idolatrous superstitions, which even their duke, or prince Romuald, authorized by his example, though son of Grimoald, king of the Lombards, who had edified all Italy by his conversion. They expressed a religious veneration to a golden viper, and prostrated themselves before it: they paid also a superstitious honour to a tree, on which they hung the skin of a wild beast, and these ceremonies were closed by public games, in which the skin served for a mark at which bowmen shot arrows over their shoulder. St. Barbatus preached zealously against these abuses, and laboured long to no purpose: yet desisted not, but joined his exhortations with fervent prayer and rigorous fasting, for the conversion of this unhappy people. At length he roused their attention by foretelling the distress of their city, and the calamities which it was to suffer from the army of the emperor Constans, who, landing soon after in Italy, laid siege to Benevento. In their extreme distress, and still more grievous alarms and fears, they listened to the holy preacher, and, entering into themselves, renounced their errors and idolatrous practices. Hereupon, St. Barbatus gave them the comfortable assurance that the siege should be raised, and the emperor worsted: which happened as he had foretold. Upon their repentance, the saint with his own hand cut down the tree, which was the object of their superstition, and afterwards melted down the golden viper which they adored, of which he made a chalice for the use of the altar. Ildebrand, bishop of Benevento, dying during the siege, after the public tranquillity was restored, St. Barbatus was consecrated bishop on the 10th of March, 663; for this see was only raised to the archiepiscopal dignity by Pope John XIII. about the year 965.

Barbatus, being invested with the episcopal character, pursued and completed the good work which he had so happily begun, and destroyed every trace or the least remain of superstition in the prince's closet, and in the whole state. In the year 680 he assisted in a council held by Pope Agatho at Rome, and the year following in the sixth general council held at Constantinople against the Monothelites. He did not long survive this great assembly, for he died on the 29th of February, 682, being about seventy years old, almost nineteen of which he had spent in the episcopal chair. He is named in the Roman Martyrology, and honoured at Benevento among the chief patrons of that city.

Many sinners are moved by alarming sensible dangers or calamities to enter into themselves, on whom the terrors of the divine judgment make very little impression. The reason can only be a supine neglect of serious reflection, and a habit of considering them only transiently, and as at a distance; for it is impossible for any one who believes these great truths, if he takes a serious review of them, and has them present to his mind, to remain insensible: transient glances effect not a change of heart. Amongst the pretended conversions which sickness daily produces, very few bear the character of sincerity, as appears by those who, after their recovery, live on in their former lukewarmness and disorders.\* St. Austin, in a sermon which he made upon the news, that Rome had been sacked by the barbarians, relates,<sup>(1)</sup> that not long before, at Constantinople, upon the appearance of an unusual meteor, and a rumour of a pretended prediction that the city would be destroyed by fire from heaven, the inhabitants were seized with a panic fear, all began to do penance like Ninive, and fled, with the emperor at their head, to a great distance from the city. After the term appointed for its pretended destruction was elapsed, they sent scouts to the city which they had left quite empty, and, hearing that it was still standing, returned to it, and with their fears forgot their repentance and all their good resolutions. To prevent the danger of penitents imposing upon themselves by superficial conversions, St. Barbatus took all necessary precautions to improve their first dispositions to a sincere and perfect change of heart, and to cut off and remove all dangerous occasions of temptations.

(1) S. Aug. Sermon de Excidio Urbis, c. 6. t. 6. p. 627. ed Ben.

\* The devil was sick, the devil a monk would be;  
The devil was well, the devil no monk was he.