

. APRIL XII.

ST. SABAS THE GOTH, M.

From his authentic acts contained in a letter, written by the Church of Gothia to that of Cappadocia, of which St. Basil was then the chief light; and penned, in all appearance, by St. Aschollus, bishop of Thessalonica, at that time subject to the Goths.

A. D. 372.

THE faith of Christ erected its trophies not only over the pride and sophistry of the heathen philosophers, and the united power of the Roman empire, but also over the kings of barbarous infidel nations; who, though in every other thing the contrast of the Romans, and enemies to their name, yet vied with them in the rage with which they sought, by every human stratagem, and every invention of cruelty, to depress the cross of Christ: by which the finger of God was more visible in the propagation of his faith. Even among the Goths, his name was glorified by the blood of martyrs. Athanaric, king of the Goths,* in the year

six to the monastery of Croyland. Being accompanied thither by the king, he there took the monastic habit, and was made abbot in 948. He restored the house to the greatest splendour; and, having served God in it twenty-seven years, died of a fever in 975, in the sixty-eighth year of his age. It was his usual saying, which he often repeated to his monks: "Preserve well the fire of your charity, and the fervour of your devotion." Croyland, pronounced Crouland, signifies a desert fenny land. The monks, with incredible industry, rendered it fruitful, joined the island to the continent, and raised several stupendous works about it.

* That barbarous people, who swarmed originally from Gothland in Sweden, passed first into Pomerania, where Tacitus places them; thence to the borders of the Palus Mæotis, where Caracalla checked their inroads by a victory over them in 215. Yet they extended themselves along the Danube, and into Thrace and Greece, and by their furious incursions were to the Roman empire the most troublesome swarm of the whole northern hive, till they overthrew the empire of the West, erecting on its ruins the kingdoms of the Ostrogoths, or eastern Goths, in Italy, and of the Visigoths, or western Goths, in the southern parts of France and in Spain. The Goths began to receive the light of the faith about the reign of Valerian, from certain priests and other captives, whom, in their inroads, they had carried away out of Galatia and Cappadocia, and who, by healing their sick and preaching the gospel, converted several among them, as Sozomen (b. 2, c. 6,) and Philostorgius (b. 2, c. 5,) relate. Hence St. Basil (ep. 338, p. 330,) says, that the seeds of the gospel among the Goths were brought from Cappadocia by the blessed Eutychius, a man of eminent virtue, who, by the power of the Holy Ghost and his gifts, had softened the hearts of those barbarians. St

370, and according to St. Jerom, raised a violent persecution against the Christians among them. The Greeks commemorate fifty-one martyrs who suffered in that nation. The two most illustrious are SS. Nicetas and Sabas. This latter was by birth a Goth, converted to the faith in his youth, and a faithful imitator of the obedience, mildness, humility, and other virtues of the apostles. He was affable to all men, yet with dignity; a lover of truth, an enemy to all dissimulation or disguise, intrepid, modest, of few words, and a lover of peace; yet zealous and active. To sing the divine praises in the church, and to adorn the altars, was his great delight. He was so scrupulously chaste, that he shunned all conversation with women, except

Cyril of Jerusalem, (Cat. 16, n. 22,) in 343, mentions the Goths and Sarmatians among the Christians who had bishops, priests, monks, holy virgins, and martyrs. In the council of Nice, among the subscriptions, we find that of Theophilus, bishop of Gothia. Ulphilas succeeded Theophilus, and after his example, adhered to the council of Nice and the Catholic faith, as Socrates (b. 2, c. 42,) and Sozomen (b. 6, c. 37,) expressly affirm; "which was the faith of his ancestors," says Theodoret, (b. 4, c. 33.) He taught the Goths to write, invented their alphabet, and translated the Bible into their language. In the year 374, St. Basil (ep. 164, p. 254,) still commended the faith of the Goths. But Ulphilas being sent to Constantinople, in 376, to beg of the Emperor Valens certain lands in Thrace, was gained over by Eudoxius and other crafty Arians, to embrace their heresy, and pervert the faith of his countrymen, as Sozomen (b. 6, c. 37,) and Theodoret (b. 4, c. 33,) testify. Athanaric, king of the Thervingian Goths, who bordered on the empire, raised a bloody persecution against the Christians in 370. Fritigernes, king of the western Goths, was at war with Athanaric, and being the weaker, in order to engage the Emperor Valens to succour him, embraced the Christian religion and the Arian heresy at the same time, by the means of Ulphilas. But the church, under the persecutor Athanaric, remained yet untainted; and both the Latin and Greek Church has always venerated the martyrs that suffered under him. Moreover, the acts of St. Sabas were addressed to the churches of Cappadocia, of which St. Basil was the metropolitan; and seem drawn up by St. Ascholius, bishop of Thessalonica, a prelate closely linked with St. Athanasius, as St. Basil assures us, (ep. 154, p. 243,) who also praised St. Ascholius (ep. 164, p. 254,) for propagating the faith among barbarous nations, whilst Christian princes sought by Arianism to destroy it. He also says, that one coming from those parts preached up against the Arians the purity of the faith professed there, (ep. 164, p. 254.) St. Ambrose extols their faith and zeal against Arianism, together with their martyrdom, (in c. 2, Lucæ. p. 1294.) So does Theodoret, (Hist. b. 4, c. 28, 30, 33.) St. Austin says, that the king of the Goths persecuted the Christians with wonderful cruelty, when there were none but Catholics in Gothia, (de civ. Dei, l. 18, c. 52.) This remark seemed necessary to correct the mistake of certain modern English writers, who pretend that the Goths embraced Christianity and Arianism at the same time.

what was indispensable. He often spent whole days and nights in prayer, and devoted his whole life to the exercises of penance: flying vain glory, and by words and example inducing others to a love of virtue, he burned with an ardent desire, in all things to glorify Jesus Christ. The princes and magistrates of Gothia began, in 370, to persecute the Christians, by compelling them to eat meats which had been sacrificed to idols, out of a superstitious motive, as if they were sanctified. Some heathens who had Christian relations, desiring to save them, prevailed upon the king's officers to present them common meats which had not been offered to the idols. Sabas condemned this impious collusion, and not only refused to eat such meats, but protested aloud that whoever should eat them would be no longer a Christian, having by that scandalous compliance renounced his faith. Thus he hindered many from falling into that snare of the devil, but displeased others, who banished him from his town, though they some time after recalled him home. The next year the persecution was renewed, and a commissary of the king arrived at St. Sabas's town in search of Christians. Some of the inhabitants offered to swear on the victims that there were no Christians in the place. Sabas appeared, and stepping up to those who were going to take that oath, said: "Let no man swear for me: for I am a Christian." Notwithstanding this, the commissary ordered the oath to be tendered. Therefore the principal men of the city hid the other Christians, and then swore that there was but one Christian in their town. The commissary commanded that he should appear. Sabas boldly presented himself. The commissary asked the by-standers what wealth he had: and being told he had nothing besides the clothes on his back, the commissary despised him, saying: "Such a fellow can do us neither good nor harm."

The persecution was renewed with much greater fury in 372, before Easter. Sabas considered how he could celebrate that solemnity, and for this purpose set out to go to a priest named Gouttica in another city. Being on the road, he was admonished by God to return, and keep the festival with the priest Sansala. He did so, and on the third night after Atharidus, son of one that enjoyed a petty sovereignty in that country, entered the town, and with an armed troop suddenly broke into the lodgings

of Sansala, surprised him asleep, bound him, and threw him on a cart. They pulled Sabas out of bed without suffering him to put on his clothes, and dragged him naked as he was over thorns and briers, forcing him along with whips and staves. When it was day, Sabas said to his persecutors: "Have not you dragged me, quite naked, over rough and thorny grounds? Observe whether my feet are wounded, or whether the blows you gave me have made any impression on my body:" and indeed they could not perceive any the least marks. The persecutors being enraged, for want of a rack, took the axle-tree of a cart, laid it upon his neck, and stretching out his hands, fastened them to each end. They fastened another in like manner to his feet, and in this situation they tormented him a considerable part of the following night. When they were gone to rest, the woman of the house in which they lodged untied him: but he would not make his escape, and spent the remainder of that night in helping the woman to dress victuals for the family. The next day Atharidus commanded his hands to be tied, and caused him to be hung upon a beam of the house, and soon after ordered his servants to carry him and the priest certain meats that had been offered to idols, which they refused to eat, and Sabas said: "This pernicious meat is impure and profane, as is Atharidus himself who sent it." One of the slaves of Atharidus, incensed at these words, struck the point of his javelin against the saint's breast with such violence, that all present believed he had been killed. But St. Sabas said: "Do you think you have slain me? Know, that I felt no more pain than if the javelin had been a lock of wool." Atharidus, being informed of these particulars, gave orders that he should be put to death. Wherefore, having dismissed the priest Sansala, his companion, they carried away St. Sabas in order to throw him into the Mææus.* The martyr, filled with joy in the Holy Ghost, blessed and praised God without ceasing for thinking him worthy to suffer for his sake. Being come to the river side, the officers said one to another: "Why don't we let this man go? He is innocent; and Atharidus will never know anything of the matter." St. Sabas, overhearing them, asked them why they trifled, and were

* A river in Wallachia, now called Mussovo, which falls into the Danube a little below Rebnik.

so dilatory in obeying their orders? "I see," said he, "what you cannot: I see persons on the other side of the river ready to receive my soul, and conduct it to the seat of glory: they only wait the moment in which it will leave my body." Hereupon they threw him into the river, praising God to the last: and by the means of the axle-tree they had fastened about his neck, they strangled him in the water. He therefore suffered martyrdom, say the acts, by water and wood, the symbols of baptism and the cross: which happened on the 12th of April, Valentinian and Valens being emperors, in 372. After this the executioners drew his body out of the water, and left it unburied: but the Christians of the place guarded it from birds and beasts of prey. Junius Soranus, duke of Scythia, a man who feared God, carried off the body, which he sent into his country, Cappadocia. With these relics was sent a letter from the church of Gothia to that of Cappadocia, which contains an account of the martyrdom of St. Sabas, and concludes thus: "Wherefore offering up the holy sacrifice on the day whereon the martyr was crowned, impart this to our brethren, that the Lord may be praised throughout the Catholic and Apostolic Church for thus glorifying his servants." Thus the acts, which were sent to the church of Cappadocia, together with the relics of St. Sabas.* Both the Greek and Latin Martyrologies mention this martyr.

The martyrs despised torments and death, because the immense joys of heaven were always before their eyes. If they made a due impression upon our souls, we should never be slothful in the practice of virtue. When an ancient monk complained of being weary of living in close solitude, his abbot said to him: "This weariness clearly proves that you have neither the joys of heaven nor the eternal torments of the damned before your eyes: otherwise no sloth or discouragement could ever seize your soul." St. Austin gives the following advice: "Not

* It is supposed that this letter was penned by St. Ascholius, bishop of Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia: for St. Basil (ep. 164, p. 284,) writing to St. Ascholius, thanks him for his account of the persecution, and of the martyr's triumph by water and wood. And again (ep. 165, p. 256,) thanks him for the body of the martyr he had sent him, probably by the commission of Duke Soranus, a relation of St. Basil, who had written to him (ep. 155, p. 244, ed. Ben.) begging him to enrich his country with the relics of some martyrs in that persecution.

only think of the road through which thou art travelling, but take care never to lose sight of the blessed country in which thou art shortly to arrive. Thou meetest here with passing sufferings, but will soon enjoy everlasting rest. In order to labour with constancy and cheerfulness, consider the reward. The labourer would faint in the vineyard, if he were not cheered by the thought of what he is to receive. When thou lookest up at the recompense, everything thou doest or sufferest will appear light, and no more than a shadow : it bears no manner of proportion with what thou art to receive for it. Thou wilt wonder that so much is given for such trifling pains." (1)

ST. ZENO, BISHOP OF VERONA, C.

From his life, compiled from his writings and other monuments, by Peter and Jerom Ballerini, two learned priests of Verona, and brothers, in their third dissertation in the excellent edition they gave of this father's works, p. 109. See also the Marquis Scipio Maffei, *Historiæ Diplomaticæ Monumenta*, at the end, p. 329. Also the same author, *Veronæ Illustratæ*, par. II. The history of the translation of his relics by an anonymous monk ; and *Serie Chronologica dei Vescovi di Verona*, par Biancolini, a Verona, 1761, 4to.

A. D. 380.

THIS holy prelate is styled a martyr by St. Gregory the Great, (2) and in several martyrologies. But was honoured only with the title of confessor, in the ancient missal of Verona, before the time of Lewis Lippoman, bishop of that city, in 1548 :* and it appears, from the manner in which St. Ambrose, who was his contemporary, writing to Syagrius, our saint's successor, speaks of his happy death, and extols his eminent sanctity, that he did not die by the sword. (3) Living in the days of Constantius, Julian, and Valens, he might deserve the title of martyr, by sharing in the persecutions carried on by those princes. Hence, in some calendars, he is styled martyr, in others confessor.

(1) St. Aug. Conc. 2, on Ps. 36.

(2) Dial. 1. 3, c. 19.

(3) St. Ambros. ep. 5, ad Syagrium.

* Hence some have distinguished two St. Zenos, bishops of Verona, the first a martyr, about the reign of Gallien : the other an illustrious father of the fourth century. But Onuphrius, in his exact history of the bishops of Verona, mentions but one of that name, the predecessor of Syagrius, in the fourth century : in which the Ballerini, and all judicious critics, now agree.