

## SEPTEMBER XXVIII.

## ST. WENCESLAS, DUKE OF BOHEMIA, MARTYR

From his life written by John Dubraw, bishop of Olmutz, in Moravia, in the reign of Charles V. See also Æneas Sylvius, *Hist. Bohem.* l. 2, c. 14, 15, and other historians of that country; with the remarks of Suysken, t. 7, Sept. p. 770; Balbinus, in *Miscell. Bohem. &c.*

A. D. 938.

ST. WENCESLAS was son of Uratistas, duke of Bohemia, and of Drahomira of Lucsko, and grandson of Borivor, the first Christian duke, and the blessed Ludmilla. His father was a valiant and good prince; but his mother was a pagan, and her heart was not less depraved, as to sentiments of morality, than as to those of religion. This princess was not less cruel than haughty, nor less perfidious than impious. She had two sons, Wenceslas, and Boleslas. Ludmilla, who lived at Prague ever since the death of her husband, obtained, as the greatest of favours, that the education of the elder might be intrusted to her, and she undertook, with the utmost care and application, to form his heart to devotion and the love of God. In this task she was assisted by Paul, her chaplain, a man of great sanctity and prudence, who likewise cultivated the young prince's mind with the first rudiments of learning. The pious pupil perfectly corresponded with their endeavours, and with the divine grace which rendered him a saint from the cradle. At a convenient age he was sent to a college at Budweis, above sixty miles from Prague, where, under the direction of an excellent master, he made great progress in the sciences, and other exercises suitable to his rank, and much more in all the virtues which compose the character of a Christian and a saint. He was extremely devout, mortified, meek, modest, a great lover of purity, and scrupulously careful in avoiding all occasions in which that virtue could be exposed to the least danger.

He was yet young, when his father dying, his mother Drahomira, assumed the title of regent, and seized on the government. Being no longer held in by any restraint, she gave a free loose to her rage against the Christians (which she had concealed whilst her husband lived) and published a severe

order for shutting up all the churches, prohibiting the exercise of our holy religion, and forbidding priests and all others who professed it, to teach or instruct children. She repealed all the laws and regulations which Borivor and Uladislav had made in favour of the Christians, removed the Christian magistrates in all the towns in Bohemia, put heathens in their places, and employed only such officers as were blindly devoted to follow the dictates of her passions and tyranny; and these she incited every where to oppress the Christians, of whom great numbers were massacred. Ludmilla, sensibly afflicted at these public disorders, and full of concern for the interest of religion, which she and her consort had established with so much difficulty, by strong remonstrances showed Wenceslas the necessity of his taking the reins of the government into his own hands, promising to assist him with her directions and best advice. The young duke obeyed, and the Bohemians testified their approbation of his conduct: but, to prevent all disputes between him and his younger brother, they divided the country between them, assigning to the latter a considerable territory, which retains from him the name of Boleslavia, and is one of the chief circles of Bohemia.

Drahomira, enraged at these steps, secured herself an interest in Boleslas, her younger son, whose heart she had so far perverted, as to taint him with the most execrable idolatry, hatred of the Christian religion, boundless ambition, and implacable cruelty. Wenceslas, on the other hand, pursuant to the impressions of virtue which he had received in his education, was more careful than ever to preserve the innocence of his morals, and acquire every day some new degree of Christian perfection. He directed all his views to the establishment of peace, justice, and religion in his dominions, and, by the advice of Ludmilla, chose able and zealous Christian ministers. After spending the whole day in acts of piety and application to the affairs of state, and of his court, he employed a great part of the night in prayer. Such was his devout veneration for the holy sacrament of the altar, that he thought it a great happiness to sow the corn, gather the grapes, and make the wine with his own hands which were to be made use of at mass. Not content to pray often in the day with singular joy and fer-

your before the holy sacrament in the church, he usually rose at midnight, and went to pray in the churches, or even in the porches; nor did he fail in this practice in the deepest snows. His austerities in a court seemed to equal those of anchorets in the deserts, and he applied himself with great diligence to all manner of charitable offices, in relieving orphans and widows, helping the poor, accompanying their bodies to the grave, visiting prisons, and redeeming captives. It was his desire to shut himself up in a monastery, had not the necessities of his country and religion fixed him in a public station: however, amidst the distractions of government, he found rest for his soul in God, its centre. The good prince stood in need of this comfort and support amidst the storms with which he was assailed. Drahomira never ceased to conjure up all the furies of hell against him. Looking upon Ludmilla as the first mover of all counsels in favour of the Christian religion, she laid a plot to take away her life. Ludmilla was informed of it, and, without being disturbed, prepared herself for death. With this view she distributed her goods and money among her servants and the poor, confirmed the duke in his good resolutions for maintaining religion, made her confession to her chaplain Paul, and received the holy viaticum. The assassins found her prostrate in prayer before the altar in her domestic chapel, and, seizing on her, strangled her with her own veil. She is honoured in Bohemia as a martyr on the 16th of September.

This complicated crime was very sensible to St. Wenceslas; a circumstance which exceedingly aggravated his grief was, that so execrable an action should have been perpetrated by the direction of his mother. But he poured out his complaints to God alone, humbly adored his judgments and holy providence, and interceding for the conversion of his unnatural mother. She was seconded in her malicious intrigues by a powerful faction. Radislas, prince of Gurima, a neighbouring country, despising the saint's piety, invaded his dominions with a formidable army. Wenceslas, willing to maintain peace, sent him a message, desiring to know what provocation he had given him, and declaring that he was ready to accept any terms for an accommodation that was consistent with what he owed to God and his people. Radislas treated this embassy as an effect

of cowardice, and insolently answered, that the surrender of Bohemia was the only condition on which he would hear of peace. Wenceslas finding himself obliged to appear in arms, marched against the invader. When the two armies were near one another, our saint desired a conference with Radislas, and proposed, that, to spare the blood of so many innocent persons, it was a just expedient to leave the issue of the affair to a single combat between them. Radislas accepted the proposal, imagining himself secure of the victory. The two princes accordingly met at the head of both armies, in order to put an end to the war by this duel. Wenceslas was but slightly armed with a short sword and a target; yet, making the sign of the cross, marched boldly towards his antagonist, like a second David against Goliath. Radislas attempted to throw a javelin at him, but, as the Bohemian historians assure us, saw two angels protecting the saint. Whereupon he threw down his arms, and falling on his knees, begged his pardon, and declared himself at his disposal.

The emperor Otho I. having assembled a general diet at Worms, St. Wenceslas arrived at it late in the day, having been stopped by hearing a high mass on the road. Some of the princes took offence hereat; but the emperor, who had the highest opinion of his sanctity, received him with great honour, would have him sit next his person, and bade him ask whatever he pleased, and it should be granted him. The saint asked an arm of the body of St. Vitus, and a part of the relics of St. Sigismund, king of Burgundy. The emperor readily granted his request; adding, that he conferred on him the regal dignity and title, and granted him the privilege of bearing the imperial eagle on his standard, with an exemption from paying any imperial taxes throughout all his dominions. The good duke thanked his majesty, but excused himself from taking the title of king: which, however, the emperor and princes of the empire from that time always gave him in letters, and on all other occasions. When he had received the above-mentioned relics, he built a church in Prague, in which he deposited them; and caused the body of St. Ludmilla, three years after her death, to be translated into the church of St. George, which had been built by his father in that city. The severity with which the

saint checked oppressions, and certain other disorders in the nobility, made some throw themselves into the faction of his unnatural mother, who concerted measures with her other son, Boleslas, to take him off at any rate. St. Wenceslas had made a vow of virginity; but restless ambition is impatient of delays. A son being born to Boleslas, that prince and his mother invited the good duke to favour them with his company at the rejoicings on that occasion. St. Wenceslas went without the least suspicion of treachery and was received with all imaginable marks of kindness and civility. This they did the better to cover their hellish design. The entertainment was splendid: but nothing could make the saint neglect his usual devotions. At midnight he went to offer his customary prayers in the church. Boleslas, at the instigation of Drahomira, followed him thither, and when his attendants had wounded him, he despatched him with his own hand, running him through the body with a lance. The martyrdom of the holy duke happened on the 28th of September, in 938.\* The emperor Otho marched with an army into Bohemia, to revenge his death; the war continued several years; and, when he had vanquished the Bohemians, he contented himself with the submission of Boleslas, who engaged to recal the banished priests, to restore the Christian religion, and to pay him an annual tribute. Drahomira, perished miserably soon after the perpetration of her horrible crime. Boleslas, terrified at the reputation of many miracles wrought at the martyr's tomb, caused his body to be translated to the church of St. Vitus, at Prague, three years after his death. His son and successor, Boleslas II. surnamed the Pious, was a faithful imitator of his uncle St. Wenceslas, and became one of the greatest princes of his time. A church was erected in honour of St. Wenceslas, in Denmark, in 951, and his name was in great veneration over all the North.

The safety and happiness of government, and of all society among men, is founded upon religion. Without it princes

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\* St. Wenceslas was the fifteenth duke from Czeclus the Sclavonian, who founded the Bohemian state about the year 644. St. Wenceslas was acknowledged duke in 921, and saluted king in 937. He is called the first king of Bohemia, but his successors were only dukes, till the Emperor Henry IV. in 1086, erected Bohemia into a kingdom in favour of Uratislas II.

usually become tyrants, and people lawless. He who, with Hobbes, so far degrades human reason, as to deny any other difference between virtue and vice, than in the apprehension of men; or who, with the author of the *Characteristics*, reduces virtue to an ideal beauty, and an empty name, is, of all others, the most dangerous enemy to mankind, capable of every mischief: his heart being open to treachery, and every crime. The general laws of nations and those of particular states are too weak restraints upon those who, in spite of nature itself, laugh the law of God out of doors. Unless religion bind a man in his conscience, he will become so far the slave of his passions, as to be ready, with this unnatural mother and brother, to commit every advantageous villany to which he is prompted, whenever he can do it with secrecy or impunity. It is safer to live among lions and tigers than among such men. It is not consistent with the goodness and justice of God to have created men without an interior law, and a law enforced by the strongest motives, and the highest authority. Nor can his goodness and justice suffer obedience to his law to go unrewarded, or disobedience and contempt to remain unpunished. This consideration alone, leads us to the confession of that just providence which reserves in the life to come the recompense of virtue, and chastisement of vice, which faith reveals to us; this is the sacred band of justice and civil society in the present life. Jeroboam, Numa, Mahomet, and Machiavel himself, thought a persuasion of a false religion necessary for government, where they despaired of accommodating a true one to their wicked purposes, being sensible, that without strong inward ties, proclamations will be hung upon walls and posts only to be despised, and the most sacred laws lose their force. A false religion is not only a grievous crime, but also too feeble a tie for men; it is exposed to uncertainties, suspicion, and the detection of its imposture, and is in itself always infinitely defective and pernicious. True religion insures to him who sincerely professes it, comfort, support, and patience amidst the sharpest trials, security in death itself, and the most happy and glorious issue, when God shall manifest himself the protector and rewarder of his servants. Virtue, here persecuted and oppressed, will shine forth with the brighter lustre at the last day, as the

sun breaking out from under a cloud displays its beam with greater brightness.

### ST LIOBA, ABBESS.

THIS saint was a great model of Christian perfection to the church, both of England, her native country, and of Germany. She was descended of an illustrious English-Saxon family, and born among the West-Saxons at Winburn, which name signifies fountain of wine. Ebba, her pious mother, was nearly related to St. Boniface of Mentz, and though she had been long barren, and had no prospect of other issue, when Lioba was born, she offered her to God from her birth, and trained her up in a contempt of the world. By her direction our saint was placed young in the great monastery of Winburn in Dorsetshire, under the care of the holy abbess Tetta, a person still more eminent for her extraordinary prudence and sanctity, than for being sister to a king.\* Lioba made great progress in virtue, and took the religious veil. She understood Latin, and made some verses in that language, as appears from her letters to St. Boniface: but she read no books but such as were proper to nourish piety and devotion in her soul. St. Boniface, who had kept up an epistolary correspondence with her, and was perfectly acquainted with her distinguished virtue and abilities, became an earnest suitor to her abbess, and bishop, that she might be sent to him with certain pious companions, in order to settle some sanctuaries and nurseries of religion for persons of their sex in the infant church of Germany. Tetta regretted the loss of so great a treasure, but could not oppose so urgent a demand.

Lioba arriving in Germany, was settled by St. Boniface, with her little colony, in a monastery which he gave her, and which was called Bischofsheim; that is, Bishop's House. By the prudence and zeal of our saint, this nunnery became in a short time very numerous, and out of it she peopled many other houses

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\* The ancient great monastery of Winburn, built by the West-Saxon kings, was double; each separated from the other and surrounded with high walls. No monk could ever set foot in the inclosure of the nuns, except in their church to say mass, and immediately after he came down from the altar to leave it and return to his own cloister. No nun could ever go out of her own inclosure.