

LIVES

OF THE

FATHERS, MARTYRS, AND OTHER PRINCIPAL SAINTS.

MARCH I.

SAINT DAVID, ARCHBISHOP,

PATRON OF WALES.

See his life by Giraldus Cambrensis, in Wharton's *Anglia Sacra*, t. 2. also Doctor Brown Willis, and Wilkins, *Conc. Britan. & Hibern.* t. 1.

About the Year 544.

ST. DAVID, in Welch Dewid, was son of Xantus, prince of Ceretica, now Cardiganshire. He was brought up in the service of God, and being ordained priest, retired into the Isle of Wight, and embraced an ascetic life, under the direction of Paulinus, a learned and holy man, who had been a disciple of St. Germanus of Auxerre. He is said by the sign of the cross to have restored sight to his master, which he had lost by old age, and excessive weeping in prayer. He studied a long time to prepare himself for the functions of the holy ministry. At length, coming out of his solitude, like the Baptist out of the desert, he preached the word of eternal life to the Britons. He built a chapel at Glastenbury, a place which had been consecrated to the divine worship by the first apostles of this island. He founded twelve monasteries, the principal of which was in the vale of Ross,* near Menevia, where he formed many great pastors and eminent servants of God. By his rule he obliged all his monks to

* This denomination was given to the valley from the territory where it was situated, which was called Ross. Frequent mention is made of this monastery in the acts of several Irish saints, under the name of Rosnat or Rosnant.

assiduous manual labour in the spirit of penance: he allowed them the use of no cattle to ease them at their work in tilling the ground. They were never suffered to speak but on occasions of absolute necessity, and they never ceased to pray, at least mentally, during their labour. They returned late in the day to the monastery, to read, write, and pray. Their food was only bread and vegetables, with a little salt, and they never drank anything better than a little milk mingled with water. After their repast they spent three hours in prayer and adoration; then took a little rest, rose at cock-crowing, and continued in prayer till they went out to work. Their habit was of the skins of beasts. When any one petitioned to be admitted, he waited ten days at the door, during which time he was tried by harsh words, repeated refusals, and painful labours, that he might learn to die to himself. When he was admitted, he left all his worldly substance behind him, for the monastery never received anything on the score of admission. All the monks discovered their most secret thoughts and temptations to their abbot.

The Pelagian heresy springing forth a second time in Britain, the bishops, in order to suppress it, held a synod at Brevy, in Cardiganshire, in 512, or rather in 519.(1) St. David, being invited to it, went thither, and in that venerable assembly confuted and silenced the infernal monster by his eloquence, learning and miracles. On the spot where this council was held, a church was afterwards built called Llan-Devi-Brevi, or the church of St. David near the river Brevi. At the close of the synod, St. Dubritius, the archbishop of Caerleon, resigned his see to St. David, whose tears and opposition were only to be overcome by the absolute command of the synod; which however allowed him, at his request, the liberty to transfer his see from Caerleon, then a populous city, to Menevia, now called St. David's, a retired place, formed by nature for solitude, being as it were almost cut off from the rest of the island, though now an intercourse is opened to it from Milford-Haven. Soon after the former synod, another was assembled by Saint David at a place called Victoria; in which the acts of the first were confirmed, and several canons added relating to discipline, which were afterwards confirmed by the authority of the Roman church; and these two synods were, as it were, the rule and standard of the British churches. As for

(1) See Wilkins, Conc. t. 1.

St. David, Giraldus adds, that he was the great ornament and pattern of his age. He spoke with great force and energy; but his example was more powerful than his eloquence; and he has in all succeeding ages been the glory of the British church. He continued in his last see many years; and having founded several monasteries, and been the spiritual father of many saints, both British and Irish, died about the year 544, in a very advanced age. St. Kentigern saw his soul born up by angels into heaven. He was buried in his church of St. Andrew, which hath since taken his name, with the town and the whole diocess. Near the church stand several chapels, formerly resorted to with great devotion: the principal is that of Saint Nun, mother of Saint David, near which is a beautiful well, still frequented by pilgrims. Another chapel is sacred to St. Lily, surnamed Gwas-Dewy, that is, St. David's man; for he was his beloved disciple and companion in his retirement. He is honoured there on the 3rd., and St. Nun, who lived and died the spiritual mother of many religious women, on the 2nd of March. The three first days of March were formerly holidays in South Wales in honour of these three saints; at present only the first is kept a festival throughout all Wales. John of Glastenbury(1) informs us, that in the reign of King Edgar, in the year of Christ 962, the relics of St. David were translated with great solemnity from the vale of Ross to Glastenbury, together with a portion of the relics of St. Stephen the Protomartyr.

By singing assiduously the divine praises with pure and holy hearts, dead to the world and all inordinate passions, monks are styled angels of the earth. The divine praise is the primary act of the love of God; for a soul enamoured of his adorable goodness and perfections, summons up all her powers to express the complacency she takes in his infinite greatness and bliss, and sounds forth his praises with all her strength. In this entertainment she feels an insatiable delight and sweetness, and with longing desires aspires after that bliss in which she will love and praise without intermission or impediment. By each act of divine praise, the fervour of charity and its habit, and with it every spiritual good and every rich treasure, is increased in her: moreover, God in return heaps upon her the choicest blessings of his grace. Therefore, though the acts of

(1) In his *History of Glastenbury*, p. 130, published by Mr. Thomas Hearne, in 1726.

divine praise seem directly to be no more than a tribute or homage of our affections, which we tender to God, the highest advantages accrue from these exercises to our souls. St. Stephen of Grandmont was once asked by a disciple, why we are so frequently exhorted in the scriptures to bless and praise God, who, being infinite, can receive no increase from our homages? To which the saint replied: "A man who blesses and praises God receives from thence the highest advantage imaginable; for God, in return, bestows on him all his blessings, and for every word that he repeats in these acts, says: 'For the praises and blessings which you offer me, I bestow my blessings on you; what you present to me returns to yourself with an increase which becomes my liberality and greatness.' It is the divine grace," goes on this holy doctor, "which first excites a man to praise God, and he only returns to God his own gift: yet by his continually blessing God, the Lord pours forth his divine blessings upon him, which are so many new increases of charity in his soul." (1)

SAINT SWIDBERT, OR SWIBERT,

THE ANCIENT, B. C.

HE was an English monk, educated near the borders of Scotland, and lived some time under the direction of the holy priest and monk, St. Egbert, whom he accompanied into Ireland. St. Egbert was hindered himself from passing into Lower Germany, according to his zealous desire, to preach the gospel to the infidels: and Wigbert, who first went into Friesland upon that errand, was thwarted in all his undertakings by Radbod, prince of that country, and returned home without success. St. Egbert, burning with an insatiable zeal for the conversion of those souls, which he ceased not with many tears to commend to God, stirred up others to undertake that mission. St. Swidbert was one of the twelve missionaries, who, having St. Willibrord at their head, sailed into Friesland, in 690, according to the direction of St. Egbert. They landed at the mouth of the Rhine, as Alcuin assures us, and travelled as high as Utrecht, where they began to announce to the people the great truths of eternal life. Pepin of Herstal, mayor of the French palace, had conquered part of

(1) *Maximes de S. Etienne de Grandmont*, ch. 105. p. 228. Item 1. *Sententiarum S. Stephani Grand.* c. 105. p. 103.