

## SEPTEMBER XXVI.

## SS. CYPRIAN AND JUSTINA, MM.

The Empress Eudocia, wife of Theodosius the Younger, (who chose her for his consort on account of her learning and skill in philosophy.) wrote the history of SS. Cyprian and Justina in a beautiful Greek poem, consisting of three books, commended by Photius, who has given an abstract of this work; but the poem itself is lost, with many other elegant poetical compositions of that princess. The authentic acts of these martyrs are likewise lost. But we have still extant the confession of St. Cyprian, written by himself, the same that was made use of by St. Gregory Nazianzen and Eudocia; also two other genuine pieces, the one entitled, *The Conversion of Justina and Cyprian*; the other, *An Account of their Martyrdom*. Also Prudentius, hymn. 13, p. 215. St. Gregory Naz. Or. 18, (though they, by mistake, confound this St. Cyprian with the bishop of Carthage,) and Photius, Bibl. Cod. 184, give us the history of these martyrs. On their Latin acts see Card. Baronius, &c. On the Greek of two sorts, Lambecius, Bibl. Impel. Vindeb. t. 8, p. 247, 257, 262. Montfauc. Bibl. Coislin. p. 210. See Tillemont, t. 5. Ceillier, t. 4, p. 89. Orsi, t. 4, p. 89. Jos. Assemani in Cal. Univ. t. 5, p. 269, ad 2 Oct.

A. D. 304.

ST. CYPRIAN, surnamed the Magician, was an illustrious instance of the divine grace and mercy. He was a native of Antioch, (not the capital of Syria, but a small city of that name, situated between Syria and Arabia,) which the Romans allotted to the government of Phœnicia, to the jurisdiction of which province this martyr was subject. The detestable superstition of his idolatrous parents put them upon devoting him from his infancy to the devil, and he was brought up in all the impious mysteries of idolatry, judicial astrology, and the black art. In hopes of making great discoveries in these infernal pretended sciences, he left his native country, when he had grown up, and travelled to Athens, Mount Olympus in Macedon, Argos, Phrygia, Memphis in Egypt, Chaldæa, and the Indies, places at that time famous for superstition and magical arts. When Cyprian had filled his head with all the extravagances of these schools of error and delusion, he stuck at no crimes, blasphemed Christ, and committed secret murders, to offer the blood, and inspect the bowels of children, as decisive of future events. His skill was employed in attempting the modesty of virgins; but he found Christian women proof against his assaults and spells.

There lived at Antioch a young lady called Justina, whose birth and beauty drew all eyes upon her. She was born of heathen parents, but was brought over to the Christian faith, and her conversion was followed by that of her father and mother. A pagan young nobleman fell deeply in love with her, and finding her modesty inaccessible, and her resolution invincible, he applied to Cyprian for the assistance of his art.—Cyprian was no less smitten with the lady than his friend, and heartily tried every secret with which he was acquainted to conquer her resolution. Justina, perceiving herself vigorously attacked, studied to arm herself by prayer, watchfulness, and mortification against all his artifices and the power of his spells. "She defeated and put to flight the devils by the sign of the holy cross," says Photius, from Eudocia.(1) St. Cyprian writes in his Confession:(2) "She armed herself with the sign of Christ, and overcame the invocation of the demons." St. Gregory Nazianzen adds: "Suppliantly beseeching the Virgin Mary that she would succour a virgin in danger, she fortified herself with the antidotes of fasting, tears, and prayers." Cyprian finding himself worsted by a superior power, began to consider the weakness of the infernal spirits, and resolved to quit their service. The devil, enraged to lose one by whom he had made so many conquests of other souls, assailed Cyprian with the utmost fury, and, having been repulsed in several other assaults, he at length overspread the soul of the penitent sinner with a gloomy melancholy, and brought him almost to the brink of despair at the sight of his past crimes. God inspired him in this perplexity to address himself to a holy priest named Eusebius, who had formerly been his school-fellow: by the advice of this priest he was wonderfully comforted and encouraged in his conversion. Cyprian, who, in the pressure of his heart, had been three days without eating, by the counsel of this charitable director took some refreshment, and, on the following Sunday, very early in the morning, was conducted by him to the assembly of the Christians; for though it was forbidden for persons not initiated by baptism to assist at the celebration of the divine mysteries, this did not regard other devotions, to which such as were under instruction in the faith might be ad

(1) Cod. 184.

(2) P. 310.

mitted. These assemblies were then held very early in the morning, both to watch in prayer, and for fear of the heathens. So much was Cyprian struck at the awful reverence and heavenly devotion with which this act of the divine worship was performed, that he writes of it: (1) "I saw the choir of heavenly men, or of angels, singing to God, adding at the end of every verse in the psalms the Hebrew word Alleluia, so that they seemed not to be men."\* Every one present was astonished to see Cyprian introduced by a priest among them, and the bishop was scarcely able to believe his own eyes; or at least to be persuaded that his conversion was sincere. But Cyprian gave him a proof the next day by burning before his eyes all his magical books, giving his whole substance to the poor, and entering himself among the catechumens. After due instruction and preparation, he received the sacrament of regeneration from the hands of the bishop. Agladius, who had been the first suitor to the holy virgin, was likewise converted and baptized. Justinaherself was so moved at these wonderful examples of the divine mercy, that she cut off her hair in order to dedicate her virginity to God, and disposed of her jewels and all her possessions to the poor. St. Gregory Nazianzen beautifully describes the astonishing change that was wrought in Cyprian, his edifying deportment, his humility, modesty, gravity, love of God, contempt of riches, and assiduous application to heavenly things. The same father tells us, that, out of humility, with earnest entreaties, he prevailed to be employed as sweeper of the church. Eudocia, quoted by Photius, says he was made door-keeper; but that, after some time, he was promoted to the priesthood, and, after the death of Anthimus the bishop, was

(1) Cod. p. 329.

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\* The ingenious Mr. Wharton, sub-preceptor of Westminster school, who had travelled into France, in his *Essay on the Writings and Genius of Mr. Pope*, among several miscellaneous anecdotes, makes the following reflection: (p. 325,) "I believe few persons have ever been present at the celebrating a mass in a good choir, but have been extremely affected with awe, if not with devotion.—Lord Bolingbroke, being one day present at this solemnity, in the chapel at Versailles, and seeing the bishop elevate the host, whispered his companion, the marquis de ———, 'If I were king of France, I would always perform this ceremony myself.'" This is the testimony of professed adversaries and scoffers. See also Dr. Taylor, &c.

placed in the episcopal chair of Antioch. Joseph Assemani thinks, not of Antioch, but of Damascus, or some other city in Syria.

The persecution of Dioclesian breaking out, Cyprian was apprehended, and carried before the governor of Phœnicia, who resided at Tyre. Justina had retired to Damascus, her native country, which city at that time was subject to the same presidial; and, falling into the hands of the persecutors, was presented to the same judge. She was inhumanly scourged, and Cyprian was torn with iron hooks, probably at Damascus. After this they were both sent in chains to Dioclesian, residing at Nicomedia, who, upon reading the letter of the governor of Phœnicia, without more ado, commanded their heads to be struck off: which sentence was executed upon the banks of the river Gallus, which passes not far from the city of Nicomedia. Theoctistus, also a Christian, was beheaded with them for speaking to Cyprian as he was going to execution. Their relics were procured by certain Christians who came from Rome, and were carried by them thither on board their vessel. In the reign of Constantine the Great a pious lady, named Rufina, of the family of Claudius, built a church in their memory, near the square which bears the name of that prince. These relics were afterwards removed into the Lateran basilic.

If the errors and disorders of St. Cyprian show the degeneracy of human nature corrupted by sin, and enslaved to vice, his conversion displays the power of grace and virtue to repair it. How strangely the image of God is disfigured in man by sin appears by the disorders of his spiritual faculties, the understanding, and will in which the divine resemblance was stamped in the creation. Not only beasts and other creatures have revolted from his dominion, and the shattered frame of his body is made a prey to diseases and death, but his will is rebellious, and the passions strive to usurp the empire, and destroy in his soul the government of reason and virtue. Also the understanding, that should be the eye to the blind will, is itself blind, and the light within us is become darkness. In the state of innocence it was clear, serene, and free from the vapours of the passions: it directed the verdict of the imagination and the senses, and gave to the soul, by intuition and with-

out study, a full view into all speculative natural truths, suited to man's condition ; but its most valuable privilege was, that it taught man all the practical rules and notions of moral virtue firm and untainted, so that he carried this law in his bosom, and had but to look into his own conscience for the direction of his actions in the practice of all moral virtue, which, by the strong assistance of grace, was always easy to him. His understanding was also enlightened by a perfect divine revelation, and his will found no obstacle in the exercises of all theological and other supernatural virtues. The most fatal consequence and punishment of his disobedience we deplore in the extravagances, folly, crimes, and errors into which men are betrayed when they become once enslaved to their passions. Religion and faith alone secure us from these dangers, enlighten our understanding, and offer us the means to restore the rectitude of the will.

#### ST. EUSEBIUS, POPE, C.

HE succeeded St. Marcellus in the pontificate, and strenuously maintained the discipline of the church in the rigorous observance of the penitential canons, with regard to penitent sinners, especially those who had denied the faith in the persecution. Many, offended hereat, having at their head a turbulent man named Heraclius, gave him great disturbance on this account ; but the true pastor stood his ground with invincible patience. He was banished into Sicily by the tyrant Maxentius, but was called thence by God in a short time to eternal rest, in 310. The Liberian Calendar informs us that he sat only four months and sixteen days. See Pope Damasus's epitaph or poem on this holy confessor.

#### ST. COLMAN ELO, ABBOT, C.

THIS eminent saint, who was born in the province of Meath in Ireland, left his own country very young, in order entirely to devote himself to the divine service. The more perfectly his heart was disengaged from the love of creatures the more vehemently he found his soul attracted to God, and inflamed with divine love. Hence proceeded his ardour for the exercise of holy contemplation and prayer, and the constant union of his