

from Rouanne, bears the name of St. Alban, famous for mineral waters, abounding with nitrous salt, described by Mr. Spon and Piganiol, t. 2. p. 9. ed. 3. ann. 1754.

JUNE XXIII.

ST. ETHELDREDA, OR AUDRY, V. A.

From her life, by Bede, b. 4, c. 19, 20, and more at large by Thomas, a monk of Ely, in his History of Ely; in Wharton, *Anglia Sacra*, p. 597, and Papebroke's Notes, p. 489, t. 4, Junij. See also Bradshaw's life of St. Wereburga, c. 18. Bentham, *Hist. Ely*, ed. 1766.

A. D. 679.

ST. ETHELDREDA or EDILTRUDIS, commonly called Audry, was third daughter of Annas or Anna, the holy king of the East Angles, and St. Hereswyda. She was younger sister to St. Sexburga and to St. Ethelburga, who died a virgin and nun in France, and was eldest sister to St. Withburga. She was born at Ermynge, a famous village in Suffolk, and brought up in the fear of God. In compliance with the desire of her friends she married Tonbercht, prince of the southern Girvij;* but

famous church and monastery founded in 804, which bear his name at Mentz, to be our English protomartyr, as appears from Sir Thomas More's book against Tindal; and from Ruinart's Notes on the History of the Vandalic Persecution. But Rabanus Maurus, in his Martyrology says, he was an African bishop, who being banished by Huneric for the faith, coming to Mentz, there fell into the hands of the Huns, and was by them put to death for the faith. Mabillon, *Annal. Ben.* l. 28, and Papebroke, Junij, t. 4, p. 68, upon this authority of Rabanus, take St. Alban of Mentz to have been an African; but Ruinart, the most judicious scholar of Mabillon, justly calls it in question. Monsignor Georgi, in his Notes on Usuard's Martyrology, inclines to the opinion of Ruinart. The great collegiate church of Namur was founded in honour of St. Alban by Albert II. earl of Namur, in 1047. The abbot of St. Alban's near Mentz, enriched it with precious relics; and it is possessed of a large portion of the cross, which was sent by Henry, emperor of Constantinople, to his brother Philip, earl of Namur, in 1205. This church was made an episcopal cathedral by Paul IV. in 1559. St. Alban of Mentz is honoured on the 21st of June. See Papebroke, t. 4, Junij, p. 86, and Serarius, *Rerum Mogunt. cum annotationibus et Supplemento a Georgio Christiano Joannis*, pp. 176, 177, printed at Francfort, in 1722.

* The Girvij inhabited the counties of Rutland, Northampton, and Huntingdon, with part of Lincolnshire, and had their own princes, dependent on the kings of Mercia.

they lived together in perpetual continency. Three years after her marriage, and one year after the death of her father, Audry lost her husband, who for her dowry settled upon her the isle of Ely.* The holy virgin and widow retired into that solitude, and there lived five years rather like an inhabitant of heaven than one in a mortal state. Trampling under her feet whatever attracts the hearts of deluded worldlings, she made poverty and humility her delight and her glory, and to sing the divine praises with the angels night and day was her most noble ambition and holy employ. Notwithstanding her endeavours to hide herself from the world, her virtues pierced the veil which she studied to throw over them, and shone with a brightness which was redoubled from the lustre which her humility reflected on them. Egfrid, the powerful king of Northumberland, hearing the fame of her virtues, by the most earnest suit extorted her consent to marry him, and she was obliged to engage a second time in that state. The tradition of the Church, which by her approbation and canons has authorized this conduct in many saints, is a faithful voucher that a contract of marriage not yet consummated, deprives not either party of the liberty of preferring the state of greater perfection. St. Audry, upon this principle, during twelve years that she reigned with her husband, lived with him as if she had been his sister, not as his wife, and devoted her time to the exercises of devotion and charity. At length, having taken the advice of St. Wilfrid, and received from his hands the religious veil, she withdrew to the monastery of Coldingham beyond Berwick, and there lived in holy obedience under the devout abbess St. Ebba. Afterwards, in the year 672, according to Thomas of Ely, she returned to the isle of Ely, and there founded a double monastery upon her own estate. The nunnery she governed herself, and was by her example a living rule of perfection to her sisters. She ate only once a day except on great festivals, or in time of sickness; never wore any linen but only woollen clothes; never returned to bed after matins, which were sung at midnight, but continued her prayers in the church till morning. She rejoiced in pains and humiliations, and in her last sickness thanked God for being afflicted with a painful red swelling in her neck, which she re-

* So called from the great quantity of eels in its waters.

garded as a just chastisement for her vanity, when in her youth at court she wore rich necklaces studded with brilliants. After a lingering illness she breathed out her pure soul in profound sentiments of compunction, on the 23rd of June, 679. She was buried, according to her directions, in a wooden coffin. Her sister Sexburga, widow of Erconbercht, king of Kent, succeeded her in the government of her monastery, and caused her body to be taken up, put into a stone coffin, and translated into the church. On which occasion it was found uncorrupt, and the same physician who had made a ghastly incision in her neck a little before her death, was surprised to see the wound then perfectly healed. Bede testifies that many miracles were wrought by the devout application of her relics, and the linen cloths that were taken off her coffin; which is also confirmed by an old Latin hymn by him inserted in his history.*

This great queen and saint set so high a value on the virtue of virginity, because she was instructed in the school of Christ how precious a jewel and how bright an ornament that virtue is in his divine eyes, who is the chaste spouse and lover of true virgins who crown their chastity with a spirit of prayer, sincere humility, and charity. These souls are without spot before the throne of God; they are purchased from among men, the first fruits to God and the Lamb, being the inheritance properly consecrated to God; they sing a new canticle before the throne, which no others can sing, and they follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.(1) "Whither do you think this Lamb goeth? where no other presumes or is able to follow him," cries out St. Austin.(2) "Whither do we think that he goeth? into what groves or meadows? Where are found joys, not like those of this world, false, empty, and treacherous; nor even such as are afforded in the kingdom of God itself to those that are not virgins; but joys distinct from theirs. The joys of the virgins of Christ are formed of Christ, in Christ, through Christ, and for Christ. The peculiar joys of the virgins of Christ are not the

(1) Apoc. xiv.

(2) L. de Sanctâ Virgin. c. 27, t. 6, p. 354.

* The monastery of Ely being destroyed by the Danes in 870, it was refounded by St. Ethelwold, bishop of Winchester, and King Edgar, for monks only, and dedicated in honour of the Blessed Virgin and St. Audry, in 970. A bishopric was erected there in 1108.

same as of those that are not virgins ; for, though others have their joys, none have such." He adds,(1) " Be solicitous that you lose not this treasure, which if it be once forfeited nothing can restore. The rest of the blessed will see you, who are not able themselves so far to follow the Lamb. They will see you, nor will they envy you ; but by rejoicing for your happiness, they will possess in you what they do not enjoy in themselves. And that new song which they will not be able to say, they will yet hear, and will be delighted with your so excellent a good. But you who shall both say it and hear it, will exult more happily, and reign more joyfully."

ST. MARY OF OIGNIES.

HER parents, who were wealthy inhabitants of Nivelles, in Brabant, gave her a virtuous education, and married her young to a gentleman remarkable for his piety. He imitated her in her long devotions and watchings, and in the extraordinary austerities which she practised. This fervent couple by mutual agreement devoted themselves to serve the lepers in a quarter of Nivelles called Villembroke. By this abject life, they exposed themselves to the railleries and contempt of their worldly friends ; but human respects were no temptation to our sincere lovers of the disgrace of the cross, who learned by humiliations to die more perfectly to themselves ; assiduous meditation on the sufferings of Christ was their favourite exercise, and was to Mary a source of continual tears ; which, as she said to Cardinal Vitry, far from exhausting her were her refreshment. Black dry bread with a few herbs, made up the slender refecton which she allowed herself only once a day. When she spun or worked, she had the psalter always open before her, the more easily to prevent distractions, by frequently casting her eyes on it ; for she seemed in all her employments never to cease praising God in her heart. She made every year two pilgrimages to our Lady's church at Oignies, two miles from the place of her abode, and her devotion to the mother of God was most tender and remarkable. The pious cardinal who has written her life testifies that in her prayer she was favoured with frequent raptures and extraordinary heavenly visits ; and that her con-

(1) L. de Sanctâ Virgin. c. 29.