

He is named in the Roman Sclavonian or Muscovite, and other calendars.¹

NOVEMBER XXVI.

SAINT PETER, MARTYR,

BISHOP OF ALEXANDRIA.

From Eusebius, Theodoret, &c. See Tillemont, t. 5. Ceillier, t. 4. p. 17. Orsi, t. 4. l. 10.

A. D. 311.

EUSEBIUS² calls this great prelate the excellent doctor of the Christian religion, and the chief and divine ornament of bishops; and tells us, that he was admirable both for his extraordinary virtue, and for his skill in the sciences, and profound knowledge of the holy scriptures. In the year 300 he succeeded Theonas in the see of Alexandria, being the sixteenth archbishop from St. Mark; he governed that Church with the highest commendation, says the same historian, during the space of twelve years: for the nine last of which he sustained the fury of the most violent persecutions, carried on by Dioclesian and his succesors. Virtue is tried and made perfect by sufferings; and Eusebius observes that the fervour of our saint's piety and the rigour of his penance increased with the calamities of the Church. That violent storm which affrighted and disheartened several bishops and inferior ministers of the Church, did but awake his attention, inflame his charity, and

¹ This saint is not to be confounded with St. Erasmus, M. called also Elmo or Ermo, who is honoured on the 2d of June; and whose acts in Latin and Greek are of little authority. See Jos. Assemani, &c.

² Eus. Hist, l. 9. c. 6. p. 444.

inspire him with fresh vigour. He never ceased begging of God for himself and his flock necessary grace and courage, and exhorting them to die daily to their passions, that they might be prepared to die for Christ. The confessors he comforted and encouraged by word and example, and was the father of many martyrs who sealed their faith with their blood. His watchfulness and care were extended to all the churches of Egypt, Thebais or Upper Egypt, and Lybia, which were under his immediate inspection. Notwithstanding the activity of St. Peter's charity and zeal, several in whom the love of this world prevailed basely betrayed their faith, to escape torments and death. Some, who had entered the combat with excellent resolutions, and had endured severe torments, had been weak enough to yield at last. Others bore the loss of their liberty and the hardships of imprisonment, who yet shrunk at the sight of torments, and deserted their colours when they were called to battle. A third sort prevented the inquiries of the persecutors, and ran over to the enemy before they had suffered anything for the faith. Some, seeking false cloaks to palliate their apostacy, sent heathens to sacrifice in their name, or accepted of attestations from the magistrates, setting forth that they had complied with the imperial edict, though in reality they had not. These different degrees of apostacy were distinctly considered by the holy bishop, who prescribed a suitable term of public penance for each in his canonical epistle.¹

Among those who fell during this storm, none was more considerable than Meletius, bishop of Lycopolis in Thebais. That bishop was charged with several crimes; but apostacy was the main

¹ Ap. Beveridge inter Canones Eccl. Græcæ. Item Labbe, Cone. t. 1.

article alleged against him. St. Peter called a council, in which Meletius was convicted of having sacrificed to idols, and of other crimes, and sentence of deposition was passed against him. The apostate had not humility enough to submit, or to seek the remedy of his deep wounds by con-dign repentance, but put himself at the head of a discontented party which appeared ready to follow him to any lengths. To justify his disobedience, and to impose upon men by pretending a holy zeal for discipline, he published many calumnies against St. Peter and his council; and had the assurance to tell the world that he had left the archbishop's communion because he was too indulgent to the lapsed in receiving them too soon and too easily to communion. Thus he formed a pernicious schism which took its name from him, and subsisted a hundred and fifty years. The author laid several snares for St. Peter's life, and though, by an overruling providence, these were rendered ineffectual, he succeeded in disturbing the whole Church of Egypt with his factions and violent proceedings; for he infringed the saint's patriarchal authority, ordained bishops within his jurisdiction, and even placed one in his metropolitanical see. Sozomen tells us, these usurpations were carried on with less opposition during a certain time when St. Peter was obliged to retire to avoid the fury of the persecution. Arius, who was then among the clergy of Alexandria, gave signs of his pride and turbulent spirit by espousing Meletius's cause as soon as the breach was open, but soon after quitted that party, and was ordained deacon by St. Peter. It was not long before he relapsed again to the Meletians, and blamed St. Peter for excommunicating the schismatics, and forbidding them to baptize. The holy bishop, by his knowledge of mankind, was by this time convinced that pride, the source of uneasiness and incon-

stancy, had taken deep root in the heart of this unhappy man; and that so long as this evil was not radically cured, the wound of his soul was only skinned over by a pretended conversion, and would break out again with greater violence than ever. He therefore excommunicated him, and could never be prevailed with to revoke that sentence. St. Peter wrote a book on the Divinity, out of which some quotations are preserved in the councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon.¹ Also a paschal treatise of which some fragments are extant.² From St. Epiphanius³ it appears that St. Peter was in prison for the faith in the reign of Dioclesian, or rather of Galerius Maximian; but after some time recovered his liberty. Maximin Daia, Cæsar in the East, renewed the persecution in 311, which had been considerably abated by a letter written the same year by the emperor Galerius in favour of the Christians. Eusebius informs us, that Maximin himself coming to Alexandria, St. Peter was immediately seized, when no one expected such a storm, and, without any form of trial, by the sole order of the tyrant, hurried to execution. With him were beheaded three of his priests, Faustus, Dio, and Ammonius. This Faustus seems by what Eusebius writes, to be the same person of that name, who, sixty years before, was deacon to St. Dionysius, and the companion of his exile.⁴

The canons of the Church are holy laws, framed by the wisest and most experienced pastors and saints for the regulation of the manners of the faithful, according to the most pure maxims of

¹ Conc. Ephes. Act. 1. p. 508. Act. 7. p. 836. (Conc. t. 3.) Conc. Chalced. Act. 1. p. 286.

² Ap. Du Fresne, lord Du Cange Pref. in Chron. Pasch. n. 7. p. 4. 5.

³ S. Epiph. hæc. 68.

⁴ We have two sorts of acts of St. Peter's martyrdom, the one published by Surius, the other from Metaphrastes, published by Combes; both of no credit; and inconsistent both with themselves, and with Eusebius and Theodoret.

our divine religion and the law of nature, many intricate rules of which are frequently explained, and many articles of faith expounded in them. Every clergyman is bound to be thoroughly acquainted with the great obligations of his state and profession; for it is one of the general and most just rules of the canon law, and even of the law of nature, that "No man is excused from a fault by his ignorance in things which, by his office, he is bound to know."¹ That any one

¹ The canon law is founded upon, and pre-supposes in some cases the decisions of the civil or Roman law. But for this, Corvinus's Abstract, or Vinnius upon the Institutes, or some parts of Syntagma Juris Universi per Petr. Gregorium; or the French advocate, John Domat's immortal work, entitled, *Les Loix Civiles dans leur Ordre, Naturel*, will be a sufficient introduction. The canon law may be begun by Fleury's *Institutions au Droit Ecclesiastique*. The decrees of the general councils should follow, and those of our own country, by Spelman or Wilkins, &c., or Cabassutius's *Epitome of the Councils*, the second edition, in folio; then Antonii Augustini *Epitome Juris Pontificii*, and this excellent book *De Emendatione Gratiani*, with the additions of Baluze. At least some good commentator on the Decretals must be carefully studied as Fagnanus, Gonzales, Reiffenstuel, or Smaltzgruben; for the new ecclesiastical law, the decrees of the council of Trent, and some other late councils, those especially of Milan; the important parts of the latest bullaries of Clement XII. and Benedict XIV. with Barbosa's *Collectanea, Bullarii*. Van Espen is excellent for showing the origin of each point of discipline; but is to be read with caution in some few places. The French advocate, Lewis d'Hericourt's *Droit Ecclesiastique François* is esteemed; but the author sometimes waded out of his depth. This may serve for a general plan to those clergymen who have an hour a day to bestow on this study, and are only deterred from it by wanting an assistant to direct them in it. Those who have not this leisure or opportunity of books, may content themselves with studying some good author who has reduced his study into a regular method, or short collection. Cabassutius's *Theoria et Praxis Juris Canonici* is accurate; that of Pichler, in five small volumes, is full, clear, and more engaging; but his relaxed principles concerning usury (which, by order of pope Benedict XIV. were confuted by Concina, a Dominican friar) must be guarded against. With such helps any one may easily make himself master of those parts which are necessary in his circumstances. How scandalous it is to see a minister of God ready enough to study the extent of the laws concerning parish dues, and strain them in-favour of his avarice, yet supinely careless in learning the duties of his ministry and his grievous obligations to God and his flock? The fatal neglect of those wholesome laws which were framed to set a bar to vice and human passions, to fence the ecclesiastical order against the spirit of the world breaking in upon it, and to check a relaxation of manners which tends utterly to extirpate the spirit of Christ among the laity, will excuse, it is hoped, this short note upon a subject which deserves so much to be strongly inculcated.

amongst the clergy should be a stranger to those decrees of the Universal Church and statutes of his own diocese, which regard the conduct and reformation of the clergy, is a neglect and an affected ignorance which aggravates the guilt of every transgression of which it is the cause, according to a well-known maxim of morality. After the knowledge of the holy scriptures, of the articles of faith, and the rules of a sound Christian morality, every one who is charged with the direction of others, is obliged to have a competent tincture of those parts of the canon law which may fall in the way of his practice: bishops and their assistants stand in need of a more profound and universal skill both in what regards their own office, (in which Barbosa¹ may be a manuduction) and others.

ST. NICON, SURNAMED METANOITE, CONFESSOR.

NICON, a native of Pontus, and of a noble family, in his youth fled privately from his friends to a monastery called the stone of God, where he lived twelve years in the practice of the most austere penance and humble prayer, by which he studied perfectly to die to himself. His heart became quite penetrated with holy compunction and the purest love of God, and he spoke on virtue with an unction which pierced the souls of those that heard him discourse on heavenly things. The incredible spiritual fruit which his conferences and private exhortations produced, induced his superiors to employ him in preaching the word of God to the people. This office he exercised in quality of apostolic missionary in most parts of Armenia, and afterward passed into Crete, which island was then in the hands of the

¹ Barbosa, De Officio Episcopi. Item de Officio archi.