

## ST. BABYLAS,

## BISHOP OF ANTIOCH AND MARTYR.

From St. Chrysostom, l. contra Gentiles de S. Babylâ, and hom de S. Babylâ, T. 2. ed. Ben. p. 531. He wrote the first discourse against the Gentiles, expressly to confound them by the miracles of this saint. He spoke the second five years after, in 387, on St. Babylas's feast, before a numerous auditory, and mentions Flavian the bishop of Antioch, and others, who were to speak after him on the same subject. The miracles were recent, performed before the eyes of many then present. None of the three acts of this saint in Bollandus can be authentic. See Tillemont, Mem. T. 3. p. 400, and Hist. des Empereurs, T. 3, and F. Merlin, Dissertation contre M. Bayle sur ce que rapporte S. Chrysostome du Martyre de S. Babylas, Mem. de Trevoux, Juin, 1737, p. 1051. Also Stilling, the Bollandist, in Vit. S. Chrysost. s. 15. p. 439. ad 14 Septemb. T. 4.

About the year 250.

THE most celebrated of the ancient bishops of Antioch, after St. Ignatius, was St. Babylas, who succeeded Zebinus in the year 237, and governed that church with great zeal and virtue, about thirteen years, under the emperors Gordian, Philip and Decius. Philip, an Arabian by birth, and of mean extraction, raised by the young emperor Gordian to be prefect of the prætorian guards, perfidiously murdered his master at the head of his victorious army in Persia, and caused himself to be acknowledged emperor by the senate and people of Rome, in the year 244. We have very imperfect histories of his reign. Eusebius says that he abolished the public stews and promiscuous bathing in Rome, which Alexander Severus, the most virtuous of the heathen emperors, had in vain attempted to do. The same historian adds, it was averred (1) that Philip, being a Christian, subjected himself to canonical penance at Antioch, where being arrived on the eve of a great festival, as the chronicle of Alexandria relates, he presented himself at the Christian oratory, with his wife; but being excluded by the bishop, with a meek rebuke for his crimes, he made his exomologesis, or confession, and ranked himself among the penitents without doors. St. Jerom, Vincent of Lerins, Orosius, and others, positively affirm that this emperor was a Christian: and Eusebius, Rufinus, St. Jerom, Vincent of Lerins, and Syncellus say, that Origin wrote two letters, one to the emperor Philip, another to his wife, with an authority which the Christian priesthood gave him over emperors.

(1) Τοῦτον κατέχει χριστιανὸν ὄντα. Eus. l. 6. c. 3

Philip assisted at the heathenish solemnity of the thousandth year of Rome; but his presence was necessary on that occasion, nor is he said to have offered sacrifice. He was indeed a bad Christian, and probably only a catechumen, an ambitious and cruel tyrant, who procured the death of Mithras, father-in-law of Gordian, murdered Gordian himself to usurp his empire, and put to death the young prince, son of the king of Persia, or the Parthians, left a hostage in his hands: circumstances mentioned by St. Chrysostom. Having reigned something upwards of five years, he was slain with his son Philip, his colleague in the empire, by Decius, about the middle of the year 249. The peace and favour which the church had enjoyed during his reign, had much increased her numbers, but had relaxed the fervour of many, as we see in St. Cyprian's works, and in the life of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus. Whole cities had embraced the faith, and public churches were erected. Decius equally hated the Philips and the Christian religion, against which he published the most cruel edicts in the year 250; which caused the seventh general persecution, permitted by God to purge away the dross in his flock, and to awake them to fervour.

St. Chrysostom extols the courage and zeal of St. Babylas, in shutting the church-doors against an emperor and a barbarous tyrant, then at the head of a victorious army. We find Philip styled conqueror of the Parthians, in an inscription in Gruter, (1) by which he seems to have returned triumphant, though Zonaras pretends he had bought a peace. Eusebius mentions it as a report, that the emperor received the bishop's rebuke with meekness, and submitted to public penance: but St. Chrysostom insinuates, that the same tyrant, in a rage for being refused admittance, threw St. Babylas into a dungeon, where he soon died. St. Jerom says, that Decius imprisoned him, which seems the true account. F. Stilting thinks that Decius, after being proclaimed emperor in Pannonia, marched first against Philip, and when he was slain, led his army into Syria, where Priscus, Philip's brother, commanded the troops of those parts, and Jotapian about that time assumed the purple, but was soon crushed. At this time he doubts not but Decius was forbidden by St. Babylas to enter the church, because he was an idolater, and had perfidiously murdered a prince who was the son of some king of a nation of barbarians, who had sent him as an hostage

(1) P. 273.

to that tyrant. Many transactions of that time are not recorded by the Roman historians. At least it seems to have been under Decius that St. Babylas consummated his martyrdom by the hardships of his prison; and when dying, ordered his chains to be buried with him, as the happy instruments and marks of his triumph. The Christians built a church over his tomb. His body rested here about one hundred years, till 351, when Gallus Cæsar translated it to Daphne, five miles from Antioch, to oppose the worship of a famous idol of Apollo, which gave oracles in that place. Gallus erected a church, sacred to the name of St. Babylas, near the profane temple, and placed in it his venerable ashes in a shrine above ground. The neighbourhood of the martyr's relics struck the devil dumb, as is averred by St. Chrysostom, Theodoret,<sup>(1)</sup> Sozomen, and others, who triumph over the pagans on this account.\* Eleven years after, Julian the Apostate came to Antioch, in the year 362, and by a multitude of sacrifices endeavoured to learn of the idol the cause of his silence. At length the fiend gave him to understand that the neighbourhood was full of dead bones, which must be removed before he could be at rest and disposed to give answers. Julian understood this of the body of St. Babylas, and commanded that the Christians should immediately remove his shrine to some distant place; but not touch the other dead bodies. Thus do the fathers and Christian historians of that age relate this miracle.† The Christians obeyed the order, and with great solemnity carried back in procession the sacred relics to Antioch, singing on this occasion the psalms which ridicule the vanity and feebleness of idols, repeating after every verse: "May they who adore idols and glory in false gods, blush with shame and be covered with confusion." The following evening, lightning fell on the temple of Apollo, and reduced to ashes all the rich and magnificent ornaments with which it was embellished, and the idol itself, leaving only the walls standing. Julian, the emperor's uncle, and governor of the East, upon

(1) Theodoret. l. 3. Hist. c. 6. & de Græcor. Affect. l. 10. Rufin. Chrys.

\* St. Chrysostom has given us the lamentation of Libanius, the celebrated heathen sophist, bewailing the silence of Apollo at Daphne; adding that Julian had delivered him from the neighbourhood of a dead man, which was troublesome to him.

† Ammianus Marcellinus, a heathen, and Julian's own historian, says b. 2, p. 225, that he caused all the bones of dead men to be taken away to purify the place.

this news, hastened to Daphne, and endeavoured by tortures to compel the priests to confess if the accident had happened by any negligence, or by the interposition of the Christians: but it was clearly proved by the testimony of these very priests, and also by that of several peasants who saw the fire fall from heaven, that lightning was the cause. The Apostate durst not restore the idol lest the like thunder should fall on his own head: but he breathed nothing but fury against the Christians in general, more especially against those of Antioch, the fatal effects of which he intended they should feel at his return from the Persian war. Vain projects against God, who defeated them by his unhappy death in that expedition! The ruins of this temple remained in the same condition above twenty years after. The Roman Martyrology, with that of St. Jerom and others of the West, celebrated the memory of St. Babylas on the 24th of January, but the Greeks on the 4th of September, together with three children martyred with him, as St. Chrysostom and others mention. His body is said to be now at Cremona, brought from the East in the Crusades. St. Babylas is the titular saint of many churches in Italy, France, and Spain.

#### ST. SURANUS, ABBOT IN UMBRIA,

WHO gave all things, even the herbs out of his garden, to the poor. He was martyred by the Lombards in the seventh century, and his relics were famed for miracles.(1)

#### ST. MACEDONIUS, ANCHORET IN SYRIA.

HE lived forty years on barley moistened in water, till finding his health impaired, he eat bread, reflecting that it was not lawful for him to shorten his life to shun labours and conflicts, as he told the mother of Theodoret; persuading her, when in a bad state of health, to use proper food, which he said was physio to her. Theodoret relates many miraculous cures of sick persons, and of his own mother among them, by water on which he had made the sign of the cross, and that his own birth was the effect of his prayers, after his mother had lived childless in marriage thirteen years.\* The saint died, ninety years old, and is

(1) St. Greg. Dial. l. 4. c. 22.

\* The great Theodoret was dedicated to God by his parents before he was born, and was educated in the study of every true branch of Syriac, Greek,