

after his death, printed at Vicenza in 1627. Also the annals of the Order, by Tuffo, bishop of Acerra. Those by Silos, t. 1. The life of this saint by F. Bonaglia, printed at Rome in 1762. That by F. Blanchi, at Venice, in quarto, and that compiled in French by F. Tracy, Theatin at Paris, yet in MS.

ST. OTHILIA, V. ABBESS.

SHE was a native of Strasburg, and of an illustrious family, but was baptized at Ratisbon, by St. Erhard, bishop of that see. Her father erected a great nunnery in Alsace, in which Othilia conducted one hundred and thirty holy nuns in the paths of Christian perfection, and died in 772. See Canisius, Raderus, t. 4. p. 7. Ado, Molanus, and the Roman Martyrology on the 13th of December.

DECEMBER XIV.

ST. SPIRIDION, BISHOP, C.

From Rufin. l. 1, c. 5; Socrates, l. 1, c. 12, p. 39; Sozomen, l. 1, c. 11, p. 22; St. Athan. Apol. 2. See also his Acts in Metaphrastes, Lipo-manus, and Surius, and other Greek Acts of his life, written by Theodorus, bishop of Paphos, quoted by Jos. Assemani in Calend. Univ. ad 12 Dec. p. 453.

A. D. 348.

SPIRIDION, or SPIRIDON, was a native of Cyprus, was married, and had a daughter named Irene, who lived always a virgin. His employment was that of keeping sheep, which in the patriarchal times even kings thought not beneath their dignity. In this retired state simplicity and innocence of heart engaged the Almighty to furnish him with extraordinary lights in the paths of virtue, which it was the more easy for him safely to pursue, as he shunned the company of those whose example and false maxims might have induced him to take the same liberties they did, and fall into a worldly course of life. For there is no more dangerous snare to our souls than the conversation of that world which is condemned by the gospel; that is to say, that society and commerce of men who are animated with the spirit of irregular self-love, and that corruption of the heart which all men inherit from their first

birth from Adam, and by which they live who have not vanquished it by grace, and put on the spirit of Christ. It is not enough for a Christian to guard himself against this contagious air abroad: he has an enemy at home, a fund of corruption within his own heart, which he must resist and purge himself of; and this not in part only, but entirely. They deceive themselves, who desire to be saved through Christ, without taking pains to put on perfectly the spirit of Christ; they who are willing to give alms, fast, and spend much time in prayer, but with all this are for reserving and sparing this or that favorite passion, this vanity, this pleasure, or this spirit of revenge. Spiridion made such use of the advantages which his state afforded him for virtue, as to seem to rival the Macariuses in their deserts: and he was honoured with the gift of miracles.

Sozomen, who wrote in the beginning of the fifth century, tells us that a gang of thieves attempting one night to carry off some of his sheep, were stopped by an invisible hand, so that they could neither perpetrate the intended theft, nor make their escape. Spiridion finding them the next morning thus secured, set them at liberty by his prayers, and gave them a ram; but exhorted them seriously to consider the danger of their state, and amend their lives; observing to them that they had taken a great deal of unnecessary pains, and ran great hazard for what they might have made their own by asking for it. The same historian says, (1) that it was the saint's custom to fast in Lent with his whole family for some days together without eating any thing; at which time, when he had no bread in his house, a traveller called upon him to rest and refresh himself on the road, according to the rule of hospitality which he practised. Spiridion having nothing else in his house, ordered some salt pork to be boiled; for he saw the traveller was extremely fatigued. Then having prayed some time, he asked the divine pardon, that is, prayed that the dispensation which he judged necessary, might be agreeable to God. After this he invited the stranger to eat, who excused himself, saying that he was a Christian.* Spiridion told him,

(1) Sozom. l. 1, c. 11, p. 24, ed Cantabr. an. 1720.

* Calvin and Kemnitius make this fact a mighty subject of triumph, inferring, that the fast of Lent was not then of precept, though a uni-

that no meats being by their own nature unclean, the rule of fasting admitted a dispensation. St. Spiridion was chosen bishop of Tremithus, a city on the sea-coast near Salamis, and continued the same rural exercise which he had before followed, yet so as to attend his pastoral functions with great assiduity and devotion. His diocese was very small, and the inhabitants were poor, but the Christians very regular in their manners; though there remained among them several idolaters. St. Spiridion divided his revenue into two parts; the one of which he gave to the poor, the other he reserved for his church and household, and for a loan to lend to such as were in necessity, never being solicitous for the morrow. In the persecution of Maximian Galerius he made a glorious confession of the faith. The Roman Martyrology tells us he was one of those who lost their right-eye, had the sinews of their left-hand cut, and were sent to work in the mines. . He was one of the three hundred and eighteen prelates who composed the first general council of Nice, and was there distinguished among the holy confessors who had suffered much for the faith of Christ. About that time died his daughter Irene. A certain person had deposited in her hands a thing of great value, that it might be the more secure. This he demanded of the bishop after her death; but it was not to be found, nobody knowing where it was hid. The person whose loss it was appeared extremely afflicted. Socra-

versal practice. But that it was of precept is manifest from antiquity: and even in this history from the traveller's scruple, the mention of his great weariness *ιδὼν τὸν ζῆνον μάλα κεκηκῶτα*, and Spiridion's asking God pardon *συγγνώμην αἰτήσας*, or the ratification of the dispensation. It is clear that Spiridion, who as a rigorous faster, but a great lover of charity and hospitality, judged the circumstances, with which we are not perfectly acquainted, a sufficient necessity for a dispensation in the ecclesiastical law, which is a point of prudence; and Spiridion was doubtless more free than others, or the action would not have been singular, or taken notice of by the historian. Dispensations from Lent were formerly very rare and difficult. The reason alleged that all things are clean, is of the same purport, showing the law to be dispensable, it being only a positive precept of the church. For though it be an act of virtue, and sometimes commanded to fast and abstain from certain meats out of motives of holy mortification, and both Jews in the old law, and Christians in the new, always observed solemn fast-days, it is superstitious to abstain with the Manichees and some other heretics, upon an erroneous persuasion that certain meats are in themselves unclean, or from the devil, which is all that Spiridion meant.

tes and Sozomen says, that the good bishop, moved with compassion, went to the place where his daughter was buried, called her by her name, and asked her where she had laid what such a person had left in her hands. They add, that she answered him, giving directions where she had hid it in the ground, that it might be more safe; and that it was found there. Though our holy prelate had very little acquaintance with human sciences, he had made the scriptures his daily meditation, and had learned what veneration is due to the word of God. The bishops of Cyprus being on a certain occasion assembled together, Triphillius, bishop of Ledri in that island, (whom St. Jerom commends as the most eloquent man of his time,) was engaged to preach a sermon; and mentioning that passage, *Take up thy bed, and walk*, he made use of a word to express the sick man's bed, which he thought more elegant and beautiful than in the original text.* Spiridion, full of a holy resentment at this false nicety, and attempt to add graces to what was more adorned with simplicity, arose and asked whether the preacher knew better the right term than the evangelist? Our saint defended the cause of St. Athanasius in the council of Sardica in 347, and shortly after passed to eternal bliss. The Greeks honour his memory on the 12th, the Latins on the 14th of this month.

Sacred learning is necessary in a minister of the church; but sanctity is not less necessary. Nothing is so eloquent, or so powerfully persuasive as example. A learned man may convince; but to convert souls is chiefly the privilege of those that are pious. There have been few ages in which polite literature has been cultivated with greater ardour than the present wherein we live. How many great orators, how many elegant writers have made their appearance in it! If these were all saints, what a reformation of manners should we see among the people! It is sanctity that possesses the art of softening the heart, and subduing all the powers of the soul. An edifying life proves the preacher sincere, and is alone a sermon which obstinacy itself will find it hard to hold out against: it stops the mouth of the enemies of truth and virtue. The life, vigour,

* Substituting *οκίμωτος* for *καθάβαντος*.

and justness of a discourse are the fruit of wit, genius, and study; but unction in words is produced only by the heart. A man must be animated with the spirit of God to speak powerfully on divine things; the conversion of hearts is the work of God. A father and a mother are surprised that their instructions seem thrown away upon their children; but let them remember, that if they spoke the language of men and angels, if they have not themselves charity, or true piety, they are only a sounding trumpet. Children, in their most tender infancy, observe with incredible penetration and sagacity every word and action of others, especially of those whom they revere and love; in these they naturally discern and read the spirit of all the passions with which such persons are actuated, deeply imbibe the same, learn to think and act from them, and are entirely moulded upon this model. The children of worldly parents will probably differ from them only in this, that their passions, by being strengthened so early will become with age more blind and headstrong.

SS. NICASIVS, NINTH ARCHBISHOP OF RHEIMS, AND HIS COMPANIONS, MARTYRS.

IN the fifth century an army of barbarians from Germany ravaging part of Gaul, plundered the city of Rheims.* Nicasius, the holy bishop, had foretold this calamity to his flock: When he saw the enemy at the gates and in the streets, forgetting himself, and solicitous only for his dear spiritual children, he went from door to door encouraging all to patience and constancy, and awaking in every one's breast the most heroic sen-

* Tillemont thinks these barbarians were Goths, and that the Vandals were Arians before they left their own country in the north of Germany. But how could they there have received Christianity so early as in the beginning of the fifth century? How could Count Stilico, by birth a Vandal, hope to advance his pagan son Eucherius by the help of the Vandals, by opening the pagan temples and restoring idolatry, for which attempt he and his son were put to death, as Orosius relates, if they were not then idolaters in 407; though in the middle of the same fifth century they were Arians, as appears from Salvian, l. 7, and King Genseric in 428? Stilting shows that St. Nicasius suffered under the Vandals in 407, of which irruption of the Vandals St. Jerom speaks in his epistle to Ageruchio in 409. See Stilting in his life of St. Viventius, the immediate predecessor of St. Nicasius, on the 7th of September, t. 3, p. 65, and Gall. Christ. Nov. t. 9. p. 6.