

ST. MAXENTIA, V. M.

THIS saint was a Scottish, or rather Irish lady, and is said to have been of royal extraction. To preserve her virginity, which she had consecrated to God by vow, she retired into France, where she lived a recluse near the river Oise, two leagues from Senlis. She was pursued, discovered, and murdered by a child of Belial who had not been able to shake her virtuous resolution. One of the continuators of Fredegarius mentions in the seventh century her veneration¹ at the passage of the Oise, which town is, from her precious relics which are honoured there, called Pont-Sainte-Maxence. Her festival was kept in Ireland and England on the 24th of October: in some places in England on the 16th of April, to which Wilson transfers it in the second edition of his English Martyrology: in Scotland, and in the diocess of Beauvais, it is celebrated on the 20th of November, as appears from the Breviaries of Aberdeen and Beauvais.

See Henschenius, t. 2. Apr. p. 402.

NOVEMBER XXI.

THE PRESENTATION OF THE BLESSED
VIRGIN MARY.

RELIGIOUS parents never fail by devout prayer to consecrate their children to the divine service and love, both before and after their birth. Some, amongst the Jews, not content with this general consecration of their children, offered them to

¹ Chron. Contin, p. 666, ed. Ruin,

God in their infancy, by the hands of the priests in the temple, to be lodged in apartments belonging to the temple, and brought up in attending the priests and levites in the sacred ministry. Thus Samuel and others were dedicated to God in their tender age. There were also apartments in which women devoted themselves to the divine service in the temple: witness Josabeth, the wife of Joiada,¹ and Anne, the daughter of Phanuel.² It is an ancient tradition, that the Blessed Virgin Mary was thus solemnly offered to God in the temple in her infancy.³ This festival of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin, or, as it is often called by the Greeks, the entrance of the Blessed Virgin into the Temple, is mentioned in the most ancient Greek Menologies extant: also in a constitution of the emperor Emanuel recited by Balsamon.⁴ Upon this festival we have several sermons of Germanus, patriarch of Constantinople, in the thirteenth century,⁵ of St. Tarasius, patriarch of Constantinople, of the emperor Leo the Wise,⁶ of George, not archbishop of Nicomedia, as Surius calls him, but chancellor⁷ of the see of Constantinople, &c. This festival passed from the Greeks into the West, and was kept at Avignon in 1372.⁸ Three years after this it is mentioned in a letter of Charles V. the French king.⁹ Sixtus V., in 1585,¹⁰ commanded

1 4 (or 2) Kings xi. 2. and 2 Par. (or Chron. xxii. 11.

2 Luke ii. 37.

3 See St. Greg. of Nyssa, Serm. in Nat. Christi, p. 779.

4 Balsamon, in Nomocan. Photii, tit. 7. c. 1.

5 T. 5. Anctar. Nov. per Combefis, p. 1411.

6 Ib. t. 1. p. 1619.

7 Chartophylax.

8 See Papebroke, in mensem Nov. Muscovit.

9 Molan. addit. ad Usuardum. See Canisius. 1. 1. de B. Maria V. c.

12. Jos. Assemani, in calendar. ad 21 Nov. t. 5. p. 369.

10 Baronius (Annot. in Martyr. hac die) observes, that in the Latin Church the word Presentation was used in rituals for the offering of the divine child, Jesus, in the temple, made by his mother in the mystery of the purification. This title of the Presentation of the child Jesus could never be mistaken for the presentation of the Virgin Mary, which feast was celebrated by the Greeks long before

the office of this day to be recited by the whole Church. Molanus tells us, it had been published before by Pius II. and Paul II. with indulgences annexed.

By the consecration which the Blessed Virgin made of herself to God in the first use which she made of her reason, we are admonished of the most important and strict obligation which all persons lie under, of an early dedication of themselves to the divine love and service. It is agreed amongst all masters of Christian morality, that every one is bound in the first moral instant of the use of reason to convert his soul to God by love; and if divine faith be then duly proposed to him (which is the case of Christian children) by a supernatural assent to it, he is bound then to make an act of faith: also an act of hope in God as a supernatural rewarder and helper, and an act of divine charity. Who can be secure that in the very moment in which he entered into his moral life, and was capable of living to God, he did not stain his innocence by a capital omission of this duty? Of this we can only judge by the care which is taken in the great duty of prayer about that age. How diligent and solicitous are parents bound to be in instructing their children in the first fundamental mysteries of faith, and in the duty of prayer, and in impressing upon their minds a sense of spiritual things in a manner in which their age may be capable of receiving it. These first fruits of the heart are a sacrifice of which God is infinitely jealous, an emblem of which, were all the sacrifices of first fruits prescribed in the old law, in token that he is our beginning and last end. Such a heart adorned with the baptismal grace of innocence, has particular charms. A victim which bears the divine image perfect and entire, without having ever been

the Latins adopted it to honour the first consecration which she made of herself to God.

stained with any spot, or tainted with the least corruption, is most agreeable to God. Grace recovered by penance is not like that of innocence which has never been defiled; nor is it the same happiness for a soul to return to God from the slavery of sin, as for one to give him her first affections, and to open her understanding and will to his love before the world has found any entrance there. This is a present suiting the spotless and infinite sanctity of God, and a pure holocaust most acceptable in his holy eyes. In return he will pour forth his most precious graces upon such a soul, whose affections, on the other side, will flow more easily and strongly toward him, not having been hampered in the inordinate love of creatures, and easily conquering all lets and impediments which might abate their ardour. The tender soul of Mary was then adorned with the most precious graces, an object of astonishment and praise to the angels, and of the highest complacency to the adorable Trinity, the Father looking upon her as his beloved daughter, the Son, as one chosen and prepared to become his mother, and the Holy Ghost as his darling spouse.

Her first presentation to God, made by the hands of her parents and by her own devotion, was then an offering most acceptable in his sight. Let our consecration of ourselves to God be made under her patronage, and assisted by her powerful intercession and the union of her merits. If we have reason to fear that we criminally neglected this duty at the first dawning of our reason, or, if we have since been unfaithful to our sacred baptismal engagements, such is the mercy and goodness of our gracious God, that he disdains not our late offerings. But that these may be accepted by him, we must first prepare the present he requires of us, that is, our hearts. They must be washed and cleansed in the sacred

laver of Christ's adorable blood, by means of sincere compunction and penance: and all inordinate affections must be pared away by our perfectly renouncing in spirit, honours, riches, and pleasures, and being perfectly disengaged from creatures, and ready to do and suffer all for God, that we may be entirely his, and that neither the world nor pride, nor any irregular passion may have any place in us. What secret affections to this or that creature lurk in our souls, which hinder us from being altogether his, unless they are perfectly cut off or reformed! What constant watchfulness and fidelity are necessary to maintain and increase the fervour of this consecration of ourselves to God, daily renewing the same, and studying to make it more perfect! This Mary did by spending her youth in holy retirement, at a distance from the commerce and corruption of the world, and by the most assiduous application to all the duties and exercises of a religious and interior life. Mary was the first who set up the standard of virginity; and, by consecrating it by a perpetual vow to our Lord, she opened the way to all virgins who have since followed her example. They, in particular, ought to take her for their special patroness, and, as her life was the most perfect model of their state, they ought always to have her example before their eyes, and imitate her in prayer, humility, modesty, silence, and retirement. "She who had the good company of holy thoughts," says St. Ambrose, "did not desire the conversation of other virgins; but then she was least alone, when she was alone: for, how can it be said that she was alone who had with her so many devout books, so many archangels, so many prophets. If she was troubled when the angel Gabriel entered, it was not because she was not accustomed to converse with angels, but because he appeared in the shape of a man.—Hence, we may understand the wariness

of her religious and chaste ears, and of her venerable and chaste eyes."

Mary lived retired till she was introduced into the world and espoused to St. Joseph. Some think her espousals were at first only a promise or betrothing: but the ends assigned by the fathers, seem rather to show them to have been a marriage. These are summed up by St. Jerom, as follows:¹ that by the pedigree of Joseph, the descent of Mary, from the tribe of Juda, might be demonstrated: that she might not be stoned by the Jews as an adulteress: that, fleeing into Egypt, she might have the comfort and protection of a spouse. A fourth reason, says St. Jerom, is added by the martyr Ignatius: that the birth of the Son of God might be concealed from the devil. The words of that apostolic father are: "Three mysteries wrought by God in silence were concealed from the prince of this world: the virginity of Mary; the bringing forth of her Son; and the death of the Lord."² Not that God could fear any impediment to his designs, from the devil; but he was pleased to effect these mysteries in silence and without worldly show and noise, that pride and hell might, by his all-wise and sweet providence be more meetly triumphed over, whilst the devil himself hastened his own overthrow by concurring to the mystery of the cross. From the marriage of the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, St. Austin shows,³ that marriage requires no more than the mutual consent of the will between parties which lie under no impediment or inability, to an indissoluble individual society of life. In this holy marriage we admire the incomparable chastity of Mary and Joseph; and the sanctity and honour, as well as

¹ In c. l. Mat. p. 7. ed. Ben.

² St. Ignat. ep. ad Ephes. p. 16.

³ S. Aug. l. de Nuptiis et Concup. c. 11. n. 13. p. 287. et l. de bono Conjug. c. 18. n. 21. p. 322.

the patronage and example which that holy state receives from this mystery. In certain particular churches the espousals of the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph are honoured with an office on the 23rd of January.

ST. COLUMBAN, ABBOT, C.

HE was a native of Leinster, one of the four principal provinces of Ireland, and was born about the middle of the sixth century. The monastic institute received at that time the greatest lustre in that country, from the eminent sanctity and great learning of those who professed it, who rendered it an *Island of Saints*, and the mart of sacred literature. It abounded in monasteries, which were so many great schools of sacred learning, and in which many fervent persons, by a special call of God, led an abstracted life, devoted to retirement, contemplation, and the practice of penance, sequestered not only from the distraction of secular business, but also from ordinary conversation with the world, that they might more freely converse with God and his heavenly spirits. The most numerous and most celebrated of these monasteries was that of Bencchor, in the county of Down, founded by St. Comgal, about the year 550; and under his direction a great number of fervent servants of God, seemed to lead an angelical life in mortal flesh. They tilled the ground with their own hands, and followed other manual labour which did not interrupt their prayer and heavenly contemplation. They also applied themselves to sacred studies, in which St. Comgal was himself an excellent master.¹ Their rule was originally borrowed from those of St. Basil, and other orientals.

St. Columban. after having learned the first

¹ See his life on the 10th of May