

spotless virgin,* &c. She excites us to call her "the mother of grace and pity," and to place a confidence in her mediation, that by it we shall more easily obtain from her Son, and through its merits, all graces. That Christian neglects a great means of succour who does not every day most earnestly recommend himself, and his particular difficulties and necessities in his main concern, to her intercession. To render our supplications the more efficacious, we ought to unite them in spirit to those of all fervent penitents and devout souls, in invoking this advocate for sinners. We ought to be ashamed not to appear among the foremost and the most ardent in our addresses, in proportion to our extreme necessities, and particular obligations,

ST. OSWALD, KING AND MARTYR.

THE English Saxon kingdom of the Northumbers was founded by Ida in 547. After his death the northern part called Bernicia was preserved by his children; but Deira, that is, the southern part, comprising Yorkshire and Lancashire, was occupied by Ælla or Alla, and after his death was recovered by Ethelfrid, grandson of Ida, who ruled the whole kingdom of the Northumbers twenty-four years. He being slain in battle by Redwald, king of the East-Angles, in 617, his sons Eanfrid, Oswald, and Oswi took refuge among the Scots, where they were instructed in the Christian faith, and received the sacrament of regeneration. In the meantime, Edwin, the son of Alla, reigned seventeen years over both kingdoms; but in 633 was killed fighting against the united forces of Penda the Mercian, and Cadwalla, king of the Britons or Welch, a Christian by profession, but a stranger to the maxims of his religion; in his manners a barbarian, and an implacable enemy to the English Saxons. Upon this revolution the three sons of Ethelfrid returned from Scotland; and Eanfrid, the eldest, obtained the kingdom of the Deira, whilst Osric, cousin-german to Edwin, was chosen King of Bernicia. Both these princes loved the glory of men more than God, and apostatized from the faith which they had embraced; but were both slain the same year

* Memento, Rerum Conditor &c.

Maria mater Gratiae, Dulcis Parens Clementiae, &c,

by Cadwalla; Osric in battle, and the other soon after by treachery. Hereupon Oswald was called to the crown, both of Deira and Bernicia, he being the son of Ethelfrid, and nephew of Edwin, whose sister Acca was his mother. This prince had embraced the faith with his whole heart, and far from forsaking Christ, as his unhappy brothers had done, to court the favour of his subjects, he had no other view than to bring them to the spiritual kingdom of divine grace, and to labour with them to secure a crown of eternal glory.

At that time Cadwalla ravaged all the Northumbrian provinces, not as a conqueror, but as a cruel tyrant, laying every thing waste with fire and sword, at the head of a vast army, which he boasted nothing could resist. Oswald assembled what troops he was able, and being fortified by faith in Christ, marched confidently, though with a small force, against this mighty enemy, who had by that time proceeded as far as the Picts' wall. Oswald gave him battle at a place called by Bede Denis-burn,* that is, the brook Denis, adjoining to the Picts' wall on the north side. Being come near the enemy's camp, the evening before the engagement, the pious king caused a great wooden cross to be made in haste, and he held it up himself with both his hands whilst the hole dug in the earth to plant it in was filled up round the foot. When it was fixed, St. Oswald cried out to his army: "Let us now kneel down, and jointly pray to the Omnipotent, and only true God, that he would mercifully defend us from our proud enemy; for he knows that we fight in a just war in defence of our lives and country." All the soldiers did as he commanded them.⁽¹⁾ The place where this cross was set up was called in the English

(1) Bede, l. 3, c. 2, p. 104.

* Not Devilsbourn, as Camden falsely read it, who imagined this place to be Devilston or Dilston; but that lies south from the Picts' wall, and even from the Tyne. Mr. Smith (Append. in Bed. n. 13, p. 720,) demonstrates the brook Denis to be that which is now called Erringburn, which runs through Bingfield, one mile north from the wall. About a mile beyond Bingfield to the north is Hallington, formerly Haledown, anciently Havenfelth; though probably the whole country for two miles from Hallington through Bingfield to the wall was called Havenfelth. On the place where Oswald erected this cross, a church was afterwards built. A church of St. Oswald stands there at this day, says Mr. Smith.

tongue Hevenfelth, that is, Heaven's field, by a happy omen, says Bede, because there was to be erected the first heavenly trophy of faith; for, before that time, no church or altar was known to have been raised in the whole kingdom of the Bernicians. This cross of St. Oswald remained afterwards very famous. Bede tells us, that to his time, many cut little chips of it, which they steeped in water, which being drank by sick persons, or sprinkled upon them, many recovered their health. He adds, that after the death of King Oswald, the monks of Hexham used to come to the place on the day before the anniversary of his death, there to watch the night in prayer, reciting the office with many psalms for his soul,* and the next morning to offer the victim of the holy oblation. A church was built on the spot some time before Bede wrote, who mentions that one of the monks of Hexham, named Bothelm, then living, having broken his arm by falling on the ice as he was walking in the night, and having suffered a long time much anguish from the hurt, was perfectly cured in one night by applying a little of the moss which was taken off from this cross, and brought him. The learned Alcuin, in his poem on the bishops and saints of York, published by Mr. Thomas Gale, at Oxford,(1) relates how the pious king, no ways daunted at the multitude and ferocity of his enemies, encouraged his soldiers to a confidence in Christ, and exhorted them to implore his protection prostrate with him on their faces before the cross which he had set up.† This author likewise adds an account of several miracles wrought down to his time in 780, at the

(1) Gale, *Historiæ Anglic. Scriptor. t. 2*, Oxford, 1691.

* "*Pro salute animæ ejus.*" These prayers were always changed into thanksgivings when the person was enrolled among the martyrs.

† "*Nunc, precor, invictas animis assumite vires,
Auxiliumque Dei, cunctis præstantius armis,
Poscite, corde pio, precibus; prosternite vestros
Vultus ante crucem, quam vertice montis in isto
Erexi, rutilat quæ Christi clara trophæo,
Quæ quoque nunc nobis præstabit ab hoste triumphum
Tunc clamor populi fertur super astra precantis,
Et cruce sic coram, Dominumque Deumque potentem
Poplitibus flexis, exercitus omnis adorat.*" &c.

Alcuin. de Pontificibus et Sanctis Ecclesiæ Eborac. v. 244, p. 707
This passage clearly explains his epistle annexed to the council of Francofort.

relics of St. Oswald, and at this cross; or by chips cut from it infused in water, by drinking which, many sick were cured, even in Ireland, and other distant countries. So great was the veneration of the people for this cross, that the abbey of Durham used for its seal, during several ages, this cross on one side, and on the reverse the figure of St. Oswald's head, as Mr. Smith exhibits it from several ancient records. Almighty God was pleased to bless the king's faith and devotion by granting him and his small army a complete victory over Cadwalla, who was killed in the battle, and his forces, with those of his allies, entirely routed.

St. Oswald, after giving thanks to God, immediately set himself to restore good order throughout his dominions, and to plant in them the faith of Christ. By his ambassadors he entreated the king and bishops in Scotland to send him a bishop and assistants, by whose preaching the people whom he governed might be grounded in the Christian religion, and receive baptism. Aidan,* a native of Ireland, and a monk of the celebrated monastery of Hij, was chosen for the great and arduous undertaking; and by his mildness soon repaired the mischief done by another monk sent thither before him, whose harshness had alienated many from the sweet law of the gospel. The king bestowed on Aidan the isle of Lindisfarne for his episcopal seat; and was so edified with his learning and zeal, that this great prince, before the bishop could sufficiently speak the English language, would be himself his interpreter, and explain his sermons and instructions to the people.

Oswald filled his dominions with churches and monasteries, and whilst he was governing his temporal kingdom, was intent only to labour and pray for an eternal crown. He very often continued in prayer from the time of matins (at midnight, to which he rose with the monks) till day-light; and by reason of his frequent custom of praying or giving thanks to our Lord at all times, it is said that wherever he was sitting he would have his hands on his knees turned upwards towards heaven. Bede says that he reigned over Britons, Picts, Scots, and English. The kingdom of Northumberland was then ex-

* See the life of St. Aidan on the 31st of August.

tended as far as the Frith of Edinburgh ; but by this expression of Bede some other provinces of the Picts, and others in Wales must have paid homage to him. Penda, the Mercian, being one of the allies of Cadwalla, and, according to Malmesbury, present at his defeat, Mercia also paid him a kind of submission ; and so great was his power, that all the other kings of the heptarchy acknowledged a certain dependence ; whence Adamnan, abbot of Hij, in the life of St. Columba, styles him emperor of Britain.

Wonderful were the humility, affability, and charity of this great king amidst his prosperity ; of which Bede gives us the following instance. One Easter-day whilst he was sitting down to dinner, an officer, whose business it was to take care of the poor, came in, and told him there was a great multitude of poor people at his gate desiring alms. Whereupon the king sent them a large silver dish full of meat from his own table, and ordered the dish to be broken into small pieces and distributed among them. Upon this St. Aidan, who happened to be at table, taking him by the right hand, said : " Let this hand never corrupt." Bede adds, that this arm being cut off from his body after he was slain, remained incorrupt till his time, and was then kept, being honoured by all with due veneration, in the church of St. Peter, at the royal castle of Bebbaborough, (so called from Bebba, a former queen,) now Bamboorough in Northumberland. Simon of Durham, and Ingulphus testify that this arm was afterwards kept at Peterborough.

When St. Oswald had reigned eight years in great prosperity, Penda, the barbarous Pagan king of Mercia, who nine years before had slain the pious King Edwin, uncle to St. Oswald by his mother, but had been vanquished by our saint in the beginning of his reign, found means again to raise a great army and invade the Christian dominions of our holy king. St. Oswald met him with an inferior force, and was killed in the battle that was fought between them. When he saw himself surrounded with the arms of his enemies, he offered his prayer for the souls of his soldiers. Whence it became a proverb : " O God be merciful to their souls, said Oswald when he fell." He was slain in the thirty-eighth year of his age, of our Lord 642, on the 5th of August, in a place called Maserfield. This seems to

have been at Winwick in Lancashire, where is a well still called St. Oswald's, which was formerly visited out of devotion; and that this territory was called Maserfelte, appears from an old inscription in Winwick church. Nevertheless, Oswaldtry, that is, Oswald's cross, a market town, seven miles from Shrewsbury. is supposed by some to have also been formerly called Maserfelth; and Capgrave, Camden, and others think this the place where St. Oswald was slain; for, he might before this, say they, when he defeated Penda, have added that part of Shropshire to his kingdom. The famous church of St. Oswald there stands without the New gate. Leland in his Itinerary says it was once a monastery; this must have been in the Saxon times; but soon after the Norman conquest this church of Oswaldtry or Oswald's cross, was a parish when it was given to the monastery of Shrewsbury, to which it afterwards belonged, and was inappropriate. See Tanner in his Monastic history; who says the town called Album Monasterium or White-minster, was not Oswaldtry, but Whit-church, which was once a monastery. The church of Oswaldtry was probably so called from St. Oswald's cross, of which it was probably possessed; but Winwick in Maserfelth in Lancashire more justly claims the honour of his martyrdom.* The inhuman tyrant caused the saint's head and arms to be struck off, and fixed on poles; but St.

* Powell, in his description of Wales, says Bede's Maserfelth, must have been situate in what was properly the kingdom of the Northumbrians, and not at Oswaldtry in Shropshire, which was called by the Britons Maesuswalht, not Maserfelth, as Camden, and from him Rapin, Carte, and Guthrie imagined. Hence the learned antiquary, Dr. Cowper, in his notes on his life of St. Werburg, places it in Lancashire, near Winwick, the famous rich church of which town was formerly a place of the greatest devotion to St. Oswald. "There is a large fee called Mackerfield," says he, "in which lies part of Winwick parish, where, and especially in the town of Newton, in that district, is a tradition, that King Oswald had a palace or castle thereabouts, where he mostly resided." On the south out-side wall of Winwick church are carved, in the old English character, some verses relating to this prince:

"Hic locus, Oswalde, quondam placuit tibi valde.
Nortanhumbroꝝ fueras Rex, nuncque Poloruꝝ
Regna tenes," &c.

St. Oswald, in the former part of his reign, seems to have lived chiefly at Bamborough, anciently Babbenburg, a castle in Northumberland, built by Ida, first king of the Northumbrians, as we learn from the Saxon Chronicle, ad an. 547, and so called from Queen Bebba. Penda marched to this place, and laid siege to it after the death of St. Oswald, but was baffled and retreated.

Oswald's brother and successor Oswi took them away the year following, and carried the arms to his own royal palace, and sent the head to Lindisfarne. The head was afterwards put in the same shrine with the body of St. Cuthbert, and with it translated to Durham, as Malmesbury and others assure us. The rest of St. Oswald's body was translated by his niece Osfrida wife of Etheldred, king of Mercia, to the monastery of Bardney in Lincolnshire. During the Danish irruptions these relics were removed, by the care of Edilred, king of the Mercians, to Gloucester, where Elfleda, countess of Mercia, and daughter to king Alfred, built the church of St. Peter. The monument erected to St. Oswald there, is still to be seen in a chapel of this cathedral between two pillars; but part of the relics were translated to the abbey of St. Winoc's Berg in Flanders, in .221, and deposited there with great solemnity by Adam, bishop of Terouanne.* The barbarous king Penda, after he had slain five pious kings, Edwin, Oswald, Sigebert, Egric, and Annas, turned his arms against Oswi, who tried in vain to soften him by presents and the most favourable proposals. Seeing himself rejected by man, he turned his gifts into prayers, and bound himself by vow, in case he should be victorious, to consecrate to God his daughter Enlfleda, then only one year old, and give with her twelve portions of land (each of which was sufficient to maintain ten families) to build and endow monasteries. God heard his vow, and Oswi, with an inferior army, defeated and slew the tyrant near Loyden, now Leeds in

* King Oswald was succeeded in Bernicia by his brother Oswi, and in Deira by Oswin, a cousin of the great King Edwin. The latter was remarkable for his humility and singular piety. Having once given a fine horse to St. Aidan, and the bishop having bestowed it on a poor man, he told him, that a worse horse would have been better bestowed on the beggar; but, reflecting on what he had said, he soon after cast himself at the bishop's feet, promising never again to concern himself whatever he should give to the children of God. After reigning seven years, Oswin was slain in war by Oswi at Gilliny, near Richmond in Yorkshire, and buried at Tinnmouth. His body was found in a stone coffin there in 1065, and enshrined. See the MS. life of Oswin, Bibl. Cotton. and Matt. Westmin. an. 1110. This church was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and St. Oswin, and some time after given to the abbey of Jarrow. Oswi, repenting of this murder, built a monastery for the monks to pray for his soul, and that of the king whom he had slain. Oswin is styled a martyr in some calendars on the 20th of August, and honoured, as chief patron of Tinnmouth.

Yorkshire, in 655 The place of this battle was called Winwidfield or Field of Victory; situated on the river Winuæd, now Aire. With Penda, who was then eighty years old, of which he had reigned thirty, fell thirty commanders of royal blood. See the Saxon Chronicle, ad an. 655. Bede, Hist. Angl. l. 3, c. 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13; and Alcuin, Poem. de Pontificibus et Sanctis Eborac. published by Gale, t. 2.

ST. AFRA AND COMPANIONS, MM.

THE persecution of Dioclesian was carried on with great cruelty by his colleague Maximian Herculeus in Africa, Italy, Rhetia, Vindelicia, Noricum, and Upper Pannonia, the government of which provinces fell to his share in the division of the empire. At Ausburg, in Rhetia, the apparitors apprehended a woman called Afra, known to have formerly been a common prostitute. The judge, by name Gaius, who knew who she was, said: "Sacrifice to the gods; it is better to live than to die in torments." Afra replied: "I was a great sinner before I knew God; but I will not add new crimes, nor do what you command me." Gaius said: Go to the capitol and sacrifice." Afra answered: My capitol is Jesus Christ, whom I have always before my eyes. I every day confess my sins; and, because I am unworthy to offer him any sacrifice,* I desire to sacrifice myself for his name, that this body in which I have sinned may be purified and sacrificed to him by torments." "I am informed," said Gaius, "that you are a prostitute. Sacrifice, therefore, as you are a stranger to the God of the Christians, and cannot be accepted by him." Afra replied: "Our Lord Jesus Christ hath said, that he came down from heaven to save sinners. The gospels testify that an abandoned woman washed his feet with her tears, and obtained pardon, and that he never rejected the publicans, but permitted them to eat with him." The judge said: "Sacrifice, that your gallants may follow you, and enrich you." Afra answered: "I will have no more of that execrable gain. I have thrown away, as so much filth, what I had by me of it. Even our poor brethren

* Sinners under canonical penance were not allowed to assist at the divine mysteries, but prayed without the church door during mass.