

in the provinces of Angus, Marris, Buchan, Elgin, Murray, and Ross. Being made bishop in this last county, he filled it with oratories and churches, and by planting the true spirit of Christ in the hearts of many, settled that church in a most flourishing condition. He died about the year 630, and was buried at Rosmark, the capital of the county of Ross. The Breviary of Aberdeen mentions that he founded one hundred and fifty churches and oratories in Scotland, and ascribes many miracles to his intercession after his death. See that Breviary, and King on this day, bishop Lesley, l. 4. Hist. Scot. and Hector Boetius, l. 9. Hist.

MARCH XV.

ST. ABRAHAM, HERMIT,

AND HIS NIECE, ST. MARY, A PENITENT.

From his life written by his friend, St. Ephrem, Op. t. 2. p. 1. Ed. nov. Vatic. See other acts of St. Abraham, given in Latin by Lipoman, 29 Oct., and by Surius, 16 March, mentioned in Greek by Lambecius, Bibl. Vind. t. 8. p. 255. 260. 266. and by Montfaucon, Bibl. Coisl. p. 211. Two other kinds of Greek Acts are found among the MSS. at the abbey of Saint Germain-des-Prez, at Paris, Bibl. Coisl. ib. See also Jos. Assemani, Bibl. Orient. t. 1. p. 38 and 396, from the Chronicle of Edessa: likewise Kohlius, *Introductio in historiam et rem literariam Sclavorum*, p. 316. Altonaviæ, A.D. 1729.

About the Year 360.

ST. ABRAHAM was born at Chidana, in Mesopotamia, near Edessa, of wealthy and noble parents, who, after giving him a most virtuous education, were desirous of engaging him in the married state. In compliance with their inclinations, Abraham took to wife a pious and noble virgin: but earnestly desiring to live and die in the state of holy virginity, as soon as the marriage ceremony and feast were over, having made known his resolution to his new bride, he secretly withdrew to a cell two miles from the city Edessa; where his friends found him at prayer after a search of seventeen days. By earnest entreaties he obtained their consent, and after their departure walled up the door of his cell leaving only a little window, through which he received what was necessary for his subsistence. He spent his whole time in adoring and praising God, and imploring his mercy. He every

day wept abundantly. He was possessed of no other earthly goods but a cloak and a piece of sackcloth which he wore, and a little vessel out of which he both eat and drank. For fifty years he was never wearied with his austere penance and holy exercises, and seemed to draw from them every day fresh vigour. Ten years after he had left the world, by the demise of his parents, he inherited their great estates, but commissioned a virtuous friend to distribute the revenues in alms-deeds. Many resorted to him for spiritual advice, whom he exceedingly comforted and edified by his holy discourses.

A large country town in the diocese of Edessa, remained till that time addicted to idolatry, and its inhabitants had loaded with injuries and outrages all the holy monks and others who had attempted to preach the gospel to them. The bishop at length cast his eye on Abraham, ordained him priest though much against his will, and sent him to preach the faith to those obstinate infidels. He wept all the way as he went, and with great earnestness repeated this prayer: "Most merciful God, look down on my weakness: assist me with thy grace, that thy name may be glorified. Despise not the works of thy own hands." At the sight of the town, reeking with the impious rites of idolatry, he redoubled the torrents of his tears: but found the citizens resolutely determined not to hear him speak. Nevertheless, he continued to pray and weep among them without intermission, and though he was often beaten and ill-treated, and thrice banished by them, he always returned with the same zeal. After three years the infidels were overcome by his meekness and patience, and being touched by an extraordinary grace, all demanded baptism. He staid one year longer with them to instruct them in the faith; and on their being supplied with priests and other ministers, he went back to his cell.

His brother dying soon after his return thither, left an only daughter, called Mary, whom the saint undertook to train up in a religious life. For this purpose he placed her in a cell near his own, where, by the help of his instructions, she became eminent for her piety and penance. At the end of twenty years she was unhappily seduced by a wolf in sheep's clothing, a wicked monk; who resorted often to the place under colour of receiving advice from her uncle. Hereupon falling into despair, she went to a distant town, where she gave herself up to the

most criminal disorders. The saint ceased not for two years to weep and pray for her conversion. Being then informed where she dwelt, he dressed himself like a citizen of that town, and going to the inn where she lived in the pursuit of her evil courses desired her company with him at supper. When he saw her alone, he took off his cap which disguised him, and with many tears said to her: "Daughter Mary, don't you know me? What is now become of your angelical habit, of your tears and watchings in the divine praises?" &c.

Seeing her struck and filled with horror and confusion, he tenderly encouraged her and comforted her, saying that he would take her sins upon himself if she would faithfully follow his advice, and that his friend Ephrem also prayed and wept for her. She with many tears returned him her most hearty thanks, and promised to obey in all things his injunctions. He set her on his horse, and led the beast himself on foot. In this manner he conducted her back to his desert, and shut her up in a cell behind his own. There she spent the remaining fifteen years of her life in continual tears, and the most perfect practices of penance and other virtues. Almighty God was pleased within three years after her conversion, to favour her with the gift of working miracles by her prayers. And as soon as she was dead, "her countenance appeared to us," says St. Ephrem, "so shining, that we understood that choirs of angels had attended at her passage out of this life into a better." St. Abraham died five years before her: at the news of whose sickness, almost the whole city and country flocked to receive his benediction. When he had expired, every one strove to procure for themselves some part of his clothes, and St. Ephrem, who was an eye-witness, relates, that many sick were cured by the touch of these relics. SS. Abraham and Mary were both dead when St. Ephrem wrote, who died himself in 378.* St. Abraham is named in the Latin, Greek, and Coptic calendars, and also St. Mary in those of the Greeks.

St. Abraham converted his desert into a paradise, because he found in it his God, whose presence makes Heaven. He wanted

* Bollandus, Papebroke, and Pagi pretend that St. Abraham the hermit lived near the Hellespont, and long after St. Ephrem: but are clearly confuted by Jos. Assemani, *Bibl. Orient.* t. 1. and *Com. in Calend. Univ.* t. 5. p. 324. ad 29 Oct. The Chronicle of Edessa assures us that he was a native of Chidana, and was living in the year of the Greeks, 667; of Christ, 356.

not the company of men, who enjoyed that of God and his angels; nor could he ever be at a loss for employment, to whom both the days and nights were two short for heavenly contemplation. Whilst his body was employed in penitential manual labour, his mind and heart were sweetly taken up in God, who was to him All in All, and the centre of all his desires and affections. His watchings were but an uninterrupted sacrifice of divine love, and by the ardour of his desire, and the disposition of his soul and its virtual tendency to God, his sleep itself was a continuation of his union with God, and exercise of loving him. He could truly say with the spouse, *I sleep, but my heart watcheth*. Thus Christians, who are placed in distracting stations, may also, if they accustom themselves, converse interiorly with God in purity of heart, and in all their actions and desires have only his will in view. Such a life is a kind of imitation of the Seraphim, to whom to live and to love are one and the same thing. "The angels," says St. Gregory the Great, "always carry their Heaven about with them wheresoever they are sent, because they never depart from God, or cease to behold him; ever dwelling in the bosom of his immensity; living and moving in him, and exercising their ministry in the sanctuary of his divinity." This is the happiness of every Christian who makes a desert, by interior solitude, in his own heart.

ST. ZACHARY, POPE, C.

HE succeeded Gregory III. in 741, and was a man of singular meekness and goodness; and so far from any thought of revenge, that he heaped benefits on those who had persecuted him before his promotion to the pontificate. He loved the clergy and people of Rome to that degree, that he hazarded his life for them on occasion of the troubles which Italy fell into by the rebellion of the dukes of Spoleto and Benevento against King Luitprand. Out of respect to his sanctity and dignity, that king restored to the church of Rome all the places which belonged to it, Ameria, Horta, Narni, Ossimo, Ancona, and the whole territory of Sabina, and sent back the captives without ransom. The Lombards were moved to tears at the devotion with which they heard him perform the divine service. By a journey to Pavia, he obtained also of Luitprand, though with some difficulty, peace for the