

Goths in the reign of Constantine the Great. When Valens ascended the imperial throne in the East, in the year 364, the nation of the Goths was divided into two kingdoms. Athanaric, king of the Eastern Goths, who bordered upon the Roman empire towards Thrace, being a savage prince, and a declared enemy to the Christian religion, in 370, raised a furious persecution against the church in his dominions. By his order, an idol was carried in a chariot through all the towns and villages, where it was suspected that any Christians lived, and all who refused to adore it were put to death. The usual method of the persecutors was to burn the Christians with their children in their houses, or in the churches where they were assembled together; sometimes they were stabbed at the foot of the altar. In the numerous army of martyrs, which glorified God amongst that barbarous people on this occasion, St. Nicetas held a distinguished rank. It was by the fire that he sealed his faith and obedience with his blood, and, triumphing over sin, passed to eternal glory.

By the lively expectation of a happy immortality, and the constant remembrance of the divine judgments, the saints courageously overcame all the assaults of the devil, the world, and their own flesh. We have these enemies to fight against, nor can we expect any truce with them so long as we remain in this mortal state. They are never more to be feared than when they lull us into a false confidence by seeming themselves to sleep. We must always watch, by assiduous prayer, self-denial, and flight of all dangerous occasions, that we may discover and shun all the dangerous arts and stratagems by which our crafty enemies seek to decoy or betray us into ruin; and we must always hold our weapons in our hands, that we may be ever ready to repulse all open assaults. Many have fallen in the security of peace who had vanquished the most violent persecutions. If we do not meet with the fiery trials of the martyrs, we are still in danger of perishing in a calm, unless we arm ourselves with watchfulness and fortitude.

#### ST. NICOMEDES, M.

HE was a holy priest at Rome, who was apprehended in the persecution of Domitian for his assiduity in assisting the mar-

tyrs in their conflicts, and for interrering their bodies. Refusing constantly to sacrifice to idols, he was beaten to death with clubs about the year 90. His tomb was on the road to Nomento, and he is commemorated on this day in the sacramentary of St. Gregory the Great, and in the Martyrologies of St. Jerom, Bede, &c. See the Acts of SS. Nereus and Achilleus.

#### ST. JOHN THE DWARF, ANCHORET OF SCETE.

ST. JOHN, surnamed, from his low stature, Colobus, that is, the Little or the Dwarf, was famous among the eminent ancient saints that inhabited the deserts of Egypt. He retired, together with an elder brother, into the vast wilderness of Sceté, and putting himself under the direction of a holy old hermit, he set himself, with his whole heart, and with all his strength, to labour in subduing himself, and in putting on the divine spirit of Christ. The first condition which Christ requires, the preliminary article which he lays down for his service, is a practice of perfect self-denial, by which we learn to die to ourselves, and all our vicious inclinations. So long as inordinate self-love and passions reign in the heart, they cannot fail to produce their fruits; we are imperceptibly governed by them in the circle of our ordinary actions, and remain habitually enslaved to pride, anger, impatience, envy, sensuality, and other vices, which often break forth into open transgressions of the divine law; and a lurking inordinate self-love, whilst it holds the empire in the affections, insinuates itself, under subtle disguises, into all our actions, becomes the main-spring of all the motions of our heart, and debases our virtues themselves with a mixture of vice and imperfection. Virtue is generally defective, even in many who desire to serve God, because very few have the courage perfectly to vanquish themselves. It is strange that men should be so blind, or so cowardly, in a point of such infinite importance, since Christ has laid down the precept of perfect abnegation and humility as the foundation of the empire of his divine grace and love in a soul: upon this all the saints raise the edifice of their virtue. He who builds not upon it, builds upon sand. He who, without this precaution, multiplies his alms, his fasts, and his devotions, takes a great deal of pains to lose, in a great measure, the fruit of his labours.