

tolie spirit of their state, and how heroic their sacrifice is.

SS. GORDIAN AND EPIMACHUS, MM.

THESE two holy martyrs are named in all calendars of the western Church since the sixth age. St. Epimachus suffered at Alexandria under Decius, in the year 250, with one Alexander. They had been long detained in a hideous dungeon, were beaten with clubs, their sides were torn with iron-hooks; lastly, they were both burnt in lime. This is related by St. Dionysius of Alexandria, quoted by Eusebius. (b. vi. c. 41.)

St. Gordian was beheaded at Rome for the faith, under Julian the Apostate, in the year 362. His name occurs in the ancient Martyrologies.

His body was laid in a cave, in which was deposited that of St. Epimachus, which was brought from Alexandria to Rome a little before St. Gordian's martyrdom. The relics of both these martyrs are now possessed by the great Benedictin abbey of Kempton, in the diocess of Ausbourg.

ST. ISIDORE OF MADRID, LABOURER,

PATRON OF MADRID.

It is a misfortune which deserves to be lamented with floods of tears, that ignorance, obstinacy, and vice should so often taint a country life, the state which of all others is most necessary and important to the world; the most conformable to a human condition and to nature; the state which was sanctified by the example of the primitive holy patriarchs, and which affords the most favourable opportunities for the perfect practice of every virtue and Christian duty. What advantageous helps to piety did the ancient hermits seek in the deserts, which the circumstances of a country labourer do not offer? The life of St. Isidore is a most sensible proof of this assertion. He was born at Madrid, of poor but very devout

parents, and was christened Isidore from the name of their patron, St. Isidore of Seville. They had not the means to procure him learning or a polite education; but, both by word and example, they infused into his tender soul the utmost horror and dread of all sin, and the most vehement ardour for every virtue, and especially for prayer. Good books are a great help to holy meditation; but not indispensably requisite. St. Irenæus mentions whole nations which believed in Christ, and abounded in exemplary livers, without knowing the use of ink or paper. Many illustrious anchorets knew no other alphabet than that of humility and divine charity. The great St. Antony himself could not so much as read the Greek or Latin languages: nay, from the words of St. Austin, some doubt whether he could read even his own barbarous Egyptian dialect. Yet in the science of the saints, what philosopher or orator ever attained to the A B C of that great man? * Learning, if it puffs up the mind, or inspires any secret self-sufficiency, is an impediment to the communications of the Holy Ghost; simplicity and sincere humility being the dispositions which invite him into the soul. By these was Isidore prepared to find him an interior instructor and comforter. His earnestness in seeking lessons and instructions of piety made him neglect no opportunity of hearing them; and so much the more tender and the deeper were the impressions which they left in his soul, as his desire was the stronger and the more pure. His patience in bearing all injuries and in overcoming the envy of fellow-servants by cordial kindnesses; his readiness to obey his masters, and in indifferent things to comply with the inclinations of others, and humbly to serve every one, gave him the most complete victory over himself and his passions. Labour he considered as enjoined him by God in punishment of sin, and for a remedy against it. And he per-

formed his work in a spirit of compunction and penance. Many object that their labours and fatigues leave them little time for the exercises of religion. But Isidore, by directing his attention according to the most holy motives of faith, made his work a most perfect act of religion. He considered it as a duty to God. Therefore he applied himself to it with great diligence and care, in imitation of the angels in heaven, who in all things fulfil the will of God with the greatest readiness and alacrity of devotion. The more humbling and the more painful the labour was, the dearer it was to the saint, being a means the more suitable to tame his flesh, and a more noble part of his penance. With the same spirit that the saints subdued their bodies by toils in their deserts, Isidore embraced his task. He moreover sanctified it by continual prayer. Whilst his hand held the plough, he in his heart conversed with God, with his angel guardian, and the other blessed spirits; sometimes deploring the sins of the world, and his own spiritual miseries, at other times, in the melting words of the royal prophet, raising his desires to the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem. It was chiefly by this perfect spirit of prayer, joined with, or rather engrafted upon a most profound humility and spirit of mortification, that St. Isidore arrived at so eminent a degree of sanctity as rendered him the admiration of all Spain. In his youth he was retained servant by a gentleman named John de Vargas of Madrid, to till his land and do his husbandry work. The saint afterward took a most virtuous woman to wife, named Mary Toribia. Those who call her de la Cabeza were deceived by a chapel to which that name is given, because her head is kept in it. After the birth of one child, which died young, the parents, by mutual consent, served God in perfect continency.

St. Isidore continued always in the service of

the same master. On account of his fidelity, he could say to him as Jacob did to Laban,¹ that, to guard and improve his stock, he had often watched the nights, and had suffered the scorching heats of summer, and the cold of winter; and that the stock, which he found small, had been exceedingly increased in his hands. Don John de Vargas, after long experience of the treasure he possessed in this faithful ploughman, treated him as a brother, according to the advice of Ecclesiasticus,² *Let a wise servant be dear to thee as thy own soul.* He allowed him the liberty of assisting daily at the public office of the Church. On the other side, Isidore was careful by rising very early, to make his devotions no impediment to his business, nor any encroachment upon what he owed to his master. This being a duty of justice, it would have been a false devotion to have pretended to please God by a neglect of such an obligation; much less did the good servant indulge his compassionate charity to the poor, by relieving them otherwise than out of his own salary. The saint was sensible that in his fidelity, diligence, and assiduous labour, consisted, in great part, the sanctification of his soul; and that his duty to his master was his duty to God. He also inspired his wife with the same confidence in God, the same love of the poor, and the same disengagement from the things of this world: he made her the faithful imitatrix of his virtues, and a partner in his good works. She died in 1175, and is honoured in Spain among the saints. Her immemorial veneration was approved by pope Innocent XII. in 1697. See Benedict XIV. de Canoniz. l. 2. c. 24. p. 246.

St. Isidore being seized with the sickness of which he died, foretold his last hour, and prepared himself for it with redoubled fervour, and with the most tender devotion, patience, and cheerful-

¹ Gen. xxxi. 40. xxx. 30.

² Eccles. vii. 28.

ness. The piety with which he received the last sacraments drew tears from all that were present. Repeating inflamed acts of divine love, he expired on the 15th of May, 1170, being near sixty years of age. His death was glorified by miracles. After forty years, his body was removed out of the church-yard into the church of St. Andrew. It has been since placed in the bishop's chapel, and during these five hundred years remains entire and fresh, being honoured by a succession of frequent miracles down to this time.

The following, among others, is very well attested. Philip III. in his return from Lisbon, was taken so ill at Casarubios del Monte, that his life was despaired of by his physicians. Whereupon the shrine of St. Isidore was ordered to be carried in a solemn procession of the clergy, court, and people from Madrid to the chamber of the sick king. The joint prayers of many prevailed. At the same time the shrine was taken out of the church, the fever left the king; and upon its being brought into his chamber, he was perfectly cured. The year following the body of the saint was put into a new rich shrine, which cost one thousand six hundred ducats of gold. St. Isidore had been beatified a little before by Paul V. in 1619, at the solicitation of the same king. His solemn canonization was performed at the request of king Philip IV. on the 12th of March, 1622; though the bull was only made public by Benedict XIII. See the life of St. Isidore, written by John of Madrid, one hundred and forty years after his death; and Card. Lambertini, de Canoniz. SS. t. 3.

ST. COMGALL, ABBOT.

ONE of the most illustrious founders of monastic Orders in Ireland. He was born of noble parents in the north of Ulster, in 516, and was brought up under St. Fintan, in his monastery of Cluain-Aidhnech, at the foot of the Bladmahills, from whence arise two rivers, the Barrow and None in the Queen's county. He came out of that school of piety and monastic discipline an accomplished master, and founded, about the year 550, the great abbey of Benchor or Bangor¹ in the county of Down, which was the most numerous and most celebrated of all monasteries of Ireland, as that of Bangor in North Wales,

¹ See Note, page 196