

fire; for Origen had among his disciples several illustrious ladies. See Eusebius, 1. 6, c. 3, 4.

SS. POTAMIANA OR POTAMIENA, AND BASILIDES, MARTYRS.

THESE two also owed their instruction in virtue to the same master with the former, as Henry Valesius proves from Eusebius's history, and as Rufinus assures us. Potamiana was by condition a slave, but had the happiness to be educated in the faith by a pious mother, whose name was Marcella, and seeking the ablest master of piety, applied herself to Origen. She was young, and of amazing beauty, and her heathen master conceived a brutish desire to abuse her; but finding her resolution and virtue invincible, and all his artifices, threats, and promises in vain, he delivered her to the prefect Aquila, entreating him not to hurt her if she could be prevailed upon to consent to his passion, and on that condition promising him a considerable sum of money. The prefect not being able to persuade her, made her undergo several torments, and at length caused a caldron of boiling pitch to be prepared, and then said to her: "Go, obey your master, or you shall be thrown into this caldron." She answered, "I conjure you by the life of the emperor whom you respect, that you do not let me appear uncovered; command me rather to be let down by degrees into the caldron with my clothes on, that you may see the patience with which Jesus Christ, of whom you are ignorant, endues those who trust in him." The prefect granted this request, and delivered her to Basilides, one of her guards, to carry her to execution. Basilides treated her with mildness and civility, and kept off the people, who pressed on to insult her modesty, with lewd and opprobrious speeches, all the way she went. The martyr, by way of requital, bade him be of good courage; and promised, that "after her death she would obtain of God his salvation," as Eusebius expresses it. When she had spoken thus, the executioners put her feet into the boiling pitch, and dipped her in by degrees to the very top of her head; and thus she finished her martyrdom. Her mother, Marcella, was burnt at the same time. Tertullian(1) and Origen(2) testify that many were then called to the faith by visions and appa-

(1) L. de Animâ. c. 4.

(2) Orig. contra Cels. l. 1, p. 35.

ritions.* By such a favour was the conversion of the soldier Basilides wrought through the prayers of St. Potamiana; who whilst alive had promised he should feel the effects of her gratitude when she should be gone to Christ. A little after her

* Among these miraculous conversions, none was more celebrated than that of the rhetorician Arnobius. This learned man holds an eminent place among those original authors of the primitive ages, who learned from the enemy himself the art to conquer him, and borrowed from idolatry arms by which they defeated it. He was a native of Sicca in Africa, and being eminent among the heathens for knowledge and eloquence, at first taught rhetoric in Numidia. Being obliged by his profession to read both ancient and modern authors, he acquired an extensive knowledge in Pagan theology, of which he was afterwards to become the destroyer. He was a most fiery stickler for idolatry at the time when, like another St. Paul, he was "compelled by heavenly admonitions" to acknowledge the evidence of the divine revelation *somniis compulsus*, says St. Jerom. (Chronic. ad an. 20, Constant.) Several examples of Pagans converted to the faith, in those times of distress, by divine admonitions, dreams, or visions, are recorded by the best historians, as of the soldier St. Basilides, mentioned above by Eusebius. (Hist. l. 6, c. 5.) Origen gives us a most authentic testimony concerning miraculous conversions by divine impulses upon hearts disposed to receive them, in the following words: "Many people have been brought over to Christianity by the Spirit of God giving a sudden turn to their minds, and offering visions to them, either by day or by night; so that instead of hating the word of God, they became ready to lay down their lives for it. I have seen many examples of this sort—God is my witness, that my sole purpose is to recommend the religion of Jesus, not by fictitious tales, but by the truth, and what happened in my presence." (l. 1, contra Celsum, p. 35.) Arnobius, being thus miraculously converted, desired baptism, but the Bishop of Sicca considering with what fury he had declaimed and stirred up the people against the church, before he would admit him to the laver of salvation, required for a condition that he should, by some learned work, give a public testimony to the truth which he had so violently combated. The sincere convert was impatient to attain to the desired happiness, and composed his seven books *Against the Gentiles*, as St. Jerom informs us, who censures his composition for want of method, and inequality of style. (Ep. 46, ad Paulin.) Nevertheless, Arnobius is a valuable author, writes with a degree of elegance, and, doubtless, would have better polished his style, if the haste with which he wrote had allowed him leisure to give it the last finishings. He borrows many passages from Cicero, and from St. Clemens of Alexandria; but never quotes the holy scriptures, which perhaps he had not then read; but he mentions and lays great stress on the miracles of Christ. He begins his first book by answering the reproach of the idolaters, that the Christians, by despising the gods, were the cause of all the calamities that befel the empire. Tertullian said long before: "If the Tiber overflows to the walls, or the Nile does not rise; if the weather is unseasonable; if an earthquake, famine, or pestilence happen, the general cry is, 'Straight away with the Christians to the lions.'" *Statim Christianos ad leones*. (Apol. c. 40.) Origen mentions the same to have been their clamour upon every misfortune, that the gods were angry with men for the Christian religion. Arnobius shows that such calamities were even

martyrdom, the soldiers who were his comrades, being about to make him swear by their false gods, he declared that he was a Christian, and could by no means do it. They at first thought he jested; but finding him to persist in his resolution,

more frequent before Christianity; that earthquakes arising from natural causes must sometimes happen in the present frame of the universe, and that they are indeed disposed by the hand of providence, but could not be produced in hatred of the Christians, seeing the heathens felt them no less severely than the Christians, &c. The idolaters objected that we pay divine honours to a man that was crucified; in answer to this, Arnobius proves Christ to be truly God, (l. 1 and 2,) and employs the general motives of the credibility of the gospel, namely the miracles of Christ and his disciples, which were the effects, not of magical enchantments, as the infidels pretended, but of divine power. He elegantly displays the great and rapid progress of the faith, which had been spread over the world by a few illiterate persons, in spite of the most bloody persecutions, &c. He says, that the very name of Christ expelled evil spirits, and made their oracles dumb. (l. 2.) He points out the time when he wrote, by mentioning the edicts of Dioclesian in 302, commanding the scriptures to be burnt, and those churches to be demolished in which the Christians offered their joint prayers to God for the princes, magistrates, armies, friends, and enemies, the living and the dead. (l. 4.) He proves the unity of God; and at large confutes idolatry from its own forms, customs, and doctrines, closely examining into its origin, temples, images, oracles, sacrifices, divinations, games, and deifications; turning its own testimony from its earliest antiquity against itself. He reasons with great force, and beautifies his arguments with the touches of a delicate and flowery imagination. His raillery of the gods and their crimes is executed with a great deal of genteel wit and humour. Nothing seems more to bespeak a fine genius than the easy and decent manner in which he treats this subject; his satire is innocent, and always pointed against the error, not the man; and the heathens he treats with a respectful regard, as men mistaken and unhappy. Thus he gains their heart, and solicits the reader by the united charms of pleasure and truth. He wrote this work whilst a novice in the faith, yet shows an accurate knowledge of its doctrine. Some have charged him with certain mistakes, from which Nourry, Ceillier, and others justify him. We have no correct edition of the works of Arnobius. See Ceillier, t. 3, p. 373.

LACTANTIUS, the famous Latin orator, was in his youth a disciple of Arnobius, at Sicca in Africa. He was converted to the faith from idolatry, (Inst. l. 7, c. ult. et epit. l. 2, c. 110,) but we have no account by what means this was done. Ceillier, Le Brun, and Franceschini, prove from his works that it happened at Nicomedia, whither he was invited out of Africa, in the reign of Dioclesian, about the year 290, to teach rhetoric in the Latin tongue. He staid there ten years, but the Greek language only being in request in that country, he had few scholars, and lived in so great poverty, that he almost wanted even necessities, as St. Jerom assures us. Poverty, indeed, is a disease which often rages in the republic of letters. About the year 317 he was sent for by Constantine the Great into Gaul, and appointed preceptor to Crispus Cæsar, whom that emperor had by his first wife Minervina, and who was then about nine years old. The great virtues and qualifications of this young prince

they carried him to the prefect, who caused him to be put in prison. The Christians who came to visit him there, asked him the cause of his sudden change. He answered them, that Potamiana had appeared to him on the night after the third day

endeared him exceedingly to his master: but Fausta, Constantine's second wife, daughter of Maximian Hercules, falsely accused him of having made an attempt upon her chastity, and prevailed upon Constantine to give an order that he should be put to death, as it is thought, about the year 326 or before. Soon after, the malice of the slander was brought to light, and Constantine caused the wicked author Fausta to be stifled in a hot bath. The tutor continued always faithful to the memory of a disciple whom he loved entirely, and after his death found no comfort but in his study. He was very old when he was called to superintend the instruction of Crispus Cæsar, and his extreme poverty seems to have preceded that employment. But Eusebius (in Chron. ad an. 318,) and St. Jerom (in Catal.) sufficiently give us to understand that he lived always poor, and by choice; retaining to his dying day the utmost contempt of riches and honours, and being very far from making any pursuits after pleasure, for which riches are chiefly sought in the world. This circumstance gives us no mean idea of his piety; for he must certainly have been a very virtuous man that could live poorly at a court, that could neglect the care even of necessary things in the midst of plenty, and had not the least taste of pleasures, when he resided among persons that were overwhelmed in them. He seems to have continued at Triers after the death of his royal pupil, and to have there ended his life. He declares that he should think his life well spent, and his labours fully recompensed, if he should by them reclaim some men from error, and bring them into the path of eternal life. "*Satis me vixisse arbitror, et officium hominis implese, si labor meus aliquos homines ab erroribus liberatos ad iter celeste direxerit.*" (l. de Opificio, c. 20.) This was the end which he proposed to himself in writing. He is the most eloquent of all the Christian authors who wrote in Latin; his style is pure, equal, natural, and florid, so extremely like Cicero's, that accurate critics have confessed themselves at a loss to find any difference between them. Whence Lactantius is called the Christian Tully; but he far surpasseth Cicero in his thoughts. He discourseth of God after a very sublime and exalted manner; and as the mysteries and maxims of the Christian religion infinitely excel the doctrine of the heathen philosophers, his writings are full of admirable precepts of morality; he lays down clear and perspicuous descriptions of all the virtues, and with invincible eloquence exhorts men to the practice of them. But his pen is chiefly employed in overthrowing paganism, which he confutes with all the ardour and spirit imaginable. It must, however, be confessed that he has handled theology after too philosophical a manner, that he has fallen into some mistakes in ancient chronology, and other things, and that both he and Arnobius have not spoken of all the mysteries of faith with the accuracy and precision of some other fathers.

Lactantius, after his conversion, first wrote his book *Of the Work of God*, in which he proves a divine providence superintending all things from man, his principal work; giving an elegant description of the principal parts of the human body, and the faculties of the soul. In his book *Of God's Anger*, he shows that justice and the chastisement of sin is no less an attribute of God than mercy. His great work is that of

from her martyrdom, and had placed a crown on his head, saying, that she had besought the Lord to give him the grace of salvation, and had obtained her request; and that he should shortly be called by Him to glory. After this, having received

Divine Institutions, comprised in seven books, in which he overturns the system of idolatry, and establishes the true worship of God. He first published this work about the year 320, during the persecution of Licinius, and seems to have revised it about four years after. In it he mounts up to the original of idolatry, demolishes it in all its forms, and confounds its most sanguine protectors. He combats the different sects of the heathen philosophers, pursuing them through all the labyrinths of error and false judgment, without ever losing himself. Having exploded falsehood, he introduces the most noble, sublime, and perfect philosophy of the holy scriptures, which alone satisfies all the inquiries of human reason, where all systems of philosophers are infinitely deficient. This consideration leads him on to the great proofs of Christianity. He represents the law of God in the most amiable light, as the re-establishment of original rectitude, as the band of benevolence, the source of true peace and unalterable consolation, and the infallible rule conducting to bliss. He ends the work with a dissertation on happiness. Virtue requires so many, and such sharp conflicts, that though men love the reward, they are too apt to shrink at the price. Therefore this author advises us, while we pass through this chequered life, to keep our eyes always fixed upon the other world, whither we are going, and to which this life is the only way. If this be a painful state of trial, a boisterous (though short) passage, we must comfort and encourage ourselves, bearing in mind that when we have once crossed it, we shall receive a boundless reward. Lactantius's manner is no less winning than his argument is everywhere strong. He mixes in the dispute no sharpness, no invective: his apology is easy, modest, and affecting. Truth in the hands of such a champion is sure to triumph. When once the heart is gained, it cannot be long deaf to persuasion. This talent of insinuation, which perhaps is seldomer met with than that of sublimity, or any other ingredient of eloquence, was the character Lactantius particularly shone in. The flowers of a lively imagination are set off by the cleanness and purity of his language, and by the neat Ciceronian turn of his phrase and way of writing. To these advantages we must add that no composition can be more methodical. How great an excellency this is, appears from all writers of true taste and judgment. To this was Dr. Tillotson chiefly indebted for his reputation in oratory, though he wanted many other qualifications, and often, by multiplying subdivisions, carried this to an excess. But by improving what Bishop Wilkins had begun, in correcting the extreme neglect of method which had reigned in the English pulpit, especially from the time of Queen Elizabeth, he acquired a greater name for eloquence than he had any just claim to. This book of Lactantius is a model in this respect. A kind of mathematical taste runs through the whole work, the plan of which is so disposed, that it is one clue of thoughts and reasoning, and by the perfect unity which is preserved in the subject, the several parts seem to flow consequently from what went before, in as easy a train as the natural succession of our ideas in a close reasoning. The works of Lactantius have run through a greater number of editions than those of any other father; though some very defective and faulty. The first was published at Subbiaco in 1465. The German

from the brethren the seal of the Lord (that is, baptism), he made the next day, a second time, a glorious confession of the faith before the tribunal of the prefect, and sentence of death being passed upon him, his head was cut off with an axe. St. Potamiana appeared to several others in dreams, and they were converted to the faith. See Eusebius, Hist. l. 6. c. 5. and Palladius, Lausiac, c. 3.

JUNE XXIX.

ST. PETER, PRINCE OF THE APOSTLES.

From the Gospels, Acts. and ancient fathers. See Tillemont, Calmet, and Ceillier.

ST. PETER, the most glorious prince of the apostles, and the most ardent lover of his divine Master, before his vocation to the apostleship was called Simon. He was son of Jonas, and

edition, procured by Buneman in 1739, is more complete than that published by Dr. Spark at Oxford, in 1684, or that by Mr. Wasse. John Baptist Le Brun Desmarettes, the editor of St. Paulinus's works, had begun to prepare a perfect edition of Lactantius, which was finished by Nicholas Lenglet du Fresnoy, and printed at Paris in two volumes quarto, in 1748. F. Francis Xavier Franceschini, a Carmelite friar, has most correctly published at Rome, in 1754, the works of Lactantius in nine volumes octavo, with new and judicious dissertations. To the notes of so many critics on this author, we must add the Theological Notes and Remarks of Dom Nicholas Le Nourry. (*Apparatus ad Bibl. Patr. t. 2, p. 571, &c.*)

The most valuable book of Lactantius, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, quoted by St. Jerom, was first published by the learned Baluze. Dom Nourry denied it to be the offspring of our author; but has been abundantly confuted by others. It is addressed to a confessor named Donatus, who had suffered several times during the persecution. Lactantius relates in it the several persecutions which the church had suffered, and the exemplary punishments which God had inflicted on the persecutors. He tells us that as the Emperor Maximianus was offering sacrifice, one of his officers made the sign of the cross, and thereupon, to the great trouble of the Pagans, the auspices were disturbed, and the demons disappeared. This book is written with elegance and spirit. Dr. Gilbert Burnet says, the style is too flowery for history, but the work is not merely historical. The doctor translated it into English, and printed it first in 1686, and again in 1714, prefixing a preface against persecution on account of religious matters. See p. 51. He published the same in French at Utrecht in 1687. See Tillemont, t. 6. p. 206, and Ceillier, t. 3. p. 387.