

with his people, and Redwald, king of the East-Angles, though the latter afterwards relapsing, pretended to join the worship, of idols with that of Christ. King Ethelbert, after having reigned fifty-six years, exchanged his temporal diadem for an eternal crown, in 616, and was buried in the church of SS. Peter and Paul. His remains were afterwards deposited under the high altar in the same church, then called St. Austin's. St. Ethelbert is commemorated on this day in the British and Roman Martyrologies: he was vulgarly called by our ancestors St. Albert, under which name he is titular saint of several churches in England; particularly of one in Norwich, which was built before the cathedral, an account of which is given by Blomfield, in his history of Norfolk, and the city of Norwich. Polydore Virgil tells us that a light was kept always burning before the tomb of St. Ethelbert, and was sometimes an instrument of miracles, even to the days of Henry VIII. See Bede, Hist. Ang. l. 1. c. 25, &c. Henschen. t. 3. Febr. p. 471.

FEBRUARY XXV.

SAINT TARASIVS, CONFESSOR,

PATRIARCH OF CONSTANTINOPLE.

From his life written by Ignatius, his disciple, afterwards bishop of Nice, and from the church historians of his time. See Bollandus, t. 5. p. 576. Fleury, B. 44.

A.D. 806.

TARASIVS was born about the middle of the eighth century. His parents were both of patrician families. His father, George, was a judge in great esteem for his well-known justice, and his mother, Eucratia, no less celebrated for her piety. She brought him up in the practice of the most eminent virtues. Above all things she recommended to him to keep no company but that of the most virtuous. The young man, by his talents and virtue, gained the esteem of all, and was raised to the greatest honours of the empire, being made consul, and afterwards first secretary of state to the emperor Constantine and the empress Irene, his mother. In the midst of the court, and in its highest honours, surrounded by all that could flatter pride, or gratify sensuality, he led a life like that of a religious man.

Leo, the Isaurian, his son Constantine Copronymus, and his grandson Leo, surnamed Chazarus, three successive emperors, had established, with all their power, the heresy of the Iconoclasts, or image-breakers, in the East. The empress Irene, wife to the last, was always privately a Catholic, though an artful, ambitious woman. Her husband dying miserably in 780, after a five years' reign, and having left his son Constantine, but ten years old, under her guardianship, she so managed the nobility in her favour, as to get the regency and whole government of the state into her hands, and put a stop to the persecution of the Catholics. Paul, patriarch of Constantinople, the third of that name, had been raised to that dignity by the late emperor. Though, contrary to the dictates of his own conscience, he had conformed in some respects to the then reigning heresy, he had however several good qualities; and was not only singularly beloved by the people for his charity to the poor, but highly esteemed by the empress and the whole court for his great prudence. Finding himself indisposed, and being touched with remorse for his condescension to the Iconoclasts in the former reign, without communicating his design to any one, he quitted the patriarchal see, and put on a religious habit in the monastery of Florus, in Constantinople. The empress was no sooner informed of it, but taking with her the young emperor, went to the monastery to dissuade a person so useful to her from persisting in such a resolution, but all in vain; for the patriarch assured them with tears, and bitter lamentations, that, in order to repair the scandal he had given, he had taken an unalterable resolution to end his days in that monastery, so desired them to provide the church of Constantinople with a worthy pastor in his room. Being asked whom he thought equal to the charge, he immediately named Tarasius, and dying soon after this declaration, Tarasius was accordingly chosen patriarch by the unanimous consent of the court, clergy, and people. Tarasius finding it in vain to oppose his election, declared, however, that he thought he could not in conscience accept of the government of a see which had been cut off from the Catholic communion, but upon condition that a general council should be called to compose the disputes which divided the church at that time, in relation to holy images. This being agreed to, he was solemnly declared patriarch, and consecrated soon after, on Christmas-day. He was no sooner installed, but he sent his synodal letters to

Pope Adrian, to whom the empress also wrote in her own and her son's name on the subject of a general council ; begging that he would either come in person, or at least send some venerable and learned men as his legates to Constantinople. Tarasius wrote likewise a letter to the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, wherein he desires them to send their respective legates to the intended council. His letter to the pope was to the same effect. The pope sent his legates, as desired, and wrote by them to the emperor, the empress, and the patriarch ; applauded their zeal, showing at large the impiety of the Iconoclast heresy, insisting that the false council of Iconoclasts, held under Copronymus for the establishment of Iconoclasm, should be first condemned in presence of his legates, and conjuring them before God to re-establish holy images at Constantinople, and in all Greece, on the footing they were before. He recommends to the emperor and empress his two legates to the council, who were Peter, archpriest of the Roman church, and Peter, priest and abbot of St. Sabas, in Rome. The eastern patriarchs being under the Saracen yoke, could not come for fear of giving offence to their jealous masters, who prohibited, under the strictest penalties, all commerce with the empire. However, with much difficulty and through many dangers, they sent their deputies.

The legates of the pope and the oriental patriarchs being arrived, as also the bishops under their jurisdiction, the council was opened on the 1st of August, in the church of the apostles at Constantinople, in 786. But the assembly being disturbed by the violences of the Iconoclasts, and desired by the empress to break up and withdraw for the present, the council met again the year following in the church of St. Sophia, at Nice. The two legates from the pope are named first in the Acts, St. Tarasius next, and after him the legates of the Oriental patriarchs, namely, John, priest and monk, for the patriarchs of Antioch and Jerusalem ; and Thomas, priest and monk, for the patriarch of Alexandria. The council consisted of three hundred and fifty bishops, besides many abbots and other holy priests and confessors,* who having declared the sense of the present church,

* In the third session the letters of the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem were read, all teaching the same doctrine of paying a relative honour to sacred images, no less than the letters of Pope Adrian. Their deputies, John and Thomas, then added, that the absence of those patriarchs could not affect the authority of the council, because the tyranny under which

in relation to the matter in debate, which was found to be the allowing to holy pictures and images a relative honour, the council was closed with the usual acclamations and prayers for the prosperity of the emperor and empress. After which, synodal letters were sent to all the churches, and in particular to the pope, who approved the council.

The good patriarch, pursuant to the decrees of the synod, restored holy images throughout the extent of his jurisdiction. He also laboured zealously to abolish simony, and wrote a letter upon that subject to Pope Adrian, in which, by saying it was the glory of the Roman church to preserve the purity of the priesthood, he intimated that that church was free from this reproach. The life of this holy patriarch was a model of perfection to his clergy and people. His table had nothing of the superfluity nor his palace anything of the magnificence, of several of his predecessors. He allowed himself very little time for sleep, being always up the first and last in his family. Reading and prayer filled all his leisure hours. It was his pleasure, in imitation of

they lived made their presence impossible, and because they had sent their deputies and professions of faith by letter: that none of the oriental patriarchs had been at the sixth general council, labouring then under the yoke of the barbarians; yet it was not less an œcumenical synod, especially "as the apostolic Roman pope agreed to it, and presided in it by his legates." This is a clear testimony of the eastern churches in favour of the authority of the holy see in general councils, and it cannot in the least be suspected of flattery. In the fourth session were read many passages of the fathers in favour of the relative honour due to holy images. After which, all cried out, they were sons of obedience, who placed their glory in following the tradition of their holy mother the church; and they pronounced many anathemas against all image-breakers, that is, those who do not honour holy images, or those who call them idols. In the end they add a confession of faith, in which they declare, that they honour the mother of God, who is above all the heavenly powers: then the angels, apostles, prophets, martyrs, doctors, and all the saints; as also their pictures: for though the angels are incorporeal, they have appeared like men. This profession of faith was subscribed by the pope's legates, St. Tarasius, the legates of the three other patriarchs, and three hundred and one bishops present, besides a great many priests and deacons, deputies of absent bishops, and by one hundred and thirty abbots. In the fifth session were read many passages of fathers falsified and corrupted by the Iconoclasts, as was clearly shown. The archpriest, the pope's legate, demanded that an image should be then set up in the midst of the assembly, and honoured by all, which was done; and that the books written against holy images might be condemned and burned, which the council also ratified. In the sixth session the sham council of the Iconoclasts under Copronymus was condemned and refuted as to every article: as first, that it falsely styled itself a *general* council; for it was not received but anathematized by the other bishops of the church. Secondly, because the pope of Rome had no ways concurred to it, neither by himself nor by his legates, nor by a circular letter, according to the custom of councils: nor had the

our blessed Redeemer, to serve others instead of being served by them, on which account he would scarcely permit his own servants to do anything for him. Loving humility in himself, he sought sweetly to induce all others to the love of that virtue. He banished the use of gold and scarlet from amongst the clergy, and laboured to extirpate all the irregularities among the people. His charity and love for the poor seemed to surpass his other virtues. He often took the dishes of meat from his table to distribute among them with his own hands: and he assigned them a large fixed revenue. And that none might be overlooked, he visited all the houses and hospitals in Constantinople. In Lent, especially, his bounty to them was incredible. His discourses were powerful exhortations to the universal mortification of the senses, and he was particularly severe against all theatrical entertainments.

Some time after, the emperor became enamoured of Theodota, a maid of honour to his wife, the empress Mary, whom he had always hated; and forgetting what he owed to God, he was

western bishops assisted at it. Thirdly, there had not been obtained any consent of the patriarchs of Alexandria, Antioch, and Jerusalem, nor of the bishops of their respective districts. These are conditions necessary to a general council, which were all wanting to that sham synod. The council goes on refuting it, because it accused the church of idolatry; which is giving the lie to Christ, whose kingdom, according to scripture, is everlasting, and whose power over hell can never be wrested from him. To accuse the whole church is to do an injury to Christ. They added, that the sham synod had contradicted itself by admitting that the six general councils had preserved the faith entire, and yet condemned the use of images which it must allow to be more ancient than the sixth council, and which is of as great antiquity as the apostolic age. And that whereas the same synod had advanced that the clergy being fallen into idolatry, God had raised faithful emperors to destroy the fortresses of the devil; the Council of Nice vehemently condemns this, because the bishops are the depositories of tradition, and not the emperors. It adds, that the Iconoclasts falsely called the blessed Eucharist the only image, for it is not an image nor a figure, but the true body and blood of Christ. In the seventh session was read the definition of faith, declaring, that images ought to be set up in churches as well as crosses, (which last the Iconoclasts allowed of,) also to be figured on the sacred vessels and ornaments, on the walls, ceilings, houses, &c. For the oftener people behold holy images or pictures, the oftener are they excited to the remembrance of what they represent: that these images are to be honoured, but not with the worship called Latría, which can only be given to God: that they shall be honoured with incense and candles, as the cross, the gospels, and other holy things are; all according to the pious customs of the ancients. For the honour paid to images, passes to the archetypes, or things represented, and he who reveres the image reveres the person it represents. This the council declared to be the doctrine of the fathers, and tradition of the Catholic church.

resolved to divorce her in 795, after seven years' cohabitation. He used all his efforts to gain the patriarch, and sent a principal officer to him for that purpose, accusing his wife of a plot to poison him. St. Tarasius answered the messenger, saying: "I know not how the emperor can bear the infamy of so scandalous an action in the sight of the universe: nor how he will be able to hinder or punish adulteries and debaucheries, if he himself set such an example. Tell him that I will rather suffer death and all manner of torments than consent to his design." The emperor hoping to prevail with him by flattery, sent for him to the palace, and said to him: "I can conceal nothing from you, whom I regard as my father. No one can deny but I may divorce one who has attempted my life. She deserves death or perpetual penance." He then produced a vessel, as he pretended, full of the poison prepared for him. The patriarch, with good reason, judging the whole to be only an artful contrivance to impose upon him, answered: that he was too well convinced that his passion for Theodota was at the bottom of all his complaints against the empress. He added, that, though she were guilty of the crime he laid to her charge, his second marriage during her life, with any other, would still be contrary to the law of God, and that he would draw upon himself the censures of the church by attempting it. The monk John, who had been legate of the eastern patriarchs in the seventh council, being present, spoke also very resolutely to the emperor on the subject, so that the pretors and patricians threatened to stab him on the spot: and the emperor, boiling with rage, drove them both from his presence. As soon as they were gone, he turned the empress Mary out of his palace, and obliged her to put on a religious veil. Tarasius persisting in his refusal to marry him to Theodota, the ceremony was performed by Joseph, treasurer of the church of Constantinople.

This scandalous example was the occasion of several governors and other powerful men divorcing their wives or taking more than one at the same time, and gave great encouragement to public lewdness. SS. Plato and Theodorus separated themselves from the emperor's communion to show their abhorrence of his crime. But Tarasius did not think it prudent to proceed to excommunication, as he had threatened, apprehensive that the violence of his temper, when further provoked, might carry him still greater lengths, and prompt him to re-establish the heresy

which he had taken such effectual measures to suppress. Thus the patriarch, by his moderation prevented the ruin of religion, but drew upon himself the emperor's resentment, who persecuted him many ways during the remainder of his reign. Not content to set spies and guards over him, under the name of Syncelli, who watched all his actions, and suffered no one to speak to him without their leave, he banished many of his domestics and relations. This confinement gave the saint the more leisure for contemplation, and he never ceased in it to recommend his flock to God. The ambitious Irene, finding that all her contrivances to render her son odious to his subjects had proved ineffectual to her design, which was to engross the whole power to herself, having gained over to her party the principal officers of the court and army, she made him prisoner, and caused his eyes to be plucked out; this was executed with so much violence that the unhappy prince died of it in 797. After this she reigned alone five years, during which she recalled all the banished; but at length met with the deserved reward of her ambition and cruelty from Nicephorus, a patrician, and the treasurer general; who, in 802, usurped the empire, and having deposed her, banished her into the isle of Lesbos, where she soon after died with grief.

St. Tarasius, on the death of the late emperor, having interdicted and deposed the treasurer Joseph, who had married and crowned Theodota, St. Plato, and others, who had censured his lenity, became thoroughly reconciled to him. The saint, under his successor Nicephorus, persevered peaceably in his practices of penance, and in the functions of his pastoral charge. In his last sickness he still continued to offer daily the holy sacrifice as long as he was able to move. A little before his death he fell into a kind of trance, as the author of his life, who was an eye-witness, relates, wherein he was heard to dispute and argue with a number of accusers, very busy in sifting his whole life, and objecting all they could to it. He seemed in a great fright and agitation on this account, and, defending himself, answered every thing laid to his charge. This filled all present with fear, seeing the endeavours of the enemy of man to find something to condemn even in the life of so holy and so irreprehensible a bishop. But a great serenity succeeded, and the holy man gave up his soul to God in peace, on the 25th of February, in 806, having sat twenty-one years and two months. God honoured his memory with miracles, some of which are

related by the author of his life. His festival began to be celebrated under his successor. The Latin and Greek churches both honour his memory on this day. Fourteen years after his decease, Leo the Armenian, the Iconoclast emperor, dreamt a little before his own death, that he saw St. Tarasius highly incensed against him, and heard him command one Michael to stab him. Leo judging this Michael to be a monk in the saint's monastery, ordered him the next morning to be sought for, and even tortured some of the religious to oblige them to a discovery of the person: but it happened there was none of that name among them; and Leo was killed six days after by Michael Balbus.

The virtue of St. Tarasius was truly great because constant and crowned with perseverance, though exposed to continual dangers of illusion or seduction, amidst the artifices of hypocrites and a wicked court. St. Chrysostom observes,⁽¹⁾ that the path of virtue is narrow and lies between precipices, in which it is easier for the traveller to be seized with giddiness even near the end of his course, and fall. Hence this father most grievously laments the misfortune of king Ozias, who, after long practising the most heroic virtues, fell, and perished through pride; and he strenuously exhorts all who walk in the service of God, constantly to live in fear, watchfulness, humility, and compunction. "A soul," says he, "often wants not so much spurring in the beginning of her conversion; her own fervour and cheerfulness make her run vigorously. But this fervour, unless it be continually nourished, cools by degrees; then the devil assails her with all his might. Pirates wait for and principally attack ships when they are upon the return home laden with riches, rather than empty vessels going out of the port. Just so the devil when he sees that a soul has gathered great spiritual riches, by fasts, prayer, alms, chastity, and all other virtues, when he sees our vessel fraught with rich commodities, then he falls upon her, and seeks on all sides to break in. What exceedingly aggravates the evil, is the extreme difficulty of ever rising again after such a fall. To err in the beginning may be in part a want of experience; but to fall after a long course is mere negligence, and can deserve no excuse or pardon."

(1) Chrysos. Hom. 3. de Ozia, t. 6. p. 14. ed. Ben.