

SEPTEMBER XXVII.

SS. COSMAS AND DAMIAN, MARTYRS.

See Ado's Martyrol. with the comments of Monsignor Georgi, Bede, Usuard, St. Gregory the Great, and St. Gregory of Tours. Their acts are so disfigured by modern Greeks, as to be of no account. See also Stilling, t. 7, Sept. p. 431.

ABOUT THE YEAR 303.

SAINTS COSMAS and DAMIAN were brothers, and born in Arabia, but studied the sciences in Syria, and became eminent for their skill in physic. Being Christians, and full of that holy temper of charity in which the spirit of our divine religion consists, they practised their profession with great application and wonderful success; but never took any gratification or fee,* on which account they are styled by the Greeks *Anargyri*, that is, without fees, because they took no money. They lived at *Ægæ* or *Egæa*, in Cilicia, and were remarkable both for the love and respect which the people bore them on account of the good offices which they received from their charity, and for their zeal for the Christian faith, which they took every opportunity of their profession gave them to propagate. When the persecution of Dioclesian began to rage, it was impossible for persons of so distinguished a character to lie concealed. They were therefore apprehended by the order of Lysias, governor of Cilicia, and after various torments were beheaded for the faith. Their bodies were carried into Syria, and buried at Cyrus. Theodoret, who was bishop of that city in the 5th century, mentions that their relics were then deposited in a church there, which bore their names.(1) He calls them two illustrious champions, and

(1) Theodoret, ep. 133.

* Boerhaave takes notice, that before there were any professed physicians, it was the custom among the ancient Egyptians, when any one was sick, to inquire of neighbours and passengers, if they knew any remedies proper for the patient. But ever since the study of physic has been a profession, it has been both honourable and lucrative. The customary yearly salary which princes paid their physicians, about the time of Christ's birth, was 250 sesteria or above £2018 sterling. Stertinus complained that he had only a salary of 500 sesteria or £4036 *9s. 2d.* when he had by his private practice 600 sesteria or £4843 *15s.* See Dr. Arbuthnot's book On Coins; and Mr. William Smith's book of Remarks on the same, p. 226

valiant combatants for the faith of Jesus Christ. The emperor Justinian, who began his reign in 527, out of a religious regard for the treasure of these precious relics, enlarged, embellished, and strongly fortified this city of Cyrus; and finding a ruinous church at Constantinople, built in honour of these martyrs, as is said, in the reign of Theodosius the Younger, (who died in the middle of the fifth age,) raised a stately edifice in its room, as a monument of his gratitude for the recovery of his health in a dangerous fit of sickness, through their intercession, as Procopius relates.(1) To express his particular devotion to these saints, he built also another church under their names at Constantinople. Marcellinus, in his chronicle,(2) and St. Gregory of Tours,(3) relate several miracles performed by their intercession. Their relics were conveyed to Rome, where the holy Pope St. Felix, great-grandfather to St. Gregory the Great, built a church to their honour, in which these relics are kept with veneration to this day.

These saints regarded it as a great happiness, that their profession offered them perpetual opportunities of affording comfort and relief to the most distressed part of their fellow-creatures. By exerting our charity towards all in acts of benevolence and beneficence, according to our abilities; and in treating enemies and persecutors with meekness and good offices, we are to approve ourselves followers of Christ, animated with his spirit. Thus we shall approach nearest in resemblance to our divine original, and show ourselves children of our heavenly Father, who bears with the most grievous sinners, inviting them to repentance and pardon, and showering down his mercies and benefits upon them. He only then arms himself with his justice against them, when they by wilful malice forfeit his grace, and obstinately disappoint his gracious love and kindness. His very nature is boundless goodness, and continual emanations of mercy descend from him upon his creatures. All the scattered perfections and blessings which are found in them, come from this source. In the imitation of the divine goodness, according to our abilities, at least in the temper of our mind, consists that Christian perfection, which,

(1) Procop. de *Ædific.* Justinian, l. 2, c. 11.

(2) *Ad. an.* 516.

(3) *L. de Glor. Mart.*

when founded in the motive of true charity, is the accomplishment of the law. Men engaged in professions instituted for the service of their neighbour, may sanctify their labour or industry, if actuated by the motive of charity towards others, even whilst they also have in view the justice which they owe to themselves and their family, of procuring an honest and necessary subsistence, which is itself often a strict obligation and no less noble a virtue, if it be founded in motives equally pure and perfect.

SS. ELZEAR, COUNT OF ARIAN, AND DELPHINA.

St. ELZEAR was descended of the ancient and illustrious family of Sabran, in Provence; his father, Hermengaud of Sabran, was created count of Arian, in the kingdom of Naples; his mother was Lauduna of Albes, a family no less distinguished for its nobility. The saint was born in 1295 at Ansois, a castle belonging to his father in the diocese of Apt. Immediately after his birth, his mother, whose great piety and charity to the poor had procured her the name of The Good Countess, taking him in her arms, offered him to God with great fervour, begging that he might never offend his divine majesty, but might rather die in his infancy than live ever to be guilty of so dreadful an evil. The child seemed formed from his cradle to piety and virtue; nor could he by any means be satisfied if he saw any poor beggar, till he was relieved; for which reason his nurses and governesses were obliged to have their pockets always furnished with bread and small money, in order to give something to every poor person they met when they took him abroad; and it was his delight to divide his dinner with poor children. The first impressions of virtue he received from his mother; but these were perfected by his religious uncle, William of Sabran, abbot of St. Victor's, at Marseilles, under whom he had his education in that monastery. In his tender age he wore a rough knotty cord, armed with sharp pricks, which galled his flesh, so that it was discovered by blood issuing from the wounds. The abbot severely chid him for this and some other extraordinary austerities which he practised, calling him a self-murderer; yet he secretly admired so great fervour in a tender young lord.