

ST. LEODEGARIUS, BISHOP, M.

CALLED IN FRENCH LEGER.

ST. LEODEGARIUS was born about the year 616, being of the first quality among the French. His parents brought him very young to the court of king Clotaire II. (son of Fredegonda) who reigned first in Neustria; but in the year 614, the thirty-first of his reign, having taken Sigebert prisoner, and put to death his mother Brunehault, became king of all France, in the same manner that his grandfather Clotaire had been. This prince kept the young nobleman but a short time at court before he sent him to Dido, his uncle by the mother's side, bishop of Poitiers, who appointed a priest of great learning to instruct him in literature, and some years after took him into his own palace to finish his education himself. Leodegarius made great progress in learning, but much greater in the science of the saints. To walk in the presence of God, and to be perfect, are things inseparable, according to the testimony of God himself.⁽¹⁾ It was by this constant union of his heart with God, joined with the practice of self-denial and humility, that Leodegarius attained in his youth the perfection of the saints. In consideration of his extraordinary abilities and merit, his uncle dispensed with the canons, and ordained him deacon when he was only twenty years old, and soon after made him archdeacon, and intrusted him with the government of his whole diocess. Leodegarius was tall, handsome, prudent, eloquent, and generally beloved. The monastery of St. Maxentius,* in the diocess of Poitiers, having lost its abbot, Leodegarius was obliged by his uncle to take upon him the government of that great abbey, which he held six years with great reputation of prudence and sanctity; and he was a considerable benefactor to this monastery.

Clovis II. King of Neustria and Burgundy, dying in 656, left three sons, Clotaire, Childeric, and Theodoric, all under age. Clotaire III. was proclaimed king, and his mother St. Bathildes, foundress of the two great abbeys of Corbie and Chelles, was

(1) Gen. xvii. 1.

* See his life on the 26th of June; also Mabillon, *Act. Ben.* t. 1, p. 578, and St. Gregory of Tours, *Hist.* l. 1, c. 37.

regent, being assisted in the government by Erchinoald, mayor of the palace, and the holy bishops St. Eligius, St. Owen, and St. Leodegarius. The fame of this last having reached the court whilst he governed his abbey in Poitou, he was called to the palace by Clotaire III. and St. Bathildes, and in 659 nominated bishop of Autun. That see had been vacant two years, whilst the diocess was miserably torn asunder by opposite factions, not without effusion of blood. The presence of Leodegarius quieted all disturbances, and reconciled the parties. He took care to relieve all the poor, instructed his clergy, frequently preached to his people, and adorned the churches, beautifying them with gildings and rich plate. He repaired the baptistery of his cathedral with great magnificence, caused the relics of St. Symphorian to be brought back thither, and repaired the walls of the city. In a diocesan synod which he held at Autun in 670,(1) he enacted many canons for the reformation of manners, of which some only have reached us which chiefly regard the monastic order. He says, that if the monks were all what they ought to be, their prayers would preserve the world from public calamities. By these ordinances they are enjoined to observe the canons and the rules of St. Bennet; to labour in common, and to exercise hospitality; are forbidden to have property in anything, or to go into cities, unless upon the business of the monastery; and in this case are commanded to have a letter from their abbot directed to the archdeacon.

The saint had sat ten years when king Clotaire III. died in 669. Upon this news he posted to court, where one part of the lords declared for Childeric, who then reigned in Austrasia with great prudence; but Ebroin procured Theodoric to be proclaimed king, and made himself mayor of his palace. But so odious was the tyranny of this minister that the contrary party soon after prevailing, Childeric was acknowledged king, who had put Ebroin to death if St. Leodegarius and some other bishops had not interceded that his life might be spared. He was shorn a monk at Luxeu, and Theodoric at St. Denis's. Childeric II. governed well as long as he listened to the advice of St. Leodegarius, who had so great a share in public affairs in the beginning of this reign, that in some writings he is styled

(1) Conc. t. 6, p. 536.

mayor of the palace. The king being young and violent, at length abandoned himself to his pleasures, and married his uncle's daughter. St. Leodegarius admonished him first in secret, and finding this without effect, reproved him publicly. Wulfoade, who was for some time mayor of the palace, attempted to render the saint's fidelity suspected, and several courtiers incensed the king against him, so that he was banished to Luxeu, where Ebroin made him a promise of constant friendship. Childeric having caused a nobleman called Bodilo to be publicly scourged, was slain by him at the head of a conspiracy of his nobility, with his queen, and son Dagobert, and infant, in 673. Theodoric, his brother, leaving Neustria, and Dagobert, son of Sigebert II. being recalled from Ireland, whither he had been banished, and acknowledged king of Austrasia, St. Leodegarius was restored to his see, and received at Autun with the greatest honour and rejoicings. Ebroin left Luxeu, and being provoked that Leudesius was made mayor of the palace, under pretence of a conference, murdered him, and setting up a pretended son of Clotaire III. under the name of Clovis, for king, sent an army into Burgundy, which marched first to Autun. St. Leodegarius would not fly, but distributed his plate and other moveables among the poor, and made his will, by which he gave certain estates to his church.* He then ordered a fast of three days, and a general procession, in which the cross, and the relics of the saints were carried round about the walls. At every one of the gates the good bishop prostrated himself, and besought God with tears, that if he called him to martyrdom, his flock might not suffer anything. He then called all the people together into the church, and asked pardon of all those whom he might have offended by too great severity. When the enemy came up, the people shut their gates, and made a stout defence all that day. But St. Leodegarius said to them, "Fight no longer. If it is on my account they are come, I am ready to give them satisfaction. Let us send one of our brethren to know what they demand." The army was commanded by Vaimer, Duke of Champagne, who had with him Diddon, formerly bishop of Châlons upon the

* This will is extant in Cointe's *Annales* ad an. 666. See *Mabil. Anal.* l. 16, n. 36, &c.

Saone, who had been canonically deposed for his crimes. Diddon answered the citizens of Autun, that they would storm the town unless Leodegarius was delivered up to them; and they all took an oath of allegiance to Clovis, for he swore to them that Theodoric was dead. Leodegarius publicly declared he would rather suffer death, than fail in his fidelity to his prince. The enemy continuing to press upon the city with fire and sword, he took leave of all the brethren; and having first received the holy communion, marched boldly out of the town, and offered himself to his enemies, who having seized on his person, pulled out his eyes. This he endured without suffering his hands to be tied, or venting the least groan, singing psalms all the while. The citizens made their submission, that they might not be all carried away captives. Vaimer carried St. Leodegarius to his own house in Champagne, whilst his army proceeded to Lyons, intending to take that city, and seize upon St. Genesius, the archbishop; but the inhabitants defended that great city so well, that they were obliged to retire, and St. Genesius died in peace on the 1st of November, 677, being succeeded by St. Lambert, who had been elected abbot of Fontenelle, upon the death of St. Vandrille.

Ebroin, who had marched into Neustria, sent an order that Leodegarius should be led into a wood, and there left to perish with hunger, and that it should be published that he was drowned. When he was almost starved, Vaimer took pity on him, and brought him to his house. He was so moved by his discourse that he returned him the money he had taken from the church of Autun, which St. Leodegarius sent thither to be distributed among the poor. Ebroin growing jealous of Vaimer's power, contrived him to be ordained, some time after, bishop of Troyes, and soon after caused him to be tormented and hanged. Diddon was also banished by him, and afterwards put to death. St. Leodegarius was dragged through a marshy ground, and very rough roads, where the soles of his feet were cut with sharp stones; his tongue was maimed and his lips cut off; after which he was delivered into the hands of Count Varinguius, to be kept by him in safe custody. This count honoured him as a martyr, took him into his own country, and placed him in the monastery of Fescan, or Fecamp, in Normandy, founded by himself. The

saint remained there two years, and, his wounds being healed, he continued to speak, as it was thought, miraculously. He instructed the nuns, offered every day the holy sacrifice, and prayed almost without ceasing. Ebroin, having usurped by violence the dignity of mayor of the palace to Theodoric, and being absolute master in Neustria and Burgundy, pretended a desire to revenge the death of King Childeric, and falsely accused St. Leodegarius and his brother Gairin of having concurred to it. They were brought before the king and the lords, and Ebroin loaded them with reproaches. St. Leodegarius told him he would soon lose that dignity which he had usurped. The two brothers were separated, and Gairin was tied to a post, and stoned to death. During his execution he repeated these words: "Lord Jesus Christ, who camest not only to call the just, but sinners, receive the soul of thy servant, to whom thou hast granted a death like that of the martyrs." Thus he continued in prayer till he expired. St. Leodegarius could not be condemned till he had been deposed in a synod. In the mean time he wrote a consolatory letter to his mother Sigrades, who was then become a nun in the monastery of our Lady at Soissons. In it he congratulates with her upon her happy retreat from the world, comforts her for the death of his brother Gairin, saying, that ought not to be a subject of grief to them which was an occasion of joy and triumph to the angels; he speaks of himself with surprising constancy and courage, and fearing lest she might be tempted to harbour any sentiment of resentment against their unjust persecutors, speaks of the forgiveness of enemies with a tenderness and charity altogether heavenly. He tells her, that since Christ set the divine example by praying on the cross for his murderers, it must be easy for us to love our enemies and persecutors. This letter is the effusion of a heart burning with charity, and overflowing with the deepest sentiments of all Christian virtues. The style is truly worthy a great martyr upon the point of consummating his sacrifice to God, and speaks a language which penetrates the heart with its holy unction. Though there is in it no other art than that which charity naturally produced, it is written with spirit, and shows that we have reason to regret the loss of the sermons which he preached to his people during the ten years that he governed his church in peace.

At length Ebroin caused St. Leodegarius to be brought to the palace, where he had assembled a small number of bishops whom he had gained, that he might be deposed by their sentence, though they could not constitute a legal synod, to which a canonical convocation, by letter or sanction of the metropolitan or primate, is required within the limits of his jurisdiction. The saint was pressed to own himself privy to the death of Childeric; but he constantly denied it, calling God to witness that he was innocent. Those who were present rent his tunic from top to bottom, which was intended for a mark of his deposition. Then he was delivered into the hands of Chrodobert, count of the palace, to be put to death. Ebroin, fearing lest he should be honoured as a martyr, ordered him to be led into a wood, and there executed, and buried in some deep pit, and the place covered in such a manner that it could never be known. Chrodobert was so moved with the exhortations and holy deportment of the martyr, that he could not bear to see him put to death; but ordered four officers to execute the sentence. The count's wife wept bitterly; but the saint comforted her, and assured her that God would bless her for her charity if she took care of his interment. The four executioners carried him into a forest, where, not being able to find a pit, they at length stopped, and and three of them fell at his feet, begging him to forgive them. He prayed for them, and afterwards, when he said he was ready, the fourth cut off his head. The wife of Count Chrodobert caused the saint to be interred in a small oratory, at a place called Sarcin, in Artois; but, three years after, his body was removed to the monastery of St. Maxentius, in Poitou; for a contention arising between St. Vindician, bishop of Arras, and the bishops of Autun and Poitiers which should possess his relics, by drawing three billets laid on an altar, they fell to the share of the last. He was martyred, in 678, in the forest of Iveline, now called St. Leger's Wood, in the diocese of Arras, near the borders of that of Cambray. Many miracles were wrought at the tomb of this saint, and a great number of churches were built in his honour. Few saints are more revered in many parts of France than this martyr.* See the life of St. Leode-

* As for the tyrant Ebroin, he seemed to grow every day more and more jealous and furious. Dagobert II. gained ground in Austrasia, and,

garius, compiled by an anonymous monk of St. Symphorian's, at Autun, who had been an eye-witness to many of the saint's actions, and wrote very soon after the translation of his relics. Also the life of this saint, written in a more elegant style, but with some mistakes and omissions, by Ursinus, a monk at Poitiers, some time later. Both these lives are published by Du Chesne, *Historiæ Francorum coetanei*, t. 4. p. 600. 625. and Mabillon, *Actâ Bened.* t. 2. Both these authors recount many miracles wrought at the translation of this saint's relics, &c. A third life of St. Leodegarius, written by a monk of Morlach, in Austrasia, in the eighth or ninth century, adds little that is material to the two former, except an account of a succession of miracles down to the eighth age. See likewise Bulteau, *Hist. de l'Ord. de S. Ben.* 1. 3. c. 32. t. 1. p. 561. Bie, the Bolandist, p. 355 to 491. Griffet, *Mélanges Historiques*, t. 1. p. 167.*

OCTOBER III.

ST. DIONYSIUS THE AREOPAGITE, BISHOP OF ATHENS, M.

See Acts xvii.; Tillemont, t. 2; Cave, p. 66.

THE great apostle of the Gentiles, esteeming himself equally a debtor to the learned and to the unlearned, arrived at Athens about the year 51, seventeen years after our Lord's crucifixion,

about the year 676, quite routed the pretended Clovis, whom Ebroin had set up to dispute that crown with him. Dagobert II. was assassinated in 678, by whose death Theodoric expected to become King of Austrasia, and the whole French monarchy; but the inhabitants of Austrasia, dreading to fall under the tyranny of Ebroin, chose Pepin and Martin dukes of their country, and had for some time no king, though Theodoric took the title. (See *Mem. de l'Acad. des Belles Lettres*, t. 6.) Ebroin was himself assassinated in 688, and was succeeded by four short-lived mayors of the palace in Neustria and Burgundy. Duke Pepin of Herstal, or Herstal, (grandson of Pepin, surnamed the Old, and father of Charles Martel, and grandfather of Pepin the Short, king of France,) was attacked by Theodoric III. but defeated him, and that prince saw himself reduced to the necessity of constituting him mayor of the palace for the whole French monarchy in 690, a little before his death. King Theodoric III. was buried in the abbey of St. Vedast, at Arras, which he had munificently endowed.

* Baronius and many others follow the mistakes of Ursin, and falsely make St. Leodegarius mayor of the palace.