

Gheel. She flourished in the seventh century. See Molanus, Miræus, the Roman Martyrology, Henschenius, t. 3. Maij, p. 477, and Colgan, in MSS. Contin. Act. SS. Hibern.

ST. GENEBRARD, OR GENEBERN MARTYR.

HE was a holy Irish priest, who having baptised St. Dymphna in her infancy, was her attendant in her flight beyond sea and was beheaded by her murderers.

His relics were translated to Santbeck in the duchy of Cleves, where his intercession is devoutly implored, especially for relief under the gout and in fevers; and blessed rings which bear his name are used. Dr. Wintringham and Dr. Liger, in their treatises on the gout, inform us that this disorder rages even amongst labourers in the countries about the Rhine, in Silesia and others, where acid wines, such as Rhenish, &c. are much drank. On St. Genebrard, see Colgan, MSS. ad 15 Maij.

1876
MAY XVI.

ST. JOHN NEPOMUCEN, M.

From his life, collected by F. Balbin. Also Benedict XIV. and his life in French by F. Marne.

A. D. 1383.

THIS servant of God possessed in an eminent degree, the virtues of a perfect anchorite, and of a zealous apostle, and by his death merited the crown of a glorious martyr. His martyrdom was the more illustrious, because the religious seal of confession (or strict obligation to silence in that tribunal on the part of the priest) not having yet armed tyrants against it, had found no victims before our saint. He was born at Nepomuc, a little town in Bohemia, some leagues from Prague, about the year 1330. His parents derived from their virtue a splendour which their birth or rank in the world did not afford them. If our saint had fewer obstacles from the world to overcome

in giving himself to God, his sacrifice was not less fervent, less generous, or less perfect in the disposition of his heart. He was regarded as the fruit of his parents' prayers. Soon after his birth his life was despaired of; but their confidence in God deserved to obtain his recovery through the intercession of the Holy Virgin Mary, which they earnestly implored in the church of a neighbouring Cistercian monastery. Gratitude moved them to consecrate their son to the service of God. They neglected nothing to give him a good education; nor could a child give more promising hopes of future greatness by his mildness, gentleness, docility, simplicity, devotion, and extraordinary application and capacity in his studies. The morning he spent in the neighbouring monastery in hearing several masses, which he did with a modesty and fervour that charmed those who saw him. When he had learned the first elements at home he was sent to Staaze, a considerable town, to study Latin. He excelled his schoolfellows in grammar, but surpassed himself in rhetoric. Charles IV. emperor of Germany and king of Bohemia, and author of the golden Bull in 1356,¹ had lately founded the university of Prague in imitation of those at Paris and Padua. John being sent thither distinguished himself in philosophy, divinity, and canon law: in which two last faculties he proceeded doctor. He

¹ This is called the golden bull from a golden seal fixed to it by silken strings. It was published with the utmost solemnity, in a great diet of all the princes, held at Nurembourg; and regulates the form of the government of the empire; the most minute circumstances to be observed in the election of an emperor, and the precedence, rights, and functions of the seven first electors. For the imperial diadem, at least after the failure of the Carlovingian race, had been elective, especially after it had been settled in Germany in the person of Otho I. surnamed the Great, king of Germany, who, having conquered Lombardy, was crowned emperor at Rome by pope John XII. in 962. But the manner of making this election had often varied, and frequently all the princes of the empire had been allowed to give their suffrage. This same emperor, Charles IV. created four dukes of the empire, namely, those of Brunswick, Bavaria, Suabia, and Lorrain; four landgraves, viz. of Thuringia, Hesse, Alsace, and Leuchtenbourg, and many other princes.

had from his tender years regarded the priesthood as the great object of his pious ambition, that he might devote himself in the most perfect manner to promote the divine honour; and he always made the most frequent and devout participation of the adorable sacrament of the altar a kind of novitiate to that dignity. He increased the fervour of his preparation as he grew nearer the term, and retired from the hurry of the schools and the city into a solitude, there by fasting, prayer, and penance for a month, purifying his soul and disposing himself for the grace of that holy order, which he received at the hands of his bishop. This prelate being acquainted with his extraordinary talents, commanded him immediately to employ them in preaching, and committed to him the care of the parish of our Lady of Tein. Surprising were the first effects of his zeal. The whole city flocked to hear him, and in a short time appeared very much reformed. The students, who were then not fewer than forty thousand, thronged to his discourses, and many hardened libertines returned from hearing him knocking their breasts and full of compunction.

The archbishop and canons preferred him to a canonry: but his constant attendance in the choir did not hinder, or abate his zealous application to all his former functions, in the care of souls. The emperor Charles IV. having reigned thirty-two years, renowned for wisdom and piety, died at Prague in 1378, crowned with the benediction of his subjects. For though he had achieved no great exploits, he had always been a lover and protector of the Church and his people. By great largesses to the electors, he procured his son Wenceslas to be chosen king of the Romans in 1376. This prince succeeded him in the empire upon his death the year following, being only sixteen years old. Intoxicated with power and flattery, he discovered early symptoms of the

most savage and vicious inclinations, by which he has deserved the infamous surnames of the Slothful and the Drunkard. He resided at Prague, and hearing high commendations of St. John, he pitched upon him to preach the Lent to his court. The holy man saw how difficult and dangerous a task it would be to make the emperor relish the genuine truths of the gospel, as he was not unacquainted with his stupid and brutish temper. However, he accepted the employ, and was much applauded by the court and by the emperor himself; and his discourses proved for some time a check to his passions. In testimony of his esteem, he offered the saint the first vacant bishopric, which was that of Leitomeritz, but no motives could prevail upon him to accept of that dignity. It was thought that perhaps the care and labours inseparable from such a charge, contributed to his refusal. He was therefore offered the provostship of Wischeradt, which (next to the bishoprics) is the first ecclesiastical dignity of the kingdom of Bohemia, and to which are annexed great revenues of one hundred thousand German florins a year, with the honourable title of hereditary chancellor of the kingdom, and this without dangers or fatigues. But to reason thus is not to know the saints. If they refuse great places when they present labours to their zeal and crosses to their virtue, what must they think of those which offer nothing but riches and honours? The virtuous canon was therefore here again as firm as ever. But the more he shunned the esteem of men the more it followed him. He however accepted soon after the office of almoner of the court, which could only give him an authority and assistance the better to perform his duty as preacher to the court, and enable him in a private capacity to assist the poor, and to gain souls to God. Nor had this charge either the distractions, or the

riches, or honours, which had so much affrighted him in the dignities before mentioned. Thus humility fixed him in the court whither ambition leads others. He appeared there the same man he had been in his private life. His apartment was the rendezvous of all that were in affliction or distress. He declared himself their general advocate, and the father of the poor, and of all who suffered by unjust oppressions. His charity was also sagacious in finding out, and secretly reconciling all dissensions which arose in the court or city: of many whereof authentic monuments are still preserved, in which the patience of this great man, his penetration and judgment, and the equity of his decisions, are equally admired. He found time for every thing, because the saints, who in temporal concerns forget themselves, find more leisure than other men for the service of their neighbours.

The empress Jane, daughter of Albert of Bavaria, earl of Hainault and Holland, was a most virtuous and accomplished princess. Touched by the divine unction of the holy preacher, she chose him for the director of her conscience. The emperor loved her with the most violent passion: but as he was capricious and changeable, he often abandoned himself to fits of jealousy, which, joined to the natural fierceness and brutish fury of his temper, gave the princess much to suffer. As the world is saved by the sufferings of a God, so it is by afflictions that all the saints are crowned. To make the empress one by the crucifixion of her heart to whatever might divide it from God, the Lord employed the persecution of her husband, which was sometimes cruel to the utmost excess. But he gave her a comforter and guide in our saint, by whose counsels she squared her life. What fruit did not she reap by this means in a few years! Supported by a man whose zeal prepared him to martyrdom,

she learned to suffer her afflictions with joy. Not only this princess, but all the virtuous persons of the court, sought to have the saint for their director, and he seemed to possess the talent of making saints upon the throne, and in the court, and men happy upon the cross. He also took upon him the direction of the nuns of the castle of Prague, whom he conducted in the exercises of a spiritual life in such a manner, that this house became a model of perfection to all others. The empress, though always a person of virtue, became much more devout after she began to follow his advice. She became altogether religious, and was not afraid to appear such. The churches were the ordinary places in which she was to be found: she spent in them whole days on her knees, and in a recollection which was the admiration of every one. Her prayers were only interrupted by offices of charity to the poor, (whom she served with her own hands,) or by a short time for meals or relaxation, which she passed in conversing with her ladies on eternity and spiritual matters, on which she spoke with an ardour which bespoke her own fervour. This fire she nourished in her heart by the frequent use of the sacraments, and the practice of perpetual mortification. Such was her holy fear of God, that the very shadow of the least sin made her tremble; and upon the fear of the least failing or imperfection, she hastened to expiate it in the sacred tribunal of penance; from which she never came but with a heart broken with sorrow, and her eyes bathed in tears.

As a corrupted heart turns every thing into poison, Wenceslas grew the more impatient and extravagant by the piety of his consort, and by the tenderness and condescension with which she always behaved towards him; and in the return of a fit of mad jealousy, he made her virtuous conduct an argument for his suspicions. To know

her interior, he formed a design of extorting from St. John what she had disclosed to him in the secret of confession, by which means he thought he should learn all the private sentiments she had ever entertained concerning him. In this view, he sent for the holy man, and at first began indirectly to sift him, and at length openly put to him his impious questions. The saint, struck with horror, represented to him, in the most respectful manner possible, how notoriously injurious such a sacrilege was both to reason and religion. But the emperor who had been long accustomed to deal with slaves, thought that no one ought to resist his will. However, in the end, he dissembled his rage; but the saint saw in his dark gloomy silence what he was to expect from so revengeful a prince. It happened one day that the tyrant finding a fowl not roasted to his taste at table, gave an order surpassing, if possible, the extravagances of Caligula or Heliogabalus, that the cook should be immediately spitted and roasted alive at the same fire at which the fowl had been dressed. The officers were preparing to execute the barbarous sentence, which no one durst contradict, when St. John was informed of it; the poor servant was already pierced with several spits, and broiling before the fire, when the saint ran in and threw himself at the emperor's feet. Wenceslas neither listened to his remonstrances, nor regarded the threats of divine vengeance; but the more earnestly the saint pressed him, the more outrageous he grew. At length he commanded him to be thrown into a dungeon; where he lay several days rejoicing in his chains, being sensible that the true cause was his former firmness in refusing to disclose the confessions of the empress. Nor did Wenceslas make a mystery of it; for he sent him this message, that as long as he refused to disclose to him the confession of the empress, there was for him

no hope of liberty. Yet, some days after, a gentleman of the palace came with an order to release him, begging in the emperor's name, that he would forget the ill treatment he had received, and dine the next day with his majesty, who had prepared a great entertainment for his sake, and to do him honour before his whole court. He was accordingly treated with the greatest magnificence and exterior marks of esteem and kindness. After the banquet, Wenceslas dismissed all the rest, and began to discourse with the saint in private, first about indifferent matters, but in the end pressing him all manner of ways to lay open to him the confession of the empress, promising secrecy, and all honours and riches, and threatening a refusal with the most horrible tortures and death. The saint answered firmly, and made fresh attempts to satisfy him on the justice and obligation of his silence. The tyrant at last gave orders that he should be carried back to prison and inhumanly tortured. He was stretched on a sort of rack: burning torches were applied to his sides, and to the most sensible parts of his body; he was burnt at a slow fire, and tormented other ways. Under his tortures he pronounced no other words but the sacred names of Jesus and Mary, and when loosened from the rack was left half dead. Our Lord visited his servant in this abandoned condition, and filled his soul with the most sweet consolations. In the mean time the empress was informed, and by her prayers, tears, and importunities, obtained of Wenceslas the enlargement of the servant of God. He therefore appeared again at court, but like a persecuted saint, full of joy and courage, showing by his countenance that he regarded his sufferings as the favours of heaven. Notwithstanding the present good humour of the prince, he prepared himself for death; and as if to take leave, and to supply by extraordinary labour the short-

ness of his time, he began to preach with greater zeal than ever. In one of these sermons, on that text, *A little while and you shall not see me*, he often repeated, *I have now but little time to speak to you*; and in the close of his discourse clearly foretold, in a prophetic rapture and shedding an abundance of tears, the evils which were shortly to fall on the church of Bohemia, literally verified in the Hussite tumults and civil wars. Coming out of the pulpit, having taken the last leave of his auditory, he begged pardon of the canons and clergy for the bad example which he humbly accused himself to have given them. From that day he gave himself up totally to those exercises which were a more immediate preparation of his own soul for eternity. In which, to obtain the protection of the glorious mother of God, he visited her image at Buntzel, which had been placed there by the apostles of the Slavonians, SS. Cyril and Methodius, and is a place of great devotion among the Bohemians. He was returning home in the evening, after having poured forth his soul in most fervent prayer in that holy place, when the emperor looking out of a window of his palace, saw him pass alone in the streets of Prague. The sight of the holy man renewed his indignation and sacrilegious curiosity, and ordering him to be immediately brought in to him, he fiercely bade him choose either to reveal the confessions of the empress, or to die. The saint made no answer, but by his silence and the steadiness of his countenance gave him sufficiently to understand that he was not to be moved, and by bowing his head expressed his readiness to die. At which the emperor cried out in his fury, "Take away this man, and throw him into the river as soon as it shall be dark, that his execution may not be known by the people." The barbarous order was executed, and after some hours which the martyr employed in

preparing himself for his sacrifice, he was thrown off the bridge which joins the Great and Little Prague, into the river Muldaw, with his hands and feet tied, on the vigil of the Ascension, the 16th of May, 1383. The martyr was no sooner stifled in the waters, but a heavenly light appeared over his body floating on the river, and drew many to the banks. The empress ran in to the emperor, not knowing what had happened, and inquired what was the occasion of the lights which she saw on the river. The tyrant struck at the news, fled in a hurry like a man distracted, to a country house, forbidding any one to follow him. The morning discovered the villany, and the executioners betrayed the secret. The whole city flocked to the place; the canons of the cathedral went in procession, took up the body with great honour, and carried it into the church of the Holy Cross of the Penitents, which was the next to the place where the body was found. Every one resorted thither to kiss the hands and feet of the glorious martyr, to recommend himself to his prayers, and to procure, if possible, some relic of his clothes, or what else had belonged to him. The emperor being informed of this, sent an order to the religious Penitents to hinder any tumults in their church, and secretly to remove the body. They obeyed; but the treasure was discovered, and as soon as the canons had made every thing ready for its magnificent reception in the cathedral, it was conveyed thither with the utmost pomp by the clergy and whole city, and interred with this epitaph, which is yet read engraved on a stone upon his tomb, "Under this stone lies the body of the most venerable and most glorious Thaumaturgus JOHN NEPOMUCEN, doctor, canon of this church, and confessor of the empress, who, because he had faithfully kept the seal of confession, was cruelly tormented and thrown from the bridge of Prague into the river

Muldaw, by the orders of Wenceslas IV. emperor and king of Bohemia, son of Charles IV. 1383." Many miraculous cures of the sick under the most desperate disorders, during the translation and interment of his relics, and at his tomb, through his intercession, were public testimonies of his favour with God. The empress, after this accident led a weak languishing life till the year 1387, when she closed it by a holy and happy death. The emperor stayed some months in the castle of Zebrac, some leagues from Prague, hardening himself against the voices of heaven, fearing at first a sedition of the people; but religion taught the virtuous part their duty to their sovereign. Seeing therefore the things remain quiet in the city, he returned to it, and wallowed in his former slothful voluptuous life. But he soon felt that the punishment of a notorious sinner follows close upon his crime. The empire was torn with civil wars in all its parts. The Switzers revolting from Albert of Austria, set up their commonwealth without opposition: the emperor himself sold to John Galeas the duchy of Milan for one hundred thousand florins, and for money alienated many others of the richest provinces, one after another. The princes and states, in the very year 1383, sent to entreat the tyrant to leave Bohemia and reside in the empire, to put a stop to the growing evils. He laughed at the deputies, and said, if there were any malecontents among them, it was their duty to come to him. The states and princes of the empire at length entered into a general confederacy at Mentz, and deposed him from the imperial throne in 1400; and meeting at Laenstein in the archbishopric of Triers, chose first Frederic duke of Brunswic and Lunenbourg, and he dying in a few days, substituted Robert or Rupert of Bavaria, count palatine of the Rhine. Wenceslas, drowned in debaucheries seemed in-

sensible at this affront. The nobility of Bohemia, by the advice of his brother Sigismund king of Hungary, confined him twice; but he found means to escape, and died of an apoplexy, without having time, in appearance, to think of repentance. This indolence fortified the Hussite heresy, broached in his reign by John Huss rector of the university, and his disciple Jerom of Prague, which for above one hundred years filled the kingdom with civil wars, bloodshed, plunder, sacrileges, the ruin of families, and every other calamity.

The tomb of the saint continued illustrious for frequent miracles, and was protected by a wonderful providence from profanations, which were often attempted by the Hussites, and again by the Calvinists in 1618, in the wars of Frederic the elector palatine. On that occasion, several officers and workmen, who set themselves to demolish the tomb of the saint, were deterred by visible judgments, and some by sudden death upon the spot, which was the misfortune, among others, of a certain English gentleman. The complete victory by which the Imperialists under the command of the duke of Bavaria, under the walls of Prague in 1620, recovered this kingdom, is ascribed to the intercession of this holy martyr; who, as many attested, was seen appearing in glory with other patrons, by the guards in the cathedral, the night before the battle, and whose protection the imperial army had earnestly implored: from which circumstance the illustrious house of Austria has shown a particular devotion to his memory. The emperors Ferdinand II. and III. solicited his canonization, which was at length procured by Charles VI. In 1719, on the 14th of April, the saint's tomb was opened, where the body had lain three hundred and thirty years. The flesh was consumed, but the bones entire and perfectly joined together, with the marks of

his fall into the river behind his head and on his shoulders. His tongue alone was found fresh and free from corruption, as if the saint had but just expired. The saint had been honoured as a martyr from the time of his death in Bohemia; but to make his veneration more authentic and universal, his canonization was demanded, and several new miracles were juridically approved at Prague and Rome. Innocent XIII. confirmed his immemorial veneration by a decree equivalent to a beatification; and the bull of his solemn canonization was published by Benedict XIII. in 1729. A narrative of many miracles wrought by his intercession may be read at the end of his life, as the wonderful preservation of the city of Nepomuc from the plague in 1680; the cure of various distempers in persons despaired of by the physicians; the deliverance of many from imminent dangers, and the protection of the innocence of many falsely accused. The count of Althan, afterwards archbishop of Bari, in the fall of a balcony in the palace of constable Colonna at Rome, was saved by St. John appearing in a vision, whose intercession he invoked aloud. Cardinal Michael Frederic Althan, viceroy of Naples, was cured of a paralytic disorder, by which he had entirely lost the use of one arm, and of a complication of several other distempers, the moment he began to address his prayer to St. John on his festival, in the Minims church. Pope Benedict XIII. dedicated an altar under the invocation of St. John Nepomucen in the Lateran basilic.

In the sacrament of penance so indispensable is the law of secresy, and so far does it extend, that the minister is bound, by all laws, so much to be upon his guard in this respect, that he may say with an ancient writer,¹ "What I know by

¹ Quæ per confessionem scio minus scio quam quæ nescio. S. Aug. vel siquis alius Serm. 10. ad Fratr. in Eremo, t. 6. Append. p. 336.

confession, I know less than what I do not know at all." St. John Climacus remarks, that a special providence watches over the fidelity of this sacred seal, "For," says he, "it is unheard of that sins disclosed by confession should be divulged, lest others should be deterred from confessing, and all hope of health be cut off."¹ Without this indispensable secrecy the very precept and obligation ceases.² And this law is expedient also to the public weal; for by it the minister will often draw sinners from dangerous designs which otherwise could never come to his knowledge, as F. Coton showed to the entire satisfaction of Henry IV. of France.

ST. SIMON STOCK, C.

HE was descended of a good family in Kent. From his infancy he turned all his thoughts and affections to attain to the most perfect love of God, and studied to devote all his moments to this glorious pursuit. In this earnest desire, in the twelfth year of his age, he retired into a wilderness, and chose for his dwelling a great hollow oak tree; whence the surname of *Stock* was given him. Whilst he here mortified his flesh with fasting and other severities he nourished his soul with spiritual dainties in continual prayer. His drink was only water; and he never touched any other food but herbs, roots, and wild apples. Whilst he led this course of life, he was invited by a divine revelation to embrace the rule of certain religious men who were coming from Palestine into England. Albert, the holy patriarch of Jerusalem, having given a written rule to the Carmelite friars about the year 1205, some brothers of this Order were soon after brought over from mount Carmel by John lord Vescy and Richard lord Gray of Codnor,

¹ S. John Clim. Ep. ad. Paston. c. 13.

² See Suarez in 3. p. disp. 23, Sect. 2. and others.