

Yorkshire, in 655 The place of this battle was called Winwidfield or Field of Victory; situated on the river Winuæd, now Aire. With Penda, who was then eighty years old, of which he had reigned thirty, fell thirty commanders of royal blood. See the Saxon Chronicle, ad an. 655. Bede, Hist. Angl. l. 3, c. 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13; and Alcuin, Poem. de Pontificibus et Sanctis Eborac. published by Gale, t. 2.

ST. AFRA AND COMPANIONS, MM.

THE persecution of Dioclesian was carried on with great cruelty by his colleague Maximian Herculeus in Africa, Italy, Rhetia, Vindelicia, Noricum, and Upper Pannonia, the government of which provinces fell to his share in the division of the empire. At Ausburg, in Rhetia, the apparitors apprehended a woman called Afra, known to have formerly been a common prostitute. The judge, by name Gaius, who knew who she was, said: "Sacrifice to the gods; it is better to live than to die in torments." Afra replied: "I was a great sinner before I knew God; but I will not add new crimes, nor do what you command me." Gaius said: Go to the capitol and sacrifice." Afra answered: My capitol is Jesus Christ, whom I have always before my eyes. I every day confess my sins; and, because I am unworthy to offer him any sacrifice,* I desire to sacrifice myself for his name, that this body in which I have sinned may be purified and sacrificed to him by torments." "I am informed," said Gaius, "that you are a prostitute. Sacrifice, therefore, as you are a stranger to the God of the Christians, and cannot be accepted by him." Afra replied: "Our Lord Jesus Christ hath said, that he came down from heaven to save sinners. The gospels testify that an abandoned woman washed his feet with her tears, and obtained pardon, and that he never rejected the publicans, but permitted them to eat with him." The judge said: "Sacrifice, that your gallants may follow you, and enrich you." Afra answered: "I will have no more of that execrable gain. I have thrown away, as so much filth, what I had by me of it. Even our poor brethren

* Sinners under canonical penance were not allowed to assist at the divine mysteries, but prayed without the church door during mass.

would not accept of it, till I had overcome their reluctance by my entreaties, that they might pray for my sins.* Gaius said "Jesus Christ will have nothing to do with you. It is in vain for you to acknowledge him for your God: a common prostitute can never be called a Christian." Afra replied: "It is true, I am unworthy to bear the name of a Christian; but Christ hath admitted me to be one." Gaius said: "Sacrifice to the gods, and they will save you." The martyr replied: "My Saviour is Jesus Christ, who upon the cross promised paradise to the thief who confessed him." The judge said: "Sacrifice, lest I order you to be whipped in the presence of your lovers." Afra replied: "The only subject of my confusion and grief are my sins." "Sacrifice," said the judge, "I am ashamed that I have disputed so long with you. If you do not comply, you shall die." Afra replied: "That is what I desire, if I am not unworthy to find rest by this confession." The judge said: "Sacrifice, or I will order you to be tormented, and afterwards burnt alive." Afra answered: "Let that body which hath sinned undergo torments; but as to my soul, I will not taint it by sacrificing to demons." Then the judge passed sentence upon her as follows: "We condemn Afra, a prostitute who hath declared herself a Christian, to be burnt alive, because she hath refused to offer sacrifice to the gods.

The executioners immediately seized her, and carried her into an island in the river Lech, upon which Ausburg stands. There they stripped her and tied her to a stake. She lifted up her eyes to heaven, and prayed with tears, saying: "O Lord Jesus Christ, Omnipotent God, who camest to call not the righteous, but sinners to repentance, accept now the penance of my sufferings, and by this temporal fire deliver me from the everlasting fire, which torments both body and soul." Whilst the executioners were heaping a pile of vine branches about her, and setting fire to them, she was heard to say: "I return thee thanks, O Lord Jesus Christ, for the honour thou hast done me in receiving me a holocaust for thy name's sake; thou who hast vouchsafed to offer thyself upon the altar of the cross a

* The church, by its ancient discipline, would not receive, even for the benefit of the poor, the offerings of public sinners, or money which was acquired by wicked means. See *Constit Apostol.* l. 4, c. 5. 6.

sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, the just for the unjust, and for sinners. I offer myself a victim to thee, O my God, who livest and reignest with the Father and the Holy Ghost world without end. Amen." Having spoken these words she gave up the ghost, being suffocated by the smoke.

Three maids of the martyr, Digna, Eunomia, and Eutropia, who had been sinners as well as their mistress, but were converted and baptized at the same time by the holy bishop Narcissus,* stood all the while on the banks of the river, and beheld her glorious triumph. After the execution they went into the island, and found the body of Afra entire. A servant man who was with them swam back, and carried the news to Hilaria, the martyr's mother. She came in the night with some holy priests, and carried away the body, which she interred in a sepulchre she had built for herself and family, two miles from the city. The sepulchres of the ancients were lofty buildings, and big enough to contain several apartments. Whilst Hilaria and her attendants were still there, Gaius was informed of what they had done. He, therefore, despatched soldiers thither with an order to persuade the whole company to offer sacrifice, and if they refused, to burn them alive without any other formality. The soldiers used both mild words and threats; but finding all to no purpose, they filled the vault of the sepulchre with dry thorns and vine branches, shut the door upon them, and having set fire to the sticks went away. Thus St. Afra, her mother, and three servants were honoured with the crown of martyrdom on the same day, which was the 7th of August, as Ruinart and Tillemont(1) observe; though their festival is kept on the 5th. They suffered in year 304. St. Afra is honoured as chief patroness at Ausburg. In her we admire the perfect sentiments of a true penitent. At every word and in every thought she has her sins always before her eyes; persuaded she never could

(1) Tillem. t. 5, p. 274.

* This St. Narcissus is honoured at Ausburg as the apostle of that country, on the 29th of October, but he is named in the Roman Martyrology on the 18th of March. He is said to have fled from the persecution in Spain, to have preached at Ausburg, and to have returned afterwards to his church of Gironne in Catalonia, where he received the crown of martyrdom with a deacon named Felix, mentioned by Prudentius, hymno, 4

do enough to efface them, she never thinks on what she had already done for that end ; immediately upon her conversion she gave what she possessed to the poor, doubtless led a most penitential life till her death, and she rejoiced to suffer in order to atone for her former crimes. See her genuine acts, copied from the public register, in Surius, Ruinart, p. 455, &c.

ST. MEMMIUS, IN FRENCH MENGE,

FIRST BISHOP AND APOSTLE OF CHALONS, ON THE MARNE.

THE Catalaunian plains, according to Jornandes, one hundred leagues in length, and seventy in breadth, famous for the defeat of Attila, and other great victories, gave name to the whole province of Champagne, and were the theatre of the apostolic labours of St. Memmius the first bishop and apostle of Chalons, in the decline of the third century. Flodoard is our voucher that he was contemporary with St. Sixtus, bishop of Rheims in 290. He is honoured on the 5th of August, the day of his death. His relics, after several translations, are deposited in a rich shrine of silver gilt, together with those of his sister St. Poma, and famous for many miracles. St. Gregory of Tours relates that when he was travelling through Chalons his servant fell dangerously ill of a fever : St. Gregory, prostrate before the tomb of St. Memmius, prayed earnestly for his recovery, and the next morning the youth found himself perfectly well.(1) St. Memmius's two immediate successors, Donatian and Domitian, are also honoured among the saints, and their relics enshrined in the basilic of St. Memmius. Likewise St. Elasius and his brother and successor Laudomerus, or Lumier, the thirteenth and fourteenth bishops of Chalons from 565 to 590, are honoured, the former on the 19th of August, the latter on the 2nd of October, though he died on the 30th of September.

(1) L. de Gl. Conf. c. 66.