

MAY XXVIII.

SAINT GERMANUS, BISHOP OF
PARIS, C.

See his life by Fortunatus, St. Gregory of Tours, Mabillon.

A. D. 576.

ST. GERMANUS, the glory of the church of France in the sixth age, was born in the territory of Autun about the year 469. He was brought up in piety and learning under the care of Scapilion his cousin, a holy priest. In his youth no weather could divert him from always going to matins at midnight, though the church was above a mile from the place of his abode. Being ordained priest by St. Agrippinus bishop of Autun, he was made abbot of St. Symphorian's in the suburbs of that city, a house since converted into a priory of regular canons. Fortunatus, bishop of Poitiers, who was well acquainted with our saint, tells us that he was favoured at that time with the gifts of miracles and prophecy. It was his custom to watch great part of the night in the church in prayer, whilst his monks slept. One night in a dream he thought a venerable old man presented him with the keys of the city of Paris, and said to him, that God committed to his care the inhabitants of that city, that he should save them from perishing. Four years after this divine admonition, in 554, happening to be at Paris when that see became vacant, on the demise of the bishop Eusebius, he was exalted to the episcopal chair, though he endeavoured by many tears to decline the charge. His promotion made no alteration in his continual fasts and other austerities; and the same simplicity and frugality appeared in his dress,

table, and furniture. In the evening at nine o'clock he went to the church, and staid there in prayer till after matins, that is, in summer till about break of day. His house was perpetually crowded with the poor and the afflicted, and he had always many beggars at his own table, at which no dainty meats were ever served; he took care that the souls of his guests should be refreshed at the same time with their bodies, by the reading of some pious book. God gave to his sermons a wonderful influence over the minds of all ranks of people; so that the face of the whole city was in a very short time quite changed. Vanities were abolished, dances and profane amusements laid aside, enmities and discord extinguished, and sinners reclaimed. King Childebert, who till then had been an ambitious worldly prince, by the sweetness and the powerful discourses of the saint, was entirely converted to piety, and by his advice reformed his whole court. And so desirous did that prince become of exchanging the perishing goods of this world for eternal treasures, that not content with making many religious foundations, to be nurseries of piety in all succeeding ages, and with sending incredible sums of money to the good bishop, to be distributed among the indigent, after his coffers were drained he melted down his silver plate, and gave away the chains which he wore about his neck, begging the bishop, whom he made the steward of his charities, never to cease giving, assuring him that on his side he should never be tired with supplying all things for the relief and comfort of the distressed.

In the year 542, king Childebert, together with his brother Clotaire, making war in Spain, besieged Saragossa. The inhabitants of that city reposed a particular confidence in the patronage of St. Vincent, whose relics they carried in procession within sight of the French camp. King

Childebert was moved with their devotion, and desiring to speak with the bishop of the city, promised to withdraw his army, on condition he might obtain some portion of the relics of St. Vincent. The bishop gave him the stole which that holy deacon wore at the altar. Upon which the king raised the siege, and at his return to Paris, built a church in honour of St. Vincent, and of the Holy Cross; which is now called Saint Germain's in the meadows, and stands in the suburbs of Paris. Childebert falling sick at his palace at Celles, near Melun, at the confluence of the Yon and Seine, St. Germanus paid him a visit; and when the physicians had in vain tried every thing, all human means failing, the saint spent the whole night in prayer for his recovery, and in the morning laid his hands on him; and at the same moment the king found himself perfectly healed. The king relates himself this miracle in his letters patent, in which, in gratitude to God for this benefit, he gave to the church of Paris and the bishop Germanus, the land of Celles, where he had received this favour. The good king did not long survive. And the king had chosen the church of St. Vincent for the place of his burial, the saint, assisted by six others bishops, performed the ceremony of the dedication on the 23d of December, 558, the very day on which that prince died. The king likewise had built a large monastery joining to this new church, which he endowed most liberally with the fief of Issy and other lands, on part of which a considerable suburb of Paris has been since built. This magnificent edifice was called the *Golden Church*, the walls being covered on the outside with plates of brass gilt, and within adorned with paintings on a rich gilt ground.¹ This church was plundered by the Normans, in

¹ See the description of this church in the life of St. Droctoveus, written by Gislemar the monk.

845, 857, 858, and set on fire by them in 861 and 881; but rebuilt in 1014, and dedicated by pope Alexander III. in 1163. The lower part of the great tower and its gate with the statues of Clovis, Clodomir, Thierry, Childebert and his wife Ultrogotta, Clotaire, and others, seemed to be as old as the time of king Childebert. This prince committed the monastery and church to the care of our saint, who placed their monks under the holy abbot Droctoveus, whom he had invited from Autun, where he had formed him to a religious life.¹ Clotaire, who succeeded his brother Childebert, was the last of the sons of the great Clovis; and united again the four kingdoms of France into one monarchy. On his removing from Soissons to Paris, he at first seemed to treat the holy bishop coldly; but falling ill soon after of a violent fever, was put in mind by some that were about him to send for St. Germanus. He did so, and full of confidence in the power of God and the sanctity of his servant, took hold of his clothes and applied them to the parts of his body where he felt pain, and recovered immedi-

¹ Gislemar, in the life of St. Droctoveus positively affirms that St. Germanus appointed St. Droctoveus first abbot: which is proved by Mabillon and Ruinart. The interpolator of Aimoin and certain anonymous writers of the twelfth century, from registers of this abbey, say that Autharius, formerly sub-prior of St. Symphorian's at Autun, was the first abbot of the monastery of the Holy Cross and St. Vincent: which is warmly defended by F. Germon, a Jesuit, against Ruinart. The rule which St. Germanus first settled in this abbey was borrowed from the Orientals, but that of St. Bennet's was afterward adopted. The general of the Maurist Benedictin monks usually makes this house his residence. The abbots of St. Germain des-Prez exercised all jurisdiction both spiritual and temporal over the suburbs of St. Germain, till archbishop Perefex recovered the former in 1668, and the Chatelet of Paris the latter, in 1674. But by a transaction in 1669, the regular prior of the abbey is Grand-Vicar-born of the archbishopric. The abbatial exemption and jurisdiction, which were extended over seculars, have been confined *intra claustra* or within the precincts. In the year 1675 the king declared that the abbey should continue to enjoy the exercise and the prerogative of what the French call *Haute-Justice* in all the places occupied by the monks or their servants, and in the territory called the Inclosure of the Abbey, which was of some extent, and contained a number of houses and shops. See Piganiol, Descrip. de Paris, t. 7. and D. Bouillart, Hist. de l'Abbaye de Saint Germain-des-Prez.

ately. From that moment he always treated the saint even with greater honour than Childebert had done. But that prince dying shortly after, in 561, his four sons, Charibert, Gontran, Sigebert, and Chilperic, divided the French monarchy into four kingdoms, in the same manner as the sons of Clovis had done. That of Paris was given to Charibert, or Aribert, Gontran was king of Orleans and Burgundy, Sigebert of Austrasia, and Chilperic of Soissons. Charibert sunk into a vicious indolence, yet was obstinate and headstrong in his passions; not being divested of all the prejudices of paganism, he divorced his wife Ingoberga, and took to wife Marcovesa her maid, who had worn a religious habit; and after her death, he married her sister Merofleda, Ingoberga being still living. Our saint many ways endeavoured to make him sensible of the enormity of his crimes; but finding all his remonstrances lost on him, he proceeded so far as to excommunicate him and the accomplice of his sin, to hinder at least the dangerous influence of his scandalous example. The sinners were hardened in their evil courses; but God revenged the contempt of his laws and of the holy pastor as he has often done by visible judgments; for the criminal lady fell ill and died in a few days, and the adulterous king did not long survive her, leaving by his lawful wife only three daughters, two of whom became nuns, the third, called Bertha, was married to Ethelbert, king of Kent.

Upon the death of Charibert in 570, his three brothers divided his dominions; but not being able to agree who should be master of Paris, the capital, came to an accommodation that they should hold it jointly, on condition that none of them should go into the city without the leave of the other two. St. Germanus found his flock involved by this agreement in great difficulties, and the city divided into three different parties,

always plotting and counterplotting against one another. He did all that the most consummate charity, prudence, and vigilance could do, to preserve the public peace; yet Sigebert and Chilperic appeared in arms, being fired by ambition, and stirred up by their wicked queens Fredegonda, wife of the latter, and Brunehaut of the former, burning with the most implacable jealousy against each other. The saint prevailed with them to suspend their hostilities for some time. At length Chilperic invaded the territories of Sigebert, but being worsted in battle, fled to Tournay. This victory left Sigebert free liberty of going to Paris with his wife Brunehaut and children, where he was received as conqueror. St. Germanus wrote to the queen, conjuring her to comply her interest with her husband to restore the peace of France, and to spare the life and fortune of a brother, whose ruin and blood would cry to heaven for vengeance. But Brunehaut's passion rendered her deaf to all remonstrances, and Sigebert was determined by her furious counsels to besiege Tournay. As he was setting out for this enterprise, he was met by St. Germanus who told him that if he forgave his brother, he should return victorious: but if he was bent on his death, divine justice would overtake him, and his own death should prevent the execution of his unnatural design. Sigebert allowed this wholesome advice no weight; but the event showed that God had put these words in the mouth of the good bishop; for queen Fredegonda, enraged at the desperate posture of her husband's affairs, hired two assassins, who dispatched him with poisoned daggers, whilst he made a halt in his march at Vitri, in 575, after he had reigned fourteen years, with some reputation of humanity, as Fortunatus tells us.

Chilperic, by his tyranny and oppressions, deserved to be styled the French Nero, as St.

Gregory of Tours calls him. He sacrificed his own children by former wives to the fury of Fredegonda, but having discovered her infidelity to him, he was, by her contrivance, murdered by her gallant in 584. Fredegonda was regent of the kingdoms of Soissons and Paris for her son Clotaire II. and continued her practices and wars against Brunehaut and her son till she died, in 601. Brunehaut governed the kingdom of Austrasia for her son Childebert II. and after his death for her grandson Theodebert; but afterward persuaded Theodoric, her second grandson, who reigned at Challons, to destroy him and his whole family in 611. The year following Theodoric died, and Clotaire II. surnamed the Great, son of Fredegonda, inheriting both their estates, accused Brunehaut before the states of putting to death ten kings and St. Desiderius, bishop of Vienne, because he had reproved her for her public scandalous lusts, and many other illustrious persons. She had at first appeared liberal, and built several churches; but afterward became infamous for her cruelty, avarice, restless ambition, and insatiable lusts, to which she sacrificed all things, and employed both the sword and poison in perpetrating her wicked designs. Being condemned by the states, she was put to the rack during three days, and afterward dragged to death, being tied to the tail of a wild mare; or, according to others, drawn betwixt four horses, in 613.¹

St. Germanus lived not to see the miserable ends of these two firebrands of their country. In his old age he lost nothing of that zeal and activity with which he had filled the great duties of his station in the vigour of his life; nor did the weakness to which his corporal austerities had reduced him, make him abate any thing in the mortifications of his penitential life, in which he

¹ See Mezeray and Challons's Hist. of France.

redoubled his fervour as he approached nearer to the end of his course. By his zeal the remains of idolatry were extirpated in France. In the third council of Paris, in 557, he had the principal share in drawing up the canons. By his advice, king Childebert issued an edict commanding all idols to be destroyed throughout his dominions, and forbidding all indecent dances and diversions on Sundays and festivals. The saint continued his labours for the conversion of sinners till he was called to receive the reward of them on the 28th of May, 576, being eighty years old. King Chilperic composed his epitaph, in which he extols his zeal for the salvation of his people, and their affection and veneration for his person. He mentions the miracles which were wrought at his tomb, and says that sight was restored to the blind and speech to the dumb.¹ He was, according to his own desire, buried in St. Symphorian's chapel, which he built at the bottom of the church of St. Vincent already mentioned.

Many miracles manifested his sanctity, of which Fortunatus, then a priest, afterward bishop of Poitiers, has left us a history, in which he gives two on his own evidence. Also two anonymous monks compiled relations of several miracles of St. Germanus, which Aimoinus,² a monk of this monastery in 870, and a careful writer, digested into two books. (Apud Mabil. sæc. 4. Bened. t. 2. and Bolland. ad 28. Maij.) The relics of St. Germanus remained in the aforesaid chapel till the year 754, when the abbot removed them into the body of the church. The ceremony of this translation was performed with great solemnity; and king Pepin thought himself honoured by assisting at it. Prince Charles, known afterward by the title of Charlemagne, who was then but seven years old, attended his father on this occasion, and was so strongly affected with the miracles performed at that time, that when he came to the crown, he took a particular pleasure in relating them, with all their circumstances. The greatest part of the relics of St. Germanus remain still in this church of St. Vincent, commonly called St. Germain-des-Prez. This abbey is possessed of the original privilege of its foundation and exemption, written on bark, and subscribed by St. Germanus, St. Nicetius, and several other bishops. (On its authenticity, see Valois, Discept. de Basilicis, p. 53. Dom. Quatremaires and

¹ Apud Aimoinum, l. 2. c. 16.

² This Aimoinus must not be confounded with another of the same name in 1001, author of the History of France, in four books; and of a History of the Miracles of St. Bennet. This latter was a monk of Fleury.

Dom. Mabillon.) The most valuable work of St. Germanus of Paris, is An Exposition of the Liturgy,¹ published from an ancient manuscript by Dom. Martenne, (Anecd. t. 5. p. 91.) The characteristic virtue of St. Germanus was his unbounded charity to the poor. Liberality in alms moves God to be liberal to us in the dispensations of his spiritual graces; but he who hardens his heart to the injuries and wants of others, shuts against himself the treasury of heaven.

SAINT CARAUNUS, ALSO CARANUS AND CARO, M:

IN FRENCH CHERON.

HE was a native of Gaul, and flourished towards the end of the fifth age. After the death of his parents, who were Christians, he distributed all his substance to the poor; and in order to serve God with more ease, retired into a desert, where the bishop of the place, discovering his merit, ordained him a deacon.

He then determined to consecrate himself entirely to the ministry of the word; and having preached in several provinces of Gaul,² he came into the territory of Chartrain, where he found but a small number of Christians, the descendants of those who had been formerly converted by St. Potentianus and St. Altinus.³ The gospel having made a rapid progress by his zeal, he made choice of some disciples to assist him in extending the knowledge of Jesus Christ; and set out on his way to Paris.

He had scarce advanced three leagues from Chartres when he perceived a gang of robbers approaching towards him; whereupon he advised his disciples to hide themselves among the thick-

¹ In it we have the genuine ancient Gallican liturgy or mass, which was used in France before the Roman was introduced, in the time of Charlemagne and pope Adrian I. This Latin Gallican mass, in all the parts, bears a uniform resemblance with the Roman. St. Germanus, in this most curious work, explains the ancient ceremonies of the liturgy, all the sacred vestments, &c.

² Gaul was then divided between the Franks, the Burgundians, and the Visigoths. The first were for the most part idolaters, the others professed Arianism, but were scarcely better than infidels.

³ These two saints were sent into this country by St. Savinianus, bishop of Sens, in the reign of the emperor Dioclesian,