

abundantly for them the greatest graces, provided we bear our cross with him, embrace it affectionately for his love, and offer our sufferings to him, uniting them with his. O precious cross! you are the highest royal road to heaven, sanctified and made divine by our sovereign Head, who opened it, and showed the way in which all his elect follow him. St. John suffered above the other saints a martyrdom of love, being a martyr, and more than a martyr, at the foot of the cross of his divine Master, with the true lovers of Jesus, Magdalen, and the Blessed Virgin mother. All his sufferings were by love and compassion imprinted in his soul, and thus shared by him. O singular happiness of St. John, to have stood under the cross of Christ, so near his divine person, when the other disciples had all forsaken him! O extraordinary privilege, to have suffered martyrdom in the person of Jesus, and been eyewitness of all he did or endured, and of all that happened to him in that great sacrifice and mystery!¹ Here he drank of his cup; this was truly a martyrdom, and our Saviour exempted all those who had assisted at the martyrdom of his cross, from suffering death by the hands of persecutors. St. John, nevertheless, received also the crown of this second martyrdom, to which the sacrifice of his will was not wanting, but only the execution.

SAINT JOHN DAMASCEN,

FATHER OF THE CHURCH.

From the works of the saint, and the histories of those times. His life written by John IV. patriarch of Jerusalem, who lived two hundred years after him, borrows the first part, before his monastic profession, from uncertain memoirs. See Nat. Alex. sæc. 8. Fleury, b. 42. Papebroke, May 6. Ceillier, t. 18. p. 110.

A. D. 780.

MAHOMET, the great impostor, subdued a con-

siderable part of Arabia before his death, which happened in 632. His successor, Abubeker, extended his conquests into Chaldea and Persia. Omar, the second caliph of the Saracens, subdued Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt, before the death of the emperor Heraclius, in 641. Othman, the third caliph, died in 655, and Ali the fourth, in 660. This last founded the sect of Mahometanism which the Persians follow, and which the Turks and others, who adhere to the interpretations of his predecessors, Omar and Othman, detest above all other religions. Such was the posture of affairs in the East, when St. John was born, in the declension of the seventh century, at Damascus, from which city he received his surname: by the Saracens he was called Mansur. He was of a noble and ancient family, and his father, though always a zealous and pious Christian, was held in great esteem by the Saracen caliphs for his high birth, probity, and abilities; was advanced by them to the first employments of the state, and made their chief secretary or counsellor. The pious statesman was the more watchful and fervent in all duties of religion, the greater the dangers were to which he saw his faith exposed. Being chiefly solicitous for the education of his son in innocence and piety, amidst the dangers of such a court, he purchased the liberty of a learned and devout Grecian monk, named Cosmas, who, having been taken prisoner by the Saracens, was brought to Damascus for sale. Him he appointed tutor to his son, and to another youth called Cosmas, the charge of whose education he had taken upon himself. The preceptor entered into the views of the zealous parent, and bent his whole attention to defend the tender plants from the rude winds of trials and temptations. The caliph was much taken with the capacity and virtue of John, and after the death of his father, made him

governor of Damascus, his capital city. After Ali, the dignity of caliph had passed into another family called the Ommiads. The name of the first of these was Moavia. This prince and his immediate successors treated the Christians with courtesy and mildness: and so great were the abilities, and such the transcendent virtue of John, that he enjoyed his prince's favour without envy. But he always trembled at the sight of those spiritual dangers with which he saw himself surrounded. He was sensible, that, in a flow of plenty and prosperity, the heart is apt to warp towards vice and the world, and he dreaded the contagion of the air he breathed. He therefore, at length, came to a resolution to resign his honours, and soon after disposed of his estates in favour of the Church and the poor, and with Cosmas, his companion, withdrew secretly to the great Laura of St. Sabas, near Jerusalem. Cosmas was afterwards chosen bishop of Majuma, in Palestine.

Saint John in his solitude, rejoiced to see himself delivered from the slavery of the world, and placed in a happy state of uninterrupted tranquillity; where his years passed away without one heavy minute, and where he had no other occupation but that of employing, without distraction, all his thoughts and endeavours on the end of his creation, the securing the salvation of his soul. He considered the important work which he had upon his hands, and set himself in earnest to learn perfectly to subdue his passions, and walk in the paths of true virtue. With this view he addressed himself to the superior of the Laura, who gave him for director an experienced old monk. This great master in a spiritual life, conducting the novice to his cell, gave him the following short lessons: First, That he should never do his own will, but study in all things to die to himself, in order to divest himself of all

inordinate self-love or attachment to creatures. Secondly, That he should frequently offer to God all his actions, difficulties, and prayers. Thirdly, That he should take no pride in his learning or any other advantage, but ground himself in a sincere and thorough conviction, that he had nothing of his own stock but ignorance and weakness. Fourthly, That he should renounce all vanity, should always mistrust himself and his own lights, and never desire visions or the like extraordinary favours. Fifthly, That he should banish from his mind all thoughts of the world, nor ever disclose to strangers the instructions given him in the monastery; that he should keep strict silence, and remember that there may be harm even in saying good things without necessity. By the punctual observance of these rules, the fervent novice made great progress in an interior life and Christian perfection. His director, to promote his spiritual advancement, often put his virtue to severe trials. He once sent him to Damascus to sell some baskets, and having set an exorbitant price on them, forbade him to take less. The saint obeyed his director without the least demur, and appeared poor and ill clad in that great city, in which he had formerly lived in splendour. On being asked the price of his ware, he was abused and insulted for the unreasonableness of his demands. At length, one that had been formerly his servant, out of compassion, purchased his whole stock, at the price he asked; and the saint returned to his superior, victorious over vanity and pride. It happened that a certain monk, being inconsolable for the death of his brother, the saint, by way of comforting him, recited to him a Greek verse, importing, that all is vanity which time destroyeth. His director, for his greater security against the temptation of vanity or ostentation, on account of learning, called this a disobedience in speaking without

necessity, and, by way of chastisement, turned him out of his cell. The humble saint wept bitterly to heal this wound of disobedience in his soul, as he confessed it to be; and without endeavouring to extenuate the fault, though in itself so excusable, begged the monks to intercede for him to his director for pardon. This was at length obtained, but only on condition that with his own hands he should cleanse out and carry away all the filth that lay about the monastery; which condition the saint, to whom humiliations were always welcome, most cheerfully complied with.

So accomplished a virtue made his superiors judge him worthy to be promoted to the priesthood, which was then much more rare in monasteries than at present. This dignity served only to increase his humility and fervour. His director at length thought him sufficiently grounded in habits of profound humility and self-denial, to be permitted to employ his talents in writing for the edification of others and the service of the Church, without falling into the dangerous temptations of self-conceit and pride. For a secret vanity or self-complacency often robs even the Christian writer of the fruit of his labours before God; and an eminent author calls this base weakness of vanity the last foible of great geniuses. John had given proof by long and severe trials, that an entire contempt of himself, and a feeling sense of his own weakness and absolute insufficiency, were deeply rooted in his heart, when his superiors thought him sufficiently armed against this snare, to be employed in teaching their theological schools. Soon after, they ordered him to take up his pen in defence of our holy faith, attacked by the Iconoclast heretics. The emperor Leo, the Isaurian, had published his edict against holy images, in 726, and had found many followers, when St. John entered the lists against

that heresy. He begins his first discourse, or oration, on this religious subject as follows, "Conscious to myself of my own baseness and unworthiness, I ought rather to condemn myself to an eternal silence, weeping, and confessing my sins before God. But seeing the Church, which is founded on a rock, assailed by a furious storm, I think I ought no longer to remain silent, because I fear God more than an emperor of the earth." He lays down for the foundation of the dispute, that the Church cannot err: consequently it could never fall into idolatry.¹ He explains what is meant by the adoration due to God alone, which, with St. Austin and other fathers, he calls *Latria*; and that inferior veneration which is paid to the friends and servants of God, which is entirely different, and infinitely beneath the former; and no more inconsistent with it than the civil honour which the law of nature and the holy scriptures command us to pay to princes and superiors. He shows that the veneration which we pay to the things which belong to God, as altars, &c. is not less distinct from the supreme honour we give to God. He says, the precept in the old law, which forbade images, (if it be not to be restrained to idols,) was merely ceremonial, and only regarded the Jews: which law if we restore, we must equally admit circumcision and the sabbath. He testifies that the Iconoclasts allowed a religious honour to be due to the holy place on Mount Calvary, to the stone of the sepulchre, to the book of the gospels, to crosses and sacred vessels. Lastly, he proves the veneration of holy images by the testimony of the fathers. In his second discourse he teaches at large that the emperor is intrusted with the government of the state, but has no authority to make decisions in points of ecclesiastical doctrine.

1 Or. 1. de Cultu Imag.

In the third, he demonstrates the use of holy images from the tradition of the fathers.

The dogmatical writings of this great doctor show the extent of his genius still more than his controversial; and in them the strength and clearness of his reasoning can be equalled only by the depth of his penetration, and the soundness of his judgment.¹ His most important and celebrated work is, *The Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*, divided into four books, in which he reduces all the branches of theology which the ancients explained in several scattered works into one regular body, which gives this sublime study the advantage of excellent method, connects all its parts in a short system, and sets them all together in one clear point of view.²

¹ Though the philosophy of Plato was then generally in vogue, this able master adopted that of Aristotle, as Boetius had done among the Latins. He cleared his physical principles of that obscurity in which they lay involved, and set their truth in a proper light; and having made himself perfectly master of his system of logic or laws of the art of reasoning, he reduced them to certain general methodical rules, in which a tedious prolixity is avoided, and this noble art, the key of sciences, is rendered easy and clear, without any embarrassed questions, and that froth of school subtilties with which the Arabians afterward clogged it. This eminently useful art hath, by the abuse of some, been made a nuisance, to perplex and cloud the understanding, and to engross all the attention and time which are due to more sublime attainments, for the sake of which logic is chiefly necessary. Whereas, when confined to its proper boundaries, it is not only introductory to science, by giving to our ideas the utmost clearness, precision, and justness, and by teaching us the laws of true and close reasoning, but it improves the judgment, and enlarges the faculties of the mind above all other studies. Theology, without its aid, is a science without arms. Nor are certain general principles of natural philosophy a less necessary foundation to it. To answer these purposes, our holy doctor compiled his abstract of Aristotle's logic and physics. In his treatise *On Heresies*, he chiefly abridges St. Epiphanius, and in those which were posterior to him, Theodoret and some others, though he gives an account of several heresies, not mentioned by any other writer, and adds a confutation of Mahometism.

² In his first book *On the Orthodox faith*, St. John treats of God and the divine attributes: in the second, of the creation, angels, man, liberty, and predestination: in the third, of the Incarnation: in the fourth, of the sacraments, &c.

That nothing might be wanting to this work, he wrote his *Parallels*, in which he laid down the principal rules of morality, in passages extracted from the fathers, confirmed by the oracles of the holy scripture. He wrote also a *Disputation with a Saracen*, and other treatises against the Eutychians, Nestorians, Menothelites, and Manichees, besides ser

This work was the first plan of the scholastic method of teaching divinity, which St. Anselm introduced much later among the Latins. St. John composed many holy canticles; and to his fellow-pupil, Cosmas, is the Greek Church indebted for the greater part of the sacred hymns which it uses in the divine office.

mions and the life of St. Stephen the Younger, a monk and martyr under Constantine Copronymus, in 766. In his treatise *Of the Trinity*, he explains that mystery, and the Incarnation: in his letter to Jordan on the Triságon, he shows that the Church addresses this triple repetition of Holy to one God, subsisting in three persons, not to the Son alone; and rejects the additions of the Syrian Monophysites or Eutychians, showing that in these rites we are to make the tradition of the Church our rule. (p. 186.) In his letter *On the Fast of Lent*, he commends the general discipline, which was that of the church of Jerusalem, according to which the fast was continued for seven weeks, every day till sun-set, except on Saturdays and Sundays: the abstinence was observed for the first week only from flesh-meat, yet with fasting till evening. This was called the preparation to Lent. The other six weeks the faithful abstained from all white meats, as eggs, cheese, and milk; and on the last or holy week, no food was allowed but Xerophagie, or dry meats. The saint condemns not those who added an eighth week to Lent, though he prefers the common rule, and repeats his favourite maxim: "What is in itself good is not good, unless it be well done." (p. 499.) In his book *On the Eight capital Vices*, he shows in what each consists, and explains the means by which they are to be vanquished, which he executes with greater precision than Cassian and St. Nilus had done in their books on the same subject. With them, he mentions vain-glory as a distinct capital sin or mother-vice, which St. Gregory and the Latins place under pride. St. John Damascen gives a short description of virtues and vices in his book *On Virtue and Vice*. The discourse, *On those who are dead in Faith*, is falsely ascribed to this father. In the second volume of the new edition are contained his *Commentaries on St. Paul's epistles*, and several homilies. The most complete edition of the works of St. John Damascen was given at Paris by F. Le Quien, a Dominican friar, in two volumes, folio, in 1712. This editor has added learned notes, and seventeen dissertations; and promised to add in a third volume, several works which some by mistake have attributed to this father. Among these we have a history of Barlaam, a holy hermit, and Josaphat, the son of an Indian king, whom he instructed in the faith and in virtue, after his father is said to have educated him in a palace, where, during his youth, he never heard that men die. This life is ascribed to St. John Damascen, in the English, and some other editions: but in old manuscripts is attributed to other authors, and seems not to be the work of this father. It is entertaining and ingenious, and contains pious reflections. Though Barlaam and Josaphat are names of two holy persons, the greater part of this piece is thought to be a parable or allegory. See Huet, *sur l'Origine des Rom.* p. 60. A MS. copy of an *Etymologicon* of St. John Damascen (which furnishes many useful corrections of Hesychius and Suidas) is mentioned in the *Catalogus MSS. Bibliothecæ Bernensis*, auctore J. R. Sinner, *Bibliothecario*, an. 1760, t. 1. Le Quien's edition is more accurately republished at Verona, in 1748.

St. John travelled into Palestine, and also to Constantinople, to encourage the faithful, and to defend the use of holy images in the very seat of the persecutor, Constantine Copronymus. But he returned again to the Laura of St. Sabas, in Palestine, where being in the dominions of the Saracen caliph, he continued to defend the Church by his pen. We have the unexceptionable testimony of Dr. Cave,¹ that no man can have a sound judgment who, reading his works, doth not admire his extraordinary erudition, the justness and precision of his ideas and conceptions, and the strength of his reasoning, especially in theological matters. But Baronius observes, that he was sometimes led into mistakes with regard to historical facts by faulty memoirs. John IV. patriarch of Jerusalem, extols his great skill in mathematics. Amidst his studies he was careful to nourish in his heart a spirit of devotion by constant recollection, and daily contemplation. For it is the reflection of a great man, and an eminent scholar,² writing to contemplative persons, "that without assiduous prayer, reasoning is a great dissipation of the mind, and learning often extinguishes the humble interior spirit of prayer, as wind does a candle." In another place he calls too close application to mathematics the death of the spirit of prayer, and adds, "suffer not yourself to be bewitched with the enchantment of geometry. Nothing will sooner dry up in you the interior spirit of recollection and devotion." St. John, to shun this rock, was careful that his studies should never degenerate into a passion; he never suffered them to dissipate his mind, or encroach on his exercises of devotion, or any other duties, and in his inquiries shunned all idle curiosity. Having by retirement prepared himself for his last passage, he died in his cell about the year

¹ Hist. Liter.

² Fenelon, ep. 155.

780. His tomb was discovered near the church porch of this Laura, in the twelfth century, as John Phocas testifies.¹

ST. EADBERT, BISHOP OF LINDISFARN, C.

VENERABLE BEDE assures us, that this holy man excelled both in the knowledge of the holy scriptures, and in the observance of the divine precepts. All his life-time he was remarkable for his alms-deeds, and it was a law with him to lay aside yearly the tenth part of his goods for the poor. He was ordained successor to St. Cuthbert, in the see of Lindisfarne, in 687, and most worthily governed that church eleven years. It was his custom twice a year in Lent, and during forty days before Christmas, to retire into a solitary place, encompassed by the waters of the sea, where St. Cuthbert had for some time served God in private before he went to the isle of Ferne. St. Eadbert spent this time remote from all company, in abstinence, prayers, and tears. St. Cuthbert had been buried about eleven years, when the brethren desired, with the approbation of Eadbert, to take up the bones of that eminent servant of God, whose life had been signalized by many illustrious miracles. Instead of dust, to which they expected they were reduced, to their great surprise they found the body as entire, and the joints all as pliable, as if it had been living: all the vestments and clothes in which it was laid were also sound, and wonderfully fresh and bright. The monks made haste to inform the holy bishop, who was then in his Lent retreat, and they brought him part of the garments which covered the holy body. These he devoutly kissed, and ordered that the blessed body should be laid in other garments, put into the new coffin which

¹ Phocas in Descript. Palestine.