

MARCH XXVI.

ST. LUDGER, BISHOP OF MUNSTER,

APOSTLE OF SAXONY.

From his life, written by Altfrid, one of his successors, and another compiled by a monk of Werden, about sixty years after the death of St. Ludger, of inferior authority to the former, both extant in Mabillon, *Act. Bened.* t. 4. p. 289: also a third life in Surius and the Bollandists, written by the monks of Werden, perhaps twenty years after the latter. See *Hist. Liter.* Fr. t. 5. p. 660.

A.D. 809.

ST. LUDGER was born in Friseland, about the year 743. His father, who was a nobleman of the first rank in that country, at the child's own request, committed him very young to the care of St. Gregory, the disciple of St. Boniface, and his successor in the government of the see of Utrecht. Ludger had the happiness to have seen that holy martyr, and received from him strong impressions of virtue. Gregory educated him in his monastery, and admiring his progress in learning and piety, gave him the clerical tonsure. Ludger, desirous of further improvement, passed over into England, and spent four years and a half under Alcuin, who was rector of a famous school at York. He was careful to employ his whole time in the exercises of piety, and the study of the holy scriptures and fathers. In 773, he returned home, and St. Gregory dying in 776, his successor, Alberic, compelled our saint to receive the holy order of priesthood, and employed him for several years in preaching the word of God in Friseland, where he converted great numbers, both among the Pagans and vicious Christians, founded several monasteries, and built many churches. This was the state of affairs, when the pagan Saxons, ravaging the country obliged him to leave Friseland. Whereupon he travelled to Rome to consult Pope Adrian II. what course to take, and what he thought God required of him. He then retired for three years and a half to Mount Cassino, where he wore the habit of the Order, and conformed to the practice of the rule during his stay but made no religious vows. In 787, Charlemagne overcame the Saxons and conquered Friseland, and the coast of the Germanic ocean as far as Denmark. Ludger hearing that by this revolution the mission was again opened, returned into east-Friseland, where he converted the Saxons to the faith; as he also did

the province of Sudergou, now called Westphalia. He founded the monastery of Werden,* in the county of La Mark, twenty-nine miles from Cologne. His old master Alcuin being come into France, made his merit known to the Emperor Charlemagne. In 802, Hildebald, archbishop of Cologne, not regarding his strenuous resistance, ordained him bishop of Mimigardeford, (or ford of the river Mimigard,) a city which afterwards changed this name for that of Munster, from the great monastery of regular canons which St. Ludger built there, to serve for his cathedral. He joined to his diocese five cantons of Friseland which he had converted, and also founded the monastery of Helmstad, afterwards called Ludger-Clooster, or Ludger's cloister, in the duchy of Brunswick.

He was very learned in the Holy Scriptures, and read daily lectures thereon to his disciples. He fasted and watched much, and always wore a hair shirt, but secretly, so that no one knew of it till a little before his death. He ate some flesh at certain times, chiefly to conform to others, but always observing a strict temperance. When invited to any entertainment, his discourse the whole time was on religious subjects, and he withdrew immediately after. To the poor he was affable and courteous, but firm and resolute to the proud rich. He exerted an episcopal vigour against impenitent sinners, and refused all manner of presents from an incestuous lady, and at length excommunicated her. Except what was absolutely necessary for his subsistence, he employed the revenues of his own estate and those of his bishopric in charities. He was accused to the emperor Charlemagne, among other things, of wasting his income, and neglecting the embellishment of churches within his jurisdiction. And this prince, who loved to see churches magnificent, giving ear to the information, ordered him to appear at court. The morning after his arrival, the emperor's chamberlain brought him word that his attendance was required. The saint, being then at his prayers, told the officer that he would follow him as soon as he had finished them. He was sent for three several times before he was ready, which the courtiers represented as a contempt of his majesty; and the emperor with some emotion, asked him why he had made him wait so long, though he had

* Some have, by mistake, confounded this place with Fellen, or Werden, beyond the Weser.

sent for him so often? The bishop answered, that though he had the most profound respect for his majesty, yet God was infinitely above him; that whilst we are occupied with him, it is our duty to forget every thing else; and that in this he judged he had rather obeyed than neglected his majesty's orders, who, when he was chosen bishop, had recommended to him ever to prefer the service of God to that of men. This answer made such an impression on the emperor, in favour of the saint, that he looked upon it as a complete justification of his conduct as to every particular that had been laid to his charge: he accordingly dismissed him with honour, and disgraced his accusers. The saint took this liberty with a religious prince, that he might condemn the sloth of many who suffer distractions or earthly trifles to interrupt their commerce with God; but they who leave prayer for necessary works of charity or obedience, find God still in the exercises of those virtues. St. Ludger required so devout an attention at divine service, that being at prayers one night with his clergy, and one of them stooping down to mend the fire and hinder it from smoking, the saint after prayer severely rebuked him for it, and inflicted on him a penance for some days. St. Ludger was favoured with the gift of miracles and prophecy. He foretold the invasion of the Normans from Denmark and Norway, and what ravages they would make in the French empire, and this at a time when there was not the least apprehension of any such thing. His great zeal inclined him to go and preach the faith to these northern nations, but the king would not allow of it. His last sickness, though violent, did not hinder him from continuing his functions to the very last day of his life, which was Passion-Sunday, on which day he preached very early in the morning, said mass towards nine, and preached again before night, foretelling withal to those that were about him, that he should die the following night, and fixing upon a place in his monastery of Werden where he chose to be interred. He died accordingly on the 26th of March, at midnight. His relics are still kept at Werden. Joseph, an Englishman, a disciple of Alcuin, whom he attended into France, wrote, in sixteen verses, an eulogium of St. Ludger, published by Vossius(1) and Mabillon, as a specimen of good poetry for that age.

Nothing so much scandalizes the very infidels, or shows the decay of piety, and loss of all sense of religion among Christians, as their disrespectful behaviour in the house of God and at the time of prayer. An awful strict silence, the most profound exterior respect, and penetrating inward devotion of heart, must essentially accompany our homages when we present them before the throne of God, in whose presence the highest seraphim annihilate themselves. This silence we must observe not only with our tongues, but also with our bodies and all our limbs, both out of respect to the presence of God and his altar, and also not to give the least occasion of distraction to others. Prayer is an action so sublime and supernatural, that the Church in her canonical hours teaches us to begin it by a fervent petition of grace to perform it well. What an insolence and mockery is it to join with this petition an open disrespect and a neglect of all necessary precautions against distractions! We ought never to appear before God, to tender him our homages or supplications, without trembling, and without being deaf to all creatures, and shutting all our senses to every object that can distract our minds from God. In the life of F. Simon Gourdan, a regular canon of St. Victor's at Paris, who died in the odour of sanctity, in the year 1729, the eighty-fifth of his age, it is related that King Lewis XIV. came to see him, and to recommend himself to his prayers, The servant of God made him wait till he had finished his thanks, giving after mass, which edified that great prince, who said, "he does well; for he is employed in attending on a much greater king." Though St. Francis of Sales on the like occasions chose rather to forego or defer his own private devotions, than not to be ready immediately to wait on others, in order to give them all the spiritual advice they desired; yet, at prayer, at least, he and all truly religious persons seemed in some degree to rival the heavenly spirits in their awe and reverence. Silence at that holy time, or place, has always been esteemed a thing so sacred, that when the temple of Solomon was building, God commanded that there should not be heard so much as the sound of a hammer, or any other instrument. Even when we come from conversing with God, we ought to appear all penetrated with the divine presence, and rather as angels than men. Sanctity, modesty, and the marks of an heavenly spirit, ought to shine in our exterior, and to inspire others by our very sight with religious awe and devotion.