

ST. CATHERINE OF GENOA, WIDOW.

CATHERINE or Catterinetta Fieschi Adorno, was born at Genoa in 1447. Her father, James Fieschi, died viceroy of Naples under Renatus of Anjou, king of Sicily.* From the first dawn of her reason, she appeared to be a child of spiritual benedictions. By a singular privilege of divine grace, and the attention of virtuous parents, she seemed from the cradle entirely exempt from frowardness, and little passions of anger or the like vices, with which infancy itself is often stained. It was something still more admirable and more edifying in her, to see a tender child, to join with the most perfect simplicity of heart, and obedience to her parents and others, a serious love of prayer, the most heroic practices of self-denial, and the most tender devotion, particularly towards the sacred passion of Christ. That at twelve years of age she was favoured by God with extraordinary supernatural comforts and illustrations of the Holy Ghost in prayer, we are assured by her own testimony. Experience teaches, that by humble obedience, and fervent love of prayer, the most tender age is capable of making great advancement in the paths of divine love and interior solid virtue; and that the Holy Ghost delights wonderfully to communicate himself to those who so early open their hearts entirely to him. But whilst he attracts them after the sweet odour of his ointments, he prepares them for the most severe trials, which furnish them with occasions for the exercise of the most heroic virtues, and perfects the crucifixion of inordinate attachments in their hearts. This conduct of divine providence St. Catherine experienced.

* The family of the Fieschi was for many ages one of the most illustrious in Italy. Its chiefs were counts of Lavagna in the territory of Genoa. They were for some ages perpetual vicars of the empire in Italy, and afterwards enjoyed very extraordinary privileges in the republic of Genoa, and among others that of coining money. This house gave to that commonwealth its greatest generals during its long wars, both in the East and against the Venetians; and to the church many cardinals and two popes, Innocent IV. and Adrian V. The family of Fieschi suffered much by the miscarriage of the conspiracy formed by count John Lewis Fieschi against the Doriae, then masters of the commonwealth, in 1547. The plot only failed by the death of count Fieschi, who was drowned by falling into the sea as he was going out of one galley into another.

At thirteen years of age she earnestly desired to consecrate herself to the divine service in a religious state, thinking a contemplative life the most secure for her, and it best suited her inclinations. But she was overruled by obedience to her parents, and by the advice of those from whom she hoped to learn what the divine will required of her. Three years after, she was married by her father to Julian Adorno, a gay young nobleman of Genoa. Her husband, drunk with youth, and giddy with ambition, brought on her a long series of grievous afflictions, which she suffered during ten years, and which, by the good use she made of them, exceedingly contributed to her more perfect sanctification. His brutish humour afforded a perpetual trial to her patience; his dilapidation of his own patrimony, and of the great fortune she had brought him, perfected the disengagement of her heart from the world, and his profligate life was to her a subject of continual tears to God for his conversion. This, her prayers, patience, and example at length effected, and he died a penitent in the third Order of St. Francis. Catherine had a cousin named Tommasa Fieschi, who being left a widow about the same time, made her religious profession in an austere nunnery of the Order of St. Dominic, and died prioress in 1534. Our saint seeing herself freed from the servitude of the world, and in a condition now to pursue the native bent of her inclination to live altogether to herself and God, deliberated some time in what manner she might best execute her holy desire. At length, in order to join the active life with the contemplative, and to have the happiness of ministering to Christ in his most distressed and suffering members, she determined to devote herself to the service of the sick in the great hospital of the city. Of this house she lived many years the mother superior, attending assiduously upon the patients with incredible tenderness, performing for them the meanest offices, and dressing herself their most loathsome ulcers. So heroic is this charity, that with regard to the institutions set apart for the relief of the poor, and attendance on the sick, Voltaire forgets his usual censorious malignant disposition in regard to religious institutions, to give them due praise. He declares that nothing can be nobler than the sacrifice which the fair sex made of beauty and youth, and oftentimes of high birth,

to employ their time at the hospitals in relieving those miserable objects, the sight of which alone is humbling to our pride, and shocking to our delicacy. In overcoming this repugnance of nature in doing many offices about certain patients it cost our saint much difficulty in the beginning, till by perseverance she had gained a complete victory over herself.

Her charity could not be confined to the bounds of her own hospital; she extended her care and solicitude to all lepers and other distressed sick persons over the whole city, and she employed proper persons, with indefatigable industry, to discover, visit, and relieve such objects. Her fasts and other austerities were incredible, and it was her constant study to deny her senses every superfluous gratification, and still more vigorously to humble her heart, and overcome her own will in every thing. Even whilst she lived in the world with her husband, it was a rule with her never to excuse herself when blamed by others, but always to be readily inclined sincerely to accuse and condemn herself. She made it her constant earnest request to God, that his pure and holy love might reign in her heart, and in her whole conduct, by the extinction of all inordinate self-love, and in this sense she took for her device that petition of our Lord's prayer: *Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.* The necessity of the spirit of universal mortification and perfect humility to prepare the way for the pure love of God to be infused into the soul, is the chief lesson which she inculcates in the two principal treatises, which she wrote, the first entitled, *On Purgatory*, and the second called, *A Dialogue*. In this latter work, she paints strongly the powerful effects of divine love in a soul, and the wonderful sweetness and joy which frequently accompany it.* St. Catherine having suffered the martyrdom of a tedious and painful illness, in which, for a considerable time, she was scarcely able to take any nourishment, though she received every day the holy communion, expired in great peace and tranquillity, and her soul went to be united to the centre of her love on the 14th day of September, 1510, she being sixty-two years old. The author of her life relates certain miracles by which God was pleased to testify her sanctity to men. Her

* These treatises are not written for the common class of readers.

body was taken up eighteen months after her death, and found without the least sign of putrefaction. From that time it was exposed aloft in a marble monument in the church of the hospital, as the body of a saint; and she was honoured with the title of Blessed, which Pope Benedict XIV. changed into that of Saint, styling her in the Martyrology St. Catherine Fieschi (in Latin Flisca) Adorno.(1) See her life compiled by Marabotti, her confessor, published in 1551; also her works. And the comments of Sticker the Bollandist, ad 15 Sept. t. 5, p. 123. For the justification of her doctrine, and the commendations of her sanctity, see Parpera, the Oratorian's book entitled *B. Catharina Genuensis illustrata*. Printed at Genoa A. D. 1682.

**ST. CORMAC, BISHOP OF CASHEL,
AND KING OF MUNSTER IN IRELAND.**

HE is called the son of Cuillenan, and was descended from king Engus who was baptised by St. Patrick; and was probably the first bishop of Cashel. He is much celebrated by the Irish writers, not only for his great learning, but for his piety, charity, valour, and magnificence; and is styled by them a saint, poet, and king. He was slain in 908, fighting against Flan, king of Meath and monarch of Ireland. He wrote in Irish a history called the *Psalter of Cashel*, still extant in MS. as Ware tells us; and is commemorated on this day in the Irish Martyrology. See Colgan, Ware, &c.

**SEPTEMBER XV.
SAINT NICETAS, MARTYR.**

From his Acts in Surius, and from Socrates, Sozomen, &c. See Stilling, t. 5, Sept. p. 38.

FOURTH AGE.

SAINTS SABAS and NICETAS are the two most renowned martyrs among the Goths. The former is honoured on the 12th of April, the latter, whom the Greeks place in the class of the great martyrs, is commemorated on this day. He was a Goth, born near the banks of the Danube, and converted to the faith in his youth by Theophilus, who was bishop of the Scythians and

(1) Bened. XIV. *De Canoniz. Sanct.* l. 3, c. 3, p. 20.