

Old, and St. Julian the Poor. See St. Greg. of Tours, de Glor. Mart. l. 2, Bosquet, l. 3, p. 176. Tillem. t. 5, &c.

AUGUST XXIX.

THE DECOLLATION OF ST. JOHN BAPTIST.

ST. JOHN the BAPTIST was called by God to be the forerunner of his Divine Son, to usher him into the world, and to prepare mankind by penance to receive their great Redeemer, whom the prophets had foretold at a distance through every age from the beginning of the world ; never ceasing to excite the people of God to faith and hope in him, by whom alone they were to be saved. The more the sublime function of this saint surpassed that of the Jewish legislator and of all the patriarchs and ancient prophets, the greater were the graces by which he was fitted for the same. Some of the prophets had been sanctified from their birth ; but neither in so wonderful nor in so abundant a manner as the Baptist. In order to preserve his innocence spotless, and to improve the extraordinary graces which he had received, he was directed by the Holy Ghost to lead an austere and contemplative life in the wilderness, in the continual exercises of devout prayer and penance, from his infancy till he was thirty years of age. How much does this precaution of a saint, who was strengthened by such uncommon privileges and graces, condemn the rashness of parents who expose children in the slippery time of youth to the contagious air of wicked worldly company, and to every danger ! or, who, instead of training them up in suitable habits of self-denial, humility, devotion, and reasonable application to serious duties, are themselves by example and pernicious maxims the corruptors of their tender minds, and the flatterers of their passions, which they ought to teach them to subdue.

St. John cannot be commonly imitated by youth in his total retreat from the world ; but he teaches what are the means by which they must study, according to their circumstances, to sanctify that most precious age of life ; what they must shun, in what maxims they ought to ground themselves, and how they are to form and strengthen in themselves the most perfect

habits of all virtues. Let them consider him as a special pattern, and the model of innocence and of that fervour with which they must labour continually to improve in wisdom, piety, and every virtue. He is particularly the pattern which those ought always to have before their eyes, who are called by God to the ministry of his altar, or of his word. Let no one be so rash as to intrude himself into the sanctuary before he has laboured a long time to qualify himself for so high an office by retirement, humility, holy contemplation, and penance, and before the spirit of those virtues has taken deep root in his soul. St. John led a most austere life in the wilderness, conversing only with God, till, in the thirtieth year of his age, he was perfectly qualified to enter upon the administration of his office; that being also the age at which the priests and Levites were permitted by the Jewish law to begin the exercise of their functions.(1) The prophets had long before described the Baptist as the messenger and forerunner sent to prepare the way of the Lord, by bringing men to a due sense of their sins, and to the other necessary dispositions for receiving worthily their Redeemer.(2) Isaiah and Malachy in these predictions allude to harbingers and such other officers whom princes upon their journeys sent before them, to take care that the roads should be levelled, and all obstructions that might hinder their passage removed.

God, by a revelation, intimated to John his commission of precursor in the wilderness, and the faithful minister began to discharge it in the desert of Judæa itself near the borders, where it was thinly inhabited, upon the banks of the Jordan, towards Jericho. Clothed with the weeds of penance, he announced to all men the obligation they lay under of washing away their iniquities with the tears of sincere compunction; and proclaimed the Messiah, who was then coming to make his appearance among them.(3) He was received by the people as the true herald of the most high God, and his voice was, as it were, a trumpet sounding from heaven to summon all men to avert the divine judgments, and to prepare themselves to reap the benefit of the mercy that was offered them. All ranks of people listened to him, and, amongst others, came many phari-

(1) Num. iv. 3. (2) Isa. xl. 3, Mal. iii. 1. (3) Luke iii. 1.

sees, whose pride and hypocrisy, which rendered them indocile, and blinded them in their vices, he sharply reproved. The very soldiers and publicans or tax-gatherers, who were generally persons hardened in habits of immorality, violence, and injustice, flocked to him. He exhorted all to works of charity, and to a reformation of their lives, and those who addressed themselves to him, in these dispositions, he baptized in the river. The Jews practised several religious washings of the body as legal purifications; but no baptism before this of John had so great and mystical a signification. It chiefly represented the manner in which the souls of men must be cleansed from all sin and vicious habits, to be made partakers of Christ's spiritual kingdom, and it was an emblem of the interior effects of sincere repentance; but it differed entirely from the great sacrament of baptism which Christ soon after instituted, to which it was much inferior in virtue and efficacy, and of which it was a kind of type.(1)

St. John's baptism was a temporary rite, by which men who were under the law were admitted to some new spiritual privileges, which they had not before, by him who was the messenger of Christ, and of his new covenant. Whence it is called by the fathers a partition between the law and the gospel.(2) This baptism of John prepared men to become Christians, but did not make them so. It was not even conferred in the name of Christ, or in that of the Holy Ghost, who had not been as yet given.(3) When St. John had already preached and baptized about six months, our Redeemer went from Nazareth, and presented himself, among others, to be baptized by him. The Baptist knew him by a divine revelation, and, full of awe and respect for his sacred person, at first excused himself, but at length acquiesced out of obedience. The Saviour of sinners was pleased to be baptized among sinners, not to be cleansed himself, but to sanctify the waters, says St. Ambrose,(4) that is, to give them the virtue to cleanse away the sins of men. St. Austin and St. Thomas Aquinas think he

(1) Matt. iii. 11. Acts xix. 5. S. Ambr. l. 2, in Luc. t. 3, p. 45. S. Aug. Enchir. c. 48, 49, t. 6, p. 214. &c. See Conc. Trid. Sess. 7. Can. 2. Bellarmin, Nat. Alexander, Tournely, Tr. de Bapt.

(2) Luke xvi. 16. S. Aug. l. 5, de Bapt. c. 9, t. 9, p. 147.

(3) John vii. 39.

(4) L. 2, in Luc. t. 3, p. 46.

then instituted the holy sacrament of baptism, which he soon after administered by his disciples,(1) whom doubtless, he had first baptized himself.(2)

The solemn admonitions of the Baptist, attended with the most extraordinary innocence and sanctity, and the marks of his divine commission, procured him a mighty veneration and authority among the Jews, and several began to look upon him as the Messiah, who, from the ancient prophecies, was expected by all the nations of the East to appear about that time in Judæa, as Suetonius, Tacitus, and Josephus testify.(3) To remove all thoughts of this kind, he freely declared that he only baptized sinners with water in order to repentance and a new life; but that there was one ready to appear among them, who would baptize them with the effusion of the Holy Ghost, and who so far exceeded him in power and excellency, that he was not worthy to do for him the meanest servile office. Nevertheless, so strong were the impressions which the preaching and deportment of John made upon the minds of the Jews, that they sent to him a solemn embassy of priests and Levites from Jerusalem to inquire of him if he was not the Christ?(4) True humility shudders at the very mention of undue honour; and, the higher applause it meets with among men, the lower it sinks in a deep sense and sincere acknowledgment of its own baseness and unworthiness, and in the abyss of its nothingness; and in this disposition it is inflamed with a most ardent desire to give all praise and glory to the pure gratuitous goodness and mercy of God alone. In these sentiments St. John *confessed, and did not deny; and he confessed, I am not the Christ.* He also told the deputies that he was *neither Elias nor a prophet.* He was indeed Elias in spirit, being the great harbinger of the Son of God; and excelled in dignity the ancient Elias, who was a type of our saint. The Baptist was likewise eminently a prophet, and more than a prophet, it being his office, not to foretel Christ at a distance, but to point him out present

(1) John iii. 26, iv. 2.

(2) S. Aug. 44, ol. 163, c. 5, sp. 265, ol. 108, et Tr. 5, 13, 15 et 16, in Joan.

(3) Sueton. in Vespas. c. 4, Tacitus, Hist. l. 5, c. 4, Joseph. De Bello Judaic. l. 7, c. 12, p. 961.

(4) John i. 20.

among men.(1) Yet, far from pluming himself with titles and prerogatives, as pride inspires men to do, he forgets his dignity in every other respect only in that of discharging the obligations it lays upon him, and of humbling himself under the almighty and merciful hand of Him who had chosen and exalted him by his grace. Therefore, because he was not Elias in person, nor a prophet in the strict sense of the word, though, by his office, more than a prophet, he rejects those titles.

Being pressed to give some account who he was, he calls himself *the voice of one crying in the desert*; he will not have men have the least regard for him, but turns their attention entirely from himself, as unworthy to be named or thought of, and only bids them listen to the summons which God sent them by his mouth. A voice is no more than an empty sound; it is a mere nothing. How eloquent does sincere humility render the saints to express the sentiments of their own nothingness! Like the Baptist, every preacher of God's word must be penetrated with the most feeling sense of his own baseness; must study always to be nothing himself and in his own eyes, whilst yet he exerts all his powers that God, the great All, may be known, loved, served, and glorified by all, and in all: he must be himself merely a voice, but a voice of thunder to awake in all hearts a profound sense of their spiritual miseries, and of the duties which they owe to God. This maxim St. Austin illustrates by the following simile drawn by the pagan mythologists: "It is related in the fables," says he, "that a wolf thought, from the shrillness of the voice, that a nightingale was some large creature, and, coming up and finding it to have so small a body, said: Thou art all voice, and art therefore nothing. In like manner let us be nothing in our own esteem. Let the world despise us, and set us at nought, provided we only be the voice of God, and nothing more."(2)

The Baptist proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah at his baptism; he did the same when the Jews consulted him from Jerusalem whether he was not the Messiah: again, when seeing him come towards him the day following, he called him, *The Lamb of God*; also when his disciples consulted him about the baptism of Jesus, and on other occasions. He baptized first in the

(1) Matt. xi. 9, 14.

(2) S. Aug. Enar. in Ps. 58.

Jordan, on the borders of the desert of Judæa; afterwards, on the other side of that river, at a place called Bethania, or rather Bethabara, which word signifies House of the Passage or common ford: lastly at Ennon, near Salim, a place abounding in waters, situated in Judæa near the Jordan. In the discharge of his commission he was a perfect model to be imitated by all true ministers of the divine word. Like an angel of the Lord *he was neither moved by benedictions nor by maledictions*,⁽¹⁾ having only God and his holy will in view. Entirely free from vanity or love of popular applause, he preached not himself, but Christ. His tenderness and charity won the hearts, and his zeal gave him a commanding influence over the minds of his hearers. He reproved the vices of all orders of men with impartial freedom, and an undaunted authority; the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, the profaneness of the Sadducees, the extortion of the publicans, the rapine and licentiousness of the soldiers, and the incest of Herod himself.*

(1) 2 Kings xiv. 17.

* Herod, surnamed the Great, died detested by the Jews for his vices, oppressions of the people, and barbarous cruelty, by which he had not only contrived the extinction of the Asmonean royal family, and cut off the most illustrious princes of the Jewish sanhedrim and nation, but also had put to death his virtuous wife Mariamne (the daughter of Hircanus, the last Asmonean king) and the two sons whom he had by her, Alexander and Aristobulus; and likewise Antipater, the eldest of his sons. He left at his death at least four sons, Archelaus and Herod Antipas by Malthace, Philip by Cleopatra, and Herod Philip by another Mariamne. Herod by his will made a partition of his dominions amongst three of these sons, leaving to Archelaus Judæa, Idumæa, and Samaria, with the title of king; to Philip Trachonitis, Auranitis, Panea, and Batanea; and to Herod Antipas, Galilee and Peræa. This disposition was confirmed by Augustus with the following limitation, that Archelaus should rule only with the title of Ethnarch till he should show himself worthy to be honoured with that of king; which he never obtained; for, inheriting the cruelty of his father, he was accused at Rome by the Jews and Samaritans of tyranny and mal-administration, and, in the tenth year of his reign, deposed by Augustus, and his goods confiscated. He died in banishment at Vienne in Gaul.

Upon his deposition Judæa was made part of the province of Syria, and seized upon by the proconsul Quirinus, under whom Caponius, a Roman of the Equestrian order, was appointed governor, with the title of procurator of Judæa. Philip the tetrarch, or prince of Trachonitis seems the most honest man of his family: he lived in quiet possession of his small territory thirty-seven years, and died without issue in the twenty-second year of Tiberius. Aristobulus, whom his father Herod put to death, left a son called Agrippa (who afterwards obtained the kingdom

The tetrarch Herod Antipas going to Rome in the sixteenth year of Tiberius, the thirty-third of Christ, lodged in his way at the house of his brother, Herod Philip, and was smitten with love for his wife, Herodias, who was niece to them both. He discovered to her his criminal passion, and she consented to leave her husband and marry him, upon condition that he first divorced his wife, who was daughter of Aretas, king of the Arabs. To this he readily agreed, and being returned from Rome in the following autumn, he considered how to rid himself of his wife. The princess having got intelligence of his resolution, made her escape, and fled to her father. By her voluntary retreat Herod Antipas saw himself at liberty, and, by a notorious infringement of all laws divine and human, married Herodias, his sister-in-law, though she had children by her own husband, Philip, his brother, who was yet living.⁽¹⁾ St. John Baptist boldly reprehended the tetrarch and his accomplice for so scandalous an incest and adultery, and said to that prince: *It is not lawful for thee to take thy brother's wife.* Herod feared and revered John, knowing him to be a holy man, and he did many things by his advice; but, on the other hand, he could not bear that his main sore should be touched, and was highly offended at the liberty which the preacher took in that particular. Thus, whilst he respected him as a saint, he hated him as a censor, and felt a violent struggle in his own breast, between his veneration for the sanctity of the prophet and the reproach of his own conduct. His passion got the better, and held him captive, and his flame was nourished by the

(1) Matt. xiv. 3. Mark vi. 17. Luke iii. 19. Joseph. 1. 18, c. 7.

of Judæa) and a daughter named Herodias, who was married to Herod Philip. This, some understand to be the tetrarch Philip; but Calmet and others prove him to be the fourth son of Herod, who had no share in the tetrarchates, and who lived privately till Vespasian's time, when, being eighty years old, he was entreated by Josephus to revise the books of his history which he sent him. This historian confirms our opinion; for, speaking of the rape of Herodias, he says that Herod the tetrarch went to the house of his brother Herod, the son of Mariamne the daughter of Simon the high priest. These principalities were called Tetrarchates, that word signifying in Greek a fourth part; the dominions of Herod the Great being divided into four portions; for, besides the three above-mentioned, one Lysanias was tetrarch of a small territory between Libanus and Antilibanus called Abilina, Luke iii. See Calmet et Synop. Critic. ib. The Jews styled some of the tetrarchs kings.

flatteries of courtiers, and the clamours and artifices of Herodias, who, like an enraged and infernal fury, left nothing unattempted to take away the life of him who durst impeach her conduct and disturb her criminal pleasures and ambition. Herod, to content her, cast the saint into prison: Josephus says the servant of God was confined in the castle of Macherus, two leagues beyond the lake Asphaltites, upon the borders of Arabia Petræa. St. John hearing in prison of Christ's wonderful works and preaching, sent two of his disciples to him for their information, not doubting but that Christ would satisfy them that he was the Messiah;(1) and that by his answers they would lay aside their prejudices, and join themselves to him.

Herod continued still to respect the man of God, frequently sent for him, and heard him discourse with much pleasure, though he was troubled when he was admonished by him of his faults. Herodias, on the other hand, never ceased by her instigations to endeavour to exasperate him against the holy man, and to seek an opportunity to compass his destruction. An occasion at length fell out favourable to her designs. It was about a year since John the Baptist had been committed close prisoner, when Herod, upon the return of his birth-day, made a splendid entertainment for the principal nobility of Galilee, in the castle of Macherus.* The dancing of Salome and other circumstances of this banquet are sensible proofs to what an infamous pitch of impudence debauchery was carried in this impious court. To dance at banquets was looked upon among civilized nations which had any regard to rules of decency and temperance, as a base effeminacy, and an excess of softness and voluptuousness,(2) as it is called by Cicero, who clears the reputation of King Deiotarus from the aspersion of such an indecency, because, being a man remarkable from his youth

(1) Matt. xi. 1, 2, &c. Luke vii. 18.

(2) See Rollin, et Tr. sur l'Education d'un Prince.

* Fleury (*Mœurs des Juifs et Chrét.*) and Melmoth (*Notes on Pliny's Letters*) observe that the ancients took only a very small refreshment for breakfast and dinner; for example, a little bread and wine with an apple or two, or the like; and that their only meal to which friends were invited, was made towards sunset, or, in great entertainments, about the ninth hour, or our three in the afternoon. See also Lemery's *Dissertation* on the wholesomeness of suppers.

for the gravity of his manners, he was incapable of such an extravagance. That orator had before endeavoured in the same manner to justify Muræna from a like imputation. When luxury and intemperance overran the Roman commonwealth, these maxims of ancient severity still so far prevailed, that Tiberius and Domitian, who will never pass for rigid reformers of morals, turned patricians out of the senate for having danced, and the former banished all the professed dancers and comedians out of Rome,⁽¹⁾ so incompatible with purity of manners was a passion for dancing looked upon. This reflection leads us to form a judgment of the extreme degeneracy of Herod's court, in which the mirth and jollity of this feast was heightened by dancing. Salome, a daughter of Herodias by her lawful husband, pleased Herod by her dancing, insomuch that he promised her, with the sacred bond of an oath, to grant her whatever she asked, though it amounted to half of his dominions. From this instance St. Ambrose and other fathers take occasion to show the dangerous consequences of a passion for dancing, and the depravity from which it often takes its rise.* Salome

(1) Tillemont *Vie de Tibère*, art. 14, de Domitien, art. 3.

* Utterly to condemn dancing in persons who live in the world would be an excess of severity in morals; nor is some degree of that corporal exercise destitute of advantage in young persons of birth. As to ground the heart in sentiments of religion and virtue, and to cultivate and adorn the mind with suitable studies and science is the first part of education, so it is a secondary care that the body be formed by exercises, both such as promote health and strength, and such as contribute to give an easy graceful mien and carriage, an upright and straight attitude, a firm and steadfast walk, and a genteelness and politeness in behaviour. This is a part of the science of the world; and awkwardness in the attitude of the body, or clownishness in making our address to others, or in appearing in company, is a mark of want of education, and a neglect which renders a gentleman contemptible, and unfit for acting his part with becoming dignity in the commerce of human life.

On this account the most severe moralists allow children to be taught not only a graceful manner of making a bow, and of addressing persons of all ranks; but also some single plain dances, such as are most proper to correct all rustic unnatural contortions, to form the shape and attitude of the body, and to give an easy, natural, and graceful carriage. Brutes attain their end by instinct; but men by reason; and the faculties of his mind stand in need of diligent culture to arrive at the perfection of nature for which he undoubtedly was designed by his author who created him capable thereof; also his body, for the sake not only of health and strength, but also of decency and gracefulness, must be fashioned by suitable exercise, as experience makes evident, and as it is easy to demonstrate from the general laws of mechanics and physics applied to the

having received the above-said ample promise made her by Herod, consulted with her mother what to ask. Herodias was so entirely devoured by lust and ambition, as willingly to forego

human frame. So far as dancing is serviceable to some of these purposes, children are usefully taught such an exercise.

But, on the other side, its abuses and dangers must be cautiously guarded against, as it is sometimes made an instrument to vice, and an incentive of the most dangerous of all passions. Such dancers as by a base licentiousness of morals are often tolerated on the stage and in promiscuous assemblies, ought absolutely to be banished out of every commonwealth which has the least regard to virtue and morals; much more out of Christian societies. Such are here meant, in which several gestures shock modesty, tend to excite the passions, and are more apt to give a soft dissolute behaviour than a grave and truly genteel easy carriage. Secondly, a passion or fondness for dancing is generally a fatal symptom, and a dangerous snare, as all agree who have laid down precepts of virtue. To extenuate the most venerable authority of the fathers in this point, many affect to treat them as persons unacquainted with the world, and to call their morality, which is no other than that of the church, too severe. But the testimonies of penitent courtiers, or of heathen statesmen and philosophers, may perhaps have some weight with such persons. An instance or two will suffice. Roger de Rabutin, count of Bussi, who lived many years with dignity and applause in the French court, and who is well known both by several loose productions of wit in his youth, and by his edifying repentance many years before his death. This great man, in his book *On the Use of Adversity*, addressed to his children, cautions them in the strongest terms against a love of dancing: assuring them from his own experience that this diversion is dangerous to many people. This pathetic admonition he concludes as follows: "A ball is generally a post too hot even for an anchorite. If it may be done by aged persons without danger, it would be in them ridiculous; and to persons that are young, let custom say what it will, it is dangerous. In a word, I aver that a promiscuous ball is no place for a Christian."

The ancient heathens, howsoever debauched in their morals, looked upon a passion for dancing as the school and mark of most dangerous passions. This appears from Sallust, a nobleman, and friend of Julius Cæsar, who was himself borne away by the torrent of the time in which he lived, and plunged into the common corruption, but who professes in his excellent histories, that he abominated the vices he saw practised, though he wanted strength to bear up against the tide. Among many judicious reflections, this author says of Sempronia, a Roman lady, that she danced too well for an honest woman. "*Psallere et saltare elegantius quam necesse est probæ.*" (*De bello Catilin.*) Which words one of our historians has applied to a certain famous English queen. St. Ambrose expresses only the general sentiments of the Romans, or rather of mankind, when he says that scarcely anything can be said more severe of a lady than to call her a dancer. This maxim is founded in experience, and in the very nature of things. Plutarch takes notice that the first rape committed upon the famous Helena when she was carried by Theseus into Thrace, was occasioned by her dancing with other maidens round the altar of Diana at Sparta. The dancing of Salome at this feast of Herod produced the martyrdom of the Baptist, and a complication of other crimes.

every other consideration, that she might be at liberty to gratify her passions, and remove him who stood in her way in the pursuit of her criminal inclinations. She therefore instructed her daughter to demand the death of John the Baptist, and her jealousy was so impatient of the least delay, for fear the tyrant might relent if he had time to enter into himself, that she persuaded the young damsel to make it part of her petition that the head of the prisoner should be forthwith brought to her in a dish. This strange request startled the tyrant himself, and caused a damp upon his spirits. He, however, assented, though with reluctance, as men often feel a cruel sting of remorse, and suffer the qualms of a disturbed conscience flying in their face and condemning them, whilst they are drawn into sin by the tyranny of a vicious habit, or some violent passion. We cannot be surprised that Herod should be concerned at so extravagant a petition. The very mention of such a thing by a lady, in the midst of a feast and solemn rejoicing, was enough to shock even a man of uncommon barbarity.

The evangelist also informs us, that Herod had conceived a good opinion of the Baptist as a just and holy man; also, that he feared the resentment of the people, who held the man of God in the highest veneration and esteem. Moreover, it was a constant rule or custom, that neither the prince's birth-day, nor the mirth of a public assembly and banquet, were to be stained with the condemnation or execution of any criminal whatever; only favours and pardons were to be granted on such occasions. Flaminius, a Roman general, was expelled the senate by the censors for having given an order for beheading a criminal whilst he was at a banquet.(1) Nevertheless, the weak tyrant, overcome by his passion, and by a fond complaisance, was deaf to the voice of his own conscience, and to every other consideration; and studied, by foolish pretences, to excuse a crime which they could only serve to exaggerate. He alleged a conscience of his oath; though if it be one sin to take a wicked oath, it is another to keep it; for no oath can be a bond of iniquity, nor can one oblige himself to do what God forbids. The tyrant also urged his respect for the company, and his fear of giving them scandal by a perjury. But how

(1) S. Hieron. in Mat. t. 4. p. 62.

easy would true virtue and courage have justified the innocent man to the satisfaction of all persons whom passion did not blind, and have shown the inhumanity of an execution which could not fail to damp the joy of the meeting, and give offence to all who were not interested in the plot! But the tyrant, without giving the saint a hearing, or allowing him so much as the formality of a trial, sent a soldier of his guard to behead him in prison, with an order to bring his head in a charger, and present it to Salome. This being executed, the damsel was not afraid to take that present into her hands, and deliver it to her mother. St. Jerom relates,⁽¹⁾ that the furious Herodias made it her inhuman pastime to prick the sacred tongue with a bodkin, as Fulvia had done Cicero's. Thus died the great forerunner of our blessed Saviour, about two years and three months after his entrance upon his public ministry, about the time of the Paschal solemnity, and a year before the death of our blessed Redeemer.

Josephus, though a Jew, gives a remarkable testimony to the innocence and admirable sanctity of John, and says: "He was indeed a man endued with all virtue, who exhorted the Jews to the practice of justice towards men, and piety towards God; and also to baptism, preaching that they would become acceptable to God, if they renounced their sins, and to the cleanness of their bodies added purity of soul."⁽²⁾ This historian adds, that the Jews ascribed to the murder of John the misfortunes into which Herod fell; for his army was soon after cut to pieces by Aretas, king of Arabia Petræa, who, in revenge for the affront offered his daughter, invaded his territories, and conquered the castle of Macherus. When Caligula afterwards conferred on Agrippa the title of king of Judæa, the ambitious Herodias being racked with envy, prevailed with Herod Antipas to repair to Rome, in order to request the like favour of the emperor; but Caligula had received a bad impression against him, being informed by Agrippa that he was making a league with the Parthians, and was provided with arms for seventy thousand men. Whereupon, instead of granting him a crown, he deprived him of his tetrarchate, confis-

(1) S. Hier. l. 3, contra Rufin. c. 11.

(2) Antiq. l. 18, c. 7.

cated his goods, and banished him and Herodias to Lyons, in Gaul, in the thirty-eighth year of the Christian æra, about four years after Christ had appeared before him at Jerusalem, and been treated by him as a mock king. Herod and Herodias died in great misery, as Josephus assures us, probably at Lyons, though some moderns say they travelled into Spain. What Nicephorus Calixti and other modern Greeks tell us, is not supported by any ancient voucher, that Salome going over the ice in winter, the ice broke and let her in up to the head, which by the meeting of the ice was severed from her body.

The Baptist's disciples came and took away his body, which they honourably interred. Rufinus and Theodoret inform us, that in the reign of Julian the Apostate, the pagans broke open the tomb of St. John the Baptist, which was at Sebaste or Samaria, and burnt part of his sacred bones, some part being saved by the Christians. These were sent to St. Athanasius at Alexandria. Some time after, in 396, Theodosius built a great church in that city, in honour of the Baptist, upon the spot where the temple of Serapis had formerly stood, and these holy relics were deposited in it, as Theophanes testifies. But a distribution of some portions was made to certain other churches; and the great Theodoret obtained a share for his church at Cyrus, and relates, that he and his diocess had received from God several miraculous favours, through the intercession of this glorious saint.(1) The Baptist's head was discovered at Emisa, in Syria, in the year 453, and was kept with honour in the great church of that city; till, about the year 800, this precious relic was conveyed to Constantinople, that it might not be sacrilegiously insulted by the Saracens. When that city was taken by the French in 1204, Wallo de Sarton, a canon of Amiens, brought part of this head, that is, all the face, except the lower jaw, into France, and bestowed it on his own church, where it is preserved to this day. Part of the head of the Baptist is said to be kept in St. Sylvester's church, in Campo Marzo, at Rome; though Sirmond thinks this to be the head of St. John, the martyr of Rome. Pope Clement VIII., to remove all reasonable doubt about the relic

(1) Vit. Patr. c. 21.

of this saint, procured a small part of the head that is kept at Amiens, for St. Sylvester's church.(1)

This glorious saint was a martyr, a virgin, a doctor, a prophet, and more than a prophet. He was declared by Christ himself to be greater than all the saints of the old law, the greatest of all that had been born of women. All the high graces with which he was favoured, sprang from his humility; in this all his other virtues were founded. If we desire to form ourselves upon so great a model, we must, above all things, labour to lay the same deep foundation. We must never cease to purge our souls more and more perfectly from all leaven of pride, by earnestly begging this grace of God, by studying with this saint, truly to know ourselves, and by exercising continual acts of sincere humility. The meditation of our own nothingness and wretchedness will help to inspire us with this saving knowledge; and repeated humiliations will ground and improve our souls in a feeling sense of our miseries, and a sincere contempt of ourselves.

ST. SABINA, M.

SHE was a rich widow lady of high birth, and lived in the province of Umbria in Italy. She had a servant called Seraphia, a native of Antioch in Syria, who was a zealous Christian, and served God in the holy state of virginity. The religious deportment of this virtuous maid-servant had such an influence over the mistress, that she was converted to the Christian faith; and so powerfully did the great truths of our holy religion operate on her soul, that her fervour and piety soon rendered her name illustrious among the great lights of the church, in the beginning of the second century. The persecution of Adrian beginning to rage, Beryllus, governor of the province, caused Sabina and Seraphia to be apprehended, and the latter to be beat to death with clubs. Sabina was discharged out of regard to her quality and friends; but her zeal procured her the crown of martyrdom the year following. She suffered at Rome, as the Bollandists have proved. She is honoured on the 29th of August, and again with St. Seraphia on the 3rd of September, because, on that day, as Ado informs us, a famous ancient

(1) See Tillem. t. 1. pp. 494, 504; Eolland, &c.