

SEPTEMBER XVII.*

SAINT LAMBERT, MARTYR,

BISHOP OF MAESTRICHT, AND PATRON OF LIEGE.

From his life, written by Godescalc, deacon of Liege, in Mabillon, *sæc.* 3, Ben. and in Canisius *Lect. Antiq.* t. 2, part. 1, l. 142, with the animadversions of Basnage. This work was compiled, with candour and sincerity, (not in 773, as Le Cointe and some others mistook, but about 729,) from the relation of those who attended the saint, as Dom. Rivet demonstrates, *Hist. Littér. de la France*, t. 4, p. 58. Stephen, bishop of Liege, Anselm, and Nicholas, canons of the same church, Rainer, monk of St. Laurence's, near that town, Giles of Orval, and Sigebert have also written lives of St. Lambert: that published by Godescalc is the foundation of all the rest; but that compiled by Stephen is the most elegant and methodical. See also Miræus, *Annal. Belgic.* ad annos 656, 676, 692, 696. Suysken the Bollandist, t. 5, p. 518. Gall. Chr. Nov. t. 3, p. 827, Martenne, &c.

A. D. 709.

ST. LANDEBERT, called in latter ages Lambert, was a native of Maestricht, and born of a noble and wealthy family, who had been Christians for many descents. His father caused him to be instructed from his infancy in sacred learning, and afterwards recommended him to St. Theodard to perfect his education. This holy bishop had succeeded St. Remacius, first, in the government of his two great abbeys of Malmedy and Stavelo, and, ten years after, when the former retired to Stavelo, in the episcopal see of Maestricht. He had such an esteem for this illustrious and holy pupil, that he spared no attention in instructing and training him up to the most perfect practice of Christian virtue. St. Theodard, in 669, resolved to go to King Childeric II, who resided in Austrasia, to obtain an order of that prince for the restitution of the possessions of his church, which had been usurped by certain powerful persons; but was assassinated upon the road by those who withheld his possessions, and torn limb from limb, in the forest of Benalt, near Nemere, since called Spire. He is honoured as a martyr on the 10th of September. St. Lambert was chosen to succeed him, with the consent of King Childeric and the applause of his whole court, where the saint was in great repute. Lambert regarded the episcopal charge as a burden too heavy for his shoulders, as

* On the impression of the miraculous wounds of St. Francis, commemorated this day, see the life of that saint, Oct. 4.

saints have always done, and, trembling under its grievous obligations, set himself earnestly to discharge them without human respect or fear, imploring light and strength from above by assiduous humble prayer. Childeric II. reigned first in Austrasia, Vulfoade being at that time mayor of his palace, whilst Theodoric III. succeeded his brother, Clotaire III., in Neustria and Burgundy, under whom Ebroin tyrannically usurped the dignity of mayor of the palace. So detestable did the cruelty of this minister render the reign of the prince, that his subjects deposed him, so that Childeric became king of all France, Theodoric and Ebroin being shorn monks, the former at St. Denis, the latter at Luxeu; to which condition they both consented, that their lives might be spared. King Childeric II., a debauched and cruel prince, was slain by a conspiracy of noblemen in the year 673, the eleventh of his reign; and Theodoric, his brother, leaving the monastery of St. Denis, was again acknowledged king in Neustria, and Dagobert II., the son of King Sigebert, in Austrasia.

This revolution affected St. Lambert, merely because he had been heretofore greatly favoured by Childeric. He was expelled from his see, in which was placed one Faramond. Our saint retired to the monastery of Stavelo, with only two of his domestics; and, during the seven years that he continued there, he obeyed the rule as strictly as the youngest novice could have done. One instance will suffice to show with how perfect a sacrifice of himself he devoted his heart to serve God according to the perfection of his state. As he was rising one night in winter to his private devotions, he happened to let fall his wooden sandal or slipper, so that it made a noise. This the abbot heard, and, looking upon it as a breach of the silence then to be observed in the community, he ordered him that had given occasion to that noise, to go and pray before the cross. This was a great cross which stood in the open air before the church door. Lambert, without making any answer, or discovering who he was, laid down the upper garment he was going to put on, and went out as he was, barefoot, and covered only with his hair shirt; and in this condition he prayed, kneeling before the cross, three or four hours. Whilst the monks were warming themselves after matins, the abbot inquired if all were

there. Answer was made, that he had sent one to the cross, who was not yet come in. The abbot ordered that he should be called; and was strangely surprised to find that the person was the holy bishop, who made his appearance quite covered with snow, and almost frozen with cold. At the sight of him the abbot and the monks fell on the ground, and asked his pardon. "God forgive you," said he, "for thinking you stand in need of pardon for this action. As for myself, is it not in cold and nakedness, that, according to St. Paul, I am to tame my flesh, and to serve God?"

Whilst St. Lambert enjoyed the tranquillity of holy retirement, he wept to see the greater part of the churches of France laid waste. When Theodoric reascended the throne, he appointed Leudisius, son of Erchinoald, mayor of his palace. Ebroin at the same time left the monastery of Luxeu, and sacrilegiously broke the sacred engagements of his vows. He had already made the whole kingdom of Theodoric feel the effects of his power and tyrannical dispositions, when, in 677, he became mayor of the palace to that prince, and absolute master in Neustria and Burgundy, and soon after also in Austrasia, when, upon the death of Dagobert II. (who was murdered by a conspiracy of his nobles, through the contrivance of Ebroin), Theodoric was acknowledged king of the whole French monarchy. Dagobert II. had filled his dominions with religious foundations, and, after his death, was honoured at Stenay, where he was buried, as a martyr. Ebroin, who had in this prince's life-time extended his violences to several churches subject to him, especially that of Maestricht, after the death of this king, oppressed them with greater fury, and persecuted our holy bishop without control. He was, however, overtaken by the divine vengeance; for, three years after the martyrdom of St. Leodegarius, he was himself slain in 681. A nobleman, called Hermenfred, whose estate he had seized, and whom he had threatened with death, watched him one Sunday before it was light, as he came out of his house to matins, and killed him with a blow which he gave him on his head with a sword. From this and other instances we see, as Fleury remarks, that at that time even those noblemen and princes, who were most employed, and who had the least sense of religion and piety,

did not exempt themselves from attending at the divine office even in the night.

Pepin of Herstal (grandson of St. Pepin of Landen, by St. Bega and Ansegasil), being made mayor of the palace, set himself to repair the evils done by Ebroin, expelled the usurping wicked bishops whom he had intruded into many sees, and, among many other exiled prelates, restored St. Lambert to the see of Maestricht. The holy pastor, from the exercise of the most heroic virtues, to which he had devoted the time of his exile and retirement, returned to his flock animated with redoubled fervour, preaching and discharging his other functions with wonderful zeal and fruit. Finding there still remained many pagans in Taxandria, a province about Diest, in Brabant, he applied himself to convert them to the faith, softened their barbarous temper by his patience, regenerated them in the holy water of baptism, and destroyed many temples and idols. He frequently visited and conferred with St. Willibrord, the apostle of Friesland. Under the weak reigns of the slothful kings, the greatest disorders prevailed in France, and every bold and powerful man set himself above the laws, and put himself at the head of a seditious faction. Of this the death of St. Lambert furnishes us with a flagrant example. Pepin, who resided at his castle of Herstal, near Liege, on the Maes or Meuse, lived for some years in a scandalous adultery with a concubine named Alpais, by whom he had Charles Martel. St. Lambert reproved the parties with so much earnestness, that some say certain friends of the lady thence took occasion to conspire against his life. Others assign the following occasion of his death: Two brothers, by their violences and plunders of the church of Maestricht, were become insupportable, and could not be restrained by the laws. At this, certain relations of St. Lambert were so exasperated, that, finding themselves driven to the last extremity, they slew the two brothers. Dodo, a kinsman of the two young men who were slain, a rich and powerful officer under Pepin, and related to Alpais, resolved to revenge their death upon the innocent and holy bishop, and attacked him with a considerable body of armed men, at Leodium, then a small village, now the city of Liege. St. Lambert had retired to sleep after matins, when Dodo with his troop

broke into his house. The bishop would not suffer his two nephews nor any of his domestics to take arms to defend him, saying: "If you love me truly, love Jesus Christ, and confess your sins unto him. As for me, it is time that I go to live with him." Then prostrating himself on the ground, with his hands extended in form of a cross, he prayed, shedding many tears. The troop of enemies, entering the house, put to the sword all they met, and one of them, throwing a dart at the holy bishop, slew him. This unjust death, suffered with so great patience and meekness, joined with the eminent sanctity of the life of this holy bishop, has been looked upon as a degree of martyrdom. It happened on the 17th of September, 709, St. Lambert having held the episcopal dignity forty years from the time he succeeded St. Theodard. His body was conveyed in a bark to Maestricht, where it was interred in St. Peter's church. Several miracles which ensued excited the people to build a church on the spot where the house stood in which he was slain. His successor, St. Hubert, translated thither his relics in 721. At the same time he removed to the same place the episcopal see, as it had been formerly transferred from Tongres to Maestricht, by St. Servatius.

Fortitude, which appears most heroical and most conspicuous in martyrdom, is a cardinal virtue, and the mother of many glorious virtues, as courage, greatness of soul, tranquillity of mind under all dangers, patience, longanimity, constancy, and perseverance. It is the band and support of all other virtues. As the root of a tree bears the trunk, branches, flowers, and fruit, so fortitude sustains, and is the strength of the whole system of moral and Christian virtues, which sink at the first shock without it. This, therefore, is an ingredient of every perfect virtue, by which a man is ready to suffer any hardships or death, to expose himself to any dangers, and to forego all temporal advantages rather than swerve from the path of justice. By confounding rashness, inconsiderate hardness, and fury with courage, many form a false idea of fortitude, which is defined, "a considerate alacrity in bearing hardships and undergoing dangers." It moderates in us the two opposite extremes of fear and confidence, it teaches us reasonably to fear dangers and death, and to decline and avoid them, when nothing

obliges us to expose ourselves to them; for to be fool-hardy and needlessly to precipitate ourselves upon danger, is the height of folly and vice, and the strongest mark of a corrupt and abandoned heart. But it is true fortitude to undertake and encounter all dangers, when duty or the cause of virtue requires it. How noble and heroical is this virtue of fortitude! how necessary in every Christian, especially in a pastor of souls, that neither worldly views nor fears may ever in the least warp his integrity, or blind his judgment!

ST. COLUMBA, V. M.

THIS saint was a holy nun in the monastery of Tabanos, who was beheaded for her faith by the Moors, under their King Mahomad, in Spain, in 853. Her body was thrown into the river Guadalquivir, but recovered by the Christians. Her relics are venerated, part in the priory of St. Columba, part in the royal abbey of our Lady at Niagara, but both in Old Castile. See St. Eulogius, *Memor.* l. 3, c. 10, and Suysken, the Bollandist, t. 5, p. 622.

ST. HILDEGARDIS, V. ABBESS.

SHE was born of most noble parentage in 1098, in the county of Spanheim, in the Lower Palatinate of the Rhine, and educated, from the eighth year of her age, in the monastery of the Mount of St. Disibode, under the care of a very pious nun called Jutta, her relation, and sister to the Count of Spanheim. Hildegardis excited herself to a contempt of the world, by representing to herself the phrenzy which possesses a great part of mankind in the world, by what springs they are moved, how in pursuit of empty imaginary honour or profit, they are driven into the most laborious and hazardous attempts, how easily they swallow the most bitter and poisonous pills when they are gilt over by ambition or avarice, how eagerly they hunt after the troubles of worldly greatness, and basely adore the gawdy nothings of this life. Full of gratitude to God, who had rescued her out of that region of darkness, she gave herself to serve him with her whole heart. She was favoured with heavenly visions, and St. Bernard, who preached the crusade in that