

the fifth age, and in an ancient pontifical written in 530. Though Severus only published the edicts for his persecution in 202, several Christians had suffered in his reign before that time, as Tillemont remarks. (1) F. Pagi thinks St. Victor did not die by the sword, because in some Martyrologies he is called only confessor, though his dignity and zeal exposed him to continual persecutions, for which alone he might deserve the title of martyr. See Eusebius Hist. l. 5, c. 23; Orsi, Berti Diss. Hist. t. 2, p. 88.

ST. INNOCENT I., POPE AND CONFESSOR.

He was a native of Albano, near Rome; and upon the death of Pope Anastasius, in 402, was unanimously chosen to fill the pontifical chair. He ascended it by compulsion, and considering himself in it with trembling, he never ceased to beg of God the spirit of his holy wisdom and prudence, which he stood the more in need of, as the times in which he lived were more difficult. Alaric the Goth, with an army of barbarians, threatened to carry desolation over all Italy. The pope exhorted the faithful to receive the scourges of heaven with submission and humility, and undertook several journeys to negotiate a reconciliation between the emperor Honorius and Alaric, but in vain. The Goths received a great overthrow from the Roman army commanded by Stilico, in 403. But Alaric led them a second time to attempt the plunder of Rome; and because Honorius refused to make him general of the imperial army, he took that city on the 24th of August, 410, and abandoned it to the fury of his soldiers, excepting the church of SS. Peter and Paul, to which he granted the privilege of a sanctuary. Pope Innocent was at that time absent with the emperor at Ravenna. The year following, Alaric being dead, his brother-in-law and successor Atulphus again plundered Rome.

After the departure of the barbarians, the good pope hastened thither, and by his presence brought comfort and joy to that afflicted people. He taught them to draw an advantage from their sufferings by making a good use of them; and so much were the Heathens edified at the patience, resignation,

(1) Mem. Eccles. t. 3, p. 112.

and virtue with which the Christians suffered the loss of their goods and whatever was dear, without any murmuring or complaint, that they came in crowds desiring to be instructed in the faith and baptized. The pope laboured incessantly to form them a holy people, always occupied in good works. His letters, especially those to Exuperius, the most holy bishop of Toulouse, and Decentius, bishop of Gubbio, in answer to their several queries, contain many useful rules, and judicious decisions. In the former, he says, that communion or absolution is never to be denied to dying penitents, that we may not imitate the hardness of the Novatians. In that to Decentius he says, that only bishops, who have the sovereignty of the priesthood, can confer the Holy Ghost in confirmation, by anointing the foreheads of persons baptized; and that he cannot recite the words of the form for fear of discovering the mysteries or sacraments to the infidels. He uses the same precaution in speaking of the sacrifice; so inviolable was the secret with which, out of respect, the primitive Christians treated the sacraments. In the same epistle, this pope mentioning the extreme unction which is given to the sick, he says, it cannot be administered to penitents before their reconciliation, because it is a sacrament; and all sacraments are refused them in that state. This evinces that it was held to be no less properly a sacrament than the eucharist. He indeed allows the custom that then prevailed for the laity to use the holy oils out of devotion, but without the sacramental words, and not as a sacrament; for being consulted whether bishops could give that sacrament, which was usually administered by priests, he proves that bishops can do it, because priests can; consequently, he supposes as undoubted, that only priests, not laymen, can minister this holy sacrament.

When, in 416, the councils of Carthage and Milevum had condemned the Pelagian errors, and wrote to the pope against them, the synodal letters of both those councils having been drawn up by St. Austin, St. Innocent, in his answer to the bishops of the council of Milevum, says, that "all ecclesiastical matters throughout the world are, by divine right, to be referred to the apostolic see, that is, to St. Peter, the author of its name and honour." He commends the bishops of this council for so

doing: "Following," says he, "the ancient rule, which you know with me has been always observed by the whole world."* The confirmation given by Pope Innocent to these two African councils being brought to Africa, St. Austin said: (1) "The decisions of the two councils have been already sent to the apostolic see; the rescripts are also come from thence. The cause is now finished; would to God that the error may at last be at end." St. Innocent closed his life with exerting his zeal in defence of divine grace, dying in 417, having been pope fifteen years. See his letters, and the councils, Ceillier, t. 10, p. 104, and Cuper the Bollandist, t. 6, Jul. p. 548.

ST. SAMPSON, B. C.

He was a child of prayer, and was born about the year 496, of noble parentage, in that part of South Wales which is now called Glamorganshire, then in the country of the Demetes, upon the borders of the Wenetes, who inhabited the province called by the Britons Guent, now Monmouthshire. At seven years of age he was put under the care of St. Iltutus, a very learned abbot in Glamorganshire, and having made great progress in learning and virtue, was ordained priest by St. Dubritius, bishop of Caërleon. In 512 he passed into a neighbouring island, where he led an eremitical life, as did several others, under the direction of St. Piro, a holy priest. By an order of SS. Dubritius and Iltutus he paid a visit to his aged father who lay dangerously ill. The saint restored him by his prayers to his health, and converted him and his whole numerous family, including his uncles, cousins, and brothers, whom he placed in

(1) St. Aug. Sermon. 131, n. 10.

* From this example it is manifest, that the African bishops referred greater causes, at least those of faith, to the holy see, and in them always allowed appeals to it; though at that time they carried on a contest with the Popes Innocent, Zosimus, and Celestine, against appeals being made in lesser causes of personal facts, which it is often difficult to carry on in remote courts, and which, if too easy and frequent, are a bar to the speedy execution of justice. Yet such appeals or revisions of causes are sometimes necessary to hinder crying injustices and oppressions. Whence the regulation of the manner of restraining appeals in smaller ecclesiastical causes is a point of discipline; but the general council of Sardica, which was an appendix of the council of Nice, declared, that appeals must be allowed from the whole world to the bishops of Rome; and in this discipline the Africans soon after acquiesced.