

upon the death of Stephen, brother to the emperor Leo VI., surnamed the wise, or the Philosopher, patriarch of Constantinople in 893. His predecessor had succeeded Photius in 886, (whom this emperor expelled,) and laboured strenuously to extinguish the schism he had formed, and restore the peace of the church over all the East. St. Antony, completed this great work, and in a council in which he presided at Constantinople, condemned or reformed all that had been done by Photius, during his last usurpation of that see, after the death of St. Ignatius. The acts of this important council are entirely lost, perhaps through the malice of those Greeks who renewed this unhappy schism. A perfect spirit of mortification, penance, and prayer, sanctified this great pastor, both in his private and public life. He died in the year 896, of his age sixty-seven, on the 12th of February, on which day his name is inserted in the Greek Menæa, and in the Roman Martyrology. See an historical panegyric on his virtues, spoken soon after his death by a certain Greek philosopher name Nicephorus, in the Bollandists. *Le Quien, Oriens Christianus*, t. 3. also t. 1. p. 250.

FEBRUARY XIII.

ST. CATHARINE DE RICCI, V.O.S.D.

See her life, written by F. Seraphin Razzi, a Dominican friar, who knew her, and was fifty-eight years old when she died. The nuns of her monastery gave an ample testimony that this account was conformable partly to what they knew of her, and partly to MS. memorials left by her confessor and others concerning her. Whence F. Echard calls this life a work accurately written. It was printed in 4to. at Lucca, in 1594. Her life was again compiled by F. Philip Guidi, confessor to the saint and to the duchess of Urbino, and printed at Florence in two vols. 4to. in 1622. FF. Michael Pio and John Lopez, of the same order, have given abstracts of her life. See likewise Bened. XIV. de Can. Serv. Dei. t. 5. inter Act. Can. 5. SS. Append.

A.D. 1589.

THE Ricci are an ancient family, which still subsists in a flourishing condition in Tuscany. Peter de Ricci, the father of our saint, was married to Catharine Bonza, a lady of suitable birth. The saint was born at Florence in 1522, and called at her baptism Alexandrina: but she took the name of Catharine at her religious profession. Having lost her mother in her infancy,

she was formed to virtue by a very pious godmother, and whenever she was missing she was always to be found on her knees in some secret part of the house. When she was between six and seven years old, her father placed her in the convent of Monticelli, near the gates of Florence, where her aunt, Louisa de Ricci, was a nun. This place was to her a paradise; at a distance from the noise and tumult of the world, she served God without impediment or distraction. After some years her father took her home. She continued her usual exercises in the world as much as she was able; but the interruptions and dissipation, inseparable from her station, gave her so much uneasiness, that with the consent of her father, which she obtained, though with great difficulty, in the year 1535, the fourteenth of her age, she received the religious veil in the convent of Dominicanesses at Prat, in Tuscany, to which her uncle, F. Timothy de Ricci, was director. God, in the merciful design to make her the spouse of his crucified Son, and to imprint in her soul dispositions conformable to his, was pleased to exercise her patience by rigorous trials. For two years she suffered inexpressible pains under a complication of violent distempers, which remedies themselves served only to increase. These sufferings she sanctified by the interior dispositions with which she bore them, and which she nourished principally by assiduous meditation on the passion of Christ, in which she found an incredible relish, and a solid comfort and joy. After the recovery of her health, which seemed miraculous, she studied more perfectly to die to the senses, and to advance in a penitential life and spirit, in which God had begun to conduct her, by practising the greatest austerities which were compatible with the obedience she had professed: she fasted two or three days a week on bread and water, and sometimes passed the whole day without taking any nourishment, and chastised her body with disciplines and a sharp iron chain which she wore next her skin. Her obedience, humility, and meekness, were still more admirable than her spirit of penance. The least shadow of distinction or commendation gave her inexpressible uneasiness and confusion, and she would have rejoiced to be able to lie hid in the centre of the earth, in order to be entirely unknown to, and blotted out of, the hearts of all mankind, such were the sentiments of annihilation and contempt of herself in which she constantly lived. It was by profound humility and perfect interior self-denial that she learned to vanquish in her

heart the sentiments or life of the first Adam, that is, of corruption, sin, and inordinate self-love. But this victory over herself, and purgation of her affections, was completed by a perfect spirit of prayer: for by the union of her soul with God, and the establishment of the absolute reign of his love in her heart, she was dead to, and disengaged from, all earthly things. And in one act of sublime prayer, she advanced more than by a hundred exterior practices in the purity and ardour of her desire to do constantly what was most agreeable to God, to lose no occasion of practising every heroic virtue, and of vigorously resisting all that was evil. Prayer, holy meditation, and contemplation were the means by which God imprinted in her soul sublime ideas of his heavenly truths, the strongest and most tender sentiments of all virtues, and the most burning desire to give all to God, with an incredible relish and affection for suffering contempt and poverty for Christ. What she chiefly laboured to obtain, by meditating on his life and sufferings, and what she most earnestly asked of him was, that he would be pleased, in his mercy, to purge her affections of all poison of the inordinate love of creatures, and engrave in her his most holy and divine image, both exterior and interior, that is to say, both in her conversation and affections, that so she might be animated, and might think, speak, and act by his most holy Spirit. The saint was chosen, very young, first, mistress of the novices, then sub-prioress, and, in the twenty-fifth year of her age, was appointed perpetual prioress. The reputation of her extraordinary sanctity and prudence drew her many visits from a great number of bishops, princes, and cardinals, among others, of Cervini, Alexander of Medicis, and Aldobrandini, who all three were afterwards raised to saint Peter's chair, under the names of Marcellus II., Clement VIII., and Leo XI. Something like what St. Austin relates of St. John of Egypt, happened to St. Philip Neri and St. Catharine of Ricci. For having sometime entertained together a commerce of letters, to satisfy their mutual desire of seeing each other, whilst he was detained at Rome she appeared to him in a vision, and they conversed together a considerable time, each doubtless being in a rapture. This saint Philip Neri, though most circumspect in giving credit to, or in publishing visions, declared, saying, that Catharine de Ricci, whilst living, had appeared to him in vision, as his disciple Galloni assures us in his life.(1) And the continuators of

(1) Gallon. apud Contin. Bolland. Acta Sanctorum, Maii, t. 6. p. 503. col. 2. n. 146.

Bolandus inform us that this was confirmed by the oaths of five witnesses.(1) Bacci, in his life of saint Philip, mentions the same thing, and Pope Gregory XV., in his bull for the canonization of St. Philip Neri, affirms, that whilst this saint lived at Rome, he conversed a considerable time with Catharine of Ricci, a nun who was then at Prat, in Tuscany.(2) Most wonderful were the raptures of St. Catharine in meditating on the passion of Christ, which was her daily exercise, but to which she totall devoted herself every week from Thursday noon to three o'clock in the afternoon on Friday. After a long illness, she passed from this mortal life to everlasting bliss and the possession of the object of all her desires, on the feast of the Purification of our Lady, on the 2nd of February, in 1589, the sixty-seventh year of her age. The ceremony of her beatification was performed by Clement XII. in 1732, and that of her canonization by Benedict XIV. in 1746. Her festival is deferred to the 13th of February.

In the most perfect state of heavenly contemplation which this life admits of, there must be a time allowed for action, as appears from the most eminent contemplatives among the saints, and those religious institutes which are most devoted to this holy exercise. The mind of man must be frequently unbent, or it will be overset. Many, by a too constant or forced attention, have lost their senses. The body also stands in need of exercise, and in all stations men owe several exterior duties both to others and themselves, and to neglect any of these, upon pretence of giving the preference to prayer, would be a false devotion and dangerous illusion. Though a Christian be a citizen of heaven, whilst he is a sojourner in this world, he is not to forget the obligations or the necessities to which this state subjects him, or to dream of flights which only angels and their fellow inhabitants of bliss take. As a life altogether taken up in action and business, without frequent prayer and pious meditation, alienates a soul from God and virtue, and weds her totally to the world, so a life spent wholly in contemplation, without any mixture of action, is chimerical, and the attempt dangerous. The art of true devotion consists very much in a familiar and easy habit of accompanying exterior actions and business with a pious attention to the Divine Presence, frequent secret aspirations, and a constant union of the soul with

(1) Gallon. apud Contin. Bolland. Acta Sanctorum, Maii, t. 6. p. 504. col. 2.

(2) In Bullar. Cherubini, t. 4. p. 8.

God. This St. Catharine of Ricci practised at her work, in the exterior duties of her house and office, in her attendance on the sick (which was her favourite employment, and which she usually performed on her knees) and in the tender care of the poor over the whole country. But this hindered not the exercises of contemplation, which were her most assiduous employment. Hence retirement and silence were her delight, in order to entertain herself with the Creator of all things, and by devout meditation, kindling in her soul the fire of heavenly love, she was never able to satiate the ardour of her desire in adoring and praising the immense greatness and goodness of God.

ST. LICINIUS, CONFESSOR,

CALLED BY THE FRENCH LESIN, BISHOP OF ANGERS.

HE was born of a noble family, allied to the kings of France, about the year 540. He was applied to learning as soon as he was capable of instruction, and sent to the court of King Clotaire I. (whose cousin he was) being about twenty years of age. He signalized himself by his prudence and valour both in the court and in the army, and acquitted himself of all Christian duties with extraordinary exactitude and fervour. Fasting and prayer were familiar to him, and his heart was always raised to God. King Chilperic made him count or governor of Anjou, and being overcome by the importunities of his friends, the saint consented to take a wife about the year 578. But the lady was struck with a leprosy on the morning before it was to be solemnized. This accident so strongly affected Licinius, that he resolved to carry into immediate execution a design he had long entertained of entirely renouncing the world. This he did in 580, and leaving all things to follow Jesus Christ, he entered himself among the clergy, and hiding himself from the world in a community of ecclesiastics, found no pleasure but in the exercises of piety and the most austere penance, and in meditating on the holy scriptures. Audouin, the fourteenth bishop of Angers, dying towards the year 600, the people remembering the equity and mildness with which Licinius had governed them, rather as their father than as a judge or master, demanded him for their pastor. The voice of the clergy seconded that of the people, and the concurrence of the court of Clotaire II. in his minority, under the regency of his mother Fredegonda, overcame all the opposition