

The beginning of true virtue is most ardently to desire it, and to ask it of God with the utmost assiduity and earnestness,(1) preferring it with all the saints to kingdoms and thrones, and considering riches as nothing in comparison with this our only and inestimable treasure. Fervent prayer, holy meditation, and reading pious books, are the principal means by which it is to be constantly improved, and the interior life of the soul to be strengthened. These are so much the more necessary in the world than in a religious state, as its poison and distractions threaten her continually with the greatest danger. Amidst the pomp, hurry, and amusements of a court, St. Maud gave herself up to holy contemplation with such earnestness, that though she was never wanting to any exterior or social duties, her soul was raised above all perishable goods, dwelt always in heaven, and sighed after that happy moment which was to break the bonds of her slavery, and unite her to God in eternal bliss and perfect love. Is it possible that so many Christians, capable of finding in God their sovereign felicity, should amuse themselves with pleasures which flatter the senses, with reading profane books, and seeking an empty satisfaction in idle visits, vain conversation, news, and sloth, in which they pass those precious hours which they might employ in exercises of devotion, and in the duties and serious employments of their station? What trifles do they suffer to fill their minds and hearts, and to rob them of the greatest of all treasures? Conversation and visits in the world must only be allowed as far as they are social duties, must be regulated by charity and necessity, sanctified by simplicity, prudence, and every virtue, animated by the spirit of God, and seasoned with a holy unction which divine grace gives to those whom it perfectly replenishes and possesses.

SS. ACEPSIMAS, BISHOP; JOSEPH, PRIEST; AND
AITHILAHAS, DEACON.

MARTYRS.

ST. MARUTHAS closes with the acts of these martyrs, his history of the persecution of King Sapor, which raged without intermission during forty years. The venerable author assures us, that, living in the neighbourhood, he had carefully informed himself of the several circumstances of their combats from those

(1) Sap. vii. 6.

who were eye-witnesses, and ushers in his account with the following address: "Be propitious to me, O Lord, through the prayers of these martyrs. Being assisted by the divine grace, and strengthened by your protection, O ye incomparable men, I presume to draw the outlines of your heroic virtues and incredible torments. But the remembrance of your bitter sufferings covers me with shame, confusion, and tears, for myself and my sins. O! you who hear this relation, count the days and the hours of three years and a half which they spent in prison, and remember they passed no month without frequent tortures, no day free from pain, no hour without the threat of immediate death. The festivals and new moons were black to them by fresh racks, beatings, clubs, chains, hanging by their limbs, dislocations of their joints, &c." In the thirty-seventh year of this persecution, a fresh edict was published, commanding the governors and magistrates to punish all Christians with racks, scourges, stoning, and every sort of death, laying to their charge the following articles: "They abolish our doctrine; they teach men to worship one only God, and forbid them to adore the sun or fire; they use water for profane washing; they forbid persons to marry, to be soldiers in the king's armies, or to strike any one; they permit all sorts of animals to be killed, and they suffer the dead to be buried; they say that serpents and scorpions were made, not by the devil, but by God himself."

Acepsimas, bishop of Honita in Assyria, a man above fourscore years old, but of a vigorous and strong constitution of body, was apprehended, and conducted in chains to Arbela, before the governor. This judge admired how he could deny the divinity of the sun, which all the East adored. The martyr answered him, expressing his astonishment how men could prefer a creature to the Creator. By the orders of the governor he was laid on the ground with his feet bound, and in that posture barbarously scourged, till his whole body was covered with blood. after which he was thrown into prison.

In the mean time one Joseph, a holy priest of Bethcatuba, and Aithilahas, a deacon of Beth-nudra, famed for eloquence, sanctity, and learning, were brought before the same governor. To his interrogatories, Joseph answered that he was a Christian, and had always taught the sun to be an inanimate creature. The issue was, that he was stretched flat on the ground, and beaten with thick twigs stripped of the thorns, by ten executioners, who

succeeded one another, till his body seemed one continued wound. At the sight of himself in this condition the martyr with joy said: "I return you the greatest thanks I am able, Christ, the Son of God, who have granted me this mercy, and washed me with this second baptism of my blood, to wipe away my sins." His courage the persecutors deemed an insult, and redoubled their fury in tearing and bruising his blessed body. After he was loosened, loaded with heavy chains, and cast into the same dungeon with Acepsimas, Aithilahas was called upon. The governor said to him: "Adore the sun, which is a divinity, eat blood, marry,* and obey the king, and you shall live." The martyr answered: "It is better to die, in order to live eternally." By the judge's command, his hands were tied under his knees, and his body fastened to a beam: in this posture it was squeezed and pulled many ways, and afterwards scourged. His bones were in many places broken or dislocated, and his flesh mangled. At length, not being able to stand, he was carried back to prison on mens' shoulders. On the next day, they were all three again brought forth, and stretched on the ground, bound fast with cords, and their legs, thighs, and ribs so squeezed and strained by stakes, that the noise of the bones breaking filled the place with horror. Yet to every solicitation of the judge or officers, their answer was: "We trust in one God, and we will not obey the king's edicts." Scarcely a day passed in which some new torture or other was not invented and tried upon them.

After they had for three years suffered the hardships of imprisonment and daily torments, the king coming into Media, the martyrs were brought before Adarsapor, the chief of all the governors of the East, several other satrapes and governors sitting with him in the palace. They were carried thither, for they were not able to walk, and they scarcely retained the figure of human bodies. The very sight of such spectacles moved all who saw them to compassion, and many to tears. They courageously professed themselves Christians, and declared that they would never abandon their faith. Adarsapor said, he saw by their wounds what they had already suffered, and used both threats and entreaties to work them into a compliance with the

* From this, and many other passages, it is clear that the obligation of perpetual chastity was annexed to Holy Orders in the eastern churches no less than in the western.

law. When they begged him to hasten the execution of his threats, he told them: "Death frees criminals from pain: but I will render life to you as grievous as a continued death, that others of your sect may tremble." Acepsimas said: "In vain do you threaten. God, in whom we trust, will give us courage and constancy." At this answer, fury flashed in the eyes of Adarsapor, and he swore by the fortune of King Sapor, that if they did not that instant obey the edicts, he would sprinkle their grey hairs with their blood, would destroy their bodies, and would cause their dead remains to be beaten to powder. Acepsimas said: "To you we resign our bodies, and commend to God our souls. Execute what you threaten. It is what we desire." The tyrant, with rage painted in every feature of his countenance, ordered the venerable old man to be stretched on the ground, and thirty men, fifteen on each side, to pull and haul him by cords tied to his arms, legs, and other limbs, so as to dislocate and almost tear them asunder; and two hangmen in the mean time to scourge his body with so much cruelty, as to mangle and tear off the flesh in many parts: under which torment the martyr expired. His body was watched by guards appointed for that purpose, till after three days it was stolen away by the Christians, and buried by the care of a daughter of the king of Armenia, who was at that time a hostage in Media.

Joseph and Aithilahas underwent the same punishment, but came alive out of the hands of the executioners. The latter said to the judge under his torments: "Your tortures are too mild, increase them as you please." Adarsapor, struck with astonishment at their courage, said: "These men are greedy of torments as if they were banquets, and are fond of a kingdom that is invisible." He then caused them to be tormented afresh, so that every part of their bodies was mangled, and their shoulders and arms disjointed. Adarsapor gave an order that if they did not die of their torments, they should be carried back into their own country, to be there put to death. The two martyrs, not being able to sit, were tied on the backs of beasts, and conveyed with great pain to Arbela, their guards treating them on the way with no more compassion than if they had been stones. Jazdundocta, an illustrious lady of the city of Arbela, for a great sum of money, obtained leave of the governor, that they should be brought to her house, to take a

short refreshment. She dressed their wounds, bathed their bodies with her tears, and was exceedingly encouraged by their faith and extortions. The blessed martyrs were soon taken from her house to prison, where they languished six months longer. A new governor at length came into that province, the most savage of men, bringing an edict of the king, commanding, that Christians who were condemned to death, should be stoned by those who professed the same religion. The news of his arrival drove the Christians into the woods and deserts, that they might not be compelled to imbrue their hands in the blood of martyrs. But soldiers there hunted them like wild beasts, and many were taken. The two confessors were presented before this new judge. Joseph was hung up by the toes, and scourged during two hours in the presence of the judge, who hearing him discourse on the resurrection, said: "In that resurrection how do you design to punish me?" The martyr replied: "We are taught meekness, to return good for evil, and to pray for enemies." "Well," said the judge, "then I shall meet with kindness from your hands for the evil which you here receive from me." To which the martyr answered: "There will be then no room for pardon or favour: nor will one be able to help another. I will pray that God may bring you to the knowledge of himself in this life." The judge said: "Consider these things in the next world, whither I am going to send you: at present obey the king." The old man answered: "Death is our desire." The emperor then began to interrogate Aithilahas, and caused him to be hung up by the heels a long time together. He was at length taken down, and to move him to a compliance, he was shown a certain Manichæan heretic who had renounced his religion for fear of torments, and was killing ants, which those heretics held unlawful, teaching that insects and beasts have rational souls. The saint, lying on the ground, was scourged till he fell into a swoon, and then was hauled aside like a dog. A certain Magian, out of pity, threw a coat over his wounds to cover his naked body; for which act of compassion he received two hundred lashes till he fainted. Thamsaphor arriving at his castle of Beth-Thabala, in that country, the governor caused the martyrs to be carried before him. They were ordered to eat the blood of beasts: which they refused to do. One told them, that if they would eat the juice of red grapes curdled,

which the people might think to be blood, this would satisfy the judges. They answered: "God forbid we should dissemble our faith." We have elsewhere taken notice that the Christians then observed in many places the positive temporary law of the apostles.(1) Thamsapor and the governor, after a short consultation, condemned both to be stoned to death by the Christians. Joseph was executed at Arbela. He was put into the ground up to the neck. The guards had drawn together five hundred Christians to his execution. The noble lady Jazdundocta was brought thither, and earnestly pressed to throw but a feather at the martyr that she might seem to obey the order of the king. But she resolutely resisted their entreaties and threats, desiring to die with the servant of God. Many, however, having the weakness to comply, a shower of stones fell upon the martyr, which put an end to his life. When he was dead, guards were set to watch his body; but the Christians found means to steal it away on the third night, during a dark tempest. St. Aithilahas suffered in the province of Beth-Nuhadra; the lord of that country, who had been a Christian, by a base apostasy, becoming one of his murderers. Saint Maruthas adds, that angels were heard singing at the place of this martyrdom, and many miracles wrought. These martyrs suffered in the year 380, the seventieth and last of the reign of Sapor, and the fortieth of his persecution. They are mentioned by Sozomen,(2) and are named in the Roman Martyrology on the 22nd of April. See their genuine Chaldaic acts by St. Maruthas in Assemani, t. 1. p. 171. Act. Martyr. Orient.

ST. BONIFACE,

BISHOP OF ROSS, IN SCOTLAND, C.

AN ardent zeal for the salvation of souls brought this servant of God from Italy to North-Britain. Near the mouth of the Tees, where he landed, he built a church under the invocation of St. Peter, another at Tellein, three miles from Alect, and a third at Restennet. This last was served by a famous monastery of regular canons of the order of Saint Austin, when religious houses were abolished in Scotland. St. Boniface, by preaching the word of God, reformed the manners of the people

(1) Acts xv. 29.

(2) B. 2. ch. 13.