

## MARCH XII.

## ST. GREGORY THE GREAT, POPE, C.

From his works, Bede, and Paul, deacon of Monte Cassino, towards the end of the eighth century. His life in four books, by John, deacon of Rome in the ninth age, is full of mistakes, as Baronius observes. See his history, compiled in French by Dom Dionysius of Sainte-Marthe, superior-general of the Maurist monks, printed at Rouen in 4to. 1697, and more accurately in Latin by the same author, in the 4to. tome of this father's works, in 1705. See also Fleury, b. 34, 35, 36. Mabillon, *Annal. Bened.* l. 6. t. 1. Ceillier, t. 17. p. 128. F. Wietrowski, S. J. *Historia de rebus in Pontificatu, S. Gregorii M. gestis*, in fol. Gradonici, S. Gregorius, M. Pontifex, a criminationibus Oudini vindicatus. and Hieron. Muzio in *Coro Pontificale*.

A.D. 604.

ST. GREGORY, from his illustrious actions and extraordinary virtues, surnamed the Great, was born at Rome, about the year 540. Gordianus, his father, enjoyed the dignity of a senator, and was very wealthy; but after the birth of our saint, renounced the world, and died Regionarius, that is, one of the seven cardinal deacons who took care of the ecclesiastical districts of Rome. His mother, Sylvia, consecrated herself to God in a little oratory near St. Paul's. Our saint was called Gregory, which in Greek implies a watchman, as Vigilius and Vigilantius in Latin. In his youth he applied himself, with unabated diligence, to the studies of grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy; and after these first accomplishments, to the civil law and the canons of the church, in which he was perfectly skilled. He was only thirty-four years old when, in 574, he was made, by the emperor Justin the Younger, pretor, or governor and chief magistrate of Rome. By this dignity he was the chief judge of the city; his pomp and state differed little from that of a consul, and he was obliged to wear the *Trabea*, which was a rich robe of silk, magnificently embroidered, and sparkling with precious stones; a garment only allowed to the consuls and pretor. But he could say, with Esther, that his heart always detested the pride of the world. From his infancy he loved and esteemed only heavenly things, and it was his chief delight to converse with holy monks, or to be retired in his closet, or in the church at his devotions. After the death of his father, he built and endowed six monasteries in Sicily, out of the estates which he had in that island, and founded a seventh in his own

house in Rome, which was the famous monastery of St. Andrew, on the hill Scarus,\* now possessed by the Order of Camaldoli. The first abbot of this house was Hilarion, the second Valentinus, under whom St. Gregory himself took the monastic habit, in 575, being thirty-five years old. In this retirement, Gregory applied himself with such vigour to fasting and the study of the sacred writings, that he thereby contracted a great weakness in his stomach, and used to fall into fits of swooning if he did not frequently eat. What gave him the greatest affliction was his not being able to fast on an Easter-Eve, a day on which, says John the deacon, every one, not even excepting little children, are used to fast. His great desire of conforming to the universal practice on that day occasioned his applying to a monk of eminent sanctity, named Eleutherius, with whom having prayed, and besought God to enable him to fast at least on that sacred day, he found himself on a sudden so well restored, that he not only fasted that day, but quite forgot his illness as he himself relates.(1)

It was before his advancement to the see of Rome, or even to the government of his monastery, that he first, as Paul the deacon testifies, projected the conversion of the English nation. This great blessing took its rise from the following occasion.(2) Gregory happened one day to walk through the market, and here taking notice that certain youths of fine features, and complexion, were exposed to sale, he inquired what countrymen they were, and was answered, that they came from Britain. He asked if the people of that country were Christians or heathens, and was told they were still heathens. Then Gregory drawing a deep sigh, said: "It was a lamentable consideration that the prince of darkness should be master of so much beauty, and have so comely persons in his possession; and that so fine an outside should have nothing of God's grace to furnish it within."† This

(1) Dial. l. 3. c. 33.

(2) Hist. b. 2. c. 1.

---

\* See Annot. at the end of the life, p. 145 infra.

† Bede adds, that he again asked what was the name of that nation, and was answered, that they were called Angli or Angles. "Right," said he, "for they have angelical faces, and it becomes such to be companions with the angels in heaven. What is the name (proceeded he) of the province from which they are brought?" It was replied, that the natives of that were called Deiri. "Truly Deiri, because withdrawn from wrath, and called to the mercy of Christ," said he, alluding to the Latin *De ira Dei eruti*. He asked further, "How is the king of that province called?" They told him

incident made so great an impression upon him, that he applied himself soon after to Pope Benedict I. and earnestly requested that some persons might be sent to preach Christianity in Britain. And not finding any one disposed to undertake that mission, he made an offer of himself for the service, with the pope's consent and approbation. Having obtained leave, he privately set forward on his journey, in company with several monks of his own monastery. But when his departure was known, the whole city was in an uproar, and the people ran in a body to the pope, whom they met going to St. Peter's church. They cried out to him in the utmost consternation: "Apostolic father, what have you done? In suffering Gregory to go away, you have destroyed Rome: you have undone us, and offended St. Peter." At these pressing instances the pope despatched messengers to recall him: and the saint being overtaken by them on the third day, was obliged, though with great reluctance, to return to Rome. Not long after the same pope, according to John the deacon, and the Benedictines, or as Paul the deacon, and Baronius say, his successor Pelagius II. made him one of the seven deacons of the church at Rome, who assisted the pope. Pelagius II. sent him to Constantinople in quality of Apocrisarius, or Nuncio of the holy see, to the religious Emperor Tiberius, by whom the saint was received and treated with the highest distinction. This public employment did not make him lay aside the practices of a monastic life, in order to which he had taken with him certain monks of his house, with whom he might the better

---

his name was Alle; and he, making an allusion to the word, said: "Alleluiah, the praise of God the Creator, must be sung in those parts." Some censure this conversation of St. Gregory as a piece of low punning. But the taste of that age must be considered. St. Austin found it necessary to play sometimes with words to please auditors whose ears had, by custom, caught an itch to be sometimes tickled by quibbles to their fancy. The ingenious author of the late life of the Lord Chancellor Bacon, thought custom an apology for the most vicious style of that great man, of whom he writes: "His style has been objected to as full of affectation, full of false eloquence. But that was the vice, not of the man, but of the times he lived in; and particularly of a court that delighted in the tinsel of wit and learning, in the poor ingenuity of punning and quibbling." St. Gregory was a man of a fine genius and of true learning; yet in familiar converse might conform to the taste of the age. Far from censuring his wit, or the judgment of his historian, we ought to admire his piety, which from every circumstance, even from words, drew allusions to nourish devotion, and turn the heart to God. This we observe in other saints, and if it be a fault, we might more justly censure on this account the elegant epistles of St. Paulinus, or Sulpicius Severus, than this dialogue of St. Gregory.

continue them, and by their example excite himself to recollection and prayer. At the request of St. Leander, bishop of Seville, whom he saw at Constantinople, he wrote in that city his thirty-five books of *Morals upon Job*, giving chiefly the moral and allegorical interpretations of the sacred book, in such a manner as to reduce into one body the most excellent principles of morality, and also of an interior life, of both which this admirable work hath been ever since regarded as the great storehouse and armory. Out of it St. Isidore, St. Thomas, and other masters of those holy sciences have chiefly drawn their sublime maxims. Mauritius having married the daughter of Tiberius, in 582, who had the empire for her dowry, St. Gregory was pitched upon to stand god-father to his eldest son. Eutychius was at that time patriarch of Constantinople.\* This prelate, having suffered for the faith under Justinian, fell at length into an error, importing, that after the general resurrection the glorified bodies of the elect will be no longer palpable, but of a more subtile texture than air. This error he couched in a certain book which he wrote. St. Gregory was alarmed, and held several conferences with the patriarch upon that subject, both in private and before the emperor, and clearly demonstrated from the scriptures, that the glorified bodies of the saints will be the same which they had on earth, only delivered from the appendixes of mortality; and that they will be palpable as that of Christ was after his resurrection.(1) The good bishop being docile and humble, retracted his mistake, and shortly after falling sick, in presence of the emperor, who had honoured him with a visit, taking hold of his skin with his hand, said: "I profess the belief that we shall all rise in this very flesh."†

(1) St. Greg. Moral. l. 14. c. 76. t. 1. p. 465.

---

\* Eutychius had formerly defended the Catholic faith with great zeal against the Eutychians and the errors of the emperor Justinian, who, though he condemned those heretics, yet adopted one part of their blasphemies, asserting that Christ assumed a body which was by its nature incorruptible, not formed of the Blessed Virgin, and subject to pain, hunger, or alteration, only by a miracle. This was called the heresy of the *Incorrupticolæ*, of which Justinian declared himself the abettor; and, after many great exploits to retrieve the ancient glory of the empire, tarnished his reputation by persecuting the Catholic church and banishing Eutychius.

† He died in 582, and is ranked by the Greeks among the saints. See the Bollandists in *vitâ S. Eutychii* ad 6 Apr.

Pope Pelagius recalled St. Gregory in 584. He brought with him to Rome an arm of St. Andrew, and the head of St. Luke, which the emperor had given him. He placed both these relics in his monastery of St. Andrew, where the former remains to this day; but the latter has been removed thence to St. Peter's where it still continues. The saint with joy saw himself restored to the tranquillity of his cell, where he eagerly desired to bury himself with regard to the world, from which he had fled naked into this secure harbour; because, as he signified to St. Leander, he saw how difficult a thing it is to converse with the world without contracting inordinate attachments.\* Pope Pelagius also made him his secretary. He still continued to govern his monastery, in which he showed a remarkable instance of severity. Justus, one of his monks, had acquired and kept privately three pieces of gold, which he confessed on his death-bed. St. Gregory forbade the community to attend and pray by his bed-side, according to custom; but could not refuse him the assistance of a priest, which the council of Nice ordained that no one should be deprived of at the hour of death. Justus died in great sentiments of compunction; yet, in compliance with what the monastic discipline enjoins in such cases, in imitation of what St. Macarius had prescribed on the like occasion, he ordered his corpse to be buried under the dunghill, and the three pieces of money to be thrown into the grave with it. Nevertheless, as he died penitent, he ordered mass to be daily offered up for him during thirty days.† St. Gregory says, (1) that after the mass of the thirtieth day, Justus appearing to his brother Copiosus, assured him that he had been in torments, but was then released. Pope Pelagius II. dying in the beginning of the great pestilence, in January, 590, the clergy, senate, and Roman people unanimously agreed to choose St. Gregory for their bishop, although he opposed his election with all his power.

(1) Dial. l. 4. c. 55. p. 465. t. 2.

\* Fleury thinks he was chosen abbot before his embassy to Constantinople; but Ceillier and others prove, that this only happened after his return.

† It appears from the life of St. Theodosius the Cenobiarch, from Saia Ambrose's funeral oration on Valentinian, and other monuments, that it was the custom, from the primitive ages, to keep the third, seventh, and thirtieth or sometimes fortieth day after the decease of a Christian, with solemn prayers and sacrifices for the departed soul. From this fact of St. Gregory, a trental of masses for a soul departed are usually called the Gregorian masses, on which see Gavant and others.

It was then the custom at the election of a pope to consult the emperor as the head of the senate and people. Our saint, trusting to his friendship with Mauritius, to whose son he stood god-father, wrote to him privately to conjure him not to approve of this choice. He wrote also with great earnestness to John, patriarch of Constantinople, and to other powerful friends in that city, begging them to employ their interest with the emperor for that purpose; but complains in several letters afterwards that they had all refused to serve him. The governor of Rome intercepted his letters to the emperor, and sent others to him, in the name of the senate and people, to the contrary effect. In the mean time, the plague continued to rage at Rome with great violence; and, while the people waited for the emperor's answer, St. Gregory took occasion from their calamities to exhort them to repentance. Having made them a pathetic sermon on the subject,\* he appointed a solemn litany, or procession, in seven companies, with a priest at the head of each, who were to march from different churches, and all to meet in that of St. Mary Major; singing Kyrie Eleison as they went along the streets. During this procession there died in one hour's time fourscore of those who assisted at it. But St. Gregory did not forbear to exhort the people, and to pray till such time as the distemper ceased.† During the public calamity, St. Gregory seemed to have forgotten the danger he was in of being exalted to the pontifical throne; for he feared as much to lose the security of his poverty as the most avaricious can do to lose their treasures. He had been informed that his letters to Constantinople had been intercepted; wherefore, not being able to go out of the gates of Rome, where guards were placed, he prevailed with certain merchants to carry him off disguised, and shut up in a wicker basket. Three days he lay concealed in the woods and caverns, during which time the people of Rome observed fasts and prayers. Being miraculously discovered,‡ and no longer able, as he says himself, (1) to resist, after the manifestations of

(1) L. 1. ep. 21. l. 7. ep. 4.

\* It is inserted by St. Gregory of Tours in his history. Greg. Touron. i. 10. c. 1.

† Some moderns say, an angel was seen sheathing his sword on the stately pile of Adrian's sepulchre. But no such circumstance is mentioned by Saint Gregory of Tours, Bede, Paul, or John.

‡ Paul the deacon says, it was by a pillar of light appearing over the place where he lay concealed.

the divine will, he was taken, brought back to Rome with great acclamations, and consecrated on the 3rd of September, in 590. In this ceremony he was conducted, according to custom, to the confession of St. Peter, as his tomb is called; where he made a profession of his faith, which is still extant in his works. He sent also to the other patriarchs a synodal epistle, in which was contained the profession of his faith. (1) In it he declares, that he received the four general councils as the four gospels. He received congratulatory letters upon his exaltation; to all which he returned for answer rather tears than words, in the most feeling sentiments of profound humility. To Theoctista, the emperor's sister he wrote thus: (2) "I have lost the comfort of my calm, and, appearing to be outwardly exalted, I am inwardly and really fallen.—My endeavours were to banish corporeal objects from my mind, that I might spiritually behold heavenly joys. Neither desiring nor fearing anything in the world, I seemed raised above the earth, but the storm had cast me on a sudden into alarms and fears; I am come into the depth of the sea, and the tempest hath drowned me." He adds: "The emperor hath made an ape to be called a lion; but cannot make him become one." In his letter to Narses, the patrician, he says: (3) "I am so overcome with grief, that I am scarcely able to speak. My mind is encompassed with darkness. All that the world thinks agreeable, brings to me trouble and affliction." To St. Leander he writes: "I remember with tears that I have lost the calm harbour of my repose, and with many a sigh I look upon the firm land which I cannot reach. If you love me, assist me with your prayers." He often invites others to weep with him, and conjures them to pray for him. John, archbishop of Ravenna, modestly reprehended his cowardice in endeavouring by flight, to decline the burden of the pastoral charge. In answer to his censure, and to instruct all pastors, soon after his exaltation, he wrote his incomparable book, *On the Pastoral Care*, setting forth the dangers, duties, and obligations, of that charge, which he calls, from St. Gregory Nazianzen, the art of arts, and science of sciences. So great was the reputation of this performance, as soon as it appeared, that the Emperor Mauritius sent to Rome for a copy; and Anastasius,

(1) L. 1. ep. 25. (2) L. 1. ep. 5. d. 491. (3) L. 1. ep. 6. p. 498.

the holy patriarch of Antioch, translated it into Greek. Many popes and councils have exhorted and commanded pastors of souls frequently to read it, and in it, as in a looking-glass, to behold themselves. (1) Our English saints made it always their rule, and King Alfred translated it into the Saxon tongue. In this book we read a transcript of the sentiments and conduct of our excellent pastor. His zeal for the glory of God, and the angelical function of paying him the constant tribute of praise in the church, moved him, in the beginning of his pontificate, to reform the church music.\* Preaching he regarded as the principal and most indispensable function of every pastor of souls, as it is called by St. Thomas, and was most solicitous to feed his flock with the word of God. His forty homilies on the gospels, which are extant, show that he spoke in a plain and familiar style, and without any pomp of words; but with a surprising eloquence of the heart. The same may be said of his twenty-two homilies on Ezekiel, which he preached whilst Rome was besieged by the Lombards, in 592. In the nineteenth he, in profound humility, applies to himself, with tears, what-

(1) Conc. 3. Touron. can. 3. See Dom Bulteau's Preface to his French translation of St. Gregory's *Pastoral*, printed in 1629.

---

\* He reformed the Sacramentary, or Missal and Ritual of the Roman Church. In the letters of SS. Innocent I., Celestine I., and St. Leo, we find mention made of a written Roman Order of the mass: in this the essential parts were always the same; but accidental alterations in certain prayers have been made. Pope Gelasius thus augmented and revised the liturgy, in 490; his genuine Sacramentary was published at Rome by Thomasi, in 1680. In it are mentioned the public veneration of the cross on Good Friday, the solemn benediction of the holy oils, the ceremonies of baptism, frequent invocation of saints, veneration shown to their relics, the benediction of holy water, votive masses for travellers, for the sick and the dead, masses on festivals of saints, and the like. The Sacramentary of St. Gregory differs from that of Gelasius only in some collects or prayers. The conformity between the present church office and the ancient appears from this work, and the saint's Antiphonarius and Responsorium. The like ceremonies and benedictions are found in the apostolic constitutions, and all other ancient liturgic writings; out of which Grabe, Hickes, Deacon, and others have formed new liturgies very like the present Roman, and several of them have restored the idea of a true sacrifice. Dom Menard has enriched the Sacramentary of St. Gregory with most learned and curious notes.

Besides his Comments or Morals on the Book of Job, which he wrote at Constantinople, about the year 582, in which we are not to look for an exposition of the text, but an excellent compilation of the main principles of morality, and an interior life, we have his exposition of Ezekiel, in twenty-two homilies. These were taken in short hand as he pronounced them, and were preached by him at Rome, in 592, when Agilulph the Lombard was laying waste the whole territory of Rome. See 1. 2. in Ezech. hom. 6. and



ever the prophet spoke against slothful mercenary pastors. Paul the deacon relates, that after the saint's death, Peter the deacon, his most intimate friend, testified that he had seen in a vision, as an emblem of the Holy Ghost, a dove appear on his head, applying his bill to his ear whilst he was writing on the latter part of Ezekiel.

This great pope always remembered, that, by his station, he was the common father of the poor. He relieved their necessities with so much sweetness and affability, as to spare them the confusion of receiving the alms; and the old men among them he, out of deference, called his fathers. He often entertained several of them at his own table. He kept by him an exact catalogue of the poor, called by the ancients *matriculæ*; and he liberally provided for the necessities of each. In the beginning of every month he distributed to all the poor, corn, wine, pulse, cheese, fish, flesh, and oil; he appointed officers for every street to send every day necessaries to all the needy sick; before he eat he always sent off meats from his own table to some poor persons. One

---

Paul the deacon, l. 4. hist. Longob. c. 8. The exposition of the text is allegorical, and only intended for ushering in the moral reflections, which are much shorter than in the books on Job. His forty homilies on the gospels he preached on several solemnities whilst he was pope. His incomparable book, on the Pastoral Care, which is an excellent instruction of pastors, and was drawn up by him when he saw himself placed in the pontificate, consists of four parts. In the first he treats of the dispositions requisite in one called to the pastoral charge; in the second of the duties of a pastor; in the third, on the instruction which he owes to his flock; and, in the fourth, on his obligation of watching over his own heart, and of diligent self-examination. In four books of dialogues, between himself and his disciple Peter, he recounts the miracles of his own times, upon the authority of vouchers, on whose veracity he thought he could rely. He so closely adheres to their relations, that the style is much lower than in his other writings. See the preface of the Benedictin editor on this work. His letters are published in fourteen books, and are a very interesting compilation. We have Saint Gregory's excellent exposition of the book of Canticles, which Ceillier proves to be genuine against Oudin, the apostate, and some others. The six books on the First Book of Kings are a valuable work, but cannot be ascribed to St. Gregory the Great. The commentary on the Seven Penitential Psalms Ceillier thinks to be his work: but it seems doubtful. Paterius, a notary, one of St. Gregory's auditors, compiled, out of his writings and sermons, several comments on the Scriptures. Claudius, abbot of Classius, a disciple of our saint, did the same. Alulphus, a monk at Tournay, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, made the like compilations from his writings. Dom Dionysius of Saint Marthe, a Maurist Benedictin monk, favoured the world with an accurate edition of the works of St. Gregory the Great, published at Paris in four volumes folio, in 1705. This has been reprinted at Verona, and again at Ausburgh, in 1758, with the addition of the useful anonymous book, *De Formula Prælatorum*.

day a beggar being found dead in a corner of a by-street, he is said to have abstained some days from the celebration of the divine mysteries condemning himself of a neglect in seeking the poor with sufficient care. He entertained great numbers of strangers both at Rome and in other countries, and had every day twelve at his own table whom his sacristan invited. He was most liberal in redeeming captives taken by the Lombards, for which he permitted the bishop of Fano to break and sell the sacred vessels,(1) and ordered the bishop of Messana to do the same.(2) He extended his charity to the heretics, whom he sought to gain by mildness. He wrote to the bishop of Naples to receive and reconcile readily those who desired it, taking upon his own soul the danger,\* lest he should be charged with their perdition if they should perish by too great severity. Yet he was careful not to give them an occasion of triumphing by any unreasonable condescension; and much more not to relax the severity of the law of God in the least tittle.(3) He showed great moderation to the schismatics of Istria, and to the very Jews. When Peter, bishop of Terracina, had taken from the latter their synagogue, St. Gregory ordered it to be restored to them, saying, they are not to be compelled, but converted by meekness and charity.(4) He repeated the same orders for the Jews of Sardinia, and for those of Sicily.(5) In his letters to his vicar in Sicily, and to the stewards of the patrimony of the Roman church in Africa, Italy, and other places, he recommends mildness and liberality towards his vassals and farmers; orders money to be advanced to those who were in distress, which they might repay by little and little, and most rigorously forbids any to be oppressed. He carefully computed and piously distributed the income of his revenues at four terms in the year. In his epistles, we find him continually providing for the necessities of all churches, especially of those in Italy, which the wars of the Lombards and other calamities had made desolate. Notwithstanding his meekness and condescension, his courage was undaunted, and his confidence in the divine assistance unshaken amidst the greatest difficulties. "You

(1) L. 6. Ep. 35.

(2) L. 7. Ep. 26.

(3) L. 1. Ep. 35, &amp;c.

(4) L. 1. Ep. 35.

(5) L. 7. Ep. 5. l. 12. Ep. 30.

---

\* *Animæ nostra pericula*, l. 1. Ep. 14.

know me," says he,(1) "and that I tolerate a long while, but when I have once determined to bear no longer, I go with joy against all dangers." Out of sincere humility he styled himself "the basest of men, devoured by sloth and laziness." (2) Writing to St. Leander, he says, (3) he always desired to be the contempt of men and the outcast of the people. He declares (4) "I am ready to be corrected by all persons, and him only do I look upon as my friend by whose tongue I learn to wash away the stains of my mind." He subscribed himself in all his letters, Servant of the servants of God, which custom has been retained by his successors. Indeed what is a pastor or superior but the servant of those for whom he is to give a rigorous account to God? The works of St. Gregory were every where received with the greatest applause. Marinianus, archbishop of Ravenna, read his comments on Job to the people in the church. The saint was afflicted and confounded that his writings should be thought to deserve a place among the approved works of the fathers; and wrote to that prelate that his book was not proper for the church, admonishing him rather to read St. Austin on the psalms. (5) He was no less dead to himself in his great actions, and all other things. He saw nothing in himself but imperfections, and subjects of confusion and humiliation.

It is incredible how much he wrote, and, during the thirteen years that he governed the church, what great things he achieved for the glory of God, the good of the church, the reformation of manners the edification of the faithful, the relief of the poor, the comfort of the afflicted, the establishment of ecclesiastical discipline, and the advancement of piety and religion. But our surprise redoubles upon us, when we remember his continual bad state of health and frequent sicknesses, and his assiduity in prayer and holy contemplation; though this exercise it was that gave always wings to his soul. In his own palace he would allow of no furniture but what was mean and simple, nor have any attendants near his person but clergymen or monks of approved virtue, learning, and prudence. His household was a model of christian perfection; and by his care, arts, sciences, and the heroic practice of piety, flourished, especially in the city of Rome. The state of Christendom was

(1) L. 4. Ep. 47.

(2) Præf. in Dial.

(3) L. 9. Ep. 221.

(4) L. 2. Ep. 121.

(5) L. 12. Ep. 24.

at that time on every side miserably distracted, and stood in need of a pastor, whose extraordinary sanctity, abilities, and courage should render him equal to every great enterprise. And such a one was Gregory. The eastern churches were wretchedly divided and shattered by the Nestorians, and the numerous spawn of the Eutychians, all which he repressed. In the west, England was buried in idolatry, and Spain, under the Visigoths, was overrun with the Arian heresy. These two flourishing countries owe their conversion, in a great measure, to his zeal, especially the former. In Africa he extirpated the Donatists, converted many schismatics in Istria and the neighbouring provinces; and reformed many grievous abuses in Gaul, whence he banished simony, which had almost universally infected that church. A great part of Italy was become a prey to the Lombards,\* who were partly Arians, partly idolaters. St. Gregory often stopped the fury of their arms, and checked their oppressions of the people: by his zeal he also brought over many to the Catholic faith, and had the comfort to see Agilulph, their king, renounce the Arian heresy to embrace it. In 592, Romanus, exarch, or governor of Italy for the emperor, with a view to his own private interest, peridiously broke the solemn treaty which he had made with the Lombards,(1) and took Perugia and several other towns. But the barbarians, who were much the stronger, revenged this insult with great cruelty, and besieged Rome itself. Saint Gregory neglected nothing to protect the oppressed, and raised troops for the defence of several places. At length, by entrea-

(1) Paul. Diac. de Gest. Longobard. l. 4. c. 8. S. Greg. l. 2. Ep. 46.

---

\* The Lombards came originally from Scandinavia, and settled first in Pomerania, and afterwards with the Huns in Pannonia, who had remained there when they returned out of Italy under Attila. Narses, the patrician, after having governed Italy sixteen years with great glory, was recalled by the emperor Justin the Younger. But, resenting this treatment, he invited the Lombards into that country. Those barbarians leaving Pannonia to the Huns, entered Italy, easily made themselves masters of Milan, under their king Alboinus, in 568; and extending their dominions, often threatened Rome itself. In the reign of Charles the Fat, the Huns were expelled Pannonia by the Hongres, another swarm from the same northern hive, akin to the Huns, who gave to that kingdom the name of Hungary. That the Lombards were so called, not from their long swords, as some have pretended, but from their long beards, see demonstrated from the express testimony of Paul the deacon, himself a Lombard, of Constantine Porphyrogenetta, by Jos. Assemani, Hist. Ital. scriptor. t. 1. c. 3. p. 33.

ties and great presents, he engaged the Lombards to retire into their own territories. He reproved the exarch for his breach of faith, but to no other effect than to draw upon himself the indignation of the governor and his master. Such were the extortions and injustices of this and other imperial officers, that the yoke of the barbarians was lighter than the specious shadow of liberty under the tyranny of the empire: and with such rigour were the heaviest taxes levied, that to pay them, many poor inhabitants of Corsica were forced to sell their own children to the barbarians. These oppressions cried to heaven for vengeance: and St. Gregory wrote boldly to the empress Constantina,(1) entreating that the emperor, though he should be a loser by it, would not fill his exchequer by oppressing his people, nor suffer taxes to be levied by iniquitous methods which would be an impediment to his eternal salvation. He sent to this empress a brandeum, or veil, which had touched the bodies of the apostles, and assured her that miracles had been wrought by such relics."(2) He promised to send her also some dust-filings of the chains of St. Paul; of which relics he makes frequent mention in his epistles. At Cagliari, a certain rich Jew, having been converted to the faith, had seized the synagogue in order to convert it into a church, and had set up in it an image of the Virgin Mary and a cross. Upon the complaint of the other Jews, St. Gregory ordered(3) the synagogue to be restored to them, but that the image and cross should be first removed with due veneration and respect.\* Writing to Theodelinda, queen of the Lombards, he mentions,(4) that he sent her son, the young king, a little cross, in which was a particle of the wood of the true Cross, to carry about his neck. Secundinus, a holy hermit near Ravenna, god-father to this young king, begged of the pope some devout pictures. St. Gregory, in his answer, says: "We have sent you two cloths, containing the picture of God our Saviour, and of Mary the holy Mother of God, and of the blessed apostles Peter and Paul, and one cross: also for a benediction, a key which had been applied to the most holy body of St. Peter, the prince of the apostles, that

(1) L. 5. Ep. 41.

(2) L. 4. Ep. 30.

(3) L. 9. Ep. 6. p. 930.

(4) L. 14. Ep. 12. p. 1270.

---

\* S:blatà exinde, quā par est veneratione, imagine et cruce. L. 9. Ep. 6. p. 930.

you may remain defended from the enemy."\* But when Serenus, bishop of Marseilles, had broken certain sacred images which some persons, lately converted from idolatry, honoured with their former idolatrous superstitions, St. Gregory commended his zeal for suppressing this abuse, but reproved him for breaking the images. (1) When the archbishop of Ravenna used the pallium, not only at mass, but also in other functions, St. Gregory wrote him a severe reprimand, telling him that no ornament shines so bright on the shoulders of a bishop, as humility. (2)† He extended his pastoral zeal and solicitude over all churches; and he frequently takes notice that the care of the churches of the whole world was entrusted to St. Peter, and his successors in the see of Rome. (3) This authority he exerted in the oriental patriarchates. A certain monk having been accused of Manicheism, and beaten by the order of John the patriarch of Constantinople, appealed to Pope Gregory, who sharply reprimanded the patriarch, exhorting him to eject a certain wicked young man by whom he suffered himself to be governed, and to do penance, and telling him: "If you do not keep the canons, I know not who you are." (4) He absolved the monk, with his colleague, a priest, re-established them in their monastery, and sent them back into the East, having received their profession of faith. He also absolved John, a priest of Chalcedon, who had been unjustly condemned by the delegates of the patriarch. This patriarch, John, surnamed the Faster, usurped the arrogant

(1) L. 11. Ep. 13.

(2) L. 3. Ep. 56. l. 3. Ep. 53. l. 9. Ep. 59. l. 6. Ep. 66. l. 7. Ep. 19. l. 5. Ep. 20.

(3) L. 3. Ep. 39. l. 5. Ep. 13.

(4) L. 6. Ep. 15, 16, 17.

---

\* These words are quoted by Paul the deacon, in the council of Rome, Conc. t. 6. p. 1462, and Pope Adrian I., in his letter to Charlemagne in defence of holy images.

† St. Gregory was always a zealous assertor of the celibacy of the clergy, which law he extended also to subdeacons, who had before been ranked among the clergy of the Minor orders. (l. 1. Ep. 44. l. 4. Ep. 34.) The Centuriators, Heylin, and others, mention a forged letter, under the name of Udalricus, said to be written to Pope Nicholas, concerning the heads of children found by St. Gregory in a pond. But a more ridiculous fable was never invented, as is demonstrated from many inconsistencies of that forged letter: and St. Gregory in his epistles everywhere mentions the law of the celibacy of the clergy as ancient and inviolable. Nor was any Pope Nicholas contemporary with St. Udalricus. See Baronius and Dom de Sainte Marthe, in his life of St. Gregory.

title of œcumenical, or universal patriarch. This epithet was only used of a general council which represents the whole church. In this sense an œcumenical bishop should mean a bishop who represents the whole church, so that all other bishops are only his vicars. St. Gregory took the word in that sense: which would be blasphemy and heresy, and as such he condemned it.(1) John indeed only meant it in a limited sense for an archbishop over many, as we call him a general who commands many; but even so it savoured of arrogance and novelty. In opposition to this, St. Gregory took no other titles than those of humility. Gregoria, a lady of the bed-chamber, to the empress, being troubled with scruples, wrote to St. Gregory, that she should never be at ease till he should obtain of God, by a revelation, an assurance that her sins were forgiven her. To calm her disturbed mind, he sent her the following answer.(2) "You ask what is both difficult and unprofitable.—Difficult, because I am unworthy to receive any revelation: unprofitable, because an absolute assurance of your pardon does not suit your state till you can no longer weep for your sins. You ought always to fear and tremble for them, and wash them away by daily tears. Paul had been taken up to the third heaven, yet trembled lest he should become a reprobate.—Security is the mother of negligence."

The emperor forbade any to be admitted in monasteries, who, having been in office, had not yet given up their accounts, or who were engaged in the military service. This order he sent to each of the patriarchs, to be by them notified to all the bishops of their respective districts. St. Gregory, who was at that time sick, complied with the imperial mandate, so far as to order the edict to be signified to the western bishops,\* as appears from a letter which he wrote to the

(1) L. 11. Ep. 28. olim. 58. p. 1180, &c.

(2) L. 7. Ep. 25.

---

\* Some Protestants slander St. Gregory, as if by this publication of the imperial edict he had concurred to what he condemned as contrary to the divine law. Dr. Mercier, in his letter in favour of a law commanding silence, with regard to the constitution *Unigenitus* in France, in 1759, pretends that this holy pope thought obedience to the emperor a duty even in things of a like nature. But Dr. Launay, *Réponse à la Lettre d'un Docteur de Sorbonne*, partie 2. p. 51. and Dr. N. *Examen de la Lettre d'un Docteur de Sorbonne sur la nécessité de garder le silence sur la Constitution Unigenitus*, p. 33. t. 1. demonstrate that St. Gregory regarded the matter, as it really

emperor as soon as his health was re-established. We learn from another letter, which he wrote some years after to the bishops of the empire, that, on this occasion, he exhorted the bishops to comply with the first part, and as to the second, not to suffer persons engaged in the army to be admitted among the clergy or to the monastic habit, unless their vocation had been thoroughly tried for the space of three years, that it might be evident they were converted from the world, and sought not to change one kind of secular life for another. He made to Mauritius, the strongest remonstrances against this edict, saying, "It is not agreeable to God, seeing by it the way to heaven was shut to several; for many cannot be saved unless they forsake all things." He, therefore, entreated the emperor to mitigate this law, approving the first article as most just, unless the monastery made itself answerable for the debts of such a person received in it. As to the second, he allows that the motives and sincerity of the conversion of such soldiers are to be narrowly examined before they ought to be admitted to the monastic habit. Mauritius, who had before conceived certain prejudices against St Gregory, was offended at his remonstrances, and showed his resentment against him for some years, but at length agreed to the mitigations of each article proposed to St. Gregory: which the holy pope, with great pleasure, notified by a letter addressed to the bishops of the empire.(1)

The emperor Mauritius, having broken his league with the Avari, a Scythian nation, then settled on the banks of the Danube, (2) was defeated, and obliged to purchase an ignominious peace. He also refused to ransom the prisoners they had taken, though they asked at first only a golden penny a head, and at last only a sixth part, or four farthings; which refusal so enraged the barbarians, that they put them all to the sword. Mauritius began then to be stung with remorse, gave large alms, and prayed that God would rather punish him in this life than

(1) Ep. 55.

(2) Theophanes Chronogr.

---

is, merely as a point of discipline, and no where says the edict was contrary to the divine law, but only not agreeable to God, and tending to prejudice the interest of his greater glory. In matters of faith or essential obligation, he calls forth the zeal and fortitude of prelates to stand upon their guard in opposing unjust laws, even to martyrdom, as the same authors demonstrate.



in the next. His prayer was heard. His avarice and extortions had rendered him odious to all his subjects; and, in 602, he ordered the army to take winter quarters in the enemy's country, and to subsist on freebooting, without pay. The soldiers exasperated at this treatment, chose one Phocas, a daring ambitious man, to be their leader, and marched to Constantinople, where he was crowned emperor. Mauritius had made his escape, but was taken with his family thirty miles out of the city, and brought back. His five sons were slain before his eyes at Chalcedon: he repeated all the while as a true penitent these words: "Thou art just, O Lord, and thy judgments are righteous." (1) When the nurse offered her own child instead of his youngest, he would not suffer it. Last of all he himself was massacred after a reign of twenty years. His empress, Constantia, was confined with her three daughters, and murdered with them a few months after. The tyrant was slain by Heraclius, governor of Africa, after a tottering reign of eight years. When Phocas mounted the throne, his images were received and set up at Rome: nor could St. Gregory for the sake of the public good, omit writing to him letters of congratulation. (2) In them he makes some compliments to Phocas, which are not so much praises as respectful exhortations to a tyrant in power, and wishes of the public liberty, peace, and happiness.\* The saint no where approved his injustices or tyranny, though he regarded him, like Jehu, as the instrument of God to punish other sinners. He blamed Mauritius, but in things truly blameable; and drew from his punishment a seasonable occasion of wholesome advice which he gave to Phocas, whom the public safety of all Italy obliged him not to exasperate.

This holy pope had laboured many years under a great weakness of his breast and stomach, and was afflicted with

(1) Ps. 118.

(2) L. 13. Ep. 31. 38.

---

\* We say the same of the compliments which he paid to the impious French queen Brunehalt, at which Lord Bolingbroke takes offence; but a respect is due to persons in power. St. Gregory no where flatters their vices, but admonishes by compliments those who could not be approached without them. Thus did St. Paul address Agrippa and Festus, &c. In refusing the sacraments of the church to impenitent wicked princes, and in checking their crimes by seasonable remonstrances, St. Gregory was always ready to exert the zeal of a Baptist: as he opposed the unjust projects of Mauritius, so would he have done those of Phocas when in his power.

slow fevers, and frequent fits of the gout, which once confined him to his bed two whole years. On the 25th of January, 604, he gave to the church of St. Paul several parcels of land to furnish it with lights: the act of donation remains to this day engraved on a marble stone in the same church. God called him to himself on the 12th of March, the same year, about the sixty-fourth of his age, after he had governed the church thirteen years, six months, and ten days. His pallium, the reliquary which he wore about his neck, and his girdle were preserved long after his death, when John the deacon wrote, who describes his picture drawn from the life, then to be seen in the monastery of St. Andrew.\* His holy remains rest in the Vatican church. Both the Greeks and Latins honour his name. The council of Clif, or Cloveshove, under archbishop Cuthbert, in 747, commanded his feast to be observed a holiday in all the monasteries in England; which the council of Oxford, in 1222, extended to the whole kingdom. This law subsisted till the change of religion.†

Every superior, who is endued with the sincere spirit of humility and charity, looks upon himself with this great hope, as the servant of all, bound to labour and watch night and day, to bear every kind of affront, to suffer all manner of pains, to do all in his power, to put on every shape, and sacrifice his own ease and life to procure the spiritual improvement of the least of those who are committed to his charge. He is incapable of imperious haughtiness, which alienates the minds of inferiors, and renders their obedience barely exterior and a forced hypocrisy. His commands are tender entreaties, and if he be obliged to exert his authority, this he does with secret repugnance, losing sight of himself, intent alone on God's

\* The antiquarian will read with pleasure the curious notes of Angelus Rocca, and the Benedictines on the pictures of St. Gregory and his parents, and on this holy pope's pious donations.

† St. Gregory gave St. Austin a small library which was kept in his monastery at Canterbury. Of it there still remains a book of the gospels in the Bodleian library, and another in that of Corpus-Christi in Cambridge. The other books were psalters, the Pastorale, the Passionarium Sanctorum, and the like. See Mr. Wanley, in his catalogue of Saxon manuscripts, at the end of Dr. Hickes's Thesaurus, p. 172. Many rich vestments, vessels, relics, and a pall given by St. Gregory to St. Austin, were kept in the same monastery. Their original inventory, drawn up by Thomas of Elmham, in the reign of Henry V., is preserved in the Harleian library, and published by the learned lady, Mrs E. Elstob, at the end of a Saxon panygeric on St. Gregory.

honour and his neighbour's salvation, placing himself, in spirit, beneath all his subjects, and all mankind, and esteeming himself the ast of all creatures. St. Paul, though vested with the most sublime authority, makes use of terms so mild and so powerfully ravishing, that they must melt the hardest heart. Instead of commanding in the name of God, see how he usually expresses himself: "I entreat you, O Timothy, by the love which you bear me. I conjure you, by the bowels of Jesus Christ. I beseech you, by the meekness of Christ. If you love me, do this." And see how he directs us to reprove those who sin: "If any one should fall, do you who are spiritual remind him in the spirit of meekness, remembering that you may also fall," and into a more grievous crime. St. Peter, who had received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, shed more tears of tender charity than he speaks words. What heart can be so savage and unnatural, as to refuse to obey him who, having authority to lay injunctions, and thunder out anathemas, weeps instead of commanding? If SS. Peter and Paul pour out the water of tears and mildness, St. John casts darts of fire into the hearts of those whom he commands. "My little children," says he, "if you love Christ, do this. I conjure you, by Christ, our good Master, love affectionately, and this is enough. Love will teach you what to do. The unction of the Holy Ghost will instruct you." This is the true spirit of governing; a method sure to gain the hearts of others, and to inspire them with a love of the precept itself and of virtue. St. Macarius of Egypt was styled the god of the monks, so affectionately and readily was he obeyed by them, because he never spoke a word with anger or impatience. Moses was chosen by God to be the leader and legislator of his people, because he was the meekest of men: and with what astonishing patience did he bear the murmers and rebellions of an ungrateful and stiff-necked people! David's meekness towards Saul and others purchased him the crown, and was one of the principal virtues by which he was rendered a king according to God's own heart. Those who command with imperious authority show they are puffed up with the empty wind of pride, which makes them feel an inordinate pleasure in the exercise of power, the seed of tyranny, and the bane of virtue in their souls. Anger and impatience, which are more dangerous, because usually canonised under the name of zeal, demonstrate

persons to be very ill qualified for governing others, who are not masters of themselves or their own passions. How few are so crucified to themselves, and so perfectly grounded in humility, patience, meekness, and charity, that power and authority infect not their souls with the deadly poison of secret pride, or in whom no hurry, importunity, or perverseness can extinguish the spirit of meekness, in which, in all occurrences, they preserve the same evenness of mind, and the same angelical sweetness of countenance? Yet with this they are sons of thunder in resisting evil, and in watching against all the artifices of the most subtle and flattering passions of sinners, and are firm and inflexible in opposing every step towards any dangerous relaxation. St. Gregory, by his whole conduct, sets us an example of this perfect humility and meekness, which he requires as an essential qualification in every pastor, and in all who are placed over others.(1) He no less excelled in learning, with which, he says, that humility must be accompanied, lest the pastor should lead others astray. But above all other qualities for the pastoral charge, he requires an eminent gift of prayer and contemplation. *Præ cæteris contemplatione suspensus*. Pastor. Cura, part 2. c. 5.

---

#### ANNOTATION

##### ON

#### THE LIFE OF ST. GREGORY.

BARONIUS thinks that his monastery of St. Andrew's followed the rule of St. Equitius because its first abbots were drawn out of his province, Valeria. On another side, Dom. Mabillon (t. 1. Actor. Sanct. & t. 2. Analec. and Annal. Bened. l. 6.) maintains that it followed the rule of St. Benedict, which St. Gregory often commends and prefers to all other rules. His colleagues, in their life of St. Gregory, Natalis Alexander, in his Church History, and others, have written to support the same opinion: who all, with Mabillon, borrow all their arguments from the learned English Benedictin, Clemens Reynerus, in his *Apostolatus Benedictinorum in Anglia*. Others object that St. Gregory in his epistles ordains many things contrary to the rule of St. Benedict, and think he who has written so much concerning St. Benedict, would have mentioned by some epithet the circumstance of being his disciple, and would have called the rule of that patriarch his own. These antiquaries judge it most probable that the monastery of St. Andrew had its own rule prescribed by the first founders, and borrowed

(1) Gregor. M. in l. 1. Reg. c. 16. v. 3 & 9.

from different places: for this was the ordinary method of most monasteries in the west, till afterwards the rule of St. Benedict was universally received for better uniformity and discipline: to which the just commendations of St. Gregory doubtless contributed.

F. Clement Reyner, in the above-mentioned book, printed at Doway, in folio, in 1626, displays much erudition in endeavouring to prove that St. Austin, and the other monks sent by St. Gregory to convert the English, professed the order of St. Benedict. Mabillon borrows his arguments on this subject in his preface to the Acts of the Benedictines, against the celebrated Sir John Marsham, who in his long preface to the *Monasticon*, sets himself to show that the first English monks followed rules instituted by their own abbots often gleaned out of many. Dr. Hickee confirms this assertion against Mabillon with great erudition. (Diss. p. 67, 68.) which is espoused by Dr. Tanner, bishop of St. Asaph's, in his preface to his exact *Notitia Monastica*, by the author of *Biographia Britannica*, in the life of Bede, (t. 1. p. 656.) and by the judicious William Thomas, in his additions to the new edition of Dugdale's *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, (t. 1. p. 157.) These authors think that the rule of St. Benedict was not generally received by the English monks before the regulations of St. Dunstan; nor perfectly till after the Norman conquest. For Pope Constantine, in 709, in the bull wherein he establishes the rule of St. Benedict to be followed in the abbey of Evesham, says of it: "Which does not prevail in those parts." "*Quæ minus in illis partibus habetur.*" In 747, Cuthbert, archbishop of Canterbury, in a synod held in presence of Ethelband, king of the Mercians, at Cloveshove, (which town some place in Kent, others more probably in Mercia, about Reading,) published Monastic Constitutions, which were followed by the English monks till the time of St. Dunstan. In these we find no mention of the rule of St. Benedict: nor in Bede. The charter of King Ethelbald which mentions the Black Monks, is a manifest forgery. Even that name was not known before the institution of the Camaldulenses, in 1020, and the Carthusians, who distinguished themselves by white habits. Dom. Mege, in his commentary on the rule of St. Benedict, shows that the first Benedictines wore white, not black. John of Glastenbury, and others, published by Hearne, who call the apostles of the English Black Monks, are too modern, unless they produce some ancient vouchers. The monastery of Evesham adopted the rule of St. Benedict, in 709. St. Bennet Biscop and St. Wilfrid both improved the monastic order in the houses which they founded, from the rule of St. Benedict, at least borrowing some constitutions from it. The devastations of the Danes scarcely left a convent of monks standing in England, except those of Glanstenbury and Abingdon, which was their state in the days of King Alfred, as Leland observes. St. Dunstan, St. Oswald, and St. Ethelwold, restored the monasteries, and propagated exceedingly the monastic state. St. Oswald had professed the order of St. Benedict in France, in the monastery of Fleury; and, together with the aforesaid two bishops, he established the same in a great measure in England. St. Dunstan published a uniform rule for the monasteries of this nation, entitled, *Regularis Concordiæ Anglicæ Nationis*, extant in Reyner, and Spelman, (in *Spicilegio ad admerum*, p. 145,) in which he adopts, in a great measure, the rule of St. Benedict, joining with it many ancient monastic customs. Even after the Norman conquest the synod of London, under Lanfranc, in 1075, says, the the regulations of monks were drawn from the rule of St. Bennet and the ancient custom of regular places, as Baronius takes notice, which seems to imply former distinct institutes. From that time down to the dissolution, all the cathedral priories, except that of Carlisle, and most of the rich abbeys in England were held by monks of the Benedictine order. See Dr. Brown Willis, in his separate histories of Cathedral Priories, Mitred Abbeyes, &c.