

JUNE XIV.

ST. BASIL THE GREAT, CONFESSOR,

ARCHBISHOP OF CÆSAREA.

[From his own works, and the panegyrics and funeral discourses compiled by St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Gregory Nazianzen, St. Amphilochius, and St. Ephrem, all his intimate acquaintance; and from the church historians. See Hermant, Tillemont, Cave, &c.; also Jos. Assemani in *Caleud. Univ.* ad 1 Jan. t. vi. p. 4.]

A.D. 379.

ST. BASIL the Great, the illustrious doctor and intrepid champion of the church, was born towards the close of the year 329, at Cæsarea, the metropolis of Cappadocia. His parents were Cappadocians by birth, both equally illustrious for their nobility, and descended from a long line of renowned heroes. But his father was by extraction from Pontus, where his ancestors had long flourished. St. Macrina, his grandmother by the father's side, and her pious husband, whose name has not reached us, suffered the confiscation of their estates, and torments almost to death for the faith, in the reign of Maximinus II., in 311. Another time, escaping by flight, they lived seven years concealed in the great forests of Pontus, where they were wonderfully fed by stags, as St. Gregory Nazianzen assures us.¹ Our saint's father, St. Basil the Elder, and his wife, St. Emmelia, adorned the conjugal state by their saintly conversation. Their marriage was blessed with ten children, of which they left nine living, all eminent for virtue; those that were married and lived in the world seeming no way inferior in piety to those who served God in holy virginity, as St. Gregory Nazianzen tells us. Four were sons, and the other five daughters. St. Macrina was the eldest of all these children, and assisted her mother in training up the rest in perfect virtue. The eldest among the boys was St. Basil; the other three were Naucratus, St. Gregory of Nyssa, and St. Peter of Sebaste. Our saint was the fruit of his mother's

(1) Or. 20.

prayers, and in his infancy by the same means recovered his health in a dangerous sickness, when he had been given over by the physicians, as St. Gregory of Nyssa relates. He received the first tincture of virtue from his grandmother, St. Macrina the Elder, under whose care he passed his infancy in a country-house near Neocæsarea, in Pontus; and he testifies himself that during his whole life he never forgot the strong impressions of piety which her exhortations and holy example made upon his tender mind. His father, who was the common master of eloquence and piety in Pontus, taught him the first elements of literature, but died about the year 349, soon after the birth of St. Peter of Sebaste. He lived sometimes at Cæsarea, where our saint was born, and where the sciences flourished; and after his decease the young Basil was sent to that great city for the sake of the schools. He was then only ten or twelve years old; but he far outstripped his age in the proficiency which he made in learning, and still more by the fervour with which he daily advanced in piety and devotion. He was judged equal in oratory to the best masters in that country when he removed to Constantinople, where Libanius, a heathen, the most celebrated rhetorician of that age, and one of the first men of the empire, gave public lectures with the greatest applause. This professor was charmed with the abilities, gravity, and virtue of his scholar. He testifies in his epistles that he was in raptures as often as he heard him speak in public. He ever after kept an epistolary correspondence with him, and gave him constant marks of the highest esteem and veneration.¹ When Basil had made himself master of whatever the schools of Cæsarea and Constantinople were able to teach him, the same laudable thirst after useful learning carried him to Athens, which from the days of Pericles, who raised Greece from barbarism, remained still the seat of the

Muses, and especially of the purity and Attic elegance of the Greek tongue, which was preserved in the East, though not always with equal splendour, till the taking of Constantinople by the Turks. Whereas, in the West, the true taste in polite literature began generally to decline from the reign of Tiberius, till by the incursions of the barbarians it seemed almost extinguished.

St. Basil, who had first met and contracted an intimacy with St. Gregory Nazianzen at Cæsarea, was overjoyed to find so worthy a friend at Athens, in 352. St. Gregory, who was arrived there a little before, had credit enough to procure his friend a welcome reception, and the great reputation and gravity of Basil protected him from the rude treatment with which the scholars were wont to receive new comers.¹ A sympathy of inclinations, an equal ardour for virtue and learning, and a mutual esteem for each other's piety and great qualities, formed between the two saints a friendship which was not founded in a light and variable affection, but in rooted love and motives of true virtue. Hence no jealousy, envy, impatience, or other passion, was ever able to impair the union of their hearts, which was not like the passions of youth, resembling a spring flower which quickly fades, and founded only in base interest, sense, or pleasure. They had no other interest or desire than to consecrate themselves entirely to God, and to be to each other a mutual comfort, spur, and assistance in attaining to this great end. No passion more easily betrays youth than that of sensual fondness begun under the sacred name of friendship; nor is there any thing in which they are to be more strongly upon their guard against themselves, lest what at first seems virtue terminate in passion. This holy pair of perfect friends, by their reservedness, watchfulness, confirmed habit of mortification of their senses, and assiduous prayer, maintained

(1) Libanius. apud St. Basilium, Ep. 145, 152.

(1) Naz. Or. 20.

themselves free from the dangerous snares which the enemy of souls never fails to throw in the way on such occasions. They conversed together with such gravity, that they might have seemed angels destitute of bodies. With this guard over themselves, they enjoyed all the support and succour which holy friendship in God is capable of affording to pious souls. They had the same lodging and the same table; they pursued the same employments, and seemed to have but one will. All things were common betwixt them, and in all they did they had both this only view, which they made the whole endeavour of all their actions, that watching or sleeping, in solitude or in company, at work or in study, fasting or taking necessary refreshment, or whatever else they did, they might live only to glorify God continually adore and honour with all their faculties the Divine Being, and do his will. All their fervour and watchfulness could not have been able to secure their innocence, had they not carefully shunned the rock of bad company, which St. Gregory particularly remarks: "Neither did we," says he, "keep company with scholars that were impious, rude, or impudent; but with those that were the best and the most peaceable, and those whose conversation brought us much profit; being persuaded that it is an illusion to seek the company of sinners on pretence to reform or convert them: it is far more to be feared they will communicate their poison to us." A most important precept to all men, especially to youth; the neglect of which is the ruin of the strongest virtue, and renders abortive all the care and instructions of the most zealous parents and pastors, and all the fruit of the best education. St. Gregory adds of himself and his friend: "We knew only two streets, and chiefly the first of these which led us to the church and to the holy teachers and doctors who there attended the service of the altar,

(1) Naz. Or. 20.

and nourished the flock of Christ with the food of life. The other street with which we were acquainted, but which we held in much less esteem, was the road to the schools, and to our masters in the sciences. We left to others the streets which led to the theatre, to spectacles, feasting, and diversions. We made it our only and great affair: it was our only aim and all our glory, to be called and to be Christians."

St. Basil was an adept in all the liberal arts and sciences. An insight into every different branch of them contributes exceedingly to improve and enlarge the faculties of the mind, and is necessary to every one that would excel in any one science, especially, as Tully observes, in oratory. This art was in the highest request, and of the greatest use among the Greeks and Romans. And our two students, in fitting themselves for the ministry of the church, spared no pains to perfect themselves in the art of true and genuine eloquence. If the fathers seem sometimes to despise it, they speak only of the studied and superfluous ornaments of rhetoric, which only tickle the ear, and in a Christian preacher debase the grandeur and dignity of our mysteries, and rather pervert than promote the end for which they are revealed to us. Too florid pomp of words takes off from the noble simplicity which best suits the dignity of sacred truths, and which inimitably shines in the inspired writings, and renders their genuine eloquence superior to the most finished pieces of all profane orators. But with this simplicity are compatible the truest grandeur, and the most agreeable charms and beauty of diction of which any subject matter is susceptible. And St. Gregory Nazianzen and other fathers have shown, that though the divine truths are not preached to us in the persuasive words of human wisdom,¹ nevertheless the proper succours of eloquence are not to be slighted by pastors in the ministry of the word. Those who

(1) 1 Cor. ii. 4; 2 Cor. xi. 6.

degrade that sublime office by a want of method in their discourses, or by a low grovelling expression, dishonour God, whose ambassadors they are, depreciate his divine word, and by their carelessness and sloth give the faithful a contempt and distaste for the most inestimable treasure, with the dispensation of which God hath honoured them. And every one who is called to the care of souls is bound to exert his utmost efforts to qualify himself to publish to men the great truths of salvation with a dignity that becomes the great importance of that function, which is the first, the principal, and the most indispensable duty of every pastor, and on which depends the salvation of most of the souls that are committed to his care. Basil and Nazianzen in this view applied themselves to the study of oratory, and imitating the industry of a Thucydides or a Demosthenes, they with incredible pains formed their style upon the best models.

St. Basil excelled likewise in poesy, philosophy, and every other branch of literature. By many observations on natural philosophy scattered in his works, especially in his book, *On the Creation*, or work of six days, called *Hexææmeron*, it appears that his skill in the history of nature was more just and more extensive than that of Aristotle, notwithstanding the helps which the treasures of an Alexander were able to procure him. In logic, such were his superior abilities, and dexterity, that it would have been more easy for a man to draw himself out of a labyrinth than to extricate himself from the web in which this great doctor entangled his adversaries by the force of his reasoning, says St. Gregory. He contented himself with learning the general principles of geometry, medicine, and the like sciences, rightly judging such an insight into all the arts of extreme use to a person who would excel in any of them, but despising whatever seemed useless to one who had devoted himself solely to religion

and piety. In checking thus his curiosity and natural thirst after knowledge, according to the excellent reflection of St. Gregory Nazianzen, he was not less admirable for what he neglected in the sciences than for what he learned. After his preparatory studies, he applied himself to the assiduous meditation of the holy scriptures, that inexhausted fund of heavenly sentiments and knowledge. He seasoned his other studies with the assiduous reading of the works of the fathers. Thus did our great doctor enrich himself with that precious treasure, with which he stored his mind, and qualified himself in so excellent a manner for the ministry of the divine word, and the advancement of piety.

Basil was soon regarded at Athens as an oracle, both in sacred and profane learning. Both masters and students used their utmost endeavours to fix him among them; but he thought it incumbent upon him rather to serve his own country. Wherefore, leaving St. Gregory some time behind him, he went from Athens in 355, and repaired to Cæsarea, in Cappadocia, where being yet young, he opened a school of oratory. He was also prevailed upon to plead at the bar; these being, in that age, the principal employs in which young orators and noblemen showed their abilities and improved themselves in the art of speaking. Philosophy had already raised Basil above ambition, and he contemned posts of honour, and all the glittering advantages with which the world flattered him. He had always led a most virtuous and regular life, and sought only the kingdom of God. Yet seeing himself received by his countrymen with the greatest applause, every one testifying the highest esteem for his person and endowments, he felt his heart secretly assaulted by a temptation to vain-glory, and a lurking satisfaction in the empty esteem of men. The danger of this enemy made him tremble for his soul; and he shortly after determined entirely to re-

nounce the world, in order to remove himself further from its precipices. The zealous exhortations of his devout sister *Macrina*, and his friend *Nazianzen*, contributed not a little to strengthen him in this heroic resolution, and instil into his soul a love of holy poverty, and a contempt of human glory, with a relish for the more sublime philosophy of perfect virtue. By their advice he gave away the greatest part of his estate to the poor; and rousing himself as from a lethargy, he began to behold the true light of heavenly wisdom, and thoroughly to understand the emptiness of worldly science and all human things. In these dispositions he embraced the penitential and laborious state of a poor monk. *Libanius*, the famous heathen orator, was much struck at the generous magnanimity with which the saint despised the world whilst it caressed and flattered him, and this haughty sophist could not forbear exceedingly to admire and extol so heroic a greatness of soul.¹ *St. Basil* and his friend *St. Gregory*, among the things which they forsook in renouncing the world, often enumerate eloquence, but mean the gaudy trimmings and empty delicacies of that art, which only please the ear; or they speak of the profane use of eloquence, to renounce which, especially in that age, was certainly a great sacrifice. For both by their example and works they condemn those Christian preachers who, pretending to imitate the inspired apostles, cover their laziness and ignorance with a contemptuous disdain of the art of eloquence. "After having forsaken the world," says *St. Gregory*, "I have reserved only eloquence; and I do not repent the pains and fatigue I have suffered by sea and land, in order to attain it. I could wish for my own sake, and that of my friends, that we possessed all its force."² And in another place,³ "This alone remains of what I once possessed; and I offer, devote, and consecrate it

entire to my God. The voice of his command, and the impulse of his spirit, have made me abandon all things beside, to barter all I was master of for the precious stone of the gospel. Thus I am become, or rather I wish ardently to become, that happy merchant who exchanges contemptible and perishable goods for others that are excellent and eternal. But being a minister of the gospel, I devote myself solely to the duty of preaching; I embrace it as my lot, and will never forsake it."¹

St. Basil, reflecting that the name of a monk would be his more heavy condemnation unless he faithfully fulfilled the obligations of that state, in 357 travelled over *Syria*, *Mesopotamia*, and *Egypt*, and visited the most celebrated monasteries and hermits of the deserts in those countries, carefully instructing himself in all the duties and exercises of a monastic life. He was much edified by the example of those holy men, who by all their actions showed that they regarded themselves as travellers on earth, and citizens of heaven; and their conversation very much encouraged him to fervour in his resolution. In all his travels he was careful to choose only those for fathers and guides of his soul in the paths of heaven, whose faith was conformable to that of the Catholic Church, as he assures us. In 358 he returned into *Cappadocia*, and was ordained Reader by *Dianæus*, the old Bishop of *Cæsarea*, by whom he had formerly been baptized. This prelate professed himself a Catholic, but had been unwarily seduced into some false steps in favour of the *Arians*. He had joined the *Eusebians* at *Antioch* in 341, and at *Sardica*, or *Philopopolis*, in 347; and when the Council of *Rimini*, in 359, had omitted the word *Consubstantial* in its decree, which the emperor had compelled the oriental bishops to subscribe, *Dianæus* had the weakness to comply. This was a sensible affliction to *Basil*, who respected him as his

(1) *Naz. Or.* 27. (2) *Or.* 3. (3) *O.* 12.

(1) *St. Basil, Ep.* 204.

pastor, and had found him an affable and grave man. But union in faith prevailing more with the saint than any other ties, he upon this subscription, separated himself from his communion. The saint left Cappadocia in 358, and retired into Pontus, to the house of his grandmother, situated on the banks of the river Iris. His mother, Emmelia, and his sister, Macrina, had there founded a nunnery, which was at that time governed by the latter. St. Basil established a monastery of men on the opposite side of the river, which he governed five years, till in 362 he resigned the abbacy to his brother, St. Peter of Sebaste. About seven or eight furlongs from the Monastery of St. Macrina stood the Church of the Forty Martyrs, enriched with an ample portion of their relics, and famous in the writings of St. Basil and his friends. The place was not far from Neocæsarea. St. Basil founded several other monasteries, both of men and women, in different parts of Pontus, which he continued to superintend even when he was bishop. For their direction he drew up his ascetic works, which consist chiefly of his Longer and Shorter Rules for cenobites or monks who live in community: in them he prefers the cenobitic life to the eremitical, as generally the more secure; he inculcates frequently that a monk ought to manifest to his superior all that passes most secret in his soul, and submit himself in all things to his direction; he orders that monks exercise hospitality to strangers, but without providing for them any dainty fare, which he says is as absurd as if they should have better clothes than their ordinary habits to receive them in; and adds this remark, that an austere diet would rid them of the trouble of idle visitants of a worldly spirit, which a neglect of this advice would invite. He says the table of a monk ought to teach even strangers sobriety.¹ He mentions, and excellently recommends each canon-

(1) *Regulæ fusius explicatæ*, Reg. 20.

cal hour of prayer, and though some have denied it, that of *Prime*,¹ by which we consecrate the first fruits of our thoughts to God, and fill our hearts before all other things with thoughts of God, and with his holy joy.² The Monastic Constitutions which are ascribed to St. Basil, differ from these two rules in several articles, and are not ascribed to this father by any ancient author. Ceillier thinks them of somewhat a later date. The rule of St. Basil is universally followed to this day by all the oriental monks, even by those who call themselves of the Order of St. Antony.

We have the truest image of this great patriarch in the glass which he holds to us in his writings; and it would be doing an injury to virtue not to give some kind of portraiture of him in his retired life, which has been the model upon which in every succeeding age many eminent saints have formed themselves in perfect virtue. He never had more than one tunic and one coat; lay on the ground; sometimes watched whole nights, and never made use of a bath, which before the use of linen, and in hot climates, was a very rare and extraordinary denial. He wore a long hair-cloth in the night, but not by day, that it might be concealed from men. He inured himself to bear the sharpest cold, which in the mountains of Pontus is very severe; and he never allowed himself the refreshment of any other fire than the heat of the sun. His only repast in the day was on bread and clear water, except that on festivals he added a few herbs; and so sparing were his meals, that he seemed almost to live without nourishment. St. Gregory of Nyssa compares his abstinence to the fast of Elias, who ate nothing for forty days; and St. Gregory Nazianzen facetiously banters him upon his excessive paleness, that his body scarce seemed to have any life;³ and in another place he says,⁴ that

(1) As Cellier demonstrates, t. vi. p. 184, against Bulteau, lib. ii. *Hist. Mon. de l'Orient*.

(2) *Regulæ fusius explicatæ*, Reg. 37.

(3) *Naz. Ep. 6.*

(4) *Orat. 19.*

he was without a wife, without estate or goods, without flesh, and seemingly without blood. The saint himself testifies that he treated his body as a slave which was ever ready to revolt, unless continually kept under with a severe hand. From his epistles, it appears that he was subject to frequent and almost perpetual infirmities. In one he says, that in his best state of health, he was weaker than patients that are given over by the physicians usually are.¹ His interior mortification of the will, and his profound humility, were far more wonderful. We have a proof of this latter in his constant desire to bury himself as much as possible in solitude, and to live unknown to men. In his letters he ascribes all the calamities of the world to his own sins. Solitude did not render him austere or morose to others; he always seemed the mildest and most patient of men. Libanius, the pagan philosopher, admired nothing in him so much as his astonishing meekness and sweetness towards all; which yet he tempered with an amiable gravity. He was a great lover of chastity, and built several monasteries for virgins, to whom he gave a written rule. About the year 359 he sold the remainder of his estate for the benefit of the poor during a great famine. St. Gregory Nazianzen assures us that he lived in the greatest poverty possible, and that his resolution was as firm as a rock amidst the waters. He cheerfully divested himself of all he possessed in the world, that he might more securely pass through the dangerous sea of this life; for of all his temporal goods he did not reserve the least thing to himself; and even when he was bishop he was content to receive his subsistence from the charity of his friends. It was his riches to have no earthly goods, and to follow naked the cross of his Saviour, which was all his treasure. In every monastic exercise and virtue, he strove to copy, and even outdo, the most perfect examples he had seen in the deserts of

Syria and Egypt. In imitation of those monks, he wore a rough course habit, with a girdle, and shoes made of untanned leather; but he principally studied to practise the interior virtues of humility, penance, and mortification, of which the dress and manner of life were only the exterior marks or symbols.¹ He divided his time in the desert betwixt prayer, meditation of the holy scriptures, and manual labour. He also went frequently into the neighbouring country to instruct the peasants in the principles of their holy faith, and to exhort them to the love of virtue.² One thing seemed at first wanting to him in his dear solitude, which was the company of St. Gregory Nazianzen, without whom he seemed deprived of one half of himself. Being therefore delighted with the charms of his cell, he endeavoured to make his friend a partner in his happiness, and to procure to himself the comfort and assistance of his company and example. He therefore invited him by several letters to come to him. In one of these³ he excellently describes the advantages of retirement for holy prayer, and the perfect subduing of the passions. He defines a monk one whose prayer is continual, who seasons his manual labour with that holy exercise, particularly with singing the psalms, whose heart is always lifted up to God, and whose only study it is to adorn his soul with virtues by assiduous meditation on the holy scriptures. He reduces the meals of a monk to one refection a day, and that on bread and water; and curtails his sleep by putting an end to it at midnight, and dedicating the rest of the night to prayer. He lays down rules for silence, modesty in exterior of dress and carriage, and the like. The two SS. Gregory assure us that our saint in this letter gives us a true portraiture of himself. Nazianzen complied, and followed Basil into his retirement in Pontus. That saint describes the extreme

(1) St. Basil, Ep. 257.

(1) Ep. 79.

(2) Sozom. lib. vi. c. 17.

(3) Ep. 2, ed Benedict. olim Ep. 1.

austerity of the life which they led in a poor open hovel, with a little barren garden, which they cultivated.¹ And he afterwards regretted the loss of the sweet tranquillity and happiness which they there enjoyed when occupied in singing psalms, watching in prayer which transported their souls to heaven, and exercising their bodies in manual labour, carrying wood, hewing stones, digging canals of water, planting trees, and the like.² The two saints pursued together their studies of the holy scriptures. But in 362 St. Basil, taking with him some of his monks, returned to Cæsarea, in Cappadocia.

Julian the Apostate ascending the imperial throne in 361, wrote to St. Basil, whom he had known at Athens, and invited him to his court. The saint answered him that the state of life in which he was engaged rendered it impossible for him to comply with his desire. Julian dissembled his anger for the present; but when the saint was come to Cæsarea, he again wrote to him, saying, artfully, that he had not altered his sentiments in his regard, though he had given him just reason for it; yet he ordered him to pay into his exchequer one thousand pounds of gold, threatening, in case of refusal, that he would level the city of Cæsarea with the ground.³ The saint, no way moved at his threats, calmly replied, that far from being able to raise so large a sum, he had not of his own enough to purchase himself subsistence for one day. He added boldly in his letter, that he was surprised to see him neglect the essential duties of his crown, and provoke the anger of God by openly contemning his worship.⁴ The emperor, enraged at this rebuke, marked out St. Basil and St. Gregory Nazianzen for victims to his resentment, after his return from his Persian expedition, in which he himself perished in June, 363. Dianæus, Bishop of Cæsarea, falling sick, sent for St. Basil,

and protested to him that if he had signed the confession of Rimini, he had done it without knowing the evil which it contained, and that he never had any other faith than that which was agreeable to the Nicene council, to which he steadfastly adhered: upon which St. Basil was reconciled to him. After his death, Eusebius, a layman, was advanced to that see; and some time after St. Basil was by him ordained priest by compulsion, as St. Gregory Nazianzen assures us, who wrote to him a letter of comfort and advice on that occasion.¹ Our saint continued the same manner of life in the city which he had led in the desert, except that to his other labours he added that of preaching assiduously to the people. He erected there a monastery for men, and another for women. Eusebius, the bishop, who stood in need of such an eloquent and prudent assistant, had for that purpose raised him to the priesthood. Nevertheless, by a frailty incident to men who watch not carefully over their own hearts (by which expression of St. Gregory Nazianzen we must understand a secret passion of jealousy), he afterwards fell out with him, and removed him from his church. The people of Cæsarea and many bishops took part in favour of Basil against the bishop, but the saint, rejoicing to see himself again at liberty, privately withdrew, and returned to his former retreat in Pontus, where he recovered again the company of St. Gregory Nazianzen. This happened in 363. It is observed by some that St. Basil for some time corresponded and communicated with Basil of Ancyra, Eustathius of Sebaste, and Silvanus of Tarsus, who became ringleaders among the Semi-Arians; but though they refused to admit the word *Consubstantial*, they at that time explained their sentiments in such a manner as to appear orthodox, especially with respect to the article of the divinity of the Son of God; and they showed great zeal against the Arians. Some of

(1) Naz. Ep. 8.

(2) Ep. 9.

(3) S. Bas. Ep. 207.

(4) St. Bas. Ep. 208.

(1) Naz. Ep. 11.

them denied the divinity of the Holy Ghost, but concealed this error some time under ambiguous terms, pretending that they only disputed about certain expressions. Wherefore the conduct of St. Athanasius and St. Hilary, when they wrote their books on Synods, was the same towards them with that of St. Basil.

Whilst our saint during three years breathed the sweet air of retirement, the empire was agitated by several revolutions. The Catholic Emperor Jovian dying in February, 364, Valentinian was chosen to fill the imperial throne, who immediately named his brother Valens Emperor of the East. This latter suffered himself to be seduced into heresy by two profligate Arian bishops, Eudoxius of Constantinople, and Euzoios of Antioch; and in 366 took a journey to Cæsarea, with the intent of putting the churches of that city into the hands of the Arians. St. Basil had then lost St. Gregory, and being invited back by his bishop Eusebius, and alarmed at the dangers of that church, he hastened to defend it against the persecutions of heresy. Upon his arrival at Cæsarea, he opposed the Arians with so much prudence and courage, that after many attempts they were obliged to desist from their pretensions with shame and confusion. He was no less vigilant, by his zealous sermons, to instil into the faithful the most perfect maxims of virtue, reconcile all differences, and extinguish law-suits. When violent hail and storms had destroyed the harvest, and a famine filled the country with desolation, the poor in their extreme necessity found relief in the boundless charity of Basil, who, like another Joseph, opened for their abundant supply the coffers of the rich. He, with his own hands, distributed among them bread and other provisions waited upon them at table with an apron before him; and with wonderful humility washed their feet. By his deference, prudence, zeal, and charity, he won the affection of Eusebius, who conceived the highest es-

teem for him, and made great use of his councils in all affairs. That prelate dying about the middle of the year 370, in the arms of Basil, the saint was chosen and consecrated archbishop of that metropolitanical church. St. Athanasius expressed an extraordinary joy at this promotion, which already announced the greatest victories over a triumphing heresy.

St. Basil being placed in this dignity, seemed as much to surpass himself as he had before surpassed others. He preached to his people even on working days, both morning and evening; and so thronged were his auditories that he calls them a sea;¹ and they listened with so great eagerness to his discourses, that he compares himself to a mother who is obliged, after her breasts are drained, still to give them to her dear babe, by that fruitless satisfaction to hinder his crying. So was he obliged, as he says, in order to satisfy the ardour of his flock, to make his voice heard by them, when a long sickness had exhausted his strength, and rendered him almost unable to speak.² He established at Cæsarea many devout practices which he had seen observed in Egypt, Syria, and other places; as that of all meeting in the church to public morning prayer, and singing certain psalms together before sunrise, at which many assisted with the deepest compunction, and with torrents of tears.³ He testifies that the people then communicated at Cæsarea every Sunday, Wednesday, Friday, and Saturday, and on all the feasts of the martyrs.⁴ When the province was afflicted with a great drought, the good pastor prostrated himself in prayer before God till the scourge was removed, as his brother of Nyssa relates. If it be one of the principal duties of a bishop to look upon himself as the guardian and trustee of the poor, as St. Justin styles him,⁵ this charge St. Basil most faithfully fulfilled. Besides his other

(1) Hexæm. nom. 2. et 3.

(2) In Ps. 59.

(3) Ep. 63.

(4) Ep. 289.

(5) Apol. 1. ol. 2.

excessive charities, he founded a vast hospital, which Nazianzen calls a new city, which continued famous long after his time, and was from him called Basiliades. The same author says, that "Having well considered it, he thought it might deservedly be reckoned among the miracles of the world; so numerous were the poor and sick that came thither, and so admirable was the care and order with which they were served." St. Basil frequently visited it, comforted the patients, and instructed and preached to them. His compassion for the spiritual miseries of souls which vice, heresy, and schism seduced, was to him a perpetual source of tears and sighs to the Father of Mercies in their behalf; and his zeal made him spare no pains and fear no dangers, to apply all possible remedies to their evils. Of this we have a remarkable proof in the glorious triumph which he gained over the Emperor Valens.

That prince, seeing this saint stand as an impregnable tower, baffling all the efforts of his heresy, resolved to remove him out of the way. By several acts of violence and persecution he had already struck a terror into the orthodox pastors. Reeking with the blood of many martyrs, Valens passed like lightning through several provinces, blasting them with Arianism, and arrived in Cappadocia, ready to dart his thunder upon the great Archbishop of Cæsarea, who alone stood more in his way than all the rest together. He sent before him the Prefect Modestus, with orders to prevail upon Basil, by threats or promises, to communicate with his Arians. Modestus being seated on his tribunal, attended by the lictors with their fasces, summoned St. Basil to appear before him. The saint came with a cheerful and undaunted countenance. The prefect received him courteously, and with many smooth words endeavoured to bring him into a compliance with the emperor's desire. But perceiving this method made no impression, he assumed a haughty air, and said to him in an angry

tone: "Basil, what dost thou mean by opposing so great an emperor, whom all obey? Art thou under no apprehensions of feeling the effects of the power we are armed with?"

Basil. "To what does this power extend?"

Modestus. "To confiscation of goods, banishment, tortures, and death."

Bas. "If you can threaten me with any thing worse than this, do so: for none of all these things give me the least uneasiness."

Mod. "How so?"

Bas. "He that has nothing to lose is secure against confiscation. I am master of nothing but a few books and the rags I wear—neither of which, I presume, you have any great occasion for. As to banishment, I know of no such thing in your power to inflict upon me, who account not the country I now inhabit my own. Heaven only is my country. I as little fear your torments: my emaciated body cannot hold out long under them. The first stroke will dispatch me, and put an end both to my life and pain. Much less do I dread death, which I regard as a favour; for it will bring me sooner to my Creator, for whom alone I live."

Mod. "Never did any man yet talk at this rate of freedom and unconcernedness to Modestus."

Bas. "Perhaps this is the first time you ever had to do with a bishop. In all other occurrences we bishops are of all men living the meekest and most submissive: we do not carry ourselves haughtily towards the meanest plebeian, much less towards persons vested with such power. But where the cause of God and religion is at stake, we overlook all things else, regarding God alone. Your fire, daggers, beasts, and burning pincers in this cause are our option and delight: you may threaten and torment us, but can never overcome us."

Mod. "I give you till to-morrow to deliberate upon the matter."

Bas. "I shall be the same man to-morrow that I am to day."¹

The prefect could not but admire the saint's intrepidity; and going out the next day to meet the emperor, who was coming into the city, he informed him of what had passed between himself and Basil, and expressed his astonishment at his heroic courage. Valens, enraged at the miscarriage, would assist himself at a second trial of skill upon the holy confessor, together with Modestus, and an officer of his household, called Demosthenes, the most insolent and brutish of men. Afterwards the prefect ventured upon a third attack; but the stout soldier of Christ acquired each time greater glory by his courage. So that Modestus, in the end, said to the emperor, "We are overcome: this man is above our threats." And Valens laid aside for that time all further attempts upon him. On the feast of the Epiphany, the emperor went to the great church, and was much surprised and edified with the good order and respect with which the divine office was celebrated, and above all with the devotion and piety with which the archbishop performed the divine service at the altar. The emperor did not presume to present himself to the communion, knowing he would have been rejected; but went up trembling at the offertory, and made the usual offering, which the bishop did not refuse, dispensing with the rigour of the ecclesiastical canons on such an occasion.

Nevertheless the next day Valens, to satisfy the importunities of his Arian bishops, ordered that Basil should depart into banishment. But at the time that the emperor gave this order against the saint, God, in the high court of heaven, passed a sentence against his only son, named Valentinian Gelatus, a child then about six years old. That very night was the royal infant seized with a violent fever, under which the physicians were not able

to give him the least relief; and the Empress Dominica told the emperor that this calamity was a just punishment of heaven for his banishing Basil, on which account she had been disquieted by terrible dreams. Whereupon Valens sent for the saint, who was then just preparing to go into banishment. No sooner had the saint set foot within the palace, but the young prince's fever began sensibly to abate, and Basil assured his parents of his absolute recovery, provided they would order him to be instructed in the Catholic faith. The emperor accepted the condition: St. Basil prayed, and the young prince was cured. But Valens, unfaithful to his promise, afterwards suffered an Arian bishop to baptize the child, who immediately relapsed and died.¹ This stroke did not make Valens enter into himself; but growing more hardened by the contempt of grace, he gave a second order for banishing Basil. Going to sign it, he took for this purpose one of those reeds which the ancients used as we do pens, which many eastern people do at this day. This reed broke in his hands, as did a second and a third in like manner, as refusing to write: and as he was taking a fourth, he found his hand tremble, and the sinews of his arm slackened, which made him in a fright tear the paper, and leave Basil in quiet.² The Prefect Modestus was not so ungrateful to him as the emperor had been; for recovering of a dangerous sickness by his charitable visit and prayers, he acknowledged the benefit done him, and was ever after the saint's friend.

St. Basil took two journeys into Armenia, to pacify certain disturbances, and to redress scandals caused by the heretics in those parts. In 371 Cappadocia was divided by an imperial law into two provinces, and of the second, Tyana, was made the metropolis. Whereupon Anthimus, bishop of that city, claimed the juris-

(1) Nazian. Nyss. in Eunom. lib. i. p. 313; Theodoret, lib. iv. c. 16; Rufin. lib. ii. c. 9.

(1) Naz. Theodoret, Socrat. Sozom.

(1) St. Greg. Nyss.; St. Ephrem; Theodoret.

diction of a metropolitan, grounding his pretensions on the civil division of the province; because it often happened that the bishop of the metropolis of a province was made an archbishop, though this was no general rule. For all ecclesiastical jurisdiction is derived from the church; and no patriarch or synod had raised the dignity of the church of Tyana to be metropolitanical. Wherefore St. Basil justly rejected the pretended claim of Anthimus, and appointed St. Gregory Nazianzen Bishop of Sasima in that province. But St. Gregory never got possession of that see; and St. Basil at length allowed that the church of Tyana should, on certain conditions, be honoured with the dignity which it claimed. In 373 the saint was visited with a dangerous fit of illness, in which he was once thought dead.¹ Yet he recovered, and took the benefit of the hot baths. In 376, Demosthenes, vicar of the præfectus-prætorii, being made governor of Cappadocia, favoured Eustathius of Sebaste, and the other Arians, and raised a violent persecution against the Catholics, especially the friends of St. Basil. But the Emperor Valens being defeated and burnt in a cottage in Thrace by the Goths, whom he himself had infected with the Arian heresy, on the 9th of August, 378, peace was restored to the church by the Emperor Gratian. St. Basil fell sick the same year, and prepared himself for his passage to eternity. The whole city, in the utmost grief and consternation, resorted to his house, ready to use violence to his soul, if it were possible, that it might not quit its habitation. But the time was come in which God had decreed to recompense his faithful servant, and the saint with these words in his mouth, "Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit," departed this life on the 1st of January, 379, being fifty-one years old. His riches he had sent before him to heaven, and he did not leave enough for a tomb-stone; but the people

(1) Ep. 141.

not only erected an everlasting monument for him in their hearts, but also honoured him with funeral obsequies magnificent to the last degree. His sacred remains were carried by the hands of saints, and accompanied by an incredible confluence of people. Every one was for touching his shroud, and the bed on which he had slept, thinking to receive some blessing from their devotion. Sighs and lamentations drowned the singing of the psalms; the very pagans and Jews wept with the Christians, lamenting the death of the common father of all, and the great doctor of the world. Those that knew him, took a pleasure in recounting his minutest actions, and every expression they had heard from his mouth; and such was their love for him, that they affected to imitate him in his gestures, his beard, his gravity, and his slow delivery in speaking. They made it a fashion to copy after him in the form of his bed, his clothes, and spare table. Thus writes St. Gregory Nazianzen, who in his panegyric of St. Basil displays the virtues of his friend in such a manner as must make his discourse no less immortal on earth than the saint whom he praised.¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Amphilochius, and St. Ephrem also wrote panegyrics in his honour. The two first of these testify that immediately after the death of the saint, the Greeks kept his festival on the 1st of June, as they do at this day; the Latins have always transferred it to the 14th of June, the day on which he was ordained bishop. Theodoret gives him the title of the Great, which epithet has been always appropriated to him. He is styled by the same father, the light of the universe; by St. Sophronius, the honour and ornament of the church; by St. Isidore of Pelusium, a man inspired by God; and by the General Council of Chalcedon, the great Basil, the minister of grace who has explained the truth to the whole earth. Photius Erasmus, in his excellent preface prefixed to the Greek

(1) Or. 20.

edition of St. Basil's works, in 1532, and many other judicious critics, call St. Basil the most accomplished orator that ever lived, and his style the best model of genuine eloquence. Rollin and all others place him at least in the first class, as one of the greatest masters of eloquence. Photius writes¹ that, "Whoever desires to become a panegyrist or orator will neither need Plato nor Demosthenes if he takes Basil for his original. For there is no writer whose diction is more pure, more beautiful, and more expressive, or whose sense is stronger or more full. He joins all the powers of persuasion with sweetness and perspicuity, and his whole discourse runs like a still river, which flows smoothly, and as it were of its own accord from its spring." Like Thucydides and Demosthenes, he is always pressing upon himself by the multitude of his thoughts, and the close union they bear one with another. The liveliness and justness of his ideas, and the fruitfulness of his imagination, vie with the perspicuity of his expressions: the harmoniousness of his numbers corresponds every where with the sense; and his style, by the beauty of its tropes and its easy transitions, rivals the sweetness and smoothness of Xenophon and Plato. Above all, the clearness of his understanding and the truth of his sentiments shine in whatever he writes, and his animated diction and commanding genius brighten whatever comes under his pen, carry light into the darkest recesses, and impress his own most lively images on his readers. St. Gregory of Nazianzen says of his writings,² "When I read his treatise Of the Creation, I seem to behold my Creator striking all things out of nothing; when I run over his writings against the heretics, methinks the fire of Sodom sparkles in my view, flashes upon the enemies of the faith, and consumes their criminal tongues to ashes. When I consider his treatise of the Holy Ghost, I find the God working within me, and I

(1) Cod. 141.

(2) Or. 20.

am no longer afraid of publishing aloud the truth; when I look into the Explications of the Holy Scripture, I dive into the most profound abyss of mysteries. His panegyrics of the martyrs make me to despise my body, and to seem animated with the same noble ardour of battle. His moral discourses assist me to purify both my body and soul, that I may become a worthy temple of God, and an instrument of his praises, to make known his glory and his power.

St. Basil was justly admired, not so much for his extraordinary learning and eloquence, as for his profound humility and eminent zeal and piety. This is the only true greatness. If this saint, with his extraordinary talents, had made a fortune in the world, gained applause, riches, and the first honours in the empire, what would all this have availed him? What advantage is it now to Demosthenes and Cicero to have been the masters of eloquence? True Christian virtue is the only solid glory and real good. Basil was only great, because he devoted himself and all his talents to the glory of God, and to procure advantages which surpass all things temporal, and which never fade.
