

## JANUARY XIV.

## ST. HILARY, BISHOP.

[From his own writings, and the histories of that age, which furnish the most authentic memoirs of his life. See what Dom Coutant, the Benedictin monk, has recorded of him in his excellent edition of his works; as also Tillemont, t. vii.; Cellier, t. v.; and Rivet, Hist. Lit. t. i. part 2, p. 139. The two books, the one of his life, the other of his miracles, by Fortunatus of Poitiers, 600, are inaccurate. Both the Fortunatuses were from Italy; and probably one was the author of the first, and the other the second book.]

A.D. 368.

ST. AUSTIN, who often urges the authority of St. Hilary against the Pelagians, styles him "the illustrious doctor of the churches."<sup>1</sup> St. Jerom says,<sup>2</sup> that he was "a most eloquent man, and the trumpet of the Latins against the Arians;" and in another place, that in St. Cyprian and St. Hilary, God had transplanted two "fair cedars" out of the world into his church.<sup>3</sup>

St. Hilary was born at Poitiers, and his family was one of the most illustrious in Gaul.<sup>4</sup> He spent his youth in the study of eloquence. He himself testifies that he was brought up in idolatry, and gives us a particular account of the steps by which God conducted him to the knowledge of his saving faith.<sup>5</sup> He considered by the glimmering or faint light of reason, that man, who is created a moral and free agent, is placed in this world for the exercise of patience, temperance, and other virtues, which he saw must receive from God a recompence after this life. He ardently set about learning what God is; and after some researches into the nature of the Supreme Being, quickly discovered the absurdity of polytheism, or a plurality of gods; and was convinced that there can be only one God, and that the same is eternal, unchangeable, all-powerful, the first cause and author of all things. Full of these reflections, he met with the holy scriptures, and was wonderfully affected

(1) Lib. ii. adv. Juliar. c. 8.

(2) Lib. ii. adv. Rufin. p. 415.

(3) In Isa. c. 60.

(4) St. Hieron. in Cata.

(5) Lib. i. de Trin. pp 1—10.

with that just and sublime description Moses gives of God in those words, so expressive of his self-existence,<sup>1</sup> "I AM WHO AM:" and was no less struck with the idea of his immensity and supreme dominion, illustrated by the most lively images in the inspired language of the prophets. The reading of the New Testament put an end to, and completed, his inquiries; and he learned from the first chapter of St. John, that the Divine Word, God the Son, is coeternal and consubstantial with the Father. Here he checked his natural curiosity, avoided subtleties, and submitted his understanding to divine revelation, resolving what seemed incomprehensible into the veracity and power of God, and not presuming to measure divine mysteries by his shallow capacity. Being thus brought to the knowledge of faith, he received the heavenly regeneration by baptism. From that time forth he so squared his whole life by the rules of piety, and so zealous were his endeavours to confirm others in the faith of the holy Trinity, and to encourage all to virtue, that he seemed, though a layman, already to possess the grace of the priesthood.

He was married before his conversion to the faith; and his wife, by whom he had a daughter named Apra, or Abram, was yet living when he was chosen Bishop of Poitiers, about the year 353; but from the time of his ordination he lived in perpetual continency. He omitted no endeavours to escape this promotion; but his humility only made the people the more earnest to see him vested with that dignity: and indeed their expectations were not frustrated in him, for his eminent virtue and capacity shone forth with such a lustre, as soon drew upon him the attention not only of all Gaul, but of the whole church. Soon after he was raised to the episcopal dignity, he composed before his exile, elegant comments on the gospel of St. Matthew, which are still

(1) *Exod. iii. 14.*

extant. Those on the Psalms he compiled after his banishment.<sup>1</sup> On these comments on the Psalms, and on St. Matthew, we are chiefly to understand St. Jerom, when he recommends, in a particular manner, the reading of the works of St. Hilary to virgins and devout persons.<sup>2</sup> From that time the Arian controversy chiefly employed his pen. He was an excellent orator and poet. His style is lofty and noble, beautified with rhetorical ornaments and figures, but somewhat studied; and the length of his periods renders him sometimes obscure to the unlearned, as St. Jerom takes notice.<sup>3</sup> It is observed by Dr. Cave, that all his writings breathe an extraordinary vein of piety. St. Hilary solemnly appeals to God,<sup>4</sup> that he held it as the great work of his life, to employ all his faculties to announce God to the world, and to excite all men to the love of him. He earnestly recommends the practice of beginning every action and discourse by prayer, and some act of divine praise;<sup>5</sup> as also to meditate on the law of God day and night, to pray without ceasing, by performing all our actions with a view to God their ultimate end, and to his glory.<sup>6</sup> He breathes a sincere and ardent desire of martyrdom, and discovers a soul fearless of death and torments. He had the greatest veneration for truth, sparing no pains in its pursuit, and dreading no danger in its defence.

The emperor Constantius, having laboured for several years to compel the eastern churches to embrace Arianism, came into the West; and after the overthrow of the tyrant Magnentius, made some stay at Arles, whilst his Arian bishops held a council there, in which they engaged Saturninus, the impious bishop of that city, in their party, in 353. A

(1) St. Hilar. in Ps. liii. n. 8; in Ps. lxxvii. n. 15; and Contant, Armon. in St. Hilar. in Psalmos, p. 165.

(2) Ep. ad Letam.

(3) Ep. 49, ad Paulinum. t. iv. p. 567.

(4) Lib. i. de Trinit.

(5) In Ps. lxxv.

(6) In Ps. i. pp. 19, 20.

bolder Arian council at Milan, in 355, held during the residence of the emperor in that city, required all to sign the condemnation of St. Athanasius. Such as refused to comply were banished; among whom were St. Eusebius of Vercelli, Lucifer of Cagliari, and St. Dionysius of Milan, into whose see Auxentius, the Arian, was intruded. St. Hilary wrote on that occasion his first book to Constantius, in which he mildly entreated him to restore peace to the church. He separated himself from the three Arian bishops in the West, Ursacius, Valens, and Saturninus, and exhibited an accusation against the last in a synod at Beziers. But the emperor, who had information of the matter from Saturninus, sent an order to Julian, then Cæsar, and surnamed afterwards the Apostate, who at that time commanded in Gaul, for St. Hilary's immediate banishment into Phrygia, together with St. Rhodanius, Bishop of Toulouse. The bishops in Gaul being almost all orthodox, remained in communion with St. Hilary, and would not suffer the intrusion of any one into his see, which in his absence he continued to govern by his priests. The saint went into banishment about the middle of the year 356, with as great alacrity as another would take a journey of pleasure, and never entertained the least disquieting thought of hardships, dangers, or enemies, having a soul above both the smiles and frowns of the world, and fixed only on God. He remained in exile somewhat upwards of three years, which time he employed in composing several learned works. The principal and most esteemed of these is that "On the Trinity, against the Arians," in twelve books. In them he proves the consubstantiality of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. He teaches that the church is one, out of which all heresies spring; but that by this she is distinguished, as standing always one, always alone against them all, and confounding them all: whereas they by perpetual divisions tear each other

in pieces, and so become the subject of her triumph.<sup>1</sup> He proves that Arianism cannot be the faith of Christ, because not revealed to St. Peter, upon whom the church was built and secured for ever; for whose faith Christ prayed, that it might never fail; who received the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whose judicary sentence on earth is that of heaven:<sup>2</sup> all which arguments he frequently urges.<sup>3</sup> He proves the divinity of Christ by the miracles wrought at the sepulchres of the apostles and martyrs, and by their relics: for the devils themselves confess Christ's godhead, and roar and flee at the presence of the venerable bones of his servants,<sup>4</sup> which he also mentions and urges in his invective against Constantius.<sup>5</sup> In 358 he wrote his book "On Synods," or "On the Faith of the Orientals," to explain the terms and variation of the eastern Arians in their synods.

In his exile he was informed, that his daughter Apra, whom he had left in Gaul, had thoughts of embracing the married state; upon which he implored Christ, with many tears, to bestow on her the precious jewel of virginity. He sent her a letter that is still extant, in which he acquaints her, that if she contemned all earthly things, spouse, sumptuous garments, and riches, Christ had prepared for her, and had shown unto him, at his prayers and tears, an inestimable never-fading diamond, infinitely more precious than she was able to frame to herself an idea of. He conjures her by the God of heaven, and entreats her not to make void his anxiety for her, nor to deprive herself of so incomparable a good. Fortunatus assures us, that the original letter was kept with veneration in the church of Poitiers, in the sixth century, when he wrote, and that Apra followed his advice, and died happily at his feet after his

(1) Lib. vii. de Trinit. n. 4, p. 917.

(2) Lib. vi. n. 37, 38, p. 904.

(3) In Ps. cxxxi. n. 4, p. 447; in c. 16, Matt. n. 7, p. 690.

(4) Lib. xi. de Trinit. n. 3.

(5) Lib. iii. adv. Constant. n. 8. p. 1234, Ed. Ben.

return.<sup>1</sup> St. Hilary sent to her with this letter two hymns, composed by himself; one for the evening, which does not seem to have reached our times; the other for the morning, which is the hymn "Lucis largitor splendide."

The emperor, by an unjust usurpation in the affairs of the church, assembled a council of Arians at Seleucia, in Isauria, to undermine the great council of Nice. St. Hilary, who had then passed four years in banishment, in Phrygia, was invited thither by the Semi-Arians, who hoped from his lenity that he would be useful to their party, in crushing the staunch Arians, that is, those who adhered strictly to the doctrine of Arius. But no human considerations could daunt his courage. He boldly defended the decrees of Nice, till at last, tired out with hearing the blasphemies of the heretics, he withdrew to Constantinople. The weak emperor was the dupe sometimes of the Arians, and at other times of the Semi-Arians. These last prevailed at Seleucia, in September, 359, as the former did, in a council held at Constantinople, in the following year, 360, where having the advantage, they procured the banishment of the Semi-Arians, less wicked than themselves. St. Hilary, who had withdrawn from Seleucia to Constantinople, presented to the emperor a request, called, his second book to Constantius, begging the liberty of holding a public disputation about religion with Saturninus, the author of his banishment. He pressed him to receive the unchangeable apostolic faith, injured by the late innovations, and smartly rallies the fickle humour of the heretics, who were perpetually making new creeds, and condemning their old ones, having made four within the compass of the foregoing year; so that faith was become that of

the times, not that of the gospels, and that there were as many faiths as men, as great a variety of doctrine as of manners, as many blasphemies as vices.<sup>1</sup> He complains that they had their yearly and monthly faiths; that they made creeds to condemn and repent of them; and that they formed new ones to anathematize those that adhered to their old ones. He adds, that every one had scripture texts, and the words *Apostolic Faith*, in their mouths, for no other end than to impose on weak minds: for by attempting to change faith, which is unchangeable, faith is lost; they correct and amend, till weary of all, they condemn all. He therefore exhorts them to return to the haven, from which the gusts of their party spirit and prejudice had driven them, as the only means to be delivered out of their tempestuous and perilous confusion. The issue of this challenge was, that the Arians, dreading such a trial, persuaded the emperor to rid the East of a man, that never ceased to disturb its peace, by sending him back into Gaul; which he did, but without reversing the sentence of his banishment, in 360.

St. Hilary returned through Illyricum and Italy to confirm the weak. He was received at Poitiers with the greatest demonstrations of joy and triumph, where his old disciple, St. Martin, rejoined him, to pursue the exercises of piety under his direction. A synod in Gaul, convoked at the instance of St. Hilary, condemned that of Rimini, which, in 359, had omitted the word *Consubstantial*. Saturninus proving obstinate, was excommunicated and deposed for his heresy and other crimes. Scandals were removed, discipline, peace, and purity of faith were restored, and piety flourished. The death of Constantius put an end to the Arian persecution. St. Hilary was the mildest of men, full of

(1) This letter is commended by the most judicious critics, Baronius, Tillemont, Fleury, and Coutant, a monk of the congregation of St. Maur, in his edition of the works of St. Hilary, and others. The style is not pompous, but adapted to the capacity of a girl of thirteen years of age.

(1) Facta est fides temporum, potius quam evangeliorum, 1. 2. ad Const. p. 1227. Tot nunc fides existere, quot voluntates, ibid. Annus atque mensuras de Dec fides decernimus, decretis penitemus, penitentes defendimus, defensos anathematizamus. ibid. p. 1226.

condescension and affability to all: yet seeing this behaviour ineffectual, he composed an invective against Constantius, in which he employed severity, and the harshest terms; and for which undoubtedly he had reasons that are unknown to us. This piece did not appear abroad till after the death of that emperor. Our saint undertook a journey to Milan, in 364, against Auxentius, the Arian usurper of that see, and in a public disputation obliged him to confess Christ to be true God, of the same substance and divinity with the Father. St. Hilary indeed saw through his hypocrisy; but this dissembling heretic imposed so far on the emperor Valentinian, as to pass for orthodox. Our saint died at Poitiers, in the year 368, on the 13th of January, or on the 1st of November, for his name occurs in very ancient Martyrologies on both these days. In the Roman breviary his office is celebrated on the 14th of January. The one is probably that of some translation of his relics. The first was made at Poitiers in the reign of Clovis I., on which see Cointe.<sup>1</sup> From St. Gregory of Tours it appears, that before his time some part of St. Hilary's relics was honoured in a church in Limousin.<sup>2</sup> Alcuin mentions the veneration of the same at Poitiers;<sup>3</sup> and it is related that his relics were burned by the Huguenots at Poitiers.<sup>4</sup> But this we must understand of some small portion, or of the dust remaining in his tomb. For his remains were translated from Poitiers to the abbey of St. Denys, near Paris, as is proved by the tradition of that abbey, a writer of the abbey of Richenow, in the ninth century,<sup>5</sup> and other monuments.<sup>6</sup> Many miracles performed by St. Hilary are related by Venantius Fortunatus, Bishop of Poitiers, and are the subject of a whole book added to his life, which

(1) Cointe *Annal. Fr. ad ann. 538*, n. 41, 42, 43.

(2) *L. de. Gl. Conf. c. 2.*

(3) Alcuin, *Hom. de St. Willibrordo.*

(4) Baillet, *Vie de St. Hilaire.*

(5) *Ap. Mab. anal. t. iv. p. 644.*

(6) *Aimoin. lib. iv. c. 17 & 33. Coutant, Vit. St. Hilary. pp. cxxiv. cxxv. cxxix.*

seem to have been written by another Fortunatus. St. Gregory of Tours, Floard, and others have mentioned several wrought at his tomb. Dom Coutant, the most judicious and learned Maurist monk, has given an accurate edition of his works, in one volume in folio, at Paris, in 1693, which was reprinted at Verona by the Marquess Scipio Maffei, in 1730, together with additional comments on several Psalms.

St. Hilary observes, that singleness of heart is the most necessary condition of faith and true virtue, "For Christ teaches that only those who become again as it were little children, and by the simplicity of that age cut off the inordinate affections of vice, can enter the kingdom of heaven. These follow and obey their father, love their mother; are strangers to covetousness, ill-will, hatred, arrogance, and lying, and are inclined easily to believe what they hear. This disposition of affections opens the way to heaven. We must therefore return to the simplicity of little children, in which we shall bear some resemblance to our Lord's humility.<sup>1</sup> This, in the language of the Holy Ghost, is called the foolishness of the cross of Christ,<sup>2</sup> in which consists true wisdom. That prudence of the flesh and worldly wisdom, which is the mother of self-sufficiency, pride, avarice, and vicious curiosity, the source of infidelity, and the declared enemy of the spirit of Christ, is banished by this holy simplicity; and in its stead are obtained true wisdom, which can only be found in a heart freed from the clouds of the passions, perfect prudence, which, as St. Thomas shows, is the fruit of the assemblage of all virtues, and a divine light which grace fails not to infuse. This simplicity, which is the mother of christian discretion, is a stranger to all artifice, design, and dissimulation, so all views or

(1) *St. Hilary. in Matt. c. 18. v. i. p. 693.*

(2) *1 Cor. i. 17. & iii. 18; S. Hilary. lib. 3, de Trin. n. 24, 25, pp. 822, 823.*

desires of self-interest, and to all undue respect or consideration of creatures. All its desires and views are reduced to this alone, of attaining to the perfect union with God. Unfeignedly to desire this one thing, to belong to God alone, to arrive at his pure love, and to do his will in all things, is that simplicity or singleness of heart of which we speak, and which banishes all inordinate affections of the heart, from which arise the most dangerous errors of the understanding. This is the essential disposition of every one who sincerely desires to live by the spirit of Christ. That divine spouse of souls, loves to communicate himself to such.<sup>1</sup> His conversation (or as another version has it, his secret) is with the simple.<sup>2</sup> His delight is in those who walk with simplicity.<sup>3</sup> This is the characteristic of all the saints:<sup>4</sup> whence the Holy Ghost cries out, Approach him not with a double heart.<sup>5</sup> That worldly wisdom is not subject to the law of God, neither can it be.<sup>6</sup> Its intoxication blinds men, and shuts their eyes to the light of divine revelation. They arrogate to themselves the exclusive privilege of learning and clear understanding: but the scepticism, the pitiful inconsistencies, and monstrous extravagancies, which characterise their writings and discourses, make us blush to see so strong an alliance of ignorance and presumption; and lament that the human mind should be capable of falling into a state of so deplorable degeneracy. Among the fathers of the church we admire men the most learned of their age, the most penetrating and most judicious, and at the same time the most holy and sincere; who, being endowed with true simplicity of heart, discovered in the mysteries of the cross the secrets of infinite wisdom, which they made their study, and the rule of their actions.

(1) 1 Par. xxix. 17.

(2) Prov. xi. 20.

(5) Eccles. i. 89.

(2) Prov. iii. 32.

(4) 2 Cor. i. 12.

(6) Rom. viii. 7.