

ST. IGNATIUS,

BISHOP OF ANTIOCH, M.

From his genuine epistles; also from the acts of his martyrdom, St. Chrys. Hom. in St. Ignat. M. t. ii. p. 592, ed. Nov. Eusebius. See Tillemont, t. ii. p. 191; Cave, t. i. p. 100; Dom Ceillier, Dom Marechal, Concordance des Pères Grecs et Latins, t. i. p. 58.]

A.D. 107.

ST. IGNATIUS, surnamed Theophorus, a word implying a divine or heavenly per-

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son, was a zealous convert and an intimate disciple of St. John the Evangelist, as his acts assure us; also the apostles SS. Peter and Paul, who united their labours in planting the faith at Antioch. It was by their direction that he succeeded Evodius in the government of that important see, as we are told by St. Chrysostom,² who

(1) St. Chrys. Hom. in illud; Vidua eligatur, &c., t. iii. 327, ed Ben.

(2) Hom. in St. Ignat. t. ii. p. 592. See also Theodoret, Dial. 1, p. 35.

represents him as a perfect model of virtue in that station, in which he continued upwards of forty years. During the persecution of Domitian, St. Ignatius defended his flock by prayer, fasting, and daily preaching the word of God. He rejoiced to see peace restored to the church on the death of that emperor, so far as this calm might be beneficial to those committed to his charge, but was apprehensive that he had not attained to the perfect love of Christ, nor the dignity of a true disciple, because he had not as yet been called to seal the truth of his religion with his blood, an honour he somewhat impatiently longed for. The peaceable reign of Nerva lasted only fifteen months. The governors of several provinces renewed the persecution under Trajan, his successor; and it appears from Trajan's letter to Pliny the younger, governor of Bithynia, that the Christians were ordered to be put to death if accused, but it was forbid to make any inquiry after them. That emperor sullied his clemency and bounty and his other pagan virtues by incest with his sister, by an excessive vanity, which procured him the surname of *Parietinus* (or dauber of every wall with the inscriptions of his name and actions), and by blind superstition, which rendered him a persecutor of the true followers of virtue, out of a notion of gratitude to his imaginary deities, especially after his victories over the *Daci* and *Seythians*, in 101 and 105. In the year 106, which was the ninth of his reign, he set out for the East on an expedition against the *Parthians*, and made his entry into *Antioch* on the 7th of January, 107, with the pomp of a triumph. His first concern was about the affair of religion and worship of the gods, and for this reason he resolved to compel the Christians either to acknowledge their divinity and sacrifice to them, or suffer death in case of refusal.

Ignatius, as a courageous soldier, being concerned only for his flock, willingly suffered himself to be taken, and carried

before Trajan, who thus accosted him:--
 "Who art thou, wicked demon, that durst transgress my commands, and persuade others to perish?" The saint answered, "No one calls Theophorus a wicked demon." Trajan said, "Who is Theophorus?" Ignatius answered, "He who carrieth Christ in his breast." Trajan replied, "And do not we seem to thee to bear the gods in our breasts, whom we have assisting us against our enemies?" Ignatius said, "You err in calling those gods who are no better than devils, for there is only one God who made heaven and earth, and all things that are in them, and one Jesus Christ, his only Son, into whose kingdom I earnestly desire to be admitted." Trajan said, "Do not you mean him that was crucified under Pontius Pilate?" Ignatius answered, "The very same, who by his death has crucified with sin its author, who overcame the malice of the devils, and has enabled those who bear him in their heart to trample on them." Trajan said, "Dost thou carry about Christ within thee?" Ignatius replied, "Yes; for it is written, I will dwell and walk in them."¹ Then Trajan dictated the following sentence: "It is our will that Ignatius, who saith that he carrieth the crucified man within himself, be bound and conducted to Rome, to be devoured there by wild beasts, for the entertainment of the people." The holy martyr, hearing this sentence, cried out with joy, "I thank thee, O Lord, for vouchsafing to honour me with this token of perfect love for thee, and to be bound with chains of iron in imitation of thy apostle Paul, for thy sake." Having said this, and prayed for the church, and recommended it with tears to God, he joyfully put on the chains, and was hurried away by a savage troop of soldiers to be conveyed to Rome. His inflamed desire of laying down his life for Christ made him embrace his sufferings with great joy.

On his arrival at *Seleucia*, a sea-port,

(1) 2 Cor. v. 16.

about sixteen miles from Antioch, he was put on board a ship which was to coast the southern and western parts of Asia Minor. Why this route was pitched upon, consisting of so many windings, preferably to a more direct passage from Seleucia to Rome, is not known; probably to render the terror of his punishment the more extensive and of the greater force, to deter men from embracing and persevering in the faith: but providence seems to have ordained it for the comfort and edification of many churches. Several Christians of Antioch, taking a shorter way, got to Rome before him, where they waited his arrival. He was accompanied thither from Syria, by Reus, Philo a deacon, and Agathopodus, who seems to have written these acts of his martyrdom. He was guarded night and day, both by sea and land, by ten soldiers, whom he calls ten leopards, on account of their inhumanity and merciless usage: who, the kinder he was to them, were the more fierce and cruel to him. This voyage, however, gave him the opportunity of confirming in faith and piety the several churches he saw on his route; giving them the strictest caution against heresies and schism, and recommending to them an inviolable attachment to the tradition of the apostles. St. Chrysostom adds, that he taught them admirably to despise the present life, to love only the good things to come, and never to fear any temporal evils whatever. The faithful flocked from the several churches he came near, to see him, and to render him all the service in their power, hoping to receive benefit from the plenitude of his benediction. The cities of Asia besides, deputed to him their bishops and priests to express their veneration for him, sent also deputies in their name to bear him company the remainder of his journey; so that he says he had many churches with him.

So great was his fervour and desire of suffering, that by the fatigues and length of the voyage, which was a very

bad one, he appeared the stronger and more courageous. On their reaching Smyrna, he was suffered to go ashore, which he did with great joy, to salute St. Polycarp, who had been his fellow-disciple, under St. John the Evangelist. Their conversation was upon topics suitable to their character, and St. Polycarp felicitated him on his chains and sufferings in so good a cause. At Smyrna he was met by deputies of several churches, who were sent to salute him. Those from Ephesus were Onesimus the bishop, Burrhus the deacon, Crocus, Euplus, and Fronto. From Magnesia in Lydia, Damas the bishop, Bassus and Apollo, priests, and Sotio deacon. From Tralles, also in Lydia, Polybius the bishop. From Smyrna St. Ignatius wrote four letters: in that to the church of Ephesus, he commends the bishop Onesimus and the piety and concord of the people, and their zeal against all heresies, and exhorts them to glorify God all manner of ways; to be subject, in unanimity, to their bishop and priests; to assemble as often as possible with them in public prayer, by which the power of Satan is weakened; to oppose only meekness to anger, humility to boasting, prayers to curses and reproaches, and to suffer all injuries without murmuring. He says, that because they are spiritual, and perform all they do in a spiritual manner, that all, even their ordinary actions, are spiritualized, because they do all in Jesus Christ. That he ought to have been admonished by them, but his charity would not suffer him to be silent: wherefore he prevents them, by admonishing first, that both might meet in the will of God. He bids them not to be solicitous to speak, but to live well, and to edify others by their actions; and recommends himself and his widow-church of Antioch to their prayers. Himself he calls their outcast, yet declares that he is ready to be immolated for their sake; and says they were persons who had found mercy, but he a condemned man; they were strengthened in grace, but he

struggling in the midst of dangers. He calls them fellow-travellers in the road to God, which is charity; and says they bore God and Christ in their breasts, and were his temples, embellished with all virtues, and that he exulted exceedingly for the honour of being made worthy to write to them, and rejoice in God with them: for setting a true value on the life to come, they loved nothing but God alone. Speaking of heretics, he says, that he who corrupts the faith for which Christ died, will go into unquenchable fire, and also he who heareth him. It is observed by him that God concealed from the devil three mysteries: the virginity of Mary, her bringing forth, and the death of the Lord; and he calls the Eucharist the medicine of immortality, the antidote against death, by which we always live in Christ. "Remember me, as I pray that Jesus Christ be mindful of you. Pray for the church of Syria, from whence I am carried in chains to Rome, being the last of the faithful who are there—Farewell in God the Father, and in Jesus Christ our common hope." The like instructions he repeats with a new and most moving turn of thought, in his letters to the churches of Magnesia, and of the Trallians, inculcates the greatest abhorrence of schism and heresy, and begs their prayers for himself and his church in Syria, of which he is not worthy to be called a member, being the last of them. His fourth letter was written to the Christians of Rome. The saint knew the all-powerful efficacy of the prayers of the saints, and feared lest they should obtain of God his deliverance from death. He therefore besought St. Polycarp and others at Smyrna, to join their prayers with his, that the cruelty of the wild beasts might quickly rid the world of him, that he might be presented before Jesus Christ. With this view he wrote to the faithful at Rome, to beg that they would not endeavour to obtain of God that the beasts might spare him as they had several other martyrs; which might in-

duce the people to release him, and so dis-appoint him of his crown.

The ardour of divine love which the saint breathes throughout this letter is as inflamed as the subject is extraordinary. In it he writes: "I fear your charity lest it prejudice me. For it is easy for you to do what you please; but it will be difficult for me to attain unto God if you spare me. I shall never have such an opportunity of enjoying God: nor can you, if ye shall now be silent, ever be entitled to the honour of a better work. For if ye be silent in my behalf, I shall be made partaker of God; but if ye love my body, I shall have my course to run again. Therefore, a greater kindness you cannot do me than to suffer me to be sacrificed unto God, whilst the altar is now ready; that so becoming a choir in love, in your hymns ye may give thanks to the Father by Jesus Christ, that God has vouchsafed to bring me, the Bishop of Syria, from the East unto the West, to pass out of the world unto God, that I may rise again unto him. Ye have never envied any one. Ye have taught others. I desire therefore that you will firmly observe that which in your instructions you have prescribed to others. Only pray for me, that God would give me both inward and outward strength, that I may not only say, but do; that I may not only be called a Christian, but be found one: for if I shall be found a Christian, I may then deservedly be called one; and be thought faithful, when I shall no longer appear to the world. Nothing is good that is seen. A Christian is not a work of opinion, but of greatness, when he is hated by the world. I write to the churches, and signify to them all, that I am willing to die for God unless you hinder me. I beseech you that you show not an unseasonable goodwill towards me. Suffer me to be the food of wild beasts, whereby I may attain unto God: I am the wheat of God, and I am to be ground by the teeth of the wild beasts, that I may be found

the pure bread of Christ. Rather entice the beasts to my sepulchre, that they may leave nothing of my body, that, being dead, I may not be troublesome to any. Then shall I be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, when the world shall not see so much as my body. Pray to Christ for me, that in this I may become a sacrifice to God. I do not, as Peter and Paul, command you; they were apostles, I am an inconsiderable person: they were free, I am even yet a slave. But if I suffer I shall then become the freeman of Jesus Christ, and shall arise a freeman in him. Now I am in bonds for him, I learn to have no worldly or vain desires. From Syria even unto Rome I fight with wild beasts both by sea and land, both night and day, bound to ten leopards, that is, to a band of soldiers, who are the worse for kind treatment. But I am the more instructed by their injuries; yet am I not thereby justified.¹ I earnestly wish for the wild beasts that are prepared for me, which I heartily desire may soon dispatch me; whom I will entice to devour me entirely and suddenly, and not serve me as they have done some whom they have been afraid to touch; but if they are unwilling to meddle with me, I will even compel them to it. Pardon me this matter, I know what is good for me. Now I begin to be a disciple: so that I have no desire after any thing visible or invisible, that I may attain to Jesus Christ. Let fire, or the cross, or the concourse of wild beasts, let cutting or tearing of the flesh, let breaking of bones and cutting off limbs, let the shattering in pieces of my whole body, and all the wicked torments of the devil come upon me, so I may but attain to Jesus Christ. All the compass of the earth, and the kingdoms of this world will profit me nothing. It is better for me to die for the sake of Jesus Christ, than to rule unto the ends of the earth. Him I seek who died for us: Him I desire who rose again for us. He is my gain at

(1) 1 Cor. iv. 4.

hand. Pardon me, brethren, be not my hindrance in attaining to life, for Jesus Christ is the life of the faithful: whilst I desire to belong to God, do not ye yield me back to the world. Suffer me to partake of the pure light. When I shall be there, I shall be a man of God. Permit me to imitate the passion of Christ my God. If any one has him within himself, let him consider what I desire, and let him have compassion on me, as knowing how I am straitened. The prince of this world endeavours to snatch me away, and to change the desire with which I burn of being united to God: let none of you who are present attempt to succour me. Be rather on my side, that is, on God's. Entertain no desires of the world, having Jesus Christ in your mouths. Let no envy find place in your breasts. Even were I myself to entreat you when present, do not obey me; but rather believe what I now signify to you by letter. Though I am alive at the writing of this, yet my desire is to die. My love is crucified. The fire that is within me does not crave any water; but being alive and springing within, says: Come to the Father. I take no pleasure in the food of corruption, nor in the pleasure of this life. I desire the bread of God, which is the flesh of Jesus Christ, and for drink his blood, which is incorruptible charity. I desire to live no longer according to men; and this will be if you are willing. Be then willing, that you may be accepted by God. Pray for me that I may possess God. If I shall suffer, ye have loved me: if I shall be rejected, ye have hated me. Remember in your prayers the church of Syria, which now enjoys God for its shepherd instead of me. I am ashamed to be called of their number, for I am not worthy, being the last of them, and an abortive: but through mercy I have obtained that I shall be something, if I enjoy God." The martyr gloried in his sufferings as in the highest honour, and regarded his chains as most precious jewels. His soul was raised above

either the love or the fear of any thing on earth, and, as St. Chrysostom says, he could lay down his life with as much ease and willingness as another man could put off his clothes. He even wished every step of his journey to meet with the wild beasts; and though that death was most shocking and barbarous, and presented the most frightful ideas, sufficient to startle the firmest resolution, yet it was incapable of making the least impression upon his courageous soul. The perfect mortification of his affections appears from his heavenly meekness; and he expressed how perfectly he was dead to himself and the world, living only to God in his heart, by that admirable sentence: "My love is crucified." To signify, as he explains himself afterwards, that his appetites and desires were crucified to the world, and to all the lusts and pleasures of it.

The guards pressed the saint to leave Smyrna, that they might arrive at Rome before the shows were over. He rejoiced exceedingly at their hurry, desiring impatiently to enjoy God by martyrdom. They sailed to Troas, where he was informed that God had restored peace to his church at Antioch, which freed him from the anxiety he had been under, fearing lest there should be some weak ones in his flock. At Troas he wrote three other letters—one to the church of Philadelphia, and a second to the Smyrnæans, in which he calls the heretics who denied Christ to have assumed true flesh, and the Eucharist to be his flesh, wild beasts in human shape, and forbids all communication with them, only allowing them to be prayed for, that they may be brought to repentance, which is very difficult. His last letter is addressed to St. Polycarp, whom he exhorts to labour for Christ without sparing himself, for the measure of his labour will be that of his reward. The style of the martyr every where follows the impulses of a burning charity rather than the rules of grammar, and his pen is never able to express the sublimity of his

thoughts. In every word there is a fire and a beauty not to be paralleled; every thing is full of a deep sense. He every where breathes the most profound humility and contempt of himself as an abortive, and the last of men; a great zeal for the church, and abhorrence of schisms; the most ardent love of God and his neighbour, and tenderness for his own flock—begging the prayers of all the churches in its behalf to whom he wrote, and entreating of several that they would send an embassy to his church at Antioch to comfort and exhort them. The seven epistles of this apostolic father—the same which were quoted by St. Irenæus, Origen, Eusebius, St. Athanasius, St. Chrysostom, Theodoret, Gildas, &c.—are published genuine by Usher, Vossius, Cotelier, &c., and in English by Archbishop Wake, in 1710.

St. Ignatius, not being allowed time to write to the other churches of Asia, commissioned St. Polycarp to do it for him. From Troas they sailed to Neapolis, in Macedonia, and went thence to Philippi, from which place they crossed Macedonia and Epirus on foot, but took shipping again at Epidamnus, in Dalmatia, and sailing by Rhegium and Puteoli, were carried by a strong gale into the Roman port, the great station of the navy near Ostia, at the mouth of the Tiber, sixteen miles from Rome. He would gladly have landed at Puteoli, to have traced St. Paul's steps, by going on foot from that place to Rome, but the wind rendered it impracticable. On landing, the authors of these acts, who were his companions, say they were seized with grief, seeing they were soon to be separated from their dear master, but he rejoiced to find himself so near the end of his race. The soldiers hastened him on, because the public shows were drawing to an end. The faithful of Rome came out to meet him, rejoicing at the sight of him, but grieving that they were so soon to lose him by a barbarous death. They earnestly wished that he might be released at the request of the people. The martyr

knew in spirit their thoughts, and said much more to them than he had done in his letter on the subject of true charity, conjuring them not to obstruct his going to the Lord. Then kneeling with all the brethren, he prayed to the Son of God for the church, for the ceasing of the persecution, and for perpetual charity and unanimity among the faithful. He arrived at Rome on the 20th of December, the last day of the public entertainments, and was presented to the prefect of the city, to whom the emperor's letter was delivered at the same time. He was then hurried by the soldiers into the amphitheatre. The saint, hearing the lions roar, cried out, "I am the wheat of the Lord; I must be ground by the teeth of these beasts to be made the pure bread of Christ." Two fierce lions being let out upon him, they instantly devoured him, leaving nothing of his body but the larger bones; thus his prayer was heard. "After having been present at this sorrowful spectacle," say our authors, "which made us shed many tears, we spent the following night in our house in watching and prayer, begging of God to afford us some comfort by certifying us of his glory." They relate that their prayer was heard, and that several of them in their slumber saw him in great bliss. They are exact in setting down the day of his death, that they might assemble yearly thereon to honour his martyrdom. They add that his bones were taken up and carried to Antioch, and there laid in a chest as an inestimable treasure. St. Chrysostom says his relics were carried in triumph on the shoulders of all the cities from Rome to Antioch. They were first laid in the cemetery without the Daphnetic gate, but in the reign of Theodosius the younger, were translated thence with great pomp to a church in the city, which had been a temple of Fortune, but from this time bore his name, as Evagrius relates.¹ St. Chrysostom exhorts all people to visit them,

assuring them they would receive thereby many advantages, spiritual and corporal, which he proves at length.¹ They are now at Rome, in the Church of St. Clement, pope, whither they were brought about the time when Antioch fell into the hands of the Saracens, in the reign of Heraclius, in 637.² The regular canons at Arouaise, near Bapaume, in Artois, the Benedictin monks at Liesse, in Hainault and some other churches, have obtained each some bone of this glorious martyr.³ The Greeks keep his feast a holyday on the day of his death, the 20th of December. His martyrdom happened in 107.

The perfect spirit of humility, meekness, patience, charity, and all other Christian virtues, which the seven epistles of St. Ignatius breathe in every part, cannot fail deeply to affect all who attentively read them. Critics confess that they find in them a sublimity, an energy and beauty of thought and expression, which they cannot sufficiently admire. But the Christian is far more astonished at the saint's perfect disengagement of heart from the world, the ardour of his love for God, and the earnestness of his desire of martyrdom. Every period in them is full of profound sense, which must be attentively meditated on before we can discover the divine sentiments of all virtues which are here expressed. Nor can we consider them without being inspired by some degree of the same, and being covered with confusion to find ourselves fall so far short of the humility and fervour of the primitive saints. Let us listen to the instructions which this true disciple of Christ gives in his letter to the Philadelphians, an abstract of his other six epistles being given above. He begins it by a strenuous recommendation of union with their bishop, priests, and deacons, and gives to their bishop (whom he does not

(1) Or. in St. Ignat. t. ii. p. 600, ed. Nov.

(2) See Baron Annal. ad an. 637, and Not ad Martyr. Rom. ad 17 Dec.

(3) See Henschenius, Feb. t. i. p. 35.

(4) Evagr. Hist. Eccl. lib. i. c. 16, ed. Vales.

name) great praises, especially for his humility and meekness, insomuch that he says his silence was more powerful than the vain discourses of others, and that conversing with an unchangeable serenity of mind, and in the sweetness of the living God, he was utterly a stranger to anger. He charges them to refrain from the pernicious weeds of heresy and schism, which are not planted by the Father, nor kept by Christ. "Whoever belong to God and Jesus Christ, these are with the bishop. If any one follows him who maketh a schism, he obtains not the inheritance of the kingdom of God. He who walks in the simplicity of obedience is not enslaved to his passion. Use one Eucharist; for the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ is one, and the cup is one in the unity of his blood. There is one altar, as there is one bishop, with the college of the priesthood and the deacons, my fellow-servants, that you may do all things according to God. My brethren, my heart is exceedingly dilated in the tender love which I bear you, and exulting beyond bounds, I render you secure and cautious—not I, indeed, but Jesus Christ, in whom being bound I fear the more for myself, being yet imperfect. But your prayer with God will make me perfect, that I may obtain the portion which his mercy assigns me." Having cautioned them against adopting Jewish ceremonies, and against divisions and schisms, he mentions one that had lately happened among them, and speaks of a revelation which he had received of it as follows:—"When I was amongst you I cried out with a loud voice, with the voice of God, saying, Hearken to your bishop, and the priesthood, and the deacons. Some suspected that I said this from a foresight of the division which some afterwards made. But He for whom I am in chains is my witness that I knew it not from man, but the Spirit declared it, saying, Do ye nothing without your bishop. Keep your body holy as the temple of God. Be lovers of unity; shun all divi-

sions. Be ye imitators of Jesus Christ, as he is of the Father. I therefore did what lay in me, as one framed to maintain union. Where disagreement or anger is found, there God never dwells. But God forgives all penitents." He charges them to send some person of honour from their church to congratulate with his church in Syria upon peace being restored to it, and calls him blessed who should be honoured with this commission.