



LEO

MAGNVS

ST. LEO THE GREAT, P.

[From the councils, t. iv., this pope's works in the late Roman edition, and the historians of that age. See Tillemont, t. xv. p. 141, and Ceillier, t. xiv. p. 316, who chiefly follow Quesnel's collection of memoirs for his life, Op. t. ii. Diss. 1, which must be compared with, and often corrected by, the remarks of F. Cacciari, in his Exercitationes in Opera S. Leonis, especially in those De Hæresi Pelagianâ et De Hæresi Eutybianâ.]

A.D. 461.

ST. LEO, surnamed the Great, was descended of a noble Tuscan family, but born at Rome, as he himself and St. Prosper assures us.¹ The quickness of his parts, and the maturity of his judgment, appeared in the rapid progress which he made in his studies. Having rendered himself a great master in the different branches of polite literature, especially eloquence, he turned his thoughts entirely to the study of the holy scriptures and theology, to which he made the profane sciences only subservient. "God, who destined him to gain great victories over error, and to subject human wisdom to the true faith, had put into his hands the arms of science and truth," as an ancient general council says.² Being made archdeacon of the church of Rome, he had the chief direction of the most important affairs under Pope Celestine, as appears from St. Prosper, a letter of St. Cyril to him, and Cassian's book against Nestorius. To his penetration and zeal it was owing afterwards that Sextus III. discovered the dissimulation of Julian the Pelagian, and rejected his false repentance. It happened that Aetius

(1) Ep. 27, ad Falcher. c. 4.

(2) Conc. t. iv. p. 820.

and Albinus, two generals of the Emperor Valentinian III., were at variance in Gaul, and no one being so well qualified to compose their differences as the eloquent and virtuous Archdeacon Leo, he was sent upon that important commission. During his absence, Sixtus III. died in 440, and the Roman clergy cast their eyes upon him for their pastor, judging that he, who for sanctity, learning, prudence, and eloquence was the first man of his age, was the most worthy and fit to be seated in the first chair of the church. The qualifications and virtues which we admire when found single in others, were all united in him to a very great degree. This justly raised throughout the Christian world, the highest expectations from his administration; which yet his great actions far surpassed. He was invited to Rome by a public embassy, and expected with impatience but it was forty days before he could arrive. The joy with which he was received is not to be expressed, and he received the episcopal consecration on Sunday the 29th of September, in 440. We learn from himself what were his sentiments at the news of his exaltation. He considered a high dignity as a place where falls are most frequent, and always most dangerous; and he cried out,¹ "Lord, I have heard your voice calling me, and I was afraid: I considered the work which was enjoined me, and I trembled. For what proportion is there between the burden assigned to me and my weakness, this elevation and my nothingness? What is more to be feared than exaltation without merit, the exercise of the most holy functions being intrusted to one who is buried in sin? O you who have laid upon me this heavy burden, bear it with me, I beseech you: be you my guide and my support: give me strength, you who have called me to the work; who have laid this heavy burden on my shoulders."

A heart thus empty of itself could not

(1) Serm. 2, de Assumpt. suâ. c. 1, p. 4, t. i. ed. Rom.

fail to be supported and directed by the divine grace. He was called to the government of the church in the most difficult times, and he diligently applied himself without delay to cultivate the great field committed to his care, and especially to pluck up the weeds of errors, and to root out the thorns of vices wherever they appeared. He never intermitted to preach to his people with great zeal; which he often mentions as the most indispensable duty of pastors, and the constant practice of his predecessors.¹ A hundred and one sermons, preached by this pope on the principal festivals of the year, are now extant. He often inculcates in them the practice of holy fasting and alms-deeds, as good works which ought to be joined and support each other. We have among his works nine sermons on the fast of the tenth month, or of Ember-days in December. He says, the church has instituted the Ember-days in the four seasons of the year to sanctify each season by a fast:² also to pay to God a tribute of thanksgiving for the fruits and other blessings which we continually receive from his bounty:³ and to arm us constantly against the devil. He sets forth the obligation of alms, which is so great, that for this alone God gives riches, and not to be hoarded up, or lavished in superfluities: and at the last day he seems in his sentence chiefly to recompense this virtue, and to punish the neglect of it, to show us how much alms-deeds are the key of heaven, and of all other graces.⁴ He says, this obligation binds all persons, though it is not to be measured by what a man has, but by the heart; for all men are bound to have the same benevolence and desire of relieving others.⁵ That the rich are obliged to seek out the bashful poor, who are to be assisted without being

put to the blush in receiving.¹ He shows the institution of Collects or gatherings for the poor to be derived from the apostles, and ever to have been continued in the church for the relief of the indigent.² He surpasses himself in sentiment and eloquence whenever he speaks of the sweetness of the divine love which is displayed to us in the mystery of the incarnation of the Son of God. His one hundred and forty-one epistles are wholly employed in treating on important subjects of discipline and faith, and alone suffice to show his pastoral vigilance and immense labours in every part of the Christian world, for the advancement of piety. He brought many infidels to the faith, and took great delight in instructing them himself. His signal victories over the Manichees, Arians, Apollinarists, Nestorians, Eutychians, Novatians, and Donatists, are standing proofs of his zeal for the purity of the faith. Carthage being taken by the Vandals in 439, a great number of Manichees fled out of Africa to Rome: but there, to escape the rigour of the imperial laws against their sect, feigned themselves Catholics. They called wine the gall of the dragon, produced by the devil or their evil god: on which account they always refrained from that liquor, which they regarded, as of its own nature, unclean. To conceal themselves, they received the holy communion from the catholic priests, but under one kind alone, which it was left to every one's discretion then to do. This affectation of the heretics passed some time unobserved, as we learn from St. Leo,³ in the year 433. But he no sooner discovered this sacrilegious abuse, than he took the utmost care to prevent the contagion from infecting his flock. He detected several of these heretics, and among them one whom they called their bishop, and to manifest the impiety of this sect, he assembled several bishops

(1) Serm. 3, 7, 11.

(2) Serm. 18.

(3) Serm. 12.

(4) Serm. 8, c. 3, p. 17; and Serm. 9, c. 3, p. 20; Serm. 10, c. 1, p. 21.

(5) Serm. 7, item. 5 and 6, 16, 39, &c.

(1) Serm. 8, p. 17.

(2) Serm. 10, p. 21.

(3) Serm. 4, de Quadrag. t. i. p. 217.

and priests, and the most illustrious persons of the senate and empire, and caused the elect of the Manichees, that is, those that were initiated in their mysteries, to be introduced.¹ They confessed publicly many impious tenets, superstitions, and a crime which modesty forbids to be named.² St. Prosper says their books were burnt; but many of them repented, and abjured their heresy. St. Leo, in receiving them into the church, exhorted his people to pray and sigh with him for them.³ Those that remained obstinate were banished. St. Leo about the same time crushed Pelagianism, which began again to show its head about Aquileia.⁴ His watchfulness put a stop to the growing evil, both in those parts and in Rome itself, where St. Prosper detected some remains of the same leaven. For this pope, who was a true judge of merit, and drew many learned men about his person, had chosen St. Prosper of Aquitain his secretary to write his letters and dispatch the like business. The Priscillianist heretics reigned almost uncontrolled in Spain: only St. Turibus, Bishop of Astorga, zealously opposed them. St. Leo wrote to commend his zeal, and to awake the attention of the other bishops of that country, whom he ordered to convene a council for the extirpation of the spreading cancer.⁵ He examined the cause of Chelidonius, Bishop of Besançon, deposed by St. Hilary of Arles, and restored him to his see.⁶ He transferred the dignity of primate from the see of Arles to that of Vienne in Gaul, which Zosimus had formerly adjudged to Arles,⁷ "Out of respect," as he said, "for the blessed Trophimus (first Bishop of Arles), from the fountain of whose preaching all the Gauls had received the streams of faith."⁸ The learned

De Marca thinks that St. Leo did not deny the jurisdiction of Hilary over Besançon before that time, but he judged Chelidonius not to have been guilty of that which had been laid to his charge, adding, "that the sentence would have stood firm if the things objected had been true." St. Leo laid down this important maxim for the rule of his conduct, never to give any decision, especially to the prejudice of another, before he had examined into the affair with great caution and exactness, and most carefully taken all information possible. He was very careful in the choice of persons whom he promoted to holy orders, as his writings show; yet the author of the *Spiritual Meadow* relates, that he heard Amos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, say to several abbots: "Pray for me. The dreadful weight of the priesthood affrights me beyond measure, especially the charge of conferring orders. I have found it written, that the blessed Pope Leo, equal to the angels, watched and prayed forty days at the tomb of St. Peter, begging through the intercession of that apostle to obtain of God the pardon of his sins. After this term, St. Peter, in a vision, said to him, 'Your sins are forgiven you by God, except those committed by you in conferring holy orders: of these you still remain charged to give a rigorous account.'"¹ St. Leo, with regard to those who are to be ordained ministers of the altar, lays down this rule, inserted in his words into the body of the canon law: "What is it not to lay hands upon any one suddenly, according to the precept of the apostle, but not to raise to the honour of the priesthood any who have not been thoroughly tried, or before a mature age, a competent time of trial, the merit of labour in the service of the church, and sufficient proofs given of their submission to rule, and their love of discipline and zeal for its observance."²

(1) Ep. 8, p. 33; and Ep. 15, c. 16, p. 71, t. i.; Serm. 15, p. 31, t. i.; Serm. 33, p. 87; Serm. 41, p. 111

(2) Ep. 15, ad Turib. p. 62; Serm. 15.

(3) Serm. 33; Ep. 8. (4) Ep. 15.

(5) Ep. 15. (6) Ep. 9, 10.

(7) See Baronius, ad an. 417.

(8) Zosimus, Ep. ad Ep. Gal.

(1) Prat. Spir. c. 149.

(2) St. Leo, Ep. 1, t. ii. p. 2, ed. Rom. Item *Distinct.* 78, 3. Quid est manus, from 1 Tim. v. 22.

Many affairs in the churches of the East furnished this great pope with much employment, as the intrusion of Bassian into the see of Ephesus,¹ &c. But above all the rest, the rising heresy of Eutyches drew his attention on that side of the world. This heresiarch had been condemned by St. Flavian in 448; yet, by the intrigues of Chrysaphius, a powerful eunuch, he prevailed with the weak Emperor Theodosius II. to assemble a packed council at Ephesus, in which Dioscorus, the wicked Patriarch of Alexandria, an Eutychian, and general disturber of Christian peace, took upon him to preside. This pretended synod, commonly called the Latrocinale, or cabal of Ephesus, met on the 8th of August, 449, acquitted Eutyches, and condemned St. Flavian, with a degree of malice and violence unheard of among barbarians. The legates of Leo, who were Julius, Bishop of Pozzoli, the ancient Puteoli; Renatus, a priest; Hilarius, a deacon; and Dulcitus, a notary, refused to subscribe to the unjust sentence, and opposed it with a zeal and vigour that was admired by the whole world, says Theodoret.² Upon the first advice of these proceedings, St. Leo declared them null and void,³ and at the same time he wrote to St. Flavian to encourage him, and to the emperor himself, telling him that no sacrilegious cabal ever came up to the fury of this assembly,⁴ and conjuring him in these words: "Leave to the bishops the liberty of defending the faith: no powers or terrors of the world will ever be able to destroy it. Protect the church, and seek to preserve its peace, that Christ may protect your empire." He adds, that he trembles to see him draw down the divine vengeance upon his own head: which had the appearance

of a prediction, on account of the various misfortunes which befel that prince, and his sudden death: though before the latter event his eyes began to be opened. Marcian and St. Pulcheria, succeeding in the empire, vigorously supported the zealous endeavours of the pope. By his authority the General Council of Chalcedon, consisting of six hundred or six hundred and thirty bishops was opened on the 8th of October in 451. St. Leo presided by his legates, Paschasinus, Bishop of Lilybæum; Lucentius, Bishop of Ascoli; and Boniface, priest of Rome. In this synod the memory of St. Flavian was vindicated, and Dioscorus was convicted of having maliciously suppressed the letters of St. Leo in the Latrocinale of Ephesus, and of having presumed to excommunicate St. Leo, which attempt was made the principal cause of his deposition; for which, besides other crimes, it was also urged against him, that he had pretended to hold a general council without the authority of the pope, a thing never lawful, and never done, as was observed by the pope's legates.¹ For these crimes and excesses, he was by the pope's legates and the whole council declared excommunicated and deposed.² St. Leo had wrote to St. Flavian on the 13th of June in 449, a long and accurate doctrinal letter, in which he clearly expounded the catholic faith concerning the mystery of the incarnation, against the errors both of Nestorius and Eutyches. This excellent letter had been suppressed by Dioscorus, but was read by the legates at Chalcedon, and declared by the voice of that general council to be dictated by the Holy Ghost, and to be a rule throughout the universal church. The great Theodoret having read it, blessed God for having preserved his holy faith.³ St. Leo approved all things that had been done in this council re-

(1) Conc. t. iv. p. 687. (2) Theodoret, Ep. 116.

(3) Conc. t. iv. p. 47; and St. Leo, Ep. 49 and 56; ed. Quesn. 50 and 57, ed. Rom.

(4) St. Leo, Ep. 42, in ed. Quesn. 43, in ed. Rom. p. 187, t. ii.; St. Leo ad Theodos. Imp. Ep. 40 ed. Quesn. 41, ed Rom, p. 178; Ep. ad Pulcheriam Augustam, Ep. 41; ed Quesn. 42, ed. Rom. p. 183.

(1) See Marcade Concordia, Sac. et Imperii, lib. v. c. 5, and Cacciari, Exercit. in Op. S. Leonis Dissert. de Hæresi Eutychianâ.

(2) Conc. t. iv. p. 424. (3) Theodoret, Ep. 121.

lating to definitions of faith; but, being an enemy to innovations, vigorously opposed the twenty-eighth canon, framed in the absence of his legates, by which the Archbishop of Constantinople was declared a patriarch, and the first among the patriarchs of the East.¹ However, the eastern bishops, who usually found access to the emperor through the Bishop of Constantinople, allowed him that pre-eminence, which the law of custom confirmed.² The same council declared the Bishop of Jerusalem independent of Antioch, and Primate of the three Palestines.³ In the synodal letter to St. Leo, the fathers beseech him to confirm their decrees, saying, "he had presided over them as the head over its members."⁴ The pope restrained his confirmation to the decrees relating to matters of faith,⁵ which were received with the utmost respect imaginable by the whole church. Theodoret was restored to his see in the council, after having anathematized Nestorius. Ibas, Bishop of Edessa, who had been unjustly deposed with Theodoret in the Latrocinale of Ephesus, was likewise restored upon the same condition. The latter seems never to have been very solicitous about Nestorius, but was a warm defender of Theodorus of Mopsuestia, whom he regarded as an orthodox doctor, because he died in the communion of the church. Ibas was accused of Nestorianism, but acquitted by Domnus, Patriarch of Antioch, and a council held in that city in 448. But his letter to Maris, the Persian, was afterwards condemned in the fifth general council.

Whilst the Eastern empire was thus distracted by heretical factions, the Western was harassed by barbarians. Attila, the Hunn, enriched with the plunder of many nations and cities, marched against Rome. In the general consternation, Saint Leo,

at the request of the whole city of Rome, went to meet Attila, in hopes of mollifying his rage, and averting the danger that threatened his country. Avienus, a man of consular dignity, and Trygetius, who had been prefect of the city, were deputed to accompany him in this embassy. They found the haughty tyrant at Ambuleium, near Ravenna, where the highway passes the river Menzo. Contrary to the expectation of every one, he received the pope with great honour, gave him a favourable audience, and, through his suggestion, concluded a treaty of peace with the empire on the condition of an annual tribute. Baronius, from a writer of the eighth century, relates that Attila saw two venerable personages, supposed to be the apostles SS. Peter and Paul, standing on the side of the pope whilst he spoke. The king immediately commanded his army to forbear all hostilities, and soon after repassed the Alps, and retired beyond the Danube into Pannonia, but in his way home was seized with a violent vomiting of blood, of which he died in 453. Divisions among his children and princes destroyed the empire of the Hunns.¹ Thus fell the most haughty and furious of all the barbarian heathen kings, styled the Terror of the World, and the Scourge of God, whose instrument he was in punishing the sins of Christians. It was the glory of St. Leo to have checked his fury and protected Rome, when it was in no condition of defence. In 455, the friends of Aëtius (whose greatness and arrogance had given the emperor so much umbrage that he caused him to be assassinated) revenged the death of that general by the murder of Valentinian himself. His wife Eudoxia married by compulsion the tyrant Maximus who had usurped his throne; but, not brooking these affronts, she invited Genseric, the Arian Vandal king, from Africa, to come and revenge the murder of her husband. Maximus fled, but was slain by

(1) St. Leo Ep. 87, 92.

(2) See Thomassin, *Discipline de l'Eglise*, lib. i. c. 6.

(3) Sess. 7. (4) *Conc. t. iv. p. 833.*

(5) St. Leo, Ep. 97, c. 2, p. 613; Ep. 92, c. 5, p. 623, &c.

(1) *Jornand. Rer. Goth. c. 12, 49; Prosp. in Chron. ad. an 452.*

Valentinian's servants on the 12th of June, in the twenty-seventh day of his reign, in 455. Three days after, Genseric arrived, and found the gates of Rome open to receive him. St. Leo went out to meet him, and prevailed with him to restrain his troops from slaughter and burning, and to content himself with the plunder of the city. The example of St. Leo shows that, even in the worst of times, a holy pastor is the greatest comfort and support of his flock. After the departure of the Vandals, with their captives and an immense booty, St. Leo sent zealous catholic priests and alms for the relief of the captives in Africa. He repaired the Basilics, and replaced the rich plate and ornaments of the churches which had been plundered, though some part had escaped by being concealed, especially what belonged to the churches of SS. Peter and Paul, which Baronius thinks Genseric spared, and granted to them the privilege of sanctuaries, as was done at other times. This great pope, for his humility, mildness, and charity, was revered and beloved by emperors, princes, and all ranks of people, even infidels and barbarians. He filled the holy see twenty-one years, one month, and thirteen days, dying on the 10th of November, 461. His body was interred in the church of St. Peter, and afterwards translated to another place, in the same church, on the 11th of April, on which day his name is placed in the Roman calendar. His relics were again translated with great solemnity and devotion, inclosed in a case of lead, and placed in the altar dedicated to God under his invocation, in the Vatican church, in the year 1715, as is related at length by Pope Benedict XIV.¹ A writer who delights in retailing slander could not refuse this character of St. Leo: "He was," says he, "without doubt a man of extraordinary parts, far superior to all who had governed that church before him, and scarce equalled by any since."

(1) *De Canonis. lib. iv. c. 22. § 8, 9, 10. t. iv. pp. 212, 213.*

The writings of this great pastor are the monuments of his extraordinary genius and piety. His thoughts are true, bright, and strong; and in every sentiment and expression we find a loftiness which raises our admiration. By it we are dazzled and surprised in every period, and whilst we think it impossible that the style should not sink, we are astonished always to find it swelling in the same tenour, and with equal dignity and strength. His diction is pure and elegant; his style concise, clear, and pleasing. It would sometimes appear turgid in another; but in him, where it seems to swell the highest, a natural ease and delicacy remove all appearance of affectation and study, and show it to be the pure effort of a surprising genius and lofty natural eloquence. But the dress with which he clothes his thoughts is much less to be considered than the subjects themselves of which he treats, in which the most consummate piety and skill in theology equally raise admiration, instruct and edify his readers in the learned and pious sermons, and doctrinal letters, which compose his works. His unwearied zeal and unshaken steadiness against vice and error, though armed with all the power of a world leagued with the devils against the truth, procured the church infinite advantages and victories over the reigning novelties of that age; and his writings are an armoury against all succeeding heresies. He fully and clearly explains the whole mystery of the incarnation; he proves, against the Eutychians, that Christ had a true body, because his body is really received in the holy eucharist. He laments, as the greatest of spiritual evils, that at Alexandria, during the violences exercised by the Eutychians, the oblation of the sacrifice, and the benediction of chrism had been interrupted. He is very explicit on the supremacy of St. Peter, and on that of his successors. He often recommends himself to the prayers of the saints reigning in heaven, especially of St. Peter, and exhorts others

to place great confidence in their powerful intercession. He honours their relics and festivals, and testifies that their churches were adorned with lights. He calls the fast of Lent an apostolical tradition, also that of the Ember-days, Whitsun-eve, &c. He adds that the church retained the fast of Ember-days in December, from the Jewish practice before Christ. Pope Benedict XIV., in a decree by which he commands St. Leo to be honoured with the mass peculiar to doctors, dated in 1744, bestows on him due praises for his eminent learning and sanctity.

According to the observation of this holy doctor, it is a fundamental maxim of our holy religion, that the only true and valuable riches consist in that blessed poverty of spirit which Christ teaches us to look upon as the first and main step to all happiness. This is a profound and sincere humility of heart, and a perfect disengagement from all inordinate love of earthly goods. By this rule, those who are exalted above others by their rank, learning, or other abilities, differ not by these advantages from the poorest in the eyes of God: only poverty of spirit makes the distinction, and shows which is truly the greatest. Of this courageous poverty the apostles and primitive Christians set us the most illustrious example. "What is greater than this their humility? What is richer than this their poverty?" By imitating this spirit, we enter into the possession of the riches of Christ. And we shall improve our share in all these spiritual treasures of grace, love, peace, and all virtues, in proportion as we shall advance in this spirit. St. Leo puts us in mind in another place, that in putting on this spirit, which is no other than that of Christ or the new man, consists that newness of life in which we are bound to walk according to the spirit of Christ; which delivers us from the power of darkness, and transfers us into the kingdom of the Son of God; which raises our love and desires of heavenly goods, and extinguishes

in us the concupiscence of the flesh. We put on this spirit by baptism, and we strengthen ourselves in it by being fed with the body of Christ. "For what is the fruit of our partaking of the body and blood of Christ, but that we may pass into that which we receive; and that in whom we are dead, and buried, and raised again (in the newness of our spirit and life) we may bear him both in spirit and in our flesh through all things." Next to frequent devout communion, the assiduous meditation on the life of Christ is the most powerful means of learning the true spirit of his divine virtues, particularly of that humility of which his whole life was the most astonishing model, and which is the summary of his holy precepts. St. Leo, by his tender devotion to our Redeemer, and the zeal with which he defended the mystery of his incarnation, was penetrated with his spirit of poverty and humility; from whence sprang that ardent charity, that admirable greatness of soul, and that invincible courage which were so conspicuous in all his actions.

ST. ANTIPAS, M.

CALLED by Christ his faithful witness, Apoc. xi. 13. He suffered at Pergamus, where his tomb was famed for miracles in after ages. See Papebroke, p. 4; Tillemont, t. ii. p. 130.
