

ST. BONIFACE, M.¹

From his authentic Acts in Henschenius, p. 283; Fleury, &c.

About the Year 307.

HERE lived at Rome, about the beginning of the fourth century, & certain lady called Aglaë, young, beautiful, and well-born, and so rich and fond of making a figure in the world, that she had entertained the city three several times with public shows at her own charge. Her chief steward was one Boniface, with whom she entertained a criminal commerce. This man, though addicted to wine and all kinds of debauchery, was, however, remarkable for three good qualities, hospitality, liberality, and compassion. Whensoever he saw a stranger or traveler, he would assist him very cordially; and he used to go about the streets and into the public places, in the night time, and relieve the poor according to their necessities. After several years' commerce in the vicious way already mentioned, Aglaë, touched with a motion of divine grace, and feeling some compunction within herself, called Boniface to her, and thus opened her mind to him: "You are sensible how deep we are plunged in vice, without reflecting that we must appear before God to give an account of all our actions. I have heard say, that they who honor those that suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ, shall have a share in their glory. In the East, the servants of Jesus Christ every day suffer torments, and lay down their lives for his sake. Go thither then, and bring me the relics of some of those conquerors, that we may honor their memories, and be saved by their assistance." Boniface came into the proposal; and having raised a considerable sum of money to purchase the bodies of the martyrs from their executioners, and to distribute among the poor, said to Aglaë on his departure, "I won't fail to bring back with me the relics of martyrs, if I find any; but what if my own body should be brought to you for that of a martyr?" She reproved him for jesting in a matter so serious. The steward set out, but was now entirely a new man. Penetrated with sentiments of compunction, in all that long journey from Rome into the East, he neither ate meat nor drank wine; and his fasts he accompanied with prayers, tears, and penitential works. The church, at that time, enjoyed peace in the West, but in the East, the persecution which had been begun by Dioclesian, was carried on with great cruelty by Galerius Maximianus and Maximinus Daie. It raged most fiercely in Cilicia, under an inhuman governor named Simplicius. Boniface therefore directed his journey to Tarsus, the capital of that country. He no sooner arrived at the city, but alighting, he sent away all his servants with the horses to an inn, and went himself straight to the court of the governor, whom he found seated on his tribunal, and many holy martyrs suffering under their tortures; one hanged up by the feet, with his head over a fire: another stretched almost to the tearing of his limbs on four planks or stakes: a third sawn asunder: a fourth had his hands cut off; a fifth was fixed to the ground by a stake run through his neck: a sixth having his hands and feet tied behind him, the executioners were beating him with clubs. There were no less than twenty tortured after this cruel manner, the sight whereof shocked the beholders, while their courage and resolution filled them with amazement. Boniface went boldly up to these champions of Christ, and having saluted them, cried out: "Great is the God of the Christians, great is the God of the holy martyrs. I beseech you, the servants of

¹Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Fathers, Martyrs and Other Principal Saints*, vol. 2 (New York: P. J. Kenedy, 1903), 321–323.

Jesus Christ, to pray for me, that I may join with you in fighting against the devil.” The governor thought himself insulted by so bold an action in his presence, and asked him in great wrath who he was. The martyr answered that he was a Christian, and that having Jesus Christ for his master, he feared nothing the governor could inflict to make him renounce that sacred name. Simplicius, in a rage, ordered some reeds to be sharpened and thrust under his nails: and this being done, he commanded boiling lead to be poured into his mouth. Boniface, after having called upon Jesus Christ for his assistance, begged he prayers of the other expiring martyrs, who all joined in putting up their petitions to God for him. The people, disgusted with so much cruelty, began to raise a tumult, and cried out, “Great is the God of the Christians.” Simplicius was alarmed, and withdrew. But the next day being seated on his tribunal, he ordered Boniface to be brought before him a second time. The martyr appeared constant and undaunted. The judge commanded him to be cast into a caldron of boiling pitch; but he came out without receiving any hurt. Lastly, he was condemned to lose his head and after a short prayer for the pardon of his sins, and the conversion of his persecutors, he cheerfully presented his neck to the executioner. His companions, in the mean time, not finding him return to the inn, searched for him in those parts of the city where they thought him most likely to be found. Being at last informed by the jailer’s brother, that a stranger had been beheaded the day before for his faith in Christ, and being shown the dead body and the head, they assured him that it was the very person they were in search of, and beseeched him to bestow the martyr’s relics upon them; this he refused to do without a reward: so they paid down five hundred pieces of gold; and having embalmed it, carried it home with them, praising God for the happy end of the blessed martyr. Aglaë, upon information of the affair, gave God thanks for his victory, and taking some priests with her, met the corpse with tapers and perfumes half a mile out of Rome, on the Latin road;² and in that very place raised a monument in which she laid them, and some years after built a chapel. She from that time led a penitential retired life, and dying fifteen years after, was buried near his relics. They were found in Rome in 1603, together with those of St. Alexius, in the church in Rome formerly called of St. Boniface, but now of St. Alexius. The bodies of both St. Boniface and St. Alexius lie under the stately high altar in two rich marble tombs. The martyrdom of St. Boniface happened about the year 307.

While we praise the divine mercy, who of sinners maketh saints, we ought earnestly to pray that he change our hearts from vessels of corruption into vessels of grace and his divine charity. Regret and sorrow for sin has many degrees; but till it has entirely subdued the corruptions, changed the affections, and purified the heart, it is not a saving repentance, or that charity and love which animates or impregnates the new creature.² The certain proof of regeneration or of a real conversion is victory. He that is born of God overcometh the world. The maxims of the gospel, the rules of the church, and reason itself, forbid us to look upon him as a sincere convert whose life is very uneven, unconstant, and contradictory to itself; if he be to-day a saint, and to-morrow a sinner; if he follow to-day the impulses of the Holy Ghost, and yield to-morrow to the temptations of the enemy; or if he has not courage to fly the dangers and renounce the occasions which are fatal to him.

² We cannot be surprised at this circumstance in the acts, on reflecting that the church at Rome then enjoyed peace. *Consurgens Aglaës confestim accepit secum clericos et viros religiosos; et sic cum hymnis et canticis spiritualibus et omni veneratione obviavit sancto corpori.* (Ruin p. 290, fol.) The like is related of the martyr St. Cyprian, even in the heat of the persecution, that his disciples carried off his body with wax-lights and torches. *Inde per noctem sublatum cum cereis.* &c: Ib. p. 218.