

The murder of his youthful ward, Valentinian II, which happened in Gaul, May, 393, just as Ambrose was crossing the Alps to baptize him plunged the Saint into deep affliction. His eulogy delivered at Milan is singularly tender; he courageously described him as a martyr baptized in his own blood. The usurper Eugenius was, in fact, a heathen at heart, and openly proclaimed his resolution to restore paganism. He reopened the heathen temples, and ordered the famous altar of Victory, concerning which Ambrose and the prefect Symmachus had maintained a long and determined literary contest, to be again set up in the Roman senate chamber. This triumph of paganism was of short duration. Theodosius in the spring of 391 again led his legions into the West, and in a brief campaign defeated and slew the tyrant. Roman heathenism perished with him. The Emperor recognized the merits of the great Bishop of Milan by announcing his victory on the evening of the battle and asking him to celebrate a solemn sacrifice of thanksgiving. Theodosius did not long survive his triumph; he died at Milan a few months later (January 395) with Ambrose at his bedside and the name of Ambrose on his lips. "Even while death was dissolving his body", says the Saint, "he was more concerned about the welfare of the churches than about his personal danger". "I loved him, and am confident that the Lord will hearken to the prayer I send up for his pious soul" (In obitu Theodosii, c. 35). Only two years elapsed before a kindly death reunited these two magnanimous souls. No human frame could long endure the incessant activity of an Ambrose. One instance, recorded by his secretary, of his extraordinary capacity for work is significant. He died on Good Friday. The following day five bishops found difficulty in baptizing the crowd to which he had been accustomed to administer the sacrament unaided. When the news spread that he was seriously ill, Count Stilicho, "fearing that his death would involve the destruction of Italy", despatched an embassy, composed of the chief citizens, to implore him to pray God to prolong his days. The response of the Saint made a deep impression on St. Augustine: "I have not so lived amongst you, that I need be ashamed to live; nor do I fear to die, for we have a good Lord". For several hours before his death he lay with extended arms in imitation of his expiring Master, who also appeared to him in person. The Body of Christ was given him by the Bishop of Vercelli, and, "after swallowing It, he peacefully breathed his last". It was the fourth of April, 397. He was interred as he had desired, in his beloved basilica, by the side of the holy martyrs, Gervasius and Protasius, the discovery of whose relics, during his great struggle with Justina, had so consoled him and his faithful adherents. In the year 835 one of his successors, Angilbert II, placed the relics of the three saints in a porphyry sarcophagus under the altar, where they were found in 1864. The works of St. Ambrose were issued first from the press of Froben at Basle, 1527, under the supervision of Erasmus. A more elaborate edition was printed in Rome in the year 1580 and following. Cardinal Montalto was the chief editor until elevation to the papacy as Sixtus V. It is in five volumes and still retains a value owing to the prefixed "Life" of the Saint, composed by Baronius. Then came the excellent Maurist edition published in two volumes at Paris, in 1686 and 1690; reprinted by Migne in four volumes. The career of St. Ambrose occupies a prominent place in all histories, ecclesiastical and secular, of the fourth century. Tillemont's narrative, in the tenth volume of his "Memoirs", is particularly valuable. The question of the genuineness of the so-called eighteen Ambrosian Hymns is of secondary importance. The great merit of the Saint in the field of hymnology is that of laying the foundations and showing posterity what ample scope there existed for future development.