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The Lives of the Saints, Volume 15

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(p. 53)

S. SABAS, AB (A.D. 531)

(p. 58).....

The reign of Justinian was, indeed, a uniform yet various scene of persecution. Heretics were allowed three months in which to feel or feign conviction, and if too honourable to embrace tenets which they could not believe, were cruelly and relentlessly banished and plundered. The churches of (p. 59) the Montanists were given up to flames, and the unhappy heretics, rather than abandon their hysterical ravings, perished in the fires. The Jews, who had been gradually stripped of their immunities, were oppressed by a vexatious law which compelled them to observe the feast of the Passover at the same time as the Christian Easter. The Samaritans of Palestine were a motley race, an ambiguous sect, rejected as Jews by the Pagans, by the Jews as schismatics, and by the Christians as unbelievers. The Emperor Zeno had built a church, and placed a garrison on Mount Gerizim. Under Anastasius, the Samaritans surprised the fort and church; and when the Emperor Justinian showed himself ready to persecute to the death, they rose in revolt, set up a rival emperor, killed a bishop, and cut to pieces several priests. Justinian sent the regular forces of the East against them; twenty thousand were massacred, twenty thousand were sold as slaves, and the remains of that unhappy nation purchased safety by submitting with disgust and disbelief to baptism. It has been computed that one hundred thousand Roman subjects were extirpated in this Samaritan war, in the extension of the kingdom of the Prince of Peace. But, as Procopius observes,— "It is not murder to massacre unbelievers." The devout and orthodox Christians of Scythopolis having caught a Samaritan of rank named Sylvanus, who incautiously ventured himself among Christians, emulated the enthusiasm and zeal of their emperor by burning him alive in their market-place. But Sylvanus was a Roman citizen, and had powerful relations. His son Arsenius went to Constantinople and appealed to the emperor for redress. Then Peter, patriarch of Jerusalem, and other bishops of Palestine, deputed S. Sabas to go to Justinian and obtain immunity for the enthusiasts who had burned Sylvanus, and demand the execution of a few more obnoxious Samaritans, and the relief of the province from certain taxes which could not well be (p. 60) paid on account of the injury done by the Samaritan revolt. S. Sabas was received by the emperor with the highest honour, galleys

were sent to meet him, he was presented before the emperor by Hypatius of Ephesus, and Justinian cast himself at the feet of the old hermit to receive his blessing. S. Sabas was so successful in his mission, that he obtained orders from the emperor for the execution both of the unfortunate Arsenius, who had objected to his father's being burned alive, and also of all the chiefs of the Samaritans who had made themselves obnoxious to the bishops of Palestine. The emperor decreed, also, that the Samaritans should be forbidden assembling for religious worship, entering any public office, and enjoying any inheritance from their parents. Arsenius found that his only chance of life was to submit with rage in his heart to the mockery of baptism by the hands of S. Sabas.

Justinian sent for Sabas, before the saint returned to the East, to ask him what he could do for him. "Nothing," replied the holy abbot, "except deliver the Church from the Arians, Nestorians, and Origenists."

Justinian gladly promised to do his best to extirpate them. He hastened to confiscate the goods of the Arian churches.

It is curious to note that this persecuting emperor himself died a heretic. Nicetius, bishop of Treves, wrote to the emperor when he was dying, "Unless you destroy what you have taught, and exclaim, 'I have erred, I have sinned; anathema to Nestorius, anathema to Eutyches,' you deliver your soul to the same flames in which they will eternally burn." He died in his heresy.

S. Sabas, on his return, published the letters of the emperor; the patriarch and other bishops went to Scythopolis, Caesarea, &c, and proclaimed the decision of Justinian, and saw to the execution of its infamous requirements. Sabas went back to his laura, and died there shortly after.

Comments on this section from the Editor of theSamaritanUpdate.com

This reference is not located in *A Bibliography of the Samaritans, Third Edition, Revised, Expanded, and Annotated*, by Alan David Crown and Reinhard Pummer, ATLA Bibliography, No. 51, **The Scarecrow Press, Inc.** Lanham, Maryland, Toronto, Oxford. 2005