

ST. AMBROSE.

A SKETCH.

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ON the seventh of December we celebrate the feast day of St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, one of the four great Fathers of the Latin Church of the West. The other three are St. Jerome, St. Augustine and St. Gregory the Great.

St. Ambrose was descended from an ancient Roman family, whose members from the time of the Apostles professed Christianity, and at various times distinguished themselves by their firmness during the days of persecution, even laying down their lives for the faith. Though staunch Christians, they were none the less interested in matters of state, and of the immediate ancestors of the saint we read that many held responsible positions under the emperors. The father of the saint, also named Ambrose, was prefect in Gaul and as such had jurisdiction over the extensive territory embracing Germany, Britain, Spain, modern France and part of Africa.

St. Ambrose was born A.D. 340. There seems to be some dispute as to the place of his birth, but the weight of opinion indicates that Treves, in Germany, was the favored spot. Upon the death of his father, which occurred when the saint was fourteen years of age, his mother returned with her children to Rome. Thus left alone, with the responsibility of the family upon her shoulders, the mother of St. Ambrose acquitted herself well. She

was a woman of deep religious convictions, and her great son in some of his writings touchingly refers to the instructions and domestic example of his mother as having laid the foundation of his future religious life.

During his early years, St. Ambrose gave indications of his future greatness. It is related that when he was a child, a swarm of bees surrounded the cradle in which he lay asleep, some of the insects creeping in and out of his mouth and soaring high in the air. From this it was predicted that he would shine by his eloquence. Be that as it may, St. Ambrose, at a comparatively early age, became famous as an orator and jurist. Before long he attracted the attention of the first men of the day by his talents. While still a young man, he was appointed Governor of Northern Italy with his residence at Milan.

Not only had he been held in great esteem for his ability, but his goodness had also been universally recognized. It is said that when about to depart for his province, Probus, his immediate superior, remarked to him: "Go, and govern more like a bishop than a judge." The words of Probus were verified by the resulting events. Ambrose bore himself so well, and so admirable was his course of action, that in a short time he endeared himself to his people to a degree that they forgot to see in him their judge and venerated him as a common father.

In the year 374, Auxentius, the Arian bishop of Milan, died, and the choice of his successor was a fruitful source of disturbance. At that time,