

Friends at Court.

GLEANINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR.

(Written for the N.Z. TABLET.)

November	26, Sunday.	—Twenty-seventh Sunday after Pentecost.
"	27, Monday.	—St. Virgilius, Bishop and Confessor.
"	28, Tuesday.	—St. Gregory III., Pope and Confessor.
"	29, Wednesday.	—St. Gelasius, Pope and Confessor.
"	30, Thursday.	—St. Andrew, Apostle.
December	1, Friday.	—St. Didacus, Confessor.
"	2, Saturday.	—St. Bibiana, Virgin and Martyr.

ST. VIRGILIUS, BISHOP AND CONFESSOR.

ONE of the most distinguished of the Irish missionaries who preached the Gospel in Germany about the middle of the eighth century, along with St. Boniface, was the celebrated and learned Feargal, commonly called Virgilius. He was born of an illustrious Irish family, and raised to the priesthood before he left Ireland as a missionary. He arrived in France about the year 743, and was most graciously received by Pepin, son of Charles Martel, then only mayor of the palace, but subsequently raised to the throne. Pepin became greatly attached to Virgilius, and detained him for two years at his princely seat at Carisiacum, near Compeigne, on the Oise. He was sent by Pepin to Otilo, Duke of Bavaria, to whom he was strongly recommended. The ecclesiastical jurisdiction of St. Boniface extended over Bavaria as well as over other parts of Germany. Virgilius was appointed abbot of St. Peter's Monastery at Salzburg, on the recommendation of Otilo, who died in 748.

It is interesting to know that an Irish monk should be the first to entertain a true notion of the existence of Antipodes, and the sphericity of the earth. Though these things are clearly understood by every schoolboy now, it was a bold doctrine to broach in the eighth century, and proves to us the surprising philosophical and geographical acquirements of Virgilius, and to what a high degree the sciences were cultivated by the Irish monks. It is stated that Christopher Columbus was greatly influenced in his belief in the existence of a western world by studying the views and opinions laid down by Virgilius, as also by reading the account of St. Brendan's voyages and discoveries. It thus appears that to Irishmen is due the credit of being the first to define the true form of the earth, and if not the actual discoverers of America, to have been the means of inspiring the great navigator and discoverer with the firm conviction that a great western continent existed.

Virgilius remained Abbot of St. Peter's Monastery at Salzburg until appointed Bishop of Salzburg by Pope Stephen II. and King Pepin, in 756. It is said by a biographer of St. Virgilius that, although named to that See, and exercising episcopal jurisdiction, he deferred his consecration for two years, until urged thereto, and that in the meantime Dobda, a bishop who had accompanied him from Ireland, exercised the necessary episcopal functions in his stead. Soon after Virgilius took possession of his See he consecrated a basilica in the city in honour of St. Stephen, in which he placed an abbot and monks taken from St. Peter's. He was very zealous in travelling through his diocese, and assiduous in preaching and instructing and propagating the Gospel. Whatever time he had to spare from his episcopal duties was devoted to prayer and works of penance. Karastus, the son of Baruth, the Solavonian Duke of Carinthia and Chitimar, and a nephew of Baruth, were at that time detained hostages in Bavaria. They became the warm friends of Virgilius, and through his teachings and ministrations became Christians. On the death of Baruth, Karastus became Duke of Carinthia, and introduced Christianity among his subjects. He died in the third year of his reign, and was succeeded by Chitimar, who was a very religious prince, and was under the spiritual guidance and instruction of Majormas, a priest who had been ordained by Virgilius.

Chitimar had been a pupil of Virgilius, and always entertained for him the greatest respect and veneration, which almost amounted to the love a good son should entertain for his father. Some time after he was raised to the dukedom of Carinthia he requested Virgilius to visit his territories and confirm his subjects in the faith. Being unable to comply with the duke's wishes, he sent to that country Modestus, a Bishop, together with several priests, with power to consecrate churches, perform ordinations, and all other necessary offices of the ministry.

Chitimar was succeeded in the duchy by Watune, who was also a Christian and a patron of the Christian religion. All this time Virgilius did not lose sight of its spiritual welfare, and kept supplying it with priests and other clergymen until Christianity was established there on a firm basis. Thus the Carinthian Church was established, and Virgilius has been justly called the apostle of that province.

Towards the close of his life Virgilius made a visitation through his vast diocese, and was received everywhere with the greatest welcome and respect. His visitation comprised Carinthia, where he was entertained by the Duke Watune, and he proceeded as far as the frontier of the Huns, where the Drave joins the Danube. After thus carefully revising the good work so auspiciously carried on by him, he returned to Salzburg, where he soon after was seized with illness, and breathed his last on November 27, 785.

Virgilius was a man of great learning, and far in advance of the philosophy of his times, as is evident from his holding 'that the earth was spherical and consequently a great portion of it undiscovered, and that every nation had its antipodes, or people living diametrically opposite to them.' He was also a man of great piety and zeal in spreading and preaching the Gospel. He was canonized in the year 1233 by Pope Gregory IX.

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