

Friends at Court.

GLEANINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR.

(Written for the N.Z. TABLET.)

- February 25, Sunday.—Quinquagesima Sunday.
 " 26, Monday.—St. Margaret of Cortona.
 " 27, Tuesday.—St. Marcellus, Pope and Martyr. Ven. Anne Line.
 " 28, Wednesday.—Ash Wednesday.
 March 1, Thursday.—St. Hyginus, Pope and Martyr.
 " 2, Friday.—Feast of the Crowning of Our Lord with Thorns.
 " 3, Saturday.—Feast of the Seven Founders of the Order of the Servites of Blessed Virgin.

THE SEVEN FOUNDERS OF THE ORDER OF SERVITES.

In A.D. 1233 there lived at Florence seven rich and noble gentlemen, who were distinguished among their fellow-citizens for virtue and piety. Being all members of a sodality established in honour of the Blessed Virgin, they often met together to celebrate the praises of their beloved Queen and Mother. Now it happened one day that, while they were thus employed on the Feast of the Assumption, our Blessed Lady appeared in the midst of them and sweetly admonished them by an interior light to abandon the world and embrace a more perfect way of life.

As soon as they had finished their devotions, they consulted with one another as to the manner in which they could best obey their heavenly call. It was determined by common consent to refer the matter to the Bishop, and, after taking counsel with him, they renounced their worldly goods, distributed abundant alms amongst the poor, and clothed themselves in coarse garments with hair-shirts next the skin. Finally, on the Feast of our Lady's Nativity, they retired to a poor cottage near one of the gates of Florence, determined to take the Virgin Mother as their mistress and model, and to begin on that day when she came into the world a life of prayer and penance.

It was remarked with admiration that when the members of this devout community passed through the streets in quest of alms or on their visits to the churches, they were everywhere greeted by the children with the title of 'Servants of Mary.' Even the very infants in their mothers' arms, and among the rest St. Philip Beniti, then five months old, had their tongues loosened by the Spirit of God and cried out in childish accents, 'Servants of Mary.' Great was the joy of these holy men in hearing that which was the desire of their hearts confirmed by the voice of infants, and greatly was the ardour of their love increased by this token of the favour of their benign patroness. Retiring to the solitude of the mountain, they erected there a number of little cells in which they led the life of hermits, practising great austerities and rendering obedience to one of their number, Bomfilio Monaldi, whom they elected as their Superior.

Some years later Brother Peter, of the Order of St. Dominic, who was afterwards martyred for the Faith, contracted during his stay at Florence a close friendship with these holy hermits. Believing that it would tend greatly to the glory of God and the salvation of souls if this new institute were established on a firm basis and extended to other countries, he urged the saintly founders to take steps for this purpose. The whole community accordingly united with him in prayer to obtain from our Blessed Lady some intimation of her own wishes. Whereupon she appeared to Brother Peter and declared to him that she had chosen these seven hermits with their followers as her special servants, and that it was her desire that an Order should be instituted in the Church to honour and compassionate her bitter sorrows.

The eminent sanctity of the seven founders of the Servites having been confirmed by numerous miracles, they were solemnly canonized by Leo. XIII., and their feast was appointed to be kept on this day throughout the Church.

VEN. ANNE LINE, WIDOW, MARTYR.

During the cruel persecution which raged in England in the reign of Elizabeth, the Faith was kept alive in the hearts of the people by zealous priests, who, at the risk of their lives, travelled from house to house to say Mass and administer the sacraments. Those who received them or allowed the sacred rites to be celebrated under their roofs were subject to the same terrible penalties as the clergy themselves. Among the many generous souls who laid down their lives in so good a cause was the Ven. Anne Line, who was executed at Tyburn on the sole charge of harbouring a seminary priest. Mrs Line was a widow lady residing in London, whose house was a favourite resort of the persecuted clergy, being furnished with ingenious places of concealment in case of sudden danger or surprise. At length the happy day arrived on which the Almighty God vouchsafed to bestow on Anne Line the favour she had so long and so earnestly desired, that of martyrdom. On Candlemas Day, when the priest was already at the altar, the doors were beset by pursuivants. Some time elapsing before they were able to effect an entrance, the priest was able to make good his escape. Finding themselves baffled of their expected prey, the pursuivants apprehended Mrs Line and conducted her to prison. The Lord Chief Justice, who was a violent persecutor, on very slender evidence, directed the jury to bring her in guilty, and immediately sentenced her to death. She was then conducted back to prison, where she spent the few intervening days before her execution in fervent prayer and pious contemplation. The day appointed for her combat having arrived, the generous confessor of the Faith was conveyed from Newgate to the usual place of execution at Tyburn. The scene of the glorious victories of so many martyrs.

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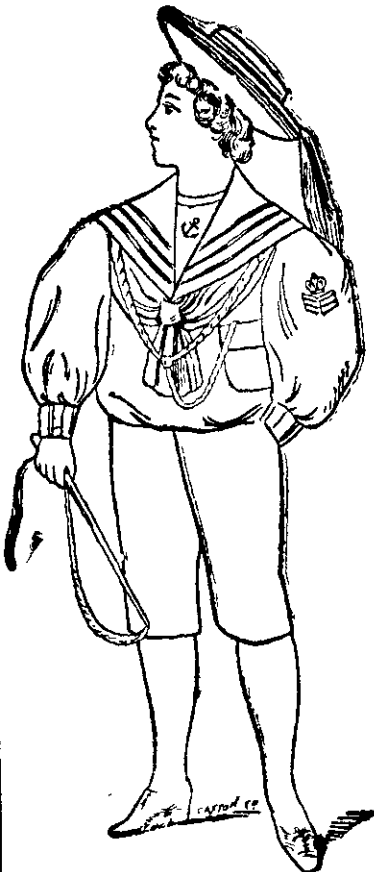
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