

Friends at Court.

GLEANINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR.

(Written for the N.Z. TABLET.)

- February 1, Sunday.—Fifth after Epiphany. Feast of St. Andrew Corsini, Bishop and Confessor.
 „ 5, Monday.—St. Agatha, Virgin and Martyr.
 „ 6, Tuesday.—St. Hyacinth Mar scotti, Virgin.
 „ 7, Wednesday.—St. Romauld.
 „ 8, Thursday.—St. John of Mattha, Confessor.
 „ 9, Friday.—St. Zozimus, Pope and Confessor.
 „ 10, Saturday.—St. Scholastica, Virgin.

ST. AGATHA, VIRGIN AND MARTYR.

The cities of Palermo and Catania in Sicily dispute the honour of being the birth-place of St. Agatha, but Catania was certainly the scene of her martyrdom. There, too, her sacred relics were deposited and preserved with extraordinary veneration, being regarded as the safeguard of the city against the terrible eruptions of Mount Etna which have often threatened its entire destruction. Born of an illustrious and wealthy family, Agatha was consecrated from her infancy to the service of God. Like St. Agnes, she had chosen Christ for her spouse, and consumed by the fire of Divine Love, despised the deceitful pleasures and empty honours of the world. When the cruel persecution of Decius broke out, A.D. 251, Agatha was apprehended at Catania by order of the chief magistrate, Quintianus, who, knowing the holy maiden to be both rich and beautiful, considered it a favourable opportunity to gratify both his lust and avarice. Seeing herself in the hands of the persecutors, Agatha prayed thus to her heavenly spouse: 'Jesus Christ, Lord of all things, Thou seest my heart, Thou knowest my desire. Possess. Thyself alone, all that I am. I am Thy sheep: make me worthy to overcome the devil.' Thus did she continue to pray with many tears during her passage through the streets to the tribunal of the Pro-consul. The first attack made upon her by the wicked judge was directed by, with a view to undermine her virtue. For this purpose he delivered her into the hands of Aphrodisia, an abandoned woman who with her six daughters kept a house of ill-fame. Here the chaste virgin was exposed to grievous assaults, more terrible to her pure soul than death itself. But all the artifices of her enemies were defeated by the power of her Divine Spouse, to whom she committed herself with entire confidence. Never did she cease, during the four weeks that she remained in this den of infamy, to implore His protection with fervent prayers, accompanied with sighs and tears. After thirty days had elapsed, Quintianus, who had been informed of her constancy, ordered her to be brought before his tribunal. Upon her arrival he began by exhorting her to renounce her faith and sacrifice to idols. Among other things he reminded her of her noble birth and illustrious ancestry, to which she replied that to be a servant of Jesus Christ was true nobility and perfect liberty. Enraged at her resolute answers the judge ordered her to be buffeted and led back to prison.

Upon the following day Agatha was again summoned before the judge, who exhorted her to save her life by prompt submission. To this she replied that Jesus Christ was her life and her salvation. Quintianus then ordered her to be stretched on the rack, a torment which was usually accompanied with stripes, the tearing of the flesh with iron hooks, and the application of lighted torches to the most tender parts of the body. But all these tortures had no effect upon the unflinching virgin, supported as she was by the invincible grace of Jesus, her Spouse. Having exhausted all the inventions of cruelty to no purpose, Quintianus ordered her to be again conducted to prison, giving strict commands to the gaoler to allow her neither food for her body nor salve or ointment for her wounds. But Almighty God vouches to be Himself her physician and support, sending St. Peter to heal her wounds and comfort and encourage her in her combat.

After an interval of four days Agatha was again summoned before the judge, who, nowise softened by beholding her miraculous cure, ordered her to be stripped of her clothes and rolled to and fro over red-hot coals mingled with broken potsheards. Being then carried back to prison, she prayed as follows: 'O Lord, my Creator, you have ever protected me from my very cradle. You have taken from me the love of the world, and given me patience to suffer. Receive now my soul.' With these words she calmly expired. St. Agatha enjoys the special honour of a commemoration in the Canon of the Mass, where she heads the glorious choir of virgin martyrs. Lucy, Agnes, Cecily, and Anastasia.

ST. SCHOLASTICA, VIRGIN, FOUNDESS OF THE ORDER OF BENEDICTINE NUNS.

St. Scholastica, sister of St. Benedict, was born of illustrious parents at Nursia, a city of Umbria in Italy, towards the close of the fifth century. The retirement of her brother Benedict from the world and the death of her parents left Scholastica heiress of her father's wealth, with the prospect of every worldly happiness. Guided by the secret inspirations of God, Scholastica, after distributing her goods among the poor, followed her brother to Cassino, accompanied by a single handmaid, in order to be formed by his direction to the perfect practice of the maxims of the Gospel. The fame of the sanctity of Scholastica and of the perfect manner of life followed by her and her companion excited the admiration of the neighbouring inhabitants and soon attracted to them a number of fervent novices. To afford accommodation for the new comers it soon became necessary for Scholastica to enlarge her humble dwelling, which gradually grew into a spacious convent, and became the mother-house of the rising Order. St. Scholastica completed her happy course about A.D. 543, her brother, St. Benedict, causing her body to be conveyed to his own abbey and laid in the tomb which he had provided for himself.

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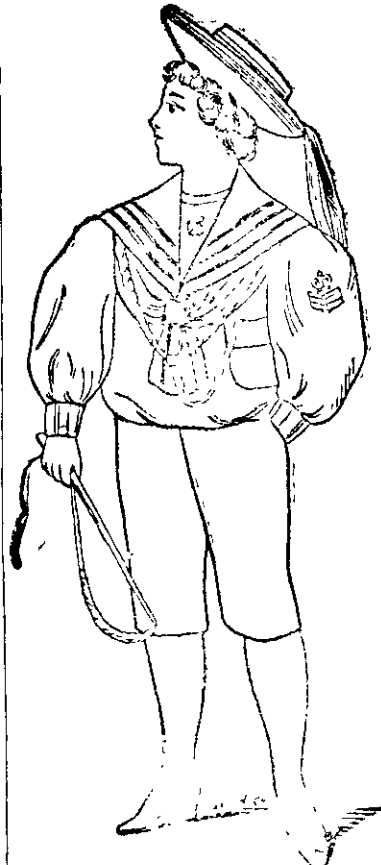
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