

Friends at Court.

GLEANINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S CALENDAR.

(Written for the N.Z. TABLET.)

- February 18, Sunday.—Sexagesima Sunday.
 „ 19, Monday.—St. Titus, Bishop and Confessor. St. Catherine of Ricci, Virgin.
 „ 20, Tuesday.—Commemoration of the Passion of our Lord.
 „ 21, Wednesday.—St. Paul, Hermit, Confessor. Ven. E. Southwell, S.J., Priest and Martyr.
 „ 22, Thursday.—St. Peter's Chair at Antioch.
 „ 23, Friday.—St. Peter Damien, Bishop, Confessor, and Doctor.
 „ 24, Saturday.—St. Mathias, Apostle.

ST. CATHERINE OF RICCI, VIRGIN, O.S.D.

St. Catherine of Ricci, who was a contemporary of St. Mary Magdalen of Pazzi, was born, like her, at Florence of a distinguished family towards the beginning of the sixteenth century. In her miraculous life, her frequent ecstasies and visions, and her intimate union with her Divine Spouse, she closely resembled the above-named Saint, and also St. Catherine of Siena, whose name she took in religion, having been baptised by that of Alexandrine. Having lost her mother in her infancy, Catherine was formed to virtue by her pious stepmother, and appeared from her earliest years a favoured child of Heaven.

At the age of seven she was placed by her father for her education in a Benedictine convent, of which her aunt was the superioress. Her new home appeared to her like a paradise, in which, far removed from the tumult of the world, she was able to serve God without distraction or impediment. After some years she returned home, where her father proposed to settle her in the married life. Finding, however, that she was deaf to all his entreaties—for her heart was already given to her heavenly Spouse—he at length, after a long struggle, permitted her to take the veil in a convent of the Third Order of St. Dominic at Prato of which her uncle was the spiritual director. Almighty God, who in His merciful designs had chosen Catherine to be the favoured spouse of His beloved Son, was pleased to exercise her patience with severe trials in order to render her dispositions more comfortable to those of her suffering Saviour. For two years she endured inexpressible pain from a complication of diseases, which all the remedies of the physicians seemed only to increase. After the recovery of her health her fervour in the observance of the rule and the practice of prayer and penance was redoubled. Her singular virtue and prudence caused her, however, to be chosen to fill some of the most important posts in the community, and she was successively mistress of novices, superioress and prioress of the convent. This latter post she held from her twenty-fifth year to the day of her death. Our Blessed Lord often appeared to her in visions, and on one occasion solemnly espoused her in the presence of His Mother, bestowing upon her at the same time a golden ring adorned with a brilliant diamond, which always appeared visible to her, though to others it bore the resemblance of a bright red circlet round her finger. He also conferred upon her the sacred stigmata and other miraculous favours, such as the gift of prophecy and miracles. All these extraordinary graces only served to increase her humility, and her constant prayer was that they might be withdrawn from her, or at least concealed from the eyes of men. This favoured spouse of Jesus gave up her soul to God on February 11, A.D. 1589, in the sixty-seventh year of her age. Those who were present at her death heard, at the moment of her departure, the sound of heavenly canticles, and St. Mary Magdalen Pazzi, who was rapt in ecstasy, beheld her soul mounting to Paradise in the midst of a company of angels.

VENERABLE ROBERT SOUTHWELL, S.J., PRIEST AND MARTYR.

Venerable Robert Southwell was born in Norfolk in the year that Elizabeth ascended the throne of England, and was sent to the English College at Douay for his education when yet very young. Thence he proceeded to Rome, where he was received into the Society of Jesus at the age of 16. His abilities were remarkable, and he has left behind him both in prose and verse writings which bear witness both to his poetic genius and his tender piety. In A.D. 1584, Father Southwell was sent upon the English mission, where he laboured with great fruit for eight years and was the means of effecting many conversions. Being at length apprehended by treachery at Uxendon, in Middlesex, he was committed to the Tower, where he was confined in a filthy dungeon. During the three years that the venerable confessor was imprisoned, he was put to the rack 10 times by order of the Queen and Privy Council. Father Southwell endured these cruel torments with heroic fortitude, nor were the persecutors able to draw from him a single admission that could compromise the lives and fortunes of his fellow-Catholics. After three years of close imprisonment in the Tower, Father Southwell was removed to Newgate, and a few days later was brought up for trial at Westminster before Lord Chief Justice Popham and three other judges on the charge that, after having received priestly orders by the pretended authority of the Bishop of Rome, he had remained in England as a false traitor, contrary to the statutes of the realm. A verdict of guilty was quickly returned and the prisoner was asked whether he had anything to say why sentence of death should not be pronounced against him. 'Nothing,' replied the holy Confessor, 'but from my heart I beg Almighty God to forgive all those who have been in any way accessory to my death.' On the following morning, February 21, A.D. 1595, he was drawn on a hurdle through the streets to Tyburn, where he was hanged in the presence of a large number of people who had assembled to witness his glorious martyrdom.

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