

Saints
(St. Ita)



Among those who attended the annual dinner dance of the Presentation Convent, Killarney Past Pupils Union, held in the Great Southern Hotel, Killarney, were (from left): Senator M. Moynihan, Most Rev. Dr. Casey, Bishop of Kerry; Miss Maura Brosnan, president of P.P.U.; Sr. Gonzaga, Superior, Presentation Convent, Killarney; Mr. Richard Burke, Minister for Education, and Mr. Michael Begley, T.D.

Today

JANUARY 15 1976

SAINT ITE OF KILEEDY AND KILMEEDY

By PADRAIG O MAIDIN

On the 15th of each recurring January, states the author of the life of Saint Ita, the faithful of this remote parish become rejoiced and gladdened at the grandeur and solemnity of ceremonies prepared for them. The parish is that of Killeedy about five miles to the south of Newcastle West in Co. Limerick. She was also venerated at Kilmeedy, also in Ui Conaill Gabhra, and at Kilmeedy in Dunhallow and at several places in Cornwall.

Few of the early saints come to life so vividly as Ita. She was born, not in Co. Limerick, but somewhere in the present Co. Waterford and belonged to the Desi people who had been driven from central Ireland in the olden times before the dawn of history, and had settled, part in the present Waterford district, and part across the channel in Pembrokeshire.

...The original of her life appears to have been very ancient. As we would expect, some fabulous stories were added to it. As we would expect also in the life of any wealthy and attractive girl who wished to take the veil of a nun, there is the episode of the father losing patience with her when she refuses to marry the noble young man. Here however is a new note, the voice of a girl but already made mature by her understanding of people: "Bear with my father for a while", she pleads "because although he now forbids me to consecrate myself to Christ, yet hereafter he shall persuade me to go

A study of the history of Munster at the time would suggest that Ita was the patron of the Corcu Oche people who were being persecuted by the Ui Fidgeint, allies of the Eogannachta, although they, like the Corcu Oche, belonged to the older Erainn settlers. The Ui Fidgeinte had placed the maintenance of their swine and their swine herds as a tax on the Corcu Oche and it was because of this imposition that the battle of Cuilne was fought. A small difficulty arises however. Although the annals generally give the victory to the Corcu Oche, the Annals of Ulster state that they were slain: A.D. 551 The battle of Cuilne in which the Corcu Oche were slaughtered through the prayers of Ita of Cluain." All we can say is that Ita, being the patron of the Corcu Oche, would not have prayed for their defeat.

When we come to traditions of St. Ita in Dunhallow we find her again involved in war. In her efforts to christianise the Millstreet area she discovered that the pagan Muscrae were firmly established there with their centre of worship at Crobh Dearg under the Paps. Their military headquarters was at Drisean. Ita encouraged her followers to capture this fort and when they had taken it and had settled down in the area they expected her to site her convent there.

Ita had other ideas. She had decided that her new foundation

was to be in the smiling fertile valley of the Upper Fionn Abha (Finnowe). The chieftain did not like this as it was too far away from the fort at Drisean to be easy to protect. Therefore he sent his messengers to her who praised Drisean as a natural site for a convent. Ita replied: "The Upper Fionn Abha valley."

They praised the rich pastures of Drisean. Ita was adamant: "The Upper Fionn Abha valley." Drisean was sheltered. "The Upper Fionn Abha valley" she insisted. So near the fortress "The Upper Fionn Abha valley." It was no use in talking further but the chieftain took precautions. Even today we find the remains of eleven forts in the single townland of Clochbhuaill mor, nine of them with double rampart. So Ita established her convent at Cill Mo Ide (Kilmeedy) in the Upper Fionn Abha valley. She had untroubled confidence in her menfolk.

Fourteen hundred years ago, on January 15, Ita died in extreme old age and was buried in the place of her habitation, the little church at Killeedy. Our ancestors, says O'Hanlon, held her in great veneration, not alone on account of her own sanctity but because of the virtues implanted in those persons who were under her direction and training. She was the refuge and the solace of sinners, ever compassionate towards the erring and ever charitably disposed towards the poor.