

give you a token to this effect, in an anecdote I am about to relate. On a certain occasion he visited the monastery of the holy virgin Chinreacha Dercain,²⁰ who asked permission to wash his feet, to which request he assented. Then this holy virgin, Chinreacha, washed the feet of Eneas, and she wiped them with a towel; as God is now my witness, I held a part of that towel, and also helped to wipe your abbot's feet. When reminded of this circumstance, he shall be pleased, and he will joyfully accept my present." While the visitors received her gift, they also admired the holy virgin's piety. Having obtained her blessing, they returned to Clonmacnoise. All that St. Ita had spoken was afterwards verified.²¹

CHAPTER IV.

ST. ITA'S PROPHETIC AND MIRACULOUS POWERS—HER PRAYERS FOR THE REPOSE OF HER UNCLE'S SOUL—HER INTERCESSION FOR A HOMICIDE EFFECTUAL WITH THE CHIEF OF HY-CONNAILL.

AT one time, a certain man had killed his own brother; moved with remorse he came to St. Ita, and did penance, according to her direction. Seeing his devout dispositions, the abbess told him, that were he to follow her advice, he should not die a sudden death, but enjoy eternal life. As a military man, he was afterwards summoned to battle by his chieftain. Being unsuccessful, this soldier, with many of his comrades, was slain in battle. When the matter was told to Ita, she said, "I have promised this man should terminate his life in a happy manner, because he performed faithfully what I enjoined on him." She then directed her servants to go and call the deceased from the field of slaughter, in God's name, as she believed he should then return to life. Having obeyed her orders, this soldier arose from the field. He then ran towards those who had called him, as if he had not been even wounded. He afterwards went with the servants to visit St. Ita. As she had foretold, the future event of a happy departure was granted him, in addition to other favours he received. On a certain occasion, greatly afflicted at the death of his son, a man came to our saint, and, while tears bedewed his cheeks, declared in a rude manner, that he could not cease to weep, nor leave her habitation, until she should have restored his son to life. St. Ita meekly answered: "Whatever you ask of me, O man, is not due to my merits, but to those of the apostles, and saints like to them." The man replied, "I am chiefly afflicted, because my son lost the use of speech before his death, so that he could neither confess to God, nor speak to us; I ask, therefore, that you obtain from the Holy Trinity he might even live for one day, so that I might be able to hear his words." Ita said, "For what length of time would

²⁰ Not being able to find any female saint named Kenreacha, either in our ancient Martyrologies or in other records, for a length of time, Colgan was under an impression, that Kenreacha was erroneously inserted for Kunera. But, having examined this matter more attentively, he thought the saint here spoken of must have been identical with St. Kairecha, called also Dercain. The addition of this latter cognomen leaves the question beyond doubt; especially when we take into consideration a strong affinity between the names themselves. According to the "Martyrologies of Tallagh," Maria-

nus O'Gorman and Maguire, St. Cairecha was venerated on the 9th of February. See "Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ," xv. Januarii, n. 20, p. 72.

²¹ See Colgan's "Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ," xv. Januarii. Vita S. Itæ, cap. xvii., p. 68.

CHAP. IV.—¹ This means that he could not ask God's pardon for his sins, or, as written in another codex, "sua peccata confiteri." See Colgan's "Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ," n. 25, p. 72. This is an instance of our ancestors' ancient practice of confessing sins orally, in the Sacrament of Penance.

you be satisfied he should live, if the merciful God, who raises the dead, had compassion on you, and brought your son to life." The man replied he would feel grateful if his child should live but one day. Ita then said, "He shall live seven years, seven months, and seven days." The youth immediately arose when the saint had prayed for his restoration to life; and he afterwards lived that exact term specified by the holy virgin.²

A man named Feargus, whose son lived at a time when the author of our saint's acts wrote,³ had been afflicted with a malady in his eyes and body. He was brought to St. Ita, in a most deplorable state. Although, in the opinion of friends, his death seemed imminent at the time, yet, through our saint's benediction and prayers, he was completely restored to the use of sight, and to general health of body. Having returned to his home, he enjoyed those blessings accorded him, to the very date of his death.⁴ An uncle of our saint, who dwelt in the Nan-Desii country, died. He left eight sons, who were sent for by the holy Abbess of Cluain Credhuile, when this report of their father's decease had been made known. On their arrival, she addressed them as follows:—"My uncle, your father, is dead; alas! for his transgressions, he now suffers in the lower regions.⁵ To me the manner of his suffering has been revealed; but let us attempt something for the deliverance of his soul, therefore, do as I require: let each one of you, every day throughout the whole of this year⁶ give bread and meat or butter with lights to the poor, for his soul's rest, and at the end of this year return to me." Being rich in this world's goods they did as their venerable relative had commanded them, and at the expiration of the time appointed they returned to her. Ita said: "Your father is in a great measure released from his sufferings, through your offerings and my prayers; now go, and make like

² Colgan's "Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ," xv. Januarii. Vita S. Itæ, cap. xxii., xxvii., pp. 69, 70.

³ The reader will refer to what has been said, in a previous chapter.

⁴ Colgan's "Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ," xv. Januarii. Vita S. Itæ, cap. xxv., p. 69.

⁵ Colgan, having cited these words, "in pœnis infernalibus pro commissis suis torquetur," and, "pater vester ex undis inferni dimidia parte extractus est," and "pater vester ex toto inferno ereptus est," adds, that no real difficulty can occur in understanding these passages, although it might appear otherwise at first sight. For by "pœnas infernales," we are to consider the heavy punishments of purgatory, and by the word "infernum," we must understand purgatory itself. This is rendered plain for a double reason. First, in another copy of St. Ita's Life, in his possession, there is no mention made of the pains of hell, but of dire and heavy punishments. As a proof of his assertion, Colgan quotes those extracts, which justify his statements. In such passages, we find no punishments distinct from those of purgatory. Secondly, the word "infernus," is frequently used to designate a subterranean place; and "pœna infernalis" is often intended to signify punishment to be endured in a place under earth. Not to mention many passages from Holy Scrip-

ture, where "infernus" is taken for a subterranean place, and for purgatory, we also find a like sense applied to this term, both by the Church and by the Holy Fathers. Thus Tertullian, "Liber de Anima," cap. 17, says, "In carcerem te mandat infernum unde non dimittaris nisi modico quoque delicto mora resurrectionis expenso." Here, by "carcerem infernum," we must necessarily understand purgatory, as souls are not freed from any other lower prison. Likewise, St. Jerome, "in cap. 9, Amos," "Quando anima vinculis laxata corporis, volandi quo velit, sive quo ire compellitur habuerit libertatem; aut ad inferna ducetur, de quibus scriptum est, in inferno quis confitebitur tibi; aut ad caelestia sublevabitur." Here "infernus" is taken generally, as well for the prison of the damned, as for purgatory. The Church, again, in the Apostles' Creed, says, regarding Christ, "descendit ad inferos." See "Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ," xv. Januarii, n. 23, p. 72.

⁶ In connection with this subject, Dr. Lanigan also remarks: "The phrase, infernal pains, affords a very strong proof of the antiquity of the Life, whereas for many centuries back the Western Church has, instead of it, generally expressed such pains by the name of purgatory. A similar phrase is still retained in one of the prayers of the Mass for the Dead: 'Libera Domine animas omnium fidelium defunctorum de pœnis

offerings this year, and then return once more to me." They accordingly obeyed her instructions, and on their visiting Ita again, she said: "Your father is now released from the pains of purgatory; but he is yet without clothing, because he gave no garments to the poor, in Christ's name; therefore, give ye alms in clothing that he may be clad." They again distributed gifts in the manner pointed out for another year. Then returning once more to their cousin, she said, "Your father now enjoys rest, through your alms and my prayers, but especially through God's mercy. Therefore, do you refrain from unlawful desires of the world and its concupiscence, for which your father has suffered." Giving thanks to God, and to His servant, Ita, they returned to their own country.⁸

One day, our saint desired some of her nuns to go forth from the enclosure, and bring her word regarding two men, who were on their way to visit her nunnery. Doing as they were ordered, these nuns brought back intelligence, that two brothers of the neighbourhood, well known to them, were coming. Fetching a deep sigh, the abbess said, "Woe! woe, to these men, grief shall shortly oppress me and them, for one of these brothers shall murder the other." This event happened in accordance with the saint's prediction, whereupon, the culprit was brought before the chieftain of Hy-Connaill, to receive judgment due to his crime. Being condemned to death, and considering the affliction into which his mother must be plunged by the double loss of her two sons, St. Ita resolved on exerting her influence with the chief, to effect a respite for the malefactor. This mediatorship she assumed, through the double motive of affording consolation to the parent of the unfortunate criminal, and of giving the fratricide an opportunity for doing penance. The chieftain was moved by our holy virgin's entreaties on behalf of this guilty young man, and he was restored to liberty. However, lest any damage should afterwards take place, through this extended clemency, the chief declared that to St. Ita must be imputed its occurrence. He recommended her, moreover, to induce the murderer to expiate his crime by practising a rigorous course of penance. Ita returned for answer, that although his repentance might be deferred for a while, yet it must certainly take place; and as she desired, that the criminal's repentance should rather be voluntary on his part than a result of coercion, the servant of God waited in patience and hope for his conversion. Although, for a time delayed, her expectations were finally crowned; and her patience was amply rewarded by the total change of heart which tranquillized the mind of this unhappy man.⁹

inferni, et de profundo lacu,' &c. I need not tell the reader that the *infernus* or *infernalibus* in the now quoted passages do not refer to the hell of the damned, out of which the Church never expected any deliverance. This manner of speaking was used in consequence of an opinion held by many theologians, that not only the devils and the damned, but likewise the souls in a state of purgation are confined in subterraneous regions, yet with this difference, that the former are kept in its lowermost and deepest parts, while the place for the latter, although contiguous to it, is supposed to be higher up (See Bellarmin De Purgatorio, lib. 2, cap. 6). But, as this place was still considered as under the earth, the name *infernus*, which signifies a lower region or tract, was often applied to it, in the same manner as it has been used also for

the grave." See "Ecclesiastical History of Ireland," vol. ii., chap. xi., sec. ii., n. 11, pp. 86, 87.

⁷ "This means that, although he was freed from the purgatorial sufferings, yet his soul was not as yet in a state fit for enjoying the beatific vision and that heavenly clothing, of which St. Paul says, 2 Cor., v. 2: We groan, desiring to be clothed over with our habitation, which is from heaven." Dr. Lanigan's "Ecclesiastical History of Ireland," vol. ii., chap. xi., sec. ii., n. 12, p. 87.

⁸ See Colgan's "Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ," xv. Januarii. Vita S. Itæ, cap. xxvi., pp. 69, 70.

⁹ See Colgan's "Acta Sanctorum Hiberniæ," xv. Januarii. Vita S. Itæ, cap. xxix., p. 70.