

THE SHANNONSIDE SERIES

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Shannonside
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THE LIFE OF ST ITA PATRONESS OF LIMERICK

This is the story of a young princess who saw God. She was abused by the Devil, and she endured a living martyrdom of a frightening kind. She was instrumental in the discovery of America. She performed many miracles and great wonders, and her name, even today, is venerated throughout County Limerick.

This is the story of Saint Ita.

The story is pieced together from many ancient manuscripts, and you may feel that much of it is little more than fanciful invention. But this is a story which has lasted in remarkable detail, of a woman who died more than one thousand four hundred years ago.

Feidhlim Reachtmuir, High King of Ireland, died in the year 119 A.D. He was succeeded by his son Conn, who, in the year 157 was slain in battle by Munster tribes.

To wreak retribution, his three nephews led an army and part of their tribe to take and settle the land of those who had killed the king. They settled in that area known as the Deicies, the land of the corn-growers, which stretches from Bruff in County Limerick south to the sea at Dungarvan.

Six generations later, about the year 480, there was born to the leader of this tribe, Kennfoelanius, and his wife Necta, a daughter, whom they called Derthrea, or Dorothy. This child was to become Ita, the abbess of the greatest convent in Ireland.

From the time of her baptism, she was filled with the Holy Ghost, for all admired her chastity and morals in her infancy, and her abstinence on days on which the servants of the Lord ought to fast.

The Book of Kilkenny goes on: — "And many miracles seemed to be performed through her when she was yet a little infant, and when she was able to walk and talk, she appeared prudent in her discourse and work, sweet in her conversation and constant in mind; setting forth always most proper words; mild towards all; very generous; fearing and loving God — so she lived in the house of her parents in her girlish years".

A traditional story of her early years recalls that servants rushed to her room one night, having seen a glow from within, believing the room to be ablaze. When they entered, the little sleeping girl was surrounded by a heavenly glow, and, when she awoke, she displayed the form of a beautiful angel.

HER CONVENT

While still a young girl, she prayed to the Lord to direct her to a place where she might serve him. An angel appeared to her and said, go to that place which is called Ui Conaill, and you shall remain in the western part of that land at the foot of Sliabh Luachra. There you will again be visited by an angel of the Lord, who will show you the place where your city will stand, where you will serve the Lord. You will be patroness of the people of Ui Conaill, which people have been given to you and to Saint Sennan by the Most High Lord".

On the morning, she told her father, who refused his permission, because he did not believe her, and because he had planned to marry her to a rich nobleman.

On that night, and on each of the two succeeding nights, she was visited by the Devil, who abused and threatened her. But she resisted. On the third night, her father also received a vision, that of an angel, who told him to reverse his decision, and to let her go to do the bidding of the Lord. So as soon as arrangements could be made, she set out to the place of her destiny, which is called Cluain Chreduil, the place of faith, or Cill Ide, the church of Ita, which is still called Killeedy, in the south west of County Limerick.

When the ruler of Ui Chonaill heard of the coming of this famous holy girl to his territory, he offered her much land, but she would take only enough land for her convent and for a garden. He offered her gold and riches but she only cast them aside, asking for water that she may cleanse her hands which had touched earthly filth and dirt.

Her fame spread throughout the land, and many young girls came to her and she received them all. She was also entrusted with the care of her young cousin, Brendan, later to become Brendan of Clonfert, Brendan the Navigator.

She fasted to such an extent that an angel was sent to her to ask her to ease off, lest she die of starvation before she had completed the work of the Lord.

HER MARTYRDOM

There exists in Irish mythology a hideous vermin, a Daol, which legend says burrowed through the ground to consume the bodies of the dead in their graves. As a penance, Ita allowed such a beast to suck blood from her side for many years, until she was wasted and emaciated, and the vermin had grown to the size of a young pig.

While she was outside on a certain day, the vermin emerged from its hiding place. It was spotted by the other holy women, who set about it and killed it.

But Ita, returning home, asked why her fosterling had been killed. The woman said that they believed it to be a poisonous scorpion.

Ita railed against them, saying that the convent would never

again, after her, be run by women. She turned her eyes to heaven, and said that she would never be content until the Lord who had permitted the killing of the Daol gave himself to be nursed by her as an infant. An angel appeared and told her that she would have her wish, and presently Christ appeared to her in the form of a beautiful young boy.

MIRACLE OF BEOANUS

Sometime later, a builder, Beoanus, who was married to Ita's sister, completed work on her convent, and refused payment for his work. He would be content, he said, if his marriage could be blessed with issue. Ita said that it would come to pass, and that he and his wife would have a child.

Shortly afterward, however, an inter-tribal war broke out, and Beoanus was beheaded in battle. His distraught widow brought his head to Ita, who asked where was the rest of his body.

I cannot identify the rest of his body, as there are so many, said she.

Then go to the scene of the battle, and call his name three times, in memory of the Holy Trinity. He will arise and come to you. Put his head on his shoulders, and he will say: "Woman, why have you called, for I was happy". And this came to pass.

The pair came to Ita, who washed Beoanus with water, and all trace of wounds disappeared from him. But remembering where he had been, he said: "This world is as dung compared to eternal joy".

Then the pair went away, and they were blessed with issue in due course.

BRENDAN

Her cousin, Brendan, blamed himself for an accident in which one of his followers was drowned. He went to Ita, and asked for a penance. She told him to do pilgrimage and to spread the word of God. So he went to Brittany, making the hazardous journey which was to be the precursor of his epic voyage to Iceland, Greenland and the New World.

While Brendan was still in Clonfert, Ita, on a certain Christmas Eve, expressed the wish to receive the sacrament from his hands. At once, an angel appeared, and took her heavenwards, bringing her through the skies to Clonfert, where Brendan was waiting to greet her. Then the angel returned her to Killeedy. The whole journey had taken less than an hour — a trip which, at the time, would have taken three days in each direction.

But Ita is still a real person to the people of County Limerick, fourteen hundred years after her death at an advanced age. Her well is said to have curing powers, and great crowds still gather each fifteenth of January at Killeedy, the date which the Four Masters ascribe to her death.

The Bridget of Munster, as she is often called, still inspires devotion, curiosity and, some will say, even yet, works of great wonder.

INSURANCE FOR MINISTER

INDUSTRY COMMERCE and Tourism Minister, Mr. Desmond O'Malley, T.D., was recently presented with a newly published book 'European Integration and Insurance'.

It analyses the implications of European developments for the insurance markets of the E.F.C.

The presentation was made by the author, Dr. Henry Ellis, Senior Lecturer at NIHE.

His work should prove of practical help to leaders of the Irish insurance industry in developing export sales of insurance to European markets.

PLANNING NOTICE

TAKE NOTICE that I, Michael Maher, have applied to Limerick County Council for permission to erect Bungalow, septic tank and entrance at Killiuragh, Capamore, Co. Limerick.

MARY QUILTS COMMUNITY GAMES

LIMERICK'S Mary Ryan will no longer be associated with the National Community Games.

The Young Limerickwoman who lives at Dooradoyle has been involved in the Community Games in the county for the past five years and has served Limerick as Assistant Secretary and P.R.O. She has also been involved at local level with Limerick Regional and has been a strong supporter of the games throughout the period.

As National P.R.O. for the Community Games Mary was most impressive with her contributions. In Limerick she made particular efforts to publicise each event as they arose.

Working life now prevents Mary from serving with the Games in either Limerick or at National level, but, it is hoped that this popular young administrator will soon have the chance to return.

VIEWPOINT

A GOOD CHRISTMAS

Two factors have come together this year to make this a very good Christmas. Firstly, the emphasis on commercialism is greatly reduced this year. The economic good-times are over — and it shows.

Secondly, and partly as a result of the first factor, we have all been more conscious of the deserving needy this year, and our charity has been much greater. We have become more aware of the essential message of Christmas — giving.

For it was at Christmas that the Father gave his Son to us, knowing that we would reject him. How little, by comparison is asked of us?

We are asked to give something to the needy, to give our love to our families, to give our understanding to our enemies, to give our time to the troubled — that's all!

Most importantly, however, we should not ignore the message of giving.

We should not, for example, deprive our families of our love by becoming drunk and unsociable. We should not put our friends at risk by driving under the influence. We should not turn a deaf ear to those who seek our help.

But, Limerick is a good place. The season of goodwill will be properly celebrated by most of us.

Let us all have a happy, holy and peaceful Christmas.

Castletroy Residents Complain

CASTLETROY residents are expressing grave concern for the deterioration of roads in their area.

Their main concern is for the Monaleen Road, especially the construction of a footpath from Monaleen Church to Monaleen School. Large numbers of children who walk to school daily are in danger of being knocked down. Concern is also being expressed for the condition of lighting on the road.

Residents are also calling for the erection of a second public telephone kiosk because of the overuse of the present one on the Dublin Road, by increased numbers

of students and passing motorists.

Cllr. Paddy Hourigan congratulated Fine Gael members for highlighting the problems at their recent meeting, and for playing a major part in bringing about improvements in the past. He promised to make strong representations to the appropriate authorities on the matters raised.

Pen Pals

If you would like a twenty year old Algerian student as a pen friend write to: Siad Tahar, Cite-Universitaire, Zoughi-Sliman, F04, Constantine, Algeria.

He enjoys listening to music, sport, travelling and most other things.

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a Happy New Year