

ST. SENAN, B. C.

HE was born in the country of Hy-Conalls in Ireland, in the latter part of the fifth century, was a disciple of the abbots Cassidus and Natal, or Naal: then travelled for spiritual improvement to Rome, and thence into Britain. In this kingdom he contracted a close friendship with St. David. After his return he founded many churches in Ireland, and a great monastery in Inis-Cathaig, an island lying at the mouth of the river Shannon, which he governed, and in which he continued to reside after he was advanced to the episcopal dignity. The abbots, his successors for several centuries, were all bishops, till this great diocese was divided into three, namely of Limerick, Killaloe, and Ardfert. St. Senan died on the same day and year with St. David; but was honoured in the Irish church on the 8th of March. A town in Cornwall bears the name of St. Senan. See his acts in Colgan, p. 602.

ST. PSALMOD, OR SAUMAY, ANCHORET.

HE was born in Ireland, and, retiring into France, led an eremitical life at Limousin, where he acquired great reputation for his sanctity and miracles. He died about 589. See the Martyrology of Evreux.

MARCH IX.

ST. FRANCES, WIDOW.

FOUNDESS OF THE COLLATINES.

Abridged from her life by her confessor, Canon. Mattiotti; and that by Magdalen Dell'Anguillara, superioress of the Oblates, or Collatines. Helyot, *Hist. des Ordr. Mon.* t. 6. p. 208.

A.D. 1440.

ST. FRANCES was born at Rome in 1384. Her parents, Paul de Buxo and Jacobella Rofredeschi, were both of illustrious families. She imbibed early sentiments of piety, and such was her love of purity from her tender age, that she would not suffer her own father to touch even her hands unless covered. She had always

an aversion to the amusements of children, and loved solitude and prayer. At eleven years of age she desired to enter a monastery, but in obedience to her parents, was married to a rich young Roman nobleman named Laurence Ponzani, in 1396. A grievous sickness showed how disagreeable this kind of life was to her inclination. She joined with it her former spirit; kept herself as retired as she could, shunning feasting and public meetings. All her delight was in prayer, meditation, and visiting churches. Above all, her obedience and condescension to her husband was inimitable, which engaged such a return of affection, that for forty years which they lived together, there never happened the least disagreement; and their whole life was a constant strife and emulation to prevent each other in mutual complaisance and respect. Whilst she was at her prayers or other exercises, if called away by her husband, or the meanest person of her family, she laid all aside to obey without delay, saying: "A married woman must, when called upon, quit her devotions to God at the altar, to find him in her household affairs." God was pleased to show her the merit of this her obedience; for the authors of her life relate, that being called away four times in beginning the same verse of a psalm in our Lady's office, returning the fifth time, she found that verse written in golden letters. She treated her domestics not as servants, but as brothers and sisters, and future co-heirs in heaven; and studied by all means in her power to induce them seriously to labour for their salvation. Her mortifications were extraordinary, especially when some years before her husband's death, she was permitted by him to inflict on her body what hardships she pleased. She from that time abstained from wine, fish, and dainty meats, with a total abstinence from flesh, unless in her greatest sickness. Her ordinary diet was hard and mouldy bread. She would procure secretly, out of the pouches of the beggars, their dry crusts in exchange for better bread. When she fared the best, she only added to bread a few unsavoury herbs without oil, and drank nothing but water, making use of a human skull for her cup. She ate but once a day, and by long abstinence had lost all relish of what she took. Her garments were of coarse serge, and she never wore linen, not even in sickness. Her discipline was armed with rowels and sharp points. She wore continually a hair shirt, and a girdle of horse-hair. An iron girdle had so galled her

flesh, that her confessor obliged her to lay it aside. If she inadvertently chanced to offend God in the least, she severely that instant punished the part that had offended; as the tongue, by sharply biting it, &c. Her example was of such edification, that many Roman ladies having renounced a life of idleness, pomp, and softness, joined her in pious exercises, and put themselves under the direction of the Benedictine monks of the congregation of Monte-Olivet, without leaving the world, making vows, or wearing any particular habit. Saint Frances prayed only for children that they might be citizens of heaven, and when she was blessed with them, it was her whole care to make them saints.

It pleased God, for her sanctification, to make trial of her virtue by many afflictions. During the troubles which ensued upon the invasion of Rome by Ladislas, king of Naples, and the great schism under Pope John XXIII, at the time of opening the council of Constance, in 1413, her husband, with his brother-in-law Paulucci, was banished Rome, his estate confiscated, his house pulled down, and his eldest son, John Baptist, detained an hostage. Her soul remained calm amidst all those storms: she said with Job: "*God hath given, and God hath taken away. I rejoice in these losses, because they are God's will. Whatever he sends I shall continually bless and praise his name for.*" The schism being extinguished by the council of Constance, and tranquillity restored at Rome, her husband recovered his dignity and estate. Some time after, moved by the great favours St. Frances received from heaven, and by her eminent virtue, he gave her full leave to live as she pleased; and he himself chose to serve God in a state of continency. He permitted her, in his own life-time, to found a monastery of nuns, called Oblates, for the reception of such of her own sex as were disposed to embrace a religious life. The foundation of this house was in 1425. She gave them the rule of St. Benedict, adding some particular constitutions of her own, and put them under the direction of the congregation of the Olivetans. The house being too small for the numbers that fled to this sanctuary from the corruption of the world, she would gladly have removed her community to a larger house; but not finding one suitable, she enlarged it in 1433, from which year the founding of the Order is dated. It was approved by Pope Eugenius IV. in 1437. They are called Collatines, perhaps from the quarter of Rome in which they are situated; and Oblates, because they

call their profession an oblation, and use in it the word *offerō*, not *profiteor*. St. Frances could not yet join her new family; but as soon as she had settled her domestic affairs, after the death of her husband, she went barefoot, with a cord about her neck, to the monastery which she had founded, and there, prostrate on the ground, before the religious, her spiritual children, begged to be admitted. She accordingly took the habit on St. Benedict's day, in 1437. She always sought the meanest employments in the house, being fully persuaded she was of all the most contemptible before God; and she laboured to appear as mean in the eyes of the world as she was in her own. She continued the same humiliations, and the same universal poverty, though soon after chosen superioress of her congregation. Almighty God bestowed on her humility, extraordinary graces, and supernatural favours, as frequent visions, raptures, and the gift of prophecy. She enjoyed the familiar conversation of her angel-guardian, as her life and the process of her canonization attest. She was extremely affected by meditating on our Saviour's passion, which she had always present to her mind. At mass she was so absorpt in God as to seem immoveable, especially after holy communion: she often fell into ecstasies of love and devotion. She was particularly devout to Saint John the Evangelist, and above all to our Lady, under whose singular protection she put her Order. Going out to see her son John Baptist, who was dangerously sick, she fell so ill herself that she could not return to her monastery at night. After having foretold her death, and received the sacraments, she expired on the 9th of March, in the year 1440, and of her age the fifty-sixth. God attested her sanctity by miracles: she was honoured among the saints immediately after her death, and solemnly canonized by Paul V. in 1608. Her shrine in Rome is most magnificent and rich: and her festival is kept as a holy-day in the city, with great solemnity. The Oblates make no solemn vows, only a promise of obedience to the mother-president, enjoy pensions, inherit estates, and go abroad with leave. Their abbey in Rome is filled with ladies of the first rank.

In a religious life, in which a regular distribution of holy employments and duties take up the whole day, and leave no interstices of time for idleness, sloth, or the world, hours pass in these exercises with the rapidity of moments, and moments by fervour of the desires bear the value of years. There is not an

instant in which a soul is not employed for God, and studies not with her whole heart to please him. Every step, every thought and desire, is a sacrifice of fidelity, obedience, and love offered to him. Even meals, recreation, and rest are sanctified by this intention; and from the religious vows and habitual purpose of the soul of consecrating herself entirely to God in time and eternity, every action, as St. Thomas teaches, renews and contains the fervour and merit of this entire consecration, of which it is a part. In a secular life, a person by regularity in the employment of his time, and fervour in devoting himself to God in all his actions and designs, may in some degree enjoy the same happiness and advantage. This St. Frances perfectly practised, even before she renounced the world. She lived forty years with her husband without ever giving him the least occasion of offence; and by the fervour with which she conversed of heaven, she seemed already to have quitted the earth, and to have made paradise her ordinary dwelling.

ST. GREGORY OF NYSSA, B. C.

HE was younger brother to St. Basil the Great; was educated in polite and sacred studies, and married to a virtuous lady. He afterwards renounced the world, and was ordained lector; but was overcome by his violent passion for eloquence to teach rhetoric. St. Gregory Nazianzen wrote to him in the strongest terms, exhorting him to renounce that paltry or ignoble glory, as he elegantly calls it.(1) This letter produced its desired effect. St. Gregory returned to the sacred ministry in the lower functions of the altar: after some time he was called by his brother Basil to assist him in his pastoral duties, and in 372 was chosen bishop of Nyssa, a city of Cappadocia, near the Lesser Armenia. The Arians, who trembled at his name, prevailed with Demosthenes, vicar or deputy-governor of the province to banish him. Upon the death of the Arian emperor, Valens, in 378, St. Gregory was restored to his see by the Emperor Gratian. Our holy prelate was chosen by his colleagues to redress the abuses and dissensions which heresy had introduced in Arabia and Palestine. He assisted at the council of Constantinople in 381, and was always regarded as the centre of the Catholic communion in the East. Those

(1) ἀδόξην εὐδοξίαν, Naz. ep. 4^a.