

ADV 1089



# Saint Patrick



By  
Very Reverend  
Canon A. Ryan



THE PAULIST PRESS  
401 West 59th Street  
New York, N. Y.

*(The Apostle of Ireland)*



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VERY REV. CANON A. RYAN

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# St. Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland

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T. PATRICK lived through the fifth century of the Christian era, and died within a few years of its close. It was a time of wonders and of wonder-workers; yet his marvelous life-span of a hundred and twenty years was even then without a rival, while his miracles stood unapproached by the most astounding even of that age.<sup>1</sup> Roman Imperial civilization had done its work as a channel of Christianity, and, like its own mighty aqueducts which had brought for centuries the pure mountain waters to the thirsty multitudes, was now falling into picturesque decay. In the west, in Gaul and Britain, the Cross, which had advanced with the Roman eagles, fell back with them when they retired. The scattered Christians that remained when the Legions had retreated, were either lapsing into

<sup>1</sup>A short life like this allows no room for controversy, or for such archæological disquisitions as naturally find a place in fuller and more learned works. I have, however, admitted nothing into the text which has not respectable authority to support it, or which does not seem to throw light on the character of the Saint. In the matter of dates and places, I have, I think, nearly always gone with the majority of writers on St. Patrick. My aim has been to give a life of the Apostle of Ireland which will be quickly and easily read by his simple and loving children, and which will give them the result, in a brief and popular form, of a long and, be it confessed, a somewhat sad experience of Patrician literature.

heresy, or were being swallowed up in the wave of triumphant barbarism rolling from the north. But the same Providence that let loose that avenging flood upon the sullied Empire, was not without a care for His own. As the Frank and the Goth pushed into the fertile lands of Italy, other conquerors as mighty rose in the lands they had left. Sainly heroes were given by God to the stricken peoples, and by Him strengthened with the power which is made perfect in infirmity. One, who had first served in the Imperial armies, was afterward, as a soldier of Christ, to plant more firmly than ever in Gaul the Cross amid the ruins of the Roman Province. St. Martin proved his divine commission by miracles. Such was the ordinary providence of God with the apostles of those days.

It was the time for the wonder-worker. And God sent him, with a hand strong to rouse or calm the forces of nature, gifted with life and death. The powers of evil were let loose upon him that he might triumph over their attacks: angelic presences surrounded him to attest his mission, guard his work, and be his messengers. Such manifestations were expected by the rude Europeans of those days. They have ever been looked for by the rude and simple of every age and clime, as charters of the preacher's right to speak with the authority of God. But Martin, whose mission was to a race settling in a land where Christianity still survived, was less in need of that power of miracle than an apostle sent to a land in which Christianity had never found a foothold, and which Rome had never cared or dared to colonize. Such an apostle was St. Patrick, the kinsman and disciple of St. Martin, sent to the Irish people un-



regenerate to Christ, unconquered and untainted by Rome. We should expect therefore to find him, as indeed we do, gifted far beyond the Apostle of the Gauls with that power of wonder-working which, while it is the glory and the fondly nursed tradition of his children in the Faith, is also the scandal and the mockery of his enemies and theirs. We enter, therefore, on his holy and assuredly most marvelous life, prepared to find it as unlike the records of modern saintliness as his mission and his times are unlike our own, and also—let it be written in thankfulness, not in pride—as the blessed success of his work in Ireland, through fourteen centuries, is unlike that of any other apostle's work among any other people in the annals of the Christian Church.<sup>2</sup>

St. Patrick was a Gallo-Roman. By his mother, Concessa, he was closely related to St. Martin, Bishop of Tours, whose disciple he afterwards became. His father, Calphurnius, was, the Saint tells us, a Roman officer of good family. It seems a fairly established fact that Concessa had been in her youth, as her son was afterwards, carried into slavery; and that it was from this state that Calphurnius, won by her beauty and virtue, rescued her to make her his wife. So it was by one who had been a slave and was the son of a slave, that the Gospel was preached to a people who were for many a cen-

<sup>2</sup>Tillemont, as a rule a cautious chronicler, likens St. Patrick to the Prophets of the Old Law, and to the Apostles who, in the grace and power of Pentecost, first spread the faith of Christ. Certainly, it is only in the records of the very greatest of God's saints that we can find parallels for the miracles commemorated in every page of St. Patrick's history, and in every tradition concerning him. It is in such company alone that his life should be read and his traditions interpreted. What is in perfect perspective there, would, at a lower level, appear monstrous and absurd.

tury to know the sorrows of servitude, and amid those sorrows to prepare for better days. The date of St. Patrick's birth was A. D. 372. The place of his birth is a question of much uncertainty.<sup>3</sup>

A miracle is said to have signaled the child's baptism. If so, it was a fitting opening for a miraculous life. The blind and aged priest failed to find water for the sacrament. Illuminated as to the future sanctity of the babe, the old man signed, with the infant's hand, a cross upon the ground. A spring of water at once burst up, in which the babe was baptized, and the blind eyes were washed and made to see. The child was, it seems, christened by the name of Succat. Patricius, or Patrick, the name so dear to-day to millions, was the gift of the Pope, and the Saint had reached the age of sixty before

<sup>3</sup>The principal claimants are Scotland and France. Dumbarton in the former, Boulogne in the latter. "North Britain," "by the shores of the Irish Sea," "not far from the Western Sea;" these expressions of our Saint's earliest biographers may refer to the Island of Britain, or to the northwest of Gaul, then often called Britain, and, in our own day, Brittany. "At Banaven, in the territory of Tabernia, my father dwelt, and I was taken prisoner there." This is St. Patrick's own account in his *Confession*. But where Banaven or Tabernia may be, who can say? Some may be inclined to accept the conjecture of the eloquent author of *The Light of the West*, who, while allowing northern Gaul to be St. Patrick's birthplace, fixes on Whitehaven—English for the Celtic Ban or Bawn Haven—in Cumberland on the shore of the Irish or Western Sea, as the place where his father was stationed when the pirates made their slave-raid and took the boy with his sister into captivity. His *patria*, to which in his *Confession* he alludes so tenderly, would then be Gallic Britain, or the modern Brittany. In comparison with that distant home, the island of his captivity and of his apostolate would be indeed the "furthest end of the earth," an expression which could scarcely be used of Ireland by a native of Scotland.



he received it from Pope Celestine, together with his commission to preach the Gospel in Ireland.<sup>4</sup>

To those accustomed to read the lives of the Saints in the Divine Office of the Catholic Church, it will be no matter for wonder, and still less for doubt, that the holy boyhood of Patrick is described, by all who write of it, as rich in miracles. It is the delight of the Creator to be with the children of men, and we seem to see Him, as He has Himself said, *ludens in orbe terrarum*, playing, as it were, with His own works, the Father condescending to be a child among His children. In the very ancient *Tripartite Life*, written by St. Evin,<sup>5</sup> we read of "many prodigies and miracles wrought by Patrick through his youth," but only "a few out of many" are there recorded. By the sign of the cross—ever Patrick's strength and comfort from youth to extreme old age—the boy healed his wounded sister, and changed water into honey. By his breath—to bring in after years the comfort of faith and love into many a soul—he kindled a frozen hearth into flame. His young hands, destined to be so often raised in potent prayer to heaven for the

<sup>4</sup>St. Palladius, our Saint's predecessor, had also received the name of Patrick when Pope Celestine sent him to Ireland. Moreover, one of St. Patrick's holiest and most trusted disciples was "Sen," that is Senior, Patrick, and he was, like his master, singularly gifted with the power of miracles. Some confusion has naturally arisen between three Patricks whose missions lay so close to one another. But the hearts of the Irish have never swerved, nor given a divided allegiance to him who alone can claim the title of Apostle of Ireland. The heart of a Catholic people is never much at fault, though the heads of even the pious and learned may, at times, get very much astray.

<sup>5</sup>St. Evin was probably a contemporary of St. Patrick. The place of Evin's minster, or monastery, is familiar to us under its modern name of Monasterevan.

distressed, stayed the devastating flood, raised the stricken cattle, and, when times were bad, paid his nurse's rent with curds and butter miraculously drawn from the drifted snow; which miracle was wrought, it would seem, for the poor woman's sake alone, for when the payment had been made, the curds and butter melted back again into the snow from which they came. But far more clearly than even the gift of miracles was the boy's sanctity foretold by his astonishing humility. So utterly did he despise himself in those young days, so far did he deem himself from God, and from all true religious obedience and observance, that in his *Confession*, written by him a hundred years after, he still holds the same opinion of himself, unchanged, and renews against himself the abasement and reproaches of his youth. When we remember his sanctity and gifts, we can hardly understand—unless, indeed, we recall the language of St. Paul against himself—such passages as these: "I knew not the true God, and I was brought captive to Ireland with many thousand men as we deserved; for we had forsaken God, and had not kept His commandments, and were disobedient to the priests, who admonished us for our salvation. . . . and the Lord showed me my unbelief. . . . and had pity on my youth and ignorance." Such humility in Patrick is more to our edification than even his wonder-working. It is of such as he there showed himself to be that the Scripture says: "He hath done wonderful things in his life." And *such* wonder-working all may strive to imitate.

Patrick was sixteen years of age when, in the year 388, he was carried into captivity. Perhaps it was, as we have seen, on the coast of Cumberland that the pirates took

him from his father's home: or possibly on the coast of Brittany. They sailed "around Erin, northwards, until they landed in the north." The lad was sold to Milcho, the chief of North Dalraida. The words of the *Confession* give simply and graphically a picture of the young captive's life: "After I had come to Ireland, I was daily tending sheep, and many times in the day I prayed, and more and more the love of God, and His faith and fear, grew in me, and my spirit was stirred; so that in a single day I have said as many as a hundred prayers, and in the night nearly the same; so that I remained in the woods and upon the mountains, and before the dawn I was called to pray by the snow, the ice, and the rain, and I did not suffer from them, nor was there any sloth in me as I see now, because then the spirit was burning within me."

Such generous prayer and penance had its own reward from Him who never suffers Himself to be outdone in generosity. God sent His angel, Victor, down to the lonely shepherd on Mount Slemish, to give him the strength and comfort that he could no longer draw from priest or sacrament; and to show him in vision, from that northern mountainside, the future glories of Erin. May we not hope that St. Patrick has been often moved by the memories of those days to give like aid to his lonely children in their exile, where the cruelest part of their cruel lot has been their banishment from the helps and comfort of the religion of their far-off home?

For six years the captive suffered and prayed, and at last his day of emancipation came. A voice from Heaven told him to go to that beloved *patria* which he so longed to see. "Behold, the ship is ready." And the place was

not near, but perhaps about two hundred miles away, and I had never been there, nor did I know any one who lived there." So writes the Saint in his *Confession*. He goes on to relate how, having found the ship, and being refused a passage, he had recourse to his never-failing prayer: the shipmaster relented, sent for him, and carried him to Gaul. His companions soon reaped the benefit of their kindness. Their provisions failed, but Patrick's prayer brought abundance again, while, with the word of God, he fed their hungry souls. After a terrible assault from the Evil One, who strove to crush him as he slept, and after a second brief captivity of two months—a not uncommon experience of travelers by sea and land in those days—he reached his journey's end. He had left Erin a fugitive to return a conqueror. The long eight-and-thirty years now before him were to be spent preparing in the homes of penance, prayer and learning, for that mission of conquest.

St. Martin was then Bishop of Tours. The aged man, who had been consecrated bishop the very year before Patrick's birth, welcomed his kinsman to his monastic home at Marmoutier, by the Loire. There, in a rock-bound spot, hard by that rapid river, the Bishop had planted his monastery—no high-soaring towers or pointed gables in those days, but only the huts and caves of the monks of the East. And well must the new-freed captive from Erin have loved that quiet home of peaceful austerity, and deep must he have drunk of that monastic spirit which was afterwards to be poured forth in fullest abundance upon the island in the west. Here the Saint vowed a life-long abstinence from flesh meat; and if his pious Irish children are even to this day singular in their



devotion to this form of penance, they can defend their conduct against modern effeminacy by a reference to their Apostle's vigor during his hundred and twenty years. But Marmoutier was soon bereft of its saintly founder. The aged Bishop died, illustrious by a life of sanctity and miracle, leaving a disciple who was to carry back to the Irish people the devotion to St. Martin, the savor of St. Martin's virtue, and a love for St. Martin's day.

It was, probably, in the hermitage of Marmoutier that Patrick saw in vision the angel Victor, his companion on the heights of Slemish, who came to him with God's message and mission. "And I read the commencement of the epistle containing 'the voice of the Irish.' And as I read aloud the beginning of the letter, I thought I heard in my mind the voice of those who were near the wood of Foclut, which is near the Western Sea. And they cried out: 'We entreat thee, holy youth, to come and walk still amongst us.' And my heart was greatly touched, so that I could not read any more." Thus doubly called, by God and man, our Saint set himself to his long thirty years' preparation for the apostolate.

St. Germanus, Bishop of Auxerre, was Patrick's guide, teacher and friend after the death of St. Martin. It was he who perhaps, of all men living, had the greatest share in forming the religious character of our Saint. We find, in the accounts that reach us of the saintly Bishop of Auxerre, a masculine courage and a sweet but firm ruling power, which seem to have been inherited by his disciple. The records of Patrick's life as student, monk, and priest, are scanty. Probus tells us how he spent the years with St. Germanus "in patience, obedi-

ence, charity, and chastity, in sanctity of heart and soul." From Auxerre he went to the famous monastery of Lerins, near the present town of Cannes, on the Mediterranean Sea. Some thirty years before, that island had no trace of man upon it save the ruins of a pagan temple, round whose mouldering walls the vipers swarmed in such multitudes as to render human habitation impossible. One day a solitary anchoret, Honoratus by name, landed on its shore. At his prayer, and before his industry, the poisonous reptiles fled. Hermits soon crossed over to join the lonely islander: gradually the fame of Lerins spread: and at the date when Patrick seeks its shore, the island of serpents has come to be called the nursery of saints and scholars. Fitting biding-place for him who on that balmy southern isle was to nourish in his heart the sanctity and learning that would purge the reptiles from distant Erin, and make her another and a grander island of saints and scholars. It is touching to read, in the monastic records of those days, the expressions of passionate attachment for that "happy island" of Lerins. St. Cæsarius died blessing it. Hearts detached from all else on earth clung fondly to the memories of what seemed to them an earthly Paradise. And there are few spots on earth more sacred to a lover of St. Patrick, since perhaps there was no other, save Erin, dearer to his heart.

From Lerins we learn that our Saint visited Rome, and pursued for some time his studies in the great College of the Lateran. And so the years wear on. Patrick is still young in heart, still preparing for his life-work, though he is approaching his sixtieth year. St. Germanus, his aged friend and guide, sent by the Pope to



Britain to attack in its stronghold there the heresy of Pelagius, calls Patrick to assist him. There is little more than the mere fact recorded. But surely it is a most interesting one—that the island which was to receive so much of its earliest as well as its latest Catholicity from Ireland, should have been the field of the first missionary labors of the Irish Apostle. And perhaps there is a blessing too in the thought of Patrick's feet having hallowed a land from which so much sorrow has come to his children. He has shown in his life how sanctity may ripen in years of servitude, and how a saint may repay a hard master by bringing, in return for slavery and oppression, the light and freedom of truth.

It was probably from his work with St. Germanus in Britain, that Patrick was sent to Rome. Palladius, Archdeacon of Rome, had been commissioned by Pope Celestine to preach the Gospel to the Irish. Where could he find a better helper than Patrick? So thought St. Germanus, and he sent our Saint with a priest, Sege-tius, to the Pope, recommending him as "a strong husbandman, well fitted for cultivating the harvest of the Lord." "O Lord Jesus," prayed the holy missionary, "lead me, I beseech Thee, to the seat of the Holy Roman Church, that receiving authority there to preach with confidence Thy sacred truths, the Irish nation may, through my ministry, be gathered to the fold of Christ." And now the hope of long years is about to be realized. The call of the Irish children is to be at last answered. Patrick receives from the Pope, the fountain-head of all authority in the Church, the commission to preach the Word of God in Erin. Hurrying back towards what was his "Isle of Destiny," his Innisfail, he hears of the death

of Palladius. He turns back, in consequence, to receive the episcopal consecration, which he now requires as the Apostle of Ireland. At Eboria, in Northern Italy, the modern Ivrea, by the command, and it would seem in presence, of the Pope, and at the hands of St. Maximus, Bishop of Turin, Patrick was consecrated. The Christian Emperor Theodosius is said to have assisted, as well as the Pope, at the ceremony which, could the secrets of the future have been revealed, would have filled both Church and Empire that day with gladness.<sup>6</sup>

It was the year 432. The Fathers of Ephesus had proclaimed against Nestorius the doctrine of the Incarnation, and the honors of the Virgin Mother of God; and St. Celestine, as successor of St. Peter, had just confirmed the decrees of the Council. Eastward to Cyril, Bishop of Alexandria, westward to Patrick, Bishop of Ireland, the holy Pope sent his blessing to those who were through the whole earth to champion the honors and spread the names of Jesus and Mary. With the joy and strength of that blessing on him, and in the spring-time of that auspicious year, our holy Patrick sailed for Erin. Some rays of Christian light had long years before pierced the pagan darkness of that island, but they had faded away. The mission of Palladius, short as it was, was long enough to be pronounced a failure. And now, when Patrick, after his thirty years' absence, stepped again on Irish soil, it seemed as though he too would fail. He had gone ashore at the lovely spot where, flowing from the wooded Wicklow mountains, the river

<sup>6</sup>The first Irish "Patrick," Palladius, being no more, our Saint received from the Pope his name as well as his mission: a name to be borne through many labors for sixty years, and through honor and invocation for all time.

Dargle breaks the coast-line at Bray. The Leinster men of those parts would not hear him. They had driven away the first Patrick: the second should go too. So the Saint sailed out again, and landed a little to the south of the Boyne, in fertile Meath. Here a boy came on the Saint while he slept. Struck with love and veneration for the old man, he culled sweet flowers, and strewed them on the sleeper; nor would he afterwards depart, but clave to Patrick from that day. "He will be the heir of my kingdom," said the Saint; and the prophecy was fulfilled when, years after, Benignus, as the boy was called, succeeded his master as Bishop of Armagh. Again sailing northwards, Patrick, together with his followers—some, probably, the fellow-workers or disciples of Palladius—landed at Strangford Lough, in Down. There he miraculously stayed the arm of the fierce Dichu, who would have slain him; and as miraculously softened his heart, and opened his mind to the love and light of Christianity. Dichu was the first of Patrick's converts, the first to succumb to that power of miracle which was, by the providence of God, to prepare the way in Ireland for the Gospel of Peace. From Down our Saint again sailed north. The hills and vales of Antrim, the scene of his sufferings and prayers, where, close on a half a century before, he had folded his flock upon the heights of Slemish—these must he see. He must save, too, if they will be saved, those whom he knew in those far-off days. Tradition tells us that the aged Milcho, consumed with avarice and remorse, perished miserably by his own hands before the Saint could reach him. His children however became Christians, and died in the odor of sanctity. The historian

naturally lingers over these dim records—the first glimmerings of the dawn which was soon to break with such dazzling radiance over the whole island.

Easter, 433, found Patrick already assured of success in his mission. King Laeghaire, Ardrigh (chief-king) of Erin, was about to hold his solemn festival at Tara. Princes and priests of Erin were gathered round him. The sacred fire that he would light should be the first in all the land to pierce the gloom. But Patrick, not knowing and not caring, as St. Evin says, lit high upon the hill of Slane, over against the hill Tara, the Easter fire; for it was Holy Saturday. The angry king saw it and stormed against the offender. But the Druids said: "If that fire is not put out before morning, it never will be put out." Summoned to the royal presence to answer for his act, Patrick advanced with his little Christian band, chanting, as he had learned to chant in Lerins and in Rome, the litanies of Easter. The king received him with coldness—for had he not broken the laws of Erin? One bard, with instinctive reverence, rose at his approach, and received, in reward, the gift of faith.

To the assembled court, as they sat "with the rims of their shields against their chins," Patrick declared his mission. The Druids saw that the hour was come when they must conquer, or forever disappear. The powers of evil were at hand to help them. And then and there, in the sight of king and court and people, Patrick, in the might of God, wrought such terrific miracles as Druid never dreamed of. The tempest in the heaven was not as awful as the devilish rage of those pagan breasts. The heaving earth was strewn with the corpses of men



who had been fallen on by their fellows and slain, no one knew why. The king's treacherous vengeance was only evaded by the miraculous escape of the Saint and his followers. Next day the Saint returned boldly, though he knew they had a mind to kill him. With the sign of the cross he drove the poison from the cup prepared for his destruction. When, by the powers of darkness, the Druids wrought malignant miracles in the plain before Tara, Patrick undid their evil and far surpassed their wonders. If they were allowed by God to bring on snow and darkness, Patrick alone had power to remove these. In more terrible proof still, the boy Benignus, clothed in the Druid's robe, was to be placed on dry faggots, and the Druid, in Patrick's cloak, on wet, green faggots; then fire was to be set to both. The trial was accepted. The flames on the one hand touched not the dry wood nor the Christian boy; only the robe he wore was consumed; while on the other, the green wood and the miserable magician were reduced to ashes, amid which lay, unscorched, the cloak of Patrick. Even this miracle was powerless to move King Laeghaire's heart. It was only when the earth opened and engulfed many of his followers that he seems to have relented. He granted Patrick the freedom he craved to preach the Gospel unmolested, though he himself remained, as the Saint had called him, "a son of death." Tradition has it that it was on this occasion that Patrick, in his sermon on the Blessed Trinity, plucked the green shamrock from the sward of Tara, making this triple leaf at once an illustration of his sacred subject, and an emblem of Christian Erin. It was at Tara, also, that we first hear of his famous prayer, called his "Lorica" or "Breastplate."

Amid the perils of that awful day some such defence was surely wanting. And what could be more suited for all who are under stress of temptation than invocations such as these?

“ Christ be with me, Christ before me,  
Christ be after me, Christ within me,  
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ at my right hand, Christ at my left,  
Christ in the fort, Christ in the chariot,  
Christ in the ship;  
Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me  
Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks to me,  
Christ in every eye that sees me,  
Christ in every ear that hears me.”

Such a trust was never yet confounded; and we read in the Acts of the Bollandists that after this “ Patrick with his disciples went through the whole land baptizing all that believed in the name of the Blessed Trinity; and God was his helper, and confirmed the word by the signs which followed.”

It seems to have been very soon after the Saint's first great victory at Tara that he passed from Meath into Cavan, to the “ Plain of Adorations,” where whatever of idolatry flourished in Erin had its centre. The huge Crom Cruach of Milesian days was still standing there, with twelve smaller idols. Patrick with his staff overturned them all, and raised on the spot a church to the living God. Indeed, the Irish seem not to have had much taste for the worship of figures of wood and stone. Their favorite god was the sun, and their religion was characterized by the freedom and picturesque beauty of



rite always found in that form of worship. Of the staff before which Crom Cruach fell, there is a world of legend, but little of authentic history. It was called the "staff of Jesus," and was said to have been made or carried by our Lord, and given in a vision to Patrick, while he prayed on his "happy isle" in the Mediterranean. It is described by St. Bernard as one of the great relics of the Church of Armagh, where it was preserved in a richly jewelled case of gold. Its sanctity and its value tempted the fanaticism and cupidity of the Reformers, one of whose bishops burned the staff and kept the gold and jewels. It mattered little to him that it had been treasured by the Irish Church for more than a thousand years.

Connaught was next visited. Churches and monasteries were now beginning to mark the Apostle's path. At Elphin, Assicus, deft worker in brass, as well as saint and bishop, was left to rule the Church. It was also westward of the Shannon at Cruachan, in Roscommon, that Patrick converted the two Princesses, Ethne and Feidelm, daughters of King Laeghaire.<sup>7</sup> Won by the Saint's eloquence, the maidens ask for Baptism and Holy Communion. Their request is granted, and in the joy of their first morning of Christianity they pass away to the joys of Heaven. But where Croagh Patrick towers over the western wave the interest of our Saint's Connaught mission centres. A very miracle of penance at all times, Patrick is about to rival the fasts of Moses and Elias. It is Shrovetide when he goes up to his lonely

<sup>7</sup>This story, touching even in the rough *Tripartite Life*, is nowhere more beautifully told than in Mr. Aubrey de Vere's pure verse.

mountain of prayer. It will be Eastertide when he comes down. He goes up there, that in that high solitude, with the desert of ocean on one side and the scarcely less deserted land-track on the other, he may fast and pray for Eirin. It is the culmination of his life-struggle; his crowning victory over the foul spirits that were striving with him for the land he loved. His arms for the fight are prayer and penance, the strong "cry and tears" with which his Master, in His dark hour of dereliction, conquered for all mankind. To understand that awful wrestling—now with the Evil One, like Anthony, now with the Almighty, like Jacob—we must remember how great was the prize, and how wonderful the Saint's demands. The island where demons seemed to have their fullest liberty, like the envenomed reptiles which in strange multitudes found there a northern home, was to become the island of sanctity and of learning. The people that sat in darkness were to shine brightest of all on earth, and to carry the light, not only to the eastward continent, but, in long centuries to come, to the unknown lands that lay beyond the western wave. It was to be a victory won for hundreds of millions of souls; and we need not wonder that the battle raged fierce and long. Patrick's cowl was drenched with tears. God's angels made him offer of souls innumerable as the wavelets on the ocean below; he would have more—the sands of the shore should be added. The angel bade him go—he had been promised enough. Enough? No, not though the promises of salvation for his own, upon the judgment day, were multiplied sevenfold for every hair upon his habit. That mount he would not quit, nor stay his fast or prayer, until God should promise to give

into his hands upon that last day the fate of the men of Erin. It was a mysterious request, seeming above God's power to grant. But, we are told, the angel brought at eventide the answer that this too was granted to the intrepid man of prayer. His joy was full.

“That thou soughtest  
Shall lack not consummation. Many a race,  
Shrivelling in sunshine of its prosperous years,  
Shall cease from faith, and, shamed though shameless, sink  
Back to its native clay; but over thine  
God shall the shadow of His Hand extend,  
And through the night of centuries teach to her  
In woe that song which, when the nations wake,  
Shall sound their glad deliverance.”<sup>a</sup>

His struggle over, Patrick, at the angel's word, knelt and blessed the land for which he had prayed. Every poisonous presence fled before that potent benediction, and his hermit's bell, as he descended from the mount that Easter evening, proclaimed the new birth of a Catholic Ireland. His was the victory of confident, persevering prayer; and that great lesson, far more than the miracles that accompanied it, has through the ages fixed the eyes of Christians on Croagh Patrick and on him who there strove against Hell and Heaven with the only sword and the only breastplate that could in such a strife prevail.

Patrick's labors in Connaught extended over seven years. We read of thousands whom he baptized, of churches without number which he built, and of miracles which he wrought wherever he went. More edifying for us even than those proofs of God's favor to our Saint, were his increasing acts of love and devotion to God

<sup>a</sup>De Vere, *Legends of St. Patrick*.

and souls. His use of the sign of the cross was itself a marvel, as was the reverence he paid to those crosses which already began to be erected through the land. "It was a custom with Patrick to place the cross of Christ over himself one hundred times each day and night; and he would go aside from his path, even though the cross were one hundred paces away, provided that he saw it, or knew it to be in his vicinity; whether he was in a chariot or on a horse, he would proceed to each cross." So writes St. Evin. The same holy chronicler tells us how "thrice Patrick went across the Shannon into the land of Connacht. Fifty bells, and fifty altar chalices, and fifty altar cloths, he left in the land of Connacht, each of them in his church. Seven years he was preaching to the men of Connacht; and he left them a blessing, and bade them farewell." After further missionary work in Ulster, the aged but indefatigable Apostle passed into Leinster. There, as we read, "churches in thirties and forties" were given to him—a statement no one need deem exaggerated who knows how small and easily built were even the largest Irish churches in those days. From Ossory in Leinster we find him journeying to Cashel,<sup>9</sup> the royal citadel of Munster. The idols on that famous rock fell prone at the approach of the man of God; so that Aengus, the Prince, went down with reverence to welcome him. He preached to him and his people at Cashel, and Aengus, and "the men of Munster" were baptized. During the ceremony the Saint inadvertently pierced with his crozier's point the

<sup>9</sup>To the Dean of Cashel, the Very Rev. T. H. Kinane, the children of St. Patrick owe the most popular and devotional of the many lives of their Apostle.



Prince's foot. Aengus made no sign; and when Patrick asked him in wonder why he had not cried out, the noble sufferer only said, "I thought it was the rule of faith."

"I thought, thus called to follow Him whose feet  
Were pierced with nails, haply the blissful rite  
Some little pain included."

St. Evin tells us that Patrick blessed the Fort upon the rock "and the men of Munster besides, and left a blessing and prosperity upon them." After this we hear of Ailbe, first Bishop of Emly and saintly founder of its famous schools. At Patrick's bidding he raised to life the boy Ailill. The devotion of the people of Emly to St. Ailbe is unchanged to this day, although time and sorrow have effaced almost every trace of the former glories of his see. From the districts about Emly Patrick passed to Limerick. Every local tradition concerning him tells of the wonders he wrought there; and close on twelve hundred years after, when evil days had come on the fair city by the Shannon, it was by St. Patrick's well, and from the ruins of St. Patrick's church, that the baffled enemy stormed at the men of Munster.

The Apostle's fame had by this time gone before him into every part of the island. We are told by St. Evin of the fleet of boats that brought the inhabitants of Thomond up the reaches of the Shannon, that they might be baptized by the Saint and receive his blessing. Into Clare and Kerry he did not pass; but he foretold the mission and sanctity of those who were, generations after, to be the Patricks of those parts: Senan, who in his Isle of Inniscattery, was to give his name to the noble river that there flows into the Atlantic; and

Brendon, the Columbus of his time, whose shadowy glories still hang round the lonely coasts of Kerry. Northwards Patrick's face was now set. In his years of labor in Munster he had "founded cells and churches, and had ordained persons of every grade, and healed all sick persons, and raised the dead." He bade the Munster men farewell, "and left his blessing with them." St. Evin goes on to tell how they could not part with their beloved Apostle, but followed in such numbers that the hills seemed alive with their loving multitudes. Again they knelt for that dearly-prized blessing, before they turned homewards. And from those homes of Munster the loving loyalty of that day has never since departed.

Dearly loved as St. Patrick was by his children, there is every evidence in his history that he was terrible towards their enemies. The destruction which came swiftly and with awful portents on those who obstinately thwarted his work for souls, reminds one of the terrors of the Old Testament; and we have seen that our Saint has been likened to the prophets of Judea. But even without the records we possess of the avenging miracles of Patrick, we have a letter from his hand showing us the spirit in which he met the raveners of his flock. His Epistle to Coroticus may be, to some, unpleasant reading; but it should be remembered that with love of justice the Scripture joins the hatred of injustice; and that it was only when gentle words had proved useless that the Saint, in his ardent charity for his own, adopted the language of denunciation. The "tyrant," as he styles Coroticus, or Caradoc, had fallen on some newly baptized converts, and had slain some and sold others



into slavery. He had laughed at Patrick's gentle entreaty to free the Christian captives. And so the Saint pours out on him and his abettors the torrent of his wrath. "Fellow-citizens of the devil. . . . patricides, fratricides, and ravening wolves, who devour the people of the Lord as if they were bread." With these the holy and humble ones of God are neither to eat, nor drink, nor receive their alms, until they do penance with many tears and liberate the servants of God. And then his love for his oppressed ones seems to overcome him, and he cries out to God, "Lo, Thy sheep are torn around me, and plundered by those robbers, aided by the soldiers of Coroticus. . . . Ravening wolves have scattered the flock of the Lord, which with the greatest rapidity was increasing most prosperously in Ireland. I cannot count all the sons of the Irish and the daughters of the kings who are monks and virgins of Christ: . . . . O my beloved ones! I grieve, I grieve for you." At the end of the Epistle there is a word of mercy for those who will accept the warning and repent, "that they may deserve of God to live and thrive here and hereafter. The praise to the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The Apostle's burning zeal, not only for the eternal but also for the temporal interests of his children, stands sufficiently proved by the terrific words above cited. From the slavery of the body, as well as from that of the soul, he would guard his dear ones; and it is worthy of remark that, in the passage just given from his letter to Coroticus, the ostracism to which he condemns the tyrants is to cease only when they repent, "and liberate the servants of God." But a proof as striking, and cer-

tainly more lasting, of his devotion to the temporal welfare of his Irish flock, is to be found in the *Senchus Mor*, or great law-code of Erin. Patrick saw that it would be impossible that a people, whose civil law was corrupt or unjust, could observe a religious law of exalted purity and equity. He saw too that the surest way to ensure obedience to the laws of man was to make those laws conformable to the laws of God; and that the maintenance of both codes as an abiding power in the land depended on welding them, as far as might be, into one, the code of the Christian citizen. Such was Patrick's work, his apostolic and truly patriotic work, in the *Senchus Mor*. It was in the early part of his ministry, when his religious teaching had won the hearts of the wise men of Erin, that he first ventured to interfere in the political life of the country. His desire to confer with the civil rulers was anticipated by them. In a conference, on the thought of which Christian statesmen might profitably dwell, the bishop, the chief, and the sage, met to revise the ancient law-code of Erin. Much of that code Patrick found to be wise and just, and seeing that it was hallowed by the usage of centuries, he gladly approved and blessed it. That part of the code which paganism had corrupted, he condemned and struck away, substituting for it the high morality of Christianity. The *Senchus Mor*, thenceforth the law-code of Christian Ireland, had thus those elements of divine justice and human liberty which alone secure for legislature permanence and popularity. For over a thousand years the work of the holy lawgiver remained; and his children loved "Patrick's law," as the Brehon code came to be called, for the sake of the Saint who blessed it, and for

the love of the Faith and Fatherland of whose rights and liberties it was so long the charter.

What time our Apostle founded the church of Armagh is a matter of uncertainty. The site was, as we read in the ancient Book of Armagh, miraculously pointed out by God. Conquered by the patience of the Saint, Daire, the chief of that territory, gave the land demanded. By what we may well regard as a special providence of God, the site then chosen is the very one on which now stands the new Cathedral: the gifts of God are without repentance. Patrick would have chosen to be laid to rest there, where he had fixed his see. He loved the spot. There he had, with a century of years upon him, settled down to prepare for his last great journey. There the lepers came to him, sure now to find him and to be cleansed. And there it seemed to him that he would like to make what, in his faith, he called "the place of his resurrection." But now as in his earliest days, he would go where God should send him. It was His will that not in Armagh, but in Saul, by the shore of Strangford Lough where he had landed sixty years before, the old man should die. His successor was already in the primatial see. The *Confession* of that wonderful life—wonderful in its simplicity as in its heaven-sent power—had been committed to loving hands. Visions of the future, clear to the aged seer, but dim and contradictory to those to whom he related them, foretold at once his approaching death, and the vicissitudes of the Irish Church. Brigid, the "Pearl of Erin," who had made Patrick's shroud, should go for it now, for the time was short. Full of years, like the prophets of old in this as in much more; with the prayers and blessings

of a people whom he had so often prayed for and blessed; in a land which he had found in darkness, and which he left to be the brightest jewel of the Church, the old man lay down to die. Borne on the cold March wind the watchers heard sounds of angelic voices—the first notes of that chorus of praise which should last in Erin as long as the waves should break on the shore of Strangford Lough. It was on the 17th of March, 493—day to stand beyond all saints' days in Erin's calendar; yes, and in thousands of churches and in millions of hearts, and in lands as yet unknown. Victor, faithful angel once upon Mount Slemish, faithful to the end, summoned Bishop Tassach: Patrick must have the Viaticum for his last journey, and the Godspeed of the people.

That journey was easily made—for the saint's road from labor to rest is very short.

St. Evin shall tell us what manner of man this was whose body lies in Saul, and whose soul lives with God. "A just man indeed was this; with purity of nature like the patriarchs; a true pilgrim like Abraham; gentle and forgiving like Moses; a praiseworthy psalmist like David; an emulator of wisdom like Solomon; a chosen vessel for proclaiming truth like the Apostle Paul; a man full of grace and the knowledge of the Holy Ghost, like the beloved John; a fair flower-garden to children of grace; a fruitful vine-branch; a flashing fire, with force and warmth of heat to the sons of life, for instituting and illustrating charity; a lion in strength and power, a dove in gentleness and humility; a serpent in wisdom and cunning to do good; gentle, humble, merciful to the sons of life—dark, ungentle towards the sons



of death; a servant of labor and service of Christ; a king in dignity and power for binding and loosening, for liberating and convicting, for killing and giving life. . . . Though great his honor here, greater honor will be his in the day when judgment will be given on the fruits of his work."

Here, standing out clearly recognizable amid so much that time has dimmed, is the personality to which the eyes and hearts of the Irish race have ever fondly turned. About dates and places and the authenticity of this miracle and that, there might be question; but there can be no question about the person whom we see and love. He is strong and tender: strong, terribly strong, against wrongdoers, and above all, as a father is, against those who would do his children wrong. He is tender too: tender to the dwellers in that land which he first trod as an Apostle—the land of Britain; but above all tender to his own who call him father, who cherish his traditions and cling lovingly to the land which he made to be an Island of Saints, and which, through much sorrow, he has kept faithful until now. The almost fierce devotion of his children to him seems to share that twofold character of strength and tenderness which made St. Evin call him a lion and a dove; "gentle, humble, merciful to the sons of life: dark, ungentle towards the sons of death." May that love remain, strong and tender, until the day on which, according to the promise of the Mount, Patrick shall be told to count his flock upon the right hand of the Judge.

"Thus therefore saith the Lord, 'So long as sea  
Girdeth this isle, so long thy name shall hang  
in splendor o'er it like the *stars* of God.'"





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