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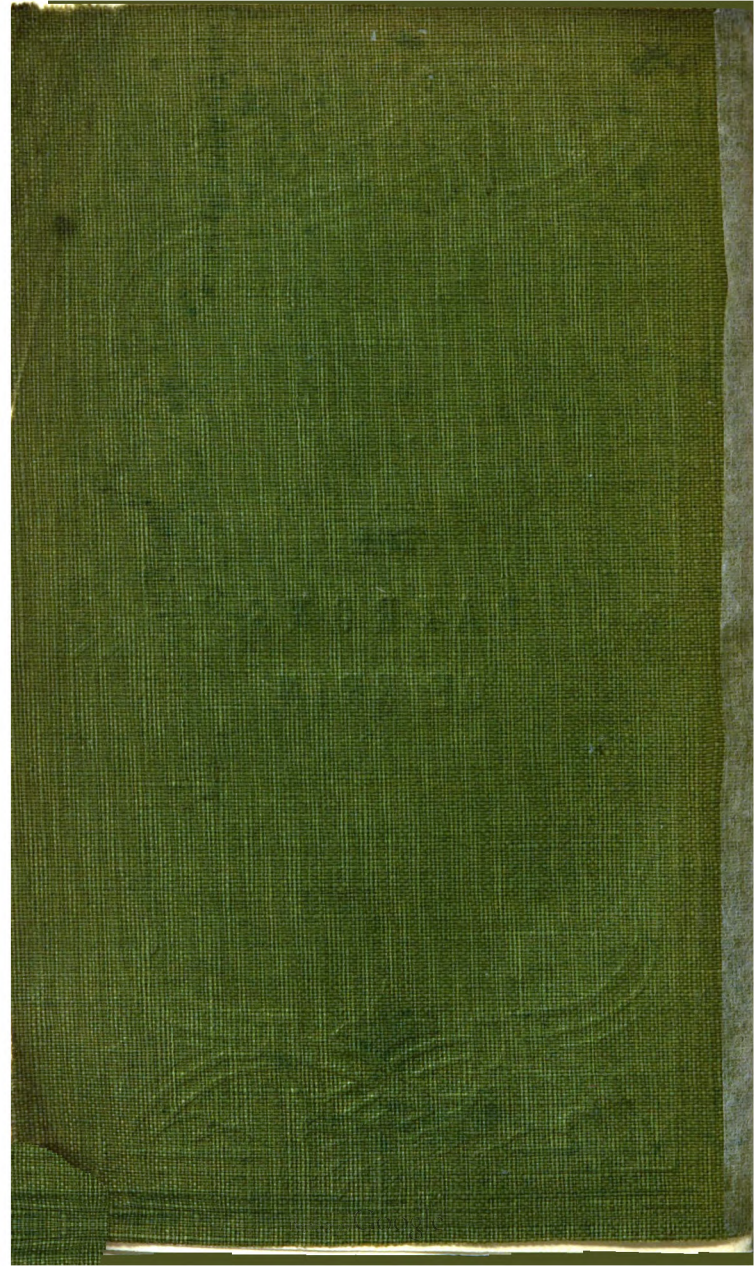
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THE
PATRONS
OF ERIN

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1859

THE

PATRONS OF ERIN;

OR,

SOME ACCOUNT

OF

ST. PATRICK & ST. BRIGID.

BY

WILLIAM G. TODD, D.D.

K

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PATERNOSTER ROW.

1859.



TO
EUGENE CURRY, ESQ.

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL IRISH ACADEMY,
AND
PROFESSOR OF IRISH IN THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY,

IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT

OF A
VALUED FRIENDSHIP.

PREFACE.

As the following pages are solely intended for popular and devotional reading, it has been considered unnecessary to interrupt the narrative by constant references to the authorities on which the various statements contained in them have been made. It is sufficient to state here, in a general way, that this little work has been compiled from the best sources of Irish History. The author has consulted Colgan's "Acta Sanctorum," Messingham's "Florilegium," Ussher's "Origines Britannicæ," Dr. Lanigan's "Ecclesiastical History," and some of the very valuable publications of the Irish Archæological Society. He believes that nothing is contained in the following narratives which has not some fair foundation in the most credible sources of Irish History. Where there happened to be a manifest difference of opinion among the historians of our ancient saints, he has always chosen to adhere to those who represent the more ancient traditions of the Church. On this account, the author has frequently been obliged to differ from the statements adopted by Dr. Lanigan, who, although a writer of considerable learning, too frequently rejects ancient testimonies and traditions on no other ground

than because they are at variance with his own impressions of probability.

It only remains for the author, in compliance with the decrees of Pope Urban VIII., to declare that to the miracles, graces, and revelations recorded in these pages he does not intend to attribute any other authority than the usual historical testimony and tradition—except in those cases, and with respect to those facts, which may have received the sanction of the Apostolic See.

CHISLEHURST, KENT.

Feast of the Immaculate Conception, 1858.

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THE PATRONS OF ERIN.

CHAPTER I.

Christianity introduced into Ireland—Early bishops—Mission of Palladius—Its failure.

THREE hundred years had hardly rolled by since the Holy Ghost had sent forth the Apostles to plant the Church, before the light of the Christian faith had begun to drive away the pagan darkness of Ireland. It is not impossible that some of those missionaries who may have accompanied St. Paul on his visit to England afterwards crossed over to the Irish coast, in order to plant the Cross of Jesus Christ on the most western island of Europe. Their names have not been preserved; but the work in which they busied themselves very soon began to be apparent in its results. Early in the fourth century there was a Christian population, with some bishops, in the south of Ireland. Four of these bishops are celebrated in the historical annals of the country; and some account of their lives is still preserved.

Kiaran, commonly regarded as the first bishop of Ossory, has been honoured with the title of "First-born of the Saints of Ireland." His parents were people of noble family; Lugneus, his father, being a native of Ossory, and his mother, Liadain, of Carberry, in Munster. This holy child was born in Cape Clear Island, where

his memory is still venerated, and where there still exist the ruins of some old churches and monasteries called after his name. Kiaran was thirty years old before he became acquainted with the Catholic religion; but happening, at that age, to hear that there were Christians at Rome, he conceived an ardent desire to learn something about the religion which they professed, and accordingly went to the holy city for that purpose. He was kindly received by the Pope; and after having been instructed in the Christian doctrine, he was baptized, and remained there for many years, studying the Sacred Scriptures and the ecclesiastical canons. At length, having been consecrated bishop, he returned to his native land, where he lived to a good old age, preaching the faith to those around him, and converting many hundreds to God.

The other primitive bishops of Ireland were Declan, Iban, and Ailbe. St. Declan lived at Ardmore, in the county of Waterford, where a succession of bishops was kept up for some time after his death. Iban resided as a holy anchorite on the island of Beg-Erin (or Little-Erin), where the ruins of his cell are still to be seen. St. Ailbe was the first bishop of Emly. He was born in the south of Ireland, and, while still a child, earnestly longed to know about Almighty God, the great Creator of the universe. No one could ever wish to know God and yet have that wondrous knowledge denied him. If only he be faithful to the grace which has excited and fostered this desire in his heart, he will be surely led on step by step, until his soul is satisfied with the knowledge and possession of God. So this young pagan boy found it. Divine Providence made him more thoughtful than those about him. Instead of spending

his youth in vice and sin, he felt an inward impulse urging him on to better and higher things. When he saw the soft hills, and the green fields, and the pleasant groves, and the gentle rivers of his native land, he wondered how all these things came to be, and who He was who had so wisely and so beautifully made them. The contemplation of this visible world* led him on to the knowledge of the Invisible Creator; and as, one day, with eyes raised up to heaven, he prayed aloud for further light and grace, his prayer was speedily and unexpectedly answered; for a Christian priest who had come from Rome many years before the mission of St. Patrick, chanced to hear him as he prayed: and we can well imagine the joy with which, in answer to such a prayer, he hastened to instruct the young child in the Catholic faith, and to baptize him in the name of the Blessed Trinity.

Some time afterwards, Ailbe was sent to Rome, where Pope Hilarius received him with the tenderness and affection so natural to the Roman Pontiffs; and, having subsequently ordained him bishop with his own hands, permitted him, with several Irish Christians, to return and preach in their own land. Besides these early bishops, there were others, priests and laymen, who had taught, and who practised, the Catholic religion here and there throughout the country, at that remote period. One of the most distinguished was the Christian poet, Sedulius. The *Introit*, or commencement of the votive masses of our Blessed Lady, in the Roman Missal, the

* For the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, His eternal power also, and divinity, so that they are inexcusable.—(Rom. i. 20.)

hymn sung at the Vespers of the Epiphany, as well as other hymns used by the Church, were composed by this poet. St. Beatus, whose memory is venerated in Switzerland, is one of the very earliest of these primitive Irish Christians; and so also was St. Cataldus, bishop of Tarento, in Italy, with many others. Thus, although the Church had only made little way in the country, before the arrival of St. Patrick, it had, nevertheless, obtained some footing. Christians were to be found here and there throughout the island; although their number was small, and they were principally confined to the province of Munster. The time, however, at length arrived when the Roman Pontiff began to turn his most serious attention to the evangelization of Ireland. The supreme pastors of the Church have never been known to slumber at their exalted post: they have always been on the watch, guarding the flock committed to their charge, and seeking to push forward the Cross and Church of Christ into the most remote corners of the world. In the early part of the fifth century (A.D. 431), St. Celestine I., who then occupied the chair of Peter, received intelligence that at a distant part of the West of Europe there dwelt a people called Scots (as the Irish were at that time commonly named), and that many of them believed in Christ. He had heard, moreover, concerning the spiritual destitution in which these few scattered Christians were living, —without churches, with irregular visits from itinerant missionaries, without ecclesiastical organization, and exposed to the insults and persecution of the heathen population around them. He also had heard that the country was ripe for conversion; and that, as was the case with the holy Ailbe, many hearts were beating with

a desire to know the true God, and Jesus Christ whom He had sent. Tidings such as these were sure to be most acceptable to the Holy Pontiff, nor did he hesitate to interest himself at once in this sacred cause: he looked about for some one acquainted with the country, its language, its manners, and its people, to whom he could intrust the delicate and arduous mission of at once extending the pale of the Church, and bringing those who already professed the faith under ecclesiastical rule and discipline. His choice fell upon a native of Britain, named Palladius, who enjoyed the privilege of being a deacon of the Roman Church. Palladius was already well known to St. Celestine; for when the Pelagian heresy* was doing great mischief, and destroying many souls among the Christians of Britain, it was at his suggestion that the Pope sent St. Germain, bishop of Auxerre, with other missionaries, into England, for the purpose of checking the spread of these dangerous errors. It was now Palladius's own turn to be sent to preach the faith. St. Celestine appointed him to be the first, or chief, bishop of the Scots believing in Christ. With him were associated four other missionaries, named Sylvester, Augustine, Benedict, and Solonius. All these,

* In the early part of the fifth century (about A.D. 402), Pelagius, a native of Britain, began to deny the propagation of original sin, and to teach that human nature, as it now is, and without the aid of grace, can do good works in the supernatural order, and merit everlasting life. He admitted, in some sense, the existence of grace; but said that although grace made it *easier* for man to do good works and obtain heaven, yet it was not in any way essential and necessary to him. These heretical opinions spread far and wide; they were immediately condemned in several councils of the Church, and they were nobly and successfully opposed by the great St. Augustine, bishop of Hippo, in Africa.

having received their powers from the Pope, set out with joy and confidence upon their sacred mission. They landed near the town of Wicklow, and began to preach in the surrounding territory, then called Hy-Garchon, of which Nathi, the son of Garchon, was the king. At first they met with some success: many listened to their holy teaching, and joyfully received the sacrament of baptism; they built three small churches in the county of Wicklow, in one of which were deposited a copy of the Old and New Testament, some relics of St. Peter and St. Paul, with those of many other martyrs—all of which Palladius had brought with him from Rome; besides these, he left, in one of the churches he had erected, his writing tablets, which long afterwards were preserved with singular veneration. The news of this temporary success soon began to spread far and wide; it was not long before it reached Rome itself, and created there the impression that the whole country had become Christian.

But, as often happens, events were magnified in proportion as they became the universal topic of conversation. Palladius's success was very far from being what report pretended: it was partial and momentary. Just as the hopes of the missionaries began to be raised, they were destined to disappointment. Nathi, the king of Hy-Garchon, had, from the beginning, looked with suspicion upon Palladius and his associates: he only waited for a favourable opportunity to interfere, and put a stop to the work of conversion; nor was it long before this opportunity presented itself. Those who were attached to their ancient heathenism were naturally indignant with Palladius for boldly and fearlessly attacking it; they soon came, therefore, with their complaints and remon-

stances to the king. They objected to the intrusion of this Christian bishop, and demanded the interference of the monarch. They employed the very same arguments which have been everywhere urged by the enemies of Christ against the missions of the Church. "What right," they said, "has this bishop and his priests to come into our country? He asked no permission from our monarch; he is come to overturn our ancient custom; he is attempting to introduce a religion which has not received the sanction of the state; he wants to bring us into subjection to a foreign power, and to make us all the subjects of the Bishop of Rome. 'We will not have this man to reign over us.'" With such arguments and with such objections they poisoned the public mind against the Christian missionaries; and Nathi the king was only too glad to receive their complaints, and to proceed against the Christians. He, of course, directed his violence against Palladius, as being the head and chief of the Christian mission, and soon obliged him to leave the country. The companions of Palladius, as being less known than their master, were enabled to evade the vigilance of their persecutors, and to remain at their posts; but the holy bishop was himself compelled to seek safety in flight. It had been his intention, on departing from Ireland, to have proceeded to Rome, in order to lay before the Holy Father a full account of the difficulties and trials which had attended his attempt to evangelize the country; but he died at the town of Fordun, in Scotland, before he could carry this intention into execution. The failure of his mission afterwards gave rise to the saying among the Irish, that "not to Palladius, but to Patrick, did the Lord grant the conversion of Ireland."

CHAPTER II.

Parents of St. Patrick—His birth and baptism—A blind man restored to sight—His early life and miracles.

THE family to which the great apostle of Ireland belonged claimed the honour and privilege of Roman descent. His immediate ancestors were of noble birth and position, and had accompanied the imperial eagles into Britain, where they appear to have settled in the district now comprised within the southern division of Scotland. St. Patrick was the son of Calphorius and Conchessa: the former a nobleman who enjoyed the Roman rank of a decurion; and the latter, equally noble in birth, being a relation of St. Martin, the archbishop of Tours. The mother of our saint had been carried away from her home during some of those expeditions which the ancient Picts and Scots so frequently made into Gaul for the purposes of plunder; and, together with her elder sister, had been sold into slavery in England. Conchessa was purchased by the father of her future husband, and for some time discharged the duties of a maid-servant in his household; but the gentleness of her manners, the simplicity of her piety, and the modesty of her demeanour so won the respect and affection of Calphorius, that, having persuaded his father to restore her to liberty, he reinstated her in her proper rank, and shortly afterwards was united to her in marriage. They were both just before God, walking blamelessly in all His holy laws, and not less illustrious for the nobility of their

birth than for their steady progress in all Christian virtues. Some time after the birth of a son who was destined by Divine Providence to be the instrument of salvation to so many millions of men, Calphorius and his holy spouse, by mutual consent, gave themselves up to a religious life; and the former, having served the Church for many years as a deacon, was advanced to the priesthood not long before his death. In thus forsaking secular cares for the ministry of the altar, this holy man walked in the steps of his own father Potitus, or Olid, who had, in like manner, abandoned the world for the divine service. Potitus is stated to have been a deacon; but there are no sufficient grounds for supposing that he was ever advanced to the priesthood. Thus the immediate forefathers of our apostle were men in whose hearts the love of God had taken such deep root as to make them despise all earthly things in order to have the happiness of dedicating themselves entirely to His service. From parents so just and holy our great apostle was sprung.

It was about the year A.D. 372, that the infant child of Calphorius and Conchessa was born, at Nemthur, among the Britons of Alcluaid, which was the ancient name of the modern town of Dumbarton. His original name was Succat,—Patrieus being rather the indication of his rank as a nobleman than strictly a proper name. On the day of his birth he was regenerated in the waters of baptism, and it pleased God to give a remarkable sign, upon this occasion, of the future sanctity of the young Christian. There was a certain man named Gorman, who had been blind from his mother's womb. This man heard, in his sleep, a voice commanding him to take the right hand of the child Patrick, recently baptized,

and with it to make the sign of the Cross upon the ground. The voice added, that at its touch a new fountain of water should spring up from the ground, and that, if he washed his eyes with the water of the new well, he should immediately receive his sight. Thus instructed by the heavenly vision, the blind man approached with faith and reverence, to perform all that he had been commanded to do ; and no sooner had he made, with the infant's hand, the sign of the Cross upon the earth, than two miracles took place instead of one. First of all, Gorman instantly received his sight ; but at the same moment in which the sensible darkness was dispelled from the organs of his body, intellectual darkness was removed from his mind ; and a man whose natural infirmities had rendered it impossible to give him any regular instruction, was henceforth able to read, and was otherwise illuminated by the Spirit of God. It is thus that the Almighty often wills to magnify his saints, even in their unconscious infancy, and by some such exercise of His omnipotent power, to afford indications and signs of the spiritual greatness to which He designs to raise them.

As the servant of God increased in years, he increased also in grace. Divine love burned ever more and more brightly within his youthful heart, continually inciting him to the most fervent acts of union with the heart of Jesus. Brought up in the town of Nemthur, the place of his birth, with one of his sisters* or near relations, named Lupita, who afterwards became a nun, and under the care of a pious woman to whom his parents had given him in charge, St. Patrick was careful to live in the constant presence of God. His days were passed in prayer,

* In the ancient accounts of St. Patrick's life the word *sister* is applied (as among the Jews) to cousins and other near relatives.

penance, and contemplation; and although he was deprived, to some extent, of opportunities of acquiring human learning, the Holy Ghost, nevertheless, ceased not to infuse into his soul the rich treasures of divine service. It was his great pleasure and happiness to commit to memory the Psalms of David and the hymns of the Church; and, from his very childhood, he began a practice, which he never afterwards omitted, of reciting day by day the entire Psalter. Not unfrequently, too, it happened, during the infancy of our saint, that Almighty God enabled him to work some remarkable miracles. It chanced once, in the winter season, that the town of Nemthur was visited by a great flood. Many of the houses were under water, and the inhabitants were afraid lest still more serious damage should be done. With the continued rains the flood rose higher and higher, and at length surrounded the place where Patrick and his relations lived. It was some time before the young boy knew what had taken place. He had come home hungry from a long walk, and asking for a piece of bread, he was rather rudely informed of the danger in which he stood. Immediately he had recourse to prayer. Standing upon a dry spot, and praying secretly to God, he three times sprinkled the advancing waters in the form of a cross, and commanded the flood to retire in the name of the Blessed Trinity. Immediately the waters receded. The ground became dry, and neither the furniture nor anything in the house appeared to have sustained the slightest injury.

Upon another occasion, Lupita, the saint's relation, having been sent by her guardian to look after some lambs in the field, fell against a stone, and having received a severe wound on the forehead, lay, as it were,

dead. Upon hearing of this accident, the servants and neighbours ran up, to give what help they could. Among the rest, Patrick hastens to the aid of his relative, and trusting to the Divine assistance, he raised her from the ground ; and, making the sign of the cross upon her forehead, immediately restored her to consciousness and to health. A scar, however, remained upon her forehead, as a sign at once of the miracle itself, and of the sanctity of him who performed it in the faith of the Cross of Christ.

But although the early days of Patrick were passed in prayer and good works, and although, even in his tender years, he was endowed with miraculous powers, it did not seem to the saint himself that he was corresponding, as he ought, with Divine grace. The nearer men approach to God, the more do they feel the deep consciousness of their own unworthiness. The tepid and imperfect Christian makes light of defects and faults, of unfaithfulness to the inspirations of the Holy Ghost, of thoughtless negligences and wilful distractions, of time wasted, prayer omitted, alms deferred—imperfections and sins which would weigh heavily upon the more fervent children of God, causing them to feel the deepest grief at heart, and making them spend whole nights in vigils and penances. It was this delicate sense of the exactitude and perfection befitting those who profess to love and honour God, that compelled our holy bishop to speak of his early life as if it had been spent in vain. St. Patrick, in his old age, wrote some account of his life, in a work called his "Confession," which is written in a very plain and simple style ; and wherever it makes mention of the success of his apostolic labours, it attributes the praise and glory of them, not to him-

self, but to the Divine goodness. In this interesting work our saint speaks in a disparaging way of himself and of his early life. He describes himself as one who was deservedly the least of all the faithful, and the most contemptible. He speaks of himself as ignorant of the true God; and he attributes to his evil deserts a trouble and misfortune which befell him when he was sixteen years of age, and which shall be noticed presently. This misfortune, he says, came upon him because, with others, "we had retreated from God, and had not kept His commandments, and had been disobedient to our priests, who were advising us for our good; and therefore the Lord brought upon us the wrath of his indignation, and scattered us among many nations, even to the ends of the earth." It is evident that these words must be understood in the same sense as the similar language of St. Paul, who called himself "the chief" of sinners. They are true, not as they sound to us, but in relation to the saint's keen and clear perception of the infinite holiness of God. They are the expressions of his profound humility, conscious of shortcomings and imperfections discernible only by the saints. For the son of parents so pious and so unworldly as Calphorius and Conchessa, could never, in the strict sense of the words, have been ignorant of God; nor would the Divine Power have graced with the gift of miracles the youthful days of Patrick, had they really been passed in unholiness of life. How beautiful is the humility of the saints, and how delicate their tenderness of conscience! Alas! if their momentary weaknesses are condemned by themselves as a culpable ignorance of God—as sins bringing on themselves and others divine scourges and chastisements, what judgment must they not form of

other men's lukewarmness, indolence, and weariness in well-doing? We little know either the inherent loveliness of the divine sanctity, or the claims which it puts forward to our most exact correspondence with its constant inspirations. The language of the saints, describing their own inner life in a way so strongly opposed to all we know of their admitted strictness and purity, ought at least to make us much more careful than we usually are how we walk in the presence of God. It is thus only that we can hope to imitate their faith and patience—to follow their example here, and to share their glory hereafter.

CHAPTER III.

He is carried into captivity, and sold as a slave in Ireland—How he passed his days in prayer, and how, at length, he was freed from slavery—His trials during his journey home.

It is seldom that we realize to ourselves the fact that we each live under the constant guidance of a special and particular providence. We are happy or we are sad; we give way to grief of heart or to weariness of spirit, as events occur in our short and chequered lives—at one time gratifying our fancies, at another trying our constancy. We are too much disposed to lose sight of the duty of placing entire confidence in God. We forget the filial tie that, by means of our Christian birth, has united us with our Heavenly Father. Perhaps no spiritual relationship is less practically relied on than the tender union which unites God the Father with His children. Men serve God rather through fear than love. Too many regard

Him as a severe and stern master, whose will is inexorable, and whose dealings with His servants, however just, are often harsh and severe. In many a heart, notwithstanding all the wonders that have been wrought for our sakes in creation and redemption, Almighty God is dreaded as an unflinching and unbending task-master, rather than adored and beloved as a kind and indulgent parent. And yet He is, in truth, the most tender of fathers. He watches over each of us as if we alone were the single object of His divine care. He never slumbers nor sleeps, nor wearies of His charge. Not a hair of our heads but He has numbered. Nothing happens to us, however small, which He has not foreseen in all its consequences. No joy, no sorrow, can cross our path in life, which He has not permitted, or specially sent for some merciful purpose. Great, for example, was the grief of the patriarch Joseph, when his unnatural brothers tore him away from his aged father, and sold him into bondage in a strange land. His eyes were red with tears, and his heart was big with grief, as he was forced to accompany the Ishmaelitish merchants in their tedious journey into Egypt. He ate his bread in sorrow; his thoughts reverted to his home, to his afflicted father, and to his young brother; and, although he patiently submitted without rebellion to the Divine will, yet he felt his lot a hard one, and he knew not why so great a trial had blighted his early days. He was thrown by these apparent misfortunes into trouble and perplexity; and perhaps he sometimes felt a temptation whether God were really with him, and whether He had not in anger and severity abandoned him into the hands of his enemies. Yet we who can survey the whole life of this great patriarch, as recorded in the sacred narrative, perceive

throughout it the clearest evidence of a kind particular Providence, guiding, permitting, controlling every circumstance that befell him. For a moment he was humbled, that he might afterwards be exalted. He was torn from his friends, that he might afterwards be the instrument of preserving their lives, and the lives of multitudes besides. He became a slave, that the providence of God might be manifested in his exaltation to be governor over all the land of Egypt. He was cast aside and rejected by his brethren, in order that afterwards they might come and bow down before him. Thus those very trials and troubles which for the moment were so hard to bear, were sent by One who allowed them to be a passing affliction, only that they might be the foundation of future honour and glory.

It was a like Providence, which, graciously watching the early youth of the future apostle of Ireland, now prepared to lead him a little by the way of the Cross. When St. Patrick had reached his sixteenth year, the village in which he dwelt was invaded by a ruthless band of pirates, who, pillaging the houses, driving away the cattle, and destroying all before them, took captive some of the principal people of the place, and among the rest, our young saint. Retiring to Ireland, they sold Patrick to a prince, or chieftain, named Milcho, who is described as having been both a cruel master and an obstinate pagan. This man lived in a part of Ireland then called Dalaradia, and which is comprised within a portion of the present county of Antrim. Some say that he was a prince, others a magician, and others, again, some minister of the pagan rites; but, however this may be, it is certain that he was a hard and bad man, grossly attached to the superstitions of his idol-worship, and consequently, bitterly opposed to

the Christian faith. It was to one thus in every way the opposite of himself that St. Patrick was sold into slavery. And yet although he felt, perhaps keenly, the pain of separation from his home, and was sensible of the degradation and wretchedness of his life of bondage, his days were passed neither unprofitably nor unhappily. He seems to have made greater strides in the love of God, while inhaling the clear, cold air of the mountains of Erin, than he had hitherto done. Even his own humility is compelled to make this admission. He tells us that after he had come to Ireland his occupation was to feed sheep; and, while thus engaged, he used to be continually praying to God, and he felt the Divine love becoming more and more strong within him every day; and his fear of God increased likewise, and his faith, and his piety. Often, throughout the day, would he repeat a hundred prayers, and nearly as many at night. Sometimes he would remain in the woods and in the mountains, and rising before daybreak, he would give himself to prayer, heedless of the snow, the frost, or the rain,—nor did he ever experience any ill results from these austere practices. Moreover, he was full of activity and fervour in these spiritual exercises; and he never felt within himself the least sloth or weariness of spirit. It was thus that Almighty God was preparing his chosen servant, amid the solitude of the mountains of Erin, for the glorious evangelical work to which he was hereafter to be called. It is by penance, retirement, and continual communion with God, that the spirit of true zeal is created and fostered. St. John the Baptist quitted the busy haunts of man, that, in the silence of the desert, he might attune his spirit to preach the coming of Jesus Christ; and almost all the great saints have, in like

manner, prepared themselves for their sacred vocation by first shunning the world which they were afterwards to conquer and subdue.

While St. Patrick was thus spending his time, forgetful of his servile condition, in the enjoyment of daily communion with God, Milcho, his master, chanced one night to have a dream which caused him considerable uneasiness. He dreamed that he saw Patrick enter the house where he was, with a bright flame of fire issuing from his head, ears, and nostrils. As he approached Milcho, the flame burst forth to consume him; but the pagan prince drove it from him, so that it did him no harm. It was otherwise with his son and daughter. The flame which could not burn the father, instantly seized upon them, and in a few moments reduced them to ashes, which the wind scattered all over Erin. Starting from his sleep in terror, he immediately summoned Patrick before him, and told him his vision, demanding an explanation. "The fire," replied the saint, "which thou sawest on me is the Faith of the Trinity, which burns within me; and it is this Faith which I shall hereafter preach unto thee, but which thou wilt not believe. Thy son, however, and thy daughter, they will believe, and the fire of grace shall consume them."

According to some authorities, there was an ancient custom in Ireland, similar to the injunctions of the Mosaic law, in virtue of which all slaves were set free at the end of the seventh year of their servitude; and these writers add that it was in compliance with this custom that our saint, having completed his period of bondage, was afterwards restored to liberty. But in his own account of his life, St. Patrick expressly says that, after having spent six years in the service of Milcho, he

heard one night a voice saying to him, in a dream, "Thou dost well fast, and thou art soon about to return to thy country." And again, after a short interval, he heard these words: "Lo! thy ship is ready." And yet there was no ship near the place where the saint was then living. It was at a distance from him of two hundred miles, and in a place where he had never been, and where he was acquainted with none of the inhabitants. Rightly understanding that this dream was sent from God, the saint regarded it as a permission or injunction to escape from bondage. Accordingly, he fled from his master, and, assisted by the Divine guidance, escaping all the dangers of the way, he came to a place called Benum, and afterwards in safety to the ship of which he had been forewarned. The vessel was on the point of setting sail when St. Patrick arrived, and the captain, who as well as all his sailors was a heathen, was extremely rough in his manners, and expressed a great reluctance to allow the saint to accompany him in his voyage. His unwillingness, in all probability, arose from St. Patrick's not having had wherewith to pay for his passage. The servant of God had recourse to the weapons which never failed him in every season of trouble—patience, meekness, and prayer. Returning to the cottage at which he was lodging, he began to commit his trials and wants to the sacred heart of Jesus: nor had he been long engaged in prayer, before he heard a man crying out with a loud voice after him, "Come quickly, for they are calling you." He returned immediately, and finding their dispositions towards him completely changed, he set sail with them, and after a voyage of three days reached land.

Here fresh troubles befell the saint and those who

were travelling with him. We are not told on what part of Britain they landed ; but the country through which they had to pass was a kind of desert, and they consequently could not find a sufficient supply of provisions. For seven-and-twenty days they journeyed through this solitude. Both food and drink began to fail them, and they were in danger of dying from hunger. At last the captain of the vessel addressed the servant of God in these words : " How is this, O Christian ? Thou sayest that thy God is great and omnipotent ; why, then, canst thou not pray for us ? Oh ! pray for us, because we are in danger of suffering from famine, and we can see no one to give us any help." " Turn," replied the saint, " with your whole heart to the Lord my God, because nothing is impossible with Him, and this very day can He send us, if He will, food more than enough to satisfy us ; for He has it everywhere, and in abundance." As the saint had said, so it came to pass, with the Divine assistance. They had journeyed on but a little way when they saw a herd of swine approaching them. Having killed several, they stopped in that place for two nights, to recover their wasted strength, and to refresh themselves with the food thus sent them by a merciful Providence. During the rest of the journey they had food, and in abundance. Sometimes they found in the woods some wild honey, which they ate with avidity. But one of the party having suggested that the honey which they had found had been offered to the idols, St. Patrick abstained from tasting it.

But the servant of God had one further trial to endure before reaching his home. On the night of the day on which God had granted them so unexpected a relief, the saint was assailed in his sleep by a strong temptation

from the devil. But it came into his mind to invoke with all his strength the prophet Elias ; and immediately a light as of the sun shone around about him, and Satan left him. The holy saint adds, “ I believe it was Christ, my Lord, who came to my aid, and that it was His spirit who then cried out for me : and I hope that it will be so in the day of my need, as He has witnessed in the Gospel : ‘ In that day,’ He says, ‘ it is not you who shall speak, but the Spirit of my Father who speaketh in you.’ ”

CHAPTER IV.

His second captivity—How God often spoke interiorly to his soul, and favoured him with many visions—He leaves home to study for the priesthood—Visits Rome, and is appointed to succeed Palladius—Is consecrated bishop, and arrives in Ireland.

THE state of interior recollection in which St. Patrick lived, from the time of his early childhood, had brought him into such close and intimate union with God, that he used often to hear in a sensible manner the voice of the Holy Ghost speaking within him. It pleased the Almighty to converse with him face to face, as a man converseth with his friends. In the same manner as, in the olden times, He spake with Abraham, with Jacob, and with Moses ; and as, in later times, He has frequently spoken with other saints of the Church, so He was wont to communicate His will to Patrick, sometimes in dreams, and sometimes by interior illuminations of the intellect, which, as we have said, frequently produced the impression and sensation of a divine voice inwardly

addressing the favoured servant of God. Thus, it happened that when, shortly after his return from captivity, he fell a second time into the hands of a lawless band of marauders, on the very first night of this second captivity he distinctly heard a divine voice saying to him, "Thou shalt be two months with them." And so it happened; on the sixtieth night the Lord delivered him out of their hands. He again returned to his relatives in Britain, who received him kindly, and urged him, after the many dangers through which he had passed, never to leave them again; but God Almighty had a higher and a nobler calling in view for him, than that he should remain quietly and indolently at home in the peaceable enjoyment of family life. In another vision of the night, he saw a man, named Victricius, coming to him as if from Ireland, with a great number of letters. He gave the saint one of them, which commenced with these words, *Vox Hyberionarum*; and while the saint was repeating these words, he seemed at that very moment to hear the voice of the people, who dwelt near a forest in Ireland called *Foclut*, close by the sea on the western coast. With one voice they cried out, "We beseech thee, Holy Child, to come and still walk amongst us." When he heard these words, he was deeply moved at heart, and was unable to read more. The vision then disappeared. The holy saint, who himself acquaints us with the circumstances of this call, adds, with much simplicity and feeling, "Thanks be to God, because, after very many years, the Lord granted to them according to their clamour."

The saint was favoured with many other visions at this period of his life. On one occasion he heard within him certain spirits singing; he knew not who they were, nor

could he comprehend aught that they said, except the last words of their divine song, *Qui dedit pro te animam suam*—"Who hath given His life for thee." And once again, he heard a person praying in his interior—as it were, actually within his body; and his prayer was vehement and with groans. The saint was amazed and wondered, and was thinking who it could be that thus prayed within him; but, at the end of the prayer, it was revealed to him that it was the Holy Ghost; and he then recollected the place where the apostle writes: "The Spirit helpeth the infirmity of our prayer, for we know not for what to pray; but the Spirit Himself demandeth for us with groanings unutterable, and which cannot be put into words." And again, "The Lord is our advocate, and He Himself demandeth for us."

Patrick had now passed his twenty-second year, and yet he had taken no step to determine his future vocation. It is one remarkable characteristic of the saints, that they are never impatient to take upon themselves the burden of the sacerdotal office. Especially they seem to have ever shrunk from the care of souls; not because they were at all wanting in zeal, but because they had a poor estimate of themselves, and they in no way regarded their own talents or labours as of real service to God. He who can raise up children to Himself from the very stones, could easily, they felt, find instruments better fitted to do His bidding—more holy, more active, more earnest, than they were. Hence it was always their first aim to sanctify themselves; to lay a deep foundation of personal humility; to eradicate, to the utmost of their ability, from their hearts and from their minds the weeds of self-love and self-esteem. And it was this self-abandonment, this singleness of heart, this absence of self-

seeking, this love of retirement, which afterwards helped them so much, when the will of God was clear, and when His providence had placed them in positions of weight and consequence, as it were against and in spite of their own will, to do so much for the service and the name of God—to convert multitudes to the faith, to reclaim heretics, to persuade kings, to withstand the world. The weapons of the saints are not the weapons of earthly wisdom, nor of mere intellectual ability; they are reliance upon God and a total contempt of themselves. As confidence and humility are the only sure sign-posts of sanctity, so are they the only sure instruments of success in the service of the Church.

As, then, our holy father, in all the steps of his life, walked in the slow but certain path of Christian humility, it is no matter of surprise that he had arrived at man's estate before he had resolved upon his future vocation. It was probably the vision of the Irish inviting him still to walk among them, which first put in his mind the idea of becoming a priest. He saw, most likely, in this vision the hand and finger of God, indicating to him, in the clearest manner, the work which he had yet to do. Accordingly, he now began in earnest his preparation for the sacred ministry. When he returned from his second captivity, notwithstanding the solicitations of his friends, he determined to leave his home again, in order that he might study for the ecclesiastical state. The next eighteen or twenty years of his life is, therefore, spent in this manner. His guides and directors were two of the most distinguished prelates of the Church, in that or in any other age—St. Martin, the archbishop of Tours, and St. Germain, bishop of Auxerre. By the former of these holy prelates he was invested with the monastic habit;

and under the latter he studied the Sacred Scriptures, the Ecclesiastical Canons, and the practical knowledge and exercise of his holy office. He probably received the tonsure and the minor orders while he was sojourning with St. Martin at Tours; and afterwards, when he had removed to Auxerre, he was advanced to the priesthood—some say by a bishop named Senior, others by Amatus, the predecessor of St. Germain. His course of life, during all this period, was in accordance with what it had ever been; his abstinence was incredible; his vigils constant and severe; his exterior and interior mortification such as became a disciple of St. Martin. Some years after his elevation to the priesthood were spent in solitude and prayer, on an island between Gaul and Italy. While he was visiting this island, he received from a celebrated hermit, who had long resided there, a relic, which was afterwards held in great veneration in Ireland. This relic was called the “staff of Jesus;” and whatever may have been its origin, it is certain that it was held in great esteem and veneration throughout Ireland for many centuries after the time of St. Patrick. St. Bernard, who lived many hundred years after the death of our holy apostle, mentions the “staff of Jesus” as a relic jealously guarded at Armagh in his day; and he tells us that it was covered with gold and ornamented with most precious gems. Some ignorant persons carried their veneration of this relic to a superstitious extent, persuading themselves that whoever had possession of the “staff of Jesus” was the real successor of Patrick; and hence, in some of the subsequent troubles of the Irish Church, one of the very first objects of the wicked men who, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, usurped the see of Armagh, was to try and get possession of this

celebrated relic. In the overthrow of religion, in the sixteenth century, the staff of Jesus was destroyed or lost; at all events, its history subsequent to that period is unknown.

The time had now arrived for our saint to visit the shrines of the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, in the capital of Christendom; and, accordingly, asking leave of St. Germain, and fortified by his benediction, Patrick set out for Rome, accompanied by a priest named Segetius, who had been selected to go with him by the saintly bishop of Auxerre. St. Patrick was probably already known by character to the Holy See, where the fame of his life of prayer and humility had in all likelihood long preceded him. St. Celestine, the Roman Pontiff, received him with open arms. He was frequently admitted to private audiences with the holy father; and on these occasions, without doubt, the two saints conversed with one another on the condition of Erin, the character of its people, and the chances of their conversion to the Catholic faith. Patrick gave to the Pope a detailed account of the early years of his life, spent in captivity amid the hills of Erin. He explained to the chief pastor of the Church the idolatrous worship which was then practised in Ireland, together with the habits and customs of its inhabitants: and, from his acquaintance with the country, as well as from the affection which he had even then imbibed for its children, the holy father clearly perceived that he would be a fitting person to be intrusted with the difficult mission of their conversion. But it was only a few months before the period of Patrick's arrival in Rome, that St. Celestine had consecrated with his own hands, and had sent Palladius as the chief bishop of the Irish. He determined, how-

ever, to send St. Patrick upon the same mission, to be the assistant of Palladius for the present, and afterwards to become his successor. Accordingly, the holy father invested our saint with all the authority and powers necessary for this mighty task. He enriched him with the most ample faculties, and showed him every consideration and favour. Some authorities state that Patrick, as well as Palladius, received episcopal consecration from the Pope; but there is great reason for concluding that he was not actually consecrated bishop until some time after he had quitted Rome, although, like St. Francis Xavier in later times, he had received from St. Celestine all the extraordinary faculties necessary for the exercise of his missionary labours.

We can well imagine to ourselves the pleasure and the happiness which it brought to St. Patrick to have been permitted to visit the Holy City—to kneel at the tomb of the Holy Apostles; to offer the Great Sacrifice at the shrines of so many martyrs and saints of God; and to have received the blessing of the prince of pastors, of him who, sitting in the chair of St. Peter, rules and guides, prays for and watches over, that universal Church, which then, as now, excites the rage and the madness of the world, but against whose stability and progress no power of earth or hell shall ever prevail. Animated and strengthened by his pilgrimage to the Apostolic See, and having taken an affectionate and tender farewell of the saintly Pontiff, from whom he had received so many marks of fatherly love, our saint, accompanied by several companions, set forth on his return to St. Germain, previous to leaving for Ireland. His former master received him with renewed esteem and veneration, and presented him with chalices, vest-

ments, and other requisites for his new mission. Nor did he remain long with his former friends and companions in the neighbourhood of Auxerre, before the news of Palladius's death obliged him to prepare for his journey to Ireland. Great efforts were made by many of those who had known him previously, and to whom he had endeared himself by the affectionate simplicity of his manners, to dissuade him from prosecuting his mission to Ireland. Acting on the impulses of ill-regulated feelings, they represented to him the troubles that he had endured in his early life; the irreparable loss which they themselves would sustain by his departure from among them; the probability that he would fail, as Palladius had failed before him; and the sorrow and grief which, by persisting in his resolution, he would cause to all his friends and companions. They even tried, by gifts as well as by persuasions, to divert him from his purpose. But the servant of God could not be persuaded, for any human considerations, to abandon a divine vocation. The vision which he had seen many years before was still present to his mind; in which Almighty God had most clearly called him to be the future apostle of the Irish. He remembered also the exhortations and the benedictions of St. Celestine; and how he had received from the successor of Peter all the authority necessary for this evangelical work. He would not resist the call of God; nor would he distrust for a moment the blessing of St. Peter. Rejecting, therefore, the overtures and entreaties of his mistaken friends, St. Patrick all the more vigorously prepared for his departure. In obedience to the injunctions of the Apostolic See, he applied to a neighbouring bishop named Amator or Amathorex, and from him he received episcopal conse-

eration. Yet just before his ordination, a person who had hitherto been his friend, brought forward an accusation against him, for the purpose of preventing him being made a bishop. St. Patrick mentions the circumstance in his Confession; but he does not tell us the nature of the accusation, further than that his former friend publicly made known a fault which the saint had committed in the early days of his youth. St. Patrick was overwhelmed with shame. He felt with great sensitiveness the confusion of his fault being thus published to the world; and he was distressed, at the same time, that one who called himself a friend should have acted in so unworthy a manner. But we may be very certain that, however grave the fault may have appeared in the eyes of the saint, it must, in its own nature, have been something exceedingly slight and trivial. And so it was considered by the prelate to whom it was told; for it did not in any way hinder him from proceeding to consecrate the servant of God. And at the same time that Patrick was thus raised to the episcopal dignity, some of those who were to be his fellow-missionaries in Ireland were admitted to the priesthood and the inferior orders. The names of two of the missionaries, Auxilius and Iserninus, both, as their names would imply, of Roman origin, have been preserved to us. After their ordination, they all set sail from the western coast of Gaul, full of faith and confidence in the protection and blessing of the Almighty; and, after a prosperous passage, they arrived in safety on the shores of Britain. They remained some short time preaching, as they journeyed along, in England, and afterwards in the neighbourhood of Menevia, or St. David's, in Wales. But they were too anxious to get to their proper work in Ireland, to make any very long

delays by the way. They accordingly availed themselves of the earliest means of transport; and leaving the coast of Wales, they set sail for Ireland early in the year 432, and soon arrived at the place now occupied by the town of Wicklow. The saint remained here a very short time, but long enough to convert and baptize one Sinell, the son of Finnchad, who was the first of the Irish who believed through the preaching of Patrick. But the saint, having been probably opposed by the same person who had proved so bitter an enemy to the former missionaries, set sail from Wicklow, and made for the island of Holm-Patrick, near Dublin. They remained on this island only for a very short time; and, re-embarking, they sailed towards the north, and, finally, landed in a part of the country well known to the saint, as being the district in which he had spent six years of his life in captivity.

CHAPTER V.

The conversion of Dicho—The first church erected in Ireland—
The punishment of sacrilege—Other conversions—The fearful
death of Milcho, and the conversion of his son and daughters—
Mochna, a young herdsman, becomes a Christian.

THE saint, with his companions, having disembarked on the coast of Downshire, was immediately observed by a herdsman in the employment of Dicho, the lord of that district. The herdsman not unnaturally took them to be a party of pirates, who were making a descent upon his master's lands for the purpose of carrying away slaves and booty. He, therefore, at once gave the alarm, running as fast as he could to acquaint his lord with the

arrival of the strangers. Dicho immediately prepared to drive the intruders from his land. Collecting together his retainers, he hastened down to the shore, with the intention of giving battle to the imaginary pirates. But no sooner did his eyes rest upon the servant of God than all his fierce thoughts and intentions fled away. He became riveted to the spot where he stood, being able neither to advance his foot a single step, nor to raise the hand which grasped his sword. The gentleness of Patrick had more strength and power than the fierceness of the angry prince. The quiet and saintly aspect of the holy bishop subdued at once the intellect and the passions of the rough heathen who stood before him. His conversion was sudden from pride to humility, from cruelty to mildness, from idolatry to the Christian faith. Patrick then and there preached to him the Cross of Christ; and the poor man listened to the saint's voice with tears in his eyes, and received into a ready and willing mind the primary truths of the Catholic faith. Released by the saint's power from the state of paralyzed stupor which had momentarily fallen upon him, he was baptized, together with all his family, and thus had the honour and privilege of having been the first of the Irish in Ulster who believed in Christ through the preaching of Patrick. Dicho was ever after a fervent and courageous Catholic, and continued to the end of his days to be a faithful and affectionate child of the great saint through whose instrumentality he had been reclaimed from idolatry. As a proof of his gratitude, and as a memorial of his almost miraculous conversion, Dicho set apart the piece of ground on which he had met with St. Patrick for the erection of a church, which was the first Christian church erected in Ireland. It was called *Sabhul Padruig*—"The barn of

Patrick," and its ruins, we believe, may still be seen at Saul, in the county of Down. It is a small stone church, facing north and south, instead of east and west, as was the more usual custom at that time. One of St. Patrick's old biographers mentions this circumstance, adding that it was so built at the request of Dicho, he knew not for what reason, "but perhaps," he adds, "that the worshipper of idols might be roused by this mystical building from the chill of infidelity to the warmth of Christian faith and charity."

Having rested for a few days at the house of his new convert, the holy bishop set out again with his companions to encounter fresh dangers and to gain still greater conquests.

While the holy bishop was resting a few days at the house of his recent convert, he extended his Divine Master's kingdom by fresh conversions and by divers miracles. One morning, as he was offering the Holy Sacrifice, he was observed by a wicked magician, who bore him ill-will, in consequence of the conversion of Dicho. This man could see through a window the altar where Patrick was saying mass, and, instigated by the Devil, he overturned, by means of a rod, the chalice with its precious contents, in the midst of the Holy Sacrifice. The Almighty did not allow so fearful a sacrilege to pass unpunished. Immediately the earth shook all around the spot on which the saint was saying mass, and, opening, swallowed up the magician, who thus went down alive into hell.

Among the relatives of Dicho was a very old man, named Rio or Rius, whose body was bent to the ground by age, and whose soul was covered with the foul darkness of infidelity. This poor man believed neither in God, nor in a future state. The conversion of his relative

had annoyed him, and now the sudden and fearful death of the magician only enraged and angered him the more. Accordingly, he attempted, by all the means in his power, to impede the preaching of Patrick; but the saint, commiserating his age and his ignorance, was resolved to attempt his conversion by the exercise of an unexpected gentleness and kindness. He first addressed himself to the old man's reason, and succeeded in convincing him, by arguments drawn from nature and the visible world around him, that God exists, and that He is indeed the great and beneficent Creator of all things. Wishing then to lead him on to faith in our blessed Saviour, the holy bishop addressed him in some such words as these:—"Seeing that thy limbs are already half dead, and the lamp of thy life is well-nigh gone out, if Christ were to restore to thee the strength and freshness of thy youth, wouldest thou not feel thyself bound to believe on him?" "If," replied the aged man, "thou wilt work in me so great a miracle, I will believe." St. Patrick prayed, therefore, to the Almighty, and, laying his hands on him, blessed him; and instantly—to use the words of the Psalmist—"his youth was renewed like the eagle's." Astonishment and admiration fell upon all who were witnesses of this miracle, and every mouth was filled with the praises of Christ, and of Patrick His servant. Rio, the old man, was transported with joy at thus beholding himself renewed outwardly in his body, and inwardly in his soul. He hastened to be baptized, and brought with him to the sacred font his twin brother and several other converts. When they had been baptized, it was suggested to St. Patrick by the Holy Spirit, to address his aged convert in these words:—"Choose now whether thy days be prolonged in this valley of tears, in the land of tribu-

lation and anguish; or whether, now, terminating the misery of the present life, and being taken up by the angel of light, thou enter into the joy of the Lord thy God?" The neophyte, enlightened by faith, and hoping to see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living, answered, without hesitation, "I choose, and I desire, to be dissolved, and to be with Christ for ever, rather than to dwell in the tents of sinners." He received then from the hands of Patrick the holy Viaticum, and commending his spirit to the Lord, was admitted into the refreshment of eternal rest.

The zealous steward of God now turned his attention to the house and family of Milcho, his former master in the days of his captivity. It will be remembered that this man had always exhibited a great fear and hatred of the Christian faith, and that on one occasion he had received a warning from heaven by means of a dream, which his servant Patrick had interpreted. Notwithstanding this Divine warning, so far from disposing himself to reflect and be converted, he became more and more hostile to Christianity. Ignorant and superstitious, he was completely in the hands of the Druids and magicians; and through their unholy influence he became more and more strongly wedded to the gross idolatries of their impious worship. Such a man was, indeed, in a condition of mind and heart ill prepared to believe and to love the unearthly truths of the Catholic religion.

Accordingly, when he heard that St. Patrick—leaving his new converts under the care of Dicho—was on his way to visit him, he was thrown into an extraordinary state of fear and excitement. The devil, who possesses fearful power over the unbaptized, drove him, through dread and rage, ultimately into a condition of perfect

frenzy. Something of an analogous kind occasionally occurs even at the present day among those who call themselves Christians. We meet with persons who appear to lose all control over their reason and their judgment whenever the Catholic religion is brought before them. They regard it with a sort of preternatural hatred and fear, similar to the feelings with which the wretched creatures mentioned in Scripture as being possessed by demons, regarded our blessed Saviour. It is this preternatural fear that causes them to imagine that if they listen to a Catholic argument, or peruse a Catholic book, or converse with a Catholic priest, they will become the victims of a species of fascination and enchantment which will compel them to submit to the Church against their will. That this state of feeling prevails to some extent among persons separated from the Catholic Church cannot be denied. Those who are brought into contact with Protestants in a missionary country like England, meet with instances of this superstitious awe and hatred of the Church almost every day; they have opportunities of observing how it takes root in people's hearts, and how it completely clouds and darkens their minds; and they see how it often leads to acts of injustice and cruelty from which their perpetrators would be the first to shrink, were they not influenced by a fatal infatuation.

If, amid all the advantages of modern civilization, a strong and fatal delusion can thus lay hold of men's minds, perverting their reason and ruling their will, we cannot be surprised when we read in the record of pagan times how Satan, exercising his fatal power over the unbaptized idolater, drove him on, under the influence of a similar delusion, to the commission of the most frightful crimes. The wretched man to whom St. Patrick was

coming on a mission of mercy and of love, was thus led on to his own destruction through the power and influence of Satan. When he saw the priest of the true God approaching his house, we are told that he erected a funeral pile, collected around it all his substance, and setting fire to the whole mass, threw himself into the flames, and thus gave himself up to ruin of body and soul. The saint, who saw, as he journeyed on, the smoke of this terrible fire, saw also the soul of the unhappy idolator going down into hell in the form of a fiery serpent; and, breaking out into tears at this heinous crime and its awful issue, he foretold that none of Milcho's children should occupy their father's principality, for that they should be thrown into bondage and slavery. This prophecy was soon fulfilled; but the Almighty, in the midst of judgment, remembered mercy—three of Milcho's children having obtained the grace of conversion. They were his son and his two daughters; the former of whom afterwards became a bishop, while the two daughters, as holy nuns, were remarkable for their sanctity, and for the miracles performed through their power and intercession both before and after their death. They were buried in the village of Clonbrone.

The saint, having met only with this partial success, returned to the district in which he had left his early converts, and continued for some time preaching the Christian faith in the neighbourhood, working, moreover, many cures and miracles for the conversion of the people. Among the multitudes gained to the faith by the holy bishop's preaching, particular mention is made of a young man named Mochna. The saint found him feeding a herd of swine; and, as the Holy Spirit revealed to him how this young herdsman was a vessel of election, Patrick

preached to him the Faith, and soon won him over to God. After a single explanation of the Faith, the young boy believed and was baptized. St. Patrick also taught him the Latin alphabet, and placed him under instruction. So diligent was the young Christian in pursuing his studies, and so brilliant in ability, that within the space of one month he learnt the whole Psalter, and before the completion of a year he had arrived at a knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. St. Patrick some time afterwards gave him the ecclesiastical tonsure, and admitting him, at due intervals, to the inferior and higher orders of the ministry, he finally elevated him to the episcopal dignity. By his learning, his piety, his preaching, and his miracles, Mochua considerably advanced the cause of religion in the district of Ireland which is now comprised within the county of Down; and dying in the odour of sanctity, he was buried in his own church, where he had so worthily and so successfully ministered before God.

CHAPTER VI.

How the saint visited Tara, and preached before the monarch and his court.

As the feast of Easter, A.D. 433, was now approaching, it was St. Patrick's desire to celebrate that festival in the extensive plains which surrounded the city of Tara. Taking leave, therefore, of Dicho and his band of converts, the holy bishop and his companions set sail towards the south, and arrived at the harbour of Colbdi, or Colp, near the mouth of the river Boyne. The missionary party here quitted their boat, and set forth on foot for

the plains of Boeg, in which Tara was situated. On their way they turned aside to the house of a man named Seschnen, for the purpose of passing the night there. Seschnen received and entertained the missionaries with the hospitality usually shown in Ireland to strangers. In reward for his kindness, the holy bishop preached to him and to his whole household the glorious faith of Jesus Christ; and such was the power which accompanied his words, that every heart was moved; and on the same night they were all baptized into the Church. Seschnen had a little son, who received baptism at the same time with his father, and on whom St. Patrick bestowed the Latin name of Benignus, or the gentle: thereby indicating the meekness and simplicity which was to distinguish his after days. This young boy, immediately after his baptism, conceived the strongest affection for the holy prelate, through whom he had been begotten to God. All the time that St. Patrick remained at his father's house, Benignus kept close to his side, and nothing could induce him to go away. Wherever the saint went, he went; holding by his garment, looking up into his face, and gathering in all his holy words. At night, when the saint retired to rest, the young child, escaping from his father and mother, laid himself down to sleep at St. Patrick's feet; and during the night he kept them pressed to his heart, and frequently covered them with his pure and affectionate embraces. On the morning when the saint was about to take leave of his host, now no longer an alien from God and an idolater, but a fervent Christian, rejoicing in the gift of faith and in the grace of regeneration, the little Benignus was moved to leave his earthly, in order that he might accompany and minister to his spiritual, father. Just as St.

Patrick was ascending the chariot which was to bear him away from the house of Seschnen, the young boy seized him by his foot, and with the greatest earnestness entreated that he might not be separated from him. Both his father and mother tried to make him leave the saint ; but the more they tried, the more did he struggle against them. Bursting into tears, he besought them to leave him alone, and on no account to remove him from his spiritual father. All this was simply the effect of the grace of God, drawing him thus forcibly to leave father and mother, and home, and all, for the love of Jesus Christ. Our holy bishop could not but conceive a strong affection for this saintly child. He perceived that he was acting under a divine impulse ; and although he was passive for a time, neither urging the child to follow him, nor interfering with his parents' endeavours to retain him, yet when he saw the boy's firmness and determination, the saint at length interfered in his behalf, and begged him of his parents. Benignus was ever afterwards the constant companion of St. Patrick. He grew every day in the grace of God. He embraced the ecclesiastical life, and became ultimately the successor of the saint in the archbishopric of Armagh.

Meanwhile the fame of St. Patrick's preachings began to spread throughout the land. Men had heard of the conversions he had effected, and of the miracles with which the Almighty had confirmed his mission. Fear and alarm began to take hold of the minds of those who were most attached to the idolatrous superstitions, and in particular the Druids, magicians, and other ministers of idolatry, trembled as they perceived the approach of their fall. They therefore assiduously attempted to stir up the fanaticism of the pagan rulers and their subjects.

They set afloat all kinds of gloomy prophecies, predicting various political calamities as the inevitable consequence of the spread of Christianity. They had previously intimated the coming of St. Patrick (probably from their knowledge of the progress made by the Church in Gaul and Britain), describing the Christian missionaries, in their bardic songs, as those who "shall come across the sea, with their crooked-headed staves and tonsured heads, whose vessels of sacrifice shall be placed in the east of their houses of prayer, and all shall say Amen, amen." They now came forward with a bolder prophecy. They assured the king and nobles that if any fire were lighted in Ireland before their own sacred fire, the person who so ignited it would secure the sovereignty of the kingdom and overthrow the ancient laws, religion, and government. In order to explain this prophecy, it is necessary to observe that, about the Easter of A.D. 433, Leogaire, the king of Ireland, with all the nobles, Druids, and principal men of the kingdom, had assembled together for the celebration of a religious festival at Temora or Tara, in the county of Meath, for a long time the residence of the monarchs of the country. "The hill of Tara, although undistinguished either for altitude or picturesqueness of form, is not less remarkable for the pleasing and extensive prospects which it commands, than for the associations connected with it as the site of the residence of the Irish monarchs from the earliest times. In both these circumstances it bears a striking similitude to the hill of Ailead, near Derry, the residence of the kings of Ulster; and to the hill of Emania, near Armagh, another residence of the Ulster kings, but who were of a different race. All these localities have shared a similar fate in the destruction of their monuments at distant periods,

and all equally present striking vestiges of their ancient importance. According to the past bardic traditions, the hill of Tara became the chief residence of the Irish kings on the first establishment of a monarchical government in Ireland, under Slainge, the first monarch of the Belgæ tribe, and continued so till its abandonment in the year 563. The bardic history of Ireland states that there reigned within these periods one hundred and forty-three monarchs, viz., one hundred and thirty-six pagans and six Christians.”*

The religious festival which the monarch and nobles of Erin had at this time met to celebrate was the lighting of the sacred fire of Beltine, or the fire of Baal. This ceremony was observed with great pomp and circumstance; and an old law of the kingdom, hitherto universally observed, prohibited the inhabitants of the country from lighting a fire upon that day, until the sacred fire of Baal had first been enkindled on the hill of Tara. This prohibition was renewed and promulgated year by year in every district of Ireland, and no one dared to disobey it. On Easter Eve, however, when St. Patrick lay encamped on the plains at some distance from the hill of Tara, in accordance with the customs of the Church, and in utter contempt of the pagan superstitions, he lighted the paschal fire, the symbol of Christ, “the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.” This blessed light, the sign of the conversion of the world by the diffusion of the Faith, shone out strong and brilliantly all over the plain, and of course was easily seen from the heights of Tara. No sooner was it perceived than the religious festivity of the pagans was

* Petrie, on the History of Tara Hill, p. 3.

thrown into the utmost disorder and confusion. Consternation seized upon every one, and superstition added to their alarm. "Who is this," cried King Leogaire, "who has thus dared to violate the laws of the kingdom, and to anticipate by a strange light the fire of Baal? Let him be instantly destroyed from the midst of my people." "O king," replied the Druids, "live for ever. Unless the fire which we now behold, and which has been kindled on this night, be instantly, on this same night, extinguished, it will burn for ever. Nay, He who hath caused it to be lighted, and the kingdom of which it is the manifestation, will overcome us all. He will seduce thyself, and all the men of thy kingdom. All kingdoms shall yield to Him, and His dominion shall fill all things, and He shall reign for ever and ever." Unable as were these ministers of a base idolatry to predict of themselves what was hereafter to come to pass, they had probably sufficient knowledge of the Christian religion to dread the effects of its holy influence. Besides, in the same way as Almighty God put the words of truth into the mouth of the false Balaam, compelling him, even against his will, to bless whom he was brought to curse; and as He rendered Caiaphas, the high priest, the unconscious vehicle of the doctrine inculcating the necessity of our Saviour's satisfaction; and as He spread here and there among the ancient Greeks and Romans some true predictions with respect to the coming of Christ, so, in the present instance, He put the words of truth into the mouths of lying magicians, and made them confess, in spite of their unbelief and wickedness, the power and the supremacy of His holy Church.

When the king had learnt from the Druids the danger which appeared to threaten himself and his king-

dom, he at once gathered together his principal officers, men of war, and Druids, and set out with the intention of seizing upon Patrick and his fellow-missionaries. But the holy prelate, feeling his confidence in the invincible arm of the Almighty, so far from being afraid of those who were coming against him, prepared to meet them with Christian courage. When he saw a multitude of soldiers and horsemen approaching the place where he was, he cried out, in the language of the Psalmist, "*Hi in curribus, et hi in equis, nos autem in nomine Domini Dei nostri invocabimus.*"—"These in chariots, and these in horses; but we shall call upon the name of the Lord our God." This Christian boldness, it would appear, terrified the Druids. For, as soon as King Leogaire, with his attendants, came nigh to the place where the saint was standing, they were persuaded by the Druids to halt in their course. Those ministers of a false religion feared, lest by some miracle of grace the holy bishop should suddenly subdue and soften the hard hearts of the king and his soldiery. Leogaire, therefore, stopped at some little distance from the missionary encampment. But he sent forward certain of his servants to command the attendance of Patrick; and the latter immediately set out, being only too glad to have the opportunity of appearing at the court of the pagan monarch, and there declaring the divine truths of our holy Faith. But as he went he armed himself with the sign of the Cross, and with prayer, against the dangers which beset him on every side. Both the king and the Druids were desirous, if possible, to cut him off; but, afraid openly to lay their hands on him, they had secretly placed men in ambush along the way, for the purpose of assailing him when and where he least expected an assault. The

holy bishop, however, proceeded on his way, singing hymns and psalms, unconscious or regardless of the dangers that impended over him. We have still in existence a hymn in the Irish language, which St. Patrick composed and sung, as he was approaching the city of Tara. This ancient hymn, although now little known, was long held in great veneration among the Irish. It was popularly called the *Lorica Patricii*,—the “breast-plate (or ‘shield’) of Patrick,”—because he composed it as a defence against the snares and machinations of the Druids when he was approaching Tara. The old lives of our saint speak of this hymn in terms of the highest estimation. They describe it as a religious armour to protect the body and soul against demons, and men, and vices. Every person, they tell us, who sings it each day, with all his attention on God, shall have no demons appearing to him. It will be a protection to him against poison and envy. It will be a safeguard to him against sudden death. It will be an armour to his soul after his death.

The following literal translation will give some idea of this ancient hymn :—

HYMN OF SAINT PATRICK.

There has come to me, to-day, powerful strength, the invocation of the Trinity.

I invoke the mighty power of the Trinity, I believe in the Trinity under the Unity of the God of the Elements.

At Tara, to-day, I place between me and harm the virtue of the birth of Christ with His baptism ; the virtue of His Crucifixion, with His Burial ; the virtue of His Resurrection, with His Ascension ; the virtue of the coming to the Eternal Judgment.

At Tara, to-day, the virtue of the love of the Seraphim, the obedience of the angels, the hope of the resurrection to eternal reward, the prayers of the noble fathers, the predictions of the

prophets, the preaching of the Apostles, the faith of the confessors, the purity of the holy Virgin, the deeds of just men.

At Tara, to-day, the strength of heaven, the light of the sun, the whiteness of the snow, the face of fire, the rapidity of lightning, the swiftness of the wind, the depth of the sea, the stability of the earth, the hardness of rocks.

At Tara, to-day, may the strength of God pilot me ! may the power of God preserve me ! may the wisdom of God instruct me ! may the Eye of God behold me ! may the Ear of God hear me ! may the Word of God make me eloquent ! may the Hand of God protect me ! may the Way of God direct me ! may the Shield of God defend me ! may the Heart of God guard me against the snares of demons, the temptations of vices, the inclinations of the mind, against every man who meditates evil towards me, far or nigh, alone or with others !

I place all these powers between me and every evil, unmerciful, power directed against my soul and my body, as a protection against the incantations of false prophets, against the black laws of Gentilism, against the false laws of heresy, against the treachery of idolatry, against the spells of witches and Druids, against every knowledge which blinds the soul of man. May Christ protect me this day against poison, against burning, against drowning, against wounding, until I merit a great reward.

Christ be with me, Christ before me, Christ after me, Christ in me, Christ under me, Christ over me, Christ at my right hand, Christ on my left, Christ at this side, Christ at that side, Christ at my back. May Christ be in the heart of each person to whom I may speak, Christ in the mouth of each person who speaks to me, Christ in each eye which sees me, Christ in each ear which hears me.*

It is difficult to form a true idea of this ancient hymn from so rough and literal a version ; but we gather enough to perceive that it was meant to be a Christian invocation of the aid of the Blessed Trinity, the Passion and merits of Christ, and the assistance of all the Heavenly Powers. It has, indeed, been suggested by an estimable

* Petrie, on the History of Tara Hill, p. 33.

and learned writer,* that in the part of the hymn in which the saint alludes to the natural works of the Creator—to the strength of heaven, the light of the sun, the depth of the sea—there are grounds for suspecting his orthodoxy; but as the amiable author, who has raised this suspicion, has not the happiness of belonging to the Catholic Church, it cannot surprise us that he should be unacquainted with the Catholic doctrine. It is very improbable that a bishop who was trained in the school of Germanus and Martin, and who received marks of personal favour from the Roman Pontiff of his day, should have imbibed and taught any pagan ideas. Besides, it was the boast of an Irish saint, in the seventh century, that no heresy or false doctrine had ever taken root, or been taught, in his native land. “All of us natives of Ireland,” writes St. Columbanus, “whose dwelling is upon the confines of the earth, receiving no doctrine beyond what the evangelists and apostles taught, are the followers of St. Peter and St. Paul, and of all the disciples who, by Divine inspiration, wrote the sacred canon of Scripture. Amongst us, there has been no heretic, no Jew, no schismatic; but we adhere, with unshaken firmness, to the Catholic faith, as we received it at the first from you, to wit, the successors of those blessed apostles.”

But, in addition to the antecedent improbability of any heretical teaching having crept into the Church in Ireland, and especially of its having been introduced by our great apostle himself, the most cursory inspection of the Hymn itself will show that it is in no respect at variance with any Catholic doctrine. In fact, it bears a close analogy to some of the psalms and hymns which

* Dr. Petrie.

are daily said in the divine office of the Church. For instance, the "Song of the Three Children" is chiefly occupied with invoking the creation of God, with all its varied works, to bless and praise the Lord. "O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord: praise Him, and exalt Him for ever. All ye waters, which are above the heavens, bless ye the Lord: praise Him, and exalt Him for ever. Ye sun and moon, shower and dew, fire and heat, ice and snow, light and darkness, mountains and hills, fountains, seas, and rivers, bless ye the Lord: praise Him, and exalt Him for ever." Again, in the psalm which follows this song, in the Office for Lauds, the Church calls upon everything to praise the Lord. "Praise the Lord from the heavens: praise Him in the lofty places. Praise Him all ye His angels: praise Him all ye His virtues. Praise Him sun and moon, stars and light, the heaven of heavens, all ye waters that are above the heavens; dragons and all abysses; fire, hail, snow, frost, spirits of the storms, which do His word." All the natural works of the Almighty are here appealed to as bound to contribute to His praise; and inasmuch as they are his handiwork, they are in themselves "good," and thus constitute at once a protest against the evil of the demons, and, so far, a barrier against their power; for their stability, their order, their uniform and invariable obedience to the laws by which they are governed, render them impervious to the power of the devil, except so far as God Almighty may now and then permit the contrary. Nor must it be forgotten that it is the doctrine of the Church, that since all these things were created for the use and service of man, they are all under the control and government of those holy angels by whom, according to the arrangements of Providence, the present constituted

order of things is ordained. Not only is mankiud under the immediate guardianship of the angelic powers, whether considered as individuals or as associated together in particular kingdoms and communities; but a like guardianship extends to all corporeal things, which are similarly subject to the watchful care and control of the angels of God.

Our holy bishop was well acquainted with this doctrine, and he had good reason to be so, for he was one of those favoured servants of God* who lived in almost continual and intimate familiarity with his angel guardian. In placing, therefore, between himself and the snares of men urged on by the powers of evil to do him harm, the material truths of the Almighty, the saint did no more than profess his belief that, created, as they have been, for the glory of God and the service of man, they are controlled and ordered for this end by those bright and blessed angels of whom it is said, "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to minister for them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation?" †

* Among the saints who have been in a special manner favoured with the visible presence of their angels guardian, we may mention St. Cecilia, who by the presence of an angel converted her husband Valerian; St. Agnes, who by an angel guardian was preserved from insult and disgrace; St. Ludovina, a virgin of Holland, who lived in the most uninterrupted familiarity with an angel; and St. Francesca Romana, whose intercourse with an angel guardian was of such a nature, that he only hid himself from her sight when she was guilty of some little failing or defect (*see* her Life, by Lady G. Fullarton).

† Heb. i. 14.

CHAPTER VII.

King Leogaire receives the saint at Tara—Herco converted—The trial between the magician and the Christians—The miserable death of the former—The success of the saint's preaching.

KING LEOGAIRE, with those who had accompanied him, had seated themselves in a kind of council, awaiting, at some distance from Tara, the arrival of the Christian missionaries. Orders had been given that no respect or courtesy should be shown to Patrick and his priests; and especially, that none of the nobles who were seated with the king should rise from their seats as the saint entered the monarch's presence. These orders, however, were disobeyed by Herco, one of the king's counsellors; who, having heard many things respecting the sanctity and miracles of Patrick, touched, too, by his venerable and holy appearance, and instigated by Divine grace to confess Jesus Christ, rose from his seat as the saint entered the place of meeting, and in the person of Patrick revered and did homage to the faith of Jesus Christ. The holy prelate immediately gave him his blessing, and promised him the reward of eternal life. Herco was shortly afterwards baptized, and became an ardent and zealous labourer in the great work of the conversion of the country. He lived for many years as a bishop, at Slane, in the county of Meath; and after his death, his relics were preserved for several generations in the church of that town, and were held by the faithful in the highest veneration.

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The persons who were most afraid of St. Patrick, and who were most desirous, if possible, to obstruct and destroy his power, were the Druids and other ministers of the false religion which then had sway throughout the land. They felt that he, of all men, was their deadliest enemy. Their influence, their occupation, were gone, if the Christian religion, through his instrumentality, should triumph over the pagan worship. These Druids were the emissaries and servants of the devil, and, like the magicians of Egypt, were often assisted in their incantations and wonders by his interposition. They were thus enabled to exercise a superstitious control over a people still sunk in heathenism, and now they exerted all their artifices in the fearful struggle that ensued between the Christian missionaries and themselves, in the vain hope of conquering and trampling upon the Cross. Both at the meeting, and afterwards at Tara, they withstood to the face Patrick and his fellow-labourers, much in the same way as the magicians in Egypt withstood Moses; as Simon Magus opposed St. Peter; as the worshippers of the goddess Diana at Ephesus stirred up a tumult against St. Paul; as the bonzes disputed with St. Francis Xavier in the East; and as the ministers and agents of all false religions have resisted, when they could, the true servants of God. It need hardly be observed, that in all these contests the Christian missionaries came off victorious. The hand of the Lord was with them, strengthening them, and enabling them to do great signs and wonders for His name's sake. The saint showed himself ready to answer all their cavils, and condescended to adapt himself to their mode of discussion. Some he attracted by the sweetness of his voice and the gentleness of his holy words; some he

won over by the clearness of his reasoning and by the evident truth of all he said; others were converted almost as soon as they had seen him: for an ineffable grace proceeded, as it were, from his countenance and his person, which moved their inmost feelings, even before the saint had time to utter a word. We meet with several instances, in the history of St. Patrick's mission, of conversions which had all the appearance of being accomplished by a sudden outflowing of Divine grace.

But if the saint won men by his sweetness and charity, there were occasions in which his zeal was compelled to manifest itself in acts of holy severity. As St. Peter brought down the Divine judgment upon Ananias and Sapphira, who had lied against the Holy Ghost, so Patrick, on more than a single occasion, vindicated our holy Faith by punishing the mocking and impious magicians with the sudden vengeance of the Almighty. This severity was exercised in charity to the souls of those who were made the dupes and victims of their unholy influence, and who could not be undeceived by any means more efficacious than a prompt and unexpected display of the Divine judgment. An instance of this severity occurred shortly after the court had returned to Tara, and after St. Patrick had been induced to proceed thither. The story, as related in the ancient lives of the saints, is curious and interesting on several accounts: it reminds us, in some measure, of the contest that was carried on between the prophet Elijah and the false priests of Baal, and in which both parties agreed to acknowledge as the true God him only who could send down fire from heaven upon their sacrifices. The prophets of Baal, having prepared their victim, "called on the name of Baal from morning even till noon, saying, O Baal,

hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered: and they leaped over the altar that they had made. . . . So they cried with a loud voice, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lancets, till they were all covered with blood. And after midday was past, and while they were prophesying, the time was come of offering sacrifice, and there was no voice heard, nor did any one answer, nor regard them as they prayed: Elias said to all the people, Come ye unto me. And the people coming near unto him, he repaired the altar of the Lord, which was broken down; and he took twelve stones according to the number of the twelve tribes of the sons of Jacob, to whom the Lord came, saying, Israel shall be thy name. And he built with the stones an altar to the name of the Lord: and he made a trench for water, of the breadth of two furrows round about the altar. . . . And when it was now time to offer the holocaust, Elias the prophet came near and said: O Lord God of Abraham and Isaac and Israel, show this day that thou art the God of Israel, and I thy servant, and that according to thy commandments I have done all these things. Hear me, O Lord, hear me: that this people may learn that thou art the Lord God, and that thou hast turned their hearts again. Then the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the holocaust, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw this, they fell on their faces, and said: the Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God. And Elias said to them: take the prophets of Baal, let not one of them escape. And when they had taken them, Elias brought them down to the torrent Cison, and killed them there.”*

* 3 Kings, xviii.

Although the story which we are going to narrate differs in its details from the sacred account of the contest between the prophets of Baal and the prophet of God, yet there is manifestly some similarity and some analogy between them ; so much so, as to make it plain that whatever objections, on the ground of antecedent improbability, may be urged against the one, can with equal plausibility be pressed against the other also.

When the holy prelate appeared before King Leogaire at Tara, the magicians set upon him with their curious questions, their subtle doubts, and their impious proposals. It was a matter of life and death to them to try and keep their influence over the king, and, if possible, to drive the saint from the regal palace. But Leogaire—although a wicked and reprobate man—was thrown into a state of great perplexity by the wisdom and the miracles of Patrick. After witnessing some of these miracles, the heathen monarch said to one of his principal magicians and to the missionaries, “Cast your books into the water, and Him whose book shall escape uninjured, we will adore.” The crafty magician replied that he was unwilling to come to the trial by water with Patrick, because he had water as his god : alluding to the sacrament of baptism—of which he had heard, but did not comprehend. Leogaire, the king, replied, “If not by water, let then the trial be made by fire.” The saint answered, “I am ready ;” but the magician, being again unwilling, said, “This man, alternately in each successive year, adores, as god, water and fire.” The holy bishop repelled this charge of superstition and idolatry ; but, anxious to manifest the power of the Almighty, and inspired, as he doubtless was, to strike terror into the hearts of the surrounding pagans, he made the following proposal to the

cunning magician: "Do thou thyself and one of my attendants enter a house apart from any other. My vestment shall be placed on thee, thine on him, and then let a fire be kindled around for both. Whichever of the two shall come forth unhurt by the fire, let his be the true God." This proposal was accepted by the magician, most probably with a secret misgiving, and because it would have confirmed the doubts of the bystanders, if he had gone on any longer demurring to every plan. Accordingly, by the order of the king, a house was constructed on the hill of Tara for the purpose of this trial. The house was built, one-half of green wood the other half of dry. The magician was put in that part of the house which was built of green wood, while Benignus, the young attendant of the saint, whose conversion has been related already, was placed in the dry portion of the building, clothed in the magician's garment. The house being then closed outside, was set on fire before the whole multitude. "And it came to pass," continues the ancient chronicle, "in that house, by the prayer of Patrick, that the flames of the fire consumed the magician within the green partition of the house; while the garment of St. Patrick, with which the magician was clothed, remained untouched by the fire. On the other hand, the young Benignus walked in the midst of the fire, like the three children, uninjured by the flames: nor was that portion of the building in which he had been placed, although built with the most combustible materials, in any way affected by the fire. Only the garment of the magician, which he had about him, was burned; everything else remained uninjured. The king, when he saw this terrible judgment of the Almighty, was, at first, fiercely incensed against the saint. He rushed at him,

and would have torn him in pieces, but the hand of the Lord restrained him: for, at the intercession of Patrick, the wrath of God descended upon him, and the king feared excessively, and his heart was disturbed, and all the city with him."

Although this sudden judgment did not result in the conversion of King Leogaire, it at all events rendered him more fearful of displaying open hostility to the missionaries. He granted them a reluctant permission to preach the gospel throughout his dominions, provided, as he said, they did not disturb the peace of the kingdom. Although the holy saint did not need any earthly permission to perform an office committed to him from heaven, yet he was glad to avail himself of the sanction thus conceded to him by the civil power. It made his work easier in many respects, giving him a civil position in the country, and thus saving unnecessary disputes and quarrels. Accordingly, during the Easter week, St. Patrick preached publicly in several parts of the county of Meath; and although he met with opposition from one or two quarters, he nevertheless succeeded in effecting many conversions. Amongst others to whom he preached were two brothers of King Leogaire—men of considerable property and influence in their neighbourhood. The elder of the brothers was as cruel and superstitious, and as bitter an enemy to Christians, as the king himself had been. Instead of listening to the glad tidings of salvation, bewailing his sins, and washing himself in the bath of regeneration, he readily seized upon the saint's attendants, beat and scourged them cruelly, and threw some of them into the neighbouring river. The other brother, whose name was Conall, acted in a very different way. The grace which the former had

spurned, the latter joyfully admitted into his heart. Yielding himself up to the teaching of the saint, he demanded and received baptism, together with all the members of his household; and as a testimony of his sincerity and a mark of his gratitude, he voluntarily ceded to the Christians the place where he had hitherto dwelt, and set it apart as a site for churches and monasteries.

But in addition to his efforts for the conversion of souls, our saint burned with a holy zeal to destroy the monuments of idolatry. At a place within the present county of Leitrim, anciently called Maghfeidh, there had long been erected a pagan idol, constructed of gold and silver elaborately wrought. The people used to come and consult this idol, as the ancient Greeks consulted the oracle at Delphi, paying it divine honour, and regarding it as "the head of the gods," on account of the supposed wisdom of its ancestors. Around this principal idol stood twelve smaller ones, placed in a reclining position, in order to show their inferiority and subjection to the chief deity. This idolatrous sanctuary was a place of frequent resort. The superstitious people flocked to it from all sides, consulting the oracle on all public and private affairs, enriching it with their gifts, and feeling confident in the truth and wisdom of its responses. The holy bishop purposely turned aside from other evangelical work, in order to effect its destruction. Having arrived at this celebrated pagan sanctuary, at first he attempted to convert the crowd of idolaters who thronged the place, to the worship of the true God; but finding his preaching to be of no avail, in consequence of the gross superstition of the people, he had recourse to the invincible arm of prayer. From the heights of a

neighbouring hill whence he could obtain a full view of the sanctuary and its idol, Patrick stretched out his hands in supplication to the Lord ; and, in the vehemence of his prayer, raising, as if in a threatening manner, "the staff of Jesus," which he had with him, immediately the idol fell to the ground, while the gold and silver with which it was adorned was all broken and scattered. The lesser idols in like manner were destroyed and sunk into the earth. Many of those who saw what had happened believed and were baptized ; and from the spot where the idol once stood the saint produced a well of water, in which he afterwards gave baptism to great multitudes. The holy prelate next resolved upon making a circuit of Ireland, in order to preach the gospel in every province of the land. He baptized multitudes wherever he went, and left priests to take charge of them, and to minister to their spiritual needs. He was exposed, it is true, at times, to violent persecutions. Sometimes snares were laid for him, as at Tara. Sometimes he was rudely repulsed, his servants beaten, his own life assailed. Often he was rejected with scorn, for no other reason than that he was a foreigner, who had come from another country to teach a foreign religion. Thus, like a true missionary of Jesus Christ, while he planted the cross in strange places, he himself bore it in his own person ; he suffered, and, as he tells us, suffered willingly, for the good of others, and his reward was great. In an unusually short space of time he converted the greater part of the Irish race to the Christian religion, and planted the Catholic faith so firmly in the land, that no subsequent persecution has been able to shake it effectually. The saint himself speaks with astonishment and with gratitude of the successes in his sacred mission. "Those who

never had any knowledge of God, and had never hitherto worshipped other than unclean idols, are now made the people and the sons of God. The sons of the Scots (Irish) and the daughters of rulers are now monks and virgins of Christ. There was one Scottish lady," adds the saint, "blessed, noble, most beautiful, of full age, whom I baptized; and after a few days, on some pretext, she came to us, for she insinuated to us that she had received an answer from the angel of God, advising her to remain a virgin of Christ, and thus to approach to God." Her example encouraged many others to choose the same holy life, even against the will of their parents, and after enduring persecutions and trials from their own relations. This was especially the case with servants, very many of whom, although terrified by threats and hard usage, persevered in their determination to consecrate themselves to God.

In connection with these holy virgins, we may mention a very beautiful story, which is found in most of the ancient chronicles of our saint's life. In the course of his apostolic wanderings, Patrick and his companions came one morning early to a fountain, in a place called Croghan, near Elphin. Here he stopped, in order to recite with his brethren the divine office; and while they were all engaged in chanting the praises of the Most High, Ethnea and Fethlimia, the two daughters of Leogaire, approached the well. They had been committed by their father to the care of two magi, who guarded them with the utmost jealousy, and brought them up in the superstitious practices of the druidical idolatry. They had probably never heard any mention made of the Christian faith, so that they were wholly unprepared to meet with the Christian missionaries; but God had

already put His seal upon them, and was bringing it to pass that, escaping from the evil influences by which they were surrounded, they should be removed from danger and temptation, ere they could soil with sin the grace He was preparing for their souls. It was, therefore, His providence which led them, in the early morning, to the place where the Christians were reciting the Psalms of David. The two young maidens were taken aback with surprise and fear, when they perceived, standing by the mouth of the well, a company of men clothed in white, and intoning a chant such as they had never before heard. At first, in their ignorance, they thought them to be beings of another world, or the spirits of the air, who, to delude their senses, had assumed the phantoms of human form. At length, partially overcoming their fears, they timidly demanded of the saint who he was, and whence he came, and what meant that strange melody which his companions and himself had been singing. In reply to these questions, Patrick preached to them the one true God, and Jesus Christ, whom He had sent. He told them that it is God who was creator of heaven and earth, the sea and all that is therein; that He has a Son coeternal with Himself, coeval and consubstantial, reigning everywhere, ruling all things, possessing all things. The saint, moreover, promised them a celestial and eternal kingdom in exchange for an earthly and transitory one, asserting that if they would acquiesce in his counsels, they would (soon) contract with the Celestial King a chaste and indissoluble marriage. Moved by these and similar exhortations, the young maidens believed gladly in Christ, and were immediately baptized with the water of the well near which they were all standing. They were no sooner made Christians than

they felt at their hearts an insatiable desire of an instantaneous union with their beloved Spouse. They demanded of Patrick the fulfilment of his promise, to show them the face of Jesus Christ. The saint replied, that they must first receive, with the mouth of the heart and body, the flesh and blood of their Spouse, in order that, nourished and strengthened by this vivifying Viaticum, they might pass through the gate of death, from this unclean world, to the pure and glorious chamber of their beloved. The mention of death neither affrighted nor dismayed these holy children. It did not cool down their fervour, nor abate their desire of speedily beholding the face of Christ: for it was the will of God that these young Christians should glorify Him by an early death, and should be thus gently and mercifully removed from the temptations and persecutions that awaited them at home. They therefore implored Patrick to feed their souls with this heavenly food; and he, foreseeing their early death, willingly complied with their request, and gave them the Body of Christ. Immediately the Almighty took to Himself their pure and innocent souls—clothed so recently with the spotless robe of baptism, and now invigorated and sustained by the Body and Blood of Jesus. Thus they obtained their desire of seeing Jesus face to face. It was a rare and singular grace which in a very short space of time translated these daughters of a pagan prince from the dominion of Satan and the tyranny of a gross superstition into the very presence of Almighty God—the reward for which we have all to undergo so many trials and labours, fighting in this weary world the good fight of faith, often on the point of yielding and of being overcome, through our own weakness; and if in the end successful, owing our

triumphant victory, like the daughters of Leogaire, only to the grace and mercy of Jesus. The friends of these young maidens made a loud lamentation over them during the space of three days, and performed all their funeral obsequies according to the custom of the country. At first, the magi, to whose care their father had intrusted them, stormed with rage and vexation at the occurrences that had taken place; but the prayer of these holy virgins, now reigning with God in heaven, obtained for these men the grace of conversion. Subduing their rage, they listened to the preaching of Patrick, and through his ministry were baptized in the faith of Christ.

It will be unnecessary for us to mention in detail the different places visited by Patrick in his missionary journeys through Ireland. The traditions of the country, even to our own day, mark the various mountains, valleys, plains, and cities that were honoured by his presence. Everywhere his progress resembled the resistless advances of an army long accustomed to victory and triumph. Whatever opposition was raised against him from time to time was soon and easily overcome. His successes, on the other hand, were such as have scarcely any parallel, except in the labours of the apostles and of St. Francis Xavier. On one occasion, in the district of Tirawly, the holy bishop not only composed a dispute which had arisen between the seven sons of the prince of that province relative to the succession, but he also converted them, with a vast multitude of people, to the Christian faith. It is said that he baptized twelve thousand on this occasion at a well within the district. Another time he continued for three days a kind of retreat or mission, to which people flocked from

all parts of the land. During this period he read and interpreted, night and day, the holy gospels in regular order, with only such intermission as was absolutely necessary for bodily sustenance. The people listened with such pleasure, that the time passed away almost unnoticed; and when the three days were completed, it seemed as if they had been listening to the saint only for one short day. This will not appear difficult of belief to those who have ever witnessed a great retreat or station in our own times, and who have observed the thousands who come some considerable distances to be present at them, the fervour with which they devote themselves to the religious exercises, and the hardships so willingly and patiently borne in order to continue at the retreat until the end.

While Patrick was preaching in the north, in the territory of the O'Neills, he converted to the faith Cinnia, the only daughter of a chieftain named Echu. The holy virgin was scarcely made a Christian before she conceived the desire of devoting herself entirely to Jesus in the religious life. Her father at first remonstrated, for she was his only hope. He had intended to give her in marriage to some neighbouring prince, and to make him the king of all his possessions. But the sacred eloquence of Patrick soon won the father also over to the truth, and induced him to withdraw his opposition to his daughter's purpose. Accordingly, she assumed the religious habit, and was intrusted by the saint to the care of a holy nun named Cetamaria, who is said to have been the first of the daughters of Erin who embraced the religious state. Under such care Cinnia soon became a proficient in Christian faith and in all good deeds, and, with many other holy virgins, edified the people by the pious life of continual penance and prayer.

But as the saint was to some the messenger of mercy, to others he was the instrument of justice. It would appear that Patrick was desirous to instruct and convert a man named Foillen, who lived in the town of Naas. This Foillen was a bigoted idolater, grossly addicted to his superstitions, and proportionately afraid of the Christian missionary. He had heard the fame of his preaching, and it seems that he dreaded the sweet persuasiveness of his words. So, although the saint wished to see him, and often sent the most earnest messages to induce him to place himself under instruction, Foillen would by no means come into his presence. Now he made one excuse, and now another. Sometimes he was absent from home, sometimes he was asleep. St. Patrick, at length, perceiving this man to be incorrigible, was made instrumental in manifesting through him the judgments of God. On a certain occasion, the saint sent to invite Foillen to come and listen to his preaching; but the same answer was returned, namely, that he was asleep. "Asleep!" said the saint, when the message was brought to him. "Well, then, let him sleep; and let him not wake nor rise before the day of judgment." In these words he intimated the punishment which had fallen on him because he had rejected the grace that had been offered him, for it had pleased the Almighty to change his pretended sleep into the death both of body and soul. The memory of this circumstance was preserved in an ancient form of a curse that once was used in Ireland. When a man wished evil to his neighbour, he would sometimes say, "May he sleep as Foillen did in the castle of Naas."

CHAPTER VIII.

How the saint retired to keep Lent—He visits the Christians in Munster—Foilge attempts to put St. Patrick to death—The martyrdom of his charioteer—The conversion of Maccaldus—The robber—The saint's zeal against slavery.

No truth is more certain than that it is impossible to be the instrument of sanctification to others, unless we attend, in the first place—and before anything else—to our own growth in holiness. Charity begins with the care of our own soul, and when this is duly cared for, it can then extend itself, with a hope and prospect of success, to the souls of our neighbours. But there cannot be a greater mistake than to neglect personal sanctification, on the pretence of labouring for the good of others. All such labour must in the end prove vain and fruitless. It may have much show, but it will have little effect. No preaching is so persuasive as example, and no words produce so great and so lasting an impression upon the minds of men as those which are felt to proceed really from the heart. The simplest words spoken by St. Alphonsus Liguori, in his old age, effected more conversions than the most elaborate discourses of polished orators; and the reason was, because the life of the saint was in itself a perpetual and an incontrovertible sermon, and thus men felt he never asked any sacrifice, or any mortification, or any self-devotion from them which he had not previously practised in his own person, and in a much higher degree. Because he did not allow a false zeal to make him negligent of the care due to his

own soul, they respected, valued, and loved him all the more. Whatever he said went straight to their hearts, and if it did not always produce the results the saint intended, it was never without some fruit and benefit. In religion, reality must, in the long run, be ever successful. It is, indeed, true, that men sometimes admire and follow the shadow instead of the substance; yet the reality of personal sanctification contains an inherent and ineffable power, which never fails to work for good. Hence, all the masters of the spiritual life lead us to probe, examine, cleanse, and adorn our own interior, before we presume to teach or preach to others; and they warn us never to intermit the attention due to our own souls, however urgent and pressing may be the claims and necessities of our neighbour. All that we do for Him will bear permanent fruit, in proportion to all that we endeavour to do for our own advancement in the path of a holy life.

The great saints and missionaries of Christendom were at all times penetrated with this truth. St. Paul, though he laboured "more abundantly than them all," yet laboured in fastings often, in watchings, in continual fear lest, having preached to others, he should be himself a castaway. St. Francis of Assissi regenerated Italy by the irresistible attraction of his own deadness to the world, and his personal piety. St. Dominic and St. Antony of Padua reconciled thousands to the Church by the holy unction which leavened their apostolic preaching, and which could only come from the practical experience of a holy life. In a word, all those great men who live in the mind of the Church, and who when upon earth were the most successful preachers, evangelizers, and apostles, were men who aimed, before all things, at a

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personal union with God, and who, in the midst of incredible labours, never forgot to fear the world, to distrust themselves, and from time to time to renew, by special acts of penance and prayer, the abandonment of themselves to God.

It was in this spirit that Patrick, having effected innumerable conversions, resolved to retire for a time from the distractions of active work, in order that he might refresh his soul by more uninterrupted prayer and intercourse with God. Accordingly, he devoted to this purpose the Lent of the year 453. Constructing for himself a rude cell, made of rough stone, on the mountain of Cruachanaichle, or "Mount Eagle," in Connaught, he retreated to this wild abode at the beginning of Lent, and there passed the whole forty days in the severest exercises of fasting and prayer. At Easter he resumed his missionary labours, which were as successful as usual. Several thousand idolaters were converted to Christianity; and during the seven years which he spent in Connaught his preaching and his example brought over nearly all the people to the Faith.

In the southern province of Ireland, Patrick was for some time threatened with opposition by the Christians no less than by the pagans. He was at first received by these Christians (who, as we have seen, had been in the country before the period of his mission) with coldness and suspicion. They regarded him as a stranger, and felt inclined to question his right to come among them at all. Just as the first Christians suspected St. Paul, on the ground of his sudden conversion, and as the original Catholics of Britain felt an unworthy jealousy of St. Augustine, so these primitive Christians of the South

hesitated, for a moment, to give a hearty welcome to the new bishop from Rome. Some accused him of being a foreigner; others spread abroad that he was loose and lax in his teaching: the bishops of the South would not acknowledge his jurisdiction, and matters for a time looked as if a storm were impending. However, this state of things did not last long; Almighty God Himself interfered to put a stop to it. Angels were sent from heaven to St. Declan and St. Ibar, commanding them to wait upon St. Patrick, and to obey him in everything. Kiaran, the first-born of the saints of Erin, was also the first to make his submission to Patrick. His example was soon followed by St. Ailbe. These four bishops are said to have met St. Patrick in synod at Cashel, to have there acknowledged his authority over them, and to have received from his hands a confirmation of all the privileges they had hitherto enjoyed. Thus ended a misunderstanding which might have produced the most deplorable results. It was healed by the piety and humility of those who were for a moment disposed to yield to an unworthy prejudice, but who were too good Christians at heart and too faithful to the Church to allow these prejudices to remain in their minds.

Opposition of another kind the saint was continually meeting with from the malice and treachery of those who hated the faith of Christ. On one occasion, as he was passing through the district now called King's County, an attempt was made upon his life by a man named Failge, whose anger the saint had excited by his zeal against idolatry. St. Patrick owed his life on this occasion to the devotion of Odran, his disciple and charioteer. This faithful servant had somehow found out or suspected the danger with which the saint was threatened; but,

concealing his knowledge from his master, he simply requested him to change their respective places in the chariot while they were passing through this part of the country, pretending, as his reason for making this request, that he was greatly fatigued; and the saint, always ready to exercise his humility, most gladly exchanged places with his servant. He soon, however, discovered, to his great grief, the real purport of this unusual request; for they had not proceeded far on their way, before the wicked man who was lying in wait for the saint rushed forward, and mistaking the servant for his master, before the latter had time to interpose, pierced the faithful Odran with his spear. We can well imagine the distress of the holy bishop at the death of his beloved servant. He saw now Odran's pious object in requesting to be relieved for a time of the guidance of the chariot. He lamented what he considered his own weakness in yielding, without further questioning, to his charioteer's request. He admired the zeal and the love which had prompted so noble a sacrifice, and he almost envied Odran that crown of glory which he had won for himself by this disinterested act of devotion. As for the wicked murderer, the vengeance of God soon fell upon him; and the day on which he took the life of this noble-hearted Christian was also the day of his own miserable death.

Another time, when St. Patrick was in Ulster, he fell in with a band of robbers, headed by a chieftain named Maccaldus, whose crimes and wicked deeds were notorious throughout the land. These abandoned men were lying in wait for such travellers as might have occasion to pass by the place of their concealment, when they perceived Patrick with his companions drawing near.

Their first impulse was to rush upon the Christian bishop, and, by cruelly putting him to death, to avenge themselves for the injuries he had inflicted upon their national superstitions and idolatries. But a divine grace made them alter their intention. They thought it would be an ungenerous and cowardly act to take the life of an old man, who bore them no ill-will, and who was incapable of defending himself by arms. So, instead of attacking the Christian party, they agreed to salute them with mock reverence, and to play a hoax upon them. They induced one of their company, named Garvan, to pretend to be dead; and covering him with a cloak, they requested the saint, as he was journeying on, to stop and say some prayers over the body. The Holy Spirit revealed to Patrick the real state of the case; but, concealing his knowledge, he did not hesitate to comply with the request made to him, and to pray for their companion in crime. The prayers which he repeated were offered for the conversion of this poor sinner, and for the salvation of his soul, when it should stand before the Divine judgment-seat. Maccaldus and his robber band stood around the Christian bishop, as he poured forth these prayers. They had intended to turn him into mockery and ridicule; but an unusual solemnity came over them all, as they listened to the holy prayers of the Church, and as the echo of the *Amens*, chanted by the Christians, was repeated along the surrounding mountains. The office ended, St. Patrick proceeded on his way; while Maccaldus and his company, half in fear, half in shame, removed the cloth from the body of Garvan, bidding him arise, and go about his work, but the wretched man was no more: his pretence was turned into a reality, and they saw before them the corpse of their luckless companion. So evident an inter-

position of the Divine judgment had an immediate effect upon all those who witnessed it. Crying out, "This is truly a man of God," they followed the saint, who had now proceeded some way on his journey, and coming up with him, they cast themselves at his feet, imploring him to intercede with God and to obtain pardon for their impiety. They all professed themselves converted to the Christian faith, and, at their own request, were admitted to baptism. The saint returned with them to the place where they had left the body of Garvan, and whom he restored to life by his prayers, and added him, through the sacrament of baptism, to the new company of believers. Maccaldus, the chief of this robber band, was likewise the foremost in his penitence. Casting himself at the feet of Patrick, he demanded a penance in some measure suitable to the wickedness of his past life, and the saint, granting his request, commanded him to give all his goods to the poor; to clothe himself in the meanest garments; to leave Ireland for ever, and embarking in a frail boat without a pilot, to go wherever God should waft him. The converted robber, now truly contrite, gladly and cheerfully accepted this severe penance. Quitting the shores of his native land, the winds carried his bark to the Isle of Man,* where he was kindly received by two bishops—Connid and Romulus, who took compassion upon his misfortune, and gave him hospitality. Maccaldus entered with great spirit upon his new life of penance, and one who had hitherto been great in crime now became great in sanctity. His contrition and his humility gained for him admission to the priesthood. He afterwards became bishop of the Isle of Man; and

* Anciently called Eubonia.

having laboured earnestly to spread the Faith, died in the grace and favour of God. He was buried in the island, where his memory was long, and perhaps is still, held in veneration.

It was somewhere about this period that an event took place which stirred up all the just anger and zeal of the holy prelate. Although many of the Britons made profession of the Christian name, their lives, nevertheless, and their lawless course of action, rendered them worse than if they had still continued in open paganism. They had fallen into very corrupt practices; and impurity, rapine, murder, and other crimes, disgraced the holy name they bore. A party of these wild and disorderly men, under the command and direction of a Welch prince, named Coroticus, or Caradoc, made a descent upon one of the south-eastern counties of Ireland for the purpose of plunder, and meeting with resistance, slew a great number of newly-baptized Christians—recent converts made by the saint, carrying many others into captivity, with the intention of selling them as slaves. When St. Patrick heard of this cruel transaction, he was overwhelmed with shame and grief. He was deeply afflicted at the untimely death of his recent converts, but he was still more deeply grieved to learn that those who called themselves by the name of Christ could, without compunction, slay for the sake of gain, or sell into slavery, their fellow-Christians. At first, the saint sent a private letter of remonstrance to Coroticus, imploring him to set at liberty the Christian captives he had taken, and not to sell them into the hands of the enemies of their faith; but his letter was received with scorn and derision. Those rough soldiers cared little for the humility and gentleness of the aged apostle, while the reputation of his

sanctity had no charms for minds so stupified by vice and for hearts so hardened in crime. St. Patrick, therefore, sent them a second epistle, which contained a more public reproof of their crime, and declared them all to be cut off, in virtue of his apostolical authority, from the communion of the Church. This second letter, in all probability, met with as little success as the first. It is still in existence. Written in the saint's simple and unadorned style, it breathes in every line the true spirit of the Christian missionary. He speaks in terms of very sincere affection of the land of his adoption, and of the people whom he had begotten unto God : for whose sake he had willingly sold his nobility, and had cheerfully abandoned his home and friends. He warns all Christian people against communicating with Coroticus or his band of soldiers ; exhorts them not to converse with them, nor to take food or drink with them, nor to receive their alms, until, having done penance with tears, they make satisfaction for their sins and set at liberty the servants of God and the baptized handmaids of Christ for whom He was crucified and had died. He calls them ravenous wolves, devouring the people of God as they would eat up bread ; robbers ; murderers ; Christians in name, not in deed. "For while it has been," he says, "the custom with the Christians of Rome and Gaul to send holy priests to the Franks and to foreign nations, with large sums of money, for the purpose of redeeming Christians in captivity, thou," addressing himself to Coroticus, "slayest men, or sellest them to a strange people that know not God : as if into a brothel, thou deliverest the members of Christ. What sort of hope, therefore, hast thou in God ?" He concludes his earnest and spirited address by lamenting the loss of those who were slain ;

and yet his grief is mingled with joy, for his labour in a strange land has not been in vain, and those who were put to death by the cruel sword of their fellow Christians will reign with the apostles, and prophets, and martyrs, for ever in heaven. Once more, he implores Coroticus and his soldiers to do penance for their crime. They have been the murderers of the brethren of the Lord; but let them do penance, and liberate the baptized captive women whom they have taken, that they may merit from God long life, and be saved both here and hereafter.

CHAPTER IX.

The erection of the church and see of Armagh—The saint visits Rome a second time, and brings back some precious relics—He holds several synods—His daily life.

OWING to the unwearied labours of its chief apostle, and to the singular benediction which attended all his exertions, Ireland was now sufficiently Christian to enable St. Patrick to turn his attention to matters strictly ecclesiastical. Accordingly, his next great act was the erection of the church and see of Armagh, which, being made his own episcopal see, was henceforth to be the metropolitan church of Ireland. The land on which the church was built was the gift of Daire, a rich man residing in the neighbourhood. This foundation took place about the year A.D. 454, and it was not long before a new city grew up around the church, and Armagh became an ecclesiastical town of considerable importance; for no sooner had the saint made it his principal residence, than the religious

from all sides flocked into it, in order that they might settle down near their beloved bishop. Hence, monasteries, schools, and convents were soon to be seen in the neighbourhood of St. Patrick's church at Armagh; and some of them became renowned in after times for the sanctity or for the learning of their members.

Among the learned men who have carefully examined and weighed all that has been recorded about the life of our saint, there appears to be a division of opinion with respect to some of his subsequent actions. It is certain that St. Patrick visited Rome before he came on the Irish mission; but whether or not he paid a second visit to the holy city, after the erection of the church of Armagh, is not so clear. He makes no mention of any such visit in his own brief account of his life and mission. On the contrary, his words imply, that from the time of his landing in Ireland as successor to Palladius, he never once quitted its shores; however, the silence of St. Patrick himself is scarcely a sufficient reason for denying what a constant tradition, resting upon ancient testimony, has invariably maintained, especially as the little treatise, to which allusion has been so often made in these pages, and which is called the "Confession of St. Patrick," is more properly a sort of apologetical defence, addressed to persons who were thinking ill of the saint, than a professed record of his labours. It is, besides, extremely probable that St. Patrick, after having laboured so strenuously to plant the Faith among the Irish, would desire to lay before the Vicar of Christ an account of all that he had done, and to seek a renewal of his blessing and approbation. Ancient writers tell us that he was admonished by an angel to visit a second time the shrines of St. Peter and St. Paul. He was

received by the Sovereign Pontiff with the warmest signs of joy and favour. All his faculties and privileges were renewed. He was invested with the pall, as archbishop of Armagh and apostle of Ireland. The Pope confirmed by his authority all the ecclesiastical and spiritual acts done by the saint in the course of his mission; and when he was about to return back again to his post, the holy father granted him many precious gifts for the ornament and benefit of his church at Armagh. Among these were several relics of St. Peter and St. Paul, as well as of many other holy martyrs. There was also a cloth stained with the blood of our Blessed Saviour. The saint, on his return, deposited these precious relics behind the high altar of his church; and, until the desecration of Armagh by the Protestants, they were annually exposed to the devotion of the faithful at the great festivals of Easter and Pentecost.

Upon his return to Ireland, St. Patrick occupied himself with the celebration of various provincial synods, in which he made such laws as were best suited to the infant condition of the Church in the country at that time. These canons do not, indeed, contain anything essentially different from the similar canons of other local councils; on the contrary, they simply put in force throughout Ireland, with a due regard to the circumstances of the country, the very same discipline which existed in the fifth century in other parts of the Catholic Church.

According to these decrees, no priest was permitted to be a wanderer among the people from place to place; nor was any clerk, from the grade of *ostiarium* even to the priesthood, to walk abroad without a suitable ecclesiastical dress, and without the Roman tonsure. All ecclesiastics were expected to be present daily at mass, or at

some public office of the Church—unless, adds the canon, they be detained in service ; from which exemption, the conclusion has been very properly drawn, that it was the custom in those early times to admit devout and well-conducted men, in the condition of servants, to the minor orders, with the consent of their masters. The alms of Christians under sentence of excommunication were not to be received ; nor were those which might be offered by the Gentiles—that is, such as were still living in idolatry. Any Christian guilty of homicide, or fornication, or of consulting a soothsayer, was to undergo a year's penance for each crime. This being completed, he was to come with witnesses to the priest, and to be by him absolved. A thief was to do penance on bread for twenty days, to give up what he had stolen, and then to be restored to the Church. Severe laws were passed against such as gave way to the popular superstitions of their pagan countrymen, consulting witches and fortune tellers, and following the gross practices which they suggested. Excommunicated persons were not permitted to enter the church on Easter Eve. The Christian who, like the heathen, should defraud any one of a debt, was to be excommunicated until he had done penance. The same penalty was to be visited upon those who should go to law before the unbelievers, and not submit his cause to the Church. Excommunicated persons were to be restrained from communion, "from the table, from mass, and from peace." Heretics, after the first admonition, were to be avoided. Those who fell away from the Faith were not to be restored, except by imposition of hands. The Blessed Eucharist was to be received, after examination of the flesh, especially at Easter ; at which time, whoever did not receive was no longer regarded as one of the

faithful. Catechumens were to be baptized on the eighth day; but the public and solemn seasons of baptism were Easter, Pentecost, and Epiphany.

The virgin who, having vowed to live in chastity, should afterwards be guilty of breaking her vow, was to be excommunicated until she had done penance for her crime. When reconciled to the Church, she was no longer to remain in the same house or in the same town with her paramour. Any Christian woman who should first accept a husband in honest nuptials, and afterwards leave him, and should form an adulterous union with another, should be excommunicated.

Priests were not to offer Mass in any new church until it had been first consecrated by the bishop. No strange priest was to baptize, offer, consecrate, nor build a church, until he had received permission from the bishop. Whatever pontifical gifts should be offered by religious men during the period of a bishop's visitation, should belong to the bishop, either for his own use, or to be distributed to the poor, as he should think fit. An ecclesiastic excommunicated was not allowed to pray in the same house with his brethren, but should perform all his religious duties alone; nor could he offer Mass or consecrate until he had made amends, and been reconciled to the Church. Priests coming from Britain without commendatory letters were not to be allowed to exercise their office. Ecclesiastical causes were not to be determined by secular judges; and if any disputes or questions arose in the island, they were to be referred for decision to the Apostolic See—or, as this decree has been more fully expressed: "If a difficult cause arise which cannot easily be decided by the Irish bishop and the see of Armagh, it shall be sent to the Apostolic See; that is, to the chair of the

Apostle St. Peter, which hath the authority of the city of Rome.”

Such were some of the regulations with which St. Patrick endeavoured to strengthen and put in order the infant Church throughout the country. They did not differ in spirit from the similar decrees of other councils of the Church; on the contrary, they are for the most part the ancient ecclesiastical laws of the universal Church renewed and enforced in Ireland. They enjoin what all the synods of the Church ever kept in view and enforced—unity with the Apostolic See, submission to the successor of St. Peter, the spiritual independence of the Church from temporal control, chastity and continence in her children, purity, piety, and good discipline in her clergy. Some of the canons relating to matters of discipline belong in spirit to a period older than the time of St. Patrick; and if they were literally enforced in Ireland at all, it could only have been for a very short period: but in all probability they were modified almost as soon as they had been decreed. The laws repressing superstitious practices serve to throw light upon the evil customs of those pagan times, while the decrees which relate to the plunder of churches, the liberation of captives, and the like, show us the unsettled condition of society at that period.

While the saint was thus providing for the good order of the Church, he did not overlook duties of a personal nature. No one ever felt more deeply than himself the necessity of living a life of prayer in the midst of all his active work. He was not satisfied with making his work his prayer, although each action of the day was offered by him to God before it was commenced, while he was doing it, and when it was completed. But, over and

above this constant and uninterrupted act of prayer, he set himself a rule of vocal prayer, such as perhaps has never been excelled by any of the saints. It was his daily custom to recite the whole Psalter, the Apocalypse of St. John, the hymns and canticles of the Church, together with two hundred other prayers. Three hundred times a day he genuflected in adoration of the Lord. At each canonical hour he signed himself a hundred times with the sign of the cross. In addition to these devotions, he was accustomed to say Mass every day with the greatest piety and recollection; nor did he ever omit to preach to the people and to instruct his disciples. He divided the night into three parts, the first of which was passed in prayer and in reciting psalms. During the second part, he exercised himself in penitential actions,—sometimes standing with his body in icy-cold water while, his heart and soul being in heaven, he repeated certain psalms and hymns. The third part of the night he gave to sleep and the rest necessary to his body; but his couch was a hard, rough stone, with another stone as his pillow, and he had no covering except the clothes which he wore by day. It was thus that even so great a saint—one who had spent his whole life in the service of God, and whose thoughts were ever in heaven—deemed it necessary to keep his body in subjection, lest the flesh should rebel against the spirit. The true servants of God never fear any enemy so much as themselves. They never presume upon the favours and graces which they have received; nor, because they have hitherto withstood temptation, do they ever relax their watchfulness against its snares. They always appear to hear in their ears the warning of the apostle: “Let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.” And this,—united to a sense of

sin, and to a sympathy with the passion of Jesus, such as the world does not understand,—is the secret cause of that intense desire of penance, and mortification, and punishment of self, which, in different degrees of heroism, is common to the lives of all the saints.

During the first years of his mission in Ireland, the saint used to go about on foot from place to place preaching and teaching the people; but as age came upon him, he was forced to use a chariot, according to the custom of the country. Over his ordinary dress he used to wear a simple white hood, which continued for some ages to be the usual monastic dress in Ireland. The saint was always unwilling to accept gifts, esteeming it better to give than to receive. If at any time he was obliged, through courtesy, to accept the offerings of some rich man, he gave them away to the poor as soon as possible, that he might rid himself, as it were, of so great a burden. The openness of his countenance, the gentleness of his manners, the softness of his voice, and the considerate kindness of his conversation, tended to attract and to edify all who came in contact with him; and no one knew better than himself how to become all things to all men, how to adapt his words and his conversation to high or low, old or young. He was able to converse in four languages—British, Irish, Gaelic, and Latin. Persons frequently came from a distance to consult him about difficult passages of Scripture, or to ask his opinion on abstruse questions of theology; but although when obliged to give an answer it was always one full of wisdom, and most satisfactory to those who were seeking advice. Yet such was his humility, that if he could avoid solving those difficult questions he would do so, while his first answer to all such queries invariably was, “I know not,

God knows." The saint enjoyed a wonderful gift of prophecy. He revealed many things relating to the saints of Erin who were to flourish after his time, sometimes mentioning even their names and the places where they should be born or should reside. Thus he foretold the birth of St. Senan of Inniscathy ; and, while journeying through what is now the county of Kerry, he prophesied that St. Brendan, the great patriarch of monks and star of the Western world, would be born in West Munster, and that his birth would take place several years after his own death. Another time two brothers came to the saint to ask his blessing : the elder was named Conall, the younger Fergus. St. Patrick gave them both his benediction ; but, in the act of blessing Fergus, the younger of the two, he laid his hands upon his head with great deliberation and with the highest devotion, saying some prayers before he gave his blessing. Conall, surprised at the difference made between his brother and himself, asked the reason ; and the saint replied in some such words as these : " Blessing, I have blessed Fergus thy brother on account of the blessed son that is to spring from him ; for his son Fedblem will be the father of a child named Columba—a name indicating that he will be filled with the Holy Ghost from his mother's womb, since he himself will be filled with the treasures of wisdom and divine science, and he will be called a singular lamp burning and shining in his generation, and the prophet of the Most High ; for from the time in which he shall come to the age of reason a voluntary falsehood shall never escape his lips." This was that celebrated St. Columba who preached the faith in the highlands of Scotland, and who founded on the island of Iona a religious community which sent forth through

England and Scotland many holy bishops and missionaries.

Notwithstanding these and many other singular graces with which the servant of God was so richly and abundantly favoured, he was ever distrustful of himself. His humility shone brightly and clearly above his gifts of prophecy and of miracle. He considered these gifts as having been bestowed upon him for the sake of others, and as being, therefore, no proof of his own virtue or sanctity. He had the meanest opinion of himself. In his own eyes, as he was small in stature, so was he small in virtue. In his letters and public documents he spoke of himself as the greatest of sinners, the least of all, the most contemptible of all; and when he used these words, he meant what he said. He fostered this humility by giving himself from time to time to the most humble occupations. He would very often devote himself to manual labour, especially to fishing, agriculture, and the building of churches, in which he himself would be employed like any ordinary workman, and by his zeal and diligence would stir up the rest to labour earnestly. Meanwhile, he never relaxed in the higher labours of his ministry—ordaining priests and bishops, founding churches, baptizing multitudes, catechising the young, promoting religious studies wherever he went, composing dissensions between rival princes and heathen people, and in innumerable other ways making full proof of the sacred ministry to which the Almighty had called him.

CHAPTER X.

The last illness and death of the saint—How his obsequies were celebrated.

THE hour was drawing near in which the aged saint, full of faith and good works, was to be called to receive his reward. St. Patrick had laboured with singular energy for the conversion of the people of his adoption; and the Almighty had prolonged his life far beyond the ordinary age of man. He had found the people given over to superstitious practices and to an idolatrous worship; they were ignorant of the true God; had never bent the knee in adoration of Jesus Christ; lived without piety, and died without hope. Full of love for their souls, he sowed among them the seed of the true faith: and although it did not immediately, nor during his own lifetime, diffuse itself completely over the land, yet it even then produced very marvellous fruit, and it has gone on ever since increasing in intensity and in power. The faith preached by Patrick has been the consolation and the glory of Ireland during a long night of social and political calamity. The people of the land passed through trials and wrongs seldom equalled, or exceeded, in the painful history of nations. They lost almost everything that the world sets a value upon—lands, and wealth, and political consequence; but, amid all their losses, they kept as a hidden treasure beyond price the seed of the faith sown by the hand of St. Patrick. This has been a lamp to their feet and a guide to their paths; this has been the unspeakable comfort of many an honest heart, when every other

comfort has been taken away ; it has sustained the widow and the childless in their bereavement ; it has made the poor cheerful and light-hearted, and happy and joyous, in the midst of their deep poverty : it has lightened distress ; it has made men indifferent to injustice, teaching them to look forward to a better and a happier land, where all wrong and injustice is avenged.

The faith sown by the great saint goes on increasing every year. Like the house built upon the rock, it has withstood every storm of wind and hail that has hitherto been stirred up against it ; the open assaults of heresy have not been able to root it out ; the neglect of centuries has been ineffectual to destroy it ; neither persecution nor bribes have succeeded in removing it ; it has grown to be a mighty tree, and though it bent beneath the storms that assailed it, they have passed away without doing it any harm. Nor yet is it satisfied merely with the power of resistance : it assails as well as defends. It has spread itself over the New World, over America, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand : wherever the tide of emigration carries the peasantry of Erin, there St. Patrick may be said to be planting anew the faith of Christ ; and although among these wanderers from their native shore, there be many, alas, who have cast away the heavenly gift inherited from their fathers, and many more who, without denying the faith, nevertheless dishonour it with their lives, still whatever there is of real Catholic faith, and zeal, and earnestness in these new worlds, may be said with the utmost truth to have sprung from the seed planted in Ireland by the hands of that venerable prelate whose holy life has been engaging our attention.

It was, then, time for the aged labourer to cease

from his arduous work in this new portion of the one vineyard. He had bravely borne the brunt and heat of the day, and the Master was standing by, eager to give him his hire. St. Patrick happened to be at Saul, in the county of Down, when he perceived his end approaching. As soon as he felt the advance of his last illness, he hastened to return to Armagh, being desirous to conclude his days at his own church, surrounded by his disciples and fellow-labourers in the Lord. But he was not permitted to carry out his intention, for the angel, who had so often appeared to him on other occasions, warned him to return to Saul, assuring him that it was the Divine will that he should die there. After seven days, his disease assumed a very serious form, and it became evident to all around him, that he could not live many days longer. His angel again admonished him to send for his disciple Thasach, a bishop, from whose hands he received the last sacraments. He had no sooner been fortified with the Divine mysteries, than, lifting up his eyes, he saw the heavens open, and Jesus standing amid a multitude of angels; raising his hands, therefore, the saint blessed his attendants and friends, and commending them to the Lord, at the same time giving thanks, he passed from out of this world, from faith to the vision of God, from the way to the country, from present trouble to eternal glory. "Oh, how happy was St. Patrick," says an ancient writer, "who saw the Lord face to face, and who in his own person was apostle, martyr, confessor, and virgin. Apostle, inasmuch as he converted Ireland, and the isles adjacent, to the Catholic faith; martyr, in that he bore in his body the cross of Christ, presenting himself a living sacrifice to the Lord, and enduring with patience the persecutions of the

idolatrous magi and kings—nay, of the very demons themselves. He was a confessor, inasmuch as he boldly proclaimed the name of Christ to many people, tribes, and tongues; and he was a virgin in body, a virgin in heart, a virgin in the purity of his faith. Justly, therefore, did he merit to be united with the choirs of angels and the company of all the saints who, by the grace of God, shared in the virtues of all the servants of the Lord. St. Patrick died on the 17th of March, about A.D. 493.

The grief was universal when the news of his death was spread throughout the Christians of the land. Every one felt that he had lost a father; and although they could not call in question the immediate happiness of the saint, yet feeling the weight of their own bereavement, no eye was free from tears. As soon as the saint was dead, a multitude of monks surrounded his bier, commending his soul in prayer to God, and wrapping his sacred remains in a linen cloth, said to have been woven for this purpose by the holy virgin St. Brigid. A crowd of clergy and laity flocked together to celebrate his obsequies, bewailing his departure as the common desolation of their country. Twelve days were spent by the clergy and people in the chanting of psalms and the offering of the Holy Sacrifice, and in other exercises of prayer and thanksgiving. All these devotional exercises were continued without interruption by night as well as by day; and such was the concourse of people, bearing lights and torches to do honour to the body of the departed saint, that the whole period of twelve days appeared like one uninterrupted space of only four-and-twenty hours. Even the holy angels were pleased to assist in a very evident manner at these sacred obsequies; keeping watch around his bier, and chanting divine songs of exquisite harmony.

Among the people there was some contention as to the place where his body should be laid. Those from Armagh claimed the sacred remains of their beloved bishop; while the people of Down, in the neighbourhood of which the saint breathed his last, were unwilling to allow so precious a relic to be carried away from them. At length, through the mediation of the priests, the matter was arranged to the satisfaction of all parties; and while some relics of the saint were sent to Armagh, his body was buried at Down, in a very deep pit, to prevent the possibility of its being stolen. In after-years, the remains of St. Brigid and of St. Columba were brought, the one from Kildare and the other from Iona, and deposited in the same tomb with those of St. Patrick. But in process of time doubts arose as to the precise spot where these sacred remains had been laid. Most probably they had been buried with the utmost secrecy, as was the case in later times with the body of St. Francis of Assisi, in order to guard more effectually against the danger of their being stolen. In the twelfth century, a holy bishop of Down, named Malachy, used to pray frequently to the Almighty that he might be pleased to point out to him the precise place in which they had been concealed. One night, while they were engaged in prayer in the cathedral church of Down, he saw a light, like a ray of the sun, traversing the church, and resting over the place where the bodies had been laid. Immediately obtaining the necessary instruments, he opened the ground, and found there three bodies, which he reverently placed in distinct coffins, and then covered them again with the earth. He communicated his discovery to John de Courcy, the Norman baron, who had recently obtained possession of

that part of Ireland ; and in conjunction with this nobleman, he sent messengers to Pope Urban III., in order to obtain permission from the Sovereign Pontiff to remove these sacred relics to another part of the church. In compliance with the request made to him, the Pope sent Cardinal Vivian as his legate, for the purpose of presiding over the ceremony of the removal of the sacred bodies. On his arrival, the removal took place with great solemnity, and the three bodies were deposited in a more conspicuous part of the church, on the 19th of June, the feast of St. Columba. A great number of bishops and other clergy were present at the translation, the anniversary of which was appointed to be ever after kept as a solemn feast. It was the wish of the bishops at the time to transfer the feast of St. Columba from the 9th to the 17th of June, but it does not appear that this change ever really took place.

It was a custom in Ireland for a long time to celebrate the feast of St. Patrick, during three days and three nights, with great rejoicings.

There is an old tradition, that St. Patrick has obtained from Almighty God the privilege of being himself the judge of the Irish people at the great day of account, that from those to whom he preached the Christian faith he may exact a strict account of the way in which they have used it. As the twelve apostles will sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel, so, says the tradition, will Patrick sit upon a throne of power and glory, judging the Celtic nations to whom he communicated the faith of Christ. He will call them to account for the abuse of their gifts, and he will reward those who, in heart and work, have been faithful to the end. And now, in the enjoyment of his supreme happiness, this illus-

trious saint does not forget the people of his adoption. He feels for them in the midst of all their sufferings, and he has obtained for them the grace to keep steadfast to the Catholic Church in spite of the temptations which continually assail their allegiance. He is with them in their wanderings; he is with them in their poverty; he is with them in their troubles. His unfailing prayer is that they may be true to the Church of God at all times and in all places; that they may not forfeit by their evil conduct those gifts of faith and purity which his intercession has secured for so many of his children; and that as time goes on, the fruitful seed, which even in his own lifetime grew up into so glorious a tree, may increase and grow with the age of the world; and may hand on from generation to generation, an unbroken and uninterrupted tradition of the Catholic faith, continually stretching forth into new regions of the earth, and yet tracing back its pedigree, through the ancient saints and confessors of Erin, to Patrick, and Celestine, and the see of Peter, the mother and mistress of churches.

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CHAPTER XI.

St. Brigid—Her birth—Early miracle—Her vision—Collects holy virgins in community—Erects the convent of Kildare—Its richness—Devasted afterwards by the Danes.

IN attempting to diffuse Christian civilization among the pagan nations of the world, the Church has ever found a powerful auxiliary in her monastic foundations and religious institutions. Not satisfied with introducing the faith into regions where it had hitherto been unknown, with planting the Cross in strange lands, and with erecting churches in places where the divine mysteries might be celebrated with suitable reverence, she proclaimed the Catholic religion to the rude or half-enlightened people among whom she came to labour, in its highest practical type and form. She set before them living examples of faith, which compelled their admiration and extorted their respect. She invited her recent converts to forsake the world, and to give themselves up to God. She taught them how to put in practice the precepts they had learnt by heart. She called out into action whatever was generous and noble, and unselfish in their characters. She persuaded them to take up their cross in a way which should gain them hereafter a peculiar and singular recompense. It was thus that she presented to the world a living, practical illustration of all her lessons about faith, and penance, and sanctification, and self-sacrifice. And so it has been, that not only by the inherent holiness of her doctrines and sacraments,

but likewise by their practical embodiment in the highest forms of the religious and monastic life, she has, in all ages, presented to the world that peculiar note of sanctity which is one of those unerring marks by which she is discerned as the only true Spouse of Christ.

The Church proceeded in Ireland as she did elsewhere. St. Patrick not only preached the faith, but confirmed it by miracles, and in his own daily life was an example of its most supernatural effects. And as he planted the Cross here and there throughout the land, he invited old and young, of both sexes, to follow the grace of God in the higher walks of the religious life. Hence, there sprang up in Ireland so many cells of holy hermits, who emulated by their strictness and piety the solitaries of Egypt. Hence were laid the foundations of great religious establishments, which in future ages sent missionaries everywhere throughout Europe, and in some of which the praises of God were not suffered to cease either by day or by night. Moreover, the daughters of Erin vied with her sons in heroic deeds of faith and devotion. The children of princes were among the first to give up the world that they might become the favoured Spouses of Jesus Christ. Several of those who had been converted by St. Patrick dedicated themselves to the special service of Jesus; and shortly after the holy missionary's death, convents of virgins arose up in different parts of the country; the most celebrated being the abbey of Kildare, founded by the holy virgin St. Brigid.

St. Brigid shares with St. Patrick the devotion and love of the daughters of her native land. She was born some time after the great saint's arrival on his mission to Ireland; and her parents, Dubtach and Brocessa, were

both Christians of noble degree.* Her native place was the village of Faugher, about two miles to the north of the town of Dundalk. The life of a little Christian girl is not one in which we are likely to meet with many striking incidents. All that is known of St. Brigid's early years is they were passed in innocence and in prayer. She was carefully instructed in the faith and practice of our holy religion. From her earliest years she exhibited the tenderest compassion, and the most warm charity towards the poor; so much so, that she would give to the needy and distressed whatever she possibly could. Her mother employed her, like other young women of her own rank and age in those primitive times, in various household occupations. Amongst other menial works, she was required to gather the milk from the cows, and to assist in the making of butter. On one occasion, while, with other maidens, she was engaged in this homely occupation, some poor people and strangers

* In some very ancient lives of St. Brigid, it is stated that she was born out of wedlock. That this was the case, if not with her, at least with several of the Irish saints, is beyond dispute. It is thus accounted for by a very learned and impartial writer:—"This, in fact, is one of the many evidences of the benign and civilizing influence exercised by the Church over a rude and barbarous age, in which paganism still continued to exist side by side with Christianity, and still retained no small influence over both chieftains and people. The child of crime, devoted to immediate death by its unnatural parent, was often saved by some pious hand, or by maternal yearning, and conveyed to the nearest religious house, there to be brought up in the faith. And hence many who, like St. Cumman Fota, were the offspring of fearful guilt, were led to devote themselves, perhaps for that very reason, and with a view to expiate the stain of their birth, to the most rigid practices of penitence and devotion."—*Liber Hymnorum*, p. 92.

happening to pass by, she bestowed on them all the milk she had been sent to bring home ; and when her mother approached to inspect her vessels, and to see that she had collected the proper quantity, the holy virgin, fearful of being punished for her indiscriminate charity, lifted up her heart in fervent prayer to God, who immediately came to her assistance, and filled her vessels with a more abundant and a richer supply of milk than was to be found in the pails of any of the other maidens.

The holy virgin was favoured with the friendship of St. Patrick, at whose request it is said that she wove the shroud in which his sacred body was wrapped at his death. She was once present on a certain occasion when the saint was preaching for a long time to a vast crowd of earnest listeners. While St. Patrick proceeded with his discourse, Brigid fell into an apparent sleep, and the saint commanded that no one should venture to disturb her. She continued in this sleep for some short time ; and when at length she awoke, the saint enjoined her to relate to all the people what she had seen in her sleep. The holy virgin hesitated to speak, and yet she was too humble and too obedient to resist the commands of her bishop. So, overcoming, as best she could, the timidity natural to a young Christian maiden, Brigid modestly and gracefully related to St. Patrick, before the assembled multitude, what the Almighty had been pleased to make known to her in the vision with which He had favoured her. "She had seen," she said, "a collection of persons clothed in white, and everything around them was white—the fields, the corn, nay, the very cattle and beasts of burden. This whiteness soon passed away, and the same objects were seen again ; but now they were all stained and spotted. Even these disappeared, or rather

changed into a dark blackness. And lastly, she saw, as it were, a great field, in which were dogs and wolves, and swine and sheep; and they were all set against each other, in fearful rage and discord. The holy prelate explained to the people what was meant by this vision. It was intended to point out different periods in the history and progress of the Church, from the fervour and zeal of men actuated in their daily lives by the spirit of faith and charity, to the bad times when heresy should come in, and endeavour, with its pride and its malice, to sow discord among the faithful.

It was her father's wish that his daughter Brigid should be given in marriage to one of the neighbouring chiefs; but it had ever been her own earnest desire and prayer that she might be permitted to dedicate herself, in the religious state, to the immediate service of Jesus Christ. Some say, that being a person of singular beauty and attractions, she prayed that she might have some personal deformity, in order that her father might be the more easily persuaded to allow her to take the veil; but, however this may be, it is certain that, after some opposition, her father gave way, and consented to her solemn dedication among the virgins of Christ. Accordingly, she hastened to present herself to a very holy bishop—one of the immediate disciples of St. Patrick, whose name was Maccaille. Kneeling at his feet, before the altar of God, she made her vows, and was clothed by the bishop with a white pall and a white dress, which continued for some centuries to be the only monastic costume worn by the nuns of Ireland. During the same period, also, those virgins who dedicated themselves to God throughout the land followed one and the same rule of religious life, and that was the rule adopted, and kept with the most

careful exactness, by the holy Brigid. At the time of her consecration our young saint was not alone ; seven or eight other pious maidens emulated her fervour, and, together with her, gave themselves to be the spouses of Jesus Christ. All these continued to live together afterwards in community ; and they thus formed the first convent in Ireland. The fame of this new manner of life soon spread far and wide ; and every day brought some fresh application for admission into this little community of saintly virgins. In no long time, therefore, Brigid was compelled, by the great increase of her sisters, to extend her religious establishments, and to open new houses in different parts of the country. As St. Patrick was employed to plant the faith, and to convert the mass of the people, so was it the peculiar and delicate task of Brigid to collect together those virgin souls who were yearning after a more perfect life, and in whose generous and heroic hearts the love of Jesus burned so purely, so brightly, so constantly, as to overcome all lesser affections—to marshal them in order, to give them their rule, and planting them in various hallowed spots throughout the land, to encourage them in their saintly life by her visits, her words, her teaching, and her example. In the execution of this holy task, she travelled through the greater part of Ireland. At one time we find her in Limerick ; at others in Connaught, in Munster, and in various portions of Leinster. Wherever she came, she brought with her the benediction of God. She stirred up the faith and fervour of the maidens of Erin, but recently converted to Christianity. She showed them how there was a life higher and more perfect, more holy, and more happy than anything that the world could give them ; and she thus became a chosen instrument in the hands

of God, by which the daughters of Erin were instructed in those deep lessons of purity which, we trust, will never be unlearnt and forgotten.

St. Brigid, with certain of her holy virgins, was sojourning for some time in a distant part of Connaught, when she received a visit from some Christians of Leinster, who came to entreat of her to return and live in her own part of the country. The saint received her visitors with grace and humility, and was inspired to comply with their request. Accordingly, with a company of sisters, she returned to the province of Leinster, and settled on some land, which was granted her for the erection and support of a convent. This was the beginning of the celebrated abbey of Kildare—or the Church of the Oak—so called, because the convent was built near a large oak-tree. Very soon there sprang up a town or village around the religious house of the nuns. The town owed its origin to the multitude of strangers and pilgrims whom the sanctity of the holy abbess attracted from all parts of Ireland and England. Many came to request her prayers on their behalf; many to be healed of disease and sickness by the miraculous powers with which the Almighty had enriched her; the poor to receive the generous relief always ready to be bountifully bestowed for the love of God. Even bishops and theologians came to consult the humble sister upon difficult questions of the spiritual life. In consequence of this influx of strangers and visitors, Kildare soon became a good-sized town; and the holy virgin, taking it under her protection, procured for it the care of a bishop, whose duties led him to the spiritual direction of the great convent, and to watch over and take charge of those who had come to settle in the new town. And

thus the holy virgin was instrumental in founding the see of Kildare, which has preserved an unbroken line of prelates even to our own day, and which is consequently one of the most ancient episcopal sees in Europe.

Together with a house for her religious, the holy virgin likewise constructed a church, which, although principally designed for the sisterhood, was accommodated to the use of the faithful in general. A very ancient writer, supposed to have lived in the sixth century, has left us the following description of this ancient church :—

“ As the number of the faithful of both sexes increased, the church extended over a wide surface of ground, and rose above to an imposing elevation. It was adorned with paintings, and contained under one roof three spacious oratories, separated by boarded screens; while one wall, at the eastern end of the church, ran across the whole breadth, from side-wall to side-wall, richly ornamented with painted figures and hanging tapestries. This had two portals, one at either extremity. Through that upon the right, the prelate, with his regular college, and those who are appointed to the holy ministrations, and to offer the sacred sacrifice of the Lord, are wont to approach the sanctuary and the altar. Through the other portal, on the left of the aforesaid cross-wall, none enter but the abbess with her maidens, and the faithful widows, in order to enjoy the banquet of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ. Another wall, dividing the pavement of the church into two equal parts, stretches from the east end until it meets a transverse wall, which crosses the breadth of the building. This church contains many windows, and one ornamental door, in the right side, through which the faithful of the male sex enter, and another on the left, by which the congregation of virgins

and faithful women is accustomed to come in. Thus, in one great church, a vast number of people, of different rank, and degree, and sex, and places (partitions being interposed between the several divisions), in various order, but with one heart, make their prayers to the Lord God Omnipotent."

The church of this convent was soon enriched by the gifts deposited through the piety of the faithful, and was afterwards made still more precious as the shrine which enclosed the body of the saint herself, and of St. Conlaeth, the first bishop of Kildare. The richness of this shrine—which was to Ireland what Loretto has been to Italy—was the occasion of the sufferings which, in subsequent years, so frequently fell upon the town and convent. On several occasions, during the Danish invasion, Kildare was among the first places to be laid waste by the invaders. Once, the town and a part of the great church was destroyed by a fire, which was, in all probability, malicious. At the period of the Protestant Reformation, the convent and its cathedral passed into the hands of the enemies of the faith; and now, as the traveller is hurried past the decayed city of Kildare in the steam-carriages of the nineteenth century, he can perceive its ancient round tower, in the midst of other ecclesiastical ruins of various dates, rearing its head in a sort of melancholy grandeur—a monument alike to the piety of our fathers and to the sorrows of their children.

CHAPTER XII.

Her manner of life—Meets with a young scholastic—Her great charity to the poor—Her miracles—Called the Mary of the Irish—Her death.

It is difficult at this distance of time to describe, with any degree of accuracy, the daily life of a religious virgin of the fifth or sixth century. We must carry back our ideas to a rude age, and imagine ourselves to be in the midst of a rough people—most of them devoted to idolatrous worship, and very little softened by the slow progress of civilization. Then we must, to some extent, dismiss from our minds the modern notions of a convent, with its spacious buildings, its neat cells, its ample refectory, and its costly chapel. In the sixth century of the Christian era, the conventual life was only just beginning to assume its shape and form: St. Brigid was, perhaps, the very first among the saints of Europe who gathered into a community, and directed by rule, a congregation of holy virgins. She was anterior to St. Scholastica, the sister of St. Benedict, who was the great promoter of monasticism in the West. St. Brigid was chosen by Almighty God to present to the admiration and astonishment of a primitive people—at that time half pagan, half Christian—the most lovely model of Christian virginity. At a period when concubinage, with its attendant evils, was almost universal, she came forward to invite the young maidens of her native land to walk with her in the hard path of Christian penance, and, despising the allurements of the world, to cling with the fervour of the

purest love to Jesus Christ alone, as their Bridegroom and their Spouse. Many were the hearts that at once responded to St. Brigid's appeal to their supernatural affections. The grace of God had been poured forth upon the land through the preaching and labours of Patrick. It was every day doing its work; every day watering the seed that had been sown; every day spreading and diffusing itself on all sides. Here there was no lack of young Christian maidens, who, like the Agneses and Agathas of a still more remote period, panted and longed to give themselves up, in soul and body, solely to the service of Jesus Christ. It was, therefore, easy to associate them in religious communities: but these communities were primitive in their manner of life, and were primitive also in the severity of their rule and discipline. The cells wherein they dwelt were of the simplest and rudest construction. Their days were given up to penance, to prayer, and to contemplation. They exercised themselves in fastings and austerities, to which the most severe of modern religious orders would, perhaps, be unequal. As the times were rude, so the race of men and women were hardy, and they were able to bear more in the way of mortification than can be borne in these days; although now, as then, mortification, and penance, and austerity of life are the only sure roads to sanctity; although now, as then, there are in the Church hundreds and hundreds of holy virgins, who, casting aside all the soft effeminacy of modern civilization, exercise themselves in penitential acts, and thus make reparation for the sins of the age in which they live. As an instance of the severities practised in those ancient days, it is related of St. Brigid, as of many other Celtic saints, that on a certain night when the snow was covering the

ground, and the water was half-frozen with the intense cold, she passed some hours standing in prayer and contemplation, with her 'body partially immersed in the waters of a neighbouring pond. In the fervour of her love for penance, the saint desired to repeat continually this severe act of mortification ; but our Saviour himself interposed to prevent her from doing so.

It was, we presume, one of the peculiarities of this early stage of the conventual life, that neither the abbess nor her holy virgins were restricted to one habitation or to one place ; for we find it not unfrequently mentioned in the ancient lives of the saints, how, with her sacred charge, she would one time be travelling through the country in the vehicles then in use ; and how, at another time, the saint and her companions would be found seated on the banks of some river, chanting the praises of God or contemplating the wonders of creation. On one such occasion, it is mentioned, that as St. Brigid and her virgins were walking in a country place, she perceived a certain youth, a scholastic, running with speed ; and she said to him, " Young man, whither runnest thou so quickly ? " He replied, "*Ad regnum Dei*" (to the kingdom of God). The saint answered him, " Would to God that I may merit to run with thee : pray for me that I may be able to do so." The young scholastic replied, " Do you ask God that my course may not be impeded, and I, in turn, will pray for thee, that thou and thy numerous companions may arrive at the kingdom of God." It is added, that then St. Brigid besought the Lord for the young man, and in those days he did penance, and was a religious even to his death.*

* Other accounts state that this youth was Ninnidh, who was afterwards abbot of Inishmacsaint, an island in Lough Erne, and

The charity of the saint towards the poor, and towards all who were in distress, was such as almost to exceed bounds. Innumerable are the traditions handed down of her beneficence and generosity towards those who were in any want. No poor person ever came across her path and was sent empty away. If she had nothing of her own with which she could part, she did not hesitate to have recourse to God, and by His miraculous intervention to satisfy the needs of all who came seeking for relief. In this charity to the poor there was manifested a kind of sacred prodigality which has often characterized the saints of God, and which has its source and its foundation, not in a reckless spirit of careless expenditure, but in a profound conviction of the mercy and providence of Almighty God. It is the privilege of the saints to realize—in a way not granted to ordinary Christians—the great truths of our holy faith; consequently, with an entire confidence in the faithfulness of God, they are ready at any moment to act upon our blessed Saviour's invitation to trust ourselves wholly to the Divine care, without thought for the morrow, where in the Sermon on the Mount, he gives utterance to these gracious words: "Therefore I say to you, be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body what you shall put on: is not the life more than meat, and the body more than raiment? Behold the fowls of the air, for they neither sow, nor do they reap, nor gather into barns: and your Heavenly Father feedeth them. Are not you of much more value than they? Be not, therefore, solicitous; for your Heavenly Father knoweth that you

that Brigid, on this occasion, predicted that from his hand she herself should receive the holy viaticum on the day of her death.—*Liber Hymnorum*, p. 60.

have need of all these things." This practical trust and confidence is very beautifully illustrated in the lives of all the saints; nor was St. Brigid inferior to any other Christian heroine in the exercise of this virtue. She was prodigal of her deeds of charity: but she was so, because none knew better than herself how exhaustless was the treasure-house of Him upon whose bounty she so freely drew.

And as her acts of Christian love and charity were without number, so was she gifted by Almighty God with a singular power of performing miracles. In her was fulfilled, almost to the letter, our Lord's promise, that His servants should cast out devils in His name, and speak with new tongues, and take up serpents, and lay their hands upon the sick and they should recover. By her prayers, she was enabled to alter the course of a river. When a great many men had striven in vain to raise from the ground a large and weighty tree, that had been recently cut down, her faith, unaided by any human help whatsoever, was sufficient to move the great mass where it was most needed. A young maiden once came to pay a visit to the saint; but although she was outwardly fair to look on, inwardly she was torn and harassed by the violence of an evil spirit which possessed her. St. Brigid's spiritual discernment at once detected what was the matter with this poor girl. The saint thought fit to allow this girl to behold, in all the horror of his hateful presence, the demon who had possession of her body, and to let her hear from his own mouth the reason of this dreadful possession. When the saint commanded the evil spirit to speak, he replied, "O holy virgin, I cannot speak unto thee, nor yet can I despise thy commands, because thou disregardest not the com-

mandments of God, and art kind unto His poor, and to the very least." "Wherefore," demanded the virgin, "hast thou come hither?" "I dwell here," replied the demon, "with this virgin: and it is on account of her sloth that I have a habitation within her." "Behold," said St. Brigid, addressing the young girl herself, "him whom thou hast been nurturing for so many years." From that day the girl was delivered from his terrible possession.

In those heathen days, actual cases of possession were much more frequent than they are now: although, even in our own day, they occur less rarely than is commonly supposed. St. Brigid delivered many persons from the power of the devil, who were afterwards converted to God. The evil spirits feared her, as they had feared her Divine Master when He was upon earth: and often they resisted with violence, that they might not be brought under the power of her faith and sanctity.

A young girl, named Daria, afflicted with blindness, once asked the saint to bless her eyes: "Bless my eyes, that I may behold the world." The saint complied with her request, and immediately she recovered her sight. But the young virgin had no sooner received back her sight, than she asked to be restored to her former condition of blindness, "For," she said, "the more absent one is from the outward world, the more interiorly present will he be with God." It was a special inspiration which taught this Christian child to glory and to rejoice in her infirmity; for how many, by means of the eyes, have lost for ever the joys of the presence of God!

Another young girl, deaf and dumb, was brought to St. Brigid by a certain woman; and the saint, not knowing that she was deaf and dumb, asked the girl if she

would wish ever to be a virgin consecrated to God? The child, immediately receiving the gift of utterance, replied, "I will do whatever you command me." From that hour her infirmity left her, and she ever afterwards continued a faithful and holy virgin dedicated to the service of God.

It was these and many such miracles, united with the wonderful sanctity of her life, with her spirit of prayer, her profound humility, her disentanglement from the world, her love of poverty, her daily penances, her zeal for the salvation of souls, and her great charity, that gained for St. Brigid, even in her lifetime, an estimation and veneration which were, perhaps, never so fully accorded to any other saint. It was not merely that the public voice regarded her as a wonderful example of sanctity; it was not merely, that bishops and priests, monks and hermits, came from time to time to consult with her upon deep questions of divine science, and to profit by her supernatural wisdom; as was the case with St. Clare of Assisi, St. Catherine of Sienna, and many other holy virgins. But even in the lifetime of St. Brigid, there went abroad among the Christian population of the land, a tradition, or persuasion, that Almighty God had imprinted on the outward form of the saint the very lineaments and likeness of the most holy Virgin, at the same time that He rendered her soul a mirror of the virtues and sanctity of His Blessed Mother. Hence, in many very ancient documents, which have been preserved to our time, St. Brigid is called sometimes *Altera Maria*, "Another Mary," and sometimes "the *Mary of the Irish*."*

* The reader who wishes to investigate the nature of the title bestowed on St. Brigid is referred to the *Liber Hymnorum*, edited by the Rev. Dr. Todd, of Trinity College, Dublin, from whose learned notes most of what follows is taken.

A few sacred poems, of great antiquity, go still further in appropriating to her the titles and prerogatives of the Blessed Virgin. Thus, an ancient Irish hymn, attributed to St. Columba, or by some to St. Ultan, speaks of her as the "Flowering Tree," the "Mother of Jesus," the "Perfect Virgin." And another sings her praises as Brigid the "Mother of my Lord," the "Veiled Virgin, who drives over the Curragh,* is a shield against sharp weapons. None was found her equal except Mary." It would appear that at a very early period of her life, St. Brigid obtained the title of the "Mary of the Irish;" and it was on the following occasion that this remarkable title was first applied to her. While she was yet quite a child, a certain holy woman obtained permission to take St. Brigid with her to a synod of the clergy of Leinster, which was to be held at the place afterwards called Kildare. An aged saint, who was present at the synod, announced to the clergy that he had seen the Blessed Virgin Mary in a vision, and that, on the following day, she would appear in the midst of them. Accordingly, on the next day, St. Brigid and her companions arrived; and the aged saint, when he saw her, immediately cried out, "This is holy Mary, whom I saw last night in my vision." Then all the people gave praise to St. Brigid, on account of that name of Mary, which was then given her; and from that occasion, she was called the "Mary of the Irish." Her sanctity and virtues have been celebrated in many ancient panegyrics preached on the recurrence of her festivals. One of them, written as far back as the ninth or tenth century, thus describes the holiness of Brigid:—

* The Curragh of Kildare is a well-known common, extending for many miles beyond the town.

“There was not in existence one of more bashfulness and modesty than this holy virgin. She never washed her hands, or her feet, or her head, before men. She never looked a man in the face. She never spoke without blushing. She was abstemious, unblemished, prayerful, patient, rejoicing in the commandments of God, benevolent, humble, forgiving, charitable. She was a consecrated shrine for the preservation of the body of Christ. She was a temple of God. Her heart and her mind were a resting throne for the Holy Spirit. She was meek before God. She shared the distress of those who were in sorrow. She was brilliant in miracles; and hence it is that her type among created things is the dove among birds, the vine among trees, and the sun above the stars.

“The Father of this holy virgin was the Heavenly Father; her Son was Jesus Christ; her tutor was the Holy Spirit; and it was therefore that this holy virgin performed great, innumerable miracles. It is she that relieves every one that is in difficulty and in danger. It is she that restrains the roaring billows, and the anger of the great sea. She is the prophesied woman of Christ. She is the Queen of the South. She is the Mary of the Gaeidbil (Irish).”

There is no Catholic who could for a moment misunderstand this remarkable language. The ancient doctors of the Catholic Church in Ireland did not confound the young virgin saint of their native land with the immaculate Mother of God, nor, in ascribing to St. Brigid some of the most sacred titles of the Virgin, did they in any way exalt the daughter to the level of the Mother. They merely accommodated to the piety and sanctity of St. Brigid, in a manner not unusual with devotional writers

in the Church, expressions and language which in strict fulness belong only to the Blessed Virgin. Our Saviour says of those who do His will on earth, that they are His brother, and sister, and mother; and in the same sense, the panegyrists of St. Brigid found in her pre-eminent sanctity, purity, and chastity, the most evident lineaments of the greatest of His works—the Immaculate Queen of Heaven. But there is one reflection with respect to this remarkable praise of our saint, which is almost obvious to all who read it. It shows us how, in the very earliest times of Christian Erin, the same devotion to the Mother of God took root in the land which prevails there to this day. We have the very same language applied to the most holy Virgin which is the common devotional language of our own day. We invoke and worship the Blessed Virgin as the Daughter of the Father, the Mother of the Son, and the Spouse of the Holy Ghost. We regard her as “the Temple of God,” the Mother of God, the perfection of the works of the Almighty—the example, beyond all imitation, of whatever is pure, and lovely, and gentle, and patient, and holy. Let us travel back, in imagination, to the infancy of the Church in Ireland, and we find our forefathers in the faith regarding the Blessed Virgin in the same light as we have been ever taught to regard her, cherishing towards her the very same devotional feelings with which we endeavour to warm our colder hearts, and speaking of her exaltation and blessedness in language the strength and depth of which we cannot surpass. It is impossible to find a more cheerful or more beautiful instance of the uninterrupted unity of the one Church, which, whether in the sixth or nineteenth century, teaches her children the same unalterable truths,

elevates them by means of the same supernatural ideas, and warms them with the same celestial love.

Little now remains to be told of the story of St. Brigid's life. Having served her Saviour with such singular purity of heart, the time at length arrived in which she was to enter upon her reward. She received the last sacraments at the hand of St. Ninnidh, who, when a young scholastic, had besought her prayers and blessing. She died on the 1st of February, A.D. 523, in the seventy-fourth year of her age. Her sacred remains were deposited at Kildare, but were afterwards removed to Down, where they were placed in the same shrine with those of Columb-kille. This shrine was devastated in the reign of King Henry VIII.

The fame of St. Brigid soon spread through many parts of Europe. In England, she is known by the name of St. Bride. In Scotland, she is venerated along with St. Columba; and one of the western isles derives its name from her. France and Germany likewise do honour to her sanctity, and implore her protection. In Ireland, her name is as a household word. She is the patroness of the Christian women of the land; and amid the glories which encircle her in heaven, she ceases not to use her advocacy for the daughters of her native land, that, like herself, they may become examples of all Christian virtues, and may be conspicuous for their innocence and purity in the midst of an evil world.

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