

ORATION
ON
“SAINT PATRICK.”

DELIVERED BY

REV. FATHER BURKE, O. P.,

Previous to his departure from the United States for Rome.

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ST. PATRICK.

Let us now praise men of renown, and our fathers in their generations; . . . those men of mercy, whose godly deeds have not failed; good things continue with their seed. Their posterity are a holy inheritance; and their seed hath stood in the covenants; and their children for their sakes remain forever; their seed and their glory shall not be forsaken. Let the people shew their wisdom, and the Church declare their praise.—**ECCLES. 44.**

We are assembled to obey the command of God expressed in my text. One of the great duties of God's Church, to which she has ever been most faithful, is the celebration of her saints. From end to end of the year the Church's saint's are the theme of her daily thanksgiving and praise. They are heroes, and therefore she honors them just as the world celebrates its own heroes, records their great deeds, and builds up monuments to perpetuate their names and their glory. 'The saints were the living and most faithful representatives of Christ our Lord, of his virtues, his love, his actions, his power, so that he lived in them, and wrought in them, and through them, the redemption of men; therefore the Church honors, not so much the saint, as Christ our Lord, in the saint; for, in truth, the wisdom of saintliness which she celebrates, wherever it is found, is nothing else, as decribed to us in Scripture, than a "vapor of the power of God, and a certain pure emanation of the glory of the Almighty God; . . . the brightness of eternal light, and the unspotted mirror of God's majesty, and the image of His goodness; . . . and through nations she conveyeth herself into holy souls, she maketh the friends of God and prophets.' Nor does the Church's honor of the saints derogate from that of God, as some say; otherwise the Lord, who is jealous of His

divine power and glory, would never command us to praise the saints as he does in the words of my text, and in many other parts of the Holy Scriptures: 'Praise ye the Lord in his saints,' 'God is wonderful in his saints,' etc., etc. Nay, so far from lessening our praise and love for God, the saints are the very channel through which praise is most acceptably given to Him, and if the Scriptures command us to praise the Lord in all His works, how much more in His saints—the master-pieces of nature and grace! Let no one, therefore, suppose that we are assembled to-day to dishonor God by honoring his saint: let no one imagine that we are come together to bless and praise other than our God Himself, 'the Father of lights,' 'for every best and every perfect gift' which He has given us through our great Apostle, St. Patrick. He was 'a man of renown,' for his work and his name are known and celebrated by all men; 'and our father in his generation,' for he 'begat us to God by the Gospel.' He was, moreover, 'a man of mercy,' for, when he might have lived for himself and the enjoyment of his own ease, he chose rather to sacrifice himself, and to make his life cheap and of no account in his sight, and this through the self-same mercy which brought the Lord Jesus Christ forth from the bosom of the Father, namely, mercy for a people who were perishing. His 'godly deeds have not failed,' for the Lord crowned his labors with blessings of abundance. 'Good things continue with his seed,' for the faith which he planted still flourishes in the land.

'HIS POSTERITY ARE A HOLY INHERITANCE,' for the scene of his labors, famous for holiness, obtained among the nations the singular title of "the Island of Saints," "And his seed hath stood in the covenants," for it is well known and acknowledged that no power, however great, has been able to move them from the faith once delivered to the saints. 'His children for his sake remain forever,' for he blessed them, as we read, that they should never depart from the fold of the 'one Shepherd' into which he had gathered them, and his prayer in

heaven has verified for 1500 years his prophetic blessing on earth. His seed and his glory shall not be forsaken, for ‘they are the children of saints, and look for that life which God will give to those that never change their faith from Him.’ Seeing, therefore that all the conditions of the Inspired Word have been so strikingly fulfilled in our saint, is it wonderful that we should also desire to fulfil the rest of the command, ‘Let the people shew forth his wisdom, and the Church declare his praise?’ I propose, therefore, for your consideration—first, the character of the saint himself; secondly, the work of his Apostleship; and thirdly, the merciful providence of Almighty God toward the Irish Church and the Irish people. The light of Christianity had burned for more than four hundred years before its rays penetrated to Ireland. For the first three hundred years of the Church’s existence the sacred torch was hidden in the catacombs and caves of the earth, or, if even seen by men, it was only when held aloft for a moment in the hands of a dying martyr. Yet the flames were spreading, and a great part of Asia, Armenia, Egypt, Spain, Italy, and Gaul had already lighted their lamps before that memorial year 312, when the Church’s light, suddenly shooting up, appeared in the heavens, and a Roman Emperor was converted by its brightness. Then did the spouse of Christ walk forth from the earth, arrayed in all the ‘beauty of holiness,’ and her ‘light arose unto the people who were seated in darkness and in the shadow of death.’ The Christian faith was publicly preached, the nations were converted, churches and monasteries were everywhere built, and God seemed to smile upon the earth with the blessings of Christian faith and Roman civilization. A brief interval of repose it was; and God, in His mercy, permitted the Church just to lay hold of society, and establish herself amongst men, that she might be able to save the world, when, in a few years, the Northern barbarians should have swept away every vestige of the power, glory and civilization of ancient

Rome. It was during this interval, between the long-continued war of persecution and the first fall of Rome, that a young Christian was taken prisoner on the northern shores of Gaul, and carried, with many others, by his captors, into Ireland.

THIS YOUNG MAN WAS ST. PATRICK.

He was of noble birth, born of Christian parents, reared up with tenderest care, and surrounded from his earliest infancy, with all that could make life desirable and happy. Now he is torn away from parents and friends, no eye to look upon him with pity, no heart to feel for the greatness of his misery; and in his sixteenth year, just as life was opening and spreading out all its sweets before him, he is sold as a slave, and sent to tend cattle upon the dreary mountains of the far north of Ireland, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, and there for long years did he live, forgotten and despised, and with no other support than the Christian faith and hope within him. These, however, failed him not; and so at length he was enabled to escape from his captivity and return to his native land. Oh, how sweet to his eyes and ears must have been the sights and sounds of his childhood! how dear the embraces, how precious the joy of his aged mother when she clasped to her 'him that was dead, but came to life again!' Surely he will remain with her now, nor never expose her to the risk of losing again joys all the dearer because they had once been lost. Not so, my brethren. Patrick is no longer an ordinary man—one of us. A new desire has entered into his soul and taken possession of his life. A passion has sprung up within him for which he must live and devote his future. This desire, this passion, is to preach the Christian faith in Ireland, and to bring the nation forth 'from darkness into the admirable light' of God. In the days of his exile, even when a slave on the mountain-side, he heard, like the prophet, a voice within him, and it said, 'Behold, I

have given my words in thy mouth. Lo, I have set thee this day over the nations and over kingdoms, to root up and pull down, and to waste and destroy, and to build and to plant. Gird up the loins and arise, and speak to them all that I command thee.' And when he was restored to his country and to those who loved him, the same voice spoke again, for he heard in a dream the voice of many persons from a wood near the western sea, crying out as with one voice, 'We entreat thee, O holy youth, to come and walk still among us.' 'It was the voice of the Irish,' says the saint in his Confessions, 'and I was greatly affected in my heart.' And so he arose, and once more leaving father and mother, houses and lands, went forth to prepare himself for his great mission. Having completed his long years of preparatory study, he turned his face to Rome, to the fountain-head of Christianity, the source of all jurisdiction and Divine mission in the Church, the great heart whence the life-blood of faith and sound doctrine flows even to her most distant members, the new Jerusalem and Sion of God, of which it was written of old, 'from Sion shall the law go forth, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem,' and here in Rome St. Celestine the first laid his hands upon St. Patrick and consecrated him first Bishop of the Irish nation.

And now he returned to our shores a second time; no longer a bondsman, but free, and destined to break the nations chains: 'You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free:' no longer dragged thither an unwilling slave of men, but drawn by irresistible love, the willing slave of Jesus Christ; no more a stripling, full of anxious fears; but a man, in all the glory of matured intellect, in the strength and vigor of manhood, in the fullness of power and jurisdiction; with mind prepared and spirit braced to bear and brave all things, and with heart and soul utterly devoted to God and to the great enterprise before

him. Oh, my brethren, what joy was in heaven at that hour when the blessed feet of the blessed Patrick touched the shores of Ireland—

THE ANCIENT 'ISLE OF DESTINY.'

This was her destiny surely, and it is about to be fulfilled—that she should be the home and the mother of saints—of doctors and holy solitaries, and pure virgins and martyrs robed in white, and of a people acceptable before the Lord. That the Cross of Christ should be the emblem of her faith forevermore, of her faith and of her trial, of her tears and sorrow, and of her victory, 'which conquereth the world.' O golden hour amongst the hours! when the sands of the Irish shore first embraced softly and lovingly the beautiful footprints of him who preached peace and good things; when Moses struck the rock, and the glistening waters of salvation flowed in the desert land; when the 'Name, which is above all names,' was first heard in the old Celtic tongue, and the Lord Jesus, entering upon his new inheritance, exclaimed, 'This is my resting-place for ever and ever; here shall I dwell because I have chosen it.'

The conversion of Ireland, from the time of St. Patrick's landing to the day of his death, is, in many respects, the strangest facts in the history of the Church. The saint met with no opposition; his career resembles more the triumphant progress of a king than the difficult labor of a missionary. The Gospel with its lessons and precepts of self-denial, of prayer, or purity, in a word, of the violence which seizes on heaven, is not congenial to fallen man. His pride, his passions, his blindness of intellect and his hardness of heart, all oppose the spread of the Gospel; so that the very fact that mankind has so universally accepted it, is adduced as a proof that it must be from God. The work of the Catholic missionary has, therefore, ever been, and must continue to be, a work of great labor with apparently small results. Such has it been amongst all the

nations : and yet Ireland seems a grand exception. She is perhaps, the only country in the world that entirely owes her conversion to the work of one man. He found her universally Pagan. He left her universally Christian. She is, again, the only nation that never cost her apostle an hour of sorrow, a single tear, a drop of blood. She welcomed him like a friend, took the Word from his lips, made it at once the leading feature of her life, put it into the blood of her children and into the language of her most familiar thoughts, and repaid her benefactor with her utmost veneration and love. And much, truly, had young Christian Ireland to love and venerate in her great Apostle. All sanctity, coming as it does from God, is an imitation of God in man. This is the meaning of the word the Apostle, 'those whom we foreknew and predestined to be made comfortable to the image of His Son, the same He called, and justified, and glorified.' Conformity to the image of God is, therefore, Christian perfection of sanctity, 'the mystery which was hidden from eternity with Christ in God.' But as our Lord Jesus Christ, 'in whom dwelt the fulness of the God-head corporally,' is an abyss of all perfections, so do we find the saints differing one from another in their varied participations of His graces and resemblance to His divine gifts, for so 'star differeth from star in glory.' Then, amongst the apostles, we are accustomed to think and speak of the impulsive zeal of Peter, the virginal purity of John, etc., not as if Peter were not pure, or John wanting in zeal, but that where all was the work of the Spirit of God, one virtue shone forth more prominently, and seemed to mark the specific character of sanctity in the saint. Now, amongst the many great virtues which adorned the soul of Ireland's Apostle, and made him so dear to the people, I find three which he made specially his own, and these were a spirit of penance, deepest humility, and a de-

voicing zeal for the salvation of souls. A spirit of penance. It is remarkable, and worthy of special notice in these days of self-indulgence and fanciful religions, how practical the Gospel is. It is pre-eminently not only the science of religious knowledge, but also of religious life. It tells us not only what we are to believe, but also what we are to do. And now, what is

THE FIRST GREAT PRECEPT OF THE GOSPEL?

It is penance. My brethren, 'do penance, for the kingdom of God is at hand.' And when, on the day of Pentecost, the Prince of the apostles first raised up the standard of Christianity upon the earth, the people, 'when they heard these things, had compunction in their hearts, and said to Peter and to the rest of the Apostles, What shall we do, men and brethren? and Peter said to them, *do penance*, and be baptized, every one of you.' This spirit of penance was essentially Patrick's. His youth had been holy; prevented from earliest childhood by 'the blessings of sweetness,' he had grown up like a lily, in purity, in holy fear and love. Yet for the carelessness and slight indiscretions of his first years, he was filled with compunction, and with life-long sorrow. His sin, as he called it, was always before him, and with the prophet he cried out, 'Who will give water to my head, and a fountain of tears to mine eyes, and I will weep day and night.' In his journeys he was wont to spend the night in prayer, and tears, and bitter self-reproach, as if he was the greatest of sinners; and when he hastened from 'Royal Meath,' into the *far west of the island*, we read that when Lent approached, he suspended his labors for a time, and went up the steep rugged side of Croagh Patrick, and there, like his Divine Master, he spent the holy time in fasting and prayer; and his 'tears were his food night and day.' Whithersoever he went, he left traces of his penitential spirit behind him; and Patrick's penance and Patrick's purgatory are still familiar traditions in the land. Thus, my

brethren, did he ‘sow in tears,’ who was destined to reap in so much joy; for so it is ever with God’s saints, who do his work on this earth; ‘going, they went and wept, scattered the seed, but coming they shall come with joy.’ His next great personal virtue was a wonderful humility. Now, this virtue springs from a twofold knowledge, namely, the knowledge of God and of ourselves. This was the double knowledge for which the great St. Augustine prayed: ‘Lord let me know thee, and know myself;’ and this did our saint possess in an eminent degree. This knowledge of God convinced him of the utter worthlessness of all things besides God, and even of God’s gifts, except when used for himself; and therefore he did all things for God and nothing for self, and of ‘his own he gave him back again;’ he lost sight of himself in advancing the interests and the cause of God: he hid himself behind his work in which he labored for God; and strangely enough, his very name and history come down to us by reason of his great humility, for he would write himself a sinner, and calls himself ‘Patrick, an unworthy, and ignorant, and sinful man,’ for so he saw himself, judging himself by the standard of infinite holiness in Jesus Christ, by which we also shall all be one day judged. Looking into himself he found only misery and weakness, clothed and enriched, not by himself, but by God; and, fearful of losing the Giver in the gifts, he put away from him the contemplation, of what God had made him, and only considered what he was himself. Thus was he always the most humble of men. Even when seated in glory and surrounded by the love and admiring veneration of an entire people, never was his soul moved from the solid foundation of humility, the twofold knowledge; and so he went down to his grave a simple and an humble man. And yet in this lowly heart there burned a mighty fire of love, a devouring zeal for the souls of his brethren. Oh! here indeed does he shine forth ‘likened into the son of

God,' for like our Divine Lord and Master, Patrick was a 'zealous lover of souls.' He well knew how dear these souls were to the sacred heart of Jesus Christ—how willingly the Lord of glory had spent Himself, and given His most sacred and precious blood for them; how it was the thought of their salvation that sustained Him during the horror of His passion; in the agony of His prayer; when His sacred flesh was torn at the pillar, when the cruel thorns were driven into His most holy brows; when, with drooping head and wearied eyes, and body streaming blood from every open wound, He was raised upon the cross to die, heart-broken and abandoned, with the anger of God and the insults of men poured upon him. Patrick knew all this, and it filled him with transports of zeal for souls, so that, like the great apostle, he wished to be accursed for them; and to die a thousand times rather than that one soul, purchased so dearly, and the offspring of so much love and sorrow should perish. Therefore did he make himself the slave and the servant of all, that he might gain all to God. And in his mission of salvation no difficulties retarded him, no labor or sacrifice held him back, no sickness subdued him, no infirmity of body or mind overcame him. Old age came upon him, yet he spared not himself, nor did he for a moment sit down to count his years, or to number his triumphs, or to consider his increasing wants; but his voice was clear and strong and his arm untiring, though he had reaped a harvest of many years, and had borne 'the burden of the day and the heat;' and his heart was young, for it was still growing, in the faith of those around him. Even to the last day of his life 'his youth was renewed like the eagle.' He repeatedly journeyed throughout the length and breadth of the land, caring and tending with prayer, and blessing, and tears, the plants which he had planted in this new vineyard of God: and grace was poured abroad from his lips, and 'virtue went

forth from him,' until the world was astonished at the sight of a whole nation converted by one man, and the promise made of old was fulfilled in Patrick, 'I will deliver to you every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, and no man shall be able to resist thee all the days of thy life.' And now we come to the question.

WHAT DID ST. PATRICK TEACH, and in what form of Christianity did he expend himself for God! For fifteen hundred years, my brethren, Christianity meant one thing, one doctrine, one faith, one authority, one baptism; now, in our day, this same Christianity, though as undivided, as true, as exclusive, as definite as ever, is made to signify many things; and men, fondly imagining that our ancestors had no greater unity than ourselves, asks what form of doctrine did St. Patrick preach to the Irish people? I answer: He preached the whole cycle of Catholic truth as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be to the end of time. He taught them that Christ's most sacred body and blood are really and truly present in the Blessed Eucharist, so that we find an Irish writer of the same century (Sedulius) using the words 'we are fed on the body and members of Christ, and so we are made the temples of God'; again, the language used by the Irish Church at the time, as even the Protestant Bishop Usher acknowledges, concerning the Mass, was 'the making of the body of the Lord.' In support of the same truth we have the beautiful legend of St. Bridgid—which, even if its truth be disputed, still points to the popular faith and love whence it sprang—how, when a certain child, named Nennius, was brought to her, she blessed him, and prophesied that his hand should one day give her the Holy Communion; whereupon the boy covered his right hand and never again let it touch any profane thing, nor be even uncovered, so that he was called 'Nennius na laumh glas,' or, Nennius of the clean hand, out of devotion and love to the most Holy Sacrament. St. Patrick taught the doctrine of penance and confession of sins, and priestly absolu-

tion ; for we find, amongst the other proofs, an old penitential canon of a synod held under the saint himself in 450, in which it is decreed that ' if a Christian kill a man, or commit fornication, or go in to a soothsayer after the manner of the Gentiles, he shall do a year of penance ; when his year of penance is over, he shall come with witnesses, and afterwards he shall be absolved by the priest.' He taught the invocation of saints, as is evident from numerous records of the time. Thus, in a most ancient life of St. Bridget we find the words, 'There are two holy virgins in heaven who may undertake my protection —Mary and Bridget—on whose patronage let each of us depend.' In like manner, we find in the synods of the time laws concerning the 'obligations for the dead ;' in the most ancient Irish missals Masses for the dead are found with such prayers as ' Grant, O Lord, that this holy obligation may work pardon for the dead and salvation for the living ; and in a most ancient life of St. Brendan it is stated that 'the prayer of the living doth much profit the dead.' But, my brethren, as in the personal character of the saint, there were some amongst his virtues that shone out more conspicuously, than the others, so in his teaching there were certain points which appear more prominently, which seemed to be impressed upon the people more forcibly, and to have taken peculiar hold of the national mind. Let us consider what these peculiar features of St. Patrick's teaching were, and we shall see how they reveal to us what I proposed as the third point of this sermon, namely, the merciful providence of God over the Irish Church and people. They were the following : Fidelity to St. Peter's chair and to Peter's successor, the Pope of Rome, devotion to the blessed Virgin Mary ; prayer and remembrance for the dead ; and confiding obedience and love for their bishops and priests. These were the four great prominent features of Patrick's teaching : by the first, namely, fidelity to the Pope, he secured the unity of the Irish Church as a living member of the Church Catholic ; by the second, devotion to the Blessed Virgin, he secured the purity

and morality of the people ; by the third, care of the dead, he enlisted on the side of Catholic truth the natural love and strong feelings of the Irish character ; and by the last, attachment and obedience to the priesthood, he secured to the Irish Church the principle of internal union, which is the secret of her strength.

HE PREACHED FIDELITY

and unswerving devotion to the Pope—the head of the Catholic Church. Coming direct from Rome, and filled with ecclesiastical knowledge, he opened up before the eyes of his new children and revealed to them the grand design of Almighty God in His Church. He showed them in the world around them the wonderful harmony which speaks of God ; then rising into the higher world of grace, he preached to them the still more wonderful harmony of redemption and of the Church—the Church, so vast as to fill the whole earth, yet as united in doctrine and practice as if she embraced only the members of one small family or the inhabitants of one little village ; the Church embracing all races of men, and leaving to all their full individual freedom of thought and action; yet animating all with one soul, quickening all as with one life and one heart ; guiding all with the dictates of one immutable conscience, and keeping every, even the least, member, under the dominion of one head. Such was the church on which on which St. Patrick engrafted Ireland—‘A glorious Church without spot or wrinkle ; a perfect body, the very mystical body of Jesus Christ, through which ‘we, being wild olives, are engrafted on Him, the true olive-tree,’ so that ‘we are made the flesh of His flesh, and bone of His bones.’ Now, Patrick taught our fathers, with truth, that the soul, the life, the heart, the conscience and the head of the Church is Jesus Christ, and that His representative on earth, to whom He has communicated all His graces and powers, is the Pope of Rome, the visible head of God’s Church, the Bishop of Bishops, the centre of unity and of doctrine, the rock and the corner-stone on which the whole

edifice of the Church is founded and built up. All this he pointed out in the Scriptures, from the words of our Lord to Peter. Peter was the shepherd of the fold, whose duty it was to 'feed both lambs and sheep,' with 'every word that cometh from the mouth of God.' Peter was the rock to sustain and uphold the Church: 'thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church' (words which are the very touchstone of faith in these days of sorrow). Peter's was the strong, unerring voice which was ever to be heard in the Church, defining her doctrines, warning off enemies, denouncing errors, rebuking sinners, guiding the doubtful, strengthening the weak concerning the strong; and Jesus said, 'Thou, O Peter, confirm thy brethren.' Patrick taught, the Irish people not to be scandalized if they saw the cross on Peter's shoulders, and the crown of thorns upon his head, for so Christ lives in His Church and in her supreme pastor; but he also taught them that he who strikes Peter strikes the Lord; he taught them what history has taught us, that 'whosoever shall fall on that stone shall be bruised; and upon whomsoever it shall fall it will grind him to powder.' He taught them that in the day when they separated from Peter they separated from Christ, as did the foolish men in the Gospel: 'After this many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. Then Jesus said to the twelve, Will you also go away? And Simon Peter answered him: Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life.' Thus it was my brethren, that he bound 'them to the rock of ages,' to Peter's chair, with firmest bound of obedience and love, and infused into their souls that supernatural instinct which, for fifteen hundred years, has kept them, through good report and evil report, through persecution and sorrow, faithful and loyal to the Holy See of Rome. It was a bond of obedience and love that bound Ireland to Rome. Thus, in the beginning of the seventh century,

when the Irish bishops assembled to consider the question of celebrating Easter, we find the Fathers selecting some 'wise and humble men,' sending them to Rome for instruction, 'as children to their mother;' and this in obedience to a primitive law of the Irish Church, which enacted that, in every difficulty that might arise, 'the question should be referred to the Head of Cities,' as Rome was called. This devotion to the Holy See saved Ireland in the day of trial.

The next great feature in Patrick's preaching was devotion to the Mother of God. Of this we have abundant proof in the numerous churches built and dedicated to God under her name. (Teampoill Mhuire), or Mary's Church, became a familiar name in the land.

IN THE FAR WEST OF IRELAND,

where the traditions of our holy faith are still preserved, enshrined in the purest form of our grand old Celtic language, the sweet name of the Mother of God is heard in the prayers and songs of the people, in their daily familiar converse, in the supplications of the poor, not under the title of 'our Lady,' or of 'the Blessed Virgin,' but by the still more endearing name of (Mhuire Mathair), 'Mary Mother.' And so it was that Patrick sent his Catholic doctrines home to the hearts of the people. He preached Jesus Christ, under the name by which he is still known and adorned in that far western land, (Mac na Maighdine) 'Virgin's Son,' thus admirably insinuating the great mystery of the Incarnation, and preaching Jesus through Mary; and Mary herself he preached, with all her graces and glories, as 'Mary Mother.' The example of her virginal purity and maternal love he made the type of the Irish maiden and mother; and so well did they learn their high lesson that they have been for ages the admiration of the world, and the glory of their afflicted country, The devotion to Mary sank deep into the heart of the nation; So

well had they already learned to love and appreciate her that, in a few years after their conversion to the faith, when they would express their love and admiration for the first great Irish virgin saint—St. Bridget—they thought they had crowned her with glory when they called her ‘the Mary of Ireland.’ This devotion to Mary was a protecting shield over Ireland in the day of her battle for the faith.

The third great prominent point in St. Patrick’s preaching was the doctrine of Purgatory, and, consequently, careful thought and earnest prayer for the dead. This is attested by the ordinances of the most ancient Irish synods, in which oblations, prayers and sacrifice for the dead are frequently mentioned, as evidently being the practise, frequent and loving, of the people. They were not unmindful of the dead, ‘like others who have no hope.’ Every ancient church had its little grave-yard, and the jealous care of the people, even to this day, for these consecrated spots, the loving tenacity with which they have clung to them at all time speak of their faith in this great doctrine, and tell us how much Irish hope and love surrounds the grave. ‘Nothing is our own, except our dead,’ says the poet, and so these affectionate hearts took with joy the doctrine of mercy, and carried their love and their prayer beyond the tomb into the realms of expiation, where the dross of earth is purged away, the gold and silver refined, and souls saved are prepared for heaven, ‘yet so as by fire.’ This doctrine of the Church, so forcibly taught by Patrick, and warmly accepted by the Irish people, was also a great defence to the nation’s faith during the long ages of persecution and sorrow.

Finally, the great saint established between the people and their priesthood the firmest bonds of mutual love and confidence. In the Catholic Church the priest is separated from men and consecrated to God. The duties of his office are so high, holy and supernatural, and require such purity of life and devotion of soul, that he must, of necessity,

stand aloof from amongst men and engage himself with God : for, to use the words of the apostle, he is ‘the minister of Christ, and the dispenser of the mysteries of God.’ Hence, every Catholic looks upon the priest as a supernatural man ; supernatural in the unction of his priesthood, in his office, his power, his life, his duties, and most sacred in his person as the anointed of the Lord. This was the idea of the priesthood which Saint Patrick impressed upon the Irish people. The very name by which the priest has ever been known in our language, and which has no corresponding word in the English tongue, signifies ‘a sacred man and a giver of sacred things.’ Such is the exalted dignity of the priesthood, such the knowledge and matured sanctity required for, and the tremendous obligations and duties imposed upon it, that we generally find the first priests of a newly converted people strangers ; men who in Christian lands were brought up and educated for their high mission. It would seem as if the young Christianity of a people, like a vine but newly planted, were unable yet to bear such full matured fruit of holiness. But it was not so in Ireland, my brethren. There we behold a singular instance of a people who immediately produced a national priesthood. The priests and bishops of Ireland, who assisted and succeeded St. Patrick in his great work, were almost to a man Irishmen. So congenial was the soil on which the seeding of Christianity fell, that forthwith it sprung up into the goodly tree of all holiness and power ; and so the aged apostle saw around him, in ‘the ring of his brethren,’ those whom he had himself baptized, anointed and consecrated into the ministry of God’s altar and people. Taken thus from the heart of the people, they returned to them again, laden with divine gifts, and, living in the midst of them, joyfully and contentedly ministered unto them ‘in all things that are of God.’ A community of joy and sorrow, of good and of evil, was thus established between the priesthoods and

the people of Ireland; an intercourse the most familiar, yet most reverential; an union of the strictest kind, founded in faith, fidelity and affection, and cemented by centuries of tears and of blood.

FOR MORE THAN A THOUSAND YEARS

the work of St. Patrick was the glory of Christendom. The Virgin Church of Ireland, unstained even by one martyr's blood, became the prolific mother of saints. Strange, indeed, and singular in its glory, was the destiny of Innisfail. The Irish Church knew no childhood, no ages of painful and uncertain struggle to put on Christian usages and establish Christian traditions. Like the children in the early ages of the Church, who were confirmed in infancy, immediately after baptism, Ireland was called upon, as soon as converted, to become at once the mother of saints, the home and refuge of learning, the great instruc-tress of the nations; and, perhaps, the history of the world does not exhibit a more striking and glorious sight, than Ireland, for the three hundred years immediately following her conversion to the Catholic faith. The whole island was covered with schools and monasteries, in which men, the most renowned of their age, both for learning and sanctity, received the thousands of students who flocked to them from every land. Whole cities were given up to them; as we read of Armagh, which was divided into three parts — 'Trianmore,' or the town proper; 'Trian-Patrick,' or the cathedral close; 'Trian-Sassenagh,' or the Latin quarter, the home of the foreign students. To the students the evening star gave the signal for retirement, and the morning sun for awakening. When, at the sound of the early bell, says the historian, 'two or three thousand of them poured into the silent streets and made their way towards the lighted church, to join in the service of matins, mingling, as they went or returned, the tongues of the Gael, the Cimbre, the Pict, the Saxon, and the Frank; or

hailing and answering each other in the universal language of the Roman Church, the angels of heaven must have loved to contemplate the union of so much perseverance with so much piety.' And thus it was, not only in St. Patrick's own city of Armagh, but in Bangor, in Clonard, in Clonmacnoise, in Mayo ; of the Saxons of Tagmahon and Beg-Erin, on the Slaney ; in famed Lismore, on the Blackwater ; in the Munget, on the lordly Shannon ; in the far-off Islands of Arran, on the Western Ocean ; and in many another sainted and historic spot, where the round tower, and the group of seven churches, still remain, silent but eloquent witnesses of the sanctity and the glory of Ireland's first Christianity. The nations, beholding and admiring the lustre of learning and sanctity which shone forth in the holy isle, united in conferring upon Ireland the proudest title ever yet given to a land or a people ; they called her 'the Island of Saints and Doctors.'

The voice of history clearly and emphatically proclaims that the intellectual supremacy and guidance of the Christian world belonged to Ireland from the sixth to the ninth centuries. But, although religion may flourish in the halls of the university, and be fairly illustrated in the peaceful lives of the saints, yet, there is one crown, and that, indeed the very countersign of faith,—' *Victoria quæ vincit mundum fides*'—which can only rest on the brows of a church and a nation which has been tried in the arena of persecution and war ; and that crown is victory. The baytree may flourish by the riverside ; the cedar may rear its majestic head on the mountain-top ; leaf and fair flower, and the fulness of fruit may be there ; but it is only in the dark hour, when the storm sweeps over the earth, and every weak thing yields to it, and is carried away by its fury, that the good tree is tested, and its strength is proved. Then do men see whether it has struck its roots deep into the soil, and so twined them about the hidden rocks, that no power can tear them out. The good ship may sail before the prosperous gales, and ' walk the waters,' in all her beauty and majesty ; but

it is only on the morning after the storm, when the hurricane has swept over the face of the deep, when the angry waves have beaten upon her seeking to destroy her, but in vain,—that the sailor knows that he can trust to the heart of oak, and sleep securely in his noble vessel. Thus it is with the church in Ireland. Her beauty and her sanctity were known and admired both of God and man ; but her Lord was resolved that she should wear such crown of victory as never was placed on a nation's brows ; and therefore, at two distinct periods of her history, was she obliged to meet and conquer a storm of persecution and of war unequalled in the world's annals. The first of these great trials came upon Ireland at the beginning of the ninth century, when the Northmen, or Danes, invaded the country in mighty force. They came not only as the enemies of Ireland's nationality, but much more of her faith ; and we invariably find that their first and most destructive fury was directed against the churches, monasteries and schools.

THE GLOOMY AND TERRIBLE WORSHIP OF ODIN

was to replace the religion of Christ ; and for three hundred long years the whole land was covered with bloodshed and confusion, the nation fighting with heroic courage and perseverance, in defence of its altars and homes ; until, at the close of the eleventh century, Ireland rose up in her united strength, shook off the Pagan and fierce invaders from her virgin bosom, and cast them into the sea. The faith and religion of Christ triumphed, and Ireland was as Catholic, though far from being as holy, at the end of the eleventh as she was at the end of the eighth century. Now, we can only realize the greatness of this result by comparing it with the history of other nations. Behold, for instance, how completely the Mussulman invasions destroyed the Christianity of those ancient peoples of the East who had received the faith from the lips of the apostles themselves ; how thoroughly the Saracens succeeded, in a few years, in destroying the Christian faith of the north of Africa.—that once famous and flourishing Church, the Alexandria of St.

Mark, the Hippo of St. Augustine, the Carthage of St. Cyprian. History attests that nothing is more subversive of the religion of a people than long-continued war; and of this great truth we have, without going to the East or to Africa, a most melancholy proof in the history of England. 'The Wars of the Roses,' as the strife between the Houses of Lancaster and York was called, cover a space of only thirty years, from 1455 to 1485. This was not directed at all against religion, but was simply a contention of two great rival Houses struggling for the sovereignty; and yet it so demoralized the English people that they were prepared to accept, almost without a struggle, the monstrous form of religious error imposed upon them at the so-called Reformation,—an heretical Church, with a tyrant, an adulterer, and a murderer for its head. Contrast with these and many other such terrible examples the glory of a nation that emerged from a contest of three hundred years, which was really a religious war, with faith unimpaired, and untarnished by the least stain of superstition or infidelity to God.

It is not necessary for us to-day to recall the sad events that followed the Danish invasion of Ireland. The crown of empire fell from Ireland's brows, and the heart broke in the nation's bosom.

"The emerald gem of the Western world
Was set in the crown of the stranger."

It is, however, worthy of remark, that although Ireland never was united in her opposition to her English invader as she had been at Clontarf, still the contest for national existence was so gallantly maintained, that it was four hundred years since the first Norman invasion before the English monarch ventured to assume the title of 'King of Ireland.' It was in 1169 the English first landed, and it was on the 19th of June, 1541, that the royalty of Ireland was first transferred to an English dynasty, and the Lordship

of the Island of Saints conferred on one of the most wicked and inhuman monsters that ever cursed the earth, King Henry VIII. And now a new era of persecution and sorrow opened upon Ireland. The nation was commanded to give up its faith and religion. Never, since the beginning of the world was an all-important question more solemnly put ; never has it been more triumphantly and clearly answered. The question was : Were the Irish people prepared to stand by their ancient faith, to unite in defence of their altars ; to close with the mighty persecuting power of England, and fight her in the cause of religion ? Solemnly and deliberately did Ireland take up the gage and accept the great challenge. The issue seemed scarcely doubtful. The world refused to believe that a people who could never be united in defence of their national existence would unite as one man in defence of religion ; or that the power which had succeeded in breaking Ireland's sceptre and wresting her crown should be utterly defeated in its mightiest and most persistent efforts to destroy Ireland's ancient faith. Yet so it was to be. The 'Island of Saints and Doctors' was destined to be a land of heroes and martyrs, and the sacred cause of Ireland's nationality was destined to be saved in the victory which crowned her wonderful and glorious battle for her faith. This is not the time nor the occasion to dwell upon the details of that terrible struggle in which the whole strength of earth's mightiest people was put forth against us, which lasted for three hundred years ; which was fought out on a thousand battle fields ; which deluged Ireland with the best blood of her children, and reduced her fairest provinces, over and over again, to the condition of a waste and desert land.

BUT THE CELT WAS ENTRENCHED

in the citadel of God ; the light of divine truth was upon his path, the power of the Most High nerved his arm, and the spirit of Patrick hung over him, like the fiery cloud

that overshadowed the hosts of Israel upon the plains of Edom and Madian.

Ireland's preservation of the Catholic faith has been a puzzle to the world, and men have sought to explain in many different ways the extraordinary phenomenon. Some ascribe it to our natural antipathy and opposition to England and everything English; others again allege the strong conservatism of the Irish character, and its veneration for ancient rites and usages, merely because they are ancient; whilst English historians and philosophers love to attribute it to the natural obstinacy and wrong-headedness which they say is inherent in the Irish. I do not deny that, amongst the minor and human causes that influenced the religious action of the Irish people, there may have been a hatred and detestation of England. The false religion was presented to our fathers by the detested hands that had robbed Ireland of her crown; it was offered at the point of the sword that had shed (often treacherously and foully) the blood of her best and bravest sons; the nauseous dose of Protestantism was mixed in the bowl that poisoned the last of her great earls—Owen Roe O'Neill. All this may have told with the Irish people; and I also admit that a Church and religion claiming to be of God, with such a divinely appointed head as the 'saintly' Henry the Eighth—such a nursing mother as the chaste Elizabeth—such gentle missionaries as the humane and tender-hearted Oliver Cromwell, may have presented difficulties to a people whose wits were sharpened by adversity, and who were not holy ignorant of the Christian character, as illustrated in the history and traditions of their native land.

We may also admit, to a slight extent, the conservatism of the Irish character, and its veneration for antiquity. Oh, how much our fathers had to love in their ancient religion! Their history began with their Christianity; their glories were all intertwined with their religion; their national banners

were inscribed with the emblem of their faith, 'the green, immortal Shamrock ;' the brightest names in their history were all associated with their religion—'Malachi of the collar of gold,' dying in the midst of the monks, and clothed with their holy habit, on an island of Lough Ennel, near Mullingar, in Meath—Brian, 'the great King, upholding the crucifix before his army on the morning of Clontarf, and expiring in its embraces before the sunset—the brave Murkertach O'Brien, answering fearlessly the threat of William Rufus—for, when the English king said, looking towards Ireland, 'I will bring hither my ships and pass over and conquer the land ;' 'Hath the King,' asked the Irish monarch, 'in his great threatenings said, if it please God ?' 'And when answered, no ; 'Then tell him,' exclaimed the Irish hero, 'I fear him not, since he putteth his trust in man, and not in God'—Roderick O'Connor, the last 'High King' of Ireland, closing his career of disaster and of glory amongst the canons of the Abbey of Cong—saint, and bard, and hero, all alike presented themselves to the national mind surrounded by the halo of that religion which the people were now called upon to abandon and despise. Powerful as was the appeal of history and antiquity, I cannot give it any great weight in the preservation of Ireland's Catholicity. I do not believe that adherence to ancient usage because of its antiquity is a prominent feature of Irish character. We are by no means so conservative as our English neighbours. It is worthy of remark that usages and customs once common to both countries, and long since abandoned and forgotten in Ireland (Christmas 'waits' for instance, harvest-home feasts, May-pole dances, and the like) are still kept up faithfully and universally throughout England. The bells which, in Catholic times, called the people to early mass on Sunday mornings, are still rung out as of old, through mere loye of ancient usage, although their ringing from Protestant towers in the early morning has no meaning whatever, for it invites to no service or prayer. And yet, in the essential manner of religion, where

antiquity itself is a proof of truth, the conservative English gave up the old faith for the new ; whilst the Irish—in other things so regardless of antiquity—died and shed their blood for the old religion, rather than turn for one instant to the strange imposture of the new.

But none of these purely natural explanations can explain the supernatural fact, that a whole people preferred, for ten generations, confiscation, exile and death, rather than surrender their faith ; and the true reason lies in the all-important circumstance, that the religion of the Irish people was the true religion of Jesus Christ, bringing not only light to the intelligence, but grace and strength to the heart and will of the nation. The light of their divine faith showed them the hollowness and fallacy of Protestantism, in which they recognized an outrage upon common sense and reason, as well as upon God ; and the grace of their holy Catholic religion enabled them to suffer and die in its defence. Here it is that we recognize the Providence of God in the preaching of St. Patrick.

THE NEW AND FALSE RELIGION

assailed precisely those points of Catholic teaching which he had engraved most deeply on the mind and heart of Ireland, as if he had anticipated the trial and prepared for it. Attachment to the Holy See was more than a sentiment ; it was a passion in the Irish bosom.

Through good report and evil report, Ireland was always faithful to Peter's chair ; and it is a curious fact, that, when the Christian world was confused by the pretensions of Antipodes, and all the nations of Christendom were, at one time or other, led astray, so as to acknowledge some false pretender, Ireland, with an instinct truly supernatural, never failed to discover, to proclaim, and to obey the true pontiff. She is the only Catholic nation that never was, for a moment separated from Peter, nor mistaken in her allegiance to him. Her prayer, her obedience, her love, were the sure inheritance of each succeeding Pope, from Celestine, who sent Saint Patrick to

Ireland, to Pius, who, in our own day, beheld Patrick's children guarding his venerable throne, and prepared to die in his glorious cause. In every Catholic land union with Rome is a principle. In Ireland it was a devotion. And so, when the evil genius of Protestantism stalked through the land, and with loud voice demanded of the Irish people separation from Rome, or their lives—the faithful people of God consented to die, rather than to renounce the faith of their fathers, transmitted to them through the saints.

Devotion to the Mother of God was the next great feature of Patrick's preaching and of Ireland's Catholicity. The image of all that was fairest in nature and grace, which arose before the eyes of the people, as depicted by the great apostles, captivated their imaginations and their hearts. They called her in their prayers 'Miden dheelish,' their darling Virgin. In every family in the land the eldest daughter was a Mary; every Irish maid or mother emulated the purity of her virginal innocence, or the strength and tenderness of her maternal love. With the keenness of love they associated their daily sorrows and joys with hers; and the ineffable grace of maiden modesty which clung to the very mothers of Ireland seemed to be the brightest reflection of Mary which had lingered upon the earth. Oh, how harshly upon the ears of such a people grated the detestable voice that would rob Mary of her graces and rob the world of the light of her purity and the glory of her example! Never was the Mother of God so dear to Ireland as in the days of the nation's persecution and sorrow. Not even in that bright day when the Virgin Mother seemed to walk the earth, and to have made Ireland her home, in the person of their own St. Bridget, was her name so dear, and the love of her so strong, as in the dark and terrible time when church and altar being destroyed, every cabin in the land resounded with Mary's name, invoked in the Holy Rosary, the great devotion that saved Ireland's faith.

The third great leading feature of our holy religion assailed

by Protestantism was the sweet and tender doctrine of prayer and love for the dead. That which is opposed to divine truth is always, when we analyze it, an outrage on the best instincts of man. Remembrance of those who are gone, and a desire to help them, to communicate with them, seems natural to us all; and the more tender-hearted and affectionate and loving a people are, the more deeply will they realize and appreciate the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, and prayer for the dead. How terrible is the separation of death, as seen from the Protestant point of view! In the Catholic Church this mystery of death is despoiled of its worst bitterness. It is only a removal from our bodily sight, as if the loved one were only gone on a journey for a few days, to return to us again. Our intercourse with him does not cease; nay, we can do more for him now than ever we could in life, and by our prayers obtain for him the relief and consolation that will never be forgotten during the long day of eternity in Heaven. To a people like the Irish, naturally affectionate, and strongly attached to each other, the Christian doctrine of prayer for the dead must always be grateful. Our history served to deepen this portion of our Catholic devotion, for it was a history of sorrow and of national privation; and sorrow softens and enlarges the heart. A people who had lost so much in life, turned the more eagerly and lovingly to their dead. I remember once seeing an aged woman, weeping and praying over a grave in Ireland; and when I questioned her, endeavoring to console her, she said, 'Let me cry my fill; all that I ever had in this world are here in this grave; all that ever brought me joy or sorrow is here under this sod; and my only consolation in life is to come here and speak to them, and pray for them, and weep.' We may imagine, but we cannot realize, the indignation of our fathers, when the heartless, sour-visaged, cold-blooded men of Geneva came to them to tell them, that henceforth they must be

unmindful of their dead, like others who have no hope.' This doctrine may do for the selfish, light-hearted, thoughtless worldling, who loves nothing in death, and who in life only loves for his own sake ; but it would scarcely be acceptable to a generous, pure and loving race, and withal a nation of mourners, as the Irish were, when the unnatural doctrine was first propounded to them.

Finally, the new religion was represented to the Irish people by men who grotesquely represented themselves as successors of the apostles. The popular mind in Ireland had derived its idea of the Christian priesthood from such men as Patrick, Columba, of Iona, and Kevin, of Glendalough. The great majority of the clergy in Ireland were at all times monastic—men who added to the character and purity of the priest the sanctity and austerity of the Cenobite. The virtues of Ireland's priesthood made them the admiration of other lands, but the idols of their own people. The monastic glories of ancient Lismore and Bangor were still reflected from Millifont and Beetive ; the men of Glendalough and ancient Armagh lived on in the Franciscan and Dominican abbeys throughout the land ; and the Catholic Church presented, in the 16th century, in her Irish clergy, the same purity of life, sanctity and austerity of morals, zeal and learning, which illuminated the world in ages gone by. Steeped as our people were in sorrow, they could not refrain from mirth, at the sight of the holy 'apostles' of the new religion, the men who were to take the place of the Catholic bishops, and priests, and monks, to teach and illustrate by their lives the purer gospel which had been just discovered—the Mormonism of the 16th century. English renegade monks, English apostate priests, English drunken brawlers, with a ferocious English army at their back, invaded the land, and, parading themselves, with their wives, or concubines, before the eyes of the astonished and disgusted people, called upon the children of St. Patrick and

St. Columba to receive them as the ministers of Christ, and the dispensers of the mysteries of God.' Their religion was worthy of them—they had no mysteries to dispense to the people ; no sacrifice, no penance, no confession of sin, no fasting, no vows to God, no purity, no counsels of the Gospel, no sacrament of matrimony, no priesthood, no anointing of the sick, no prayer for the dead. Gracious God ! They came to a people whom they had robbed of their kingdom of earth, and demanded of them also the surrender of the Kingdom of Heaven !

WAS EVER HEARD SUCH AUDACITY !

What wonder that Ireland took her own priest, her 'soggarth aroon,' to her bosom ! Never did she know his value till now. It was only when she had seen his hideous counterpart that she realized all that she possessed in the humble child of St. Francis and St. Dominick. The sunshine is all the more welcome when we have seen the blackness of the night; the sweet is all the sweeter when we have tasted bitterness ; the diamond shines all the brighter when its dull, glassy counterfeit is set beside it ; and the Angel of Light has all the purer radiance of heaven around him, after the affrighted eye has caught a glimpse of the Spirit of Darkness. As strangers, the ministers of Protestantism have lived in Ireland for three hundred years ; as strangers they live in the land to-day. The people and their clergy, united, have fought the good fight, have kept the faith, and we have lived to see the triumph of that faith in our own day.

Now, I say, that in all this we see the Providence of God in the labor of Ireland's glorious apostle. Who can deny that the religion which St. Patrick gave to Ireland is divine ? A thousand years of sanctity attest it. Three hundred years of martyrdom attest it. If men will deny the virtues which it creates, the fortitude which it inspires, let them look to Ireland's history. If men say that the Catholic religion flourishes only because of the splendor of its ceremonial, the grandeur

of its liturgy, and its appeal to the senses let them look to Ireland's history. What sustained the faith when church and altar disappeared? when no light burned no organ pealed, but all was desolation for centuries! Surely the divine life, which is the soul of the Church, of which the external worship and ceremonial are but the expression. But if they will close their eyes to all this, at least there is a fact before them—the most glorious and palpable of our day—and it is, that Ireland's Catholicity has risen again to every external glory of worship, and triumphed over every enemy. Speaking of our Lord, St. Augustine says, 'In that He died He showed Himself man; in that He rose again He proved Himself God.' Has not the Irish Church risen again to more than her former glory? The land is covered once more with fair churches, convents, colleges, and monasteries, as of old; and who shall say that the religion that could thus suffer and rise again is not from God; This glorious testimony to God and to His Christ is thine, O holy and venerable land of my birth and of my love! O glory of earth and Heaven, to-day thy great apostle looks down upon thee from his high seat of bliss, and his heart rejoices: to-day the angels of God rejoice over thee, for the light of sanctity which still beams over thee; to-day thy troops of virgin and martyr saints speak thy praises in the high courts of Heaven. And I, O Mother, far away from thy green bosom, hail thee from afar—as the prophet of old beholding the fair plains of the promised land—and proclaim this day that there is no land so fair, no spot of land to be compared to thee, no island rising out of the wave so beautiful as thou art; that neither the sun nor the moon, nor the star of heaven, shine down upon anything so lovely as thee, O Erin!



