

ARTICLE V.

SAINT PATRICK, THE APOSTLE OF IRELAND.

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A LITTLE over fifteen hundred years ago, or about the year 372, a boy by the name of SUCCAT first saw the light. By some he is said to have been born at Boulogne-sur-Mer, in France; by others, at Bonavem, a place in the estuary of the river Clyde in Scotland. If birthplace determine nationality, then we would say he was Gaul or Celt, or, in later phrase, French or Scotch, according as he was born in the one place or the other. The very large predominance of opinion is in favor of Scotland as his birthplace.

His father, who bore the Latinized name of Calpurnius, was an elder or deacon in the church, and also a *decurio*, or magistrate, in the place where he lived. His grandfather was one Potitus, a priest,—a married priest, presumably, for the celibacy of the clergy was not an enforced law of the church until the time of Pope Gregory VII., some seven hundred years later. His mother is said to have been a godly and devoted woman by the name of Conchessa, and sister to Martin, Bishop of Tours in France. With such parentage, he must have had careful religious training. But with the waywardness characteristic of too many youth, he did not seem to profit by it.

Those were wild times. Great Britain was largely a heathen country, for the Christianity that had been taught there by the Roman conquerors had been well-nigh crushed out by the

Saxon invasion. In now and then a home, like Succat's, it remained. One day, when the boy was about fifteen years old, a band of pirates landed at Bonaven and, in ravaging the country, found the boy upon his father's farm, carried him away captive to Ireland, and sold him as a slave to an Irish chieftain. He was sent into the fields to attend flocks and herds, and for six years he endured the cruel hardships of slavery. Here, like the prodigal, he came to himself. Amid his bitter experiences, memory recalled the tender religious teachings of his home. God was watching over the lad. Long afterwards, when he wrote a story of his life in what are called his "Confessions," he says: "I was sixteen years old, and did not know the true God. But in a strange land, the Lord brought me to a sense of my unbelief; so that, although late, I minded me of my sins, and turned with my whole heart to the Lord my God. He looked down on my loneliness, and had pity on my youth and ignorance. He preserved me ere I knew him; and he protected and comforted me as a father does his son."

Though of an enthusiastic temperament, he was after his conversion much given to prayer and meditation. He had visions and dreams. Towards the close of his six years of bondage, a dream revealed to him a way of escape. Obedient to the voice that thus spoke to him, he fled from his captivity, reached the seacoast, and there, as he had been told, found a ship which conveyed him away, and he soon reached his home. Some speak of a second enslavement and escape. In his freedom, the constraining power of the love of Christ inspired in him the noble idea of devoting himself to the religious welfare of the people among whom he had been enslaved. He now gives himself to preparation for the work of the ministry, pursuing his studies, it is supposed, at an institution

in Scotland, founded by St. Ninian,¹ and located at a place now called Whithorn. Perhaps it was during this time that there was given to Succat the Latin name Patricius, a name which, like Augustine, seems to have been commonly used, even down to the seventh century, in the sense of nobleman, or gentleman. Patricius gives us the name PATRICK. And Bonavem, the place of his birth, has had its name changed to Kilpatrick, by which it is now called.

Passing through his period of preparation, and receiving ordination in Scotland, he, notwithstanding the previous failure of Palladius, who had been sent out from Rome, enters with enthusiasm upon the work of preaching the gospel of Christ, about the year 432, among the then idolatrous and savage inhabitants of Ireland.

He seems to have adopted, at the outset, the expedient of addressing himself first to the chiefs, and taking advantage of the spirit of clanship and other existing usages of the Irish, assuring himself that if he could reach the chiefs, he could also reach their subjects. He was of course not without apprehension in casting his lot among so unrestrained a people, but his faith, courage, and tact seem to have been adequate for all emergencies. One memorable scene deserves attention.

It was his appearance before the Chief of Tarah, at the very time when sacred rites were to be performed to heathen

¹ "The tradition of some connection between the Irish apostle and St. Martin of Tours, the monastic type of the earliest Irish Church, the doubts as to Patrick's fitness for the work which led to his writing his *Confession*, and indeed all the difficulties that beset the question of the origin of the Irish Church, receive a simple and satisfactory explanation upon the hypothesis of Patrick having prepared himself for the priesthood at *Candida Casa*, the monastic institution founded by St. NINIAN" (*The Encyclopædia Britannica*, xviii. 411).

deities, and when the fanaticism of the priests of a false religion might be expected to destroy him without mercy. The rites appear to have been connected with the ancient fire worship. According to Dr. Walsh, Bishop of Ossory, who describes the scene, a law existed that upon this particular evening no fire should be lighted until the signal was given by a royal bell of Tarah. The missionary band, probably not aware of the existence of this law, lighted their evening fire. The astonished priests represented to the king that unless this fire was extinguished it would overcome all their fires. Little knew they how great meaning was enfolded in their angry prediction. The king was soon face to face with the unprotected missionary. Patrick's conduct was both wise and conciliatory; for, instead of vengeance and expulsion, he received permission to preach the next day before the royal assembly; and that memorable Easter day, if it did not lead to the conversion of the king, led to the conversion of some of his family, and to a wide and effectual opening of doors for the gospel throughout his dominions. It was upon this occasion that Patrick composed the famous prayer which has been called his "Breast-plate," a translation of which will be given farther on.

Having learned the language and customs of the country during the days of enslavement, he called the people together, by the beat of the drum, wherever he went, and related to them the story of the sufferings of Christ for the salvation of men. Although the Druids opposed all their influence to his efforts, his amiable and commanding character disarmed all hostility. By degrees he made his way through the Island, baptizing great numbers, chieftains and people. According to the accounts of his biographers, he himself founded three hundred and sixty-five churches, and baptized with his own

hand twelve thousand persons. He is also said to have trained and ordained a large number of fellow-helpers in the ministry of the Word, so that after a few years all Ireland was converted to Christ, and the country covered with churches and monasteries.

As to the evangelical character and work of those early Irish missionaries, Ebrard says, that they read the Scriptures in the original text, translated them wherever they went, expounded them to their congregations, and, instead of withholding them from the people, recommended their diligent perusal. They acknowledged no rule of faith but God's Word. They preached precisely the doctrines which are preached to-day by those who draw their doctrines from the Bible; such as, the depravity of man, the atoning death of Christ, justification by faith and without the merit of works, regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and the sacraments as signs and seals of the grace in Christ. From the numerous cloistered institutions of learning founded by them, whose inmates combined deep piety with ardent study of the Scriptures, there went forth so many to teach and preach, not only in that land but in other lands, that there was gained for Ireland the title "*Insula Sanctorum*," the Island of Saints.

Patrick, in preaching to the idolatrous people, often found it necessary to break their idols in pieces, before they could be got to believe that there was no power or divinity in them. It is related that on one occasion, when he was in the plains of M'Sleight, County Cavan, he observed one of the lofty pillar-stones erected by the chieftains as objects of worship, and lettered all over with the strange Ogham letter, which is now the puzzle of the learned. To this, worship was being paid. His indignation was so stirred that he boldly rushed forward at the head of the few followers, overturned the pillar, and

said to the false worshipers, "It is not lawful to bow down to any image, but only to the one true God, the great Spirit, Maker of heaven and earth." This greatly aroused the wrath of those who held the column in veneration. Among those who witnessed the act, none was more enraged than Berraidhe, the great Chieftain of Offaly, who thereupon swore that, the next time the missionary should pass his way, he would take his life. Patrick did not hear this oath, but his faithful chariot-driver, Oran, did; and this servant resolved to save his master's life at any price. It came to pass that shortly afterward Patrick's course lay through this district of the province of Leinster, in which the wrathful Berraidhe's fortress stood. Ignorant of the design upon his life, he ordered the chariot-driver to take the road that led by the castle of this Prince. As they drew near, Oran feigned great fatigue. He declared that he could no longer ride upon the horse's back, and begged that for one brief space his master would change places with him, intimating also that, by taking a postillion's position he might give convincing proof of the reality of the humility with which he was credited. They exchanged places, and thus they passed by. Just, however, as they were leaving the spot, a keen and well-aimed arrow flew from the Prince's bow, shot from the rampart of the castle, and, through the back of the carriage, pierced the heart of the faithful Oran, who had been taken for his master by the archer. The master, not knowing what was done, urged the horse along, when the sound of a voice caused him to turn. Beholding the loving and heaven-lit smile of the dying man, and catching the expiring but exulting words, "Blessed Jesus! it succeeded! it succeeded!" he saw only too well the success of the stratagem. The servant had thus taken the master's place that, if need be, he might die in his master's stead,—

beautiful illustration not only of the self-abnegation which the gospel inspires, but of the great vicarious sacrifice on which the salvation revealed in the gospel rests!

There is not a little of uncertainty as to all dates connected with Patrick's life; but if the date (372) of his birth named at the outset, and one of the latest assigned dates (493 or 495) of his death, be accepted, he must have attained the age of over one hundred and twenty years. He is said to have come to his end in Ulster, near Downpatrick, and at this place, still venerated by the people, his relics were preserved as late as the period of the Reformation. He was canonized a Saint by the Roman Catholic Church, and his festival appointed for March 17th, the day of his death.

If this portrayal of St. Patrick be true, then it will doubtless be readily allowed that he was a man whom all Protestants, as well as Roman Catholics, may rightfully (and should) honor. While possession of him is gladly granted to our Romanist brethren, we may also claim him as a simon-pure Protestant saint. The doctrines which he preached were purely Protestant doctrines.¹ But they were Catholic doctrines as well. Why not? Professor Briggs, in his book "Whither?" says, "The Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches are agreed as to nine-tenths, or more, of the contents of Christianity" (p. 268).

¹ Before the writer lies a *Life of St. Patrick*, in which, from a study of this Irish, or rather Scotch, apostle's literary remains,—The "Confession," the "Epistle" to Coroticus, the "Loricum," or "Breastplate,"—which alone give the data that all can accept as conveying his belief, the following summarization is given:—

"First. The supremacy and sole authority of the sacred Scriptures appear from this Confession to have been an article of the creed of St. Patrick.

"Second. It is evident, from his Confession, that St. Patrick held the doctrine of 'salvation by grace,' through the work of

When we all adhere to the Word of God, do we not easily agree as to nine-tenths of the contents of Christianity? The things which differentiate them as Romanists from us as Protestants are almost entirely human additions to Christianity. Why not let these go, and rest only upon the Bible? for, surely, only what *it* teaches can be essential to salvation.

The title, "Apostle of Ireland," accorded to St. Patrick,—this shrewd, sanctified Scotch missionary,—is one that he well deserves. His name is the chiefest glory of the Emerald Isle. The Church of Ireland, as he left it, and long thereafter, owning and yielding no allegiance to any foreign domination,¹ Christ, and taught that man, as a sinner, cannot merit the favor of God.

"Third. The invocation of saints and angels was not practiced or taught by St. Patrick. Throughout this Confession we have many references to prayer, but in every instance it is prayer to God. St. Patrick was often exposed to great danger, but he never commits himself to the care of a guardian angel, or implores the protection of the Virgin mother.

"Fourth. It is evident that, what is called the celibacy of the clergy was not recognized by St. Patrick, nor by that portion of the Christian church to which he belonged.

"Fifth. It appears also that St. Patrick did not derive his mission from the Pope of Rome. He himself attributes his mission directly to God, and not at all to man.

"Sixth. It may be finally remarked that there is in this Confession a total silence respecting all the peculiar doctrines of the Church of Rome. Everywhere St. Patrick speaks of the great blessing he was by God's grace enabled to secure, namely, that there should be everywhere, through Ireland, clergy for the benefit of the people; and he speaks of their work as consisting of two parts—baptizing, and exhorting, or preaching the gospel to, the people. He is silent respecting hearing confessions, bestowing absolution, or saying mass, and changing bread and wine into the body and blood, soul and divinity, of Christ (transubstantiation), that is, he is silent respecting the greatest and most important and wonderful parts of religion as held by the papacy, and only mentions those duties of the clergy which are ordinary and received by Protestants as well as Roman Catholics."

¹ "Until the middle of the twelfth century, the Church of Ire-

seems to have been, in Christian purity and simplicity, far ahead of the rest of Christendom. Protected in a great degree by the isolation of its locality, it was not corrupted by political complications, as was the church in the countries bordering upon the Mediterranean. There was as yet no papacy. The word "Pope," Latin PAPA, FATHER, was at first, apparently, applied to bishops and priests alike, as it now is in all Greek and Russian churches. The first known writer who applied it to the Bishop of Rome, as his specific title, was Ennodius of Pavia, in the latter part of the fifth century, who, after the death of St. Patrick, thus addressed Symmachus, who acceded to this bishopric in the year 498. The countries about the Mediterranean were divided into five

land maintained its character as an independent, national church without acknowledging any preëminence, authority, or jurisdiction of the see of Rome" (History of the Church of Ireland from the Reformation to the Revolution, by Rt. Rev. Richard Maut, D.D., Lord-Bishop of Down and Conner). "That the Britons acknowledged no ecclesiastical power of the Pope over them is proved by their opposition to the Roman regulations, an opposition which continued in *Ireland* down to the twelfth century" (Gieseler's Ecclesiastical History, §126).

Ground for Rome's domination of the Irish Church is sought to be laid by the allegation that St. Patrick received his commission to evangelize Ireland from Pope Celestius. "For all this there is no evidence whatever" (Britannica, xviii. 411). St. Patrick "attributed his mission to no Pope, Bishop, or Church" (Schaff-Herzog Encyclopædia, iii. 1764). "The earliest Christian writers who mention the first communication of the glad tidings of salvation to that country do not trace it from Rome, but ascribe it to the disciples of St. John. They look back to *them* as their fathers in the faith" (Wordsworth's History of the Irish Church, p. 25). "The Charter of St. Patrick is a mere figment, invented by the Monks of Glastonbury" (Ussher's Religion of the Ancient Irish, p. 65). "But this 'Carta or Epistola' has its uses, as reminding us that documents were forged in the name of St. Patrick, and that the authors of those forgeries endeavored to connect his name thereby with the Roman See" (Wordsworth's History of the Irish Church, p. 53).

patriarchates, and the Bishops of Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, and Jerusalem, were patriarchs of these respective divisions. There were thus one patriarchate in the West and four in the East. Leo I. (440–461), called “Leo the Great,” became possessed, about the middle of the fifth century, with the idea of the primacy of Rome; and to this idea, pushed more for political than for religious reasons, is due THE PAPACY. Rome, claiming all the West, endeavored to subdue all religious interests within its patriarchate to itself. And it soon succeeded, save in Ireland. Mosheim tells us that in the ninth century the Irish divines were the only ones who refused obedience to the dictates of its hierarchical authority. This greed of power, pushing eastward and attempting to dominate the other patriarchates, resulted, in the eleventh century (1054), in the Great Schism, or separation of Christendom into two parts: The Latin, or Western, or Roman Church; and the Greek, or Eastern Church.

But to return to Ireland. The monasteries which St. Patrick and others of the early Irish Church founded, became, as Professor Fisher tells us, “centers of Christian learning and devotion, whose influence was felt through the middle ages, and in distant parts of the world.” Irish Christianity, as taught by the schools and preached by their pupils, was essential Protestantism, and essential Catholicism, too; for it was the common Christianity of the Scriptures.

But how did the Roman Catholic Church become possessed of St. Patrick and the Irish Church?

In the year 1154, Nicholas Breakspeare was elected Pope as Adrian IV.—the only Englishman who ever occupied the papal chair. Henry II., King of England, who had been placed upon the throne by the Roman Church, sent the Abbot of St. Albans and three Bishops to Rome with his congratu-

lations. Adrian, acting upon the notion of Gregory VII., that all the kingdoms of the earth belong by right to the Roman See, acknowledged the courtesy and secured thereby certain very substantial advantages, by conferring upon the English Monarch the sovereignty of the kingdom of Ireland! but reserving for himself all ecclesiastical rights there, and making one penny tribute annually payable from each family to St. Peter. If Henry could establish his civil claims in the Island, he could at the same time establish Adrian's ecclesiastical claims. The king, with that beautiful political piety and purity of which we see specimens in these days just before election, declared his aim to be "to enlarge the bounds of the church, to restrain the progress of vices, to correct the manners of the people and plant virtue among them, and to increase the Christian religion." Giraldus, chaplain to Henry II., says, that "enormities and filthiness" defiled the Irish Church; but it is claimed that "nothing worse could be found to condemn than marriages within the prohibited degrees, and trifling irregularities about baptism."¹

So Ireland was invaded. The frightful carnage and desolation caused by these Norman invaders, and the stout resistance of the Irish clergy and people to the papal decree, are admitted even by papal historians. In the subjection of Ireland to the English crown, its religious institutions were likewise subjected to the papacy. In this way the Roman Catholic Church became possessed of the Irish Church and St. Patrick.

It must be added that war was waged not only against "heretics," as these simple Bible believers were called, but against the schools which had in so remarkable a manner sent forth their light over Europe: against old manuscripts also,

¹The Encyclopædia Britannica, xiii. 259.

that the history and teaching of the early Irish fathers might be blotted out. In return for this monumental wrong, the Irish people, through the centuries since, have rendered the Roman Church a devotion equaled by none. For some reason England does not receive like grateful return.

It is hardly in accordance with the dignity of these pages to recount the legend of St. Patrick's banishing with his crosier the snakes and toads from Ireland; but of which the earlier writers of his life say nothing. The Adirondack guides say there are no snakes in their region; but the writer has seen them there. Whether there really be none of these reptiles in Erin or not, may be a question; but more likely the substantial basis of the legend is that the serpents which St. Patrick sought to banish were those which live, not in bogs and marshes and holes of the rocks, but in men's hearts,—vile thoughts, evil desires, wicked passions, cruel purposes. These, in wonderful measure, the great missionary, with God's help, succeeded in banishing.

Reference has been made to the adherence to Scripture and to the doctrinal purity of the Irish Church. With them, as has been stated, the Bible was the only rule of faith; its pages were given to the people; their worship was in their native language; the sacraments were not vehicles, but simply signs and seals, of grace. Entirely scriptural. As to human additions to Christianity, Clement and Virgilius, two of their missionaries in the eighth century, and Claude in the ninth, are cited as witnesses that the Irish Church did not inculcate baptismal regeneration, transubstantiation, purgatory,¹ adoration

¹“The two later books of O'Sullivan's history [published in 1629] relate to St. Patrick's purgatory, which neither Joceline nor Probus [St. Patrick's biographers] has mentioned, and probably never heard or dreamt of. St. Patrick's purgatory is first mentioned by Henry, monk of Saltrey, who wrote A.D. 1153” (Ware's “Bishops”).

of relics or images, auricular confession, works of supererogation, pilgrimages, invocation of saints, nor even the worship of the virgin Mary. St. Patrick made no place for these things in the Irish Church.

It is said that the oldest piece of writing in "the sweet Irish tongue" is the "Breast-plate of St. Patrick," his prayer, to which reference has been made, when he went to Tarah to preach to the pagan king and nobles of Ireland. There is no appeal in it to the mother of our Lord, but only to God and his co-equal Son. Its metrical rendering gives it the force of a hymn:—

"At Tarah to-day, in this fateful hour,
 I place all Heaven with its power,
 And the Sun with its brightness,
 And the Snow with its whiteness,
 And Fire with all strength it hath,
 And Lightning with its rapid wrath,
 And the Winds with their swiftness along their path,
 And the Sea with its deepness,
 And the Rocks with their steepness,
 And the Earth with its starkness—
 All these I place,
 By God's almighty grace,
 Between myself and the powers of darkness.

"At Tarah to-day
 May God be my stay!
 May the strength of God now nerve me!
 May the power of God preserve me!
 May God the Almighty be near me!
 May God the Almighty espy me!
 May God the Almighty hear me!
 May God give me eloquent speech!
 May the arm of God protect me!
 May the wisdom of God direct me!
 May the Shield of God defend me!
 May God give me power to teach and to preach!

"May the Host of God attend me,
 And ward me

And guard me
 Against the wiles of demons and devils,
 Against the temptations of vices and evils,
 Against the bad passions and wrathful will,
 Of the reckless mind and wicked heart,
 Against every man who designs me ill,
 Whether leagued with others, or plotting apart.

“ May Christ, I pray,
 Protect me to-day,
 Against prison and fire,
 Against drowning and wounding—
 That so, in God’s grace abounding,
 I may earn the preacher’s hire.
 Christ, as a light, illumine and guide me!
 Christ, as a shadow, o’ershadow and cover me!
 Christ be under me!
 Christ be over me!
 Christ be beside me
 On left hand and right!
 Christ be before me, behind me, about me!
 Christ this day be within and without me!

“ Salvation dwells with the Lord,
 With Christ, the Omnipotent Word,
 From generation to generation—
 Grant us, O Lord, Thy grace and salvation! ”