

He is an oracle of optimism and of joy. When St. Patrick condemns the warfare carried on between the different Irish clans, Benignus pleads for his wayward countrymen in a hopeful and cheerful strain, likening Christianity to "the glad spring" tripping "above a dusky forest roof, leaving a track sea-green" and "above green copse of thorn, leaving a track foam-white," and though "not straight she ran; yet soon she conquered all." The figure very aptly traces the happy progress of Christianity in Ireland, turned aside, now and then, by a slight rebuff, but, in the end, conquering all. Benignus then asks the Saint,—

"O Father, is it sinful to be glad
Here amid sin and sorrow? Joy is strong,
Strongest in spring-tide! Mourners I have known
That, homeward wending from the new-dug grave,
Against their will, where sang the happy birds
Have felt the aggressive gladness stir their hearts,
And smiled amid their tears."

The phrase "aggressive gladness" is, I believe, very apt. It conveys an exact impression of that sensation which so often takes possession of one in balmy spring days and fills one with the joy of living. It is "aggressive gladness" which turns the poet's thoughts and pen to the praises of spring, and here, indeed, the phrase is a confession of what has moved Benignus to these "spring tide raptures."

But it would be interesting to know what caused de Vere to write the "Legends" in such a happy vein. True, the narration of a whole nation's conversion to Christianity is no occasion for tears, yet, while the nature of the subject must be admitted as a cause of the poet's joyful tone, it is admitted only as a partial cause. I will mention three other probable causes which lie in the poet's personality. First, the fact that he was Irish calls for optimism in his poetry for Irishmen are essentially optimistic. Secondly, the fact that Aubrey de Vere was a convert explains much of the joy and pleasure which he evinces in proclaiming the glories of the Catholic Church, his new-found Mother. Lastly, his great love of the Faith afforded him pleasure in his work and influenced him, no doubt, in painting the happy condition the Gospel left in its wake.

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