

PANEGRIC OF ST. PATRICK.

An Eloquent Sermon by Rev. James F. Treacy, D. D.

The following is a full report of the eloquent panegyric of the Apostle of Ireland pronounced by Rev. Dr. Treacy in St. Michael's Cathedral on St. Patrick's Day.

"I will send thee unto the Gentiles to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness into light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance amongst them that are sanctified. Acts, xxi, 14.

Your Grace, Rev. Fathers, and Dearly Beloved—The foregoing words were addressed by our Lord to the Apostle St. Paul, on that eventful day when, thrown from his horse and stricken blind on the road to Damascus, the spiritual eyes of his soul were first opened to the light of faith in the doctrines of Jesus of Nazareth. When he was afterwards arraigned before the tribunal of King Agrippa and charged with being an apostate from the Jewish religion, the Apostle, in self defence, related the wonderful circumstances of his conversion—how Jesus had appeared to him, revealing the great mission for which he was chosen, the many trials that awaited him in his accomplishment, the various imprisonments that he should suffer from both Jews and Gentiles—how, finally, God would deliver him out of their hands, and send him back again amongst them to deliver them from the bondage of Satan and from the slavery of Sin. "Rise and stand upon thy feet, for I have appeared to thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of those things which thou has seen and of those in which I will appear to thee, delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness unto light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and inheritance amongst them that are sanctified by faith that is in Me."

Words, dearly beloved, of Divine origin, and possessing all the fecundity of the word of a God; not restricted to one sense only, nor yet addressed solely to the Apostle of one particular nation, but divinely applicable to the Apostle of every converted nation, and more especially to that nation whose religious glory we honor, and to that Apostle whose feast we celebrate. Like St. Paul, the Apostle of Ireland was favored with many visions of his future ministry. Like him also, he was long a prisoner in the hands of those whose Apostle he afterwards became; and being afterwards delivered by God out of their hands, was again sent back amongst them to deliver them from the bondage of Satan and lead them captives under the sweet yoke of Jesus Christ. *Victi victoribus leges dedit.* The conquered gave laws to their conquerors. The captive triumphed over his pagan masters. From him they received forgiveness of their sins and inheritance amongst the Christian nations; and not only the common inheritance of his Christianity, but the peculiar inheritance of his own apostleship. Unlike the mantle of Elias, the apostolic cloak of St. Patrick did not descend upon the shoulders of one man alone, but has fallen into the arms of an entire nation, that has ably supported it with the faith it symbolized for over 1,400 years, and has carried it unscathed to all the nations of the earth.

The Son of God came down from Heaven to teach mankind the great doctrines of eternal salvation. This He did by word and example. His words, being the words of a God, carried the conviction of divine faith to the intellects of His hearers, and His example, as that of a man fashioned in soul and body like unto themselves, induced them to practice the doctrines which He had taught them. The Catholic Church, the living representative of Jesus Christ on earth, still adheres to that two-fold method of propagating divine truth. By the ministry of her priests she bears the doctrines of salvation to the nations of the earth, and by the examples of her Saints she persuades them into practicing the doctrines which they have received. In her divine office she brings daily before the eyes of her children the holy lives and virtues of the Saints, and desires that we should ever regard these great examples of Christian perfection as our daily models in the practice of virtue.

To-day, the anniversary of his death, the Church celebrates the feast of St. Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland and forgetting, as it were, that he is by no means a particular nation, she holds him forth before the eyes of all her children as the example of one of the most perfect imitators of his Divine Master—the saint of humility, meekness, mortification and prayer, who still continues to teach his sons and daughters by the silent sermon of his life and virtues. "Be ye imitators of me, as I have been of our Lord Jesus Christ." Though you have heard the story of his life a thousand times, though it has sunk deeply into your hearts and memories, yet I should consider that I were failing in reverence to our nation's Apostle, and to conform to the spirit of the Church, if I did not again repeat it in brief and simple words.

St. Patrick was born in France, near the city of Boulogne sur Mer, about the year 357. His father, Calpornius, held the Roman dignity of Decurion or Municipal

Senator. His mother, Conchessa, was a niece of the celebrated St. Martin of Tours. Calpornius and his wife, says an old chronicle, were both holy in the sight of God, "walking without offence in the justifications of the Lord." They were eminent in birth, in faith, in hope and in religion, showing themselves by their acts and in their conversation to be worthy citizens of the Church. Of the early religious life of our Saint we know but little. In his "Confessions" he tells us that in his youth he was not as fervent as he should have been, and accepted the afflictions of his captivity as a just punishment from God for the sins and imperfections of his youth.

In his sixteenth year he was made captive, along with several others of his nation, by pirates from the Irish coast. The youthful Apostle was sent to the northern part of the island, where he was sold as a slave to a pagan chieftain called Milcho. In his service our Saint was occupied in herding the flocks. In this lonely occupation he had ample leisure to meditate on the great truths of religion, which in his father's home he had well nigh forgotten. The beauties of the surrounding scenery, the dark solitude of the oak forests, the whistling of the wintry wind along the cliffs, and the screaming of the eagles from the mountain top, all spoke eloquently to the heart of the young slave of the wisdom and goodness and power of the Creator. In his humble avocation as herdsman he learned those great lessons of patience and humility which in after years constituted so much towards the success of his missionary life.

It was in this hardy climate of Ulster where he acquired that strength of body and indifference to heat and cold which enabled him in time to come to support the labors of the Episcopacy for over thirty years. But above all, it was during these long weary years of captivity, and from daily intercourse with the natives, that he obtained so thorough a knowledge of their customs, laws and language, which afterwards attracted the attention of St. Germain of Auxerre, and marked him at once as the future Apostle of our country.

After six years' captivity our Saint returned to his native France. The school of adversity had been for him one replete with the richest lessons. He had become accustomed to meditate on the hidden ways of the Almighty, and it was in those nightly meditations by the mountain slopes of Antrim that God had spoken to him, revealing the secrets of his vocation. Like Abraham, he was to leave his father's house and the home of his kindred and go to a strange land which should be pointed out to him, there to become the Apostle of a faithful people and the Father of a chosen race. Restored once more to liberty, his first thought was to prepare himself for the mission which awaited him. After having studied for years in the great monastic centres of Marmoutier and Lerins; after having accompanied St. Germain to Britain in a mission undertaken by him to extirpate the Paganian heresy in that country, our Apostle journeyed to Rome, and there, on the recommendation of the Holy Bishop of Auxerre, was commissioned by Pope Celestine to preach the Gospel to the Pagan Irish.

His friends and relatives became alarmed on hearing of his resolution to devote his life to the conversion of a race who, under the dread name of "Scots" had often carried death and destruction through the outskirts of the Roman Empire. All the means that natural affection could suggest were employed to shake his resolution. Gifts were offered, tears shed in abundance, and the most touching entreaties were addressed to him. "The grace of God," he said afterwards, "enabled me to resist them that I might preach the Gospel to the Irish nation." All the efforts of his friends proved fruitless. The will of God had been but too clearly defined in his regard. The voice of the Irish children was constantly ringing in his ears. It had often disturbed his nightly meditations in the solitude of Marmoutier, and in the holy seclusion of Lerins he still heard it. It followed him to Rome, even into the presence of Celestine, and now it rose high above the cries of even flesh and blood: "Holy youth! Divine Apostle we implore thee to come and dwell with us!" Their prayers were heard. He would come to them. Like the great patriarch of old, he would leave all to obey the voice of God.

He accordingly set out for Ireland, and arrived off the coast of Wicklow in the month of May, of the year 432. What a change had taken place in his destiny from that time when, as a humble shepherd boy and slave, he led his flocks to pasture on the hill sides of Antrim. He now appears as the prophet of a new religion, the accredited ambassador or the Most High God of the Christians to the Pagan clans of Ireland. He goes to proclaim Christian liberty where he himself had found pagan bondage, and to impose the sweet yoke of a crucified God on pagan necks which had long endured the shackles of Satan. Innisfall was now dearer to him than it could ever have been to the Phœnicians of old, who first visited its shores. Dearer than it was to the Scots who, when they beheld it from afar, framed in the rays of the setting sun, knelt reverently on the docks of their ships and thanked the Sun-God for the island home, He had given them.

Ireland was no longer to be the land of the heathen and the mother of the Sabean fire-worshipper; she was now to assume the real signification of her loveliest title: "The Isle of Destiny." Destined to be henceforward Christianity's sacred Isle and the virgin home of that Incroasted Fire which came down from Heaven, and which warms and lights every man that cometh into the world." This was the land which God had pointed out to the new Abraham. Thou shalt leave Ur-of the Chaldeans, the home of heathenry, the courtly palaces of Arian Bishops, and the high places where Nestorius and Pelagius worship; and thou shalt turn thy face to the West, to that land which I have pointed out to thee, and there I will build thee a great nation which shall be the home of light and truth amid the universal gloom, and which in time shall communicate its inherited blessing to all the nations of the earth.

Repulsed at Wicklow, he landed in Ulster, where he preached the new Gospel and made many converts. Hearing that a solemn convocation of the nobles and princes of the land would take place about Easter-tide at the Royal Palace of Tara, he resolved to go thither, and propagate the new religion in the very midst of Paganism. Sailing round the mouth of the Boyne, he proceeded up the river, and encamping on the Hill of Slane, boldly lighted the Paschal fire. Now it happened that the pagan Irish, many of whom were Sabæans, or fire worshippers, celebrated that day their greatest feast in honor of Baal, the Sun-God. It was the custom that all the fires in the province should be extinguished before the ceremonies began. When, therefore, the King beheld the strange fire on the neighboring hill he was surprised, and angrily enquired of his followers who had so presumed to disobey the royal command and violate the sacred customs of the country. An aged druid priest replied that they were strangers from a far-off land beyond the seas; and unless their fire were that night extinguished, those men who lighted it should in time reign over the whole island.

That Paschal fire, dearly beloved, of divine faith was never extinguished in Ireland. It first warmed the hearts and lighted the intelligence of that Pagan audience at Tara, and thence gradually diffused itself throughout the entire kingdom, burning everywhere the evil works of idolatry and brightening the gloom of Paganism.

After that Easter day the mission of St. Patrick was virtually at an end. The princes and nobles returned homewards from that last Sabæan feast clothed in the white baptismal robe. The Druids left the occult rites of the oak and the mistletoe to become Christian priests, and the vestal virgin of Baal, shorn of their tresses, consecrated themselves to the Sun of Justice, and cherished henceforward a newer fire—that fire of Divine Love—in the seclusion of his convent.

The Apostle labored, however, with consummate prudence. He did not rudely assail or reject customs or ceremonies which might be tolerated—thus affording a precedent which the Apostle of the Anglo-Saxons, in after years, was not slow to follow. The forests of the Druids were consecrated to Christianity, and side by side with the round-towers, and in order to share the solemn feelings which they inspired, Christian temples arose. Nor did the occupation of the bar's end with the religion by which it was created. Their services would be henceforth necessary to chant the glories of the new heroes, the Saints and Martyrs of the Catholic Church, and when once blessed and transformed (says the old chronicle) the music or their harps became so sweet that even the angels lent down from Heaven to listen to it.

But, dearly beloved, the Church does not regard only the life of the Apostle and the innumerable spiritual graces which he had received for the benefit of others. She primarily directs the eyes of her children to the many graces which St. Patrick had received for his own individual perfection, and the heroic use that he made of them to sanctify himself, lest, having preached to others, he himself might become a castaway. Though in his manifold virtue he equalled the greatest Saints of the Church, yet in his humility he surpassed even himself. He was wont to call himself "the lowliest and vilest of sinners, unworthy of the mercies of God." Like St. Paul the Apostle, and in imitation of His Divine Master, he did not disdain to work with his own hands, but would often times assist his monks and lay brothers in manual labours. But above all, he was a man of prayer. He daily recited the whole Psalter and the Canticles; and in the most hurried moments of his missionary life would always find time to raise his heart to the Almighty. At night he rose with his monks to chant the divine office, and when the others had retired he would still be found in prayer before the Tabernacle imploring the divine assistance for his own wants and the necessities of the Infant Church. He would afterwards recline on the hard floor of his cell, with a stone for his pillow, and thus would he refresh his body after the fatigues of the day and prepare his soul for the needs of the morrow.

It was this life of continual prayer and mortification which drew down upon his

labors those blessed results which remain unsurpassed in the history of the Church. That blessed life was now drawing to a close. He had truly fought the good fight, and nothing remained but to receive the crown of justice which a merciful and just Judge had in store for him. The weakness of his body increasing, he desired that he might be laid to rest in that Northern Land that he loved so well; and fortifying himself with the Divine Mysteries, he breathed his soul into the hands of his Creator. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, from henceforth now, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow them."

Coming as an Apostle in their midst, he had found our fathers sitting in the darkness of Paganism and in the shadow of idolatry—and what a change he had effected. The princes and nobles, the rich and the poor, the Druid and the bard—all had come to kneel before the altar which Patrick had erected, and to adore that God whom he adored. The idols were broken, the shades of the sacred forest were deserted, and the shrines before which their fathers bent the knee in reverence were scattered to the winds. The power of the Druids and their gods have passed away forever, and the sacred Isle of the Phœnicians, the Innisfall of the "Scots," has now become the "Isle of Saints" of the Christians.

Though dead in the flesh, the spirit of the Apostle still survived in the midst of his children. He did not leave them in poverty, but bequeathed to them the Godly inheritance of his own Christianity—and what was more, his mission of Apostle. Soon after his death his children carried his faith to the nations of Europe, and became in turn the Apostles of other races. Columba introduced Christianity amongst the kinsmen of North Britain, where he established the celebrated monastery of Iona. It was from him that Scotland has received that religious spirit which, corrupted though it has been by the foreign leaven of Geneva, still retains much that is admirable. Columbanus and his monks evangelized Southern France and Northern Italy, building monasteries and founding universities. To Switzerland Ireland has given her patron, St. Gall. Germanic races have received no fewer than 150 Irish missionaries, and in return for the double civilization of science and faith which they brought, have placed them on their altars as the Patron Saints of those churches whose foundation they have laid.

But it is not alone their missionary spirit that must commend itself to our admiration; their intellectual development of Law was still more disgraceable. Schools and Universities multiplied on every side, and strangers from all parts of Europe were received in their midst, and with that generosity characteristic of their race, were educated and clothed free of charge. "A residence in Ireland," says a learned English writer, "like a residence now at our University, was then deemed essential to literary fame." "The monasteries of Ireland," says Dr. Milner, "were the luminaries of Western Europe when the Sun of Science had almost set upon it; and it is to them, under God, that we are indebted for the preservation of the classics, the fathers, and even the Holy Scriptures."

Such was Ireland in the "Dark Ages" of European history. She was then really "the Isle of Saints and Doctors;" and religion and science, banished from the continent by the barbarian chivalry of feudal Europe, found here a peaceful asylum and a home. Thus was the life of our Saint continued, reflected and honored in the labors of his children; and when in after years our native land was tried by the sword of persecution and by the fire of religious hatred, she arose from that trial with all the constancy of the martyr's and the zeal of the Apostle.

Other nations have given isolated examples of their missionary zeal, but the glory of Ireland is infinitely greater. Not content with giving individual proofs of her religious activity, she has gone forth herself as a nation to evangelize that almost universal Empire on whose territories the sun never sets. Providence has allotted to England the conquest of the world; but her soldiers, like the Romans of old, are only the heralds of the Gospel. They prepare the way for its spiritual conquest by the Apostles from Ireland with their Catholic Religion—that religion alone which is large enough, broad enough, deep enough and strong enough to sustain the universality of the Empire to which we belong, and which it is our duty and our mission to Catholicize. That should ever be our chiefest glory—the glory of being chosen instruments in the hands of God for the propagation of the true faith amongst the different races who speak the same language.

But let us remember that such a vocation is not the subject for boasting; neither is our faith itself anything without these good works by which it should be practically manifested. It is only by example of our Christian lives and the faithful discharge of the duties which we owe to God, to ourselves, and to this the land of our birth or the home of our adoption, that our religion shall not be dishonored or reviled on our account. It was one of the reproaches frequently addressed to the Jews by their