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FATHER BURKE'S LECTURE

"St. Laurence O'Toole, the Last Canonized Saint of Ireland."

(From the N. Y. Irish American.)
The following lecture was delivered by the Rev. Father Burke, in the Brooklyn Academy of Music:—
My friends, — Coming over to Brooklyn this evening, I confess I did not expect to find so large a house as this which I have now the honor of addressing. I thought to myself that, perhaps, the subject might not be sufficiently interesting to many amongst you; for in this nineteenth century of ours, saints are rather out of fashion, and people don't take much interest in them. But your presence here, in such numbers, this evening, cheers me, and gives me another argument, if such were necessary, to be proud of my fellow-countrymen and countrywomen, who find, amidst the varied attractions of these two great cities in which they live, nothing more attractive to bring them together than the record of a saint of the Catholic Church—as true a saint and as true a patriot as ever the Island of Saints and of martyrs produced (applause).
I have had, before now, the honor to address you in this hall; but never, either here or elsewhere, have I been furnished with a nobler theme than that upon which I propose to speak to you this evening. It comes home, my friends, to your hearts and to mine; for there are two blessings for which we all thank God. The first of these is the blessing of that Catholic faith in which we live and which we enjoy; and the second is the blessing of that Irish blood which flows in our veins and throbs around our hearts (applause). When, therefore, I mention to you the name of Lawrence O'Toole, the last canonized saint of Ireland's children, I name one of the grandest figures that rises up registered upon the annals of the Catholic Church, and one of the grandest figures that passes before the historian's eye when he contemplates the great men and the great glories that make up the history of Ireland (applause). Interesting to you as Catholics, I shall endeavor to describe the saint; interesting to you as Irishmen, I shall endeavor to describe the patriot; and I shall invite you to reflect upon the great lesson that this man's name and history teaches us, namely, that the highest sanctity, upon which the Catholic Church sets the crown of her canonization, is compatible with the purest and strongest love of fatherland; and that the Catholic Church never refuses to crown the patriot in the saint, and the saint in the patriot (applause). The subject will, necessarily, oblige me to touch upon the most lamentable and dolorous part of our history. The historical muse, in tracing the record of other nations, writes with a pen dipped in characters of gold; the historical muse in writing the history of Ireland, dips her pen in tears and in blood.
Lawrence O'Toole lived in the day that witnessed his country's downfall; and he went down to his grave a young man,—only forty-five years of age. The physicians could not tell what was the malady that terminated that

glorious life; but his Irish attendants, who surrounded his death bed, in a foreign land, said to each other that he died of a broken heart. In his veins flowed the blood of Ireland's royalty. It may be new to some of you,—to many amongst you, I am sure, it is no novelty,—to tell you that the ancient form of government in Ireland subdivided the Island into four distinct kingdoms, and that the ancient Brethnael, or Celtic Constitution, recognized one supreme monarch, elected at stated periods to govern all. These kingdoms were Ulster, Leinster, Connaught, and Munster, and although each province was governed by its own chief or ruler, the king,—still under these again there were several independent chiefs, or petty sovereigns, who governed the powerful clans into which the nation was divided. The beautiful mountains and glens of Wicklow, which the traveller of to-day loves to visit, and where he beholds scenery as lovely in its pastoral beauty as any he can find upon the earth's surface,—this beautiful land of Wicklow was subject to a chieftain of the name of O'Byrne,—in possession of his sept or clan, who were all men of his own name. Even to this day, after more than a thousand years, a few of the name of O'Byrne still hold freehold property in Wicklow. Never will I forget how, in one of my trips on foot through that romantic land, there was a man pointed out to me, working in the field, as the last lineal descendant of the ancient sept, or clan of O'Byrne, who once ruled and possessed the county of Wicklow. I went over to speak to him. He was 86 years of age, tall, erect, majestic; his hair, white as silver, and combed back, fell in venerable locks upon his shoulders; his blue eye still retained somewhat of the chieftain's fire of the ages long past; and, at the age of 86, he was doing a hard day's work, suited to a young and able-bodied man. But he had the privilege,—so rare to the Irish peasant,—he was digging his own soil, the land that belonged to himself (applause). He leaned upon his spade, when I spoke to him. I asked him his name. Drawing himself up to his full height,—which was considerably more than six feet,—he answered like a hero: "My name is O'Byrne; and I am the last of them." "Of whom," I said, "do you rent your land?"—"This little spot," he answered, "into which I send this spade, was my father's before me; was his father's before him; and so on, until we go up to the time when the first of the O'Byrnes sat upon his chair in the Hall of Tara, and heard from Patrick's voice the name of Jesus Christ" (applause). The simple, poorly clad, royal peasant, in a few words, flung back his ancestry and genealogy through generations of heroes, until he reached the very fountain head of Ireland's religion and Ireland's history. Where is there a nation on the face of the earth, where the peasant, laboring in the field, can make such an answer to the casual inquirer,—tell of ancestors who wore royal crowns fifteen hundred years ago (immense applause)? Adjoining the possessions of these clans, and the mountains of Wicklow, lay, surrounding them,—the fertile plains of historic Kildare. The traveller threading down his way from the summits of the mountains of Kippure—called in the Irish language *Cearn Bawn*, or "White Head," because of the snow which almost perpetually rests upon its summit,—beholds before him the verdant plains of Kildare, in slightly-swelling, undulating hill and dale,—the richest land in Ireland, save and except the "Golden Vale" of glorious Tipperary (great applause). Through this beautiful plain, winding in and out, he sees, like a thread of silver, the river Liffey, from its rising in the mountains of Wicklow; until, after many windings and murmurings, it passes through the glens, and the romantic scenery of *Pou-na-Phouca*, finds its way to the city of Dublin, and mingles with the sea where it was reddened with the blood and covered with the corpses of the Danish invaders, when the sword of Ireland gleamed in the hand of Brian Boru (applause). These plains of Kildare were owned by an Irish chieftain named O'Toole; and, as his territories lay adjoining the septs of Wicklow, it happened that early in the twelfth century, about the year 1100, Maurice O'Toole, prince of Kildare, took as his wife a princess of the house of O'Byrne of Wicklow. God blessed their union with many children; and amongst them a fair child was born to the Kildare chieftain; and by Divine inspiration revealed by a man of God,—a holy man that travelled through the land, the child, at the baptismal font, received the name of Laurence, or, as it is in the Irish language, *Lorchan*. He was baptized before the shrine of St. Bridget, in Kildare. He was born in his father's palace, near the spot whereon now stands the town of Castledermot. In accordance with the tradition of his royal family he was sent to the shrine of Ireland's first virgin-saint. There he received the sign of his Christianity—his Christian name and his adoption into the children of God. Thence, taken once more to his fa-

ther's house, the child was reared there by his Irish mother, drawing from her breasts the pure, untainted, maternal nourishment that the mothers of Ireland have given to so many holy priests and bishops of the Church of God, that have sprung from them for fifteen hundred years (applause). Never from that mother's lips did he hear a word save what might form his young spirit,—his young heart,—in the love of Jesus Christ, his Lord (loud applause). Never did he see under that mother's roof a sight that might for an instant taint his young virgin soul. So he grew up under that mother's hand, even, with reverence be it said, as the Child of Nazareth grew under the hand of His Virgin Mother, Mary, until, when he was ten years old, the young Laurence was the delight of his father's house, the joy of that Irish father's heart, and the very idol of his pure and holy mother's bosom. When the child was ten years old, a scene occurred, alas! too frequent in the history of Ireland! War was declared against Prince Maurice O'Toole, of Kildare. His territories were invaded; his people were put to the sword; his royal palace destroyed; and he was obliged to fly with his princess wife and her child. Who was the invader? Out of this heart, consecrated to God,—out of this heart, filled with the love of Ireland,—I send my curse back seven hundred years upon the head of that invader, who was no other than the thrice accursed Dermot MacMurrough, the traitor that sold Ireland (applause). He was the king of Leinster, born in an hour accused of God and of the genius of Irish history. He was that Dermot MacMurrough who stole away the wife of O'Rourke, prince of Bretni. And, when Ireland arose, like one man, and declared that no adulterer should be allowed to live in the Island of Saints, he was that Dermot MacMurrough who fled over to England, knelt down before Henry II., and asked him to help him in Ireland, and he would lay his country enslaved and enchained at his feet. MacMurrough invaded the glens of Wicklow and the plains of Kildare in the year 1142. The Prince Maurice, unable to contend against so powerful an enemy, was obliged to come to terms of peace with him; and the very first thing that the accursed Dermot MacMurrough asked was that he should obtain possession of the young child Laurence, to be held by him as a hostage for his father. The child of ten years,—the child who had never seen evil,—the child, covered with the blessings of God, was handed over into the hands of the king of Leinster, to be treated by him as became his lineage and degree as a royal prince. For two years he remained in that captivity; and history tells us that no sooner had MacMurrough got hold of the young prince of the house of O'Toole, than he sent him into a desert part of his kingdom; the child was only allowed as much food as would keep him alive; only allowed a covering of rags sufficient to keep life in him; and for two years the young prince lived the life of a slave. It seemed as if he who was to be the last great saint of Irish blood was to go through the same probation of suffering which the Almighty God permitted to fall upon Patrick, the first great saint of Ireland's adoption.
Two years were thus spent in misery and slavery; two years in starvation, cold and want; and, during these two years, the child learned, in the school of sorrow and suffering, to despise the world; to despise his royal dignity and his royal name; to despise everything except two things; and these two things he learned to love—namely, Jesus Christ, his God, and Ireland, his country (loud applause). Oh! my friends, it is not prosperity that teaches a man the true, deep love either of his God or of his fatherland. The test of this twofold love is in suffering. The Church honors her martyrs, because they suffered for her; and I honor the man,—I do not care how different his views are from mine;—I do not care how mistaken, how rash he may have been. I honor, from my inmost soul, the man that has shown his love for his native land by suffering in her cause (enthusiastic applause). Meantime, word was brought to Prince Maurice, the father, of the treatment his son was receiving. And, now, mark here again,—for, remember, that, this evening, I am not come so much to speak of this saintly man as an individual; I am come to speak of him with all his surroundings, all his associations, as the very epitome and essence of Irish genius, Irish character and Irish history;—no sooner did the Irish father hear of the sufferings of his son, than he rose up, unprepared as he was,—unfit to make war against his powerful adversary,—he rose up; he drew his sword; he rallied the men of his name around him; and he declared war against Dermot, king of Leinster, for the recovery of the young prince. The Irish father went out like a man; went out with the embrace of his pure Irish wife; went out with his soul in his hands, to stake his life, in the day he drew his sword, for his child (enthusi-

astic applause.) He was not one of those forgetful of his own offspring, heedless of the education they receive, not caring for their sufferings,—provided he himself enjoyed his own bread and his own peace. No! He was an Irish father. He was what Irish fathers and mothers have been in every age of her chequered and sorrowful history. He was prepared to lay down his life,—to sacrifice himself and shed his blood,—rather than suffer his young child to be brought up in ignorance, in misery and in sin (applause). He forced the unwilling tyrant to restore him his boy. The graceful, beautiful child appeared before his father's eyes. He was led to that home blessed by his loving mother. O how changed from the darling child who two years before had won every heart, in all the grace, in all the beauty, in all the comeliness of a young prince, arrayed as became his dignity, with every sign of the tenderest care and the most zealous guardianship around him. How did they find him? Grown, through misery, beyond his years, he had attained almost to the stature of a man, with all the signs of suffering—the signs of emaciation, of misery and of hunger upon him; his eyes sunken in his head; his pallid face expressing only all the trials he had gone through; his head bowed down as that of a man old before his time; his beautiful figure all wasted away to a mere anatomy of man, and clad in unprincipally rags. So he appeared to them. But the Irish father, who was a man of faith, discerned the inner beauty that had come upon his son,—recognized in his dear son the sign of predestination, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly, he took him to the Abbey of Glendalough; and there he consigned him to the care of the Bishop of that ancient see. Let me say a word about this place whither the young man went to enter upon his studies at twelve years of age.
High up in the heart of the hills of Wicklow, surrounded by those towering mountains that throw their shapes in fantastic forms far up into the clouds; high up in the heart of these hills, there is a valley enclosing a deep lake surrounded by beetling rocks. There, upon the borders of that lake, there still remains an ancient round tower, and the ruins of seven churches,—nothing more. Silence reigns around. No voice is heard save the voice of the singing bird upon the hawthorn tree, or the bleating of the cattle on the sides of the distant hills; but when there was a day, a year, a century when, for many ages, that deep valley resounded to the voice of praise, from the morning watch even until night, and from the setting of the sun until the stars fled before his coming splendor in the East. Morning and night; at the midnight hour; at the rising of the sun; at the preclaiming of high-noon; at the sinking of the orb of day to his golden home in the West,—every hour was marked by the voice of praise, of benediction and of prayer, sounding forth from hundreds of Irish lips and Irish bosoms, in those happy days, when the glens and valleys of the surrounding hills were filled with the monks of old, and when from the choirs of Glendalough,—numbering from 500 to 800 monks,—the voice of praise was never silent upon the lips of the servants of God. They dwelt in their little cells, each man living in a little hut, made by his own hands, upon the mountain sides around; they came forth at stated times to public prayer in some one or another of the seven churches. They were all skilled musicians; for, as the ancient chronicler of Ireland's monasticism tells us, "It is a poor church, indeed, that is without a choir." They were skilled musicians; and, therefore, as one group finished their utterances in the divine offices of praise to God, there was another ready to take up the note and perpetuate the glorious praise. The rest of the time not given to prayer was spent in study; for the solitaries of Glendalough were not only the holiest of men, but were also the most learned men in the world, for three hundred years; and, during that time, gaird for Ireland, amongst the nations, the singular title of the "mother of saints and of scholars" (cheers). The founder of this famous seat of anchorites was the great monastic father St. Kevin; and the place where he retired to study and to pray is still pointed out,—one of the caves imbedded high up in the face of the mountains, amid the poplar forests. And the traditions of holiness and learning which St. Kevin established were perpetuated in Glendalough, not only for the three hundred years of Danish invasion and bloodshed and war. The land was desolated; but Glendalough flourished. The cathedral was in ruins; but the choir of Glendalough was vocal as before. The scholar and student fled from every sacred receptacle in the land; but the monks of Glendalough, even in the darkest hour of the Danish war, still upheld the glorious purity of Ireland's learning and of Ireland's holiness (applause). And thus, for five hundred years, the valley in the heart of the Wicklow hills was the home of the servants of God, and resounded to His

perpetual praise. So great was the importance of this monastic seat, that it was erected into an Episcopal See; and there was a Bishop of Glendalough.
Now, it was to this man that Maurice O'Toole brought his child of twelve years old. He had, besides him, several other sons, tall, strapping, brave and pious Irish youths, full of love for Ireland; full of love for its ancient, glorious history; full of love for their honored, royal name; full of love,—as every true Irishman shall be until the end of time,—full of love for their holy religion and for the Catholic Church of Ireland (applause.) These young princes came with their father to Glendalough; and, as all stood around the Bishop, the warrior prince said to him: "My Lord, here are my sons. I want to give one of them to God. They are all willing; and I must cast lots to find which of them the Lord will choose for His own service in the sacerdotal state." While the father was deliberating, out stepped the young but chastened and sanctified Laurence. "Oh, father!" he said, "the lot is already cast in Heaven; and it has fallen upon me. I, Laurence, belong to God, and to Him alone. I have known His support in the days of my misery and my exile. I have fed upon His love in the days of my wretchedness and my hunger. I have separated my heart from all other love, save that of my God in Heaven and my fellow-countrymen upon the earth. To that God and to Ireland will I devote myself. Let me be the Priest" (applause). And, my friends, right well did he express, in this determination, and in this choice, the true love of a true-hearted man,—for God and for his country. Let no man deceive you; the best lover of God and of his country is the Priest. The man who, in the days of his youth, in the days of his awakening passions, in the days when nature makes her loud demand for enjoyment,—the man who then says, "I will sacrifice my heart, my affections, my life, my body, and my soul," for whom? For God alone? No; for he does not go into the desert; he goes out amongst his fellow-men; he grasps every man by the hand with a loving grasp, and he says, "I belong to God and to you" (applause.) No man is so consecrated to his fellow-men as the Priest; because he comes to them with a consecration from God. There is no man upon whom the people can fall back, as they can upon the Priest; for no matter what angel of pestilence may stalk in the midst of them,—no matter what demon may scatter death or destruction around them,—every man may fly; the Priest alone must not, dare not, cannot fly, because he is sold to God and to his neighbor (applause).
In the day, therefore, that the young prince said, "I renounce my principality; I renounce the prospect of reigning amongst my people; I renounce the glory of the battle, the praise of the minstrel, and the luxury of the palace; all I ask is the hut upon the mountain side in Glendalough,—my God above me, and my country around me;"—in the day that he said that, he gave proof that, amongst the sons of the Kildare chieftain there was not one that loved his God and Ireland as he did (applause.) How well that love was tested we shall see.
The father, like an Irish father, gave up, willingly, the son whom he loved best of all; for it is the peculiarity of Irish parents to give to God the best that they have, and give it cheerfully; because "God loveth a cheerful giver." I have seen in other lands, in France and Italy, young men asking to be admitted to the priesthood, and the father and mother saying, "How can we give him up? How can we sacrifice our child?"—trying to keep him back, with tears and entreaties. Oh, my friends! when I witnessed that, I thought of the old woman, in Galway, who had no one but me,—her only son; I thought of the old man, bending down towards the grave, with the weight of years upon him; and I thought of the poverty that might stare them in the face when their only boy was gone; and yet no tear was shed; no word of sorrow was uttered; but, with joy and with pride, the Irish father and the Irish mother knew how to give up their only son to the God that made him (great applause—renewed again and again).
Laurence bade adieu to his father and his brothers; they bent their steps down the slopes of the neighboring hills unto their own principality; and he took possession of the Monk's cell, at Glendalough. For thirteen years he remained, a model of the most exalted sanctity, even to the aged ones who were versed in sanctity. They knew what was demanded of the Monk and the consecrated Priest; they knew by old-time experience—the experience of years,—how complete the sacrifice of the heart must be. But the presence of the young prince amongst them as he came forth in his monastic habit, with his eyes cast to the ground; and his face radiating and shining with the love of God, that, borne forth from his heart, came like rays from the brightness of Heaven falling in light around him;—they saw in that