

Irish Architecture and Irish Monks

By "CRUX."

FOR a moment we will leave the question of the Irish language, as an evidence of the civilization and education of the Irish each in years when Europe was still steeped in barbarism, and turn to another evidence of Ireland's past greatness—a greatness that was due to the Catholic faith she possessed and the men who taught and practised that faith. I refer to the architecture of Ireland and of Western Europe in the earlier centuries of our era. This is not exactly the place to bring in this subject, but as it forms a link in the chain, and must be used later on in connection with the story of Irish literary achievement and the importance of the Gaelic tongue, it may be as well to here dispose of it.

I will commence with quotations from Mooney's History and Lectures, in which he traces the Irish monks, step by step, through Europe, erecting churches and forming religious congregations everywhere. Before, however, entering upon the footsteps of these monks, it may serve our purpose to have a few general ideas concerning the subject of architecture.

Every architect, every artist, every scholar, will at once admit that great public edifices, whether civil, military, or ecclesiastical, and the richly-constructed palaces of princes and wealthy men, can alone come under the denomination of "architecture." In the erection of such edifices, a knowledge of arithmetic, geometry, and mathematics,—of the laws of gravity and equilibrium, of chemistry and the nature of metals—is absolutely required, not only in the master workman, but in his men; and this remark applies more especially to the erection of arched Irish architecture; in the whole of which nothing but stone is used, even to the window frames, mullions, and diminutive interfections. The starting of those stone arches from side walls, and buttresses, and columns; the intersecting of them, again and again, with flying arches of the same solid material; the poisoning in the air hundreds of tons of stone, supporting each other by the nicest calculated powers of gravity and equilibrium; the poisoning and binding them together, that the shocks of a thousand years are not sufficient to disturb them—these are requirements which such semi-savage tribes as the inhabitants of the continent of Europe, in the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh centuries, did not, it is admitted, possess. They could not write and knew nothing of mathematical calculations. Ages and ages pass over the heads of an ignorant race before they can be brought to the condition of learners, reasoners, thinkers or calculators.

Architecture could not have grown amongst the inhabitants of the West of Europe until they were first educated, because it is the result of a combination of learned acquirements. We will see in the pages of history how, during those early centuries, swarms of educated monks went out of Ireland in every direction, carrying with them knowledge, piety, and industry, which they devoted, agreeably to the precepts of their religion, to the exaltation of their fellow-men.

Every architect and scholar knows that these monks were the workmen who built all the churches of Europe for five hundred years; they were the architects, the masons, the carpenters, the plumbers, the smiths, the glass-makers, the sculptors, the painters. A great many societies of these holy men joined together for the purpose of erecting churches and bridges, from motives of pure charity to others, in obedience to a strong religious feeling; of course,

this is incredible to the great masses of vulgaritry, who continue to call the monks "lazy," in defiance of the literary and scientific monuments they have left behind. But scholars know that the stone bridges and churches throughout Europe, which were erected in the tenth century, were all built by the hands, and under the direction, exclusively, of the monks; nay, more, there was not a single want of mankind, or a mode by which they could be benefited, that these calumniated men did not combine into associations to supply. Were youth to be educated, they were the teachers; were the poor to be relieved, they were the almoners; were books to be written, or translated, or multiplied, they performed the work; were the sick to be tended, they were the physicians and visitors; were widows and orphans to be provided for, the monks were their guardians; were travellers to be protected, guided, and entertained—the monks formed associations to perform this humane duty; were bridges to be erected over impassable fords and rivers, these men combined to build them,—the noblest bridge in all Europe, that of Avignon, over the Rhine, was erected by the labor and collections of these charitable monks; were churches, monasteries, and schools to be built, they formed into holy brotherhoods for the purpose. If this is not true, then the history of Europe is a huge lie!

We now come to some of the works of the Irish monks as Mooney records them—gleaning his record from most authentic sources.

The first Christian edifice erected for divine worship, in England, was built by Irish architects at Withern, in the year 603. "For the Anglo-Saxons," says Bede, "were partly converted to Christianity by Irish missionaries before the arrival of St. Austin in 597." The same architects who built Withern were then employed to build old St. Paul's, in London, in 610, on the site of the temple of Diana, Turner, and other English historians, say that St. Wilfrid, Bishop of York, who built the Church of Hexham, in 674, sent to Ireland for architects to construct it. Dr. Milner, an Englishman, remarks, "Can we suppose that the tutors of the English, French and Germans, in the learned languages, the sciences and music, as the Irish are known to have been during four centuries, were incapable to build plain round towers of stone?" In the island of Hy (Iona), St. Columbkille and his Irish monks built the famous monastery, from which the north of England was instructed in architecture, literature and Christianity. "The monastery of Lindisfarne was built," says the Royal English Encyclopaedia, "by Irishmen, under St. Finan, in the beginning of the sixth century." The monastery of Malmesbury was founded and built by the Irish monk Maildolphus in the seventh century. It is the oldest existing building in England of that style, and, according to the English Elmes, displays all the main features of arched architecture, which is now called Gothic. Gallus, an Irish monk, built the monastery of St. Gall, in Switzerland, in connection with which several other monasteries afterwards subsisted, about the year 630. Dichuill, an Irish monk, built the monastery of Luttwia, in France, and received grants of lands from the French monarch Clotaire the Second, in 650. The monastery Centula, in Ponthed, was built by Caidoc, to whom a splendid tomb was erected, on which was engraven: "To whom Ireland gave birth, and the Gaelic law a grave." St. Fursa, from Ireland, built the monastery of Lagny, near

the river Marne, in France, in 650. In Brabant, the brothers of this saint, Ultan and Foillan, built a monastery, called "The Monastery of the Irish." St. Fridolin fixed himself and his monks on the then uninhabited island in the Rhine, called Seckingen, where he built a monastery, in 590. Prince Dagobert, of Strasburg, in the seventh century, who, like many other German and Saxon princes, was educated in Ireland, brought with him several Irish monks, who built churches throughout his dominions. The Irish Virgilius raised the splendid Basili of Salzburg, in 750.

The great Church of Europe, erected by Charlemagne, at Aix-la-Chapelle, was built by Irish monks from the Abbey of St. Gall; and the architect erected an Irish round tower, in memory of his fatherland, the only one to be seen on the continent.

The most distinguished specimen of old Gothic architecture, in Portugal, is the church of the convent of Batalia, which was constructed by an Irish architect. (See Hoskings, in Adam's and Black's Arts, Edinburgh edition, page 21).

"Who, sir," says the English Dr. Milner, "were the luminaries of the western world when the sun of science had almost set upon it? Who were the instructors of nations during four whole centuries, but the Irish clergy? To them you are indebted for the preservation of the Bible, the Fathers, and the Classics; in short, of the means by which you yourselves have acquired whatever literature you possess."

The Church of St. Peter's, at Oxford, built by Alfred the Great, was copied from Cormac's Chapel, at Cashel; Salisbury Cathedral is the first complete erection of the pointed arch style that was built in England, finished in 1258, was a copy of Holy Cross, in Ireland, built one hundred and fifty years earlier. Painted glass was not introduced into England until about the year 1250, nor generally till 1400, though it was common in Ireland four hundred years before. It has been contended that this arched and pointed architecture was introduced to Europe by the crusaders or the Knights Templars. Yet they had it in Ireland in the ninth and tenth centuries, whereas the Crusaders did not return from the East till the twelfth century; nor were the Knights Templars established until 1148, and the first church they built of their own, at Paris, was in 1222.

If the structures of Ireland are not as colossal as those of her neighbors, it should be remembered that they built them from their own resources, and by their own labor. The palaces of pagan Rome were built by the captives she dragged thither from all nations; but Ireland never built her churches or edifices by the pillage of any other people. Her churches and temples were built to worship in them the true God. Their aspect, as they look down upon us in placid grandeur, is sublime. Every aisle, every column, arch and porch, every window, proclaim them houses of prayer. A Hottentot, if brought into one of these ruins, would pronounce it a house of the "Great Spirit." The Grecian was the style for state and revelry, the Irish for prayer. The elements of the Irish are spires, pinnacles, lofty arched and painted windows, and elevation, as opposed to the square, angular, flat and horizontal style of the Greeks.

In truth Ireland, before her fall in the twelfth century, brought this arched and pointed style to the highest desirable perfection, uniting in itself the three great essentials of architecture, strength, grace and richness.

possesses at the top of its hierarchy the great ordering power which marks the strict distinctions between weaknesses and crimes, and practises in a sovereign way the policy of compromise, that great art of diplomacy." There is, in this one passage, the assertion of a great truth and the advancement of a grave error. In the first part he tells of the "great ordering power" at the head of the Church's hierarchy. That is the Vicar of Christ, and his infallible authority; no doubt that is "the incomparable merit" of the Church, and the strongest evidence of her Divine mission. But, when he says that she "practises the policy of compromise" he either commits a grave error, or else he leaves it open for others to fall into that error. In matters of Faith and of morals the Church knows no compromise. Exactly the opposite has been her principle from the very beginning. It is impossible for her to accept any compromise; the powers of earth and furies of below have been unable to bend her to compromise. Not the terrors of the Flavian amphitheatre, nor the secret machinations of the sectaries could induce or compel her to compromise the most infinitesimal particle of her dogmas, or of the laws given her by Christ.

But, it would seem, by the closing words of that paragraph, which style that compromise "the great art of diplomacy," that the correspondent merely uses the term in connection with the Church's policy of government, or administration—a policy which is not affected by the infallibility of the Church Head. If such be the case, we cannot offer such a pointed denial, for, in matters of purely diplomatic government, and when dealing with the various civil Powers of the world, the Church exercises no infallible prerogative. She is not likely to err, on account of the wisdom and statesmanship of her visible Head on earth, and of those who form his council; but, she is obliged to use the weapons that her opponents use, in order to compete with them in the arena diplomacy. Still the broad assertion of "Innominate" is calculated to impress the untrained mind with the idea that the Church can compromise in everything. Those not of the Catholic faith, as a rule, confound dogmatic teaching with ecclesiastical government, and apply to the one that which can only be made applicable to the other.

Later on in the same letter we read:—"A mysterious game is being played by M. Combes and the Pope, the closest of games of chess, in which the fate of France and perhaps the near future of the Papacy are at stake. Who will win?" We do not find fault with the term "game;" but we cannot agree that the idea of the warfare between the Vatican and the enemies of the Papacy suggests a game of chess, or any other kind of game. A game presupposes two or more antagonistic players; and it supposes each one of them an adept in the same arts and methods. Looked at in this light, it is evident that the Pope is not shifting his pieces around upon the chess-board of diplomacy, merely to check-mate M. Combes. But the grave mistake we find here, is the suggested possibility of the Papal cause ultimately meeting with defeat. What is more, the writer plainly states that "the future of the Papacy" is at stake. Had he said that the future position of the Church in France were in the balance we could understand it; but the future of the Papacy cannot be affected by any such opposition. The past, the present, and the future of the Papacy rest upon the direct promise of Christ that "the Gates of Hell shall not prevail" against that institution. And were M. Combes to finally succeed in all he has planned; were the Church to be uprooted in France (and it would not be the first time); were the entire French nation, government and all, to vanish from the face of the earth, or to be transformed into a power antagonistic to the Church still the Papacy would go on, just as it has gone on for twenty centuries. Such obstacles may appear grave in the eyes of the world's statesmen, but they are mole-hills compared to the Alpine ranges that the Church has had to encounter and scale during the lapse of centuries. And the Papacy the most triumphant epochs in her history. Decidedly the future of the Papacy is not at stake, nor can it ever be brought into question. M. Combes may succeed for a time, "but in the very banquet of his triumph the Almighty's decree will be seen upon the wall, and the sceptre of power will be snapped in the hand of the tyrant and renegade."

Hence, while we are deep in our admiration of "Innominate's" gifts and principles, we cannot shut our eyes to his occasional errors.

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France and the Vatican

(By an Occasional Correspondent.)

In his Roman letter, of November 6th, to the New York "Sun," the now universally known correspondent "Innominate" has touched upon one of the most important questions of the day. He deals with the differences between France and the

Vatican. In describing the policy of silence that the Pope has adopted, and the desire of Combes to drive the Sovereign Pontiff to some hostile movement that could be used as an excuse for the destruction of the Concordat, the correspondent seems to have gauged the situation to a nicety. He also draws attention to the differences existing between Combes and Loubet, that is to say, between the Radical anti-clerical branch of the Republican Government and the more moderate, rational and democratic one.

While we have great admiration for "Innominate's" ability, and while we recognize the fact that he writes for a purely secular press, still we cannot but be impressed with his rather looseness of expressions in regard to certain matters affecting the Catholic Church. As we have been told by the "Sun," this correspondent is a priest, we conclude that his peculiar language is not the result of any misconception, on his part, of the subjects treated, but rather of a desire to keep on a level with his readers. It may be said that our

criticism of "Innominate's" language resembles hair-splitting; but, in the couple of instances we wish to point out, we do not think that any such narrowness can be attributed to us. In fact, we deem the matters elementary, at least for a Catholic theologian, and we consider that the correspondent's modes of expression open a regular avenue of doubt and uncertainty; in other words, his expressions belie his own convictions. For example, he says, in one part of that letter—"It is the incomparable merit of Catholicism that it

differs between France and the