

IRELAND ITS RELIGION AND ITS CULTURE

The following lecture has just been received for publication. The sender accompanies the manuscript with the following laudatory remarks, which our readers will doubtless endorse in so far as at least as cold type can take the place of a magnetic presence and the living voice:

"Enclosed I hand you verbatim report of a magnificent lecture that was delivered here in Thorold last St. Patrick's night by Rev. Father Walsh, Professor of Rhetoric at Niagara University, Niagara Falls, N.Y. The lecture as given by the brilliant speaker, was a gem. His youthful personal appearance, his magnificent voice and gestures, all combined to make it a most charming address. If not too lengthy, I should like to see it published in your paper."

Rev. Father Walsh said: Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,—I must say that I really feel it a pleasure in being able to be with the people of Thorold again this evening. The first visit, which was more or less memorable for me and perhaps more or less memorable for you, was certainly a joy, and I suppose the best proof of that joy is the fact that it is a joy to be here again with you this evening, and I do not know any occasion upon which it would give me greater joy than the one we wish to commemorate this evening, because St. Patrick's Day has ever been celebrated, and will always be celebrated, by the loyal sons and daughters of that great Isle which they fondly call Mother.

The subject upon which I have chosen to address you this evening is not a new one, however, whilst it is very true we live in the present, we can never forget the past. Some of the sweetest joys of life are those which link us to a happy past, a past which was happy while it lasted, and even a past, though not perhaps too happy while it existed, grew happy in the light of the present; and indeed it is a noble sentiment which makes us turn our mind from the present and look back and admire those things which in the past are set up for our admiration, and to try and mould our lives and thoughts so that as heirs of the past, we may be able to transmit to posterity something they may be able to look back upon with pleasure and joy. It is a mark of a noble mind to do this and it is certainly a mark of great nobility in the Irish race that year after year it looks back and commemorates the great achievements of its past.

Year after year as the 17th of March comes around the loyal children of Erin, wherever they are, send up one grand chorus of prayer and praise in honor of that great hero who transmitted to them the great faith they possess; and so we come to night to lead out little mite of praise to try and swell the grand chorus that ascends to great St. Patrick, and to try and make him feel that we are still his children in loyalty and love.

To come at once to the subject of Ireland's religion and culture, we are face to face with the fact that was before St. Patrick when he first set his foot on Irish soil. The island was pagan; the worship was not worship of the true God because he was not known in that fair land, the worship was the worship of nature, viz., the skies, the sun, and chief of all, the stars of the heavens. Now right here we may say that this is the noblest form of paganism because when a man does not know God, does not know the nature of the God Whom we have the happiness to know, it is very natural that he would look out on the world before him and be led to fall down and worship what he sees as his God. That worship of nature prepared the people to see the nature of the true God when the teachings were presented to them. There is something in nature that appeals to every noble mind and heart.

There is an element of greatness in one that can look back of nature and see the Author of nature, and indeed it is not strange that the early Irish race from their characteristics, should fall down and worship those silent orbs which live a quiet life. It was the starry heavens that the early Irish people knelt down to adore and since then, when we have come to know God, we, too, must admit a fascination in nature; as for instance when out for a walk on a starry night our eyes often turn towards the heavens and we are fascinated with the great works of nature. This idea permeated all literature and it is one of the noblest things in nature, and from it we are led to learn great spiritual lessons.

After all, what do we mean by the grandeur and greatness of nature? We mean God's handiwork, the beauty of the ocean, of the stars, and sunset, and therefore it is that the psalmist, telling human hearts to

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praise the Maker, does not forget the works of nature and says "Bless the Lord, ye Stars of Heaven," and bids them unceasingly to sing silent songs of praise.

Shakespeare has given us one of the most beautiful passages in all his works in the Merchant of Venice, in the scene where Lorenzo says to Jessica:

"How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank! Here will we sit and let the sounds of music Creep in our ears; soft stillness and the night Becomes the touches of sweet harmony."

Sit, Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold; There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdest But in its motion like an angel sings, Still quiring to the young-ey'd cherubims."

I need go no farther than to recall to your minds the fascination of the human heart when going along on a starry night.

The priests or ministers of worship in the olden times to which I refer, were called Druids, and closely related to these were the Bards. These tuned their harps to hymns in praise of the God whom they worshipped and adored.

When St. Patrick came to Ireland, at the inspiration of Heaven, the condition which I have described is that which was presented to him and it was something like that to St. Paul when he entered Athens. St. Paul saw the different temples erected to this and to that god, and among them being one to the unknown God. That gave him a text and he said to the people that "while journeying in Athens I saw a temple erected to the unknown God and this is the God whom I have come to preach to you." So it might be said of St. Patrick that when he came to Ireland he came to preach to them the real God whom they did not know. When persons do not have the knowledge of the true God they must recognize some power behind nature.

There were some early attempts to Christianize Ireland before St. Patrick came, but they did not prove great results as the opposition of the Druids and Bards was so great that those who attempted the work left Ireland, having accomplished little. It was God's design to have St. Patrick go to Ireland and try to Christianize the people there, and this was St. Patrick's destiny.

For some years St. Patrick was a slave in Ireland and went to France for his education. While there studying he could see the Irish people calling to him to come back to preach to them. St. Patrick did come back and established a mission whose effects and results have been felt, and will be just as long as time will last.

The great feast in the pagan worship of Ireland was a festival of the Sun God and when St. Patrick and his followers first landed they found it was just about time to celebrate this festival of the Sun God, which was to be held on Easter Sunday. The day before, Holy Saturday, St. Patrick lighted that fire on the Hill of Tara. It was immediately noticed by the kings and chieftains. The light from the fire caused great commotion throughout the land, because the oracle ran that if any fire were lighted before the signal was given, it would spread and grow until it consumed the whole island. The prophecy was truer than was thought. The fire that St. Patrick did light that Saturday afternoon, did spread over that whole land, but in a different sense than seen by the kings of the island. The fire was a spiritual fire and it expanded and covered the whole island, however the fault was a grievous one from the pagan standpoint. St. Patrick and his followers were summoned before the king immediately and St. Patrick boldly and fearlessly proclaimed their mission, so boldly, in fact, that the king invited him to come again on Easter Sunday morning to explain this mission more fully. On Sunday morning St. Patrick appeared before the king and gave him and his immediate followers a beautiful exposition of paganism and Christianity, and so deeply did St. Patrick's words sink into their hearts that some of them were converted, among them being the king's wife, the brother of the king, and the chief Bard. The king was not converted at that time, but gave to St. Patrick permission to go through the land and preach Christianity to the people.

There is no parallel in all history of any nation accepting Christianity as did Ireland. In most cases throughout history it was at the price of slaughter and blood and it has often been quoted that the blood of martyrs was the seed of Christianity. But here in Ireland, unparalleled, the faith was planted without the shedding of a single tear, or the running of a drop of blood. It is unique and not to be lost sight of in the destiny of Ireland. When looking into the early ways of Ireland we are not surprised to find things just as related, but had St. Patrick come to preach to some of the northern people of Europe it would have been a far different task.

We are told that when St. Patrick addressed the king and the chieftains of Ireland, he addressed a more noble band than did the great St. Paul, on the Hill of Mars. Here were people that were true in the worship they professed; here were people strong in their belief; here were people dwelling beneath the light of the stars and everywhere looking for vestiges of the lost Divinity. St. Patrick did not have to convert the moral natures of these people. He preached to people who were not demoralized with those terrible forms of Pagan worship which characterized the people of the southern part of Europe. St. Patrick faced a band of

men; a race who were noble in the dignity of their manhood, and the wonderful purity of their womanhood; therefore it was not hard to preach the doctrine St. Patrick came to preach. He simply appealed to their minds, because their moral nature was correct.

It took but a few years to convert the whole of Ireland. Even in the lifetime of St. Patrick Ireland became one continual train of churches and monasteries, and there was not a hill which did not echo to prayer and praise. By the end of the sixth century there was not a spot which had not got off the worship of ancient Paganism and donned the robe of Christianity. It is characteristic of the human heart when it is appealed to, not to be content to rest in its joy. When Ireland had left the glory and beauty of Christianity, they were not content to let it rest with themselves. Charity begins at home but it does not rest at home. Irish missionaries went forth in all the countries of Europe and spread the doctrine, carrying forth a torch of the true religion which St. Patrick had so generously bestowed on them.

History tells us that there was not a nation in all Europe that was not indebted to Ireland for its spirit and work. These countries to-day, which I have mentioned, preserve relics in memory of the days when the Irish missionaries spread through the land with teachings of the true religion? However it is something indeed to so generously receive religion that was imparted to them, but it is much more to retain it, and this has been characteristic of the Irish race, to preserve the religion which St. Patrick taught to them.

Fidelity is characteristic of the Irish people. Fidelity in all lines, particularly in religion. I believe we can reckon the worth of a man or woman by the fidelity to his or her convictions. We must admire the man who sticks to a principle; he may be wrong, he may be ignorant, but if he firmly believes a thing and sticks to it, he is a man. This is what I claim of Ireland, therefore we all admire her. After all, if we want to know what is a nation we have to look to what is a man; a nation is an aggregate of men.

Ireland received her religion from St. Patrick. She found it adapted to her noblest sentiments; she found it answered all the wants and cravings of her soul; she believed she was right and through all circumstances she clung to that, and that is what we must admire. Some might say she was wrong, still we have to admire Ireland, believing she was right; she clung to it through evil and good reports, and through all manner of suffering.

Now there is another point which I think worth mentioning, and it is the fact that in the fidelity to the religion which was preached to Ireland, there was nothing selfish, nothing ungenerous. One familiar with history may have noticed a national spirit creep into religion in some countries. In France we find that spirit tried to creep into the churches and they tried to make them French churches, but Ireland never did this. She was never surpassed in her loyalty to her creed and for all that, her fidelity did not want to make the church her own coloring. She received it as given to her and did not try to change it. That is characteristic of Ireland and perpetuates a sort of fidelity, a sort of true, real genuine spirit.

Love is tested by suffering. It is harder to be faithful in sorrow than in love, yet when we turn to the Divinity of sorrow, we must realize that there is nothing great throughout the realm of nature that has not about it a tinge of sorrow. All nature preaches this doctrine. Why? What would the sunshine be without the shadow? If all days were sweet and balmy and fragrant with the breath of flowers, we would not appreciate them. As for instance a night like to-night, stormy, and bitterly cold, makes us appreciate a nice warm sunny day. So about all great things; there is a tinge of sorrow. Throughout all art there is that. We find we are not so much impressed by joy as by sorrow. It is not the smile, it is the tear that moves us. If so with individuals, it is so with nations. Because smiles do not sink deep into the human nature, but tears do, and the soul mourns, there is more capability of nobility in a tear than in a smile.

The smile has its place, which is to brush away a tear, but it is the tear that counts; so it was with Ireland; she should shed her tear. She should suffer. She suffered for a principle and that is a point I want you to admire her for. I need not go into detail to tell you what she suffered, but I simply want to impress upon you that she suffered for her convictions. We must admire any man who sticks to his convictions, so we must admire Ireland. We must admire, also, the man who suffers and dies for his convictions. That shows there is something more great than life, to die a martyr for a cause. Think of the soldier when leaving his home, his wife and children, to fight for his country; he feels proud to die for his country, yet look at the sacrifice he has made. So it is there is a heroism about suffering for a cause. This is the point we must admire about Ireland. This is the cause which she suffered for and which she believed to be right, therefore we should honor her.

To come to the point of Ireland's culture, we notice at the very outset that culture goes hand in hand with religion, at least true culture. It has been said that manners are "shadows of great nobility." I believe we must realize this; if we have a noble, upright heart we cannot wound our fellow-man. Knowledge is the greatest boon to the race, after religion. We all feel the desire to know. It is the greatest gift to the race after religion, and histories of the world state that knowledge and religion have always gone hand in hand. We find Ireland no excep-

tion to this and when the missionaries from Ireland left their homes and land to spread religion, we may also say that they went to spread abroad knowledge.

If I were to ask the smallest child what was his destiny; why was he here; he would tell me it was to know, to love and serve God. We cannot love if we do not know. The more we know about it, taking for granted it be a good thing, the more we must love it. Love is in proportion to knowledge and therefore, we can see that when these noble-hearted missionaries took abroad the torch of religion and the torch of knowledge, they contributed a great boon to the race.

It was said by historians that up to the time of the ninth century, there was not a country in western Europe that was not indebted to Ireland for its knowledge. Alfred the Great finished his education in Ireland and took back with him some of the monks of Oxford. At that time professors in Divinity, in History and in Literature, were Irish. We are told that scholars flocked to Ireland in droves, came from all parts of Europe to slack their thirst for knowledge; so all of the western part of Europe was really indebted to this Isle for their knowledge, and it looked for a time as though Celtic Christianity was to be spread abroad with the flame of knowledge.

The coming of St. Patrick to Ireland was coeval with another great event in the southern part of Europe. The Roman Empire controlled the whole of the known world at that time. It was the policy of the government of Rome to permeate every form of government. Rome was mistress of the world at that time but in the fifth century where was Rome—Rome had fallen. The barbarians of the north of Europe swept down on the southern part and burnt monasteries, churches and everything that lay before them. From a practical standpoint, it seemed as though the old City of Alexandria would be the place for the storehouses of knowledge; but no, the sagacity of the Popes was too keen to trust all knowledge of the past to Alexandria, and they saw well, because within one hundred years Alexandria was burned to the dust. Alexandria, the famous old city, was ruined and the seat of knowledge would have been destroyed if this had been made the storehouse of knowledge. To England and to Ireland did the Popes transfer all this knowledge; those famous old manuscripts and documents were all placed there. So up to the ninth century, Ireland and England played an important part in the preservation of knowledge. It shows that there is something destined for a nation as well as for an individual, and history has proved the wisdom of that fact because we are to-day indebted to that learning preserved by the Islands of the North.

Here Ireland has played a wonderful part. Ireland's poetry and music are far famed. There is something in their nature that preserves them. The harp has played a wonderful part in the history of Ireland. Whilst we all have not power to give forth our feelings in poetry, or to sing them, it is at the same time true we are all poets and musicians, and it is very true of the Irish race. The Bards used their instruments, the harp, and they tuned them to the hymn of their nation. The Bards of Ireland sang laws and all things commemorative to their race. The harp emblazons the Irish flag. Even to-day we will find the harp as the national emblem of Ireland, and we can go back of this and see a wonderful career beyond in the history of Ireland. During the middle ages the great painters placed lyres in the hands of their many subjects.

We can hardly think of music without thinking of poetry; in fact, they are very much allied, and when Thos. Moore set words to music under the name of Irish melodies, he but used the old melodies that came down through the ages and gave them words. His idea was this, that song was only half a being and he called words the heart of the soul, and so he used it, and the Irish melodies as we have them to-day are simply words set to the old music that had been hummed and hummed. There is no race more musical than the Irish race, and it is said it is a characteristic of them in all their occupations to hum some little sentiments which commemorate something great in their race. Ireland—hers was inspiration and there is much in her life that would appear to anyone who had poetical inspirations, that nature certainly blessed Ireland. Of course we cannot think of poetry without thinking of nature. We cannot look out upon nature, upon the glowing sun and the setting sun; we cannot look out upon the beautiful marvels in the heavens, clouds made so by the glow of sunlight in the heavens, without letting those deep lessons sink in our hearts and being deeply thrilled. Wordsworth tells us that many there are that have the feelings of a poet, who have deep appreciation of the deep sense of beauty in nature, but have not power to express it. Ireland was consecrated by sorrow and this, too, was the source of her inspiration. Some of the deepest sentiments are those of sorrow. So Ireland being consecrated by sorrow, there is really a poetic

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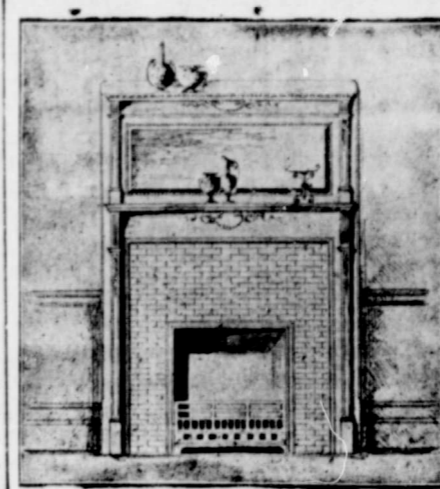
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