

ST. PATRICK, THE APOSTLE OF IRELAND.

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St. Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland, is one of the greatest names in the long annals of the Christian Church. His character was so noble, his aims so pure, his writings so truly Catholic in tone and so evangelical in sentiment that his personality and teaching ought to be of living and permanent interest to all Christians.

The birthplace of St. Patrick is not definitely known, although the consensus of opinion seems to point to a place near Dumbarton, in Scotland. Lingard, the eminent Roman Catholic historian, thought that he was born in France. But Professors Sullivan, Stokes, Kurtz or Dr. Wright and D'Arcy McGee think that it was in Scotland.

His father, as he declares himself, was Calpornius, a deacon, who was a son of Potitus, a presbyter of the church. His father was also a magistrate.

There has been so much confusion in names connected with St. Patrick that some have been led to doubt his existence. There are at least four or five Patricks famous in the early history of the Irish Church. Our saint has been confused with at least seven different persons. But there can really be no question as to his personality, and that he was an historical personage. His writings have come down to us. There is a MS. treasured in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, which is at least 1000 years old, and is in all probability in the handwriting of St. Patrick himself.

St. Patrick had four names. His real name given in baptism was Succat. Patrick was the name taken at ordination, a name which was not uncommon, and which means one of noble birth.

St. Patrick was taken as a captive and sold into slavery in Ireland in early youth. His master was Milchu, King of Dalradia, and Patrick was made a herdsman, and watched his master's cattle on Mt. Slamish, near Ballymena, County Antrim. He spent seven years in the quiet seclusion of a herdsman's life, and, like David of old, communed with

God under the silent stars. It was, no doubt, then that he nursed his great spiritual ambition to bring spiritual liberty to the Irish, who were then nearly all Pagans. His escape from slavery made his dream a possibility.

It was when he was with his parents and kindred, after his escape from Ireland, that he received his great missionary call, which has been compared to the great Macedonian cry which reached the ear of St. Paul. In a vision of the night he tells us that Victorinus appeared to him bearing many epistles. The first read, "The voice of the Irish." He heard a cry: "We pray thee, holy youth, to come and henceforward walk among us." On another night he heard a voice, whether within or without he could not say: "He who gave His life for thee is He who speaks to thee," and he woke with unspeakable joy.

His preparation for the work of the ministry is wrapped in obscurity. There is no record in St. Patrick's own writings of the character of his preparation, save his testimony that he was a missionary by the grace of God. The legend that he studied under St. Martin, of Tours, falls to the ground before the fact that St. Martin was then dead. The legend that St. Patrick was sent to Ireland by Pope Celestine arose from a confusion of his name with Palladius, who was sent to Ireland by the Pope, but who met with but little success, and was not the Apostle of the Irish. It is probable that St. Patrick studied under Germanus of Auxerre, and that he was there ordained priest and bishop.

The dream of his life was realized when he landed at the mouth of the Vartry in Wicklow on his mission to Ireland. He was met in an unfriendly spirit, for he landed amidst a shower of stones from the hostile natives. St. Mantan, his companion, had his front teeth knocked out. But nothing daunted St. Patrick, and he preached Christ to them. He sailed northward, and landed at Downpatrick. He made his first convert in the person of Dichu, a chieftain, who gave his barn for a church. The place has ever since been consecrated by Christian worship. He journeyed

then to Antrim, to the place of his captivity, but Milchu, his former master, under the influence of the Druid priests, burned his household goods and perished himself in the flames. He now determined to attack the stronghold of heathenism at Tara, where King Laoghaire had gathered the Irish chiefs in conference. Patrick's paschal fire on the Hill of Slane was a bold challenge to the king who had commanded that no fire be lit that night until his own shone out from Tara's hill. But in the conflict between Patrick and the heathen king and priests, Patrick triumphed, and many were baptized in the faith of Christ, the king amongst the number. Seven years were spent next in Connaught. Then he founded the Metropolitan Church of Ireland at Armagh. Seven years were then spent in the South. Thus Patrick traversed nearly the whole of Ireland, calling the people together by the beating of a drum, and preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ.

St. Patrick's missionary zeal was unbounded. Like Basil, he was "afire for God." He was consumed with an intense and yearning love for souls. Yet he was always prudent and discreet. As Tillemont points out, he resembled St. Paul as a missionary and in his love for the Scriptures.

He founded schools and colleges. As Froude said, "their religion burned like a star in Western Europe." Soon the time came

"When the school and the college gave light to the shore,
From gifted Iona to wooded Lismore."

The Universities of Durrwo and Armagh were crowded with students and were great seats of learning.

St. Patrick's zeal influenced others. The Irish Church was foremost in missionary enterprise. St. Columba, of the royal houses of Ireland and Scotland, landed from his coracle of wickerwork at Iona, which he made a very school of the prophets, a nursery of bishops, scholars and missionaries. Though only a Presbyter-Abbot he became the Apostle of Scotland, and possessed the highest authority. St. Columbanus was the first great Irish missionary to the Continent, where he preached before kings,