

repeated attempts to assassinate Patrick ; then, by ridicule and satire. But their efforts were fruitless, and in the life-time of one man a whole nation was brought from idol-worship to the knowledge of the true God. The conversion of the Irish exhibits a grander moral spectacle than any the course of human events has presented since Christ drew all things to Himself on the cross. While in other countries the introduction of Christianity was the slow work of time, invariably resisted, and seldom effected without lavish effusion of blood, in Ireland by the influence of one humble but zealous missionary, God aiding all, the whole island was converted to Christianity in a few years. Montalembert's tribute is short but eloquent: "Ireland, that virgin island on which præconsul never set foot, which never knew either the orgies or the exactions of Rome, was also the only place in the world of which the gospel took possession without bloodshed. This branch of the great family of Celtic nations . . . adopted the faith of Christ with enthusiasm ; and at the moment when Celtic vitality seemed about to perish in Gaul and Great Britain, under the double pressure of Roman decay and Germanic invasion, appeared among all the Christian races as the one most devoted to the Catholic faith, and most zealous for the spread of the Gospel. From the moment that this Green Erin had seen the sun of faith rise upon her, she had vowed herself to it with an ardent and tender devotion which became her very life. The course of ages has not interrupted this ; the most bloody and implacable of persecutions has not shaken it ; the defection of all Northern Europe has not led her astray ; and she maintains still, amid the splendors and miseries of modern civilization and Anglo-Saxon supremacy, an inextinguishable centre of faith, where survives, along with the completest orthodoxy, that admirable purity of manners which no conqueror and no adversary has ever been able to dispute, to equal, or to diminish."

The total conversion of Ireland was accomplished by St. Patrick in the 60 years of his missionary life in that country. At his death, which occurred on the 17th of March, 493, so complete was his work that he was buried by the nation in the primatial church of Armagh amidst universal expressions of affliction and sorrow. "Such was the concourse of

mourners," says McGee, "and the number of masses offered for his eternal repose, that from the day of his death till the close of the year, the sun is poetically said never to have set—so brilliant and so continual was the glare of tapers and torches."

St. Patrick's work deserves to be ranked with that of St. Paul. Seven times did he visit in person every mission in the Irish Kingdom, and for the six first visits he journeyed entirely on foot. In apostolic zeal and unrelaxed discipline he was a model, and his whole life was an eloquent and effective sermon on the doctrines he so successfully endeavored to inculcate. The permanency of his results is a most prominent feature, and distinguishes his work from that of all other apostles. For well nigh fifteen centuries the Irish have been Catholic ; during all that time never for one moment did they, in whole or in part, forget their duty to the Vicar of Christ or refuse obedience to defined dogmas. The like is true of no other nation under the sun.

Christianity from the first was no dead letter for the Irish ; it became a part of the national life. Its first influence was on the laws, and the "Book of Rights" containing the substance of the original institutes of Erin—the Brehon Laws—was prepared under the personal supervision of St. Patrick. It established Christianity as the law of the land, but all national usages and customs not conflicting with this supreme law were recognized as good, christianized, and allowed to remain. All purely pagan rites were declared illegal and this declaration was as binding on the King as on his humblest subject. Nowhere was this more evident than in the ceremony of the election and coronation of the Monarch. He was elected by the votes of the four Provinces, but the benediction of the Archbishop of Armagh, Primate of all Ireland, was necessary to confirm this choice. Before the coronation the King-elect was presented with a white wand, perfectly straight, as an emblem of the purity and uprightness which should guide all his decisions. He then swore to protect the rights of his people and to administer equal justice to all. This was the civil ceremony ; the solemn blessing followed in the Church of Tara. This is the first form of kingly consecration observed anywhere in Chris-