

Roman province. But they heard also that it was inhabited by a brave and warlike people, who were their masters in bravery and skill, so they considered it more prudent to pass them by, than perhaps to suffer humiliation of defeat. This is what all historians testify about Ireland previous to the dawn of Christianity. Even in its paganism there was something elevated, something above the abject paganism of other nations. The Irish adored the sun and moon, and the stars of heaven, but they never grovelled in adoration before images of wood and stone, or before the beasts of the field, as other nations had. They did not know the true God, yet their minds carried them to something elevated, and if they did not adore the God of heaven, they adored at least the heavenly bodies.

Such was pagan Ireland. By its learning and civilization, by its strict observance of the moral law which God has implanted in the human heart, it was well prepared to receive the gift of faith which St. Patrick was destined to bring. He reached Ireland early in the fifth century, and immediately began to preach the gospel of his Divine Master. Here we find a striking contrast between the Irish people and other pagan nations. In other countries the true seed of the gospel was sown in torrents of blood, but in Ireland, not one drop of blood was spilt. The Irish were an enlightened and intelligent people, and if St. Patrick could convince them that he was the messenger of the one true God, they were willing to obey. There was none of that stubborn spirit of persecution about the Irish that characterized the barbarous nations of Europe. Had St. Patrick with his few followers landed on the shores of other pagan nations, he would soon have filled a martyr's grave. The Irish people for the first time heard the words of life; their beloved apostle showed them the crime of idolatry in its true colors, he told them of the one eternal God who had created this world out of nothing, who had fashioned man to his own image and likeness, and who loved him with such an infinite love that he sent down His only begotten Son to redeem them from the slavery of sin, and from eternal death. We are told that in order to illustrate the mystery of the most Holy Trinity, St. Patrick plucked a shamrock leaf and showed the people the

three branches growing from the one stem, and hence the shamrock has ever since been held in veneration by the Irish people. In a short time after the arrival of St. Patrick, Ireland was as thoroughly Catholic as the most ancient nations of Christendom. Is it any wonder we love to dwell on the memory of our glorious apostle! He conferred on his children a gift which no royal potentate could bestow. He planted the faith of his Divine Master so deeply in the soil of Ireland that all the powers of hell have never yet been able to uproot it. Cold indeed must that heart be that can recall what St. Patrick has done for the human race without feeling penetrated with sentiments of deep and lasting gratitude! Holy missionaries stamped with the authority of the vicar of Christ, have carried the true faith into every pagan nation, and they have even shed their blood in testimony of their belief. But the fruit of their labors seems to have long since passed away. St. Augustine evangelized Africa, and made it for the time a stronghold of the faith. Now, scarcely a vestige of his labors in that country remains. The true faith was preached in Germany, and at one time it too, was Catholic. On the approach of the so-called reformation, it severed its connection with the Holy See, and now it is recognized as a protestant nation. England received the light of faith, and for a time was considered a Catholic country, but in submission to the commands of her impure king, she broke off from Catholic unity, and now the true faith is preserved in that country only by the faithful sons of St. Patrick.

What a contrast exists between the Irish people and many other countries which have fallen away from the faith they once received! The blessing of God attended the labors of our national apostle, and it must be admitted he had a docile, intelligent people to instruct. In all this we see the finger of God, who destines certain people or a certain class of people to attain some great end, and he endows them with the natural dispositions and the supernatural graces necessary for that purpose. He pre-ordained St. Patrick to be His instrument in carrying the light of Faith to the Irish people. He prepared him for this supernatural mission, and hence his labors were so successful, and brought forth fruit a hundred-fold. The