

# The True Witness,

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### FATHER BURKE'S LECTURE ON "The Exiles of Erin."

(From the New York Irish American.)

The following lecture was delivered by Father Burke, in the Academy of Music, New York, on Wednesday evening, May 22nd, when the Academy of Music was crowded to its utmost capacity with people from all parts of the city and vicinity. The Rev. gentleman addressed his auditors as follows:—

Ladies and Gentlemen: One of the strongest passions, and the noblest, that God has implanted in the heart of man is the love of the land that bore him. The poet says, and well:

"Breathes there a man with soul so dead  
Who never to himself has said,  
This is my own, my native land."

The pleasure of standing upon the soil of our birth; the pleasure of preserving the associations that surrounded our boyhood and our youth; the pleasure—sad and melancholy though it be—of watching every grey hair and every wrinkle that time sends even to those whom we love,—these are amongst the keenest and the best pleasures of which the heart of man is capable. Therefore it is that, at all times, exile from native land has been looked upon by men as a penalty and a grievance.—This is true even of men whom nature has placed upon the most rugged and barren soil. The Swiss peasant, who lives amidst the everlasting snows of the Upper Alps, who sees no form of beauty in nature except her grandest and most austere and rugged proportions, yet so dearly loves his arid mountain-home, that it is heart-breaking to him to be banished from it, even though he were placed to spend his exile in the choicest and most delicious quarters of the earth (cheers). Much more does the pain of exile rest upon the children of a race, at one the most generous, the most kind-hearted, and the most loving in the world. Much more does it rest upon the children of a race who look back to the mother-land as to a fair and beautiful land; a climate temperate and delicious; soil fruitful and abundant; scenery now rising into the glory of magnificence, now sinking into the tenderest pastoral beauty; a history the grandest of all the nations of the earth; associations the tenderest, because the most Christian and the purest.—And all these, and more, aggravate the misery and enhance the pain which the Irishman, of all other men, feels when he is exiled from his native land (applause).

And yet, my friends, amongst the destinies of the nations, the destiny of the Irish race, from the earliest time, has been that of voluntary or involuntary exile. Two great features distinguish the history of our race and our people. The first of those is that we are a warrior and warlike race,—quick, impulsive, generous, fraternal, and fond of a fight for the sake of a fight (laughter). Indeed, the student of history must see that wherever the Celtic blood is, there is a taste for military organization and for war. Whilst the Teuton and the Saxon are contented with their prosperity, and very often attain to the end of their aims more directly and more successfully by negotiations, the Celt, wherever he is, is always ready to resent an insult or an injury, and to create one for the sake of resenting it, very often, when it is not intended (laughter). How strangely has not this great fact been brought out in relation to the great Celtic nation

of France,—France, which is of the same race, the same stock, and the same blood as Ireland (applause).—France, to whom in weal or woe the heart of Ireland has always throbb'd sympathetically; exulting in her joys or lamenting or weeping over her sorrows (applause). Hundreds of years of history lie before us; and this French Celtic race has always been engaged, in every age and every time, in war with their more prudent and more cold-blooded neighbors around them. Now if you look through history, you will invariably find that France (or the Celt), was always the first to fling down the glove, or draw the sword and cry out "War!" Even in the late fatal war things were so managed and so arranged that, while Bismarck was smiling and shrugging his shoulders and "invisibly washing his hands in imperceptible water," the French, the moment they saw that war was possible, that moment, unprepared as they were,—not stopping to calculate or reflect,—they rushed to the front. They are trodden in the earth to-day; but that gallant flag of France has gone down without dishonor, as long as it was upheld by the heroic hands of the Celt (applause).

As it was with our French cousins, so, for good or bad luck, as you will, has it been with ourselves. From the day that the Dane landed in Ireland, at the close of the 8th century, down to this blessed day, at the close of the 19th century,—for the last 1100 years, Ireland has been fighting! War! war! incessant war! War with the Dane, for 300 years; war with the Saxon, for 800 years (applause). And, unfortunately for Ireland, if we had not the Dane and the Saxon to fight with, we picked quarrels and fought with one another.

Now the second great feature of our destiny, as traced in our history, is that it was the will of God and our fate that a large portion of our people should be constantly either driven from the Irish shore or obliged by the course of circumstances, or apparently of their own free will, to leave. The Irish Exile is a name recognized in history. The Irish Exile is not a being of yesterday or of last year. We turn over these honored pages of history; we come to the very brightest pages of the national records, and still we find, emblazoned upon the annals of every nation of the earth, the grand and the most honored names of the EXILES OF ERIN (applause). It is therefore to this theme that I invite your attention this evening. And why? Because, my friends, I hold, as an Irishman, that, next to the Gospel I preach, and to the religion that I love, come the gospel and the religion of my love for Ireland and my glory in her (great applause). Every point in her history that is a record of glory, brings a joy to your heart and to mine. The argument that builds up the temple of Irish fame upon the foundations of religion and valor—every argument, I say, is an argument to induce in your hearts and mine the strong, stormy feeling of pride for our native land (applause). Why should we not be proud of her? Has she ever,—in that long record of our history,—has she ever wronged or oppressed any people? Never! Has she ever attempted to plunder from any people their sacred birth-right of liberty? Never! Has she ever refused, upon the invitation of the Church and her own conscience, to undo the chains and to strike them off the limbs of the slave? Never! Has she ever drawn that sword, which she has wielded for centuries, in an unjust or doubtful cause? Never! Blood has stained the sword of Ireland for ages: that blood has dripped from the national sword; but never did Ireland's sword shed a drop of blood unjustly, but only in the defense of the highest and holiest and best of causes,—the altar of God and the altar of the nation (prolonged applause).

And now, my friends, coming to consider the "Exiles of Erin," I find three great epochs are marked in the history of Ireland, with the sign of the exodus and exile of her children upon them. The first of these goes back for nearly fourteen hundred years. In the year 432, Patrick, coming from Rome, preached the Catholic faith to Ireland; and the Irish mind, and the Irish heart sprang to that faith, took it and embraced it, and put it into her blood, and into the lives of her children; and she became Catholic under the very hand of an apostle, such as no nation on the earth ever did, or ever will know, until the end of time (applause). At once the land became a land, not only of Christians, but of saints. Wise and holy kings ruled and governed in Tara. Wise and saintly counsellors guided them, every law was obeyed so perfectly, and so implicitly, that in the records of our national annals it is told that, under the golden reign of the great King Brian, a young and unprotected female could walk from one end of the land to the other, laden with golden treasure; and no man would insult her virtue, or bring a blush to her virgin cheek; nor attempt to rob her of the rich and valuable things that she wore (loud cheers). Then the Irish heart, enlarged and expanded by the new element of Christian charity, which was infused in the nation, with its religion;—the Irish mind, before so cultivated in all Pagan literature, now enlightened with the higher and more glorious rays of faith,—this heart, and mind of Ireland looked out with pity upon the nations who were around them

sitting in darkness, in barbarism, and in the shade of death. From the Irish monasteries, in the sixth and seventh centuries, began the first great Exodus, or Exile from Ireland, which I call the Exodus, or going forth of Faith. Reveling in all the beauty of her grandeur, enjoying the blessings of peace, and the light of Divine truth, the warmth of holy charity, enjoying that learning, until she became the great school-house and university of the world,—all the nations around sent their youth to Ireland to be instructed. Then, these Irish and saintly masters of all human and divine knowledge found, by the accounts given by those youthful scholars, that there was neither religion, nor faith, nor learning in the countries around them. England, now in the possession of the Anglo-Saxons, was still in Paganism. The ancient Britons (now called the Welsh) had their Christianity; but they kept it to themselves. In their hatred to their Saxon invaders, these British bishops, priests and monks took the most cruel form of vengeance that ever was known to be exercised against a nation. They actually refused to preach the Gospel to the Saxons, for fear the Saxons might be saved, and get into Heaven with themselves (laughter). Ireland, evangelized; Ireland, enlightened; Ireland, warmed with the rays of Divine charity,—cast a pitying look upon the neighbor country; and in the sixth and seventh centuries, numbers of Irish monks went forth and travelled into Scotland and through the land of England, and everywhere preached the Gospel of Christ, spreading from the north of England to the remote north of Scotland. We find them in every land of Europe. We find them, for instance, in the valleys of Switzerland, which was evangelized by the Irish St. Gall, whose name is still held in veneration even by those who scarcely know the land of his birth. We find another Irish saint of that time, *Prudentius* or *Fridolind*; he went through the length and breadth of Europe, until he was known to all men for the greatness of his learning and the power of his preaching, and for the wonderful sanctity of his life. He was called "*Fridolind* the Traveller," for he went about from nation to nation evangelizing the name of Christ. We find Columbanus going forth in the seventh century, penetrating into the heart of France, preaching the Gospel to the people of Burgundy; thence passing over the Alps he descended into the plains of Lombardy. In that very land where St. Ambrose and other lights of the Church had shone, Columbanus preached the Gospel, and appeared as a new vision of sanctity and goodness before the Italian people, who were converted by the sound of his voice. At the same time St. Kilian penetrated into Germany, and evangelized Franconia. But the greatest of all these saints and Irish exiles of the seventh century was the man whose name is familiar to you all,—whose name is enshrined amongst the very highest saints of the Church's calendar,—whose name and whose history has furnished the material for the Count Montalembert, the greatest writer of our age, who found in the name of the Irish St. Columba, or Columbkille, the theme for the very highest and grandest piece of history that our age has produced. The history of this saint is striking for his extraordinary sanctity, and yet brings out fully, forcibly, and wonderfully the strength as well as weakness of the Irish character. St. Columbkille was a descendant of Nial of the Nine Hostages, who founded, in Ulster, the royal house of O'Neill. His name was O'Neill, and he was a near relation to the King of Ulster. He consecrated himself to God in his youth, and became a monk. Speedily he arose in the fame of his learning and his sanctity. He studied in Armagh; in Munster, near Limerick, on the Shannon; and went at last to the island of Arran, outside of Galway Bay; and there, as he himself tells us, he passed years of his life in prayer and study. Well, as you are aware, at this early period, there were no books, because there was no art of printing; and every book had to be written out patiently in manuscript. Books were then of such value that the price of a copy of the Scriptures would purchase a large estate. At this time a celebrated Irish saint,—St. Finnian,—had a precious copy of the Book of Psalms, written out in goodly characters upon leaves of parchment. St. Columba wanted a copy of this book for himself; and he went to St. Finnian and begged the privilege of the book to take a copy of it. He was refused: the book was too precious to be trusted to him. Then he asked at least to be allowed to go into the church where the book was deposited; and there he spent night after night, privately writing out a clean copy of it. By the time St. Columbkille had finished his copy, somebody, who had watched him at the work, went and told St. Finnian that the young man had made a copy of his psalter. The moment St. Finnian heard of it, he laid claim to this copy as belonging to him. St. Columbkille refused to give it up; and appealed to King Dermott, the Ard-righ, at Tara. The King called his counsellors together; they considered the matter, and passed a decree that St. Columbkille should give up the copy; because, the original belonging to St. Fin-

nian, the copy was only borrowed from it, and should go with it; and the Irish deers began with the words, "Every cow has a right to her own calf" (laughter). Now, mark the action of Columbkille;—a saint,—a man devoted to prayer and fasting all the days of his life;—a man gifted with miraculous powers; and yet under all that, as thorough-bred an Irishman as ever lived. The moment he heard that the King had resolved on giving back his precious book, he reproached him saying: "I am a cousin of yours; and there you went against me!" He put the clanship—the "*sheamachus*"—upon him (applause and laughter). The King said he could not help it. What did St. Columbkille do? He took his book under his arm and went away to Ulster to raise the clan of the O'Neills. He was himself the son of their King; they were a powerful clan in the country; and the moment they heard their kinsman's voice they rose as one man; for who ever asked a lot of Irishmen to get up a row and was disappointed (laughter and applause). They arose: they followed their glorious, heroic monk down into Westmeath. There they met the King and his army: and, I regret to say, a battle was the consequence, in which hundreds of men were slain, and the fair plains of the country were flooded with blood. It was only then that St. Columbkille perceived the terrible mistake he had made. Like an Irishman, he first had the fight out, and then he began to reflect on it afterwards (laughter and applause). In penance for that great crime, his confessor a holy monk named Manuel condemned him to go out of Ireland and exile himself, and never again to return to the land of his birth and of his love. Nothing is more beautiful or more tender than the letter St. Columbkille wrote to his kinsmen in Ulster. "My fate is sealed," he says, "my doom is sealed. A man told me that I must exile myself from Ireland; and that man I recognize as an angel of God; and I must go." With breaking heart and weeping eyes he bade a last farewell to the green "Island of Saints" and went to an island among the Hebrides, on the northern coast of Scotland. There, in the mist and storms of that inhospitable region,—there, upon a bare rock, out from the main land,—he built a monastery; and there did he found the far-famed school of Iona. That school, founded under the eyes and under the influence of St. Columbkille, became the great mother and fountain-head of that grand monasticism which was destined to evangelize so many nations, and to Christianize all Scotland and the Northern parts of England (applause). We shall return to St. Columbkille again, in the course of the lecture, when I come to gather up the three great periods of exile, in speaking of the one love which characterized them all.

The next century following, the Irish monk, St. Cataldus, penetrated through the length and breadth of Italy, preaching everywhere; until at length the Pope of Rome made him Bishop of Tarento in the South of Italy. Another Irish monk, Romauld, went out in the 8th century and evangelized Brabant and the Low Countries. Two Irish monks, Clewnt and Albians, were so celebrated throughout the schools of Europe in the 8th century, that they were known by the name of the "Disseminators of Wisdom," or the "Philosophers." In a word, the Irish monks of the 7th, 8th and 9th centuries were the greatest evangelists and the greatest apostles, and the most learned men that the world then possessed. They gave to their island home the strange title amongst the nations of the "Island of Saints";—and the sanctity that made Ireland the bright glory of Christendom they poured abroad upon their apostolic labors, until they brought that message which sanctified Ireland, home to every people in the then known world (loud applause).

For two hundred years after Ireland's Catholicity was preached to her by St. Patrick, no Catholic missionary was ever heard to preach the name of Christ to the Saxons of England. St. Patrick came to Ireland in the year 432. St. Augustine came to England, for the first time, to preach to the Saxons, in the year 596. Nearly two hundred years intervened; during which time St. Columbkille and his children had evangelized the Scots and Picts of the North; and when the Roman Monk, St. Augustine, and his Benedictines came, they landed in the South of England. England was then divided into seven Kingdoms, under the Saxons; and thirty-six years after the death of St. Augustine, we find that the Benedictine Monks, who came from Rome, had only preached to one nation out of the seven,—what is now the county of Kent;—whilst the Irish Monks had evangelized and preached the Gospel to all of the other Kingdoms of the Saxon Heptarchy (applause). Therefore, I claim that from Ireland, and Ireland's monasticism, many of the nations of Europe, and more especially the Scots and the Kingdom of Northumbria (comprising all England north of the Humber), lit their lamps, and entered into the glorious light of Christ. Then the light that was in Ireland shone forth from her. As when the clouds part and let the strong rays of the noon-day sun flood the darkened world, filling it with light and joy and worship, so the clouds of ignorance and Paganism parted, and forth from the pure, ardent light of Ireland's Catholicity

came the faith which illumined, and brightened, and evangelized, and saved all the surrounding countries during that first great exodus of Ireland's faith (great applause).

Is there anything in all this to be ashamed of? There are nations in the world that must go up to the fountain head of their history, and touch, not heroes, not saints, but robbers and the vilest men of the earth. It is worthy of remark, that nearly every nation, when it goes up to the fountain head of its history, has to be very quiet and very humble, indeed. The Romans, for instance, who conquered the whole world, when they trace their history to its fountain-head, come to a day when the foundations of Rome were laid by Romulus and Remus; and we find that the first inhabitants of Rome were the banditti and robbers who escaped from the neighboring cities, and came for refuge into Rome,—the offscourings of Tuscany, and Latium, and all the surrounding countries. We find, when it was a question of propagating the Roman people, the very first thing these robbers did was an act worthy of them: they rushed out and, by force and violence, took the wives and daughters of their peaceable neighbors. We find that Romulus, the founder of Rome, with his own hand, shed his brother's blood, as Cain did that of Abel. As it was in the first days of Roman history, so it is with nearly every nation. What is English history? It takes us back to the time when troops of half-naked barbarians roamed over the hills and valleys. Then came the Saxon to take every liberty from them, to rob the ancient Briton of his country, and his land of freedom. What is this but the fountain-head of history traced up to its barbarism and injustice. But trace up the far more ancient history of Ireland. No man, even the noblest of all on the earth, can point to such an ancestry as ours. Trace up that history to the days when the druids stood in Tara; when the crowned Monarch on the throne, with the Bretons, sat to administer justice, and listen to the glories of their song. Trace it up to the very fountain head, and you will find civilization and law, and power, and virtue, and glory (applause). Come down but a day from out those Pagan recesses of our earliest history,—come down but a day on the road of time, and you step into the full light of Ireland's Christian holiness and glory, when she was the light of the world and the glory of the Church of Christ (cheers).

Now, my friends, we pass to the second exodus; and here, alas! it is not the voluntary exile going forth from his native land, reluctantly and regretfully, yet impelled by the high and celestial motives that animate the heart of the Apostle and the missionary; it is not the saint looking back with tearful eyes upon the land which he sacrifices and abandons for the possession of higher aims,—the souls of men on earth and the higher place in Heaven. No! the second exodus in Ireland was one of the most terrible in her history. We know that from the days when the English invasion took shape and form—we know that, in proportion as the English got firm hold of the land,—in proportion as they divided and consequently defeated chieftain after chieftain, king after king,—that in proportion as they encroached upon the Irish soil there was, at last, no room upon that soil for a man who loved his native land. And this, my friends, is one of the worst consequences of national conquest; this is one of the most terrible consequences of a nation being subdued and enslaved: for the moment the foreigner or the invader sets his foot firmly on the soil, that moment one of the highest aims and virtues,—namely the virtue of patriotism, becomes treason and a crime. But, yesterday, the people of Alsace and Lorraine gloried in the name and in the glory of their beloved France (applause). To-day, if the man of Alsace or Lorraine only lifts his hat to the statue of France, or says in public "Long live ancient and glorious France," he is taken and put into prison and tried as a malefactor and arraigned as a traitor before the tribunals of the country. And why? Because the curse of a foreign invasion and an unjust occupation is on the land (applause). If Germany, instead of being the conqueror, were the conquered land, and the French unjustly and wickedly took possession of the provinces within the empire, then the German would not be able to love his native land, or to express the emotions of his heart without treason. So it is in Ireland: patriotism became a crime in proportion as the English power advanced; and the words of the poet, are unfortunately verified:—

"Unprized are her sons 'till they've learned to betray;  
Undistinguished they live, if they shame not their sires;  
And the torch that would light them to dignity's way,  
Must be caught from the pile where their country expires."

(Applause.)

What wonder then, that we find a people naturally warlike, naturally high-spirited, a people whose spirit was never crushed, nor never knew how to bend, even under centuries of oppression and persecution—never (cheers); "the spirit of Ireland," says Tom Moore, "may be broken, but never would bend;" what wonder, I say, that this people, this warlike