

IRELAND'S GOLDEN AGE.



IN his "Vision of Judgment" Byron calls history the scripture of the devil. DeMaistre styles it "a vast conspiracy against truth." What has been offered, previously to the last half century, as Irish history, justifies these assertions, and marks Father Lacordaire a true philosopher when he defines history as "the rich treasury of man's dishonor." Vilified by civil and political historians, neglected by writers ecclesiastical, it is not surprising that the sublime mission of the Irish people has not appeared before the eyes of the world in its true grandeur. Bigotry might excuse the secular writers, but what can explain the silence of those who have undertaken to chronicle the progress of the church? In the whole range of ecclesiastical history the most amazing thing is the innocent, child-like ignorance or indifference displayed regarding Catholic Ireland's part in the world of religion. Historical questions, great and small, ancient and modern, are treated in a thousand books, and with a fulness of detail that leaves nothing to be desired, but the establishment and development of Christianity in Ireland is not one of these questions, and is dealt with not at all, or in such a vague and perfunctory manner as to leave the impression that the influence of the Irish was a fact of slight importance to the world and the universal church.

The history of civilization makes nothing clearer than that the intellectual supremacy of the world has been held by various countries at different times. Far back in those ages of which our knowledge is rather obscure, it belonged to China, Arabia, and Egypt. Greece succeeded Egypt, and Rome, Greece. It was with Italy in the 13th and 14th, with England in the 16th, with France in the 17th century. It is with Germany now. No one will seriously dispute that from the 6th to the 9th century Europe received the light of science from Ireland. And—most uncommon occurrence—while Ireland led in devotion to science and in depth of learning, she was crowding the calendar

with saints, holy men and women, renowned, and even personally known throughout the Continent, as well for their vast learning as for the purity and sanctity of their lives. Briefly to show how this came about, how Christianity reached Ireland, and how that island rapidly advanced in Christian virtue and science, is the object of this essay.

St. Patrick crossed the Irish Sea in the year 432, A. D., bearing with him the priceless gift of faith for a nation sunk in paganism. He was met on the coast of Wicklow by a mob who pelted him with stones; proceeding northward he was repulsed by his former master Milcho, of Slemish. A third time he attempted a landing; this time successfully at the mouth of the historic Boyne. The princes, the priests of Druidism, and the people were assembled at Tara to celebrate the birthday of the monarch. From the mouth of the Boyne to Tara was a three days' journey. Patrick would go and strike a blow against Paganism in its most vital point; he would "confront the Druids in the midst of all the princes and magnates of the island." Druidism reeled under the shock. St. Patrick preached his God, the God for whom he was ready to die; who had healed man's infirmities and raised the very dead to life; the God of three persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, all equal, yet but one God. To the look of incredulity occasioned by those last words, the Saint replied by an illustration. Stooping down he plucked a tiny plant that grew at his feet. He pointed out the single stem with its three distinct and equal leaves, yet forming all together but one whole. God's grace worked in the hearts of this people whom He had chosen for Himself. The seeming impossibility of the mystery vanished; they believed, and in heartfelt gratitude made the plant their national emblem. How beautiful, even if legendary, is this tradition of the Shamrock of Ireland! Other countries have their national flowers, chosen by reason of their beauty or some like circumstance; the shamrock reminds the Irishman of the Blessed Trinity—the foundation of Christianity.

The Druids struggled against the truth for 25 years; first, by violence and oft-