



# CATHOLIC CHRONICLE.

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## SERMON PREACHED BY THE REV. W. J. WHITE,

ON ST. PATRICK'S DAY, IN SAINT MICHAEL'S CATHEDRAL, TORONTO.

Time, in its slow but steady course, has again brought round the festive day of Ireland's Patron Saint. Duty to our country, and gratitude to our country's Saint, call upon us to celebrate a memory that shall never perish—that lives in the deepest recesses of every Irish heart—that is honored and held in eternal veneration. Duty to our country calls upon us to honor the bard that sang her praise—to honor the scholars that proclaimed her fame—to honor the warrior that fought her cause—to honor the Saint that graced her history—to honor the martyrs that wrote in their blood her fidelity—to honor the apostles that bore the torch of faith to the nations in darkness. Gratitude to our country's Saint calls upon us to thank him for his labors in our behalf—to thank him for the benefits bestowed on our ancestors—to thank him for the favors conferred on our nation—to thank him for the boon of faith he bore to the island, and planted there. Therefore, because we are proud of our benefactor, proud of the nation blessed by his labors, proud of the faith that blessed our island, proud of those who possessed that faith, we assemble, in the name of patriotism, in the name of gratitude, in the name of religion, to celebrate the memory of the Apostle of our nation—the Saint who sowed the good seed of faith upon the fruitful soil of Irish hearts—the Saint who reigns with God—Patrick, the Apostle of Ireland.

Patrick! The very name is music to an Irish ear. It thrills through the soul, and stirs the deepest fountains of its gratitude, love, and veneration. It calls back the minds of Erin's sons, through the golden sunshine of numbered years, to view the departed grandeur of their country. Hence Ireland's sons in foreign lands—sad as is their fate, no more to visit the verdant plains, the sunny hills, the placid lakes, the murmuring streams, of their native isle—seek consolation in the past—the bright, the glorious past—of their country, whose splendor has sunk, as the meridian sun, to rise again more glorious, more resplendent.

And who will blame the scattered race to turn their thoughts to early home, and sip from the fountains of memory the pleasures that arise from the remembrance of the past? Who blames the wanderer that backward turns, to take a last, fond look on the fading shores of his early home? Who blames the eye that drops a silent tear, the last farewell to scenes of innocence, youth, and pleasure? Who blames the heart that, from its deepest well, heaves up a sigh, the last adieu to a long-loved home? Then, who shall blame the thought that speeds with lightning pace across the realms of time, to dwell amidst the ages numbered with the past—the sparkling ages of our country's history? 'Tis nature's voice that calls the pilgrim back, to look, and think, and sigh again o'er youth and pleasure, and pleasant scenes, and happy homes that were, but now are not.

Hence, Irish minds are filled with Irish scenes to-day. At fancy's call, the ancient home, the verdant lawn, the fertile field, the hawthorn hedge, the river side, sprung up to being, and array themselves in beauty as when their native sun adorned them. And the ancient round-tower, and the holy well, and the broken cross, and the ivy ruins that cover the land, bring back the mind to days of national greatness, of national prosperity, of national freedom, and of national Catholicity.

But, when we contemplate these last, the vast domain of ruin, the remnant left from the vandal hand of the destroyer, we are apt to sigh—Alas! her glory, 'tis gone;—no more again shall laurels decorate the brow of our crowns ocean queen! But truth bids us stay the lament. Her glory is not all departed. True, she has not a national government, to direct her national progress; true, she has not a national parliament, to protect her national interests; true, she has not a national army, to defend her national cause; true, she has not national political independence, to succor and develop her national growth. But she is a nation still, possessing a national instinct—a national history—national traditions—national literature—a national church—a national spirit, which may be bowed down but cannot be broken—the admiration of her friends—the fear of her enemies.

Dark, indeed, as is the history of Ireland, one brilliant gem remains forever untarnished in her national escutcheon. 'Tis the fidelity of her children. To the traveller amid the ruins of Ireland—to the student of history, wearied and sickened over the long, dark roll of iniquities practised towards Ireland, that bright trait relieves him from the abhorrence to humanity which his labors excited—the fidelity of the Irish to virtue, to religion, to God. This is the true glory of Ireland. Though the storm of persecution, gathered thick and dark, burst upon her with unrelenting fury—though persecution rolled

its billows o'er the island, and swept the monuments of her religion and her faithful children from the soil—though famine's dark form, as the angel of death, sped over the land and laid its thousands of victims low—and all this to drive Catholicity from the soil, to pluck it from the bosoms of the children of faith, to bury it beneath the ruins of itself—all this was in vain, for Catholic Ireland is Catholic Ireland still—her verdant faith fresh, green, and growing, as when first the dew of divine grace fructified the seed sown on the fertile soil by the skilful hand of our Saint. Ireland's history, though a sad, is an interesting history. She espoused the cause of God as soon as it was presented to her with an avidity equalled only by the tenacity with which she clings to us. Only 20 years elapsed from the day when St. Patrick visited the island till the whole people were converted to Catholicity till the whole island was consecrated to God, the people remain Catholic—the island remains consecrated.

In order to understand the cause of the rapid spread of Christianity, the complete victory of the cross among our Pagan ancestors, we must look at the character of the people prior to the coming of the envoy of Christ to the island.—Thence swiftly coursing down the stream of time we will point out as we pass the monuments of Ireland's fidelity which the tried faith of her children had erected.

The history of Ireland prior to the advent of Christianity tells us that heaven in its own mysterious way destined Ireland to write a bright page in the Christian history of the world.—When God wills to make use of peoples or individuals for any high or holy purpose, He prepares them for the work by preserving them from the grossness into which others are apt and frequently do fall who are less favored. Thus He preserved the Hebrew children. Through the crucible of tribulation He prepared them to be the repository of His Word. Thus He prepared the prophets, calling them from the womb of their mothers to His service. Thus He prepared His precursor, visiting Him before He was born. Thus He prepared the Irish nation to become the repository of religion and the missionary of truth to the nations.

The ancient Irish never sank into the foul abyss of degraded Roman idolatry, nor practiced the vicious refinement of the Greeks.—They were noble, generous, religious, chaste, even as pagans. They were idolaters, but of a noble stamp. No altar erected to crime ever desecrated her soil. No temple dedicated to the polluting worship of vice ever sunk its foundations in her bosom. No gross, revolting rites entered into their worship or sullied the purity of their religious forms. No obscene or destructive divinity was ever exposed to the adoration or attracted crowds of debauched or deluded votaries. No Mars, no Bacchus, no Jupiter, no Venus was worshipped there. They never bowed before the Roman eagles nor knelt before the Roman Gods. Rome was to make a conquest there, but it was beneath the Cross of Christ, and not beneath the eagle of the Cæsars that it was to be effected. In their pagan error the Irish cultivated a pure morality—practised charity, honored virginity—detested the enervating vices and avenged even to death an insult offered to virtue. The Old Royal Foundation on Tara when noble virgins dwelt till death called them forth, bears testimony to the high toned morality of the people and is the only example of a pagan nation providing an institute to protect perpetual virginity.

A nation thus prepared, and by an especial providence protected from the enervating effects of vice, was a fit receptacle for the truths of the Gospel. The national mind, ennobled, not degraded—possessing all its native strength and power—could easily grasp the grand idea of an Omnipotent God—Creator and Lord Supreme. The national affections pure easily formed attachments for the purer morality of the Gospel. This conquest of the Cross was easy and rapid. A single saint, whose memory shall be in eternal remembrance before God and with man, gathered in the harvest of the whole island. A conquest so rapid, so complete and so permanent before nor since has not crowned the efforts of any other Apostle of Rome, and does not adorn the ecclesiastical history of any other nation. The people were virtuous—the Apostle a saint.—Hence the Church grew as the lily of the fertile valley without a stain to tinge its native purity. The people were virtuous—therefore the crowned head bowed to the Cross of Christ—the noble warrior bowed his knee to the symbol of salvation—the learned Druid drank from the pure fountains of evangelical truth—the people, men and women, old and young, sought with avidity and practised with facility the lessons of wisdom they learned from the envoy of Christ.—The Gospel struck a responsive chord in the hearts of the people, and blended in purest harmony with the refined and high-toned instincts of their nature."

The Apostle was a saint, hence by his labors consecrated churches decorate the land, and their cross-crowned summits sanctify the air—by his labors the groves are destroyed where once resounded the song of the Druid—by his labors the altars are cast down which once smoked with the fire of an unholy sacrifice—by his labors, the dark and mysterious priest of a heathen worship is transformed into the holy ascetic, and the vessel of unhallowed rites into the chaste spouse of Christ—by his labors the swelling congregations are guided by learned and devoted pastors. Thus idolatry passed away from the land and a purely Catholic, purely national church was established in its stead; and to the admiration of the world Ireland is known abroad as a holy land—the land of sages and the land of saints.

Such is the history of the early conversion of our nation. She stands the solitary example on the pages of the history of a nation, emerging from the gloom of paganism, and instantaneously embracing Christianity, as she exhibits to the world an example of fidelity to that religion which no other nation can boast.

Religion spread thus throughout the land, science, too, began to flourish. Our ancestors were not slow in learning that a nation to be virtuous must be wise. In the early part of the sixth century, the schools of Ireland began to flourish. I cannot recount you all the famous names which history has handed down to us;—but the traveller who is thus inclined, may still inspect the massive ruins, majestic in their decay, of Kells, of Holy Cross, of Lisnmore, of Clonfert, of Clonmacnois, whose ivy walls blacken the waters of the passing Shannon, with hundreds of other devastated remains of Ireland's literary fame. To these the youths of Europe flocked as to fountains of knowledge, there to satisfy their thirst for literary fame. Ireland was in those days the university of Europe. I will give you the literary character of her children as written by the historian: "No men came up to the monks of Ireland for sanctity and learning"—"Ireland had crowds of philosophers, and to it the Saxon rushed from all quarters as to a mart of learning"—"They were lovers of learning," says Mosheim, no friend, I may remark, "and distinguished themselves in those times of ignorance beyond all European nations." They were the fountain source whence the tide of arts and science sprang. "The land was inundated with a love of learning." These were the days when Ireland's sons marched under the banner of the Cross to literary fame and merit. These were the heydays of Ireland's golden Catholicity. These were the days of her attachment to the cross. These were the days when Irish monks and Irish nuns taught the Irish youth the intricate ways of the paths of science. Then Ireland marked the passing age with the sparkling gem of literary and scientific fame. Then the muses descended and dwelt in the bowers. Then wisdom was enthroned in her halls.

These are simple facts of truthful history, recorded by faithful historians, and in presence of these facts Ireland is exhibited by the unlearned and the bigot as the refuge and home of ignorance. Words cannot brand the perpetrators of so foul a calumny with the title they deserve. It is sometimes the offspring of ignorance, but more frequently of malice. They point to the exile, and call him the ignorant Irishman. Well, open the penal code—that hellish invention of cruelty, at which a Nero might blush, which is described as standing forth in bold and conspicuous relief among the most appalling records of national prostitution—and you will learn from that fiendish code, that, if we are ignorant, "we are ignorant" by Acts of Parliament—if we are ignorant, we are ignorant because the law, the bayonet, and the hangman's rope and the headsman's axe made us ignorant. But we are not ignorant. True, we have lost our prestige.—Acts of Parliament forged chains that fettered our souls in dark dungeons of ignorance. But they live and sigh for their deliverance. Acts of Parliament extinguished the flames of science which blazed as the sun, and sent their rays to the bounds of the globe; but the embers remain till a more favorable breath will again fan them into a flame. No, ignorance is not found in the ingredients of the Irish character. 'Tis an exotic plant, transported across the Channel in a case of parliamentary decrees. No, Ireland is not, never was, the home of ignorance—its black cloud never darkened her valleys, never sat on her mountains, till her masters of learning were driven like wolves from her shores.

Ireland had knowledge, and to spare, and she gave it to her neighbors. The Irish were always generous; they were generous with their science and religion. Another mark of the fidelity of our race to the cause of God. With the lamp of science in one hand and the torch of faith in the other, the Irish priest and scholar left their homes in swarms, and flocked to for-

ign shores to disseminate the faith they had received, to plant and preserve faith and civilization amid the barbarous tribes of Europe. And when the dark clouds of ignorance and infidelity lowered over European society, and Paganism raised its threatening billows, the Irish Apostles rushed to the rescue and spread themselves—to use the words of St. Bernard—like an inundation over Europe. France, Germany, the Provinces of the Rhine, Italy, bear testimony to the zeal, learning, and piety of the missionaries who crossed the sea and came to their assistance. I might recount for you the names of the saints of Ireland whose memory lives in foreign lands blessed by their labors—where altars are erected to their remembrance—where churches are dedicated to God in their honor—over whose tombs the nations have strewn garlands of praise—whose lives adorned by deeds of golden virtues, are recorded as worthy models of heroic imitation; but the number is great, and I will pass to another proof of the fidelity of our people to the altar of their fathers and to the God of their glory.

Nations as individuals may grow great in the sunshine of prosperity, but when that sun is obscured, and the clouds of adversity, and the storms of persecution break in a hurricane upon them, then is the hour of trial. Scripture furnishes us an example of unyielding fidelity, which is the admiration of the world—and the patience of Job is a proverb. Job was an upright man, fearing God, avoiding evil, and he was prosperous in all his possessions. The devil had gone round about the world, and had gone through it; and when the sons of God assembled before the Lord, he appeared in their midst. He told the extent of his travels, and God asked him, "Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there are none like him upon earth—a just and upright man, fearing God, and avoiding evil?" But when God spoke of the fidelity of His servant Job, Satan answered by asking a question—Does Job fear God in vain, said the devil? hast Thou not blessed him with many blessings? But stretch forth thy hand and touch all that he hath, and see if he won't bless thee to thy face. God gave the devil permission to afflict Job, and he afflicted him, but spared his life, because he was not permitted to destroy it. This incident in the life of Job, bears a strong resemblance to our case. I think the devil made a second voyage around the world about the beginning of the 16th century, and found a nation of Jobs, of which he made a complaint similar to that which he made of the man *Us*, and received a like permission to afflict them.

Ireland, a Christian and Catholic nation, a land of sages, and a land of Saints waxed strong in the mild influence of Catholicity. The devil had gone around about the other nations and had gone through them, and had sown the seed of division and religious discord among them, and they were actually engaged in a religious strife. While union and Catholic harmony smiled on the green Isle of the Ocean; the devil, envious of the happiness of the Irish obtained permission to afflict them. He chose for his instrument, an ambitious monarch, and a subtle subversive parliament, who sent their emissaries to drive religion from its home—they persecuted the work vigorously.—The land of Saints was made the tomb of martyrs.—The soil sanctified by the tears of penitents, was saturated by the blood of martyrs.—The air hallowed by the sweet incense of prayer, was burthened by the groan of martyrs, mingled with the blasphemies of their wicked persecutors. All the cruelties and atrocities that intrigue, rapacity, spoliation and robbery, cruelty, persecution, and murder, could inflict, were practised upon Ireland to subvert the faith of the people, and all in vain—the faith of that people could not be subverted. Their souls free as the sunbeam that lit up the smiling valley could not be bound. Their faith, firm as the mountain, could not be shaken.

At the period of the so-called Reformation, when the champions of civil and religious liberty forged fetters for the soul of men, Ireland presented a rich feast to the harpies of the English castle. Her magnificent churches princely endowed—her monasteries of gigantic dimension and rich resources—the castled possessions of her wealthy gentry, presented such flattering inducements to the avaricious adherents of a pillaging potentate that it would be absurd to suppose men who, at home, had tasted of plunder, would refrain from satiating their morbid appetite on the property of weaker neighbors. Spoliation and pillage, the companions of the reformation in England, found their way into Ireland. But the Irish Prelates had seen the workings of Royal supremacy in England. 'Twas marked by bloodshed, sacrificial rapine and robbery.—They knew the extent of evil which must necessarily arise from the exercise of unlimited power in the hands of a monarch, whose sole ambition was self-aggrandisement, and they obstinately refused to mock their conscience and to offend their God by placing a spiritual crown on an un-

sanctified brow. To reward their fidelity to their conscience and their God, the devastating hand of the destroyer was sent to spread desolation throughout the land. Thence we date the age of Irish martyrs, an age which is not yet ended, an age of sufferings and an age of blood, an age unparalleled in the history of nations.

This characteristic fidelity of the prelates and of the people, which I have mentioned, had to be overcome, ere the churches, the monasteries and their possessions, could belong to the crown; and the low cunning and rapacious avarice of hungry, unprincipled statesmen, pointed out a way which seemed plausible.

The first sad injury to the Irish Church was inflicted when her native clergy could no longer fill her native sees—when a subversive foreigner was thrust upon her faithful people, who, under the shadow of authority, was charged to corrupt the pure stream which, undefiled, had flown through twelve centuries of their history. They sent over a batch of government bishops to fill the sees of Ireland. But if the power of princes could fill the Irish sees with English incumbents, it could not fill the Irish mind with English ideas, nor corrupt pure Irish faith with the foul effusions of English heterodoxy. The Irish pastors and their flocks still remain faithful; and few, indeed, in those trying times, are the Irish names which history has handed down to us branded with the infamous distinction of a Judas. So deeply imbued with the religion of their country was the Celtic character, that it became obvious to the leading spirits of reform plunder that, to eradicate true faith, it was necessary to banish the children of the soil. How well they executed their design, millions of banished exiles tell. How they failed to accomplish their end, present facts bear witness. They commenced by confiscation, and plunder, and sacrilege. And Ireland suffered all. She suffered her churches to be desecrated—she was powerless to defend them; she suffered the modern Iconoclasts to crumble the images of the Redeemer and His redeemed saints; she suffered her altars to be torn down; she suffered the bones of her sacred dead to be dishonored; she suffered her pulpits to be disgraced by imported substitutes for ministers of religion; she suffered her monasteries to be demolished and their holy inmates to be driven out to seek shelter in the bogs, in the forests, and in the mountains; she suffered all this and more, but she could not suffer heresy to take root in her soil; she could not suffer apostasy; she could not become a Judas; she might be despoiled of her wealth—she could not be deprived of her conscience. Her churches might be torn down and her altars demolished; but the blue vault of heaven would cover her prostrate children in earnest prayer, and the solitary stone in the cave or in the mountain pass would furnish an altar. That sacred stone—the Mass-rock round which our fathers assembled for the dead sacrifice—will live in the memory of Ireland's children, till the last generation. So well was the work of demolition carried on, that a modern American writer says, "To a distant observer, that beautiful island appears like a city of ruins in the saddened light of evening." Need I cite for you examples to prove what I have said. You who were born and reared under the shadow of her ruins. You who have been accustomed to gaze on the crumbling remains that look with a sad, solemn, majestic silence over a depopulated land, need I mention to you the names of the abbey of Pierpoint, of Holy Cross, of Kells and its thousand monks, of St. Catharines, of Newtown, of Clonmacnois and its seven churches—of many others—where the sparrows now build their nests and the rook and night owl are the sole occupants of the crumbling tower, that seems to stand a faithful watchman over the graves of our fathers, and the deserted homes of Ireland's scholars and Ireland's saints. Ah! you may weep at the mention of those names—you may weep when you hear the stranger ask what Goth or Vandal hand thus desecrates the land? why are those ruins?—and when you tell them, this is the land of our fathers thus desolated, because they would not forswear their conscience and offend their God.

The English reformers found their work in Ireland a difficult one. They made the land a desert; but this could not change the faith of the people. Life was left, and with life faith remained—but that faith was to be sealed in blood. I will not quote to you from the code of penal enactments that mark with indelible disgrace the rule of English monarchs in Ireland, and will continue a reproach to the character of the nation, so long as England refuses to do justice to her oppressed neighbor; I will not quote to you from a code which Burke described as the invention of the devil, when he said, "had Satan sat upon the throne, things could not have gone worse;" but I will use the words of our patriotic priest and scholar, who describes the means used by the Protestant party to alienate the people from the faith of Peter. He sa y