

SERMON BY VERY REV. DANIEL J. McDERMOTT, V.G.

WHAT IRELAND HAS SUFFERED FOR THE FAITH.

The Omaha Evening News published an extract from the eloquent and able sermon delivered in St. Philomena's Pro-Cathedral, at Omaha, Neb., on St. Patrick's Day, by the Very Rev. Daniel Ignatius McDermott, Vicar-General, formerly Pastor of St. Patrick Church, Pottsville, Pa., and more recently of St. Michael's Church, Chester, Pa. Father McDermott is well known in the Diocese of Philadelphia, and the following extract from his sermon on the trials of Ireland and her children will be read with interest and pleasure:

"The light has come—the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. The Gentiles shall walk in thy light, and Kings shall rejoice in the brightness of thy rising."—Isaiah ix. 1.

Light is opposed to darkness, knowledge to ignorance. Ignorance resembles darkness, knowledge resembles light. Hence darkness and ignorance have become synonymous.

There is a darkness other than that which affects the eyes of man; a darkness which clouds his mind, casts its sombre pall upon his soul, and obscures his mental vision. This is darkness, dense, thicker than Egyptian blackness, thicker than the darkness of the night. This darkness is not of God; to dispense this darkness light is required. This light must be instruction concerning these three momentous questions, "What am I?" "Why have I been created?" "What after this life shall I be?"

Conscious of this metaphor, and stationed upon his lofty eminence, with Jerusalem the Royal City of David, that earthly type of the Heavenly Kingdom, of that Jerusalem which is above, which is free, the crucifixion of all that was holy upon earth, lying at his feet, the prophet, casting his eyes upon the chosen people of God, sees them unimpaired of their high vocation, following spirits of error, doctrines of devils, until they had led the abomination of desolation into the sanctuary; he beholds the kingly race forgetful of its destiny, sitting in darkness. Turning, no doubt, with fearful face on the city, looking out into the distance, he beholds the glorious sun of justice rising—in Simeon's words—"A light to the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of the people of Israel." He seems to hear in anticipation the joyful strains of angels as they hover over Bethlehem's shed; then, full of joy, as one bringing glad tidings, he turns to his dear Jerusalem and calls upon her in the sublime words of my text. Glad tidings, not only for Jerusalem, but for those parts of the earth over which the light of Jerusalem's sun will be shed.

Let us now turn our thoughts from Judea to another land upon which heaven, for centuries, showered down blessings. Let us say to that land, "Arise—be enlightened! Thy light has come"—a light which was to arise while this great Western World was yet unknown. I need not tell you that land was Ireland—that light was Patrick. What care we if men spurn the name of our saint when angels speak it reverently! The reward Christ promised to his chosen ones was: "Men will revile, persecute you, and speak all manner of evil of you for my name's sake;" and as this was to be the sure sign of their election, he bade them rejoice on that day and be exceedingly glad. Patrick and Ptolemy were the two extreme classes among the Romans. Only a few citizens could enjoy the dignity of belonging to the former. To this Order Patrick, not only in name, but by birth, belonged. So far as it concerns our purpose, however, it makes little difference whether he was a Patrick or a Ptolemy. We have to deal with him only as God has made him great.

The question of the birthplace of St. Patrick has been the subject of much discussion. For a long time the popular theory declared Alcuin, Scotland, to be his birthplace, but more recent discoveries prove that France is his country, and that he was born at Bologne.

By an expedition under O'Neill, St. Patrick was brought captive to Ireland and sold as a slave to one Milch, a pretty Prince of Ulster. He was sixteen years of age at the time of his captivity. His biographers tell us that as a child he showed evident signs of future greatness. During the period of his captivity the work of the Almighty had been continually though unconsciously performed. Patrick had acquired from his rugged mode of life that strength of body which enabled him afterwards to undergo his arduous missionary labors—he had acquired a thorough knowledge of the Irish language, an intimate acquaintance with the doctrines and ceremonies, and above all an ardent zeal for the conversion of the Irish people.

Notwithstanding the remonstrances of his friends, he entered the service of God, and he took himself to the Monastery of St. Martin, in which he spent four years, perfecting himself in the sciences, but above all in the science of the Saints. At length, animated with the desire of accomplishing the will of God, he bade a final adieu to parents and friends, and went to St. Germain, Bishop of Auxerre. He was soon ordained priest, and went to the monastery of Lerins, where he spent nine years; thence he went to Rome, and was kindly received by Pope Celestine the First. St. Patrick spent eight years in Ulster and Leinster. He twice visited Connaught, spending in the counties of the province in all or twenty-two years preaching the Gospel throughout Ireland. In 445 he proceeded to Armagh, where he founded his Metropolitan See. He passed from this life to receive his crown on the 17th March, 461, at Down, where he was buried. At the time of his death he was seventy-eight years of age.

After centuries of evil government and legislation, with every laudable ambition removed from reach with every aspiration that could ennoble man, smothered, when in law evil was called good, and good was called evil, when good was rewarded and evil punished, when, like the Egyptians of old with the Israelites, the English endeavored to make of the Irish only "holders of wood and drawers of water," is it any wonder that the Irish were poor and ignorant? When we remember that man is prone to evil, and that rightness of statements have ever endeavored to devise means by which the people might be educated; when we remember, in our own day, legislators, in order to keep up the intelligence of the people to a certain standard, seriously think of making education compulsory; when we remember that the very purpose of this was the only way in which the people could be educated, and that some hidden power sustained them.

The same system of penal laws was enforced in England with the desired effect. England had been Catholic for over a thousand years, and yet, exposed only a few years to this persecution, she abandoned her faith. All the cruel enactments of men were unable to make Ireland worse than her steadfast devotion to Christ. The very visitations of heaven were turned into agents of apostasy. In those

years of famine and pestilence which followed the failure of the crops, when most of the inhabitants, from this misfortune, unable to pay their rents, were ejected, when they wandered, without house, without food, seeking to obtain something from their opulent neighbors—when babes might be seen falling dead from their mothers' arms—when infants were often found clasped in their dead embrace—when men, unable to listen to the ravings of famished children and wife for bread, betook themselves to the hedges in order that they might not be compelled to listen to the agonies of those they loved more dearly than life—when they died by the wayside, as Ireland's poet tells us, "without a tear, without a prayer, without a shroud, without a coffin, without a grave—when the living could only bury the dead when naught arose from the land but one ceaseless litany of human groans—when all eyes were turned towards heaven, when the wasted, uplifted hands alone could pray, Lord, grant us death—when this heart-rending scene had elicited the sympathy and charity of the civilized world—when the great heart of humanity everywhere beat responsive to the cries of distress, England, with her established Church, anticipating the succor of all other lands, came upon the scene with an abundance, like the corn of Egypt, garnered in the years of plenty. Did she come to relieve the starving Irish? No! but to proselytize them.

This epoch was to witness the advent of a new philosophy, one so cruel and inhuman that savages who knew not God had never thought of it, a philosophy which would enable a man to sell his birthright, not only in this world, but in the world to come, for a mess of pottage. By this teaching the grosser nature was to hold dominion over the mind and the soul; according to it, in the words of the Apostle, their belly was to be their god. A pound of beef held up before the eyes of a starving man was the cogent argument urged by the ministers of the Gospel pure and undefiled, against the divine institution of the Church, that was to convince an Irishman that St. Patrick brought darkness to his land. A coat to cover his trembling body was an argument well calculated to shake his faith in transubstantiation. A pair of blankets was a sure to have more effect than the cleansing fires. Have we not read that when distress was at his height, Bible-readers and Scribes, as they rode past the places where the Irish were lying by the wayside, tortured with hunger, maddened by fever's scorching breath, lighting the fires beneath the gridirons, in order that the savory odor of the broiling beef might be wafted to the nostrils of the dying in the hope that the love of life would triumph over love of God and faith?

All history affords but one instance in which this philosophy was practiced and conclusively points to one master. The instance was the temptation of Jesus in the desert with the bread—the master was the devil. This was the darkest hour in Ireland's history, the last, the severest test by which God could prove Ireland's faith—for greater love than this no man can have, to lay down his life for his friends?

Satan, when he envied Job, spoke thus to the Lord: "Job has not feared Thee in vain; hast Thou not made a fence for him and his house and all his substance round about? Hast Thou not increased his possessions on the earth? After these favors, why should he not bless Thee? But stretch forth Thy hand and take these things away, and see if Job will (still) bless thee. When stripped of his earthly goods Job, blessed God, Satan with his fearful intelligence, could suggest only one more trial, and that was that God should stretch forth His hand and touch his bone and his flesh. Then says Satan, "Job will surely curse God because all that a man hath will he give for his life." Satan and the Soupers seem to have studied in the same school, but just as Job disappointed Satan, so did the Irish disappoint the Soupers, for they feared not Him who can kill only the body, but they feared Him who can kill both soul and body in hell. If this was Ireland's greatest trial, it was also her greatest triumph, for in their tribulation the white-robed children of Erin washed their garments in the Blood of the Lamb, and added to their diadem of saintly glory the martyr's crown.

As we contemplate their sufferings the eyes well with tears, the heart by turn breaks with grief and is fired with revenge, for thy wrongs, O Ireland, are such as to stir a fever in the blood of age and make the infant's sinews strong as steel. But Ireland, the light of thy faith comes to our eyes, and we behold thee not cursing but blessing thy persecutors, like the holy martyr, St. Stephen, praying for those that are putting thee to death. We see thee as we saw the Saviour, weak, weary, disfigured with blood and sweat, like him loaded with the contumely of the great ones of the world, walking to thy Calvary; and as we look at thee after thy centuries of persecution we see thy tears blood have purchased pardon for thy persecutors—for England instead of making thee Protestant is walking in thy light, becoming Catholic. We see verified in her the beautiful legend of Calvary of the Centurion who pierced Jesus' side with the lance—we remember before that cruel act his eyes were nearly blinded with disease which had afflicted them from his youth, but no sooner did his lance pierce Jesus' sacred heart than the blood and water spouted forth, he touched his eyes and he healed them—this miracle opened the eyes of his soul, and he who assisted at the crucifixion came down from the mountains filled with compunction striking his breast and exclaiming, Jesus whom we have crucified, was truly the Son of God. Thus, O Ireland, have the blood and water which flows in such copious streams from thy children during the centuries of persecution brought light to the eyes of thy enemies, opened the eyes of their soul to the truth which thou sufferedst for; they turned their eyes in upon their souls until in horror they discovered their hearts in persecuting thee were as black and cruel as Nero's or Domitian's or Julian the Apostate's.

Ireland, this dark hour will ever be thy glory, for it has reserved to thee, alone the singular privilege among all creation of never having barred thy faith for the things of this world. Since the glorious epochs of the Church are periods of bloody persecution, since the tombs of her martyrs are the only monuments of her triumphs, thou wilt ever be the glory of the Church of God. Generations yet unborn will turn back to thee and point to the preservation of thy faith, amid trials such as the early martyrs endured not, as the most striking, the most convincing proof that the word of the Lord remaineth forever, that the gates of hell shall never prevail against the Church founded upon a rock. Yes, from the dark period of thy history will arise a light, a glory which will reach from earth's profoundest depths up to Heaven, a light which conclusively shows, since thou wouldst sooner die than change "not of thine own faith, that thy faith is that which Patrick received from Celestine, that which was delivered by Jesus Christ to Peter; that thy glory reaches back to the first age of the Christian world, and it will shed its influence on the last age; it is a light, a glory which nations yet will walk in, in which souls kindly will rejoice.

Oh, Erin! why then should we not love

thee? In fancy we visit thee by night as we behold thee beautiful as a goddess rising out of ocean's foam, as thy mantle of green, thy hills and smiling valleys and beautiful lakes burst upon our view, "Flower of the earth, gem of the sea," we exclaim, how beautiful! how beautiful in nature, but, oh, how transcendently beautiful with the beauty of holiness! Every foot of thy soil hallowed with the footsteps of saints, every hedge and ditch a shrine presided over by some martyr-spirit whose glories are celebrated only in Heaven, for his name is written only in the book of life. As we remember as a mother in tribulation and groaning, thou didst bear us unto Christ; as the remembrance of all thy past glories rise up before us. Erin, why should we not love thee? Land of our fathers, land of our faith, homes of our birth, why should we not cherish thee? Thou art but the shadowing of our Heavenly home, for

"What if earth Be but the shadow of Heaven and the things therein Each to each more like than on earth is thought?"

Why should we not hope for, pray for thee, sweet Isle of the ocean, that thy banner might again rise in glory, that thy silent harp that once the soul of music shed might again resound to the anthem of "Erin Go Bragh." May we not in the bitterness of the grief for thee look up to heaven and complain. "How long, how long, oh Lord, shall Erin suffer? Has not Erin been faithful to Thee? Has she not in water and blood sought Thy kingdom and Thy glory? Why, then, dost Thou not fulfil Thy promise and add unto her these things? Alas, Erin, for all our hopes that as thou hast been a model to the nations of fidelity to God, thou wouldst become, when a brighter era should have dawned upon thee, a model of fidelity to man. Thy sad figure ever rises up before us, pointing to a steep, narrow thorny path as thy road to glory; thou tellest us that it is ever thus that God tries His noblest by the cross—that it is only in heaven thy sorrows will be turned over into joy. At thy command, with our eyes lighted up with the light of thy faith, we look up to heaven; we then see thy children, remarkable among men for the love of the angelic virtue, as the lily among flowers, for its purity, numbered among the white-robed throng that follows the Lamb whithersoever he goeth; we see thy armies of just men made perfect, we see thy glorious hosts of martyrs, we see a great multitude, which no man can number, of every nation, and tribe, and people, and tongue, who now enjoy the reward of the blessed in heaven because they walked in thy light upon earth; we see thy glorious apostle Patrick as the Joshua who has led this chosen people into the true promised land, we see him crowned with a diadem, the brightness, the glory of which pales not before that of saint or martyr or apostle. Oh! as this vision of holiness bursts upon our astonished gaze, Erin, may we not dream of earthly conquests, earthly glory for thee, but as for me, I would not rob thee of one ray of that glory with which heaven has crowned thy brow, if with it I could purchase all the triumphs, prosperity, peace and glory of this world.

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