

Celts of Erin were a cultured people. Their bards sang the heroes of the clans in strains rivalling those of ancient Greece ; the Brehons digested a code of law equal, in its conformity to natural justice, to the ancient Roman code ; but their civilization far surpassed that of either Athens or Rome in point of morals and religion. Druidism, which taught the existence of one omnipotent God, was far superior to any other ancient religion, with the exception of revealed Judaism. It had an elevating influence on the mind, in singular contrast to the debasing influence of the material polytheism of Greece, Rome and other nations of antiquity.

The Irish were therefore better prepared for Christianity than any other nation. And when St. Patrick announced the Truth to them, they embraced it with unexampled readiness. Their minds "challenged by truth, with recognizing voice cried out, 'Flesh of my flesh, bone of my bone !' and cleaved thereto." They were better prepared than others to understand the teachings of Christianity. They grasped them more firmly. Hence, Erin became a land of saints and scholars, with a celerity that seems miraculous, when compared with the tardy success that crowned the strenuous efforts which Christianity in other lands put forth in raising up to its own high level the degraded adepts of polytheism. St. Patrick himself was surprised at the ardor that his spiritual children manifested in consecrating themselves to the service of God in the highest form of Christian life, the practice of the evangelical counsels. This ardor went on increasing until the island became one vast monastery, the centre of learning and piety for all Europe.

A glance at the Roman Empire, that is, at the civilized world outside of Ireland, for the terms were then synonymous, will reveal the place that this wonderful development of Christianity in Ireland occupied in the designs of Providence. It would be hard even to imagine greater enervation and corruption than that of Roman society, before the fall of the Empire. Christianity had not succeeded in infusing new life into the decrepid form. "Christianity," says Montalambert, "had accepted that abject condition, as it accepts all, with the supernatural confidence of aiding what was good in it, and of lessening the evil. But