

IRELAND'S HOLY WELLS.

Bishop Healy on the Health Giving Fountains—Faith vs. Superstition.

Bishop Healy, writing in St. Peter's Magazine, London, says:
As a rule, all the Irish saints have one or more blessed wells dedicated to their memory in the immediate neighborhood of the churches which they founded. Indeed, the church was never founded except near a well. Pure water was necessary, not only for baptism and for the Holy Sacrifice, but also for the daily needs of the holy men and women whose lives were given there to the service of God. Pure water was for them an urgent need, for they led lives of extreme rigor, hardly ever tasting animal food, except a little fish from time to time. Bread, herbs and water was their daily fare; they drank neither wine nor beer nor spirits, nothing but the crystal spring. What wonder these became holy wells—blessed for baptism, used at mass, giving daily drink to generations of saints, whose pure and grateful hearts blessed God who gave them these crystal springs, and blessed again and again the fountain itself that gave its grateful waters to quench their thirst at every frugal meal!

For a somewhat similar reason we find constant reference to the "blessed trout," or the "enchanted trout," that frequented the holy wells. No doubt some of the saints sought to keep fish for their own use in some of these wells and streams, as the religious of medieval times certainly did in the larger rivers, right to which they always built monasteries. Then no Christian would touch those little fishes which the saint or hermit kept in the stream or well near his church. It would be almost a sacrilege to rob the holy man of the little he claimed as his own, so that the fish, like the stream, would be holy things in the estimation of the people, and came to enjoy a kind of immortal life.

We have a remarkable instance of this at Aghagower, in the county Mayo. St. Patrick founded that church for his disciple Senach, who, on account of his spotless innocence, was called the Lamb of God. The church was built on the bank of a limpid river, which still flows as full and clear as in ancient days, although church and round tower are now in ruins. Patrick himself loved the place much for his sweet retirement, and was minded to stay there, as he was "weary faring round so many churches, and crossing so many floods." But the angel said "No"—It was not God's will. Whereupon Patrick left Senach there, and placed in the stream for him two salmon, as the "Tripartite" tells us, that always kept together, and could not be harmed, through the blessing of Patrick, for he left angels to watch over them. So we are told in this book, written more than one thousand years ago; and the wondrous tale has come down through the ages, and, for aught we know, the blessed salmon are still at Aghagower, as they are said to be in so many other of the holy wells in Ireland.

After St. Patrick, the greatest missionary saints of Ireland were Bridget and Columcille. St. Bridget, "the Mary of the Gael," was a woman not only of great holiness, but also of great zeal and energy in doing the work of God. She made missionary journeys throughout various parts of Ireland. She founded many churches, and right to her churches we find the holy wells that still bear her name, and are still held in great reverence by the people. Bridget was venerated at Cam, west of Athlone, quite as much as she was in Kildare. Her comrades, or successors, were entitled to collect the baptismal penny from all the men of Hy Many, and the holy well close to her church in which they were baptized by her clerics is still one of the most celebrated of those beyond the Shannon. It is yearly frequented by great crowds of pious pilgrims, who perform the stations there on the saint's feast day, and leave many votive offerings behind them to testify to the efficacy of her prayers on their behalf. It is called Bride's well, and has been thus frequented from time immemorial by all the men and women of Hy Many.

So it was, likewise, with Columcille. He founded, before setting out for Iona, many churches and monasteries in the northern half of Ireland, especially in Donegal, Derry, Sligo and Meath, and at all these foundations we find some reference to the holy wells blessed by the prayers and the daily use of the saint and of his companions. Like St. Patrick, he was a great traveler, and on his missionary journeys went mostly on foot. Hence it came to pass that, often tired and weary, he sat down by the wayside to rest and refresh himself with a draught from the pure waters of the cooling fountain. Then he preached there, and baptized those who flocked to hear him, and if the place were otherwise suitable, he chose it as the site of a church, or hermitage, or monastery, for, although most of the monks lived in community, others preferred a solitary life, and sought to serve God in some deep mountain valley, or lonely island, or pathless wood, where they might live alone with Him far removed from the distractions of the world. Such a wild mountain valley is Glen Columcille, at the base of Slieve League, in the county Donegal, cut off, as it then was, from the world and looking over the wild western sea. But Columcille loved it for its very loneliness; and his holy well on Slieve League is still greatly venerated by the men of Tirconnell, who confide in the saint as their special patron and protector.

Then every diocesan patron and almost parochial saint had his own holy

well, of which the memory is now sometimes lost, but in very many cases is still fondly cherished. The Well of the Virgin, in which St. Brendan was baptized, is greatly venerated, and votive offerings still hang around it on the bushes that grow on its margin.

Another famous well was St. Mullin's, near New Ross, but we believe its ancient celebrity is now waning. Many holy wells were dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, like that near Angheny, which is still much frequented by pilgrims on the eve of the Assumption, for it is believed to possess great curative virtues. Even in remotest Connemara we find a Tober Maira, or Mary's well, in the townland of Kibride, in the barony of Ross. This shows that the church was dedicated to St. Bridget, and perhaps the well, too, for she is often called the "Mary of the Gael." There are, however, many other Tober Mairs throughout the country, which certainly bear the name of the Blessed Virgin, most probably on account of cures believed to have been wrought through her intercession.

There was a second holy well near the monastic Church of St. Augustine in Galway, at which some wonderful cures took place. One of these has been formally attested by more than a dozen of the first citizens of Galway, both clerical and lay. It was in the case of Patrick Lynch, and took place on June 11, 1673. He himself deposed on oath, and his deposition was confirmed by the oaths of the witnesses, that he was visited by "a most grievous, desperate, dangerous disease and given over by all doctors to be incurable, and could not eat one bite since Easter last." But when brought to St. Augustine's well on the day named, and "totally dipped therein, and having also drank a cup out of the well three times in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost," he at once got up of himself and walked about the well and recovered his strength and his appetite and "doth sleep as well as before," for which the deponent plausibly adds, the "eternal God be glorified and praised for the same for ever." It is not the well of itself but the mercy of God and the prayers of St. Augustine to which he attributes the cure, but through the instrumental agency of the water of the well, just as the Jordan's waters healed the Syrian leper, who went to bathe in them by command of the prophet of God. Similar cures, but less formally authenticated, are said to occur every year at some holy wells.

There are certain superior persons even among Catholics who deem any religious reverence paid to those holy wells to be superstitious; and they are inclined to sneer at the ignorant pieties of the simple faithful who perform their devotions at the sacred springs or attribute any healing efficacy to their waters. They say in effect, like the Syrian leper: "Are not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel, that I may wash in them and be made clean?" "Would it not be better for these foolish people to go to the doctor than put faith in prayers and blessed wells?" But the water of Jordan alone could cleanse the leprosy of the scolding Syrian, and so we can hardly blame our poor people, who, in their strong and simple faith, believe that the prayer at the blessed well and the washing in its water have more value than the doctor's medicine. With non-Catholics who do not reverence even the cross of Christ, we do not reason here. But Catholics ought to know better than regard all these observances as superstitious. It is true that they sometimes degenerate into superstition; but the Catholic instinct that shows reverence to the relics of the saints, and venerates the holy fountains which they blessed, used in the service of the Church, is not superstitious. We may indeed well venerate them, for some of the ancient holiness of the world, and it is not too much to hope that the saints who blessed them may still look down from their high place in heaven on the faithful souls who so lovingly cherish their memories in the scenes of their earthly pilgrimage, and risk their strong prayers before the great white throne in heaven. This is not superstition, and the Church has no sympathy with the hollow smile and frozen stare of those superior persons who, with all their wisdom, do not understand the things of the Spirit of God.

This same spirit would sneer at the poor woman who touched the hem of our Saviour's garment that she might be healed, and would have no patience with the superstitious people of the Apostolic age who brought forth their sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that St. Peter's shadow at least might fall upon them, and that they might thus be delivered from their infirmities. And what would such people say of the folly and superstition of those foolish people who brought to the sick the handkerchiefs and aprons of St. Paul, which yet was powerful to drive away disease from the sick and evil spirits from the bodies of the possessed?

With this half-skeptical faith and sneering pieties we have no sympathy. We believe that some of their ancient holiness still lingers round our blessed wells, that their holy patrons still pray in a special manner for those who frequent them in a pious and confiding spirit, and that God often hears those fervent prayers, and grants special requests to the faithful suppliants, through the fervor of their faith and the merits of the saints. No doubt there have been abuses. Let them be corrected, and if there is ignorance let it be enlightened. But do not brand as superstitious those pious practices which in themselves are not only blameless, but laudable;

or surely it is nothing else but laudable to visit in a spirit of prayerful faith those sacred scenes and places hallowed by the foot steps of the saints of God, where every memory moves the penitent to ask their prayers with confidence, and recalls to mind for their own lives. Let the skeptic go to Bath, Buxton or Harrogate to have his disorders cured, but let not our poor faithful people be blamed too much if, in their own hearts, they prefer the sacred streams of the Jordan to all the rivers of Damascus.

THE BLESSED VIRGIN.

Veneration of Catholics for Mary.—The Ambiguous Word Worship—Its Etymology and Original Meaning—Mistakes of Protestant Preachers.

It was "old Hobbs" who said, in his "Leviathan," that "words are wise men's counters; they do not reckon by them, but they are the money of fools." Logicians tell us that most disputes and misunderstandings arise out of an abuse or misuse of words. Two centuries ago Bossuet pointed out that the dispute between Catholics and Protestants of the subject of the "worship" of images and the Blessed Virgin and the saints is to some extent a dispute rather about words than things. This is true even at the present day. The very word "worship" itself is one that readily lends itself to verbal jugglery and controversial ledgerdom. Reference to any standard dictionary will show that it includes two such hopelessly and generically different meanings as (1) the mere respect or honor which a man may show to his fellow-man, and (2) the supreme adoration which is due to God alone. A class of callow pulpiteres and small controversialist pamphleteers avail themselves of this ambiguity of meaning to fix the tradition of an odious charge upon the Catholic body. The rank and file of their hearers and readers have no practical acquaintance with any but one—namely the divine—form of religious worship. We have, of course, been frequently charged in coarser and more direct fashion with the monstrous crime of giving divine honor to our Lady. But the great tradition of the Protestant masses has been f.d in no small degree (1) by the ambiguity of the term "worship," (2) by the limitation of its meaning, as stated above, and (3) by the deadly ding dong persistency with which this comparatively new idea of its meaning has been for some centuries associated, in their minds, with the legitimate honor shown by Catholics to her whom God's angel found "full of grace."

It is only within comparatively recent times that the word "worship" has come to acquire the meaning of supreme adoration, as of the Godhead. The scholarly Protestant writer Archbishop Trench, in his "English past and present" (6th ed., p. 245), shows that the word was originally written "worship" and that it meant "honor" or "only." It retained that meaning exclusively for centuries. It retains it still, though not exclusively. We recommend to the notice of a certain Devonport preacher a number of old English reprints which were issued in London and Birmingham in 1868-1869. Notable among them is the "Revelation of the Monk and the Evesham," written in 1196 and first printed by William de Machin in 1842. Throughout the whole of this curious work—which is an English forerunner of Dante's "Divina Commedia"—the word "worship" is used exclusively in the sense of "honor." Thus, a certain abbot is described as a man of "worshipful" (i.e., honorable) conversation; a monk is represented as being punished in purgatory for having unduly sought "worshipful" (or honor at the hands of the people; and the writer describes how "our Lord did worship" (i.e., honor) His servant—a holy Bishop—by bestowing upon him the gift of miracles. And so on and on in a score of other passages throughout the work.

The Bible improperly attributed to Wyckliffe and dating from about the year 1382—translates Matthew xix, 9 as follows: "Worshipful (i.e., honor) shall fade and the modir," and our Saviour's words in John xii, 28 thus: "If any man serve me, my Father shall worshipful (i.e., honor) him." A precisely similar meaning is given to the word in "The Babes Book" (p. 37), published by the Early English Text Society; and in Langland's "Piers Plowman" and Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales." The two last named works were written in the latter half of the fourteenth century, and are easily procurable by the general reader. We have counted no fewer than nine different places in which Shakespeare uses the word "worship" in the sense of mere honor and without any reference whatever to that supreme worship or adoration which is due to God alone. The authorized version of the Protestant Bible thus translates our divine Lord's words in Luke xiv, 10:

"But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee: Friend, go up higher; then shalt thou have 'worship' in the presence of the them sit at meat with thee."

In the Church of England marriage service the bridegroom says to the bride: "With my body I thee worship" (meaning, of course, "honor.") In Cardwell's "History of the Conferences" (p. 200) exception is stated to have been made to these words by Dr. Reynolds. Thereupon "His Majesty looked upon the place. I was made believe (saith he) that phrase did impart no less that divine

worship and adoration, but by the examination find that it is an usual English term, as 'a gentleman of worship,' etc., and the sense agreeable unto Scriptures, 'giving honor to the wife,' etc. But turning to Dr. R. y. nolds, with smiling, said His Majesty: 'If you had a good wife yourself you would think all the honor and worship you could do to her well bestowed.'

Nobody misunderstands Tennyson when he urges a young man to "worship her (a maiden) with years of noble deeds;" nor Carlyle when he writes of the "hero-worship" offered to Mirabeau, Cromwell, Napoleon, Johnson, Rousseau, Madame de Sael and Robbie Burns. Here in the very midst of this Protestant land, Mayors and Magistrates are still addressed "As Your Worship;" the master of an Orange lodge is styled by the brethren "Worshipful" and the grand master the "Right Worshipful." A glance at Webster's or any good dictionary will show that "worship" still holds its original meaning of simple honor or respect. But it has also in the course of time acquired the later and far different significance of supreme divine adoration. It is needless to say that the merely relative "worship" (r honor paid to a creature—even the spotless Virgin Mother—differs not only in degree, but in kind, from the supreme "worship" of adoration which must be given to God alone. With Catholics the meaning of the word "worship" is defined and safeguarded by the terms of the Church's known teachings. It is quite another matter when the term is used of with hostile or controversial intent and in the sense already indicated by Protestant preachers or writers. Without due explanation and definition the word as applied to our veneration of the Blessed Virgin, etc., is tolerably certain to mislead. It insinuates a gross and monstrous charge of idolatry. In the circumstance an honest man's plain duty is either to explain his meaning of the term or to seek a better one. Those who knowingly decline both alternatives ought to revise their moral code. Those who are ignorant of the slippery character of the term would do well to go to school again.

The teaching of the Catholic Church in the so-called "worship of the Virgin Mary" is well and tersely expressed in the following words of one of our great divines: "The Church condemns the least expression which oversteps that clear line, never to be crossed, dividing supreme worship of God from the highest honor paid to His highest saint." We accord the Blessed Virgin peculiar veneration, just because God crowned her with peculiar honors. Huse, Wyclif and the early Reformers, Luther, the authors of the Bohemian, Tetrapolitan and Basle Confessions of Faith, of the Declaration of Thorn and of the Leipzig Colloquy (1631)—all agreed in a lesser and legitimate form of "worship of the Virgin Mary." In his preface to the "The Story that Transformed the World" (1890) Mr. W. T. Stead says of the veneration of Catholics for Mary:

"Protestantism will have much leeway to make up before it can find any influence so potent for softening the hearts and inspiring the imagination of men as that of the true ideal of the womanhood of the world (Mary)!"

One of the hopeful signs of the past fifty years is the steady advance of respect and veneration for the Blessed Virgin among our Protestant brethren. It is not to be stopped by abusive or begging-question epithets nor by appeals to the feelings of ignorant hearers. As for the Catholic Church, her divine Founder prophesied that she should ever be the butt of the persecutor's hand and of the calumniator's tongue. We are the heirs of the blessings as of the trials of those who, when the Church was in the catacombs, were accused of worshipping an ass. Foolish charges and covert insinuations of rank idolatry may and do cause local irritation and effect some local harm. It is our duty to repel them as far as we may. But if they form part of the Church's cross, they will all form part of her crown. "They shall persecute and calumniate you." So in substance ran the prophecy. But the gates of hell shall not prevail against her (the Church). So ran the promise. An army of sons of Ananias can no more shake the rock-foundations of God's Church than volleys of stones could shift the rock of Gibraltar. And it is a bad cause that needs support itself by falsehood.—New Zealand Tablet.

A WARNING.

We have received a little volume intended to win converts to the gospel of faith cure, and we refer to it only to warn our readers against the whole school of literature of which it is a specimen. Every book issued in the interests of "Christian Science" and faith cure is a compound of quack medicine and quack theology. That the mind influences the body toward health or sickness, and that confidence helps toward cure in innumerable cases, are the commonest truths, and have ever been recognized as such; no competent physician neglects to profit by them. But the "quack people" quote so many Scriptural texts in justification of their theories, and the faith cureists are an extremely dangerous experiment. When physicians honestly admit their helplessness in a particular case and the cureists blatantly assert their power, the temptation to test that power is almost irresistible; then

a temporary or accidental improvement fixes the Christian Science delusion not only on the patient but on countless others who hear or read about his case. Thus this modern madness will "deceive, if possible, even the elect," whom ordinary heresy never could mislead. The only safe policy for those who love their body more than their soul—and lots of people do—is total abstinence from the literature of the cureists.—Ava Maria.

CARDINAL VAUGHAN ON PROTESTANTISM.

The Westminster Gazette, London, publishes a remarkable interview with Cardinal Vaughan on the forthcoming act of homage by which the Catholic Church will celebrate the incoming of the twentieth century. Having given some idea of the nature of the celebrations in England, the Cardinal was asked whether by this sacred homage he anticipated any substantial expansion of the Catholic Church. "That will be as Christ shall direct," he replied. "You tell me," he went on, "that the Church of England is also celebrating in a special manner the advent of the new century. Ah, well, we shall not interfere with them. There will be nothing controversial or antagonistic in our plan of action. We are not opening a net. The Catholic Church is above that. Our celebration is purely and solely an acknowledgment of Christ's Divine way and of the authority of His Vicar, the Holy Father. I do not connect the crisis in the Established Church with this Jubilee," the Cardinal added significantly. "The one is quite remote from the other; but as you ask me what is my opinion of the so-called crisis, I will tell you; but I cannot discuss the matter in any detail."

"It is not for me to pass judgment. The Established Church is riding for a fall; it cannot live, it will not live; it is simply a sect flourishing like the Arians and the Eusebians for three or four hundred years, and then collapsing. When there is serious and continuous friction the end cannot be far off. I myself am confident that the end is not very distant; but," and his Eminence seemed to shrug his shoulders, "what has this got to do with our homage to Jesus Christ? Such things are impossible in our Church; we have all precisely the same faith. The learned may have a larger acquaintance with the doctrines of the Faith than the illiterate, but there is nothing upheld by the most distinguished member of the Catholic Church that is not indorsed by the most simple Catholic everywhere. The Church offers the same Sacraments of the Mass everywhere, administers the same Sacraments everywhere, observes the same festival days at the same time. No matter what national or political government under which he or she may live, the Catholic is, without exception, under the subjection of the Pastor and the Bishop. We are essentially united. In this respect the Catholic Church excels all others. Is there not a difference?"—American Herald.

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