

MARCH 14, 1903

In an unfinished poem, written by an Irish poet, in the early years of the nineteenth century, this beautiful spirit of living in the presence of God is well described—a noble hearted Celtic youth, Mat Hyland, thus addresses the Creator.

"I see Thee in the winter's snow, The smiling boy and roving wanderer, And waves that foam, and dross that glow, And sounds of awe and sighs of wonder."

I hear Thee in the rustling woods, When dark flocks rest on grove and fountain, I see Thee in the rushing floods, I read Thee in the lonely mountain.

From household love—from friendship's tie—Thou art sweet, the transient bliss we borrow, Soothe us from the fruit of melancholy, And leave us woe in lonely sorrow.

For Thee alone our love was made, In Thee alone it centres pure, In Thee lives its light that "cr can fade, There rests its spirit with security."

With this spirit the Celtic people wended their way along the varied paths of "Life's Pilgrimage." Clouds rose on the horizon, dark, heavy, sorrow-laden clouds, but in every dark cloud they saw the silver lining, the pure bright silver of eternal hope.

Storms of persecution swept over the land they loved. What matter? God was with them, and they loved Him with a great, generous-hearted love, they felt it was a privilege to suffer for Him, a glory to die for Him. They daunted they met their enemies—they might throw them into prison, fetter them with cruel chains, bear them to the torture-chamber or to the scaffold. What matter? St. Patrick had taught them to live in the presence of their Creator, to call Him into their midst, and He was "Alpha and Omega" of their highest aspirations.

This spirit of prayer, the secret of Ireland's fidelity; it is with us still! Alas! alas! the sweet Celtic aspirations are heard but seldom now. The rush, the worry, the nineteenth century years of the nineteenth century have obliterated, in most places, the sweet old customs, the grand traditions of the past, that have done so much to strengthen and preserve faith. The tastes of our people have become vitiated, the struggle for existence, the love of excitement, the rush for crowded cities and large towns, the panic to make fortunes, the flood of evil literature. All these tend to materialize the mind and to rob the heart of its spiritual beauty.

Here and there we find the old customs of the Irish mother parting from her daughter at some way-side station, will still be heard murmuring in broken accents, as the train steams away, "Oh, God be with you, acushla, God be with you!" We know that poor mother, when she returns to her lonely hearth and feels the full weight of her sorrow, will cry out from the depth of her sorrowing heart, as did our ancestors, "God help me!"

The 20th century is advancing, the Irish language is being revived. Let us revive with it the sweet greetings and aspirations that were a living part of the language. The Church has many enemies; if we have a holy pride in our glorious past, let us prepare to be brave soldiers, as our forefathers were. For this we must put on the breast-plate of prayer. We must drive from our homes the evil literature that comes like a fetid stream into our land, poisoning the moral atmosphere around us. We must foster an appreciation of the lives and traditions of our noble heroes and our great scholars. Irish mothers, at home and far away, do your duty and place before the young people "noble ideals," if you want them to be noble-hearted. In the name of Heaven, let us, in this new-born century, have the good and true woman, not the "new woman," that is the woman who calls herself independent, but is the veriest slave of every evil fashion, and uses slang which calls herself educated, and uses slang which calls her birth in low-class theatres and drinking-saloons, and could not be found in any dictionary.

Irish fathers at home and far away, guard your sons from evil companionship. Keep them away, far away, from the enemies of our Holy Church, and the worst enemy of all is the "wolf in sheep's clothing." The bad Catholic who is only in name a Catholic, who rewards his followers, not in this life with worldly goods, but in the life to come "with the incorruptible treasures of heaven." The God, with their hearts as well as with their money, where by the Catholic poor. God loves the poor, for as a writer puts it, "God would not have so many poor unless He loved the poor," and to poverty borne with resignation is attached by our Lord Himself that crowning blessing of life eternal. "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." The ignorance of the Irish. Are the Irish people ignorant at the present day, and if so, who is to blame? Were they steeped in ignorance and barbarity when they received the gift of Faith through the medium of St. Patrick? Let us take up the latter question first, as it is the more important, for ignorance and Catholicity are bracketed by some. "It," writes Father Morris, "the Irish were styled barbarians in St. Patrick's time, they were barbarians of the stamp of Caracalla and Clovis, and the men who put living blood into the veins of expiring Europe. It was the first of the new-born nations of the West who began the work of the spiritual and intellectual re-organization of Europe. Ireland had already won the title of 'The Island of Saints' at a time when Clovis and his Franks were still worshippers of Odin, and the Arian Goths were enemies of the destroyers of Christianity as relentless as the pagan." No better proof of the enlightenment of the Irish people at the time of St. Patrick can be given than the fact that Ireland was the only country in Europe that was bloodlessly converted. Men embraced the Gospel of Christianity with an open heart, and ever since they clinging tenaciously to that Faith, never falling for a moment under the lumbering wheel of oppression, whilst other nations sold their Faith for a mess of pottage. Other nations were robbed of their Faith, and in turn

WHY CATHOLICS, AND PARTICULARLY THE IRISH, ARE REPUTED "POOR, IGNORANT AND SUPERSTITIOUS."

M. LACE, in the Australasian Catholic Record, January, 1903.

Under the name of Ireland, sometimes the Church of God is held up for ridicule, and the Irish people are poor, we are told, because they are under the yoke of a foreign despot, the Pope, and because they have no liberty of conscience, and have forsaken the true religion which spells material prosperity and worldly comfort everywhere; they are ignorant, for the Catholic Church has never prospered, except amongst people remarkable alike for gross ignorance and intellectual stagnation; and they are superstitious, for the Catholic Church is one vast network of superstition, and Catholic priests are engaged merely in throwing clouds of superstition over the people lest the dark clouds roll by and a clear atmosphere help to rescue from the fogs of superstition the victims of the wills of the Roman Pontiff and his satellites. Let us examine each of the above separately.

The Irish people are poor because they do not belong to the true Church, whose subjects are rewarded with worldly happiness and prosperity. See, for example, say these heralds of the true religion, how successful Protestant England is from a commercial standpoint; see its grandeur, its riches, its splendid territories, its civilizing influence, and see by contrast how poor are Catholic countries like Ireland and Italy! This is an old objection, and the answer is, "It is as hard for a rich man to go to Heaven as for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle," and again, "No man can serve two masters, for he will either serve the one and hate the other, or hate the one and serve the other. No man can serve God and mammon."

Pagan Greece and Rome were once the richest and most powerful nations in the world, therefore it follows by analogy that Greece and Rome were rewarded for being pagan nations, with the same reward meted out to Protestant England for being a Protestant nation. Are riches an incentive to virtue and to godliness, or has the abuse of wealth brought down the anger of God on more than Dives of the Gospel, who "died and was buried in hell?" Is not the humble cottage in the thralls of poverty a more congenial soil for the propagation of virtue than the lordling's palace?

"And certe, in fair virtue's heavenly road, The cottage leaves his palace far behind, What is the lordling's pomp? A cumbersome load, Disgracing of the wretch of human kind, Stained in acts of hell, in wickedness reined."

But not to mince matters, if our Divine Lord wished His Church to be rich and to be known by its riches, why did He found it in poverty? Why did He select twelve poor, illiterate men to be His pillars on earth? Why did He Himself select the blessed Virgin, a poor woman, to be His mother? Why was He born in the stable at Bethlehem? Why did He elect to live almost all His years with a poor carpenter? Why did He select for friends the poor? And, finally, why did He allow Himself to be crucified—to die an outcast to the world on the hill of Calvary? Why then boast of riches in connection with the Church of God when our Divine Lord preferred poverty, lived among the poor, selected twelve poor, illiterate men to be the pillars of His Church on earth, and finally died a poor man, despised by the world? The Catholic Church, then, if poor, I say, is nearest to God's ideal of a Church. Whether it be rich or poor, it is God's Church, who rewards His followers, not in this life with worldly goods, but in the life to come "with the incorruptible treasures of heaven." The God, with their hearts as well as with their money, where by the Catholic poor. God loves the poor, for as a writer puts it, "God would not have so many poor unless He loved the poor," and to poverty borne with resignation is attached by our Lord Himself that crowning blessing of life eternal. "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

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robbed others, but Ireland has proved to the world the verifications of the words of Tertullian: "Crush us; afflict us; torment us; the blood of martyrs is the seed of new Christians." You may rob Ireland, but you cannot take away from her the bread of life; but one thing you cannot do, and never will be able to do—you can never rob her of the faith sealed by the life-blood of her martyrs, and ennobled by the blight of religious persecution. This dogged determination, despite every obstacle, to cling to the religion of the Apostles shows the highest form of enlightenment from a religious standpoint at least. Are the Irish ignorant today? If so, who is to blame? If ignorant, I answer, prevail in Ireland at the present day—a fact which I deny—it is only the natural outcome of the penal laws which proscribed learning, the speaking of the Irish language, the continuation of Irish customs, and which aimed with deadly precision to uproot not only religion, but arts and literature in Ireland, and to thus enslave the Gael, testantize, and denationalize itself until the Danish invasion, far surpassed the English in commerce, in literature, and in civilization. The B-tons, the inhabitants of England, were then despised by the Scots, the inhabitants of Ireland and of Caledonia. The Roman eagle, though victorious in Britain, feared to conquer Ireland at a time when a nation's progress in civilization is measured by the number of its soldiers, and the calibre of its scholars. "More than two-thirds of England," writes Montalbert in his "Monks of the West," "owed its final conversion to the labors of the Irish monks of the great schools of Iona, Old Melrose, and Lindisfarne." Irish exiles flocked to the Continent during this time, carrying with them the lamp of faith, as well as letters and civilization; so much so, that Ireland was honored by the title of "The Lamp of the West," and of "The University of Europe." Thus Ireland won for herself in the sixth century the first place amongst the saviours of learning and civilization "The Island of Saints and scholars," and the proudest boast of princes and nobles of France and Germany was that "they studied in Ireland."

Whatever Ireland be now, it was once the educator of England and the Continent; to its schools once flocked the leading families of the Continent; it was the seat of the foremost universities in the world, not only for sanctity, as it now is, but also for learning; and if, since "England has been proscribed in Ireland, if Irish literature and arts have received no encouragement since, if a chance of education has not been given to all, then Ireland and Irishmen are not to blame, but the unjust laws and the grinding tyranny of an alien rule. If the Irish people today be not the most ignorant on the face of the globe, England, "the land of enlightenment," is not to be thanked, but that innate love for learning in the Irish breast—a passion which no penal law could subdue, and which led many an Irish peasant at the peril of his life in the frosts and snows of winter to that fountain of knowledge whose only cover was the blue canopy of heaven—the Irish hedge school. We have seen that when other countries were steeped in ignorance, and blinded by the fogs of infidelity, Ireland was the seat of enlightenment, faith and prosperity; and if these countries today boast of their learned sons and daughters, let them remember they owe much to poor, distressed Ireland, and to the crumbling ruins of Bangor and Clonmacnoise. Above all, let them not accuse of ignorance the motherland of their own generations, the motherland of the nobility of Europe and the teacher of the English King, Alfred the Great, who stands far above all English kings for his learning with the proud title of the "Scholar King," for which he was indebted to an Irish University.

To those who say that ignorance and Catholicity go hand-in-hand, and that the Catholic Church has only flourished in ages of intellectual stagnation, let me say that of the most intellectually gifted men of the century have abandoned Protestantism for Catholicity—in America such names as Dr. Brownson, Haldeeman, and Anderson, in England Dr. Newman, Allies and Wilberforce, and in Germany Haller, Phillips and Huster, etc. What explanation can the apostles of the "intellectually reformed" religion give of this fact?

Are the Irish superstitious people? "The fear of fairies," said Father Tom Butty, "is at least a proof of the faculty of realising the Unseen." And another writer has said "superstition can only exist side by side with a lively faith." The Irish people, true it is to say, have their folk-lore, fairy tales, weird legends, and romances and traditions woven around forts and castles and in the flight of time these legends and traditions secure the impress of a highly imaginative people. If the Irish be deemed superstitious on this account, then other nations, for precisely the same reason, are superstitious too. Take, for example, Burns' Tam O'Shanter, and follow the unfortunate Tam to Alloway Kirk, where in the fairs held a midnight revel, clothed in death's shroud and with the collars tied securely to their backs, and you will be led to conclude that a country under the same climatic influence as Ireland, but of a different religion, has its fairies too. Therefore it follows at least that Catholicity is not the only breeding-ground for fairies. For Scotch legends, traditions, and fairy tales, I would recommend Burns' "Halloween." Let me mention a few of the practices of the canny Scotchmen on that night when "witches, devils, and other mischief-making beings are abroad" on their baneful errands. The first ceremony of Halloween is to pull each hand-in-hand with eyes shut and pull the first they meet with, its being a little, straight or crooked, is prophetic of the size and shape their future husband or wife, etc. A

similar ceremony is practised at the barn-yard by pulling a stalk of oats, to which, according to its appearance and ripeness, is attached extraordinary significance. The burning of the nuts also takes place, and according as the nuts, burning together jump about or remain stationary, so will the course and issue of courtship be. Another is this, in which the following directions must be strictly observed: Steal out alone to the mill, and something will hold the thread, who, when asked, will give the name and surname of your future spouse. Go unnoticed to a bean stack, and fathom it three times round, when you will catch in your arms the appearance of your future husband. As a last example, if one goes to a south-running stream where "three lairds' lands meet," and dip the left shirt-sleeve, and put it before the fire to dry, and to bed in sight of the one, about midnight the future spouse will come to take it as it to dry the other side. From this it follows that the fear of fairies and folk-lore, as well as legends and traditions, can no more be coupled with Catholicity than with Presbyterianism.

Let me ask, are the Irish a truly religious people? To illustrate this one has but to recall a typical Irish funeral, and if religion ever shows itself it is in presence of death, especially when it has entered one's household. On the day of burial the friends of the deceased come to pay their last tribute of love and respect to the departed—by kneeling beside the corpse and pouring out to God a few prayers from their generous hearts. Stand beside the crowd, scan the faces round about and see the tear rolling down many a cheek. Hear the heartfelt prayers going up to God on every side for the repose of the soul of the deceased. Listen to the pitiful wailing as the corpse is about to be taken away. Watch that mournful procession as it slowly winds around the hill covered with blue heather, and you cannot but admire the faith of those generous hearts impugning God by prayer to have mercy on the soul of the departed. The little cemetery beside the hill is soon filled, and so truly touching and pathetic is the scene beside the grave that anyone, no matter how hardened in heart, who joins this little circle beside the grave cannot escape being moved to tears. The trait of Irish character, I believe, has no parallel in this world, and it is one of the most striking evidences of the generous, sympathetic and truly religious Gael.

If the Irish be superstitious, as a writer puts it, "no people have ever sacrificed so much for a mere superstition." The history of the Catholic Church in Ireland is sad and chequered. In the entire history of persecuted and oppressed nations, no such tyranny and persecution were imposed upon an innocent people. Through the penal days under Elizabeth's reign, and later during the struggle of 1798 and the famine of 1747 and 1748, the poor Catholics of Ireland had to face persecution for their religion—persecution and tyranny that could only be endured by a nation whose faith was deeper to them than their lives. Bribes, tortures, every kind of seduction and treachery were tried in vain to annihilate the Catholic Church in Ireland: "They tried the flocks to sell their piety, They bribed the sons to rob their sires, They tried the wretch to sell his fire, They tried the wretch to sell his fire."

But in vain, for the Catholic Church outlived it all, and emerged from the penal days with the same vigor and freshness as when it rose from the ruins of the Coliseum. The Catholic Church has always suffered. It was planted in blood, and brought forth its first fruits in blood, but nowhere has a dogged determination to cling to the religion of the Apostles been more clearly evinced, and nowhere has it been more keenly tested than in Ireland during the penal days. The Irish lost their property on account of their faith; they were fined, imprisoned and put to death for putting that faith into practice. Why, the actual cause of the struggle of 1798 was the burning of Seaulabogue Church (as Fr. Kavanagh tells us in his history of '98), and the burning of the church and the bayonetting of every unfortunate Catholic that tried to escape from the burning pile. If a nation that has given such a true and sterling proof of a solid faith and a true and sterling piety be styled superstitious, then I say superstition is the highest form of religion. We are told sometimes it is well to forget the past, and to let "the dead past bury its dead," for the calling up of the persecutions endured by Catholics for their faith has only effect to sow rancour and breed dissensions in the breasts of Catholics. Perhaps the fact that has given such a true and sterling proof of a solid faith and a true and sterling piety be styled superstitious, then I say superstition is the highest form of religion. We are told sometimes it is well to forget the past, and to let "the dead past bury its dead," for the calling up of the persecutions endured by Catholics for their faith has only effect to sow rancour and breed dissensions in the breasts of Catholics. 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