

turned into stags, which the astonished king saw skipping away in safety. No legend is more popular and more interesting than that which represents Patrick as employing the shamrock to illustrate the mystery of the Trinity; though the story can be traced no farther back than the sixteenth century. The trefoil was sacred in pagan religions. He drove the snakes into the sea with his miraculous staff. A similar miracle, banished all frogs from Ireland. An angel predicted Patrick's death, and for a whole year the sun stood still over his grave. He was buried in Downpatrick, and when, long afterwards, workmen were, amid their labors, approaching too near his grave, they were warned by flames of fire to desist. Such legends might be multiplied indefinitely. Thus, if fiction be held to serve the purposes of devotion as well as truth, the inventive faculty will not be allowed to rest by reason of inactivity.

The effect of this abundance of legend in connection with one so venerable is, that Patrick has been regarded by many as altogether a myth. But it is the business of the historian to separate truth from fiction, and there are precious memorials that enable us to place this eminent Christian and missionary among the great historical characters of the church. The earliest and most authentic information which we possess is contained in two writings of his own; namely, his Confession and his Letter to Coroticus. The Confession is found in a collection, called the Book of Armagh, the age of one part of which is determined by a date inscribed on the book. This date is 807 A. D. The book contains writings much older and, among others, a copy of the Confession taken from one written in Patrick's own hand; as the Scribe attests in the note already quoted. The Scribe complains of the illegibility of the manuscript; for Patrick was not a professional writer and could produce nothing to be compared with the beautiful Celtic manuscripts of a later age. He had tended cattle in his youth and nearly all his life had lived among barbarians. Dr. Charles H. H. Wright, in the introduction to his edition of the original writings of Patrick, tells us that: "There are four other MSS. of the Confession known to be in existence, namely, the Cottonian MS. in the British Museum, and two MSS. in the Bodleian Library. There is another in the public library of Arras, France." The Epistle to Coroticus is