

The "Sun-Burst" of Ireland

By "CRUX."

AS I am not bound to any special line in these articles, I expect that I am at liberty to break in upon their course with a theme that is not wholly foreign to the general subject. Recently I was asked by a learned gentleman, and one well versed in Irish history and Celtic lore, if I could tell him the meaning, or the origin of the "Sun-Burst." It is the first time that I ever heard the question asked, and I must admit that I have never met with any direct statement regarding the origin of that ancient standard. Moreover, it never occurred to me to make any inquiry concerning it. Now that the matter was thus brought to my attention I have ransacked the authorities at my disposal, and I will give the readers the benefit of my investigation.

Firstly, in a note to his melody—"Tis Gone, and Forever," under the fourth line of the second stanza, Moore says: "The 'Sun-Burst' was the fanciful name given by the ancient Irish to the royal banner." Now, to my mind, this is pretty vague. It neither tells us when that banner was adopted, nor how the rising sun came to be painted on its folds, nor yet why the name was "fanciful." I am inclined to believe that there was no fancy about it; it was a reality; and as I will show was not a banner.

In "O'Hart's Pedigrees" I find that Milesius, in his youth, went into Scythia and there married the King's daughter, and became a general commander. Thence he went to Egypt, where Pharaoh Nectonibus, the King, made him general of all his forces in the war with the King of Ethiopia. He there learned all the trades and arts that he might teach them to his own people on his return to Spain. After his death, in obedience to a commandment of his, the eight brothers, his sons set sail from Spain for Ireland. They met with untold difficulties in their attempts to land. The arts, sorceries and enchantments of the Tuatha-de-Danaus were used against them. That part of the fleet commanded by Heber, Heremon, and Amergin (the three surviving brothers) landed in safety, fought and routed the natives, and establish themselves in the land. Heber and Heremon divided the country between themselves, allotting lands to Amergin, who was the archpriest, or Druid, or magician, and poet of the band. Moore commemorates this event in his "Song of Inisfail." In the third stanza he sings:—

"Then turned they unto the Eastern wave,
Where now their Day-God's eye
A look of such sunny omen gave
As lighted up sea and sky."

Thus we see that allusion is made to the rising sun as the Day-God of the Milesian invaders of the Island. Now if we turn to McGee's notes to his poems, we find the following under his grand poem "The Celts." Referring to his own line:—

"Cromah, their day-god and their thunderer."

McGee says:—

"Crom, or Crom-eacha, was the name given by the ancient and pagan Irish to their Fire-God, the sun—the dispenser of vital heat, and the author of fecundity and prosperity. He was their Deus Optimus Maximus, from whom all other deities descended. The name is derived from the Egyptian word Chrom—Ignis, fire—which was the only visible object of devotion permitted, and that only as the symbol of the Supreme. Consistently, however, with this view, they deified also the powers of nature. The Irish Crom-Cruith—God the Creator—was the same as that adored by Zoroaster and the Persians for more than five hundred years before Christ." It is evident, and I base my assertion upon the best and most competent authorities, that the Milesian princes were fire-worshippers. The sun was their day-god, and they received from Egypt that form of faith. The Persians were essentially fire-worshippers; and in Persia did Milesius imbibe the precepts that he subsequently brought home to Spain. If we study Moore's "Lalla Rookh," we will find that, under the veil of its Orientalism, it is purely an Irish poem. This is a subject I would like very much to write upon; but this is not the time.

When the Milesian princes were struggling in vain to land in Ireland, it was only when their Day-God, the sun arose in the East, bursting forth in glory from a cloud, that the enchantments of their enemies were broken and that they triumphed over the sorceries of the wicked. Amergin, their poet sang of that victory, and attributed it to the "Sun-Burst" of promise that flashed in the East. It may be not unnaturally concluded from this that the sun bursting out of a cloud was accepted as the symbol most appropriate for the royal standard.

O'Hart says: "The banners of the ancient Irish were termed bratach, and the standard meirge; the standard-bearer was called Meirgeach, and a banner-bearer was called fear-brataige." So we have here the distinction between the "standard" and the "banner."

Mooney, in his "History of Ireland" says:—"The harp was the earliest national symbol of the Firbolgs, or first inhabitants. When Heber and Heremon divided the kingdom between them, they differed about a musician and poet; but the matter was settled in a friendly manner by Amergin, their brother, who adjudged the musician to Heber and the poet to Heremon; the brothers then assumed the Harp as an emblem of the harmony that prevailed between them." This emblem was woven into banners carried by both brothers. When Rodrick O'Connor, King of Connaught, went to interview Henry the Second of England, he bore a yellow banner, emblazoned with the dead serpent and the rod of Moses. But these were all banners, belonging to princes or chieftains. Mooney says:—"Brian Boru bore on his standard, at Clontarf, the sun bursting through a cloud." Mark it well. The "Sun-Burst" was on the royal standard; the other emblems were on banners. We may, therefore, conclude that the "Sun-Burst" had its origin in the sun-worship, or fire-worship of the sons of Milesius, and that it was for them the emblem of victory, of hope, of glory; while the Harp was their emblem of concord between themselves. The Harp, then, would naturally be found on their respective banners, while the "Sun-Burst" would have been their standard.

In one of his poems, "The Munster War Song," Williams has the line:—

"The Sun-Burst that slumbered, embalmed in your tears,
Tipperary, shall wave o'er your tall mountaineers."

The "Sun-Burst" must have "slumbered," or disappeared for several centuries, until the aged Brian emblazoned upon his royal standard, the day that drove the "Raven" of Denmark from the shores of Erin. As the Harp of Tara was silent during the long ages of mourning, so the Sun-Burst was effaced while those centuries of misery and strife, of suffering and death rolled over the Celts.

I conclude from all this that the origin of the "Sun-Burst" is to be found in the sun-worship of the early Irish; a worship that links them to the oldest races of antiquity. Its use on the Royal Standard of Ireland can only be traced to the dawn of the eleventh century, to Brian Boru. And the Harp, the emblem of Erin to-day, was originally intended for particular banners belonging to individual chiefs.

I might add, although it casts no fresh light on our immediate subject, that the "Sun-Burst" finds its place at all times in the annals of Irish literature. Poet, orator and essayist have all made use of it in their works, either as a symbol of Ireland's future emancipation, or as the accepted national standard. Osian's address to the sun is possibly the sublimest passage in all profane literature, ancient or modern, and the inspiration of that "Inspired Giant" was the faith of his race in the majestic day-god, worshipped as a symbol of the Eternal Deity. The Clan of MacCaurea, or McCarthy, whose royal line extends back to what Denis Florence McCarthy calls "the dawn of the world," had the "Sun-Burst" upon its standard. He tells us that:—

"When Heber and Ir, and the Spanish patriars
Came free Inisfail from the spell of magicians."

the house of MacCaurea flourished. And he adds:—

"Proud should thy heart beat descendant of Heber;

Lofty thy head as the shrines of the Queber;
Like theirs are the halls of thy forefathers shattered;
Like theirs is the wealth of thy palaces scattered;
Their fire is extinguished; your Sun-Burst unfurled;
But how proud were ye both at the dawn of the world."

This Sun-Burst was the royal standard of the House of Desmond. We may, therefore, conclude that in our peaceful times, in our age of constitutional agitation and union, and harmony between Ireland's representatives, the Harp should be considered as the national symbol for the country's flag.

"But if ever the day should come again
When Irish women and Irish men"

should have to join in the headlong charge, the wild dash for liberty, the standard that would be then most suitable would be the Sun-Burst of Erin. It was the standard of the Irish Brigade "from Dunkirk to Belgrade;" and in its folds was King Dathi wrapped when stricken to death amidst the poises of the Alps. But whether it would be an appropriate standard for a kingless Ireland is a question that may come up, when the day of Ireland's actual Freedom will dawn.

A Hint to Our Readers

The subscribers and readers of the "True Witness" are often aware of events, the record of which would be of interest to themselves and to their friends—and yet, how few of them ever think of sending us an account of them!

Chats with Parishioners

The editor of the "Church Progress" puts a few leading questions apropos the parochial duties of Catholics:

Does it not seem strange that the man who can spend dollars for drinks and cigars every day in the week, cannot find a dime for religion on Sunday?

That the woman who can describe all the new hats and dresses at church cannot see the contribution box, no matter how large?

That the man who never gives a dime to the church fund always finds the most fault about the manner in which it is distributed?

That the pastor who does his full duty to God is usually unpopular with many of his parishioners?

That persons who are always pressing their employers for larger salaries expect their pastors to live on good wishes and the grace of God?

That parents who never attend their religious duties expect their children to become model Christians? That many of the men who worship in the rear of the church and block the entrance are always found in the front seats at questionable places of amusement?

That the sermon which touches the guilty conscience never fails to find warm commendation?

That those who never help to defray the church expenses demand the most comforts and conveniences?

That those who make the least haste to get to service on time are always in a rush to get away before it is over?

Premium TO Subscribers.

We offer as a premium to each Subscriber a neatly bound copy of the Golden Jubilee Book, who will send the names and cash for 3 new Subscribers to the True Witness.

This is a splendid opportunity to obtain a most interesting chronicle of the work of Irish Catholic Priests and laymen in Montreal during the past Fifty years.

Archbishop Bruchesi In Rome.

The special correspondent of "La Semaine Religieuse" at Rome writes the following interesting description of the farewell audience which Archbishop Bruchesi had with His Holiness the Pope, and of the audience of a large number of Canadians, including some non-Catholics with the Sovereign Pontiff on the same day, the latter having been introduced by the Archbishop of Montreal.

At a quarter past eleven o'clock, His Grace was received in private audience by the Holy Father, while the other Canadians who had been notified that His Holiness would grant their desire to be received in audience waited in the ante-rooms. His Holiness manifested great affection for the Montreal prelate and when the audience was over said as he leaned on the arm of the Archbishop: "And now, Monsigneur, let us go and bless your Canadian compatriots." The Holy Father had scarcely reached the door-sill when, walking unaided, he proceeded with rapid steps to the throne-room, and took his seat on a couch placed on a slightly raised platform. He wore, according to custom, his white soutane, and as soon as he had taken his seat the attending chamberlains threw his red, gold embroidered cloak over his shoulders. Having made the usual genuflection, Archbishop Bruchesi, spoke as follows:

"Most Holy Father,—You now see before you representatives of most of the dioceses of Canada. Our country is known to you. Your Holiness is aware that there, more than anywhere else perhaps, the Catholic Church enjoys its sacred liberties; that there the Faith is strong and ardent; and that there the Pope is held in deep affection. Deign, Most Holy Father, to accept with our gratitude for the paternal solicitude you have always shown us, our most respectful congratulations on the occasion of your glorious jubilee, the homage of our filial devotion, and of our complete submission. And while we are kneeling at your feet, we ask you to bless us and our brethren, while from the bottom of our hearts we address to God the prayer which so often ascends to His throne from our temples:

"Oremus pro Pontifice nostro Leone, Dominus conservet eum, et vivificet eum et beatum faciat eum in terra, et non tradat eum in inimicorum ejus."

The Archbishop pronounced this prayer in a clear voice and in tones which showed that it came from his heart.

The Holy Father thanked His Grace for his brief speech, and the audience began, those present passing before the Supreme Pontiff in single file, kneeling before him and kissing his feet and the hand which he cordially held out to them. Archbishop Bruchesi presented each to the Holy Father, who had a kind word for every one of them. The ladies were admitted first. In presenting one family to the Pope, Archbishop Bruchesi told him that it comprised fourteen children. "Fourteen children!" exclaimed His Holiness. "Why," rejoined the Archbishop, "in Canada we have families in which there are twenty-six children." "Twenty-six children," said the Pope in astonishment. Then after reflecting a little while, he added: "What a number of voices which are blessing the Lord!"

When the Archbishop was introducing the Protestants to the Holy Father he said: These are not Catholics, but they would like to receive Your Holiness' blessing." The Pope smiled tenderly as he placed his hand on the brow of each. One of these Protestants recommended to the prayers of the Pope a member of his family who was seriously ill. "Yes," said the Pope to him, "I shall ask God to grant your prayers." I noticed tears falling from the eyes of some of the members of this family.

Next came the turn of the young Canadians who are studying in Rome. The Canadian college contains 23 of them; 8 more are at the College of the Propaganda; 4 are with the Brothers of St. Vincent de Paul; and 2 at the North American College. The Holy Father asked each of them the name of the diocese to which he belonged. Then came Canon Dauth of Montreal, who was highly praised to His Holiness by Archbishop Bruchesi, and who asked and received a blessing upon "La Semaine Religieuse." The rector and procurator of the Canadian College, the Rev. Fathers Clapin and Vachier. At the request of Father Clapin, the Pope accorded his apostolic blessing to the Abbe Colin, Superior of St. Sulpice, Montreal. Having given all present his Pontifical benediction, the Pope descended from his throne, and with-

out any assistance proceeded towards his private apartments, accompanied by Archbishop Bruchesi. After bidding His Holiness goodbye, the Archbishop said to him: "Holy Father, I cannot return until three years." "Very well," said the Pope with a smile, "I shall expect you then, Monsigneur."

May Divine Providence preserve the life of His Holiness until he and the distinguished Archbishop of Montreal meet again!

OLD LETTERS.

(By a Regular Contributor.)

The letter which I find next in my bundle is, perhaps, of greater interest to me personally than it can be to the public. Moreover, I feel obliged to suppress the name of the writer, because I have not his permission to use his letter in this manner, and his former connection with Canadian institutions might become a reason why he would not care to have his name published; especially as the author of correspondence that was intended for the eyes of only one person. This is all surmise on my part; the letter contains nothing that might not be posted up on the city walls, to the credit of the writer, but not having his consent, and he being still alive, I prefer to simply give the letter and no more. Its value to me is a personal matter; but as far as the readers go, it will only prove another evidence of how useful a Catholic newspaper may be, and how seriously some of our French priests seek to master, under great difficulties, the English language. The letter is in two parts; the first written at Lyons, the second at Grenoble, in France. The one who wrote it is an Oblate Father, and one of the most erudite men in any religious community of the Church to-day. He had spent a short time in Canada, and he undertook to learn English. He was making rapid progress when duty summoned him away to France. This letter is a sample of the English written by one who had but a brief opportunity of hearing, studying, and using the language. I will draw special attention to the dates on the letter, then to the prophetic remarks on the subject of France and the Church; viewed in the light of recent events in that country, especially the Law of Associations, and the brutal course taken by Premier Combes, these few words of the gifted priest may be both pertinent and significant. The letter is as follows:

"Lyons, France,
"46 Rue de la Charite
"Feb., 24th, '94
"My Dear Friend:
"I come very late; but whose fault? You told me in your letter of the 18th of December 'I will write soon again'—yet I have received no further news from you. I know how busy you are, and must be, and I exonerate you.
"The paper that you so kindly send me comes every week, as a ray of the Canadian sun, or as a breeze of the Ottawa or St. Lawrence; and it is so gladly welcome. I thank you with all my old Canadian heart for this kindness of yours. In return I would like to do more, but all I can do is to send you this short letter, and to promise you others more interesting, when I will have mastered my situation.
"I am now preaching the Lenten sermons in the St. Francis of Sales' Church at Lyons; it is one of the most aristocratic churches in the city, and I have, of course, a great deal to do to be up to the mark. But I always believed in the practice of obedience, and, in twenty years, I never had to complain of having strictly adhered to it.
"It is midnight; I commenced my letter quite late, after having spent several hours preparing sermons, but I will complete it in time for the next mail to Canada. Next month I will send you a few descriptive letters—if you can find any use for them, or think they can do any good, just use, change, enlarge, curtail, destroy them.....as you like."

Here the first part of the letter ends. For eight months it had found a resting place in the bundles of the good Father's manuscripts, and on its being unearthed—I suppose to show me that I had not been intentionally forgotten—he proceeds to complete it, and to post the entire epistle to me. Here is the second part:

"Grenoble, Oct. 9th, '94.
"My Good Friend:
"Imagine my surprise on finding the foregoing in my papers. How you must have thought me neglectful and forgetful, during all these summer months. And I, on my part, wondered why you did not write to me. Well, I suppose that the world has not suffered to a great extent in consequence, so we need not worry over the matter.
"I write to you, now, at the foot of a mountain more than 1,000 feet high, and surrounded by hundreds of others, some of which are as lofty, others less so, but all of which are covered by fortresses and cannons of every description. It is simply sublime and I am sure you would feel an inspiration were you on these first steps of the Alps. Unfortunately I am not a poet; in fact, I am less poetic than ever before, having to preach a retreat in a convent of the Good Shepherd, where life is found to be a mere and sad reality, and many things of this world a tragic farce."

Mark that last expression! It is decidedly a stroke of the true artist's pencil. I am obliged to skip two very beautiful pages, on account of allusions to certain events in which I was conspicuous in the early nineties; but the readers lose very little. I come now to the portion of this letter that, to my mind, is the most remarkable. He continues: "I have been severely tried this year by the so-called influenza. For three months I could not move out of my room. Doctors said it was due both to overwork and the change of climate. I do not know whether they were right or wrong; but I know too well that this condition of health was extremely unpleasant to bear and exceedingly annoying."

"Thanks be to God, I feel stronger, and I have begun again to go around preaching and hearing confessions. Pray that I may do some good in our old France. It is a glorious country after all; but I assure you it sadly needs the pulpit and the confessional. If I read the signs aright, a grave change has come gradually over the land since I left here to live my few years in Canada. We preachers and confessors know how Catholic to the core is the nation's heart; but we also see with fear and trembling the hourly onsets of evil days for the Church and her children in this country. Mirabeau once alluded in a famous speech to Cataline at the gates of Rome and the Romans hesitating; the days that followed Mirabeau may yet return to us, for the evening, the relentless spirit of infidelity is at our gates and we hesitate. Pray God that we may not hesitate long enough to give the helm of state into the grasp of that cruel hand. If the favorable hour comes, and the man of sufficient vindictiveness appears, the preacher and the confessor may take care, for the road to exile will be his only pathway of escape."

"I thank you most heartily for the 'True Witness.' It is just now, with a few letters, the only means I have of keeping up my English and of knowing something about our 'Fatherland,' as I love to call Canada. You may be sure that I read every line of the paper each week, and even the advertisements do I read, for they are like old friends. You will please present with my warmest regards those of my former friends whom you may meet, and believe me forever, yours in X. and M.I."

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The reader cannot but recognize the present Law of Associations and Premier Combes, as well as the exiled members of religious orders of to-day, in that sentence: "If the favorable hour comes, and the man of sufficient vindictiveness appears, the preacher and confessor may take care, for the road of exile will be his only pathway of escape." Decidedly the Rev. Father, who wrote this double letter, was a keen judge of the situation in France; and if I only knew his address to-day I would feel inclined to write him on the subject, enclosing a copy of his own prophetic letter of eight years ago. But, unhappily, his spirit of obedience has sent him into some mission unknown to me, and his whereabouts is a matter of uncertainty.

I have not made any selections in going over these letters. I find that I have numbers of others much older and much more interesting than any I have yet given, and I hope to have the opportunity of presenting a few more of them to the readers of the "True Witness."

In a course of reading the first thing necessary is a vital interest in some subject; then, in tracing this out through its maze and relying upon yourself for the connecting links, your mind will be occupied. You will read and think, and while your interest grows your mental faculties strengthen.