

Saint Patrick



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If we want to know the life of a saint intimately, we must learn it from the saint, himself. That is also true of men of the world. We can learn from others of the deeds saints did; but only from their own diaries, their autobiographies, and the reflections they make in them, can we come to know the springs of their actions, their feelings in relation to worldly interests, and to the events in which they took part. That is still truer of the saints. Men of the world are seen, and see themselves, in relation to the world, its interests, and its ways. Saints see themselves in the light of faith, in relation to God, and to the world beyond the grave. We can learn from history what they did, how they labored as missionaries of Christ, how they led the good to greater holiness, the bad to repentance or whole nations to a knowledge of God. These are facts of history. However, there is something in the life of a saint beyond and above these, which only the saint himself can thoroughly reveal to us—his hidden or interior life, his growth in holiness, which is brought about by the twofold action of Divine Grace and his own goodwill. The actions that we see may be signs of sanctity, but, however great, they are not enough to make a saint; they must have saintly motives, and only the saint himself can tell us of these.

There is in the life of a saint, as in the life of everyone, a oneness, a continuity, and a growth which make him what he is and distinct from everyone else. It is the spiritual character, the moral web that the union of his soul with God has woven for him through the course of his life. Only the saint himself has the key of that sanctuary; he alone can let us see its secrets. The biographer who undertakes to inform us about it is but an outsider like ourselves. How is it that the greatest artist the world has ever known could not paint a flower so perfectly as nature paints it? His genius may blend colors so well that, when seen from a distance, the painting appears like real life; but, when examined closely, it is found not to be the living thing. The reason is that the painter lays on the colors from without while the color of the living flower comes from the living forces within. Hence, the best praise we can give a painter is that his picture is true to life, by which we mean that it is very like what nature can do, as good an imitation of nature as art can make. That is all. So, too, only those can know a saint intimately who have lived with him, and have had the privilege of watching his saintly character forming itself, and growing out of the saintly motives which make him live in God and move him in all he does. We who have not that privilege can best know him when he makes himself known by his writings. He is the best interpreter of himself. As we read what he reveals of his

inner life, we have a talk with him. We know Saint Catherine of Siena better from her letters than from the part she took in great historical events; we know more of Saint Francis de Sales from his correspondence than from his fruitful labors in the Chablais; more of Saint Jerome from his correspondence than from the monuments of Biblical scholarship he has left us. We become really intimate with Saint Augustine only when we read his “*Confessions*,” that greatest self-revelation in all human literature. No saint has had more written about him than Saint Patrick. For that reason, I pass them by. I ask you to consider his life in a few passages I have selected from his “*Confessions*.” They were written by Saint Patrick when his life in the world was drawing to a close and his work in the world was nearly done. If I ask you to read several extracts, it is because they are a better revelation of the saint than any thoughts I could set before you. It is like an examination of conscience made aloud.



The “*Confessions*”

“I, Patrick, a sinner, when I was hardly sixteen years of age, was carried into Ireland with thousands of others, and the Lord opened the understanding of my unbelieving heart so that I might at length remember my sins and be converted with all my heart to the Lord my God, Who regarded my humility, Who took pity upon my youth and ignorance, Who watched over me before I knew Him, and Who protected and consoled me as a father his son. On coming to Ireland, I daily herded flocks, and many times in the day I prayed, and the love of God and the fear of Him grew in me more and more. My faith increased, and my soul was strengthened, so in a single day I had said as many as a hundred prayers, and in the night nearly as many, although I lived in the woods and the mountains. Before dawn, I awoke to prayer in snow and frost and rain, and there was no tepidity in my soul as there is now, because my spirit burned within me.

“Whence now this wisdom which was once not in me? Whence afterwards that great and saving grace to know God and to love Him, even to the giving up of parents and country for His sake? I owe an immense debt to Him Who gave me this great grace that, through

me, so many should be regenerated unto God. I might leave those whom I have gained to Christ to revisit my parents and country—and God knows I greatly desired to see them once more, and the face of the saints of my God—but I am bound in the spirit, who witnesseth to me that, if I should do so, He would hold me guilty; and I fear to lose the labor I began—and I would lose it but for Christ the Lord, Who commanded me to come and stay with them for the rest of my life.

“And, therefore, I ought to acknowledge and give some return to the Lord for blessings, temporal and eternal, such as the mind of man cannot measure. Who was it that recalled me, fool though I be, from amidst those who seemed wise and learned in the law, the powerful in word and in everything? Me, hateful before the world though I be, He inspired beyond all others, provided that, with fear and reverence, and without complaint, I should faithfully serve the nation on whom the love of Christ bestowed me for life and to serve them in all humility and truth.

Voices from Focluth

“Once more I was with my family, who received me as a son, and earnestly besought me that, after all the trials I had endured, I should never leave them again. In a vision of the night, I saw a man coming as if from Ireland with many letters, and he gave one of them to me, which purported to be the ‘Voice of the Irish.’ Whilst I read it I thought I heard the voices of those who dwelt beside the wood of Focluth, which is by the Western Sea, and thus they cried, as if with one voice, ‘We pray thee, holy youth, to come and walk once more amongst us.’ Thanks be to God that, after many years, the Lord heeded their appeal.

“And on another night, whether within or beside me I know not, God knows, He spoke this to me in the clearest words which I heard, but could not understand till the end of the discourse. ‘He who hath laid down His life for thee, He it is Who speaketh within thee.’ I wondered, considering who it was that prayed within me. At the end of the prayer, He said He was the Spirit, and I remembered the words of the Apostle, ‘The Spirit helps the weakness of our prayer: for we know not what we should pray for, but the Spirit asketh for us unspeakable appeals, which things I cannot express in words.’

“Therefore, I speak boldly; my conscience does not accuse me. God is my witness that I have not lied in what I have written. I ought not to conceal the gift of God given me by God in the land of my captivity. For them I earnestly sought Him, and there I found Him, and He guarded me from all iniquity. Therefore do I thank God with-out ceasing who kept me faithful in the time of temptation, so that to-day I offer my soul a living sacrifice to Christ my God, Who has protected me in all my trials.

“I now commend my soul to my faithful God, for Whom, in my lowliness, I am an ambassador. This is my confession before I die.”

Paul and Patrick

Those are a few passages selected from the “*Confessions*” of Saint Patrick. There is a striking similarity between them and what Saint Paul wrote of himself—wonderful visions; heavenly messages; a commission direct from God to preach the Gospel, one to the Gentiles outside Judea, and the other to the pagan inhabitants of an island outside the bounds of the Roman Empire. Whilst they both tell us of their visions and their raptures, their singular supernatural gifts, their penances and their prayers, they make confession also of their infirmities, and of what in their humility they call their sins. Saint Patrick says that he was “the least of the faithful,” that his captivity was in punishment of his “unbelieving heart,” and “because he knew not the true God,” although he was born and brought up by Christian parents. Saint Paul thought himself “the least of the Apostles,” and “the chief of sinners,” and he ranks himself with the heathen before his conversion, although he had been a conscientious Jew, full of zeal for God according to his light. There is also the same manner of emphatic expression. “I speak the truth,” says Saint Paul; “I lie not, my conscience bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.”

Saint Patrick writes, “I speak boldly; God is my witness that I have not lied in what I have written.” Our Divine Lord said to Saint Paul on his conversion, “I send thee to the Gentiles to open their eyes, that they may be converted from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” Saint Patrick was called in a vision “by the voices of those who dwelt by the Western Sea.” They are alike also in this—that he comes next to Saint Paul in the fruitfulness and permanency of his Apostolate.

Gift of Miracles

His “*Confessions*” give us many manifestations of the supernatural, and, according to his biographers, his life was strewn with miracles. Catholics do not see that the miracles recorded of him are impossible at all. If we hesitate to assert some or many of them, it is not because we think any of them impossible. The wonderful, the strange, and the unaccountable in the life of a saint should not take by surprise anyone who believes in Divine Providence, and that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us,” and Catholics, least of all, who know that the Incarnate God is at once present in heaven and on our altars. If we exclude the miraculous from the life of a saint, we keep him at the level of ordinary men; we leave his life without a meaning; he is nothing better than ourselves. It is not for us to know how these wonders happen. The sun helps the growth of plants, but we do not know how. Many things exist, but we do not know how. It will be said that our senses bear witness to these things. Aye, and we easily accept them, because we are used to them, whilst we cannot explain them. However, for those who believe in the supernatural, whose religion is not a religion of one day in the week, but of every day and of every hour and moment of life, who are used to the things of God, their faith fits them to expect the miraculous in the life of a saint. They are not surprised by evidences of it and the light of their faith helps them to see it when it appears. However, it is outside the vision of those whose view is bounded by the natural; necessarily so. We



find ourselves in an atmosphere of the supernatural as we read the “*Confessions*” of Saint Patrick. The singular spiritual gifts he confesses to have gotten from God prepare us to see them confirmed by supernatural tokens in the work of his life; and that all the more because, like the first Apostles, he had no credentials to recommend his mission to the pagans of Ireland except the words he could speak and the deeds he could do. Like the Apostles, he was his own witness. Palladius, who had gone before him, left nothing but failure, if he can be said to have failed in a work he hardly began.

We learn from his “*Confessions*” that he was barely sixteen years old when he was taken captive into Ireland, and that he spent six years in captivity. He spent four years afterwards under Saint Martin at Marmoutier, and Saint Martin died in 397. Thus, we

can trace back the birth of Saint Patrick to 372. According to the “Annals of Ulster,” he began his Irish Apostolate in 432, and died in 492, at the age of 120.

Now, let us put flesh on to these few dry bones, and see what we shall have.

The Mission of Saint Patrick

Theodosius, the last who ruled over a united Roman Empire, died in 395, and with him disappeared what was left of Roman civilization. The Goths were already on their way to devour the decaying old Empire, and they were followed soon by the Huns and the Vandals. Saint Chrysostom, Saint Ambrose, and Saint Augustine lived in those times, but their lives were spent in defending the rights of the Church against the traitors of Chalcedon in the East, and its doctrines against the Arian heretics in the West. Their only thought was to extend Christianity, or to preserve and purify what there was of it, within the Empire. Nobody thought of carrying the light of the Gospel outside it. Saint Patrick also lived in those times, and was a witness of those events, and he would have been led by the same influences and purposes as others if he had not believed that he had received a commission direct from heaven, which he could not dare to disregard. The voices “from the woods of Focluth, by the Western Sea,” kept ringing in his ears. Thirty-five years had passed from the time he left Marmoutier until he set out for Ireland to answer the appeal of those voices. During those years, we are told, he “wandered through Gaul, Italy, and the islands of the Mediterranean,” waiting for that word which alone could send him with authority on his mission to Ireland; but that word he had long to wait for. He told Saint Germain of the voices he had heard. By Saint Germain’s advice he went to the Pope, but the Pope was slow to heed him and his relatives sought to dissuade him. His youth and middle age passed, the sun of his life appeared declining behind the hills. He had come to a time of life when most men have either succeeded or failed in the work they give their lives to, and he had not yet begun his—not begun so far as the world could see, but he had been wistfully looking forward to and preparing for it all the time. His early penances and prayers amidst the hills and woods of Antrim, his ascetic training under Saint Martin, Saint Honorat, and Saint Germain, his supernatural visions, his mystical life from boyhood to old age; were the seeds of it, hidden from the vision of men, which were to “bring forth fruit in due season.”

The Roman Mandate

In 432 Pope Celestine spoke the word for which Saint Patrick had been waiting so long, and he set out on his mission. It is interesting to think of him receiving consecration in Ivrea, where Saint Malachy, his successor in Armagh, was a pilgrim seven centuries later, and where, for the past five centuries, and to this day, are venerated the relics of Blessed Thaddeus, who died there on his way from Rome to govern the diocese of Ross. The weight of sixty years was upon him, with the memory of friendly dissuasions, with the weariness of disappointments and delays, with the knowledge of the failure of Palladius, who had gone before him. However, the visions he had and the voices he had heard were more to him than these. God had given him a work to do, and he knew that God would help him to do it. We can best learn from Saint Patrick himself the thoughts that filled his heart as he made his way across the country to Tara, to deliver his religious message to the king and the chieftains of the land who were assembled there. Those thoughts are expressed in the hymn known as "*Saint Patrick's Breastplate*," which he composed and sang on his way to Tara.

The Breastplate of Saint Patrick

I bind to myself this day:
The Power of God to guide me,
The Might of God to uphold me,
The Wisdom of God to teach me,
The Eye of God to watch over me,
The Ear of God to hear me,
The Word of God to speak to me,
The Hand of God to protect me,
The Way of God to lie before me,
The Shield of God to shelter me,
The Host of God to defend me...
Against the snares of devils,
Against the temptation of vices,
Against inclinations of nature,
Against everyone who shall wish me ill,
afar and near, alone and in a crowd.
Christ, Protect me this day.

Christ be with me, Christ before me,
Christ behind me, Christ within me,
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,
Christ where I lie, Christ where I sit,
Christ where I arise,
Christ in the heart of everyone who
thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who
afar speaks of me,
Christ in every ear that hears me.
Salvation is of the Lord,
Salvation is of the Lord,
Salvation is of Christ,
May thy salvation, O Lord,
be ever with us.

A Pagan and Warlike Nation

He went to make God known in a nation where idols were worshipped, to preach the Gospel of the Prince of Peace to a people given over to war—Claudian, the poetlaureate of the Emperor Honorius, describes the Irish of those days as setting out for conquest, ploughing the sea with their warships. Nine years later Saint Leo succeeded Saint Celestine, and for 443 the “Annals of Ulster” have this record: “Patrick, the Bishop, shines in Ireland amidst the fires of the faith and the teaching of Christ.”

If one of those warriors to whom Claudian alluded had been away for some years, had seen the change that had taken place in the meantime in the social ways and the religious life of the people, he would have wondered at the transformation. If that warrior asked what had happened, the simple answer should be that an old man came and he passed over the country. He had some mysterious influence over the people. He proposed strange doctrines and new ways of life quite opposed to what they had been used to. They listened to him with reverence, they were fascinated, and they yielded to him without opposition or bloodshed. The result is what you see. It all strikes one like that narrative in the Gospel that tells us of the reply from the man to whom Our Divine Lord had restored his sight made to the Pharisees. He said, “How He did it I don’t know; I only know that I was blind, and that now I can see.”

Saint Patrick went as a foreigner to Ireland. He did not flatter popular vanity. He opposed popular prejudices. He did not carry to his work the influence of scholarship or natural genius; yet, standing on the brink of the grave, and looking back over the sixty years of his apostolic work, he was so overpowered by the thought of the change that had taken place that he commented in his “*Confessions*.” He stated, “And who am I, or what is my prayer, O Lord, Who hast made known to me so much of Thy Divinity?” He had converted a whole nation and he had done his work so completely that he could not have a successor in it. It was his work exclusively. The faith, holiness, and learning that grew and strengthened afterwards was but the effect of the one impulse that he gave. Scholars from the Continent had fled from the barbarian invaders to Ireland. To that island they took with them whatever literature and science had remained, together with the tradition of study they had inherited from the past. They also found in those who, under the influence of Saint Patrick, had cast off their heathen superstition for Christian faith, an eagerness for profane knowledge. Saint Patrick himself was not a man of learning, but he

prepared a shrine for it in the new spirit that he had put into the Christians he had made. Now, these two strange phenomena appear, attested, not by Irish writers only, but by foreigners, such as Saint Bede and Saint Bernard, Tillemont, Montalembert, and Dollinger. One was a movement to Ireland, which had become a refuge and home for scholars. The second was a movement from Ireland. Saint Patrick was hardly fifty years in the grave when pioneers of faith and profane knowledge poured out from Ireland, spread the light amidst the forests of Gaul and Germany, and put new, untainted blood into the Christianity that, corrupted by Arianism, had taken hold of Northern Italy.



Saint Patrick's Cross

A Witness to the Supernatural

What I have just said sets the work of Saint Patrick before us as a great historical fact, in some respects singular in Christian history, and that historical fact remains with us as a witness to his heavenly visions and to his miraculous life. We cannot otherwise explain his work. There are those who will not allow the supernatural in human affairs, as though the world which God made was no place for Him to act or meddle with; or, at least, they will not hear of a miracle brought in to explain any event since the days of the Apostles, as though God had sent them a message from heaven that He would not meddle in the affairs of men after the Apostles died. How, then, do they account for those facts? Why, quite easily.

They call them social psychological phenomena, the cause of which they have not yet succeeded in finding, but promise to find for us, if we only take their word and wait for it. They cannot shut their eyes to the facts; they dare not deny them; but, rather than allow the plain explanation of a supernatural cause for them, they betake themselves to the foolish one of explaining them by the facts themselves expressed in other words, burying them in fine phrases which lead to nothing. I have noticed this only to point out that critics heighten the character of Saint Patrick, unknown to themselves, in seeking to keep it low, since the necessity they see for some explanation implies something wonderful in

those facts they think it necessary to explain. It would really have been a greater miracle to have brought about those events without the aid of miracles than to have worked those miracles through which Saint Patrick is said to have produced them.

A great event took place the year Saint Patrick was sent to Ireland: the Nestorian heresy was condemned. The Nestorians would keep the divine and human nature of Christ apart. Catholic teaching supposes them united into a personal union, for it declares Our Blessed Lady to be the Mother, not of the humanity of Christ merely, but the Mother of God, since the human nature of Christ was assumed into His divine personality. Behold here the greatest manifestation of the supernatural in the world that has ever been, or ever can be: God, taking our human nature, transfigured, supernaturalized, raised it from its fallen condition, and Christ became “the first-born of many brothers.” What a motive for our gratitude and thanksgiving! And Mary, one of our fallen race, was made fit to become the Mother of that Son of eternal grace and purity. What an object for our imitation! What a human ideal it sets before us! Saint Patrick carried with him to Ireland that teaching so full of dogmatic truth and of devotional and moral consequence; and the mark it made on the religious character of the Irish people has never been blotted or disfigured. Nine years after his arrival in Ireland, Saint Leo succeeded Saint Celestine, and we are told by the “Annals of Ulster” that “Patrick, the Bishop, was approved in the Catholic Faith,” and no successor of Saint Leo down to the present Pope has ever had to cancel or change it. The Church which he founded is not a thing of the past, not reduced to a shadow of what it was at any time; it lives and breathes today, palpitating with the life that he gave it, as it was when he committed it to the care of Our Divine Lord and His Blessed Mother in the freshness of its young formation. The work he completed before he died was a witness to his miraculous life and to the reality of his visions. It justified the hope he built on them. The Catholic Faith of his children today is a living witness to the same, and a witness that has never failed or faltered, for it makes an unbroken chain connecting the twentieth century with the fifth—a chain of which every link is sound. The Church of Saint Patrick is not for the study of the antiquarian: we see and feel it.



Catholic Ideals

It is part of Catholic teaching that the State is subject to the moral law, and for the same reason that the individual is. The nation no more than the individual can get outside the authority of God. There is a current phrase stating that religion and politics, Church and State, have nothing to do with each other. What is really meant is not that religion should not touch politics or influence public life, but that politics may touch religion and bend it to its way. However, by what process can it come to pass that the multitude of persons who compose a nation are not bound by the moral law which binds them one by one?

Love of God and Country

Hence, for Catholics, love of country and loyalty to civil government are not a mere natural sentiment for which one has to answer to public opinion only; they are a moral obligation, for which one is accountable to God. They are a religious obligation, which binds in conscience. They rightly think that if religion has any real meaning at all, they should be Catholic first and of their own country afterwards; not that these two elements should be separate, but that they should be kept inseparable, as they have always been. Being an individual, being a member of a family, being a citizen of a state, are only different moral relations that each one bears.



I can illustrate that Catholic ideal without taking you from where we are. Beside a church, in a large hall where Wadding wrote and where Harold, Ponce, and Barron taught, the Cardinal-Protector of Ireland used to inaugurate the work of his office. Every Catholic nation had a Cardinal-Protector assigned to it, whose office was to represent it before the Holy See and to take care that its rights were duly regarded. It was an institution that arose in medieval times, and had its origin, I suppose, in the Christian Empire that began with Charlemagne. When the Confederation of Kilkenny raised hope of casting off the misrule of the Tudors and of the first Stuarts, those hopes were blighted. When Rinuccini had left the country, and age and disappointment had left O'Neill powerless, the Cromwellian rebels, who murdered their king, passed over into Ireland, and butchered or banished or reduced to silence the Catholics of that country for a time. After the Restoration, the Catholics of Ireland stood by Charles II, and again they were

loyal to James whilst his own drove him from his throne and country. Then, when all was lost but honor, they made a treaty with William at Limerick—and, what is better, they kept it. It was a contract between two nations and it bound in conscience, as every free contract does. They did not look on it as merely an expedient arrangement that they might keep or break according to the gain or loss it brought them. It had a moral sanction; it was a law to them, and, therefore, they were loyal to it. The Catholics of Ireland have ever been loyal to law; they have never been loyal to iniquity—let us pray they never shall. In direct contradiction of that international contract came a succession of laws woven one into another with careful ingenuity so as to preclude all evasion. They hung like a cloud over the country and for one hundred and fifty years they crushed the hearts of the people. To borrow a phrase used by a well-known philosopher of the last century, they set the right of force against the force of right. However, force cannot make right; force does not consecrate its deed. Wrong is not less a wrong because it is decreed by a Legislature; and illegal resistance or evasion became the natural protection against immoral laws. So, the Catholics of Ireland rightly disowned that which force made them endure. Were they bound in conscience by laws that confiscated their lands, drove their families from their homes, or made them serfs in the lands they once possessed? Were they bound to respect decrees that deprived them of the churches they had built and gave them over to an alien worship contradictory of their Faith? Were they bound in conscience to respect laws that made them keep those same churches in repair, pay for the support of the false worship that was brought in to supplant their own? When those churches were let go to ruin, were the people to contribute to the erection of other churches in their place?

From a Hiding-Place

In a parish in Queen's County, a popular story has been handed down for many generations. The story stated that local chapel was once surrounded during Mass, set fire to, and the priest and congregation were burned and buried beneath the ruins. During the past few months, the parish priest, to test the truth of the story, had the location excavated and the ghastly reality came to light in the skulls and bones of a few hundred persons along with the chalice that was used at the Holy Sacrifice. I once made a visit to a Mass-rock hidden away in a mountain cave, and it was not without emotion that I gazed on that

rude and lonely altar around which the people used to gather by stealth to hear Mass in other days, whilst I looked out over the valley at the well-built preaching church, where half a dozen persons at most assembled once a week for prayers. A few days ago, I happened to read some letters written to the Papal Internuncio at Brussels by the successor of Saint Patrick in the early part of the eighteenth century. He was a man of noble family, but he dared not sign his name to any of those letters... He addressed them, as did all the Irish Bishops of those days, “ex loco refugii.” In those times, the original of the Papal Brief, by which an Irish Bishop was appointed, was never sent to the Bishop; it was kept in the office of the Internuncio. Only a copy containing the mere essentials was sent, lest it should become known to Government that the Vicar of Christ had dared to appoint a Catholic ecclesiastic to a vacant Catholic See of a Catholic people and country.



The darkness of those times was giving way to the dawn of a better day, when the Catholics of Ireland were allowed to hear Mass in chapels hidden away in the lanes of the cities, or in rude buildings, mostly thatched, scattered here and there over the country. As recently as a century ago no bells could toll from those chapels to summon the people to Mass, until a happy thought inspired one priest to evade the law by hanging his chapel bell from a neighboring tree; others followed his example, and the law finally went out due to the mockery of the people. Its death was well worthy of its birth.

The Enduring Faith of Ireland

I have said that the work of Saint Patrick is not a subject of antiquarian research for it lives. Fifteen hundred years ago, the Irish nation was baptized and born into Christ. The film of paganism was raised from her eyes; she saw the eternal truth and beauty of the Catholic Faith, and she has never lost sight of it. Her children have ever since been born into Christ, one by one, and that supernatural life has been the bond of their natural life and the mainstay of their enduring national existence. In many parts of Ireland, a beautiful custom illustrates how the supernatural is realized there. A messenger who calls a priest at night to prepare a sick person for death insists on accompanying the priest back again to his home. The Catholic instinct of the people will not let Our Divine Lord

be taken back alone after He had come to console and strengthen a dying member of their household. The custom may be a lingering relic of a procession of the Blessed Sacrament, which the Ritual orders; its original and true significance may have been lost but the supernatural and the living root is there. It was my good fortune to have studied under one of the most illustrious professors who taught in the Roman schools during the last century. He was sublime and deep as he was eloquent. I well remember this: As he tried to explain how the finite intellect of the blessed in heaven can see directly into the infinite essence of God, illustrating it with his fervid and nervous eloquence, in a theological term that he used, I recognized a saying I had known from childhood, and familiarity had made me understand its meaning. “The light of glory to your soul” is a phrase used in Ireland by old and young, rich and poor, learned and illiterate, in that simple faith which realizes the Unseen, and sees more vividly than science. It has come down as an expression of mutual goodwill from those times when the thoughts of Catholics in Ireland turned most towards the rewards of the next life, because they found themselves shut out from all hope of happiness or justice in this.

The Soul of a Nation

Their supernatural life has become also the mainstay of their national life. The soul of a nation can never die, except of moral corruption. Brute force may grind to powder the material elements that compose it, but if it rests on the moral law it will revive and put out its activity again. A nation that lives in God lives by purity, by justice, by fortitude, by hope. It may have to pass through its winter of bleak distress, but its spring and summer are sure to come round, and it will bloom again like every tree that grows. That leads us into the secret of this striking fact. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the Catholics of Ireland had been reduced to about two-thirds of the population. By the middle of the nineteenth, they were in a majority of six to one. In spite of the consequences of the famine of 1847—a famine not because there was not food, but because it was taken from those who produced it, and under the sanction of the law—in spite of wholesale evictions, of the dispersion of families, and other causes of the continuous depopulation which has been going on for the past seventy years till now, the Catholics are still in a majority of three to one. There has been a systematic design to destroy the race, and yet the race lives on. There may be more than one cause of that

striking phenomenon, but the chief one has its root in the faith of the people. The teaching of the Divine Motherhood of Our Blessed Lady, which Saint Patrick took to Ireland as it came fresh from the Council of Ephesus; the ideal of her virginal purity, which that teaching stamped on the souls and hearts of the women of Ireland; reverence for the sanctity of the marriage state: these have saved Irish Catholics from those two growths of our fashionable civilization—the divorce court and the suicide of race. Their faith has saved them from that filth. Their faith is not a mere philosophy; it is a life. They live by their Catholic Faith; they hold by their national ideals, which that faith has helped them to form and to keep. And they have never been forgiven for it— no, not from the day when Giraldus Cambrensis lied in the twelfth century, to the politician and the news correspondent who lie to-day, and lie without scruple and without shame.

The Faith is Spread Abroad

Where is the work of Saint Patrick in evidence today? Outside the inner life of the people, the history of Catholic Ireland in modern times can be read better over the face of the country than in written documents, for those who have done destruction there have destroyed also, as far as possible, the written records of their deeds. However, their deeds are recorded in the ruin they made. Read it, then, in the dismantled monasteries and burnt churches, from Quin and Cashel to Donegal and Carrickfergus; in the loose walls which remain of those humble chapels in which the people worshipped from the close of the eighteenth century to the latter part of the nineteenth. A little while ago you could read it in the ruined homes of families dispersed and gone, but that record, too, has been blotted out, for grass grows and cattle feed where those families once passed their peaceful lives, bound together in human sympathy and Christian love. Read it again.



The lesson it teaches is worth learning. It was taught in the first and second generations of those same families, who have grown in number and in power in the busy centers of Great Britain, America, and Australia. It was taught in the lives of those who became makers and guardians of law in their exile, but who were its victims at home. They have not forgotten the past. It was taught in the schools and colleges, taught in the orphanages and hospitals they built and supported; taught in the glorious memorial they raised to the name of Our Blessed Lady in the Cathedral of

Sydney and in the name of Saint Patrick in the Cathedrals of Melbourne and New York. Read it in the resurrection of the dry bones in Ireland itself; in those new and beautiful churches built all over the country by those who stayed at home. Their steeples beckon from earth to heaven, as if to keep the people in mind of Saint Paul's warning that "we have not here a lasting city, but we seek one that is to come."

Why This Waste?

It is all an expression of an undying faith in the supernatural. But Saint Paul also wrote, "The animal man understandeth not the things of God." He knows the world he lives in and lives for, but he does not understand the ways of the world that is outside and above it. Hence, naturalism raises its voice in cynical reproach; and this is what he says. "Why this waste? Why not use the money those churches cost in reviving the industries you once had?—industries that have been legislated out of existence; in opening factories you once had?—factories you have taken care to close; in developing the resources of your country?—resources that have since dried up. It is a cruel criticism; it is a heartless voice; but it comes back on the naturalism that speaks it. It brings a double discredit in seeking to conceal a wrong, and it has not even the merit of originality. Whilst Our Divine Lord was at supper in the house of Simon the leper, Mary Magdalen, in gratitude for His mercy, came with costly ointments to anoint Him. However, one person was present who was greatly scandalized. He said, "Why this waste? Could not the money those ointments cost be given to the poor?" He was Judas Iscariot. However, another person said that Judas spoke as he did, not because he loved the poor, but because he loved the purse—he was Saint John, the beloved disciple of Our Divine Lord.

An Expression of Faith

Naturalism says, "I advise them, and I long to help them; but they dream their lives away, and will not heed me; they have vain ideas of life, and cannot or will not, understand me." To all this, Catholics have a very plain and telling reply: "Yes, we understand you well, and we have good reason. The tears you shed for us are the tears of the crocodile. It is not those costly churches that give you pain, but it is that we have any churches at all.

They stand out as an earnest to the world of our Catholic life and of our reviving Catholic activity, but they are also memorials of your failure after you had done your worst. Therefore, you badly bear the sight of them. You never reproved us for straining our poverty to pay the rack-rent and the tithe-rent, and the taxes. No, indeed; you approved—nay, you compelled us. Your anxiety lest our poverty be overborne begins when the money spent becomes an expression of our faith and an evidence of your failure. Again, it is you made our poverty, not we. We pay for those churches; not you. We have neither sought your approval nor do we heed your reproach. We go our own way. We recognize that our way is not your way; we own it; and, what will possibly surprise you, we rejoice in the distinction. Whilst we are in this world, like you, we value “our daily bread,” but, unlike you, we believe that “not in bread alone doth man live.”

You took possession of the churches our fathers built. Some of them are long since in ruins, and the rest are empty. We have built others to take their place, and we fill them. Choose your own ideals; we prefer those of Magdalen the penitent, and of Saint John, the Apostle of Love. She bought costly ointments to show her love for her Savior, and the Apostle of Love approved what she did in reproving the Pharisee who blamed her. It is the same Apostle of Love who tells us “the Word was made flesh and dwelt amongst us.” He dwells amongst us still, and, therefore, we build costly churches and costly altars to enshrine Him... Like Magdalen, we don’t begrudge the cost. We enclose those altars, too, with costly altar rails, but we surround them with something infinitely more precious than marble—penitent souls, who, purified by the Sacrament of Penance, show their love for and their need of their Savior by approaching these altar rails to receive Him. We have our shortcomings, like the rest of mankind, but we know it. Our faith gives us hope, and we have trust in the good God, Who has preserved us through many difficulties and grievous trials unto this day. The thought of Saint Paul keeps ever sounding in our souls when he said, “We are confident of this very thing, that He, Who began the good work in us, will perfect the same unto the day of Jesus Christ.”

Nihil Obstat:

J. DONOVAN
Censor Deputatus

Imprimatur:

✠ DANIEL MANNIX
Archiepiscopus Melbournensis



This e-book was produced by:

The Seraphim Company, Inc.

8528 Kenosha Drive
Colorado Springs, CO 80908-5000

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