

THE
ROMAN MISSION OF ST. PATRICK

(By the REV. J. KELLY, PH.D., for the *N.Z. Tablet*.)

'We Protestants claim our descent from the early Church of St. Patrick, and we say the domination of Rome was introduced by the perfidy of Henry the Second, and thrown off when the face of the Church was washed at the Reformation.' . . . No fact is so well established in history as this.—J. M. Robinson, M.A., Rector of Avoca, in the *Ulster Guardian*.

Few luminaries hang in the grey firmament of the venerable Church of Ireland; so few that periodic displays of fireworks are as a matter of course to be expected, and as a matter of course do come off. A few years ago Dr. O'Hara, Protestant Bishop of Waterford, in his hatred of Papists, opened his mouth at Coleraine and put his foot in it decisively and marvellously. Later, Walter McMurrough Kavanagh, a Protestant layman, stood up at a synod and, in equivalent words, begged the dignitaries of his Church to have some regard for truth and common sense. 'George Birmingham,' himself a Church of Ireland cleric, also protested that Irish Catholics really were not the murderous savages which the combined intelligence of an Ulster Synod proclaimed them.

A Church of Ireland Synod is fair as a coruscation; but, to borrow one of the latest flowers of nervous English, J. M. Robinson is simply 'It.' We used to think that it was the domination of England, Henry's perfidy introduced. Moreover, until J. M. Robinson told us we were wrong, we believed that St. Patrick was sent to Ireland by Rome. But now we see that 'no fact is so well established in history' as that St. Patrick is the spiritual father of the Church of Ireland. Mr. Robinson did not go to any pains in his letter to establish anything—possibly he took it for granted that his readers were as conversant with facts 'well established in history' as Macaulay's pet school-boy must have been. But it is worth while inquiring into the *rationale* of the matter.

In his *Life of St. Patrick* (Macmillan, 1905), Professor Bury tells us that his conclusions 'tend to show that the Roman Catholic conception of St. Patrick's work is, generally, nearer to historical fact than the views of some anti-papal divines.' And, in discussing the circumstances of St. Patrick's consecration, he writes that the question does not involve any kind of theoretical importance, for the reason that, 'by virtue of what had already happened, Ireland was, in principle, as closely linked to Rome as any Western Church.' So that whether Patrick 'was consecrated at Rome or at Auxerre was a matter of little moment' (Cap. III., p. 61).

The ancient biographies of the saint bear witness to the fact that Patrick spent some time in the peaceful close of the great Monastery of Marmoutiers at Tours, under the direction of his relative, St. Martin, and in the village of St. Patrici, in the department of Loire, the memory of the Irish Apostle is still kept green. Evin and Probus record that Patrick received minor Orders during his stay at Tours. According to St. Eleran he was thirty years of age at the time of the visit to his relations mentioned in the *Confession*: about the same time (A.D. 403) he was ordained priest. From that time to the date of his mission to Ireland about thirty years elapsed, concerning which little information is forthcoming.

According to the *Lives*, he went south from Tours and abode for a considerable time at Lerins. This little island, half cloister, half university, was one of the gardens of sanctity and learning which girdled the shores of Italy and Provence before the end of the fourth century. It is still called St. Honorat in memory of St. Honoratus, who first gathered about him here that little community of monks whose influence became so great in southern France. The names of Honoratus, Archbishop of Arles, Hilary, his successor in office, Eucherius, Bishop of Lyons, Lupus, Bishop of Troyes, the great Vincentius, and of Patrick

himself, shed unfading lustre on the little island off the Cape of Cannes, where in the holy solitude and sequestered cells 'withdrawn into the great sea' the Apostle of Ireland prepared for his great work.

From Lerins to Auxerre Patrick was attracted by the fame of Germanus, at whose feet, according to Probus, 'he spent many years in patience, in obedience, in charity, in chastity, in purity of heart and soul.' In 1882 Father Hogan, S.J., discovered the first five chapters of Muirchu's 'Life of St. Patrick,' which were missing from the *Book of Armagh*, in which, however, reference to them was found in the twentieth folio. The text discovered by the Irish Jesuit in the Burgundian Library at Brussels corroborates the testimony of Probus with the following words: 'He (Patrick) found in the city of Alsiodorus a certain holy prince-bishop, Germanus, with whom he remained no little time like Paul at the feet of Gamaliel.'

Meantime in Great Britain the Pelagian heresy was fast gaining ground. Pope Celestine sent his deacon, Palladius, to the aid of the English bishops, but the mission proved unfruitful. The bishops asked their French brethren to help them. Celestine made Germanus his legate, who, taking with him Lupus, Bishop of Troyes, and Patrick, went to England on a mission which seems to have had good results. This took place about the year 429, and about the same time the Pope sent Palladius to Ireland. 'Archdeacon of Pope Celestine, Bishop of Rome, and forty-fifth successor to the Chair of St. Peter,' says the *Book of Armagh*, 'was Palladius consecrated and sent to convert this island which was stark with the colds of winter, but with no result. For nobody can receive from earth without it is given him from above. Also these raw barbarians were not inclined to receive his teachings, and just as little was he inclined to stay in a country which was not his home, wherefore he went back to him who had sent him. Hardly had he passed the first sea on the return journey when he died in the country of the Britons' (Hogan, *Documenta* 25).

What was denied to Palladius was reserved by Providence for Patrick, who now in his sixtieth year undertook the conversion of Ireland. Thirty years previously in a vision he heard the voices of the Irish calling to him over the seas. His boyhood had been spent in captivity among the hills and valleys of Connacht. Green Erin was calling him as she invariably calls even her adopted children. I like to think that he, too, felt the *Heimweh*, the nostalgia we all feel for the dear old island of our dreams. And he was going back to conquer where he had been captive, to kindle on the crest of Croagh Patrick a light that was to be in after ages a beacon to all the world. He was going with the authority of the Pope. No fact in his life is so significant as this, none—with apologies to J. M. Robinson—more clearly established.

1. Among the sayings of St. Patrick, found in the *Book of Armagh*, we find the following advice to his flock: *Ut Christiani, ita et Romani sitis*—As ye are Christians be ye also Romans. The genuineness of these words has of course been disputed, but it is significant that so far back as the year 800, the first part which contains the words quoted, was ascribed to St. Patrick himself. A century later Columbanus calls the Irish 'the disciples of Rome,' and Boniface IV. says that Ireland kept the faith as it was received from the successors of the holy apostles.

2. Tirechan's notes on the life of St. Patrick, written in the *Book of Armagh*, were, according to the Protestant historian Graves, already nearly illegible in 806, and so, undoubtedly of the time of Tirechan, who had his information from Ultan, Bishop of Ardraccan, a contemporary of Patrick. Tirechan testifies that Patrick's mission by Celestine took place in the thirteenth year of the Emperor Theodosius.

3. Aileran, Abbot of Clonard (664), author of the fourth *Life of St. Patrick*, mentions the saint's journey to Rome.

4. In the introduction to his *History of the Britons*, published in 822, Bishop Markus speaks of the sending of St. Patrick by St. Celestine.