

Current Topics

St. Patrick and Rome

A few weeks ago we made some casual comments in this column on the fantastic theory which finds favor in certain Anglican circles to the effect that St. Patrick had no connection with and did not acknowledge the authority of Rome, and that his Christianity was of an entirely non-Papal type; and our remarks found their way into a controversy which has been going on in the columns of the *Adelaide Register*, which controversy was inaugurated by an Anglican clergyman, the Rev. W. H. Winter, B.D. His references to the *Tablet*—a paper which he has presumably never seen—and his method of controversy generally are not remarkable either for manners or modesty. Sweeping assertion, and a lordly dogmatism and cocksureness which are entirely alien to the spirit and attainments of the true scholar, are his constant characteristics. Here is a specimen of his idea of controversial courtesy: 'The *Tablet* shows complete ignorance when it says that the non-Roman theory has been in existence for only 50 years.' The *Tablet* said no such thing. What it said was that the theory had been 'flitting about on the field of polemics' during the last fifty years—which is an entirely different thing. There exists in London an organisation known as the Flat Earth Society, which disseminates literature for the purpose of proving that the earth is flat; and it establishes its thesis by the simple process of ruling out all the evidence on the other side. In his method of dealing with awkward statements Mr. Winter is a follower of the Flat Earth school of controversy. In his first letter he asserted very confidently that St. Bede 'does not mention' St. Patrick. When confronted with our specific and fully attested quotation from Bede's *Martyrology*, he calmly declares that the *Martyrology* is spurious—and triumphantly proves that the earth is flat! The *Adelaide* cleric is in error. The specific quotation which we gave from the *Martyrologium de Natalibus Sanctorum* is recognised as genuine not only by the distinguished Oxford scholar from whom we quoted, but also by that erudite investigator and brilliant Celtic philologist, Professor Zimmer, in his article 'Keltische Kirche,' in the *Realencyclopädie für Protestantische Theologie u. Kirche*, 1901.

The *Adelaide* writer evidently found the two direct quotations which we gave from St. Patrick's sayings a difficult hurdle to negotiate. To the first 'As you would be children of Christ, so be you children of Rome,' he makes no direct reply. Nor could he, for the genuineness of this third Dictum, as it is called, of St. Patrick is, says the learned Hartmann Grisar, now recognised. The actual text runs: '*Aecclesia Scottorum immo Romanorum, ut Christiani ita et Romani sint*' ('The Church of the Scots—i.e., Irish—is a Church of the Romans. Be Christians, but in such wise as to be Romans also.') In regard to the second—the famous canon ordering disputes to be referred to the Apostolic See—the *Adelaide* writer, still following the Flat Earth method, observes: 'The *Book of Armagh* was not written by St. Patrick at all, therefore a citation from it is not to the purpose.' Here again the Anglican apologist blunders. The *Book of Armagh*, besides containing the earliest and best authenticated Life of St. Patrick in Latin by Muirchu Maccu Maictheni, contains also the *Dicta Sancti Patritii*, or brief sayings of the Saint, which are recognised as certainly authentic. The canon is given in two forms—the longer form (from the *Book of Armagh*) quoted by us, and a shorter form found in the *Collectio Hibernensis Canonum*, which is of unquestionable authority and dates from the year 700 (Wasserschleben, 2nd ed., 1885). We may mention in passing that the theory that the word 'archbishop' stamps the canon as a forgery is a pleasant invention of Mr. Winter's, which finds no countenance in scholarly works on the subject such as that of Professor Bury (1905), who deals exhaustively with the whole question of the organisation

of the Irish episcopate. Even Mr. Winter's great standby, the ultra-Protestant Dr. Todd, admits that the word 'archbishop' occurs in early Irish Church history, though not, of course, in the precise and definite sense which it now has. The actual text of the famous decree as given in the *Hibernensis* is as follows: '*Si quae (difficiles in three MSS.) quaestiones in hac insula orientur, ad Sedem Apostolicam referantur.*' ('If any difficulties arise in this island let them be referred to the Apostolic See'). The Protestant Wasserschleben contends that the longer canon is the original. Others maintain that it is but a paraphrastic explanation of the shorter one, yet conveying its true meaning. But as Salmon (*Ancient Irish Church*) points out: 'As far as the Papal supremacy is concerned, the point is of no importance. Both canons involve that doctrine. Both direct that disputes be carried to Rome. One provides for a preliminary reference to Armagh; the other does not. And this is the only difference, in substance, between them.'

The argument from silence is always more or less dangerous, but the use made of it by the *Adelaide* writer is a beautiful sample of logic gone stark mad. The argument from the silence of Bede fails, as we have seen, because there happens to be no silence. Equally disastrous is the misguided attempt to draw an anti-Roman inference from the silence of St. Patrick's *Confession* as to his Roman mission. 'Can we imagine,' writes Mr. Winter, 'Cardinal Moran or Archbishop O'Reilly writing an account of their faith at great length, and answering objections against their mission, making no mention whatsoever of the Church of Rome or of the Pope. The thing is incredible.' The man who wrote that either shows 'complete ignorance'—to use his own expression—as to the subject matter of the *Confession*, or he shows that there are few lengths to which he is not prepared to go in the way of misrepresentation. The full text of the *Confession* lies before us. It is not, and was not intended to be, a set exposition of all the articles of Patrick's faith. Nor was it written to 'answer objections against his mission.' It is an almost entirely personal document, written as a reply to things that were said to belittle him personally. One charge that was brought against him was his lack of literary education. Another referred to the matter of a youthful peccadillo committed when Patrick was about the age of fifteen, and which was thrown up against him 45 years later when he was about to be promoted to the episcopate. The two main objects of the *Confession* are to vindicate his personal character against certain specific charges, and to exhibit the wonderful ways of God in dealing with his own life. He did not refer to the Roman mission for the simple reason that the Roman mission had nothing to do with the subject he was writing about.

Mr. Winter commits himself to theories as to the 'anti-Roman' attitude of St. Aidan, St. Columba, etc., that have long ago been discarded by scholars, and which could be easily refuted, did space permit, from the testimony of Anglican historians themselves. But this discussion began with the question of St. Patrick's relation to Rome, and to that it shall for the present be confined. On this general question the following summary of the position—necessarily condensed—will furnish a sufficient answer to the utter travesty of the facts presented by the *Adelaide* partisan. (1) The learned Protestant writer, Dr. Whitley Stokes, in his edition of *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick* (I., cxxxv) says of St. Patrick: 'He had a reverent affection for the Church of Rome, and there is no ground for disbelieving his desire to obtain Roman authority for his mission, or for questioning the authenticity of the decrees that difficult questions arising in Ireland should ultimately be referred to the Apostolic See.' (2) Another Protestant authority, Wasserschleben, in his edition of the *Hibernensis* (or eighth century collection of Irish canons), distinctly states that the ancient Irish Church was in unison with Rome, and acknowledged the Pope as its head (p. xxxv). (3) St. Patrick's canon regarding appeals to Rome was not alone known in the early Irish Church. It was acted upon. A conspicuous

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