

OUR SAINT AND HERO

AND ANOTHER

(By T. P. CUMMINS.)

I tell a tale and no lying tale, with mine own eyes it was clear to me, with mine own ears I myself heard it, The thing I speak I speak aloud.

There are few records in the wide range of history, sacred and profane, that command such attention and have evoked more inquiry and contention as the life and labors of the apostle of the Irish nation. In the realm of Irish history, I venture to assert, he is the outstanding figure, by reason of his personality, mentality, and genius. The marks he impressed upon his adopted race, through his missionary labors and the revision of the Brehon Laws, have made Catholicity in Ireland not only a spiritual but an intrinsic national asset. His mission and successes flame into a volcanic awesomeness not surpassed by the acts of the chosen Twelve, and resembling in many respects the wonderful works of Christ, his Lord and Master, Who indeed promised as much, did He not, when He said at the Last Supper, ". . . he that believeth in Me, the works that I do, he also shall do, and greater than these shall he do."

In the history of civilisation, which, when carefully analysed, is in great part the history of God's Church, Patrick fills a niche beside which the shrines of Constantine and Charlemagne loom not more glorious. He was the Moses of the West, the servant of God, and the Thaumaturgus of the Gael. Ecclesiastic and lawgiver, seer and champion, Patrick is the greatest heroic personality in the records of the Irish. His labors, spiritual and temporal, redeemed and released a latent force, the full fervor and power of which has not spent itself yet. This force, pre-eminently spiritual, assailed the fabric and very foundations of heathenism, purged a great deal, obliterated much, and, for nearly 1500 years across the world, has grappled with every enemy—heathen, infidel, and pseudo-Christian—of the Cross. This great force not only purged the minds of our forebears and rejuvenated the souls of the people, but set its seal on the national aspect, becoming in time the major factor in moulding, guarding, and emblazoning the ideal of independence. Patrick is not only a saint but a heroic figure as well—points in his personality deserving more consideration at the present day by those of us who can only recall for the time being a far-away saint. Looking at the saint we must not ignore the natural man; and, by surveying relatively and studiously the saint and man, and not losing one in the other, we arrive at a correct estimation of his sainthood and a true conception of his heroic qualities. As apostle of the Gael he is the first and most eminent of our holy men, and not by any means a vague wonder-worker of a dim and distant age. As purger and collaborator of the makers of the Brehon Laws, as one who wrote, chanted, and preached in the Gaelic language, as the inspirator of saints, scholars, poets, storytellers, and soldiers, Patrick is the most heroic figure in the story of our race. There is no hero, ancient or modern, can dim his heroism. The Gallo-Roman, the swineherd, the

priest who "heard the voice of the folk who were near the wood of Fochland nigh to the Western Sea," is the greatest of our saints and the noblest of our heroes.

Patrick lives in history not only from the facts of his life and mission, but mainly, I should say, as a force, the only force that won the soul of a great people and has never vacated the citadel. Therein Patrick is with us to-day, looming larger than ever, more powerful, fearless, and restless than when he confronted King Laighaire at Tara, and became the companion of kings, and the friend and adviser of the Brehons. The mind of Irish Ireland is Catholic. The intense earnestness of her teachers, singers, preachers, and heroes indicates the strength of the spirit-force infused into the national being by the Gallo-Roman missionary. So intense is the fervor and vision of the race that at home the faith of Patrick is a bulwark of national solidity, and abroad a beacon of splendor. Down the long centuries this spirit-force has come, combating armies, invigorating the race, foiling stupendous menaces, scattering bellish conspiracies, permeating Europe, and overflowing into the marts and desert places of the world. To-day we have it struggling and conquering on foreign fields, and at home bracing the nerves of the people against a mighty combination of hate, savagery, and greed. When Patrick prayed on Crohan Aigh that the faith of Eirinn might never fail, and when he rose up from his knees and looked out over Clew Bay and the great Western Sea, he had won from the Most High the fairest gift the Creator could give to a people. There is no other gem in the crown of Eirinn that sparkles so brilliantly and attracts so powerfully. From her brow the pearl has never been torn; and to-day millions the earth over salute the Everlasting Throne with the assurance of the Gael—a salutation that voices the flaming soul of a faithful people—*Credo!*

Good people, of course, who can derive more satisfaction and consolation from a smart novel or musical comedy than from the lives of great men, will see in Patrick, as in most of the saints, a mere name, or, probably, a national symbol to be passively respected or wrangled over. Yet, it is from such moderns—cultured and uncultured—that the criticisms and speculations, born of pride and ignorance, stream forth, assailing the personality, labors, miracles, and conquests of the saints. In a world uneasy, visionless, and materialistic, the plain facts of sainthood cannot be focussed, and criticism and speculation incidental to such failure are natural enough. With many of us one must see and read and think to understand, and comprehend to appreciate, and believe to accept. The apostle of Ireland has come in for his share of criticism: his life and mission have been questioned. Even pseudo-Christians of the Luther order have bravely attempted to weave his personality and mission into the warp and woof of their Wittenberg fabric! And a few Irish writers of our day have essayed to join the sceptics and purblind students by sneering at the giant flower that blossomed on Irish soil from the mustard seed as an "exotic bloom!" Christianity remoulded, rejuvenated, and strengthened the soul and body of Ireland. The seed fell on fertile ground, and good ground and good seed maintain the tree in natural health, vigor, and beauty.

One of our brilliant critics and essayists, Mr. John Eglinton (another of the "Dublin mystics"), pays a dry

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