

Patrick on Cruachan Aigle.

*The life and writings of St. Patrick*

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I. —The Saint's Fast.

FROM Aghagower Patrick went to Cruachan Aigle. [1] The beautiful cone of this hill, since called Croaghpatrick, rises just over the low hills surrounding Aghagower on the west ; and it appears so near, so striking, so attractive, that the heaven-aspiring soul of Patrick must have longed with an ardent longing to reach its summit. He would there be farther from men, he would be nearer to God, and he could see from that lone summit by land and sea all the western country he had already won or was still to win for Christ. It was like Mount Sinai, on which Moses saw God face to face ; there he would fast and pray for Erin, and strive with God for the land that ' He had given him at the end of the world,' so that neither men nor demons should ever wrest it from His sway. No one who reads the Confession of St. Patrick will deny that he was, like St. Paul, a man of burning zeal and of high enthusiasm in the service of God ; and such a man could hardly see Croaghpatrick near him without longing to ascend it, for the lone grandeur of its soaring peak has a strange fascination for the beholder, and attracts the eye from every point of view.

Tirechan's narrative is brief and simple. The Apostle went there on Shrove Saturday, that is the Saturday before Ash Wednesday, and his purpose was to fast the forty days of Lent, thus following the example of Moses, of Elias, and of Christ himself. He buried his coachman at the foot of the mountain near the sea where he died ; [2] and then he went to the summit himself and remained there forty days and forty nights. The birds were a trouble to him ; and he could not see the face of the heavens, the earth, or the sea (on account of them) ; ' for God told all the saints of Erin, past, present, and future, to come to the mountain summit—that mountain which overlooks all others and is higher than all the mountains of the West—to bless the tribes of Erin, so that Patrick might see (by anticipation) the fruit of his labours, for all the choir of the saints of Erin came to visit him there, who was the father of them all.'

The idea here clearly is that the flocks of white birds which disturbed the repose of Patrick really represented the choirs of Erin's saints who were come to meet their common father, and join him in blessing all the tribes of Erin.

But the Tripartite enlarges greatly on this simple narrative in a fashion that suggests the perfervid imagination of the Scotie Chronicler. Still, as it is a very ancient narrative, and has laid hold of the minds of the western people for many ages, we shall give it here in full, but at the same time as briefly as possible : —

Patrick then went to the summit of the mountain, not only to fast, but above all to pray for the people of Ireland, and he was resolved to do violence to heaven until his petitions were granted.

The Angel then came to him to tell him that God was disposed to grant his petitions, although he was ' excessive and obstinate' in urging them, and the requests were also great

in themselves. ‘ Is that His will ? ’ said Patrick. ‘ It is, ’ said the Angel. ‘ Well, then, ’ said Patrick, ‘ I will urge them ; and I will not go from this Rick till I am dead, or till all the petitions are granted to me ; and so he abode on the mountain in much disquietude without food, without drink, from Shrove Saturday until Easter Saturday, after the manner of Moses, son of Amra ; for they were alike in many things, but especially in this that God spoke to both out of the fire, that the age of both was at their death 120 years, and that the burial place of both is unknown.

But meanwhile Patrick was by his prayers and fasting doing violence to heaven, and he was greatly tormented. For towards the close of his term of forty days and nights the mountain was filled with black birds, [3] so that he knew not— that is, could neither see heaven nor earth. He sang maledictive psalms against them ; but still they held on. Then he grew wrathful against them, and rang his bell against them, ‘ so that all the men of Erin heard its voice ; ’ and, as the birds still kept flying around him, he flung the holy bell at them, whereby a piece was broken out of it, whence it was called Bernan Brigte or Brigid’s gapling, because it seems Brigid had given the bell to Patrick. Then Patrick’s heart was filled with grief, the tears in streams flowed down his cheeks, and even his chasuble was wet with them. At length the demon birds disappeared ; and no demon for seven years, seven months, seven days, and seven nights afterwards came to torment the land of Erin. Now when the demon birds were gone an angel came to console Patrick, and the angel cleansed his chasuble from the tear stains and brought beautiful white birds around the Rick, which sang sweet melodies to comfort the afflicted Saint. The angel, too, announced the granting of the first petition. “ Thou shalt bring,” he said, “ an equal number of souls—equal to the birds—out of pain, yea, as many as can fill all the space sea-ward before your eyes.” “ That is not much of a boon,” said Patrick, “ for mine eyes cannot reach far over the sea.” “ Then thou shalt have as many as will fill both sea and land,” said the angel—but Patrick, recalling his sorrows and the crowds of demons that had surrounded him, said—“ Is there anything more that He granteth me ? ” “ Yes,” said the angel, “ seven persons on every Saturday till Doomsday shall be taken out of hell—that is, torment—by your prayers.” “ Let twelve be given me,” said Patrick. “ You shall have them,” said the angel ; “ so now get thee gone from the Rick.” “ I will not go,” said Patrick, “ since I have been tormented, till I am blessed” (by having my petitions granted). Then said the angel “ thou shalt have seven on Thursday and twelve on Saturday, so get thee gone now.” “ No,” said Patrick, “ I must have more.” Then said the angel, “ a great sea shall overwhelm Ireland seven years before the day of judgment”—so that they will not be tormented in Erin by the signs and wonders of that day—“ Now get thee gone.” “ No,” said Patrick, “ I must still be blessed.” Then said the angel, “ Is there aught else you would have ? ” “ Yes,” said Patrick, “ that the Saxons [3] shall never hold Ireland by consent or force so long as I dwell in heaven.” “ Thou shalt have this, too,” said the angel, “ so now get thee gone.”

“ Not yet,” said Patrick. “ Is there aught else granted to me ? ” “ Yes,” said the angel, “ every one who shall sing thy hymn (that is the Latin hymn by Sechnall) from one watch to the other shall not have pain or torture.” “ The hymn is long and difficult,” said Patrick. “ Then every one who shall sing it from ‘ *Christus illum* ’ to the end, that is, the last four stanzas, and every one who shall give aught in thy name, and every one who shall do penance in Erin, his soul shall not go to hell ; so now get thee gone from the Rick.” One would think that this was giving much indeed ; but Patrick was not yet content. “ Is there aught else I am to get ? ” said he. “ Yes,” said the angel, “ a man for every hair on thy chasuble thou shalt bring out of pains on Doomsday.” “ Why, any saint will get that number,” said Patrick. “ How many more do you want ? ” said the angel. “ Seven persons for every hair on my chasuble to be taken out of hell (or pains) on the day of Doom,” said Patrick. “ Thou shalt get that, too,”

said the angel ; “ so now get thee gone.” “ Not yet,” said Patrick, “except God Himself drive me away.”

“ What else do you want ?” said the angel. “ This,” said Patrick, “ That on the day when the twelve Thrones shall be on Mount Sion, that is on the day of Doom, I myself shall be judge over the men of Erin on that day.” “ But this surely cannot be had from God,” said the angel. “ Unless it be got I will not leave this mountain for ever,” said Patrick, “ and I will leave a guardian on it after me.” The angel went to heaven to see about this petition, and Patrick went to say Mass to make his own case stronger, no doubt. The angel came back at None after Mass. “ All heaven’s powers have interceded for thee,” said the angel, “ and thy petition has been granted. You are the most excellent man that has appeared since the Apostles—only for your obduracy. But you have prayed and you have obtained. Strike thy bell now, and fall on thy knees, and a blessing will come upon thee from heaven, and all the men of Erin living and dead shall be blessed and consecrated to God with thee.” “ A blessing on the bountiful King who hath given it all,” saith Patrick, “ and now I leave the Rick.” [4]

This narrative is evidently made up ; and yet it is full of meaning. It teaches the efficacy of prayer in a very striking way, and it is full of faith and confidence in God. There is no more authentic fact in Patrick’s history than this Lenten fast of Patrick on the Rick. The ancient road from Aghagower to the Sacred Hill has been worn bare by the feet of pilgrims who in every age followed the footsteps of their beloved Apostle even to its very summit, as they do still. If the demon tempted our Saviour at the beginning of His public mission, we may be sure he would not leave untempted the man who broke down his ancient empire over the Gael of Erin. In some things the story is extravagant, in others almost untheological ; but the prayer, the yearning efficacious prayer, for the men of Ireland, is no myth. It has been fulfilled, and no greater marvel is recorded in the history of the Church than its fulfilment. It is in itself a miracle. The common tradition that Patrick, by his strong prayers, on Cruachan Aigle, conquered the demons, and drove them far from his beloved Erin, has been verified of the nation as a whole, and except through his prayers and blessing it could never, humanly speaking, have been accomplished.

Yes, Croaghpatrick is a sacred and beautiful hill. From most points of view, it rises from the sea on the southern shore of Clew Bay as a perfect cone to the height of 2,510 feet. [5] There are larger and loftier masses of mountain in Ireland, but none so striking from its isolation, and so regular in its outline, especially when viewed from the east. It commands both land and sea, and has the great advantage of looking down on the most beautiful bay in Ireland, with its hundred islets mirrored in its glancing waters. The whole rugged coast-line of the West—its hills, its cliffs, its havens, its rock-bound islands—can be seen from that lone summit of a clear day as distinctly as if they were stretched at its feet. Then the vast inland plains, their woods and towers and towns, can be traced with perfect distinctness. You see the rivers stealing serpent-like to the sea, the great brown bogs in the distance, the clouds resting on Nephin or the Twelve Pins of Connemara, the far-off hills of Donegal on the horizon’s verge, rising from the main, the smoke of the train rounding Clew Bay, the hookers and fishing boats with their white wings spread to catch the gale, the long waves bursting in streaks of light on the cliffs of Clare Island and Achill. Such a scene, combining at once so much sublimity, variety, and beauty, cannot be found anywhere else, at least in these kingdoms.

## II.—Patrick’s Mission Confirmed by Pope Leo The Great.

The Tripartite states that ‘ when Patrick was in Cruachan Aigle he sent Munis to Rome with counsel unto the Abbot of Rome, and relics were given to him.’ The full significance of this passage will appear from another and quite independent statement made in the Annals of

Ulster under date A.D. 441 :—‘ Leo ordained 42nd Bishop of the Church of Rome, and Patrick the Bishop was approved in the Catholic faith.’ This is a most important statement for many reasons. Pope Leo the Great was consecrated on the 29th of September, A.D. 440. News of his election would not probably reach Ireland until the end of the year, or some time in the beginning of 441. Patrick, who was then on Cruachan Aigle, resolved to send one of his disciples to present his own homage and submission to the new Pope, to give an account of the Irish mission, and beg the Pope’s blessing. He would also naturally ask for relics, and no doubt in those difficult times he would forward a written confession of his own faith and teaching in Ireland. The Pope ‘ approved’ of Patrick’s doctrine, confirmed his mission, and blessed his labours—that is what is clearly meant by the statement that ‘ Patrick was approved in the Catholic faith.’ The entry also enables us to ascertain that Patrick was on Cruachan Aigle during the Easter of the year 441, which is of itself a most interesting fact.

When Patrick left Cruachan Aigle on Saturday of Holy Week, he returned to Aghagower, which is not more than eight miles to the east, by the ancient straight road, traces of which still remain. There at Aghagower, with his beloved Bishop Senach and his holy son Oengus and the virgin Mathona, he celebrated, doubtless with great joy, the festival of Easter. He had been through the desert, and was now come, as it were, into the Promised Land. But it was not allowed him to remain there ; so once more he set out on those toilsome journeys, about which he had already made some not unnatural complainings. The Tripartite here inserts a curious paragraph, not found in the Book of Armagh, concerning the keepers whom Patrick had set on various well known hills in Ireland. They are said to belong to Patrick’s familia, or household ; and the writer adds, ‘ they are alive in Ireland still.’ Let us hope that it is in a spiritual sense, for if they keep their lofty lodging in the body they must often have hard times and windy weather to endure.

‘ There is a man of Patrick’s on Cruachan Aigle’— he threatened to have a guardian there if his petitions were not granted—‘ and people hear the voice of his bell on the mountain, although they cannot find himself.’ There is another keeper of Patrick’s in Gulban Guirt—the beautiful hill called Benbulbin, overlooking the Bay of Donegal, and, indeed, the whole north-west of Ireland—and we know it well, for we often sat upon its rocky brow. There is a third man from him east of Clonard (in Meath), together with his wife. Well, he is much better off than his fellow-watchers, for there is no hill there by the infant Boyne, only a small mound or tullagh not worth talking about. Besides, east of Clonard it is a dead level, so what the old couple are doing there it is difficult to see. The reason assigned is that they showed hospitality to Patrick when he was there in South Meath, and he rewarded them with an earthly immortality ; for ‘ they will remain there of the same age until the day of doom.’ There is another in Drumman Breg or Bregia, the site of which it is not easy to determine. It is probably the hill called the Moat, a few miles north of Slane, which rises to the height of 750 feet, and is the most commanding summit of all that overlook the fair Bregian Plain. Patrick knew it well, for it was not far from that other famous hill where he lit his first Paschal Fire in Erin. There is a fifth watcher of Patrick on Slieve Slainge—namely, Domongart, from whom the hill gets its present name of Slieve Donard—in Down. It will not be denied that he, too, has an airy position and a wide look out, but he has a special duty which he waits to perform. It will be his business to upraise Patrick’s relics before the day of doom. St. Domongart, son of Echaid, was a historical personage who had an oratory on the mount [ain ; but his ceaseless watching is no doubt purely imaginary. The writer adds, however, that ‘ he has a fork and its belongings’—meat, let us hope—and a pitcher of beer always before him at his church at Rath Muir-builc on the slope of the mountain, and he gives them to the mass-folk on Easter Tuesday always.

It may be said that in a spiritual sense all this is true. From these lone summits God's Guardian Angels keep watch and ward over all the land of Erin that Patrick loved so well. He foreknew that they would be needed in the evil days to come, and God placed them there to watch the land and the people of the land, and help them in the long struggle that awaited them. Patrick's own striving on the Holy Mountain was only a figure of the still more desperate strife in which his spiritual children were to be engaged, and as God's angels comforted him, so they have comforted them through the prayers of Patrick.

Perhaps, too, it might have some foundation in a more literal sense if we take it that Patrick ordered a perpetual watch to be maintained by the religious of the nearest monasteries from those conspicuous summits. But even that explanation will hardly suit the case of the old couple at Clonard. There certainly was an ancient oratory on Croaghpatrick, and another on Slieve Donard. We know of no trace of an oratory on Benbulbin, although doubtless there was a church of some kind on Drumman in Bregia. The nuns of St. Brigid kept a perpetual fire in Kildare until it was extinguished by John Comyn, Archbishop of Dublin, who, being an Anglo-Norman, declared it savoured of superstition. So it may be that Patrick told his monks to keep watch—a spiritual watch—on these commanding hills, and by their prayers drive far away the demons of the air [6] who might seek to injure his own beloved land of Erin.

It is also noted, both in the Tripartite and the Book of Armagh, that Patrick's charioteer, Totmael, that is Barepoll, [7] died at the foot of the hill of Croaghpatrick—in Murrisk Aigle—that is the plain between the sea and the mountain. So they buried him there at Murrisk, and over his grave they raised, after the fashion of the country, a great earn of stones ; and Patrick said : “ It will remain there for ever. and I shall visit it on the last day,” as if he intended to make sure of the salvation of his faithful charioteer before the Day of Doom.

There is good reason to think that during his sojourn at Murrisk St. Patrick paid a visit to at least one of the islands off this coast. Caher Island is a small green island off the coast of Mayo, some three-quarters of a mile long and one quarter in breadth. There is a vivid local tradition that it was visited by our saint ; and the ancient ruin, which still bears the name of Temple Phatraic, confirms the tradition. It is at present uninhabited, but its very loneliness would be an additional reason to induce the Apostle to visit the island, which is a striking object as seen from the shore beyond Louisbourg, for it rises in a peaked summit to a height of 188 feet above the sea. No reference, however, is made to this visit in any of the written Lives of the Apostles.

There is one clear statement, both in Tirechan and the Tripartite, that Patrick before leaving the ‘ Owles’ founded a church in the Plain of Umall, [8] the last being the ancient form of what has since been called the ‘ Owles.’ This church was situated close to the later church founded by Columcille, called with reference to this more ancient church Nuach-ongbhail, that is the New Monastery, which has been corrupted into Oughaval, the modern name of the parish. The old church was on the other side of the road.

### III. Croaghpatrick Pilgrimage.

This famous pilgrimage had its origin in the fact that Patrick spent one whole Lent of forty days and nights on Cruachan Aigle, the beautiful conical hill that rises over the sea on the southern shore of Clew Bay. We have already given a full description of the hill itself ; it only remains for us here to indicate the principal points connected with Patrick's sojourn on the ‘ Holy Mountain’ which have rendered it so sacred a place in the estimation of all the people in the West of Ireland.

It would appear from the narrative in the Book of Armagh that Patrick went first from Aghagower to Murrisk, at the base of the mountain. There his car-driver, Totmael the Bald One, sickened and died, rather suddenly it would appear, and there they buried him in the ancient Irish fashion, raising a great cairn of stones over his grave, which is, we believe, still to be seen. The simple people of Murrisk had at the time little or no idea of a resurrection of the dead ; so Patrick, standing by the great cairn, said—“ Let him rest there until the world’s end, but he will be visited by me in those last days”—and raised from the dead. [8]

Thereafter, Patrick, we are told, ascended the summit of the mountain, and remained upon it forty days and forty nights—that is the whole of Lent—but as a fact he spent more than forty days and forty nights on the Holy Hill, for he ascended it, we are told, on Shrove Saturday, *i.e.*, the Saturday before Ash Wednesday, and remained there until Holy Saturday, the eve of Easter Sunday. We can even fix the exact year and the day of the month on which St. Patrick ascended the Reek. The Annals of Ulster, under date A.D. 441, have this important entry—‘ Leo ordained 42nd Bishop of the Church of Rome, and Patrick the Bishop was approved in the Catholic Faith.’ There is also a sentence in the Tripartite Life which helps to explain this entry. It is this—‘When Patrick was on Cruachan Aigle (that is on the Reek), he sent Munis (his nephew) to Rome with counsel for the Abbot of Rome’—that is the Pope—‘ and relics were given to him’ to carry home to Patrick.

Now, St. Leo the Great was consecrated Pope in Rome on the 20th September, in the year A.D. 440. Croaghpatrick was a long and, at that time, a very difficult journey from Rome, so that news of the new Pope’s election could hardly reach Patrick in the far West before the early Spring of the following year. As soon as the news did reach him on the Reek, he felt it his duty to send off at once his own nephew, Bishop Munis, to congratulate the new Pope, to give an account of his own mission and preaching, and to beg the Pope’s blessing and authorisation to continue his work. This authority Munis readily received from the Pope, with many relics for the consecration of the altars in the new churches which Patrick was founding in Ireland, and we hear of him on his return journey at Clonmacnoise. That is the meaning of the phrase—that ‘ Leo was ordained 42nd Bishop of Rome, and Patrick the Bishop was approved in the Catholic Faith’ in Ireland. It is an exceedingly important statement and, as might be expected, Protestant writers have not called attention to its full meaning. It is a very interesting fact connected with the history of this Holy Mountain that it was from its summit St. Patrick sent this wise message to Rome, and got back the Pope’s blessing.

The Tripartite tells us that during the time Patrick was on the Reek, he abode there in much discomfort, without drink and without food, from Shrove Saturday to Holy Saturday. There can be no doubt the Saint must have spent those days on the great mountain’s summit in much discomfort. He was exposed, day and night, to all the fury of the elements—wind and rain, sunshine at times, but not improbably much snow and hail also, in the early months of spring. He had the poor shelter of four stones round about him ; and at night, when he sought to rest, his head was pillowed on a flag, the five stones making the shape of a rude cross—great discomfort surely of body, and no doubt, too, much anguish of mind ; but it is by the cross the saints reach their glory. Hence, all our ancient writers compare Patrick on the Reek to Moses on Mount Sinai. Both were bidden by God’s angel to spend the forty days upon a holy hill ; both fasted and prayed for their people ; both fought against demons and druids ; both, it is said, lived to the same great age of 120 years, and the sepulchre of both, the exact spot, no man knows—for, although we know that Patrick was buried at Downpatrick, the exact spot has been unknown for many ages, even from the day of his burial, since it was deliberately concealed lest his body might be stolen. There can be no doubt, too, that Patrick suffered much anguish of spirit on the Reek. He was fasting in prayer for his people, over whom the demons of paganism had ruled so long ; and the demons resolved, so

far as they could, to tempt and torment him. They tempted Christ himself, as we know—why not try to tempt his apostle ? They covered the whole mountain top in the form of vast flocks of hideous black birds, so dense that Patrick could neither see sky nor earth nor sea. They swooped down upon him and over him with savage beaks and black wings ; they filled the air with discordant screams, making day and night horrible with their cries.

Patrick chanted maledictive psalms against them to drive them away, but in vain ; he prayed to God to disperse them, but they fled not ; he groaned in spirit, and bitter tears coursed down his cheeks, and wet every hair of the priestly chasuble which he wore—still prayers and tears were in vain. Then he rang his bell loudly against them—it was said its voice had always power to drive away the demons—whereupon they gave way, and to complete their rout, he flung the blessed bell amongst them, and then they fled headlong down the side of the mountain, and over the wide seas beyond Achill and Clare, and were swallowed up in the great deeps, so that for seven years no evil thing was found within the holy shores of Ireland. The bell itself, rolling down the mountain, or from the excessive ringing, had a piece broken out of its edge, although such bells were made of wrought iron or bronze ; but an angel brought it back again to Patrick, and when dying he left it to Brigid—who prized it greatly—hence it was called Brigid’s Gaping, or Brigid’s Broken Bell. This is a very ancient tale, and you may believe as much of it as you please. If it should seem strange why the voice of the bell should have more virtue than Patrick’s prayers and tears, let us remind you that it was Patrick’s Bell, the symbol of his spiritual authority, and, as it were, the voice of his supernatural power.

The bells from the earliest days in the Western Church were blessed, or, as it came to be said later on, they were baptised—that is sprinkled with holy water and salt, and anointed with the holy Chrism, and had a special name given to them. The very oldest form of blessing that we have shows that the bells were not only used for calling the people to the Divine Offices in the Church, but their sound was regarded also as powerful to drive away demons, and repel storms and lightning. In Ireland these blessed bells were especially esteemed ; and one of them was always regarded as an essential part of the equipment of Bishop or Abbot. He was to have a bell, a book, a crozier or bachul, and a menistir or chalice, with its paten, and an altar stone ; and when St. Patrick had St. Fiacc consecrated Bishop of Sletty, he gave him a case containing all these four articles. This explains why the voice of the blessed bell was so powerful, and why the demons could not bear its sound or its presence. The voice of Patrick’s bell on the holy mountain was, as it were, the voice of God proclaiming the routing of the demons and the victory of the Cross. And hence, it is said in some of the Lives that all the men of Erin heard the voice of Patrick’s Bell on the Reek—sounding the triumph of the Cross—and from the same lone height, in one sense at least, it may be said that its voice is still heard over all the land. It was heard on the 16th August just passed ; and with the blessing of God the voice of Patrick’s Bell will be heard every year by all who dwell along these western shores, far over land and sea. It is no new sound ; it verily and indeed is the voice of Patrick’s Bell that you will hear coming down to us through the ages, and sounding once more from the Reek over all the land.

In the might of God, and by the power of God, Patrick drove off the demons from the Reek and from the West—let us hope for ever. He was victorious, but worn out after the long conflict, and his Angel Victor suggested that he might now leave the sacred Hill and return to Aghagower to celebrate Easter.

And to console Patrick the whole mountain summit was filled with beautiful white birds, which sang most melodious strains ; and the voices of the mountain and the sea were mingled with their melody ; so that the Reek became for a time, as it were, the paradise of God, and

gave one a foretaste of the joys of heaven. “ Now get thee gone,” said the Angel, “ you have suffered, but you have been comforted. These white birds are God’s saints and angels come to visit you and to console you ; and the spirits of all the saints of Erin, present, past, "and future, are here by God’s high command to visit their father, and to join him in blessing all this land, and show him what a bountiful harvest his labours will reap for God in this land of Erin.” The Book of Armagh goes no further, but the Tripartite and the later authorities add much more.

Taking Colgan’s version of the narrative, he tells us that God’s angel promised to Patrick that through his prayers and labours as many souls would be saved as would till all the space over land and sea so far as his eye could reach—more numerous far than all the flocks of birds he beheld. Furthermore, by his prayers and merits seven souls every Thursday and twelve every Saturday were to be taken out of Purgatory until the day of doom ; and thirdly, whoever recited the last stanza of Patrick’s Hymn in a spirit of penance would endure no torments in the world to come. Moreover he prayed, and it was granted to him. that as many souls should be saved from torments as there were hairs in his chasuble, also that those Whitely Stokes calls the Outlanders should never obtain permanent dominion over the men of Erin ; that the sea would spread over Ireland seven years before the judgment day, to save its people from the awful temptation and terrors of the reign of Anti-christ ; and that Patrick himself would be like the Apostles over Israel, and judge the men of Erin on the Last Day ; and this too was granted, but not without great difficulty. Such is the substance of the wrestling of Patrick on the Holy Hill, and the wonderful favours he obtained for the men of Erin by his strong prayers. What wonder, then, that the Reek has been esteemed the holiest hill in all Erin ; that it has been from the beginning a place of pilgrimage, and that somehow an idea has got abroad that whoever did penance, like Patrick, on this Holy Hill would have his special blessing, and by the powerful prayers of the Saint, escape eternal punishment ?

But Patrick was not content with praying for his beloved flock, and watching over them during his own life : he left holy men of his family, it is said, to watch over the men of Erin until the Day of Doom. One he left, first of all, on the Reek itself, to watch over all this western land and over the islands of the main, and his bell, they say, is often heard, although he himself cannot be seen. Another he left on Ben Bulbm. which, after the Reek, is the most beautiful hill in Erin, and he watches over the north-west ; a third he left on Slieve Donard, who gave his name to that grand mountain over-looking all the north-east ; a fourth on Drumman Breg, to watch over the plains of Meath ; a fifth at Clonard, and a sixth on Slieve Cua, the great ridge overlooking at once the plains of Tipperary and the beautiful valley of the Blackwater. Well, all we can say is, if the men of Patrick’s family have not kept watch and ward on these lonely heights for the past fourteen hundred years, God’s Angel-guardians have done it ; for, otherwise, the Irish race and the faith of St. Patrick would have been utterly rooted out of the land.

It is a common belief that it was from the Reek that St. Patrick drove all the poisonous reptiles and serpents into the sea, so that none has ever since been found in Erin. We find no trace of this ancient tradition in the Book of Armagh or in the Tripartite, or other more ancient Lives of the Saint. Still the tradition is very ancient.

Jocelyn, in his Life of St. Patrick, written towards the close of the twelfth century, expressly states that from the day the Saint blessed the Reek, and from the Reek all the land of Ireland, with all the men of Erin, no poisonous thing has appeared in Ireland. Patrick expelled them all by the strength of his prayers, and the virtue of the Staff of Jesus which he bore in his hand.

Gerald Barry, who wrote some years later, in the beginning of the thirteenth century, refers to the same popular belief as almost universal. He himself, however, does not attribute the absence of all poisonous reptiles to the power of Patrick and his crozier. He says rather that it is due to certain properties in the air and in the soil of the land which render it fatal to all venomous things ; and he quotes Venerable Bede, who wrote in the eighth century and states the same. The Welshman declares, furthermore, that if anything poisonous was brought from other lands, it perished at once, when it touched the soil of Ireland. We will not attempt to settle this controversy, or decide on the truth of the alleged facts. For eight hundred years at least the popular voice has attributed this immunity to the merits of St. Patrick and his blessing of Ireland from the Reek. That he drove away the demons of infidelity and paganism, corporeal or incorporeal, cannot be questioned ; and Jocelyn says he drove away the toads and serpents also, in order that the demons, if they returned, might have no congenial abode in which to take refuge.

Patrick having received all these great favours from God descended the mountain on Holy Saturday, and returned to Aghagower, where he celebrated the great Easter festival with his beloved friends, Senach the Bishop, Mathona the Nun, and Aengus the student, who was then learning his catechism and his psalms.

It is hardly necessary to observe that pilgrimages for the purpose of visiting in a spirit of faith and penance holy places sanctified by the penance and by the labours of our Saviour and His Saints, have been in use from the earliest days of Christianity, and will continue to the end of time. They are the natural outcome of Christian piety, and they have always proved to be a most efficacious means of enlivening Christian faith and deepening Christian devotion. Pilgrimages to the sacred scenes in the Holy Land were made long before the time of St. Helena, and, one way or another, are still made every year by members of every Church that calls itself Christian.

Now, we find the pilgrimage to the Reek existing from the very beginning. The ancient road by which the pilgrims crossed over the hills from Aghagower to the Reek can still be traced, worn bare, as it were, by the feet of so many generations of Patrick's spiritual children. No doubt the celebrity and sanctity of the place in popular estimation arose not only from the fact that St. Patrick prayed and fasted there for forty days, and blessed the hill itself, and the people, and all the land from its summit, but also from the promise of pardon said to be made in favour of all those who performed the pilgrimage in a true spirit of penance. In the Tripartite Life the first privilege St. Patrick is said to have asked and obtained from God, is that any of the Irish who did penance even in his last hour would escape the fire of hell. That is, no doubt, perfectly true, if there be real penance ; but in popular estimation it came to mean that penance at the Reek was an almost certain means of salvation, through the influence of the prayers, example, and merits of Patrick. Moreover, if any sinners were likely to obtain the special favour of the saint, it would be those who trod in his sacred footsteps, praying and enduring, where he himself had prayed and endured so much. This is a perfectly sound and just view. Penance—sincere penance—performed anywhere will wash away sin, even in the latest hour of a man's life ; but the penance is far more likely to be sincere, and the graces from which it springs are far more likely to be given abundantly, in the midst of those places which Patrick sanctified, and through the efficacy of his intercession for such devoted disciples. He prayed for all the souls of Erin ; but, naturally enough, he prays especially for those who honour, and love, and trust him. On the soundest theological principles, therefore, a pilgrimage to the Reek is likely to be a most efficacious means of obtaining mercy and pardon through the prayers and merits and blessings of Patrick. And Colgan tells us, in a note to the promise referred to above, that the Reek was constantly visited by pious pilgrimages with great devotion, from all parts of the Kingdom, and many

miracles used to be wrought there. That was some three hundred years ago. But the pilgrimage was an old one many centuries before the time of Colgan, for Jocelyn tells us in the twelfth century that crowds of people were in the habit of watching and fasting on the summit of the Reek, believing confidently that by so doing they would never enter the gates of hell, for 'that privilege was obtained from God by the prayers and merits of St. Patrick'—and that hope is no doubt the chief motive of the pilgrimage. Even in those ancient days it was considered a great crime to molest any persons on their way to the Reek ; and we are told in the Annals of Loch Ce that King Hugh O'Connor cut off the hands and feet of a highwayman who sought to rob one of the pilgrims. Sometimes, too, the pilgrims suffered greatly, like St. Patrick, not only on their journey thither, but on the Reek itself. St. Patrick's Day also, being within Lent, was a favourite day for the pilgrimage, and we are told in the Annals 'that thirty of the fasting folk' perished in a thunder storm on the mountain in the year A.D. 1113, on the night of the 17th of March. But like those who die in Jerusalem on pilgrimage, no doubt their lot was considered a happy one.

It was doubtless the hardships and dangers attendant on the pilgrimage to such a steep and lofty mountain that induced the late Archbishop, Most Rev. Dr. MacEvilly, to apply to the Pope for authority to change the place of pilgrimage to some more convenient spot. The petition was granted on the 27th May, 1883, and at the same time a plenary indulgence was granted on any day during the three summer months to all who would visit the church designated by the Ordinary ; and a partial indulgence of 100 day'ss for every single visit paid to that church during the three months named—June, July, and August. There is nothing, we believe, to prevent the Ordinary still 'designating' the little oratory [9] on the summit of the mountain, and we did so last Summer, with very wonderful results. We should not wish to see this ancient pilgrimage discontinued. We know His Eminence Cardinal Moran is of the same mind. Moreover, it is practically impossible to transfer the scene of such pilgrimages to other places, and so it has proved here. The blessing of God and Patrick has been on the ancient pilgrimage, and on the pilgrims too. It will be with them still, and, for our part, we shall authorise the celebration to take place every year on the very summit of the Reek ; and we believe it will bring graces and blessings to all those who ascend in fact and make the pilgrimage, or if they cannot ascend in fact, will ascend in spirit with the pilgrims to pray on Patrick's Holy Mountain. We can say for ourselves, that the vision of this sacred-hill has been constantly before our mind for many years during all our Irish studies. We have come to love the Reek with a kind of personal love, not merely on account of its graceful symmetry and soaring pride, but also because it is Patrick's Holy Mountain—the scene of his penance and of his passionate yearning prayers for our fathers and for us. It is to us, moreover, the symbol of Ireland's enduring faith ; and, fronting the stormy west, unchanged and unchangeable, it is also the symbol of the constancy and success with which the Irish people faced the storms of persecution during many woeful centuries. It is the proudest and the most beautiful of the everlasting hills that are the crown and glory of this western land of ours. When the skies are clear and the soaring cone can be seen in its own solitary grandeur, no eye will turn to gaze upon it without delight.—Even when the rain clouds shroud its brow we know that it is still there, and that when the storms have swept over it, it will reveal itself once more in all its calm beauty and majestic strength. It is, therefore, the fitting type of Ireland's Faith, and of Ireland's Nationhood, which nothing has ever shaken, and with God's blessing nothing can ever destroy.

As might be expected, the country around the Reek is teeming with living traditions of our Saint. One who has dwelt in the midst of them from his earliest years [10] supplies us with a few that may be of interest to our readers. In the first place we shall give the unwritten 'Order of the Croaghpatrick Station,' as he himself has learned it : —

At the base of the cone of the mountain, as one ascends from Munisk, or from Aghagower, is met the first ‘ garden,’ or heap of stones. Around this the pilgrim, provided with seven pebbles for the purpose of counting his circuits, walks barefooted seven times, all the while repeating appropriate prayers—generally the Rosary. He then, wearing his shoes, if he so desires, struggles to the summit, and there, starting from the little chapel, walks barefooted around a beaten pathway, saying his Rosary as before. Instead of the fifteen rounds barefooted, one round on bare knees will suffice. This done, the pilgrim approaches the altar of the oratory of Templepatrick on his bare knees.

The next portion of the station consists in going to the second ‘ garden,’ which is on the west, or Lecanvey side of the Reek, where there are three piles of stones, round all of which, taken together, the pilgrim walks barefooted, all the while praying, and then seven times in like manner around each of the piles taken separately. Thus the station is finished. Many pilgrims, however, finish by a visit to Kilgeever Well, but this is not part of the Croaghpatrick station.

Our informant vouches for the truth of the following remarkable example of filial devotion, and of faith in the power of Patrick :

About 30 years ago a respectably dressed man, carrying a bag, came to a house at the foot of the mountain, and begged lodging for the night, which was willingly given. He manifested the greatest anxiety about the bag, which, it was noticed, he never allowed from his own keeping. On being questioned regarding his conduct he frankly gave his explanation. The bag contained the bones of his mother, who died some years before in America. The good woman had, it appears, some time before her death, promised to perform a station upon the Reek, but the hand of death forestalled her pious intention. Her devoted son was determined the promise should be kept, as far as possible, and so, bearing the mortal remains of his dead mother upon his shoulder, he himself therewith made the station upon the Holy Mountain.

#### Murrisk Patron.

When St. Patrick came down from the mountain, on Holy Saturday, it is said that he and his followers knelt to give thanks in a field at the foot, now called the ‘ Old Patron Field.’ It is immediately to the right of the path leading from the public road at Murrisk to the Reek. A ‘ Patron’ is still held in this field to commemorate the Saint’s Thanksgiving Prayer.

The road to the Reek is now called ‘ Boher Na Miasa,’ i.e., the Road of the Dishes, because it is said refreshment was there provided for St. Patrick and his people as they came down from the Holy Mountain.

+ John Healy, D.D.,  
*Archbishop of Tuam.*

St. Jarlath’s,

*September, 1905.*

[1] Ad muntem Egli.—*Book of Armagh.* The plain at its foot between the mountain and the sea was called Muirisc, and took its name from a Muirisc, daughter of Liogan, who dwelt there. In after times a famous Augustinian monastery was founded in the same place, and still bears the name—the Abbey of Murrisk.

- [2] Tolmael was his name; over the grave they raised, in Irish fashion, a great earn of stones, and Patrick said ; ‘ So let him remain for ever until he will be visited by me in the last day’—no doubt to give a new life to the ashes of the dead.
- [3] This was written long before the Norman Conquest. The reference appears to be to the pagan Saxons, who were conquering Great Britain, and who, it was feared, might also conquer Ireland.
- [4] In the *Book of Armagh* Patrick’s three petitions only are given, thus : — I. That every one of us doing penance even in his last hour will not be doomed to hell on the last day. II. That the barbarians shall never get dominion over us. III. That the sea will cover Ireland seven years before the Day of Judgment.—*Rolls Trip*, 331.
- [5] Muilrea, over Killary Harbour, is the highest mountain in Connaught—2,688 feet high. Nephin (2,646) is nearly as high. Croaghpatrick is the third in altitude (2,510). See *Joyce’s Atlas*.
- [6] ‘ The spirits of wickedness in high places,’ with whom St. Paul (*Eph.*, 6. 12) says Christians have to wrestle.
- [7] ‘ Totus-Calvus,’ in the *Book of Armagh*.
- [8] The ancient graveyard is there still, beside a small stream : hence it is called Glas-Patraic, and is the undoubted site of Totmael’s grave.
- [9] That little oratory called Templepatrick was a small shed, built of dry stones, and open to the wind. The author and his administrator, Rev. M. M’Donald, of Westport, have just completed a new oratory, solidly built of concrete, which will be dedicated on July 30. as these sheets are going through the press. It will, of course, be also called Templepatrick, and will be dedicated to our national Apostle.
- [10] The Rev. James Campbell, till lately Prefect of Studies at St. Jarlath’s College, Tuam.

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