



THE MOST ANCIENT LIVES OF

SAINTE PATRICK



Various

The Most Ancient Lives of Saint Patrick

**Biographies, Works & Fulfillments of the
Apostle of Ireland**

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Table of Contents

Preface.

The Confession of St. Patrick.

St. Patrick's Epistle to Coroticus.

St. Fiech's Metrical Life of St. Patrick.

Tripartite Life.

Part I.

Part II.

Part III.

The Proeme of Jocelin.

The Life and Acts of St. Patrick.

Chapter I.

Chapter II. How a Fountain burst forth, and how Sight and Learning were given to the Blind.

Chapter III. Of the Stone of Saint Patrick.

Chapter IV. Of the Well dried up.

Chapter V. How he produced Fire from Ice.

Chapter VI. How the Sister of St. Patrick was healed.

Chapter VII. How he restored to Life his Foster-Father.

Chapter VIII. Of the Sheep released from the Wolf.

Chapter IX. Of the Cow freed from an Evil Spirit, and Five other Cows restored to Health.

Chapter X. Of the Water turned into Honey, and of his Nurse restored to Health.

Chapter XI. How the Fort was Cleansed.

Chapter XII. Of the Religious Conversation of Saint Patrick.

Chapter XIII. How Saint Patrick was Carried into Ireland.

Chapter XIV. Of Milcho's Dream, and of its Interpretation.

Chapter XV. Of the Angel Victor appearing to Saint Patrick.

Chapter XVI. How St. Patrick was Redeemed from Slavery.

Chapter XVII. How he Relieved those who were Perishing of Hunger.

Chapter XVIII. Of his Fast continued for Twenty Days.

Chapter XIX. How he Overcame the Temptation of the Enemy.

Chapter XX. How he was again made Captive, and released by the Miracle of the Kettle.

Chapter XXI. Of Saint Patrick's Vision.

Chapter XXII. How he dwelt with the blessed Germanus, and how he received the Habit from Saint Martin.

Chapter XXIII. Of the Flesh-meat changed into Fishes.

Chapter XXIV. How in his Journey to Rome he Found the Staff of Jesus.

Chapter XXV. How he Journeyed unto Rome, and was made a Bishop; and of Palladius, the Legate of Ireland.

Chapter XXVI. How he Saw and Saluted the Lord.

Chapter XXVII. Of the Miraculous Voyage of the Leper.

Chapter XXVIII. How he beheld Devils.

Chapter XXIX. Of the River sentenced to perpetual Sterility.

Chapter XXX. How the Dry Land was turned into a Marsh.

Chapter XXXI. Of his coming into Ulidia, and of the Prophecy of the Magicians on his coming.

Chapter XXXII. How a Fierce Dog was suddenly Tamed; of the Conversion of Dichu; and how a Fountain rose out of the Earth.

Chapter XXXIII. Of the Evil-doer Swallowed up by the Earth.

Chapter XXXIV. Of the Aged Man restored unto his Youth.

Chapter XXXV. Of the Death of Rius.

Chapter XXXVI. Of the Death of Milcho.

Chapter XXXVII. Of the Holy Mochna.

Chapter XXXVIII. Of the Hostages of Dichu which were Freed by an Angel.

Chapter XXXIX. Of Saint Benignus, and of the Prophecy which was made of him.

Chapter XL. The Fire that was Lighted by Patrick.

Chapter XLI. Of the Holy Man named Hercus.

Chapter XLII. How the Magician was Destroyed.

Chapter XLIII. Of the Miraculous but Terrible Rescue of Saint Patrick.

Chapter XLIV. How the Saint Escaped the Deadly Snares.

Chapter XLV. Of the Poison mingled in the Wine.

Chapter XLVI. Of the Fantastic Snow.

Chapter XLVII. How the Darkness was Dispersed.

Chapter XLVIII. How the Magician and his Garment were consumed, and Benignus and the Garment of St. Patrick preserved unhurt.

Chapter XLIX. Of Many who were Swallowed up by the Earth, and how the rest were Converted unto God.

Chapter L. Of the Sisters and the Nephews of St. Patrick.

Chapter LI. How Saint Lumanus Sailed against the Wind and the Stream.

Chapter LII. How Forkernus and his Parents were Converted and Baptized.

Chapter LIII. Of the Prophecy of St. Patrick on Coyrbre, and of the Unfruitfulness of a River.

Chapter LIV. Of Conallus, and of the Prophecy of Patrick concerning him.

Chapter LV. Of the Altar of Saint Patrick.

Chapter LVI. Of the Images destroyed from Heaven, and of the Fountain produced from the Earth.

Chapter LVII. How the Darkness was Dispersed.

Chapter LVIII. Of the Virgins who went unto Heaven.

Chapter LIX. Of the Magician Struck by Lightning, and of Twelve Thousand Men Converted unto Christ.

Chapter LX. Of another Magician whom the Earth swallowed up.

Chapter LXI. How another Magician is Sunken up to the Ears, and again is Raised up.

Chapter LXII. How a huge Stone was raised by the Saint.

Chapter LXIII. How the Women were raised from Death.

Chapter LXIV. Two Women who were pregnant are with their Infants rescued from Death unto Life.

Chapter LXV. How he builded a Church of Clay alone.

Chapter LXVI. Of the two Rivers, Dubh and Drobhaois.

Chapter LXVII. Of the Voice that issued from the Sepulchre.

Chapter LXVIII. Of his Journey, and of his manifold Miracles.

Chapter LXIX. The Prophecy of the Saint Concerning Dublinia; and the Sick Man cured.

Chapter LXX. A Fountain is produced out of the Earth.

Chapter LXXI. The Dead are raised up; the King and the People are converted; a Fountain is produced, and Tribute promised.

Chapter LXXII. Of the Sentence pronounced on Murinus.

Chapter LXXIII. Foylge is punished with a double Death, and the deceiving Fiend is driven out of his body.

Chapter LXXIV. Of the Saint's Prophecy concerning the Kings of Momonia.

Chapter LXXV. How Dercardius and his Companions were destroyed.

Chapter LXXVI. Of the Quarrel of the Two Brothers.

Chapter LXXVII. Fourteen Thousand Men are miraculously refreshed with the Meat of Five Animals.

Chapter LXXVIII. Nineteen Men are raised by Saint Patrick from the Dead.

Chapter LXXIX. The King's Daughter becomes a Nun.

Chapter LXXX. The King Echu is raised from Death.

Chapter LXXXI. A Man of Gigantic Stature is revived from Death.

Chapter LXXXII. Of Another Man who was Buried and Raised Again.

Chapter LXXXIII. Of the Boy who was torn in pieces by Swine and restored unto Life.

Chapter LXXXIV. The Prayers of the Saint confer Beauty on an Ugly Man.

Chapter LXXXV. The Stature of the same Man is increased unto a sufficient Height.

Chapter LXXXVI. Of Saint Olcanus, the Teacher and Bishop, raised out of the Earth.

Chapter LXXXVII. How the Tooth of Saint Patrick shone in the River.

Chapter LXXXVIII. The Saint Prophesieth of the Virgin Treha, and a Veil is placed on her Head by an Angel.

Chapter LXXXIX. Saint Patrick Prophesieth of the Sanctity of Saint Columba.

Chapter XC. The River is Divided in Twain, and Blessed.

Chapter XCI. The Prophecy that Patrick made unto Connedus.

Chapter XCII. Of Mannia and the other Islands Converted unto God.

Chapter XCIII. Of the Saint's Prophecy concerning Six Priests, and of a Skin which he bestowed to them.

Chapter XCIV. Saint Patrick Continueth his Preaching Three Days.

Chapter XCV. Of the Vision of the Blessed Brigida, and its Explanation.

Chapter XCVI. Of the Angels of God, of the Heavenly Light, and of the Prophecy of Saint Patrick.

Chapter XCVII. The Temptation of the Nun is Subdued.

Chapter XCVIII. Of Saint Comhgallus, and the Monastery foreshowed of Heaven.

Chapter XCIX. The Saint Prophesieth of the Obstinate Fergus and of his Children.

Chapter C. The Malediction of the Saint is laid upon the Stones of Usniach.

Chapter CI. Of the Woman in Travail, and of her Offspring.

Chapter CII. The Bishop Saint Mel catcheth Fishes on the Dry Land.

Chapter CIII. The Footprints of Certain Virgins are impressed on a Stone.

Chapter CIV. The Earth is raised in the midst of the Stream.

Chapter CV. Of the Altar and the Four Chalices discovered under the Earth.

Chapter CVI. A Treasure is Twice discovered in the Earth by Swine.

Chapter CVII. Saint Patrick prophesieth of the two Brothers.

Chapter CVIII. The Penitence of Asycus the Bishop.

Chapter CIX. The Tempest of the Sea is Composed.

Chapter CX. The Miracle of the Waters is Repeated.

Chapter CXI. Of the Cowl of Saint Patrick which remained untouched by the Sea.

Chapter CXII. Of the Veil that was sent from Heaven.

Chapter CXIII. Of the Holy Leper, of the New Fountain, of the Angelic Attendance, and the Prophecy of Patrick thereon.

Chapter CXIV. Of the Lake which was removed by Saint Patrick.

Chapter CXV. Patrick understandeth the Conscience of Saint Fiechus, and blesseth him.

Chapter CXVI. The Chariot is, by the Decision of the Angel, sent unto Fiechus.

Chapter CXVII. The Several Offices of a certain Monastery are appointed by an Angel.

Chapter CXVIII. The Prophecy of Saint Patrick concerning the Men of Callria.

Chapter CXIX. Certain Cheeses are converted into Stones, and many Wicked Men are drowned.

Chapter CXX. Of the Pitfalls passed over without danger, and the Prophecies of the Saint.

Chapter CXXI. The Prophecy of the Saint on a Certain Village.

Chapter CXXII. The Sentence prophetically declared.

Chapter CXXIII. The Prophecy of the Saint on a Certain Bishop and on the one who consecrated him.

Chapter CXXIV. The Blind Man is restored to Sight; from him who seeth is Sight taken; and three are relieved of Lameness.

Chapter CXXV. Nine Evil-doers are consumed by Fire from Heaven, and a Fountain is produced out of the Earth.

Chapter CXXVI. Another Magician is in like manner Consumed.

Chapter CXXVII. A Grove is cursed by the Saint.

Chapter CXXVIII. The Sentence pronounced by the Saint on his Deceivers.

Chapter CXXIX. A Mountain is swallowed up in the Earth, and again it is raised.

Chapter CXXX. Euchodius is cursed by the Saint, and his Son is blessed.

Chapter CXXXI. Of Saint Sennachus the Bishop.

Chapter CXXXII. The Miracle which is worked for Certain Hewers of Wood.

Chapter CXXXIII. A Hone is divided by Saint Patrick, and the Oppressor is drowned.

Chapter CXXXIV. An Angel foretelleth to Patrick of Saint Moccheus.

Chapter CXXXV. The Sentence pronounced by Patrick on Moccheus.

Chapter CXXXVI. The Saint prophesieth of two Brothers, and a Fountain is produced out of the Earth.

Chapter CXXXVII. The Saint Prophesieth of a Certain Youth.

Chapter CXXXVIII. Of Conallus and of his Shield.

Chapter CXXXIX. A Heavenly Light shineth around Saint Patrick, and Victor is converted unto the Faith.

Chapter CXL. A Certain Cymbal of Saint Patrick is lost and found again.

Chapter CXLI. The Obedience of Saint Volchanus.

Chapter CXLII. Of Saint Rodanus, the Herdsman of Patrick.

Chapter CXLIII. Of Saint Kertennus, the Bishop of Clochor.

Chapter CXLIV. Of a Boy who was blessed by Saint Patrick.

Chapter CXLV. Of a Woman who was raised from Death.

Chapter CXLVI. The Testimony of One who was revived from Death.

Chapter CXLVII. The Cross that was not observed; and the Voice which issued from the Sepulchre.

Chapter CXLVIII. A Goat bleateth in the Stomach of a Thief.

Chapter CXLIX. Of the Cloaks which fell from Heaven.

Chapter CL. A wicked Tyrant is transformed into a Fox.

Chapter CLI. The wicked Man Machaldus and his Companions are converted unto the Faith.

Chapter CLII. The Penitence of Machaldus.

Chapter CLIII. A Meadow is overflowed by the Sea.

Chapter CLIV. A Stone is changed into Milk, and Milk is changed into Stones.

Chapter CLV. A Wagon laden with Twigs is saved from the Fire.

Chapter CLVI. The Saint is preserved untouched from the falling Rain.

Chapter CLVII. The Fingers of Saint Patrick shine with Light.

Chapter CLVIII. Fire is also seen to issue from his Mouth.

Chapter CLIX. The holy Virgin Memhessa departeth unto God.

Chapter CLX. Of the Work which was done in the Lord's Day.

Chapter CLXI. A certain Man is healed, and a Horse revived, in a place which is called Feart.

Chapter CLXII. Of the Vessel which was given unto Saint Patrick, and again taken from him.

Chapter CLXIII. Ardmachia is given unto Saint Patrick; and a Fountain is produced out of the Earth.

Chapter CLXIV. The Saint beholdeth a Vision of Angels, and cureth Sixteen Lepers.

Chapter CLXV. Of the City of Ardmachia, and Twelve of its Citizens.

Chapter CLXVI. At the Direction of the Angels Saint Patrick goeth unto Rome.

Chapter CLXVII. The Acts of Saint Patrick while returning from Rome.

Chapter CLXVIII. The Acts of St. Patrick after he had Returned.

Chapter CLXIX. Of the Threefold Plagues of Hibernia.

Chapter CLXX. The Threefold Plague is driven out of Hibernia by Saint Patrick.

Chapter CLXXI. Without Earthly Food the Saint completeth a Fast of Forty Days.

Chapter CLXXII. He banisheth the Demons forth of the Island.

Chapter CLXXIII. Troops of Angels appear unto the Saint.

Chapter CLXXIV. The Saint titheth Hibernia and the Dwellers therein.

Chapter CLXXV. The different States of Hibernia are in a Heavenly Vision shown unto the Saint.

Chapter CLXXVI. The Answer of Saint Patrick to Secundinus.

Chapter CLXXVII. Secundinus composeth a Hymn in Honor of Saint Patrick.

Chapter CLXXVIII. The Soul of a Certain Sinner is by Saint Patrick freed from Demons.

Chapter CLXXIX. How the Saint appeared unto Colmanus while singing his Hymn.

Chapter CLXXX. The Admirable Contemplations of the Saint.

Chapter CLXXXI. Saint Patrick beholdeth the Souls of the Rich and of the poor Man sent unto different Places.

Chapter CLXXXII. Saint Vinvaloeus is miraculously stayed by Saint Patrick from his purposed Journey.

Chapter CLXXXIII. The Daily Prayers and Genuflexions of the Saint.

Chapter CLXXXIV. How he passed the Night Season.

Chapter CLXXXV. The Habit, the Bearing, and the Acts of Saint Patrick.

Chapter CLXXXVI. Of the Sick whom he healed, and the Dead whom he raised; and of his Disciples who recorded his Acts.

Chapter CLXXXVII. The Angelic Voice showeth unto Saint Patrick of his Death and of the Place of his Burial.

Chapter CLXXXVIII. The Place of his Sepulture is foreshown by a Light from Heaven.

Chapter CLXXXIX. Saint Brigida bringeth unto Saint Patrick the Garment which was to enshroud his Body.

Chapter CXC. The Death of Saint Patrick.

Chapter CXCI. The Number of the Years of his Life.

Chapter CXCII. The Funeral Honors which Men and Angels paid unto the Body of the Saint.

Chapter CXCIII. The Light continueth for Twelve Days.

Chapter CXCIV. The Miraculous Rising of the Sea between the Contending People.

Chapter CXCV. Two Wains appear, the which are sent by a Miracle.

Chapter CXCVI. The Sepulture of Saint Patrick in the City of Dunum.

A Chronological Table to the Lives of St. Patrick.

PREFACE.

[Table of Contents](#)

The present volume has three objects in view: first, to present the life of Saint Patrick without writing a history of the national church which he founded or introducing irrelevant matter; secondly, to place his life and character before the reader as they have been handed down to us in the most ancient extant documents, without overcoating or withholding anything in the originals; and, thirdly, to deliver to the public at as low a price as possible the original documents grouped together.

At first I had intended to present the Seven Lives of St. Patrick as published by Colgan; but, to my knowledge, there is no copy of the *Acta Triadis Thaumaturgae* in this country, and the four lives which I have omitted—that is, by Benignus, Patrick Junior, Eiselan the Wise, and Probus—are of little consequence. The metrical life by St. Fiech is undoubtedly the most ancient and the most removed from saintly imaginings of miracles. The other two, that by Saint MacEvin and that by Jocelin, appear to have been elaborate compendiums of stories written in antecedent ages, and extant in their time, concerning Saint Patrick. Of the life by Saint Fiech I have made a rude translation corresponding with the original; of the Tripartite I have given Professor Hennessy's version; and of the extraordinary biography by Jocelin I reproduce, for the first time in this country, the rendering from Colgan by Mr. Swift, as published by the Hibernia Press Company, at Dublin, in 1809. Colgan's Latin version of the Life of Saint Patrick by Jocelin is given by the Bollandists, and may be seen in many libraries in this

country; but the original Lives, as published at Louvain, are at the Irish College in Rome and at Trinity College, Dublin. A copy may be found elsewhere, but, if so, it is exceedingly valuable, forasmuch as it is exceedingly rare. The Life of Saint Patrick by Saint Fiech will convey an estimate of his character about the time of his death; the Tripartite life by Saint MacEvin will probably impart the notions of the eighth century; and the life by Jocelin will communicate the exaggerations of mediaeval times in the twelfth century. The public will thus have fairly placed before them the thoughts of ages about Saint Patrick through seven centuries after his death. I supply the reader with the Confession and Epistle attributed to Saint Patrick, though I incline to the opinion that they are the issue of an age subsequent to that of Ireland's Saint. The Chronotaxis or Chronological Table at the end of the book I have made out from the work by the Bollandists, which seems to have been prepared with scholarly and judicious diligence.

Of the illustrations, it is to be stated that the one prefixed to the life of St. Fiech has been an heirloom in the family of Counsellor Shechan, of this city, and is taken from an old Irish prayer-book, supposed to be between three and five hundred years old. The frontispiece and the illustration fronting the Tripartite Life are taken from the *Spicelegium*, were engraved by Messengham, with the approbation of the French King and the Paris Archbishop, at Paris, in 1629, and were reproduced at Dublin in 1809. They are now re-engraved for the first time in this country. The illustration prefixed to the life by Jocelin is of ancient date, and supposed to have been suggested by the representation of St. Patrick in the Kilkenny Cathedral.

I hold myself responsible in no way whatsoever for the statements of St. Fiech, St. MacEvin, or Jocelin, but I present

to the reader what they asserted they had received from antiquity. Their narratives may be pronounced fables, or legends, or inventions, or superstitions, or histories. On their intrinsic merits I am silent, except inasmuch as they breathe a firm belief in the omnipresence of God amongst men, strangely at variance with the lifeless, frosty indifference of our own day, and are, in addition, savored with a holy heat of charity and a high moral tone. Without comment, then, from me, I present to you in America, kind readers, Saint Patrick, the Apostle and Patron of Ireland and the Irish race, as I received him from my ancestors. I neither overstate, nor under-estimate, nor withheld anything. Judge for yourselves.

REV. JAMES O'LEARY, D.D.

THE CONFESSION OF ST. PATRICK.

[Table of Contents](#)

THE BEGINNING OF THE BOOKS OF THE BISHOP ST. PATRICK.

I, Patrick, a sinner, the rudest and least of all the faithful, and most contemptible to very many, had for my father Calpornius, a deacon, the son of Potitus, a priest, who lived in Bannaven Taberniae, for he had a small country-house close by, where I was taken captive when I was nearly sixteen years of age. I knew not the true God, and I was brought captive to Ireland with many thousand men, as we deserved; for we had forsaken God, and had not kept His commandments, and were disobedient to our priests, who admonished us for our salvation. And the Lord brought down upon us the anger of His Spirit, and scattered us among many nations, even to the ends of the earth, where now my littleness may be seen amongst strangers. And there the Lord showed me my unbelief, that at length I might remember my iniquities, and strengthen my whole heart towards the Lord my God, who looked down upon my humiliation, and had pity upon my youth and ignorance, and kept me before I knew him, and before I had wisdom or could distinguish between good and evil, and strengthened and comforted me as a father would his son.

Therefore I cannot and ought not to be silent concerning the great benefits and graces which the Lord has bestowed upon me in the land of my captivity, since the only return

we can make for such benefits is, after God has reproved us, to extol and confess His wonders before every nation under heaven.

For there is no other God, nor ever was, nor shall be hereafter, except the Lord, the unbegotten Father, without beginning, by whom all things have their being, who upholds all things, as we have said; and His Son, Jesus Christ, whom, together with the Father, we testify to have always existed before the origin of the world, spiritually with the Father, ineffably begotten before every beginning; and by Him were the visible things made—was made man, death being overthrown, in the heavens. And he hath given Him all power over every name of things in heaven and earth and hell, that every tongue should confess to Him that Jesus Christ is Lord, and whose coming we expect ere long to judge the living and dead; who will render to every one according to his works; who hath poured forth abundantly on us both the gift of His Spirit and the pledge of immortality; who makes the faithful and obedient to become the sons of God and coheirs with Christ; whom we confess and adore one God in the Trinity of the holy Name. For He Himself has said by the prophet: "Call upon me in the day of thy trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt magnify me." And again he says: "It is honorable to reveal and confess the works of God."

Although I am imperfect in many things, I wish my brothers and acquaintances to know my dispositions, that they may be able to understand the desire of my soul. I am not ignorant of the testimony of my Lord, who declares in the psalm: "Thou wilt destroy all that speak a lie." And again: "The mouth that believeth, killeth the soul." And the same Lord: "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall render an account for it in the Day of Judgment." Therefore I

ought, with great fear and trembling, to dread this sentence in that day when no one shall be able to withdraw or hide himself, but all must give an account, even of the least sins, before the judgment-seat of the Lord Christ.

Therefore, although I thought of writing long ago, I feared the censure of men, because I had not learned as the others who studied the sacred writings in the best way, and have never changed their language since their childhood, but continually learned it more perfectly, while I have to translate my words and speech into a foreign tongue; and it can be easily proved from the style of my writings how I am instructed in speech and learning, for the Wise Man says: "By the tongue wisdom is discerned, and understanding and knowledge and learning by the word of the wise." But what avails an excuse, however true, especially when accompanied with presumption? For I, in my old age, strive after that which I was hindered from learning in my youth. But who will believe me? And if I say what I have said before, that as a mere youth, nay, almost a boy in words, I was taken captive, before I knew what I ought to seek and to avoid. Therefore I blush to-day and greatly dread to expose my ignorance, because I am not able to express myself briefly, with clear and well-arranged words, as the spirit desires and the mind and intellect point out. But if it had been given to me as to others, I would not have been silent for the recompense; and although it may seem to some who think thus that I put myself forward with my ignorance and too slow tongue, nevertheless it is written, "The tongues of stammerers shall speak readily and plain"; how much more ought we to undertake this who are the epistle of Christ for salvation unto the ends of the earth, written in pure heart, if not with eloquence, yet with power and endurance, "not written with ink, but with the Spirit of

the living God"; and again the Spirit testifies, "Husbandry, it was ordained by the Most High."

Therefore I undertook this work at first, though a rustic and a fugitive, and not knowing how to provide for the future; but this I know for certain: that before I was humbled, I was like a stone lying in deep mire, until He who is powerful came, and in his mercy raised me up, and indeed again succored and placed me in His part; and therefore I ought to cry out loudly, and thank the Lord in some degree for all his benefits, here and after, which the mind of man cannot estimate. Therefore be amazed, both great and small who fear God; rhetoricians and ye of the Lord, hear and enquire who aroused me, a fool, from the midst of those who seem to be wise, and skilled in the law, and powerful in speech and in all things, and hath inspired me (if indeed I be such) beyond others, though I am despised by this world, so that, with fear and reverence and without murmuring, I should faithfully serve this nation, to whom the charity of Christ hath transferred me, and given me for my life, if I shall survive; and that at last with humility and truth I should serve them.

In the measure, therefore, of the faith of the Trinity it behoves me to distinguish without shrinking from danger, and to make known the gift of God and everlasting consolation, and, without fear, confidently to spread abroad the name of God everywhere, so that after my death I may leave it to my Gallican brethren and to my sons, many thousands of whom I have baptized in the Lord. And I was neither worthy nor deserving that the Lord should so favor me, his servant, after such afflictions and great difficulties, after captivity, after many years, as to grant me such grace for this nation—a thing which, still in my youth, I had neither hoped for nor thought of.

But after I had come to Ireland, I was daily tending sheep, and I prayed frequently during the day, and the love of God, and His faith and fear, increased in me more and more, and the spirit was stirred; so that in a single day I have said as many as a hundred prayers, and in the night nearly the same; so that I remained in the woods, and on the mountain, even before the dawn, I was roused to prayer, in snow, and ice, and rain, and I felt no injury from it, nor was there any slothfulness in me, as I see now, because the spirit was then fervent in me. And there one night I heard a voice, while I slept, saying to me: "Thou dost fast well; fasting thou shalt soon go to thy country." And again, after a very short time, I heard a response, saying to me: "Behold, thy ship is ready." And the place was not near, but perhaps about two hundred miles distant, and I had never been there, nor did I know any one who lived there.

Soon after this, I fled, and left the man with whom I had been six years, and I came in the strength of the Lord, who directed my way for good; and I feared nothing until I arrived at that ship. And the day on which I came the ship had moved out of her place; and I asked to go and sail with them, but the master was displeased, and replied angrily: "Do not seek to go with us." And when I heard this, I went from them to go thither where I had lodged; and I began to pray as I went; but before I had ended my prayer, I heard one of them calling out loudly after me, "Come quickly, for these men are calling you"; and I returned to them immediately, and they began saying to me; "Come, we receive thee in good faith; make such friendship with us as you wish." And then that day I disdained to supplicate them, on account of the fear of God; but I hoped of them that they would come into the faith of Jesus Christ, for they were Gentiles; and this I obtained from them; and after three

days, we reached land, and for twenty-eight days we journeyed through a desert, and their provisions failed, and they suffered greatly from hunger; and one day the master began to say to me: "What sayest thou, O Christian? Your God is great and all-powerful; why canst thou not, then, pray for us, since we are perishing with hunger, and may never see the face of man again?" And I said to them plainly: "Turn sincerely to the Lord my God, to whom nothing is impossible, that He may send us food on your way until ye are satisfied, for it abounds everywhere for Him." And with God's help it was so done; for, lo! a flock of swine appeared in the way before our eyes, and they killed many of them, and remained there two nights, much refreshed and filled with their flesh; for many of them had been left exhausted by the wayside. After this, they gave the greatest thanks to God, and I was honored in their eyes.

They also found wild honey, and offered me some of it, and one of them said: "This is offered in sacrifice, thanks be to God"; after this, I tasted no more. But the same night, while I was sleeping, I was strongly tempted by Satan (of which I shall be mindful as long as I shall be in this body), and there fell, as it were, a great stone upon me, and there was no strength in my limbs. And then it came into my mind, I know not bow, to call upon Elias, and at the same moment I saw the sun rising in the heavens; and while I cried out Elias with all my might, behold! the splendor of the sun was shed upon me, and immediately shook from me all heaviness. And I believe that Christ my Lord cried out for me; and I hope that it will be so in the day of my adversity, as the Lord testifies in the Gospel: "It is not you that speak," etc.

Some time after, I was taken captive; and on the first night I remained with them I heard a divine response,

saying: "You shall be two months with them"; and so it was. On the sixtieth night the Lord delivered me out of their hands, and on the road He provided for us food, and fire, and dry weather daily, until on the fourteenth day we all came. As I have above mentioned, we journeyed twenty-eight days through a desert, and on the night of our arrival we had no provisions left.

And again, after a few years, I was with my relations in Britain, who received me as a son, and earnestly besought me that then, at least, after I had gone through so many tribulations, I would go nowhere from them. And there I saw, in the midst of the night, a man who appeared to come from Ireland, whose name was Victorious, and he had innumerable letters with him, one of which he gave to me; and I read the commencement of the epistle containing "The Voice of the Irish"; and as I read aloud the beginning of the letter, I thought I heard in my mind the voice of those who were near the wood of Focluti, which is near the western sea; and they cried out: "We entreat thee, holy youth, to come and walk still amongst us." And my heart was greatly touched, so that I could not read any more, and so I awoke. Thanks be to God that, after very many years, the Lord hath granted them their desire!

And on another night, whether in me or near me God knows, I heard eloquent words which I could not understand until the end of the speech, when it was said: "He who gave His life for thee is He who speaks in thee"; and so I awoke full of joy. And again, I saw one praying within me, and I was, as it were, within my body, and I heard, that is, above the inner man, and there he prayed earnestly with groans. And I was amazed at this, and marvelled, and considered who this could be who prayed in me. But at the end of the prayer it came to pass that it was a bishop, and I awoke and

remembered that the apostle said: "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings." And again: "The Lord is our advocate, who also maketh intercession for us." [And when I was tried by some of my elders, who came and spoke of my sins as an objection to my laborious episcopate, I was on that day sometimes strongly driven to fall away here and for ever. But the Lord spared a proselyte and a stranger for His name's sake, and mercifully assisted me greatly in that affliction, because I was not entirely deserving of reproach. I pray God that they may not be found guilty of giving an occasion of sin; they found me after thirty years, and brought against me words that I had confessed before I was a deacon; from anxiety, with sorrow of mind, I told my dearest friend what I had done in my youth, in one day, nay, rather in one hour, because I was not then able to overcome. I know not, God knows, if I was then fifteen years of age, and from my childhood I did not believe in the living God, but remained in death and unbelief until I was severely chastised, and, in truth, I have been humbled by hunger and nakedness; and even now I did not come to Ireland of my own will until I was nearly worn out. But this proved a blessing to me, for I was thus corrected by the Lord, and he made me fit to be to-day that which was once far from my thoughts, so that I should care for the salvation of others, for at that time I had no thought even for myself.

And in the night of the day in which I was reprov'd for the things above mentioned, I saw in the night.] I saw in a vision of the night a writing without honor before me. And then I heard an answer saying to me, "We have heard with displeasure the face of the elect without a name." He did not say, "Thou hast badly seen," but "We have badly seen,"

as if he had there joined himself to me, as he said: "He that touches you is as he who toucheth the apple of my eye." Therefore I give thanks to Him who comforted me in all things that He did not hinder me from the journey which I had proposed, and also as regards my work which I had learned of Christ. But from this thing I felt no little strength, and my faith was approved before God and man.

Therefore I dare to say that my conscience does not reproach me now or for the future. I have the testimony of God now that I have not lied in the words I have told you. [But I feel the more grieved that my dearest friend, to whom I would have trusted even my life, should have occasioned this. And I learned from certain brethren that, before this defence, when I was not present, nor even in Britain, and with which I had nothing to do, that he defended me in my absence. He had even said to me with his own lips: "Thou art going to be given the rank of bishop," though I was not worthy of it. How, then, did it happen to him that afterwards, before all persons, good and bad, he should detract me publicly, when he had before this freely and gladly praised me? And the Lord, who is greater than all? I have said enough. Still, I ought not to hide the gift of God which he gave me in the land of my captivity, for I sought him earnestly then, and found him there, and He preserved me from all iniquity, I believe, through the indwelling of His Spirit, which worketh within me unto this day more and more. But God knows, if it were man who spoke this to me, I would perhaps be silent for the love of Christ.

Therefore I give unceasing thanks to my God, who preserved me faithful in the day of my temptation, so that I can to-day offer him sacrifice confidently—the living sacrifice of my soul to Christ my Lord, who preserved me from all my troubles, so that I may say to Him: "Who am I, O

Lord! or what is my calling, that divine grace should have so wrought with me, so that to-day I can so rejoice amongst the nations, and magnify Thy name, wherever I am, not only in prosperity, but also in adversity?" and I ought to receive equally whatever happens to me, whether good or evil, giving God thanks in all things, who hath shown me that I should, undoubtingly, without ceasing, believe in Him who hath heard me though I am ignorant, and that I should undertake, in those days, so holy and wonderful a work, and imitate those of whom our Lord predicted of old that they should preach His Gospel to all nations for a testimony before the end of the world; which has been accomplished, as we have seen. Behold, we are witnesses that the Gospel has been preached to the limits of human habitation.]

But it is too long to detail my labors particularly, or even partially. I will briefly say how the good God often delivered me from slavery and from twelve dangers by which my soul was threatened, besides many snares, and what in words I cannot express, and with which I will not trouble my readers. But God knows all things, even before they come to pass [as he does me, a poor creature. Therefore the divine voice very often admonished me to consider whence came this wisdom, which was not in me, who neither knew God nor the number of my days. Whence did I obtain afterwards the great and salutary gift to know or love God, and to leave my country and my relations, although many gifts were offered to me with sorrow and tears. And I offended many of my seniors then against my will. But, guided by God, I yielded in no way to them—not to me, but to God be the glory, who conquered in me, and resisted them all; so that I came to the Irish people to preach the Gospel, and bear with the injuries of the unbelieving, and listen to the reproach of being a stranger, and endure many persecutions, even to

chains, and to give up my freedom for the benefit of others. And if I be worthy, I am ready to give up my life unhesitatingly and most cheerfully for His name, and thus, if the Lord permit, I desire to spend it even until my death.]

For I am truly a debtor to God, who has given me so much grace that many people should be born again to God through me, and that for them everywhere should be ordained priests for this people, newly come to the faith, which the Lord took from the ends of the earth, as He promised formerly by His prophets: "Our fathers falsely prepared idols, and there is no profit in them, to thee the Gentiles come and will say." And again: "I have set thee to be the light of the Gentiles, that thou mayest be for salvation unto the utmost parts of the earth." And thus I wait the promise of Him who never fails, as He promises in the Gospel: "They shall come from the east and the west [from the north and from the south], and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob." So we believe that the faithful shall come from all parts of the world.

Therefore we ought to fish well and diligently; as the Lord taught and said: "Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men." And again: "Behold, saith the Lord, I send many fishers and many hunters," etc. Therefore we should, by all means, set our nets in such a manner that a great multitude and a crowd may be caught therein for God, and that everywhere there may be priests who shall baptize and exhort a people who so need it and desire it; as the Lord teaches and admonishes in the Gospel, saying: "Going, therefore, teach ye all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, even to the consummation of the world." And again: "Go ye into the whole world, and preach the Gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that

believeth not shall be condemned." The rest are examples. [And again: "This Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony to all nations, and then shall the consummation come." And again, the Lord, speaking by the prophet, says: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith the Lord, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Moreover, upon my servants and handmaids in those days I will pour forth my spirit, and they shall prophesy." And Osee saith: "And I will say to that which was not my people: Thou art my people: and to her who hath not found mercy; and they shall say; Thou art my God. And in the place where I said to them, You are not my people, it shall be said to them, Ye are the sons of the living God."]

Wherefore behold how in Ireland they who never had the knowledge *of God*, and hitherto only worshipped unclean idols, have lately become the people of the Lord, and are called the sons of God. The sons of the Scoti and the daughters of princes are seen to be monks and virgins of Christ. [And there was one blessed Irish maiden, of adult age, noble and very beautiful, whom I baptized, and after a few days she came to us for a reason, and gave us to understand that she had received a command from God, and was informed that she was to become a virgin of Christ, and to draw near to God. Thanks be to God, six days after this she most excellently and eagerly entered on this state of life, which all the virgins of God now adopt, even against the will of their parents, even enduring reproaches and persecution from them, and notwithstanding they increase in number; and as for those who are born again in this way, we know not their number, except the widows and those

who observe continency. But those who are in slavery are most severely persecuted, yet they persevere in spite of terrors and threats. But the Lord has given grace to many of my handmaids, for they zealously imitate him as far as they are able.

Therefore, though I could have wished to leave them, and had been ready and very desirous to go to Britannia, as if to my country and parents, and not that alone, but to go even to Gallia, to visit my brethren, and to see the face of my Lord's saints; and God knows that I desired it greatly. But I am bound in the spirit, and he who witnesseth will account me guilty if I do it, and I fear to lose the labor which I have commenced—and not I, but the Lord Christ, who commanded me to come and be with them for the rest of my life; if the Lord grants it, and keeps me from every evil way, that I should not sin before him. But I hope that which I am bound to do, but I trust not myself as long as I am in this body of death, for he is strong who daily tries to turn me from the faith, and from the sincere religious chastity to Christ my Lord, to which I have dedicated myself to the end of my life, but the flesh, which is in enmity, always draws me to death—that is, to unlawful desires, that must be unlawfully gratified—and I know in part that I have not led a perfect life like other believers. But I confess to my Lord, and do not blush before him, because I tell the truth, that from the time I knew him in my youth the love of God and his fear increased within me, and until now, by the favor of the Lord, I have kept the faith.

Let him who pleases insult and laugh at me; I will not be silent, neither do I conceal the signs and wonders that the Lord hath shown to me many years before they took place, as he who knew all things even before the world began. Therefore I ought to give thanks to God without ceasing,