



# Croagh Patrick

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## *The Mount Sinai of Ireland*

By F. P. CAREY

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By F. P. Carey

Commentators are sometimes apt to differ as to the authenticity of a statement or claim made in one or other of the several ancient accounts of the life and apostolate of St. Patrick. It seems, therefore, significant that the Croagh Patrick claim has stood unquestioned against the inexorable processes of time and research. All authorities are agreed, without reservation as to date or detail, that, in the tradition, as it were, of Moses on Mount Sinai, our National Apostle passed a period of solitude, penance, mortification, and prayer on the summit of the great western mountain in the spiritual behest of the Irish people, not only of his own time, but of the ages yet to come.

The claim is not contended even by leading non-Catholic writers, as witness Professor J. B. Bury, who, in his refreshingly impartial *Life of St. Patrick*, has declared that the confined space on the top of *The Reek*, as Croagh Patrick is locally called, is "*the one spot where we can feel some assurance that we stand literally in Patrick's footsteps, and realise that, as we look southward across the desolate moors and tarns of Murrisk, northward across the Bay to the hills of Burrishoole and Erris, and then westward beyond the islets to the spaces of the ocean, we are viewing a scene on which Patrick for many days looked forth with the bodily eye.*"

In natural grandeur and rugged magnificence, the district entered by the pilgrim, hallowed almost everywhere by the footsteps of our Apostle, is practically unsurpassed, even amid the characteristic wild beauty of the Mayo coast. Excepting, perhaps, Croagh Patrick, the principal scenic attraction is Clew Bay. This noble water expanse escapes inland from the Atlantic between Achillbeg and Buinaha Point. Studded in a picturesque semblance of confusion with green and brown islets, it covers an area of approximately fifteen miles, with a depth averaging five miles, and provides the town of Westport with its trading harbour.

Westport, modern centre of the ancient parish of Aughaval, is the railway and bus destination for the majority of pilgrims. Its almost exclusively Catholic life is presided over by the imposing Church of St. Mary, in which, on the morning of the Annual Pilgrimage, the Archbishop of Tuam invariably offers the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and preaches, for the advantage of those unable to make the ascent of the Reek. The educational interests of the town are furthered by the Christian Brothers and the Sisters of Mercy.

About four and a half miles distant is *Murrisk (Muirisc)*, meaning a *seashore marsh* where there is a statue of St. Patrick indicating the point at which the ascent is begun. This locality comprises part of the storied territory of the O'Malleys, Lords of Umhail. It is thus not surprising that the place, should have had interesting associations with Grace O'Malley, or Grania Uaile, the celebrated sea-going *Queen of Clew Bay*, who is said to have been born at Murrisk about the year 1530. There, at all events, Most Rev. Dr. Healy considers, she was baptised, presumably in the chapel of the Augustinian monastery founded by her forbears. The oddly-battlemented walls of this foundation, Murrisk Abbey, as it is called, remain, but there would seem to be no record extant as to the date or circumstances of its

origin. It is, however, believed to have been one of the first religious houses of Connacht suppressed and despoiled by Henry VIII.

#### WHERE ST. PATRICK TARRIED

After our Apostle had crossed the Shannon to the westward during the mid-years of his missionary itinerary, he would appear to have relaxed to some extent from the arduous of his labours. Some of the annalists state that he passed seven years in Connacht, not actually desisting from the work of the apostolate, but occasionally interrupting its routine, and withdrawing apart for anxious contemplation and prayer.

The statement may be accepted, for the sojourn of St. Patrick in the West coincided with what he would seem to have regarded as a crisis in his missionary life. In almost poignant words, he tells us in the *\*Confession* that, because of a sin of his boyhood, and one which he had duly confessed before he had been ordained Deacon, some of his seniors were murmuring that he was unworthy of the grace and dignity of the episcopate. Thirty years earlier, as he states, he had confided the fact of this transgression to a friend, but the latter had now betrayed the confidence, even bringing forth the youthful remissness in challenge of his worthiness to preach the Gospel. "*I had not gained the upper hand,*" he writes, in obviously anguished reference to the fault in question. "*I cannot tell, God knoweth, if I was then fifteen years of age, and I did not believe in the Living God, nor had I from my infancy.*"

It is said to have been at the moment of greatest depression in this connection that the Saint came into the district immediately commanded by the mountain now associated with his name and sanctity. He continued to preach and baptise as he went, but, at length, physically weary, and troubled anew by recurring reports of the murmurings against him, came to rest at Aghagower.

Aghagower—in the original Gaelic rendering, *Acadh Fobhair—Field of the Spring*, from a well afterwards

\*See "Confession of St. Patrick" published by Irish Messenger Office.

called *St. Patrick's Well*—is located some four miles south-east of Westport on the road to Ballinrobe. It would appear to have been a place of importance in earlier times, for, as well as a Round Tower, there are in the vicinity the ruins of the Castle of Doona, often mentioned in the chronicles of O'Malley adventure. In the *Book of Armagh*, it is described as *the place where Bishops dwell*, an entry which is generally taken to imply that it was there that the prelate having jurisdiction over the O'Malley clan resided. Latest historical reference to the district occurs in relation to the Insurrection of 1798, particularly to that stirring episode of the period remembered as *The Races of Castlebar*.

But to the minds of many, Aghagower is first memorable as having been the spot from which St. Patrick ascended the Reek. There, too, was the homestead at which he lodged awhile previously, and, by merit of his humble piety, spirit of resignation, and practical example, won in its pagan entirety to Christ. The house was that of Senach, a man sorrowing in consequence of the recent death of his virtuous wife, and the powerful chieftain of the neighbourhood, yet, as the ancient writers seem eager to stress, one of singularly gentle disposition and austere moral righteousness.

As the Apostle neared the house, Mathona, daughter of the chieftain, hastened forward to meet him, asking that he would bless and counsel her. Then she knelt at his feet, and having shown him that she had had a premonition as to his advent to those parts, and was conversant with tidings of the mighty spiritual regeneration associated with his name elsewhere in the country, entreated him to instruct her as to knowledge of the One True God. An old account seen by the present writer, but necessarily to be taken with reserve, being uncorroborated by the established authorities, presents Mathona as having been the first convert made by the Saint in the immediate shadow of Croagh Patrick. Ultimately, he baptised her, and at her further earnest desire, besowed upon her the white veil of virginity.

Upon their first meeting, however, the girl brought St.

Patrick into the presence of her father, who, observing the bodily weariness and seeming mental distress of their visitor, invited him to abide with them until fully rested. To this the Apostle consented. Presently, he brought Senach—whom he called *Agnus Dei*—Lamb of God—as well as his son, Fergus, a student of the arts and sciences, to the Faith. Subsequently, he ordained the former chieftain, and left him in charge of the church which he founded at that place. In his humility, Senach, who, with his daughter and son, is venerated among the Saints of Ireland, asked that this foundation should not, after the procedure then prevailing bear his name, but that it should be known, as has ever since been the case, as *The Church of Aghagower*.

With this exemplary family our Saint stayed for more than a year. But when, at last, he had taken an affectionate farewell of the house, and was once more setting forth upon his missionary journeying, a new sorrow befell him in the sudden illness and death of Tothmael, his chariot-driver and constant companion, a disciple whom he had dearly loved. It was now Quinquagesima season of the year 441. His cup of human bitterness was full. Yet, as he so beautifully acknowledges in the *Confession*, hope had not abandoned him, for "*Christ knoweth that fully and exceedingly did I desire, and was ready, that He should grant me to drink of His Chalice, as He had permitted also to others who loved Him.*" Thus, he turned from the unkindness of men, and the uncertainty of mortal life, to the ineffable, unchanging, friendliness and eternal security of the Heart of Divine Pity.

The Reek, with its arresting suggestiveness of nearness to Almighty God, loomed up before his eyes. The vast remoteness of its cloud-misted crest called encouragingly to his soul, and with especial promise to his troubled mind. Having conducted the obsequies of Tothmael, and laid him to rest, as believed, near Murrisk, he, accordingly, retraced his steps to Aghagower, whence, unaccompanied by man or beast, and unprovided as to means of physical sustenance or conveni-

ence, he began the laborious ascent of *Cruachan Aigil*, the hill of holy history, to be known almost from that moment as *Cruagh Padraig*, and not unreasonably to be acclaimed by posterity as *The Mount Sinai of Ireland*.

#### THE ROYAL MOUNTAIN

Mrs. S. C. Hall, who has left such charming and informative accounts of early nineteenth century travel through Ireland, was so impressed by the comparative majesty of Croagh Patrick among the mountains of the country as involuntarily to have called it *The Grand Monarch Mountain of Erin*. Those seeing the Reek for the first time cannot but be similarly impressed.

Its aspect immediately suggests regality. Most Rev. Dr. Healy, Archbishop of Tuam, and author of *The Life and Writings of St. Patrick*, to whose active zeal the latter-day widespread development of the Annual Pilgrimage is mainly due, quite habitually referred to it as *The Royal Mountain*. Epithets in kind have fallen in like matter-of-course manner from the lips of many other distinguished pilgrims, including Cardinal Moran, Canon John O'Hanlon, compiler of *The Lives of the Irish Saints*, John O'Donovan, and Dr. Douglas Hyde.

The suggestion of regality may, likewise, have been appraised by the Irish savants of pre-Patrician centuries, for, having named it *Cruachan Aigil*—*Mount of the Eagle*, had they not associated the Reek with the creature honoured in their pagan lore as the symbol of royal splendour and power?

Croagh Patrick is situated on the southern shore of Clew Bay, and, rising to an altitude of 2510 feet above sea level, is the highest among the surrounding chain of mountains. It has been described by more than one observer as *the most shapely mountain in Ireland*, inasmuch as its contour presents a perfect cone, though the apex is usually obscured by mist.

The view from the summit, when not clouded, extends so far across the Atlantic that olden-time gossips claimed that the streets of New York were discernible from a given point. The land view is equally far-flung,

encompassing, as it does, much of Mayo and surrounding counties, and, in particularly remarkable degree, stretching southward to the great natural arena of Connemara and the Twelve Pins.

#### TEMPLE PATRICK

The traditional *Beds*, or *Stations*, apart from the small remains of the ancient Oratory, offer the only evidence of the historical associations of the Reek encountered during the climb, or on the summit. It is clear from a number of acceptable references that, even from the morrow of the sojourn there of St. Patrick, a chapel of some kind had existed on the spot. But there is nothing extant to show whether this tiny *Temple Patrick*, as the ruin is called, is the original erection. Whatever the origin of the structure, there may be no doubt that, thanks to successive donors who kept it in repair, it withstood the vicissitudes of, at least, three centuries. The little edifice measured only 16 feet by 10 feet, and, save for a rudely constructed altar, was unfurnished, as it was also evidently unadorned. O'Donovan, making the *Ordnance Survey of the West of Ireland* in 1838, found it damp and virtually ruinous, but was edified to observe that, even in its squalor, it was a sacred object in the pious affections of the peasantry, who, because it was believed to have enclosed the spot whereon St. Patrick had knelt, approached it barefooted. Many, indeed, still cling to the belief that our Apostle offered Holy Mass in the old chapel.

#### THE ORATORY OF TO-DAY

Ireland has possibly known no more incessantly practical advocate of devotion to St. Patrick than the late Most Rev. Dr. Healy. And for Croagh Patrick he had, as often he declared, a real and especial love. Even as far back as his seminarist days he had wistfully wished to see the Annual Pilgrimage expand from the character of the circumspect local gathering, which it then was, into a great national demonstration of Irish Catholic Faith. Opportunity for the realisation of this desire even-

tuated in 1903, when, having been translated from the See of Clonfert to the Archbishopric of Tuam, the Reek and its interests had been brought within his jurisdiction. Eloquent pulpit, platform, and press appeals for the revival of the traditional Pilgrimage along nation-wide lines, set in motion by a few zealous expressions in that connection by Dr. Healy, soon rang out over the western dioceses, and everywhere evoked enthusiastic response. Echoes of this quickly spread through the country, and encouraged by the many Gaelic and Nationalist societies, and Catholic organisations, a body of pilgrims representatives of all Four Provinces, and of several countries, made the ascent on the last Sunday of July, 1904.

Meanwhile, Archbishop Healy had been furthering plans for the erection of a worthier and more commodious Oratory than the crumbling ruin of more difficult times. His friend, Mrs. Mary Maher, author of *Footsteps of Irish Saints*, had anticipated his ready action, and already had unostentatiously been amassing the nucleus of a building fund, to which Cardinal Moran, Archbishop of Sydney, and a number of the Irish Bishops and clergy had liberally subscribed. Despite innumerable operative problems, as, for instance, that of conveying the building requirements to the top of the Reek, the work was so blessed with facility and success that the Oratory was completed within a year. Much of the praise due for this happy outcome belonged to the indefatigable Administrator of Westport, Father Michael McDonald, afterwards P.P., Burrishoole, who had watched and guided the project with valuable advice and ability.

To quote one of the newspapers of the time, a wave of *pious enthusiasm* swept over the country in anticipation of the opening of the Oratory, which took place on Sunday, July 30th, 1905. Great numbers of the faithful from all parts of Ireland, with many from across Channel, flocked to Westport, although the extensive rail and road accommodation and reduced fares of to-day had not yet been introduced. The pilgrims included exiles returned

for the occasion from the United States and Australasia, and some Continental Catholics.

The solemn Dedication ceremony having been performed with full liturgical significance by Most Rev. Dr. Healy, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was offered by Father McDonald. Perhaps it was not until that moment that the immense meaning and worth of the new Oratory was realised, for, though chiefly comprised of strangers to Croagh Patrick and its circumstances, the pilgrim-congregation numbered very many local people who knew that rarely, if, indeed, ever within living memory had Mass been offered on the summit. Very Rev. Dean Phelan, who had come as special representative of the aged Archbishop of Melbourne, (and former Bishop of Galway) Most Rev. Dr. Carr, declared in course of a sermon of long-echoing eloquence that the association of the Mass with the ceremonies of the day would have occasioned in the heart of St. Patrick the most joyous possible remembrance of his vigil of prayer and penance on the Reek. Following Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament, given by Most Rev. Dr. Healy, the Rosary in Irish was recited by Canon McAlpine, P.P., V.G., Clifden.

The voice of the Archbishop of Tuam was vibrant with happy emotion as, afterwards, he addressed the pilgrims gathered on the hillside, which, he said, was *as far as the eye can reach, black with people*. The Irish people, he continued, and particularly the people of the West, are poor people, "*and are often told by the wise men of the world that it is folly to spend so much money on building churches. But the idea of building one on top of a mountain would in their estimation be an act of the most superlative folly. It was, of course, true that the work would not be reproductive from an economic point of view. It would, however, bear much fruit to feed the soul. They could not have the Pilgrimage without the Mass, and they could not have the Mass without the Oratory, and all their history told them that pilgrimages served above all to enliven and quicken their Faith, and bring them nearer to God.*"

The concourse of 1905, which is regarded to have

marked the inauguration of the modern development of the Annual Pilgrimage, was computed to have numbered slightly more than one thousand persons, an estimate which, however small by comparison with the growing assemblages of later years, was considered phenomenal. To-day, as many as fifteen thousand pilgrims make the ascent, and about half that number receive Holy Communion on the summit. Masses are celebrated continuously from about 6 a.m., as priests from at home and abroad eagerly claim the privilege of thus officiating on the spot where the Apostle of Ireland made retreat. Nor do the earlier Masses lack congregations for very many pilgrims keep all-night vigil on the Reek. A sermon in Irish, as well as in English, is now part of the solemn concluding ceremonies at noon. The Oratory has been much enriched by gifts and votive offerings brought by pilgrims. Particularly edifying interest attaches in this connection to the Chalice, Ciborium, and Chime of Bells, presented by the staff, including several non-Catholics, of the Midland and Great Western Railway in 1914.

Here, perhaps, it may be justifiable to offer a little criticism by way of suggestion as to the tendency of present-day pilgrims and others to mispronunciation in reference to the Reek. The now too-common rendering, *Croe—Patrick*, is ludicrous and incorrect. The prevailing name is, indeed, the original Gaelic name, and should be pronounced *Kruach Faudhraig*, the prefix, according to Joyce (*Irish Place Names Explained*), signifying, in the differential manner customary in ancient Irish, a *stacked-up hill*, or conical mountain.

#### THE CROAGH PATRICK TRADITION

The principal authorities for the account of the penitential vigil of our Apostle on Croagh Patrick are the *Tripartite Life of St. Patrick* and the *Book of Armagh*, both compiled from documents of greatest antiquity, and of unquestioned authenticity. There are corroborative references in other ancient writings, such as the *Annals of Ulster* and the *Annals of Loch Cé*, and in the lives of some of the early native Saints.

From those sources we learn that *Patrick went to Mount Egli, to fast on it forty days and forty nights, keeping the discipline of Moses and of Christ.* We read further that *he abode on the mountain in much disquietude, without food, without drink, from Shrove Saturday till Easter Saturday, after the manner of Moses, the son of Amra.* It is thus clear that our Saint, having made the ascent on the Saturday preceding Ash Wednesday, and descended on Holy Saturday, passed the entire Lent of 441—the year agreed upon by all authorities—in prayer and fasting on the Reek.

Some commentators upon the *Tripartite* narrative visualise the Apostle as sheltered against the piercing, icy, winds of the exposed summit only by four large stones. Resting at night, his head was pillowed on a fifth stone, the five forming a rude Cross. "*Great discomfort, surely, of body,*" Archbishop Healy remarks, "*and, no doubt, too, much anguish of mind. But it is by the Cross that the Saints reach their glory.*" For physical suffering and mental anguish, St. Patrick had gone prepared, as it was his resolve to have spent himself to the utmost in prayer and mortification that, forgiving his own frailties, Almighty God would bless the work which he had done in His Name, and that the grace of final perseverance would be granted to the people whom, through His Mercy, he had been privileged to have led forth from the errors of paganism to knowledge of the Christian Faith.

Demons tormented him with horrible temptations and vicious approaches from the moment in which he had reached the summit, and desisted not throughout the long period of his retreat. In the form of great, hideous, black birds, they swooped around him, so densely that he could see neither sky nor ocean. The records graphically describe how they kept upon and before him, threatening him with their savage beaks and immense wings, and filling the air with discordant, terrifying cries.

For many days, St. Patrick chanted psalms against the demons, but in vain. He implored Our Divine Lord to disperse them, yet they continued to torment him. He

beat at them with his hands, and actively struggled against them until, as the *Tripartite* tells us, the chasuble which he wore was damp with perspiration, but still they prevailed. In fact, the more the Saint prayed and resisted, the more overbearing and menacing seemed the diabolical attack.

But the mind of our Apostle was, as so many passages in the *Confession* show, ever with Christ. Thus, it may be assumed that in the solitude and struggle of the Reek, his ultimate thoughts were with Gethsemane, for, *being in an agony, he prayed the longer.* Counselling, at length, as a result of this further invocation of the Divine Power, he rang his blessed bell at his tormentors. As its note resounded across the hill, his prayer for deliverance was suddenly answered. The demons fled in headlong confusion down the mountainside, and away across the land, finally burying themselves in the sea beyond Achill. In order to hasten their defeat, St. Patrick flung after them the sacred bell which, rolling down the mountain had a piece broken from its edge. It was, however, recovered, and brought back to him by an angel. It was afterwards known as *St. Brigid's Gapling* (or broken bell) from a belief that when dying our Apostle directed that it should be given to that holy woman.

The chroniclers of old state that *after the demons had been swallowed up in the great deeps, no evil thing was found in Erin.* In a note to *The Life of St. Columba*, by St. Adamnan, it is further stated that after a lapse the hideous black birds emerged from the sea on the northern shore, and made their abode in the wilds of Seann-Gleann, in south-west Tir-Conaill. There they remained until the coming, after some generations, of St. Colmcille, who drove them forth for ever. The names of the present parish of Glencolumkille, which approximates with the ancient Seann-Gleann, is thus explained.

The popular conviction that St. Patrick banished snakes and dangerous reptiles for ever from Ireland has obviously had its origin in the traditional account of the routing of the demons on Croagh Patrick. Probably the belief had arisen from some contemporary misconcep-



tion of the meaning intended by those early writers who have recorded simply, but, as it has transpired, vaguely, that *every poisonous thing* was banished into the sea by the efficacy of his prayers. St. Bede, who wrote in the eighth century, decries the tradition of the snakes and reptiles with the argument that the air and soil of Ireland is fatal to the breeding of all such venomous creatures, which, inferentially, could never have infested the country. The Welsh historian, Giraldus Cambrensis, writing four centuries later, adds that poisonous animals introduced into these islands of the western sea most certainly die when brought into contact with the soil. Responsible modern writers incline to the latter view, despite the plausibility of some earlier contentions, like that of the twelfth century monk-biographer of our Apostle, Jocelyn, who differentiates between demons and snakes, stating that the Saint drove out both, so that the demons, had they returned, should have had no congenial environment or company.

#### THE TRIUMPH OF ST. PATRICK

Returning to St. Patrick on the Reek, we find him, according to the account translated and edited by the Franciscan historian, Colgan, being comforted by an angel. The angel promised that the number of souls saved by his prayers, sacrifices, and preaching would overcrowd the space covered by land and sea to the limit of human eyesight, and beyond; that, indeed, those souls would be infinitely more numerous than the hordes of demons which had assailed him. Secondly, his prayers and virtues would avail until the Day of Judgment to the release from Purgatory of seven souls each Thursday, and twelve each Saturday. This pious belief is still widely honoured in many parts of the Irish West. Thirdly, the angel announced that whosoever should recite St. Patrick's Hymn (obviously the familiar *Lorica*, or *Breastplate*) in a spirit of penance would not endure torment in Eternity. The Church has not pronounced as to the acceptability or otherwise of those beliefs.

It was also promised to the Apostle, the narrative con-

tinues, that the Stranger should never obtain lasting dominion over the Irish Race; and that the sea would spread over Ireland seven years before the end of the world, so that her people should be spared the fearful ordeal of contact with Anti-Christ. Finally, it is stated, God promised, after much difficult pleading, that St. Patrick himself would be judge of the men and women of Ireland on the Last Day.

The promises made to our Apostle, undoubtedly, seem extraordinary, and, at least, in respect of the last-stated two, even impossible. "*It was a mysterious requesting,*" writes one of the modern hagiologists, "*seeming above God's Power to grant.*" But it is essential that such promises must be well considered in order to be understood. Many are still apt to accept them literally, or at face value, to do which, however, would be to have taken insufficient regard of the extravagant, picture-making, style of narration characteristic of the ancient scribes. Thoughtful consideration should leave it clear enough that the undertakings given by an angel simply mean, in summary, that Almighty God will always graciously entertain the prayers of St. Patrick for Ireland, and, perhaps, that the Saint will be permitted to stand as special advocate of the Irish Race at the Judgment Seat, having given the promise.

When, at length, he had descended from the Reek, St. Patrick is said to have appointed certain disciples to watch for ever over the land, in body as afterwards in spirit, lest the demons of paganism and sin should attempt to return. Those watchers were placed by him on, respectively, Sliabh Donard, Co. Down; Benbulbin, Co. Sligo; Sliabh Ruadh, Co. Tipperary, and at Clonard, Co. Meath.

It is of important interest to note that, whilst St. Patrick prayed and fasted on the mountain, his nephew, Munis, left Ireland, and made journey across the seas, having, according to the *Tripartite Life*, been sent forth by the Apostle *with counsel for the Abbot of Rome*, that is for the Pope. An entry of later date in the *Annals of Clonmacnois* mentions the due return of Munis, with

replenishment of relics for the churches of Ireland. These records are confirmed to a very significant extent by a passage in the *Annals of Ulster*, dated 441: *Leo, ordained forty-second Bishop of the Church of Rome, and Patrick, the Bishop, was approved in the Catholic Faith.*

St. Leo the Great was elected to the Pontifical Chair at Michaelmas of the year 440, approximately six months previous to the sojourn of our Saint on Croagh Patrick. In that age of slow communication, it would have taken about the stated lapse of time for the news to have reached Ireland. The above records would, therefore, seem satisfactorily to show that St. Patrick, having heard of the event just as he was about to make the ascent, at once despatched Munis forth to greet the newly-elected Pontiff, and to present him with counsel, or report, as to the progress of the Irish apostolate. The entry in the *Annals of Ulster* would thus mean that the Holy Father, in the manner customary to this day, blessed the great work which the Saint was achieving in this country, and confirmed his appointment as Bishop of the Irish.

As may have been expected, Dr. Healy writes, Protestant writers give scant attention to the importance of this documentary evidence, for, of course, the records are in themselves quite a conclusive refutation of the claim that the early Church in Ireland was independent of communion with the Apostolic See. One, at least, of their number, however, seems satisfied that they sufficiently prove the allegiance of St. Patrick to Rome, though this writer, none other than the learnedly discriminating Professor J. B. Bury, singularly favours the view that it was eventually our Apostle himself in person, rather than Munis, who greeted and reported to Pope St. Leo the Great.

#### THE PILGRIMAGE

Ancient references indicate that, even before the death of St. Patrick, the Reek had become known as *The Holy Hill*, and was an established pilgrimage venue. The custom would appear to have begun among the disciples

of our Apostle, who, even whilst he lived, revered him as a saint. But soon the pilgrimage ideal had extended to the faithful, throngs of whom scaled the difficult slopes of the mountain with great frequency during the early ages of Irish Faith. Croagh Patrick, moreover, had the special protection of the native kings and princes. Of this fact there are some remarkable recorded instances, notably an entry in the *Annal of Loch Cé*, stating that Aodh O'Connor, one of the eleventh century rulers of Connacht, cut off the hands and feet of a highwayman who had attempted to rob one of the pilgrims.

For about four hundred years the Feast of our National Apostle was first favoured as Pilgrimage date. The cause of departure from this rule may possibly be suggested by a record, also in the *Annals of Loch Cé*, of a thunderstorm of March 17th, 1113, in course of which thirty pilgrims perished on the summit. In other records there are occasional complaining comments on the harsh weather normally prevailing at Pilgrimage time. Even thus early, numbers of pious persons again made penitential ascent on the last Friday of July, which was locally referred to as *Garland Friday*. It is conceivable that during the closing medieval ages this date may have superseded the original choice.

The period at which the Pilgrimage was transferred to the date now obtaining, namely the Sunday preceding the commemoration of St. Peter's Chains, which Feast has been celebrated from time immemorial on August 1st, may not be ascertained. But it is obvious that this date, corresponding, of course, with the last Sunday of July, obtained at the commencement of the fifteenth century, for, as will be noted below, it was mentioned in a Pontifical document of that epoch in a manner of reference as to an occasion already established, or commonplace. The Decree in question, dated September 27th, 1432, is an important one, since it expresses the first known approval by the Holy See of the Croagh Patrick Pilgrimage, and enriches the exercises, as follows: "*Pope Eugene IV grants to the Archbishop of Tuam an Indulgence of two years and two quarantines on the*

*usual conditions for those penitents who visit, and give alms towards the repair of the fabric of the Chapel on the mountain which is called Croagh Patrick; this Indulgence to be given on the Sunday preceding the Feast of St. Peter's Chains, because on that day a great multitude resorts thither to venerate St. Patrick in the said Chapel."*

Despite the rigours and perils of long continued religious persecution, many periods of armed unrest, the Famine, and other such discouraging influences, the Pilgrimage has never fallen into abeyance. Four centuries after his Decree, a *great multitude*, comparable with that appraised by Eugene IV, still made the ascent. Croagh Patrick was now further enriched, by the Holy See, for, on May 27th, 1883, Leo XIII, at petition of Most Rev. Dr. McEvilly, Archbishop of Tuam, issued a Rescript, granting, subject to the usual conditions of Confession and Holy Communion: (1) *a Plenary Indulgence once to all who should visit the Chapel on the summit on a day appointed by the Ordinary during June, July, or August, and there pray for the Propagation of the Faith, and the intentions of the Sovereign Pontiff.*

It may be of interest to mention another instance of Papal decision affecting Croagh Patrick, though of much different purport. This concerns a claim sustained since about the year 824 by the Archbishops of Armagh for a tax on the summit chapel, on the plea that it had been founded by St. Patrick, first ruler of that See. In 1216, however, Pope Honorius III, in answer to an appeal made by Felix O'Ruane, Archbishop of Tuam, decided that, as the chapel was within the jurisdiction of the latter, the Archbishops of Armagh could not exact tribute in respect of it.

#### THE EXERCISES

The Pilgrimage may be anticipated as being actually, as well as traditionally, penitential, commencing with the arduous, and often exhausting, ascent of the mountain. This invariably occupies from two to four hours, according to the climbing capacity of the pilgrim, and the prevailing weather conditions. Many, planning a leisurely

ascent, begin to scale the rugged, and sometimes slippery slopes at about the previous midnight. All are relieved to discover that at some distance above the base there is a level stretch offering the possibilities of the much needed respite. The climb thereafter is intrigued by gorse and heather, and presently by large, loose stones which are perilously likely to slip from beneath the feet. Yet, there are numbers who make the ascent, as they, likewise, perform the exercises, bare-footed, a voluntary act of mortification by no means confined to the young and agile.

There are three penitential *Stations*, named and situated as follows, the significance of the names being now presumably obscure: *Leacht Benin* (The Memorial of Benignus) at the base of the cone, or near the rise of the topmost slope of the hill. Here the pilgrims recite seven Paters, seven Aves, and the Apostles' Creed, and makes seven walking circuits of the *Bed*, or *Station*. *Leabha Padraig* (The Bed of Patrick) at the summit. Seven Paters, fifteen Aves, and the Creed, are first recited here, the pilgrim kneeling. Thereupon, in front of the altar of the ruined Chapel (Temple Patrick), fifteen Paters, fifteen Aves, and the Creed, are said, again kneeling. The pilgrim then walks around the circular mound fifteen times, praying the while. He next enters *Leabha Padraig*, and, upon his knees, recites seven Paters, seven Aves, and the Creed. He now walks around the *Station* seven times. *Rolligh Muire* (The Resting Place of Mary) some distance down on the Lecanvey side of the mountain, Seven Paters, seven Aves, and the Creed, are here recited, and seven walking rounds made, of each of the circles forming this *Station*. The pilgrim then walks around the *Garrah Mor* (The Great Enclosure) seven times. The traditional exercises are now concluded.

First-time pilgrims sometimes seem under the impression that devotions are enjoined also at the statue of St. Patrick at the Murrisk base. This figure is of modern erection, and has no traditional significance. Neither is it essential, as many seem to believe, to make the somewhat difficult ascent to the ancient Kilgeever Well, which

is not at all associated with the Pilgrimage. Latterly, a leaflet, setting forth the order of exercises, etc., has been obtainable in the vicinity of the Reek.

The spiritual struggle and triumph of our Saint on Croagh Patrick may be said to have been the grand culmination of his apostolate, the blessed consolidation of his mighty conquest of a nation for Christ. It was for solace of his own troubled soul, no doubt, that he had sought communion with the Most High amid the solitude of the Reek. But it was primarily for Ireland that his vigil had been undertaken, and, in words of very special pleading, he prayed for the land which he had made his own, and for the people whom, as he so frequently said, he dearly loved. Of this we are assured, as if with one accord, by the early writers. It would seem, indeed, from one account that he implored such exceptional Heavenly favours for the Irish Race that the angel actually rebuked his claims as being unreasonable.

Nevertheless, Almighty God crowned his lone campaign of confident, persevering, prayer with victory. *"You have prayed, and you have obtained,"* the angel told him, at length, as we read in the *Tripartite Life*. *"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."* What Irish man or woman may come away from consideration of the story of the ages-long, unshaken, adherence of Ireland to the True Faith of Christ without the reflection that the vigil of the National Apostle on Croagh Patrick has truly and beneficently availed?

## OTHER IRISH PILGRIMAGES

Lough Derg and its Pilgrimage

Knock and its Shrine

Faughart of St. Brigid

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