

ST. LAWRENCE OF DUBLIN

AFTER wellnigh eight centuries of cruelty and hate, peace seems now at last to be dawning upon Ireland. In a poem of servile flattery addressed in 1545 to Henry VIII by the antiquary Leland, are three Latin verses to celebrate an imagined final settlement of the Irish question. "Repentance has subdued the savage Irish everywhere routed, and has taught them to bear the sweet yoke of British law." After the experience of some four further centuries of persistent attempt to force on the Irish the "yoke"—to their taste not sweet but bitter—of an alien people, we have at long last learnt that the only true and final peace between England and Ireland must be based on liberty and justice. Whether the present treaty be wholly in accordance with these is a political question I do not wish to raise. Only this is surely evident that it does offer such measure of both as will enable Ireland to enter with full self-respect a new and a better union with England, a union not of force and terror, but of free co-operation. That the dawn is overcast with the storm clouds of bitter opposition from irreconcilables should not make us despondent. For the storm clouds will pass over, and the dawn will brighten into daylight.

While we are thus watching the dawn with a hope not to be killed by passing anxieties, it seems opportune to remember one who at the very hour of sunset, when the shadows of the coming night were beginning to darken over his country, worked for that dawn whose rise we now witness. St. Lawrence O'Toole—Lorcan ua Tuathail—true born son of Ireland and canonized saint of the universal church, contemporary with the first English attempt to conquer Ireland, the invasions of Henry II, strove even then for peace

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between the English and Irish rulers, died in fact on an embassy of peace, in a foreign land for Ireland's sake. There can be no saint of all the blessed whose goodwill and prayers are deeper engaged for the cause of peace between England and Ireland, than he who in a very true sense laid down his life for that peace.

Our knowledge of his life depends in the main on a biography composed by one of the Augustinian canons of Eu in Normandy among whom the saint died. A version of this life has been edited by Mr. Charles Plummer and published in the *Analecta Bollandiana* (Vol. XXXIII, p. 121, *et seq.*). But another version of the same life, in substance identical, but with the style polished to suit Renaissance Latinity was printed by Surius in the sixth volume of his *Historia Sanctorum* (1575 and 1581). Though, as Mr. Plummer points out, the life is not contemporary, the author writes "after the passage of many years," he claims to have sifted his evidence carefully. His statements "have been gathered from most reliable sources"—perhaps even eye-witnesses—the sense of the Latin is doubtful. But the historical framework of his episodes, selected solely for edification, must be sought from the secular chronicles, English and Irish, out of which Mr. Plummer has pieced it together in his introduction.

It is impossible to measure the degree of credibility attaching to the stories, often marvellous, of the *Vita*. The writer tells us that a scrivener, who joined the saint's company in hope of obtaining a safe journey from the veneration enjoyed by his office and personal holiness, was nevertheless murdered by brigands under the very eyes of the archbishop. A conscienceless hagiographer or a writer devoid of critical sense and eager only for his patron's honour would either have preserved him from death or raised him to life. But this mark of credibility—the more valuable from its

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purely incidental character—does not warrant implicit faith in every statement of the Life. In view, however, of the impossibility of controlling its evidence it is best to use it as it stands, as certainly a record in the main reliable. Even if we cannot be certain that every incident happened, as it states, we can obtain a substantially true picture of the saint and his work.

The life begins with a contrast between the sanctity of its hero and the barbarism of his birthplace. "The Lord found him in a barbarous land as a lily among thorns, or as Job in the land of Hus, and he was no more touched by the savagery of his country than a fish is affected by the salt of the ocean. . . . In the midst of a vicious and perverse folk he shone as the morning star in the midst of a cloud." This judgment is taken from St. Bernard's *Life of St. Malachy* (O'Morghair) where we even find the simile of the fish and the salt water. Apparently it represents the view of Ireland current in twelfth-century Christendom. St. Bernard expands it into accusations of an incredible lack of ecclesiastical and even of moral discipline. Something of this dark picture is due to St. Bernard's exaggerated, even Puritan, severity of judgment, so evident in his controversy with Peter the Venerable. Something to the rhetorical device which sets a hero in brighter light by darkening the shadow of his environment, something also to misunderstanding of the peculiar Irish customs, ecclesiastical and social. But it is the facts recorded in St. Lawrence's life alone that are sufficient proof that Ireland after her glorious epoch as a spiritual and intellectual teacher of western Europe had sunk into a condition of anarchy and savage violence, which had lowered the level of her Catholic fervour and practice much below that of the rest of Christendom. That the reverse is now true is the result of the long discipline of eight centuries

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of suffering and persecution. The writer of St. Lawrence's life sees in the capture and pillage of Dublin by Strongbow's troops a divine chastisement for the wickedness of its inhabitants. And with every allowance for pious exaggeration which is so often the preacher's bane, we may well believe that the purgatory in which Ireland has for centuries lain, has been permitted to mould out of the Ireland denounced by St. Bernard, the Ireland in which robbers could publicly desecrate the sacred Host (*Life of St. Lawrence*, ch. vi.) the Ireland whose religious fervour and moral purity are an example to the world.

Lawrence was born in 1123, the youngest son of a Leinster chieftain, Muirchertach. Sent by his father to King Diarmaid to be baptized in his presence, his name which should have been Conchubar was given as Lorcan, in accordance, we are told, with the prophecy of a soothsayer ("an Irish Merlin," says the *Vita*) who met the child on the road. When the boy was ten years old he was sent again to Diarmaid as a hostage. Diarmaid kept him in chains without sufficient food or clothing. But his father, by the capture of twelve of the king's soldiers, forced Diarmaid to surrender his son to the bishop of Glendalough. The bishop's chaplain, entrusted with the care of Lawrence, not only restored his bodily health, but taught him the Lord's Prayer and the Creed. What Catholic child in Ireland to-day would reach ten years in ignorance of these rudiments? And Lawrence was the son of a chief! Such undesigned sidelights are more illuminating than St. Bernard's rhetorical diatribe. When his father arrived and wished to cast lots to discover which son should embrace the ecclesiastical state, Lawrence chose it for himself. So Muirchertach left him at Glendalough, an oblation "to God and Saint Coemghen." With a wealth of Scriptural quotations the biographer

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insists on Lawrence's entire devotion to the divine service and his growth in holiness and wisdom.

At the age of twenty-five (1148), Lawrence was elected Abbot of Glendalough, a position of considerable temporal as well as spiritual responsibility. His office was marked by years of famine, alleviated by the generous charity of the new Abbot. This is not the last time that we read of Irish famines, and of St. Lawrence's charity in relief of their victims. Providence seems to have faced him with the typical sufferings of his people as the typical Christian comforter and helper of Ireland.

Envious tongues vainly calumniate Lawrence, presumably in connection with his famine relief administration, and a brigand of noble birth despoils a party of relief workers. Asked to use his temporal power to revenge the outrage, Lawrence refuses and leaves the matter with God. On the third day the robber is seized and blinded by a band of enemies. Three other brigand chiefs who attack churchmen on their way to the abbey, finally outrage the Blessed Sacrament as it accompanies for their protection a body of travellers over the bog. On the eighth day these robbers also fall into the hands of justice. Meanwhile St. Lawrence's unwearied charity has exhausted not only his own wealth but a "treasure belonging to his father that had been entrusted to his charge." We must hope that Muirchertach gave more approval to this charity at his expense than St. Francis's father gave to a similar action of his son.

Ten years after a refusal of the Glendalough episcopate, Lawrence was elected in 1162 Archbishop of Dublin. And he was still quite a young man, only thirty-nine years of age.

Replacing the secular canons of Trinity Cathedral by canons regular he led among them the life of a canon. After matins he spent the remainder of the

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night in solitary prayer before a crucifix reciting the entire psalter. When day broke he walked in the cemetery repeating the commendation of the dead. Thrice at least every night he took the discipline. Next to his skin he wore, not a mere shirt, but an entire coat of hair cloth. He ate no meat ; and fasted every Friday on bread and water. But we are expressly told that he took care to provide excellent dinners, " a variety of courses and drinks," for his guests, and entertained lavishly.

Every day at least thirty poor men were fed at his table. When, later in his episcopate, another famine afflicted Ireland for three years, he gave daily relief to five hundred, in addition apparently to three hundred others whom he provided with food and clothes throughout his entire episcopate.

During this famine* many mothers, unable to provide food for their infants, left their babies on the archiepiscopal doorstep or in the street where they knew he would pass. " For they were aware of the material affection in him, that he could not fail the children. And he, not forgetful of the poverty and childhood which Jesus Christ took for our sakes, and that on the day of judgment He shall say, ' What ye did to one of these my least ones, ye did it to Me,' and again, ' Whosoever has received one such little child in My Name, has received Me,' proved himself towards these children a nurse full of pity, and entrusted them to the care of his bailiffs and other servants in various places of his diocese to be nourished and carefully guarded, and himself provided all necessaries." There were two hundred of these children, beside others whom he brought up in his

* The biographer must be in error here. The famine is placed by him in the legateship of St. Lawrence. This office, however, he only held for the last two years of his life, and we are told (see text) that the children succoured by the saint grew to manhood during his life-time.

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own palace. A charming episode in which the loveliness of the saint, so austere towards himself, shines out. When these children were grown up the saint sent them round the province with a wooden cross for badge to beg a livelihood from all who honoured "the name of God and his own episcopal office." This quaint device was apparently successful, however little it would commend itself to modern charity organization. Almost as quaint was the despatch at the Archbishop's expense of a shipload of starving Irish to England "where a greater supply, indeed an abundance, of provisions was obtainable." It seems an anticipation of the great Irish emigration during the famine of the forties.

To base his labours even more securely on the foundation of interior prayer, Lawrence spent his Lents as a hermit in a cave about three miles from Glendalough. It was situated in a cliff overhanging a lake and the only approach was by water. "Nor does the spot lack the delight of a spring. For a musical stream of water wonderfully pleasant falls from the rock and ministers no small comfort to a dweller in the place, and trees and grass growing by its course preserve an unfading green." Three times a week, his nephew, the Abbot of Glendalough, brought him by boat and ladder bread and vegetables. At the same time he laid before him any difficulties that had arisen in his flock and received his answers. "But the saint was not slow to leave the place if he heard of any urgent necessity of his subjects that required it." To some time unknown during his pontificate is referred another adventure with brigands who killed a scrivener in the Archbishop's convoy. When the saint excommunicated the murderers, they dared to reply, "Let us excommunicate the Archbishop." With oxen's guts for stoles and burning billets for candles and "howling like wolves," they

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performed a mock excommunication. Shortly after they all perished one after the other by various forms of death.

On another occasion the Archbishop tried to rescue one of his serfs from the gallows. When the executioner saw him coming, to prevent the rescue he hastily beheaded his victim. St. Lawrence anathematized him for this and on his way home the man fractured a rib and died of the fracture. We also read of cures of a demoniac woman, of two maniacs, of a provost incurably diseased and of a Dublin priest raised from the dead as he was being carried to his burial. From the account given of this last miracle, it seems to have been a case of recovery from a long trance.

In 1170 occurred the sack of Dublin by Richard of Pembroke, in league with the banished King Diarmid, to whom thus belongs the infamy of first calling the foreigner into his country. According to the *Vita*, St. Lawrence had predicted this catastrophe. When it came, he snatched the bodies of the dying from the very hands of the enemy and when they had breathed their last, gave them, "like another Tobias," a Christian burial. He relieved the poverty-stricken survivors and successfully defended the sanctity of the churches and clergy. The following year, according to the chroniclers, St. Lawrence with his suffragans did homage to Henry II. According to feudal views this would not interfere with the local jurisdiction of the Irish chiefs and he no doubt felt that on a matter purely political he must yield to necessity. Very probably he was also influenced by the most unfortunate sanction given by Pope Adrian to the English aggression. And above all he was not the man to encourage a hopeless war which could only bring ruin and misery on his flock. And here his example may be profitably commended to the patriotic irreconcilables of modern Ireland.

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In 1175 St. Lawrence undertook his first embassy for Anglo-Irish peace. He went to England to negotiate a treaty between the King of Connaught and Henry II. The treaty was successfully concluded. On this occasion he visited Canterbury and said Mass at St. Thomas's shrine. As he was beginning Mass, a lunatic, "desirous to equal so holy a man with blessed Thomas in the glory of martyrdom," struck him a powerful blow on the head with a club. The saint washed the wound with holy water, whereon it immediately healed and he continued his Mass. It is pleasant to hear that he saved the poor maniac from the gallows. It was on his return from this journey that he was detained in Wales by lack of winds till he had consecrated there a new church to Our Lady, in accordance with her command in a vision shewn to the hermit attached to the church.

In 1179 St. Lawrence was again in England on his way to the Lateran Council. As he crossed the Irish Channel he is said to have calmed a storm by his prayers. Henry compelled him and his suffragans to swear that they would attempt nothing at the Council to the prejudice of himself and his kingdom. Doubtless the king was afraid he might lose the support of the church in his designs against Irish independence. But St. Lawrence did not construe his oath as derogating from the rights of the Irish Church, and in view of possible attempts to submit the Irish hierarchy, like the Welsh, to the jurisdiction of Canterbury he was careful to secure a Papal confirmation of the privileges of his see. He also received the legateship of Ireland. And this was the more necessary because his predecessor, a Scandinavian, had been consecrated by the English Archbishop and had been regarded by his flock as "the foreigners'" bishop. In the administration of his legatine office, St. Lawrence displayed the sterner side of his character

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by sending to Rome 140 unchaste priests for an absolution he possessed the authority to give himself.

The following year, 1180, St. Lawrence returned to England to negotiate another peace between the King of Connaught and Henry. But Henry, furious at his independent action in Rome, which he regarded as a breach of oath, denied him an audience. And like Archbishop Mannix, St. Lawrence was refused a passage to Ireland. "And thus Henry made the holy man an exile from his native land."

Shortly afterwards Henry crossed over to Normandy. After waiting in vain three weeks at Abingdon Abbey, Lawrence followed the king. He was scarcely in Normandy when he fell ill of a fever, which delayed him three days. "But the fire of charity fought with greater violence than the heat of the fever and he compelled his fever-wasted frame to fight on bravely for the blessing of charity and peace." But he felt the hand of death upon him and was obliged to look around for a fit place in which to die. He found a death-bed with the Augustinian-Victorine Canons of St. Mary at Eu. With an affectionate quaintness the chronicler relates how the dying saint came among his brethren. "Foreseeing the deposition of his bodily tabernacle he sought from the depth of his heart the tabernacle not made with hands whose type was shown by God to his saint on the mount of Eu. For he reached the brow of that hill and saw the fortified town below and in it a lofty church, and some passers-by told him the place was Eu and the church St. Mary's served by Victorine Canons. Filled with no little delight, as though he had received of David's prophetic spirit, he exclaimed, "This is my rest for ever. Here will I dwell for I have chosen it."

As he lay on his death-bed the saint made a last effort for peace. He sent a cleric named David to Henry. This time the embassy was successful and

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the king granted a peace. On the fourth day David returned with the good news. The saint, "though on the verge of death, displayed an evident delight, and to shew his gratitude for what was done, since he had lost the use of speech, laid his head on David's lap. By which gesture he gave it to be understood that David had rejoiced his spirit though already in the pains of death by the conclusion of peace for which to the utmost of his power he had laboured." The evening of the same day, Friday, November 14, 1180, he died.

EDWARD INGRAM WATKIN.



THE LADY COURTESY.

WHENCE art thou, O thou Lady Courtesy ?
What strain illustrious hath given thee birth ?
Was a High-King thy father ? Did our earth
Give a High-Queen the grace of bearing thee ?
What court hath reared thee, so exceedingly
Beautiful in transcendency of worth
That shames the praise whose fullness is but dearth ?
Tell us thy lineage and thine own country.

Love is my father, and Charity my mother.
Of these great two-in-one begotten and born,
I came to earth with song o' the sons of morn,
Whose sister am I ; each, beloved brother.
Yea, I am of a Court unearthly fair ;
All-courteous God hath presence-chamber there.

EMILY HICKEY.