

Pilgrim Legendary & Historical

Saint Patrick's purgatory : a mediaeval pilgrimage in Ireland

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THE subject of St. Patrick's Purgatory, the visits paid to it by pilgrims from distant lands, the visions seen therein by them, and the literature that subsequently and consequently arose, is of extreme interest. When I commenced to study the subject for my own edification and entertainment the idea of writing a book had not then occurred to me I was astonished to discover how much strange and out-of-the-way information might be gathered together, and yet how little knowledge my fellow-countrymen possessed of the past history of a place that was once of European fame. The only book that dealt with it in anything approaching a satisfactory manner was Canon O'Connor's St. Patrick's Purgatory, Lough Derg ; of this I have used the revised edition published in Dublin in 1910. I differ from him on one or two points ; but I must admit my indebtedness to him for many allusions and suggestions which otherwise I might easily have overlooked. He has written a most useful popular history of Lough Derg and the surrounding district, and has given a very good account of the later period down to the present day, which I have consequently passed over very rapidly. I have dealt with the subject on an entirely different plan, as the most superficial comparison will show, and have endeavoured to present the reader with a fairly exhaustive account of an almost forgotten episode in the ecclesiastical and social history of Ireland. For the profound scholar I have not attempted to write, but as there are many by-paths in the history of Ireland as yet almost untrodden, perhaps I may be pardoned for venturing down one of them with tornewhat halting steps.

The authorities of which I have made use are sufficiently referred to in the notes. I should state, however, that Father Delehaye's most valuable article in *Analecta Bollandiana*, torn. XXVII, has been for me, as it will be for all other writers on the subject, a basis and a[^] starting-point.

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ST. PATRICK'S DAY, 1918.

I.

Early Legends. The Celtic Monastery. The Augustinian Canons.

IN the extreme south of county Donegal, close to the borders of Tyrone, and about four miles north of the town of Pettigo and Lough Erne, lies a small lake, Lough Derg. It has an area of 2,200 statute acres and is about thirteen miles in circumference ; it is surrounded on all sides by mountains, and its surface is studded with forty or more islands, great and small, of which two only, Station and Saints', will concern us in this work. Apart from the stern and lonely aspect of this mountain-ringed expanse of water, which would appeal to all lovers of Nature in her rugged moods, the lake has no especial claim to scenic beauty ; under ordinary conditions the tourist and sight-seer would pass it by, and the only visitor from the outside world would* be the patient angler, or the keen antiquary desirous of examining the almost effaced vestiges of a stronghold of the Celtic Church. But, as it happens, the conditions here are very far from being ordinary ; in fact they may well be termed extraordinary and unique. For to

this lake for the past seven centuries and longer, pilgrims have come, and still come, from every part of the world ; during the mediaeval period it was known and spoken of in every corner of Europe, and was visited by men who performed hazardous and tedious journeys from the ends of the earth for the sake of doing penance and making atonement for their sins.

For here lay St. Patrick's Purgatory, that dread ante-chamber to the unseen world, [1] into which if a man dared to enter, and pass twenty-four hours in the face of unknown and unspeakable horrors, he could (so the belief ran) purge himself at once from the evil deeds of this life, and on his death avoid the purgatorial pains, and enter straight into the bliss of heaven. To give a brief account of the earlier history of this celebrated spot, to relate at some length the visions seen by certain pilgrims, to deal with the literature that consequently arose, and the effect this had on the literary life of Europe, and finally to say something about the history of the cave and monastery from the suppression that took place at the end of the fifteenth century to the present day, will be our task in the following chapters, and if we have to traverse some ground already trodden by previous writers at least we shall be found to have brought along with us many new and interesting items.

As happens elsewhere with regard to ecclesiastical sites in Ireland, the earliest historical period at Lough Derg is preceded by a legendary one which, however, the historian cannot afford to ignore. These tales may in themselves be valueless, but as a general rule it will be found that when an accretion of legend gathers round a place it is an indication that the site was of some importance in the pre-Christian period. Or, in other words, that the early missionaries, with commendable foresight, established themselves in a spot where they might both combat Paganism in its citadel, and as well ultimately transfer to themselves its traditional importance. The name "Lough Derg" means the Red Lake, evidently so-called from the reddish tinge of its waters which partly arises from the streams supplying the lake which flow through bog and moorland, and partly from the presence of numerous chalybeate springs around the shores, the outflow from which helps materially to colour the water, and as well to impart to it healthful and palatable qualities. [2]

Such an explanation is perfectly natural and credible, but far too much so for our Celtic forefathers. Consequently they resorted to legend. According to this source the original name was Lough Finn, or the Fair Lake, and the change of nomenclature and colour was brought about as follows : At one time there lived in Ireland a most venomous old beldame, known as the Hag with the Finger, for she had but one pliant finger on each hand. She was a most potent witch, and spent her time with the assistance of a giant, her son, in concocting baleful poison, into which arrow-heads were dipped in order to render their wound mortal. The King of Ireland desired to rid the country of her, and consulted his druids as to the best means of effecting this object. They informed him that she could only be destroyed by one of the Fianna, who must shoot her with a silver arrow. Accordingly the renowned Finn MacCumhaill, with some of the Fianna his companions, proceeded to hunt her. They found her in Munster, gathering herbs for her dire concoction. On perceiving them approaching the giant seized his mother, threw her over his shoulders, and fled ; but before he had got out of range Finn discharged his silver arrow and pierced the old hag to the heart. Unaware of this the giant continued his headlong course till he came to Donegal, when, stopping to take breath he found that in the rapid passage over mountain and through wood the greater portion of his mother's body had been rubbed and torn away, till nothing remained but the legs, the backbone, and the two arms. Accordingly he flung these down on the ground, and disappeared.

Some years after this event a party of the Fianna were engaged in their favourite pursuit of hunting, and came upon the bones. As they stood looking at them a dwarf appeared, and

warned them not to break the thigh-bone, for in it lay concealed a venomous worm which, if it got out, and could find water to drink, might destroy the whole world. Despite this sage advice the bone was broken by Conan Ma'ol, the Thersites of the Fianna-legends, upon which there crawled out of it a long hairy worm. Taking it on the point of his spear Conan threw it into the lake, adding, with a sneer, "There is water enough for you." Immediately a terrible beast rushed out of the lake, before which the party fled in terror, while the monster over-ran the country unhindered, devouring people by the hundred. Finn MacCumhaill learnt that the beast was vulnerable in one spot only, a mole on its left side. Armed with this knowledge he attacked it with his sword, and succeeded in disabling it. The monster lay struggling and writhing on the shore of the lake, while its blood poured out in torrents and tinged the waters with a crimson hue hence the "red" lake. In process of time St. Patrick came that way, and compelled it by his power to go to the bottom of the water, as he had done to many monsters elsewhere in Ireland. [3]

A variant of the above, probably picked up from some local raconteur, is given by Richardson in his *Folly of Pilgrimages* (1727). According to this the monster that came out of the lake was called Caoranach by the natives, and could suck men and cattle from a distance into its mouth. Such loss did it occasion that at length the people compounded with it for so many cattle per diem. At length when almost all the cattle in Ulster were destroyed the inhabitants began to threaten Conan Maol for all the misfortune he had brought upon them by his rash act. In order to make amends he went sword in hand to the place where the daily allowance was left for the monster, and allowed it to swallow him. He then proceeded to cut his way out through its belly, and in the process lost all his hair from the heat of its entrails ; hence he was nick-named Maol, or "the bald." He then decapitated it, and threw its head on the shore, where the blood ran in such quantities that the lake was reddened for forty-eight hours ; from this the name arose. The bones of the animal were metamorphosed into great stones ; these, which lie in the water close to the shore of Station Island, are marked by Richardson on his map.

One more variant may be given. The district was at one time haunted by a serpent called Caol, apparently in the very best of health, which used to consume a great deal of the produce of the country. St. Patrick heard of this, and came to Lough Finn, where he found the serpent on an island in the lake. It proceeded to spit out poisonous matter at him and the clerics of his company : but the saint hurled his crozier, which traditionally had a very sharp point, at it, piercing its heart and causing the blood to run out so profusely that it dyed all the water red. Upon which Patrick said that the lake would be called Lough Derg until the Day of Judgment. This affords an interesting example of the manner in which a legend, in its origin purely pagan, became Christianised by the substitution of St. Patrick's name for that of Conan Maol. [4]

In such a way, and by such a curious mixture of pagan and Christian legend, is the name of the lake explained. But, according to O'Donovan, whose opinion on such matters cannot be lightly put aside, the correct form of the name should be, not Lough Derg (the red), but Lough Dearc, the lake of the cave that is, the grotto or cavern which was known as St. Patrick's Purgatory.

To the accounts of the origin of this dread spot we must now turn. The one generally given is, that when St. Patrick endeavoured to convert the Irish people to Christianity by preaching to them of the happiness of heaven and the misery of hell, they turned a deaf ear to him, and said that they would never be converted by his words and miracles, unless one of their number should be permitted to see with his own eyes the torments of the damned and the bliss of the saved. Patrick was naturally in despair at their obduracy and unreasonableness. Upon this Our Lord appeared to him, and led him into a desert place, where He showed, him

a certain round pit, dark within, and said, “ Whatever man, being truly penitent, and armed with a lively faith, shall enter that pit, and there remain for a day and a night, shall be purged from all his sins, and going through it shall behold not only the torments of the lost but the joy of the blessed.” The Lord then disappeared, and Patrick joyfully built a church in that place, and placed Canons Regular of St. Augustine in it. He surrounded the ditch (fossa), which is in the cemetery outside the front of the church, with a wall, and fitted it with gates and locks, lest anyone should rashly seek to enter it without permission, and then entrusted the key to the keeping of the prior of the convent. In the time of Patrick himself many entered the ditch, induced by penance. When they came out they bore witness that they had beheld the greatest torments ; and these Revelations Patrick ordered to be noted down in a record kept in that church. [5]

Such is the account given by Henry of Saltrey. It seems to be the earliest and most complete description of the traditional foundation of the celebrated Purgatory. It is worthy of note that in it there is no allusion to the Purgatory being situated on an island in a lake ; on the other hand, it is located in a desert place on the mainland, not necessarily in the Province of Ulster. It may be pointed out here as well that the establishment of Canons Regular of St. Augustine by Patrick is an anachronism, as that Order was not introduced into Ireland until the twelfth century.

Other accounts vary slightly in detail. According to one, when St. Patrick prayed to God for a sign for the impenitent natives, he was ordered to trace with his staff a large circle on the ground, upon which the earth within the circumference of the circle opened, and a very deep pit appeared ; it was revealed to him that this was purgatory. Elsewhere we read that the Saint struck the earth with his pastoral staff, making with it the sign of the cross, upon which a chasm opened. It is said that the staff thus employed was that known as the *Bachall Iosa*, or “ Staff of Jesus,” a celebrated relic which was in existence until about 1538, when it was publicly burnt. [6]

Again, a later writer, Father Feyjoo, declares his belief in the origin of the story as follows : “ Perhaps God had shewn a signal favour to the great St. Patrick, and to others who imitated him, by representing to him in that cave a vision of the pains of purgatory and of the joys of paradise, and that, upon this foundation, the report became noised abroad that all who enter the cave should share the same vision.” A similar explanation of the name is given in a Louvain treatise of the seventeenth century, entitled *The Mirror of Penitence*. It states that the Saint removed from the distractions of the world into that cave, and there prayed that the pains of purgatory might be revealed to him. His request was granted, and he was so overawed by the vision that he departed from the cave and ordered that henceforth the island should be made a terrestrial purgatory, where sinners could atone for their sins by prayer and fasting. In like strain runs a local legend which relates that the cave was tenanted by all the evil spirits which St. Patrick had banished from other parts of Ireland, in consequence of which no one dared to approach this spot. The Saint heard of this, and rowed out alone in a little boat to the island. He entered the cave, and finding it admirably suited for a penitential retreat spent forty days there in fasting and prayer. He not only drove Satan from his last stronghold in Ireland (would that the expulsion had been permanent), but also obtained from God the privilege of seeing the pains by which the temporal punishment due to sin is expiated in Purgatory. [7] It should be noted that some writers refer the origin of the place to an abbot named Patrick.

Let us now see what may be said with respect to the early ecclesiastical history of the place. At one time Station Island was known as St. Dabheoc’s Island, from which the cave and surrounding district took the name of Termon-Dabheoc. This saint, whose name some-

times appears under such forms as Beoc and Mobheoc, following a recognised method of treating Irish saints' names, and is latinized Dabeocus, Abogus, Arvogus, and perhaps Beanus, is held to be the patron saint of Lough Derg. Three festivals were annually held in his honour viz., January 1st, July 24th, and December 16th. In the Martyrology of Tallaght occurs the following allusion to him :

“ Aedh, Lochagerg, alias Daibheog.”

Lochagerg, or Loch Gerg, being other forms of Lough Derg. St. Cummian of Connor, in his poem on the characteristic virtues of Irish Saints, credits him with performing the following austerities, which were also practised by other persons eminent for sanctity in Ireland and the East :

“ Mobheoc the gifted, loved,
According to the synod of the learned,
That often in bowing his head
He plunged it under water.”

His memory is still perpetuated in the townland-denomination of Seeavoc on the southern extremity of the lake. This name means “ St. Dabheoc's Seat,” and this curious structure may still be seen in the vicinity, though it is not now reckoned as on the above townland. [8]

It is certain that at some remote date a saint named Dabheoc lived at Lough Derg, and was very probably the original founder of the monastery there. Beyond this all is mere conjecture. There exists some uncertainty as to whether there were not two saints of the same name connected with the spot, the one a Welshman, son of a king named Brecan, who ruled over a district now represented by Brecknock, the other an Irishman, descended from Dichu, St. Patrick's convert.

But that an important Celtic monastery flourished here at an early date is made certain by the irrefragable arguments of stone. On Saints' Island are the remains of an ancient oratory and cemetery, while the large liss, or circular earthen enclosure there, probably marks the site of the original monastic establishment. On Station Island are the remains of the “ penal beds,” which so great an authority as Wakeman, after a careful examination, considered to be the ruins of what were originally bee-hive oratories, probably of the ninth century, of which examples are to be found along the west coast of Ireland. It seems probable that the two islands were held as one by the Celtic monks, forming together the monastery of Lough Derg. Add to the above the remains of carved stones, inscribed monuments, and fragments of crosses, and some small conception may be formed of its erstwhile importance.

But, as unfortunately happens so often in Ireland, the mists settle down very speedily, and the history of the site is blotted out. Under the year 721 the Four Masters record the death of Cillene of Lough Derg, who was probably an inmate, or perhaps abbot, of the establishment. It is quite probable that at some unrecorded date the monastery was wiped out by the Danish invaders in their terrible forays.

After the lapse of unreckoned years the mists commence to roll away. The deserted site was again tenanted, this time by an Order from over-seas, the Canons Regular of St. Augustine, during whose lengthy tenure of possession occur the highly interesting accounts of visits made by pilgrims from all parts of Europe and of visions seen by them. It is said that this Order was introduced into Ireland early in the twelfth century, and that they took possession of Lough Derg between 1130 and 1134, the establishment there being constituted a dependent priory on the abbey of SS. Peter and Paul, Armagh. [10]

NOTES.

- [1] A possible rival to this place existed at one time in France. “ La forêt de Longhoel, avant les grands défrichements qui l’ont bouleversée, possédait un trou de Saint Patrice, qui donnait entrée dans l’enfer. Il va sans dire que ce trou était purement idéal, et que jamais personne n’a pu le montrer.” *Melusine*, t. I, col. 13.
- [2] O’Connor, *St. Patrick’s Purgatory, Lough Derg* (Dublin, 1910), p. 18.
- [3] Wright, *St. Patrick’s Purgatory*, p. 2.
- [4] O’Connor, p. 154.
- [5] *Acta. SS. Boll. t. II (Martii)*, p. 585.
- [6] *Golden Legend ; Chronicles of Matthew Paris ; Hdrstman, Alt-Englische Legenden* (Paderborn, 1875), p. 153.
- [7] O’Connor, pp. 12, 115; McKenna, *Lough Derg* (Cath. Truth Soc. Pubs.), p. 4.
- [9] O’Hanlon, *Lives of the Irish Saints*, Vol. I, No. I, p. n ; Vol. VII, No. 79, p. 354 ; O’Connor, p. 38.
- [10] *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vol. XII (s.v. St. Patrick’s Purgatory).

II.

The Evidence of David of Wurzburg of Joscelin of Giraldu Cambrensis of Henry of Saltrey.

List of Pilgrims During The First Period.

FROM the statements made by four twelfth-century writers, three of whom were contemporary, much valuable information, albeit it will be found unsatisfying on certain points, may be gleaned with respect to the history of the Purgatory during that period, the first appearance of the vision-stories in written form and the date of that occurrence. These writers are David of Wurzburg, Joscelin of Furness, Giraldu Cambrensis, and Henry of Saltrey.

The first-named, David Scottus,¹ or of Wurzburg, is said to have written circa 1120 a book entitled *De Purgatorio Patritii*. [11] Of the contents of this, however, nothing appears to be known. Therefore we are only entitled to infer from the name that early in the twelfth century there existed a “ Purgatory” of which St. Patrick was reputed to be the founder, and which was of sufficient importance to warrant a book being written about it. Nor is it at all certain that the “ Purgatory” above-mentioned was at Lough Derg ; David may have been referring to some such place as Croagh-Patrick, as we find Joscelin doing. This appears to be the first allusion in literature to St. Patrick’s Purgatory. David of Wurzburg stands about midway between the date of the arrival of St. Patrick in Ireland (432), and the present day.

The first of the three contemporary writers, Joscelin, who was a monk of Furness Abbey in Lancashire, wrote his *Life of St. Patrick* between the years 1180-85. He connects the Purgatory with the towering peak of Croagh-Patrick in Mayo. According to him St. Patrick ascended to the summit of that mountain and there spent the forty days of Lent in fasting and prayer. In order to divert him from his holy labours the devils appeared in the shape of hideous black birds, which swooped down upon him with savage beaks and claws, and made the sky resound with their discordant shrieking. Strong in faith he rang his famous bell against them, and by the power of God routed them, and then drove them westward over the sea. In process of time the custom arose of climbing the sacred mountain in order to fast and pray on its summit. Joscelin adds that those who do so consider “ that they will never enter the gates of hell, because this boon was obtained from God by the merits and prayers, of Patrick. Certain who spent the night there say that they suffered terrible torments, by which

they held that they were purged from their sins ; hence they call the place St. Patrick's Purgatory." [12]

Thus Joscelyn locates the Purgatory, not at Lough Derg, but at Croagh-Patrick. It is true that the Bollandist editors explain this by saying that he was deceived by a similarity of names, and confused Croagh-Patrick with the " mountains of St. Patrick" teste suis tabulis Mercatore between Loughs Derg and Erne. This explanation seems a very forced one. Croagh-Patrick has a good right to be connected with the National Saint ; to it pilgrimages were made at an early period, and the custom still prevails.

Our next witness is Giraldus Cambrensis, who composed his Topography of Ireland about 1186-87 ; In Dist. I, Chap. 5 of that work he says : " There is a lake in Ulster containing an island divided into two parts. In one of these stands a church of especial sanctity, and it is most agreeable and delightful, as well as beyond measure glorious for the visitations of angels and the multitude of the saints who visibly frequent it. The other part, being covered with rugged crags, is reported to be the resort of devils only, and to be almost always the theatre on which crowds of evil spirits perform their rites. This part of the island contains nine pits, and should anyone perchance venture to spend the night in one of them (which has been done, we know, at times by some rash men) he is immediately seized by the malignant spirits, who so severely torture him during the whole night, inflicting on him such unutterable sufferings by fire and water, and other torments of various kinds, that when morning comes scarcely any spark of life is found left in his wretched body. It is said that anyone who has once submitted to these torments as a penance imposed upon him will not afterwards undergo the pains of hell, unless he commit some sin of a deep dye. This place is called by the natives the Purgatory of St. Patrick. For he, having to argue with a heathen race concerning the torments of hell reserved for the reprobate, and the real nature and eternal duration of the future life, in order to impress on the rude minds of the unbelievers a mysterious faith in doctrines so new, so strange, so opposed to their prejudices, procured by the efficacy of his prayers an exemplification of both states even on earth, as a salutary lesson to the stubborn minds of the people. [13]

This account calls for some comment. In the first place, though Cambrensis does not expressly name it, Lough Derg is undoubtedly the lake that is referred to. He appears to be the only early writer who speaks of the bipartite isle, though we shall encounter an aspect of this question again in the fifteenth century. The nine " pits" are almost certainly the penal beds or circles on Station Island, though the custom of the pilgrims spending the night in one or other of them, instead of in the purgatorial cave, to which he does not allude, is not described by any other writer. Of the points mentioned by Henry of Saltrey viz. : the House of Augustinian Canons, the permission to be obtained from the bishop and prior, the preparatory fast, the formalities employed, he mentions nothing. In fine, his rather contemptuous opinion of the whole matter appears to be that the native Irish had a tradition that St. Patrick had there been shewn a glimpse of the other world, but that anyone who acted on that belief, and spent a night in one of the pits, was nothing but a fool, and deserved all he got.

The last of the three contemporary witnesses is H[enry], a Cistercian monk of Saltrey in Huntingdonshire. He it is who committed to writing the earliest known account of a descent made by a visionary, the Knight Owen, in the year 1153, and of his strange and terrifying experiences therein ; this he says he heard recited by a monk named Gilbert, who declared that he had had it from Owen's own lips. Henry also gives us the earliest description of the preliminary formalities which had to be observed by each pilgrim prior to his entrance into the Purgatory. It runs as follows : " It is a custom established by Patrick and his successors that no man may enter the Purgatory unless he have licence to do so from the Bishop in

whose diocese it is ; or who may choose of his own free will to enter there on account of his sins. When he shall have come to the Bishop, and indicated what his purpose is, the Bishop shall first exhort him to desist from such an undertaking, saying that many have entered in and have never come out. If he perseveres he receives letters from the Bishop to the prior of the monastery ; when the latter shall have read these he shall dissuade the man from entering the Purgatory, and shall diligently advise him to try some other penance, showing him the great danger that lies in it. If he persists, however, he brings him into the church, where he remains for fifteen days in fasting and prayer. At the end of this period the prior summons the neighbouring clergy, the penitent is fortified with the Holy Communion and sprinkled with holy water and is then led with procession and litany to the entrance of the Purgatory. The prior shall then declare again to him the danger, and the fact that many have been lost in that ditch (fossa), opening the door for him in the presence of all. If he remains firm the priests present bestow their benediction on him, and commending himself to their prayers, and marking himself on the forehead with the sign of the cross, he enters. The door is then closed by the prior, and the procession returns to the church. The following morning they come back and the door is opened by the prior ; if the pilgrim is there waiting he is joyfully conducted to the church, in which he spends another fifteen days in vigils and prayer. If, however, he does not make his appearance he is given up as lost, and the door is locked.” [14] In the following chapters we shall see this ceremonial carefully carried out, though sometimes with modifications and amplifications.

Now, to sum up. Our witnesses fall chronologically into two groups, David of Wiirzburg being in the first, and the three contemporary writers in the second. Of the first sufficient has been said ; he simply bears witness to the existence of a Purgatory believed to have been founded by St. Patrick, or else dedicated to him, and at some undetermined locality which was possibly, though not[^]certainly, Lough Derg.

But what are we to say to the fact that our three contemporary witnesses differ from each other on almost every point ? Joscelyn applies the title of “ St. Patrick’s Purgatory” to a mountain many miles away from Lough Derg, and either is ignorant of, or ignores, that spot. Probably the latter explanation is the correct one ; he may have regarded Lough Derg as an interloper which would be likely to detract from the awful dignity of Croagh-Patrick’s rugged peak, and so through jealousy made no mention of it. If this supposition be correct it would help to shew that the final shaping of the legend took place at a late date, and that at the period 1180-85 Lough Derg was still a shrine of secondary importance, for if Joscelyn had written even fifty years later than he did he could not possibly have adopted such a contemptuous attitude without damaging his literary reputation ; even then Lough Derg was rapidly nearing its zenith.

Cambrensis writes a year or two later. He says nothing in his Topography about Croagh-Patrick, but places St. Patrick’s Purgatory at a lake in Ulster, and then proceeds to give what is in substance the same legend as Henry of Saltrey has worked up into literary form in his story of the Knight Owen. In detail he differs somewhat from the latter, and this difference may be perhaps explained by the fact that Cambrensis followed a variant of the tradition, or else that the unknown source (oral or written) from which he received the legend did not report it too correctly.

Our third witness, Henry of Saltrey, presents at the same time the fullest information and the greatest difficulties. He tells the traditional origin of the Purgatory, describes the well-developed and elaborate ceremonial that was practised whenever a pilgrimage was made there, and then relates minutely the adventures of a pilgrim in the abodes of pain and bliss. Strangely enough he says nothing about the exact location of the Purgatory ; though one

might infer, from his account of its origin, that the cave or pit visited by Owen and others lay on the mainland in the midst of a barren wilderness.

It has generally been assumed that Henry of Saltrey wrote his narrative in the year 1153, at which date Owen is supposed to have made his descent. Our assumption is, that he did not finally commit it to writing until after 1186, and for this reason we have hitherto been treating him as a literary contemporary of Joscelin and Cambrensis.

Let us see what proof may be brought forward in support of this. Of Henry of Saltrey, apart from what we learn from the story of the Knight Owen, nothing is known. In it he assures us that he obtained his information from the tale related by Gilbert in his presence, and that he wrote it down at the request of Henry, abbot of Sartis. Now this Gilbert, whom Henry represents as a simple monk charged with the ownership of a newly-constructed monastery in Ireland, became abbot of Basingwerk circa 1157-9. Furthermore, the Irish bishop Florentian, whom Henry consulted with respect to the truth of the story before he took the step of giving it permanent form, may certainly be identified with Florence O'Carolan, who was placed over the see of Maghera (afterwards Derry) in 1185. This would bring down the date of the committal of the story to writing to as late as 1185, and it is quite possible that it must be carried down to an even later point. At this period councils were held at Canterbury (1189), at Westminster (1190), and at London (1191). It seems quite possible that Florentian was present at one or other of these, and that in the consequent assembling of clerics at Saltrey or elsewhere the story was told and discussed, and Henry had the opportunity of consulting him and the Irish abbots with respect to it. The date seems fixed to 1186 at earliest by another fact. In that year the relics of SS. Patrick, Brigit, and Columcille proved the object of solemn and splendid ceremonies at Downpatrick, and this "translation" would tend to focus public opinion on the National Saint, and thus would naturally encourage the circulation and publication, of legends concerning him. On the other hand, the earliest manuscripts of the story go back to the late twelfth century, so that if we place the actual committal to writing not earlier than 1186 on the one hand, we cannot allow it to be later than circa 1190 on the other. Neither Joscelin nor Cambrensis seem to have known anything of Henry of Saltrey's work. [5]

This does not imply that the tales of visions only came into existence between those dates quite the contrary. We can well imagine that for years, if not for centuries, legends of strange purgatorial visions had been gathering round Lough Derg in the vague timeless way that legends have, and that they only awaited an opportunity and a narrator to make them known to the world at large. Henry of Saltrey and the translation of the relics supplied the deficiency. That author took the story of Owen, which probably contained a nucleus of truth, and worked it up into literary form, no doubt considerably embellishing it in the process.

One of the difficulties in Henry of Saltrey's narrative is, that he presents us with the description of the elaborate ceremonial which was practised before the pilgrim was permitted to enter the cave ; this cannot have sprung into existence all at once, but must have been a gradual growth, and would seem to imply that the Purgatory had occupied a position of considerable importance for some years. On the other hand, the weight of evidence seems altogether against the idea that the place enjoyed any general favour until Henry of Saltrey wrote his narrative, though it must be admitted that our twelfth-century authorities are few and unsatisfactory ; we have here preserved for us an instance of the practice of local ceremonial, which was only of local interest, and for this reason not noticed by general writers. It is probable that other places of pilgrimage in Ireland at this period had their own peculiar ceremonies and customs attached to them.

Another argument of late date for the prominence of the Purgatory and the final literary form of the legend may perhaps be drawn from the widely-known story of Tundal. That wicked knight beheld his vision in the year 1149, only four years prior to the alleged descent of Owen. If the story of St. Patrick's Purgatory, and the great spiritual efficacy of a descent therein had been widely known throughout Ireland, it is quite reasonable to suppose that the author, Brother Marcus, would have sent his hero to expiate his many crimes in the body at Lough Derg, instead of in the spirit at Cork.

Why it was that the Purgatory at Lough Derg achieved a European reputation, and so by its brilliancy eclipsed all the other places of pilgrimage in Ireland, is a question not easy to answer ; but it seems probable that what principally contributed to its favour was the belief that in Ultima Thule, the remotest corner of the earth, there was an actual entrance into the other world, or at all events the less pleasant regions thereof no dream-gate of dazzling ivory through which fantasies might ascend, but a cave or grotto of stone, through which *facilis descensus* men could wend in the body to behold sights hidden from mortal eye.

Whatever explanation we may essay to give at all events the fact remains that very speedily after Henry of Saltrey's literary effort St. Patrick's Purgatory became renowned throughout the western world to a degree which we can scarcely realize at the present day ; to make this fact patent shall be our task in the succeeding chapters. Its subsequent history may be divided into two periods : From the end of the twelfth century to the suppression of the Purgatory in 1497 ; and from 1497 to the present day ; while the literary side of the two periods is dealt with in the final chapter.

This chapter may be brought to a conclusion by an attempt at compiling a list of the names of all the pilgrims at present known to have visited the Purgatory between the end of the twelfth century and 1497, at which latter date the purgatorial cave was demolished by order of the Pope. From the very length of the list we may argue its incompleteness ; the names of many pilgrims, and the accounts of their strange visions and experiences are lost, or as yet undiscovered, while there appear to be some in existence on the Continent, the exact location of which is not at present known. Others, too, whose whereabouts is definitely ascertained have only been partially published and await an editor. Incidentally this list is of interest as shewing the extent to which foreigners, who were not merchants or traders, came into Ireland during the 13-15th centuries through motives of piety or curiosity. The names of persons printed in italics are here inserted for the sake of completeness, as they and their adventures are alluded to at greater length elsewhere, or else form the subject of separate chapters.

Canon O'Connor states (p. 128) that King Alfred of Northumbria had visited the spot, and that about the year 1050 Harold, afterwards the ill-fated King of England, had made pilgrimage to " the miraculous cave of St. Patrick." Unfortunately he does not give the slightest clue as to where these interesting allusions occur. He also states (p. 93) that it was while Tiernan O'Rourke was on pilgrimage at, according to local tradition, Lough Derg, that Dermot MacMurrough ran away with his wife. If this tradition be correct it would merely prove that St. Patrick's Purgatory was resorted to by pilgrims, like Clonmacnoise and other venerable sites, before 1170 as we would naturally expect ! We shall therefore commence our list with

1153. THE KNIGHT OWEN. His adventures have been so often and so fully described that they need not be related here. See amongst other places, Roger of Wendover's Chronicle ; Wright's St. Patrick's Purgatory, Chap. III ; Baring-Gould's Curious Myths of the Middle Ages, essay XI. The account of his experiences had no small influence on European

literature, as will be seen further on ; manuscripts of it in French, Latin, or English are to be found in nearly all the great libraries at home and abroad ; while from the date of the invention of printing the presses were engaged in putting forth versions of the story, books which treated of it in a greater or less degree, attacks and apologies. Even at the close of the nineteenth century this output had not entirely ceased. The full Latin text may be found in Migne *Pair. Lut.*, t. CLXXX. It is said that translations into Irish also exist. See Hull. *Text-book of Irish Literature*, Part II, p. 241.

NICHOLAS. This pilgrim is a most mysterious being. He is alluded to by Stanihurst in his *De vita S. Patricii* (p. 66), who calls him “nobilis vir,” and by Fazio degli Uberti in his *Dittamondo*. He is also mentioned in the certificate given to Rathold by the prior, and in Mannini's story, in both of which he is described as “beatus” or “saint.” In the *Golden Legend*, and in O'Sullivan Scare's *Patritiana Decas* (IX. 9) an account is given of his adventures in the Purgatory, which closely agrees with that of Owen. There is nothing to shew to what period his date should be assigned, or whether he is a real person or an idealized character.

GUARINO DA DuRAZZO. 6 The Papal Nuncio, Chiericati, writing in 1517, says that this was the first name to be read in the volume containing pilgrims' names which was in existence at Lough Derg at that date. At the time he deemed him to be a fabulous personage, but afterwards found his journey described in “an ancient parchment manuscript.” Is this character to be identified with Guerino il Meschino, the hero of a wild romance into which the Purgatory is introduced ?

An anonymous pilgrim. 7

EUGENIUS DICTUS OsRIAN DE ANGLiA ; which may be rendered “Owen O'Brien (resident in) England.” He is alluded to in the certificate given to Rathold.

1248. GoDALH. 8 His vision in old French is said to be at Turin. However—a letter to the Biblioteca Nazionale of Turin elicited the following reply from the chief librarian : “The reference 4.22. K. given by Champollion-Figeac (*Documents Historiques* III, 325) to a Turinfese MS., containing the “Vesion de Godalh” is certainly an error, as it does not correspond with any reference in use at any time in this library. No trace of this manuscript is to be found in our catalogue ; and there is reason to believe that it was destroyed by the fire of 1904.”

Between 1300 and 1350. LE SIRE DE BEAUJEU. “He was of the lineage of the Counts of Flanders, and of the blood-royal of France. By his great courage he went into St. Patrick's Purgatory, where he beheld the infernal torments, as Heronnet his squire tells, who relates many marvellous tales of that place. Heronnet says that he beheld Burgibus, the porter of hell, who caused a wheel to make a hundred times a hundred thousand revolutions in the space of a single day, and on it there were fixed a hundred thousand souls. He saw the bridge which had to be crossed, and it was as sharp as a razor. He saw the souls in the fields of fire, and recognised some of them. He saw the gallows of hell. He saw the pit of hell. He saw the gulf of hell. Afterwards they came into the terrestrial paradise.” 9

1353. GEORGE CRISSAPHAN (Chapter III).

1358. Louis DE SUR. The account of his visions, written in barbarous Latin, is preserved in Cod. 3160 in the Palatine Library in Vienna. In certain respects it resembles the narrative of the Knight Owen, while in other points it agrees with the Irish Vision of Tundale. The form of prayer to be used by the pilgrim was : *Verbum caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis*. When

Louis came out of the cave he saw Malatesta Ungarus cum familia magna, et cum monachis S. Pafticii, in processionibus euntem. This proves that he did actually enter the Purgatory in the year 1358. See *Giornale storico della letter atuva italiana*, Vol. XVII, P- 50 ff.

1358. MALATESTA UNGARUS OF RIMINI, knight, and NICHOLAS DE BECCARIIS OF FERRARA, donsel, visited the Purgatory. On the 24th October in that year they both received letters testimonial to that effect from King Edward III. In that given to Malatesta it is stated that “ he visited the Purgatory with great labour of body, and remained shut up therein for a day and a night, as is the custom.” The Malatestas of Rimini were a well-known Italian family, and it has been conjectured that this member (who was not a Hungarian) visited the Purgatory by way of penance for having quarrelled with the Pope. 10

Before) FRA TADIO DI GUALANDI of Pisa, Lector of Ara Cceli at Rome. His'

1360. [name occurs in the introduction to the vision of Louis de France.

1360. Louis DE FRANCE. The account of his vision is contained in Cod. 384, class I, in the Correr Museum at Venice ; it is in Italian, with many words in the Venetian dialect. It is probably derived from that of Louis de Sur (see above).

1366. JOHN BONHAM and GUIDO CISSY received a letter of recommendation from Milo Sweteman, Archbishop of Armagh, dated the 15th of March. This is still preserved in his Register. In it he states that these persons have for devotion's sake gone on pilgrimage and visited many places, and for the health of their souls desire to visit Lough Derg. He commends these, therefore, to the hospitality of the prior, and to the clergy and laity of the province of Armagh. 11 2nd A unique instance occurs at this period of an intending pilgrim not being half permitted to go. A Carthusian monk, Giovanni, of Rome, desired to of (- leave his monastery in order to visit the Purgatory; but fell into great 1 4th trouble of mind at failing to get permission to do so from his superior.

cent.j On hearing this St. Catherine of Sienna (1347-80) wrote to him counselling submission and obedience. 1 *

1394-5. SIR WILLIAM DE LISLE and another English knight (see chapter VIII).

1397. RAYMOND, VISCOUNT DE PERELHOS (chapter IV).

1397. At the time the last-named visited Lough Derg there was to be found there a throng of pilgrims of different nationalities. One of these entered the Purgatory with him ; in the Latin version this pilgrim is alluded to as “ Anglus Eques Taresi Dominus,” i.e., his surname was Tracey ; but in the Languedoc version he is named “ Mossenhör Guilhem, senhor de Corsi.”

1 399- “ In the year of Our Lord 1399, in Lent, went MASTER JOHN OF BREDERODE to St. Patrick's Purgatory in Ireland, and he came home again on St. Odulph's Day in the same year. He founded also the chapel in the Zandtpoort in honour of God and St. Patrick, with t \vo masses a week.” 11

1406. WILLIAM OF STRANTON (chapter V).

Before 1411. ANTONIO DA FOCHA, a priest of Rome (see chapter VI).

1411. ANTONIO MANN IN I (chapter VI).

1411 LAURENCE RATHOLD DE PASZTHO (chapter VII).

1430. MESSIRE GUILLEBERT DE LANNOY, in his *Voyages et Ambassades* (p. 121), gives the following interesting account of his visit to the Purgatory : “ In this year, the 4th day of March, I set out from Ecluse, a village in Flanders, upon an embassy from Monsigneur le Due to the King of Scotland, and from thence to pass on upon a pilgrimage to St. Patrick’s hole in Ireland, beyond the realm of England. . . . We went to a village and island called Roussaux-moustier, and all the houses are of lath, and it belongs to a duke who has fully fifteen hundred boats, whose name is Macanienus (MacGuinnis), subject to king Maguier (Maguire), which duke lent us a boat (chimbe) to go to St. Patrick’s hole, in which we embarked, and rowed to St. Patrick’s Isle. We passed several islands upon which we landed to sleep and dine of which I make no mention because of the poverty therein ; we found some little old churches, and poor abbeys. From this said lake [Lough Erne ?] to the lake of St. Patrick the distance is four miles by land ; we left our boats there, and went these four miles on foot. We reached the Island of St. Patrick’s Purgatory in another boat, the distance being half a mile, and they say there are twelve islands in this lake, on one of which is the cloister and priory of St. Patrick, and all this is within the territory of the aforesaid King Maguier. The island of St. Patrick’s Purgatory is long for its breadth, and measures two hundred dexters in its circumference, there is a chapel of St. Patrick and four or five huts of lath thatched with straw. The place of St. Patrick’s Purgatory is like a Flemish window, fastened with a stout key and- a single door, and is as high off the ground as the chapel, and is situated four paces to the north near the north-east corner thereof (esi de haulteur a la terrt; dc la chappelle, et siet noord a quatre piez pris du coing noord-ost d’icelle) in a straight line w r ith the said corner. And the said hole is nine feet long from east to west, and then turns round five feet towards the south-west, its length being from fourteen to fifteen feet in all ; and it is built of black stones, and is about two feet wide, and barely three feet high ; and at the end of this hole, in which I was shut up for two or three hours, they say is a mouth of hell, but St. Patrick stopped it with a stone which he placed upon it, and it is still there.”

1446. CONRAD DE SCHARNACHTHAL, a Swiss knight, went into Ireland and repaired with certain noble natives of that country to the cavern known as St. Patrick’s Purgatory. A. Way, who contributed this item of interest to the *Archceological Journal*, 1 * says that he found it in “ a singular contemporary document, bearing date 1449, which gave a detailed narrative of his travels ;” but unfortunately he omits to tell us where this document might be found. The family of Scharnachthal had estates near the town of Thun in Switzerland.

Before ' In a French book published at Bruges this year the author states 1464. ,that he had spoken to different people who had been in the Purgatory. Amongst these were a CANON OF V> ATERFORD, who had entered eight or nine times, and a knight of Bruges, SIR JOHN DE BANST ; neither had any strange experiences. 18

1485. JOHN GARHI and FRANCIS PROLY, priests of Lyons, together with their servant JOHN BURGES, entered the Purgatory, and received a certificate to this effect from Octavian de Palatio, Archbishop of Armagh. In it he stated that they had visited the Purgatory “ in which, even in this world, the crimes of sinners are purged ; and the mountain [Croagh-Patrick] in which the holy Confessor Patrick remained without temporal meat forty days and forty nights. After the customary fasting and prayers they remained a certain time in the said Purgatory, and armed by Christ overcame all the deceits and fantastic temptations of the Devil.” 16

Before i A certain BLASIUS BIRAGUS visited the Purgatory, and describes it as

1494. i follows : “ There is an island, where a pit descends by six steps into the rock, not into an open square (forum) as the myth-makers say. I entered and saw everything.” 17 This occurs in the *Britannicæ Historiæ* of Ponticus Virumnus, a book which was printed in 1508, though this may have been merely a reprint, and not the first edition. Consequently it seem permissible to date Biragus's visit before the close of the first period.

1494. THE MONK OF EYMSTADT, who was the innocent means of having the Purgatorial cave demolished by Papal authority (see chapter VIII).

NOTES.

t. Catholic Encyclopaedia, Vol. XII ; Ulster Journal of Archeology, Vol.III (1859), pp. 240, 296 ; Dictionary of Nat. Biography.

2. P. de Felice, *L'autre Monde* (Paris, 1906), p. i8ff ; Archbp. Healy, *St. Patrick in the Far West* (Cath. Truth Soc.), p. 13.

3. Ed. by T. Wright (Bohn's Library), p. 63.

4. In Messingham's *Florilegium* (reprinted in Migne, *Pair. Lat.* t. CLXXX)

5. P. de F6lice, -op. cit. p. 28ff ; H. L. D. Ward, *Catalogue of Romances in MSS. of British Museum*, Vol. II (1893), pp. 436-40.

6. J. Cartwright, *Life of Isabella d'Este*, Vol. II, p. 177.

7. *Analecta Bollandiana*, t. XXVII, p. 36.

8. *Ibid.*

9. S. Luce, *Chronique des quatres premiers Valois* (Paris, 1862), p. 22.

10. *Anal. Boll.*, t. XXVII, p. 36-7 ; Wright, p. 135.

11. *Anal. Boll.*, p. 37 ; *Proc. Roy. Ir. Acad.*, Vol. XXIX, sect. c., No. 8, p. 274 (Register of Archbishop Sweteman).

12. O'Connor, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

13. Johannes a Leydis, *De origine et gestis dominorum de Brederode*, cap. XXXIX.

14. Vol. XVI, p. 360.

15. *Ulster Journal of Archeology*, Vol. IV (old series), p. 237.

16. *Anal. Boll.*, p. 39.

17. Bishop Henry Jones, *St. Patrick's Purgatory* (London, 1647), p. 119.

, The “ open square” which Biragus places to the credit of the myth-makers is obviously the cloistered hall in which the Knight Owen is assaulted by demons after he has had conversation with the old men.

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