

The Story of
St. Patrick's Purgatory

By

Shane Leslie

1917

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Hark, amid the prayers of pilgrims plying
Round the Isle of shrine and bed.
How the wind is sadder for the crying
Of the unremembered dead.

Whom the hunger scourged across the breakers,
Whom the ships of exile sped.
Hear them crying, " Will ye all forsake us
To the seas that sweep the dead ?"

" Brothers, where your footprints pass unheeding
Once our paths and lifeways led,
Brothers, pray ere ye be gone and needing
Mass and dirges for the dead."

" Pray for us where Patrick's lips were praying ;
Pray for us by Brendan's bed.
Soon in turn your children may be laying
You among the watchful dead."

Almost may you hear the wan half-sleepers
From their purgatorial bed
Crying unto God—" O Reaper, reap us
Lest we droop for ever dead."

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PREFACE

This little book gives a glimpse of a very legendary past. The first story is of the nature of an allegory. The second and third I gleaned from the spirit of old Celtic monasteries.

S. L.

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INTRODUCTION

HIDDEN away in the southern highlands of Tir-conail, within a storm's cry of the Atlantic, lies Derg, the holy lough of Ireland. Round her desolate shores cluster the bleak, billowy hills that merge northward in the rocky chain of the Bearnas-mor, eastward into the green floating plains of Tir-owen, and south-ward to the waters of the Erne.

It is a long passage of time since the men of Ireland first felt the mystery of those quiet little hills and looked for the unseen in the waters that lie at their feet, for the spiritual history of Derg stretches back into the dimmest age of legend. In the far past strange unholy rites were practised there. The cairns on the hills about are the gravestones of elder faiths that died of sheer old age.

Though little of the former worship of Ireland has come down to us, there is a wisp of flotsam to be gleaned drifting with the customs of the people. Here and there we may lay curious hands on some charm or rann that was in Ireland before Patrick, and is still borne on by the sacred current of Faith. No temples were left to bring wonder to the eyes of strangers, only a few gaunt circles of stone that have stood dumb and without meaning for so many centuries, yet perhaps not meaningless to all.

Once these grim stones were great among the heathen and received the homage of a religious race. Of the rise and splendour of Druidism there is no record. History reveals only its last phase, a slow and angry agony during the dawn of Rome's rebirth and second conquest of the world. Druids there remained throughout Ireland, and the people feared them pitifully unto their last hour. Their wise old bones must be lying by the red waters of Derg, but how have they perished that even the place of their perishing has been lost? They are gone beyond the sweep of imagination, for even a dreamer practised in his dreaming will not easily see their white robes fluttering in the bygone oak forests, or the weird rites which some wise old women forgot a few generations back.

In the fullness of time there came to the people of Ireland one who had heard their crying in his sleep. In the fullness of time his voice was heard in the valleys and his feet crossed the mountains. Over Ireland he went laying the invisible foundations of the Holy City whose earthly counterpart is Rome. It is Patrick, the first historical figure on the blue immortal hills of Tir-conail. Kings and heroes are melting away into the mists and the Druids are forgetting their wisdom. With the bright zeal of an Apostle he has swept over the five kingdoms, driving men's hearts to the City of God. With all his fierce love there is a little wisdom as well, for rather than destroy all he found he gladly consecrated many spots dear to the people, and turned many of their customs to the service of the True God. He broke down angrily the grinning idols that reigned in Leinster, but the wells and the oak groves that were made of God he could but bless, and they are blessed unto this day.

At Derg he found a spot of awe and eerness. Men dreaded the cave on the little island as a very mouth of hell. It seemed to be the last stronghold of the powers of gloom and evil in Ireland. Whatever they were, unknown and hateful, Patrick met them during a forty days of fast and prayer and set their bounds for ever. Thence forward their weird lodging was to be hallowed by the Catholic religion. The legend comes to us with a bare simplicity—*loca purgatoria ostendit Deus*—God showed him the places of Purgatory.

It is a strange record from the past, but generations have held it for true, and it has entered the unwritten creed of Ireland. It is difficult to gather what part the sanctuary played in the final conversion of the country. The annals of the time are gone. We only know that soon after the mission of Patrick, Derg and its storm-beaten little island was a centre of his Church. The haunting memories of evil perished and it came under the protection of a community of monks. With Saint Dabheoc as their founder they planted themselves on the great green ridge known to this day as Saint's Island. It is the name of Dabheoc that still lives in the townland of Seavoc hard by. This seat is still jealously guarded there by the peasantry, as a place might be kept at the fireside for an absent friend.

These were the Culdees or gillies of God who entrenched themselves among the Celtic peoples. It was by their love and devotion that the fire came to the lighthouses of God scattered about the Scottish seas. It was theirs to keep Holy Lore from the destroyer, and, though they were to perish themselves in the raids of the Danesmen, it was the light of their lamps that illuminated the Church far on into the dark ages, till the day when Francis and Dominic relit the altar-flames of God. At Derg the ruins of their foundation have been left under the moss, and, stranger still, a remnant of their strong discipline has reached us, too. The three days of fasting, the night spent in prison, the prayers prayed in the cold water at the Pilgrimage to-day, are all in glorious descent from the time of the Culdees. They are the strong customs of a strong people—a native growth that never found root under the warm skies of Italy. Is it not written in the Martyrology of Donegal? The little quatrains that celebrate the Celtic Saints can be understood by the pilgrims of to-day. There was Saint Ciaran who was often in a vat of water for the love of God, Saint Fiontain who ate but bread of barley com and drank but water of earthly day; Saint Cormac, Bishop, King and Martyr, who sang thrice fifty psalms in the fountain of Lough Tarb. The spirit of such heroes of prayer lingers yet in Derg.

During the great missionary era Derg became a spiritual centre. There is only a memory left of those impassioned bands of young men who went forth without purse or script, by twentys and by fifties, conquering and to conquer. Among the shrines of Europe lie the bell-men and book-men who visited her from the west in her dark years. Many who sleep today behind perfumed tombs in Italy or Switzerland learnt their mission at Derg and drew strength by her hillsides.

Then, in a sudden of time, the Danesmen swept across Ireland, and for a while everything was wrapt in a sea-mist of blood. They sowed seaports and sea-towns along the eastern coast until they, too, met their perishing in the Meadow of the Bull. Now had Derg reached a peace as of a ripening summer. The springtide of overflowing Faith had left her and spent itself in the Alps and the Apennines, A grey winter was yet in store, in which Ireland and Derg were to share the one sorrow and brave the one storm. Here and there behind the broken canopy of Irish history we can discern the bright waters of the lough. Even in the age of Faith, Derg was not always safe, for there were wild souls in Ireland, and at the hands of one of these, a MacMahon, the monastery was sacked. But there were ever hands to build anew, and it is just before the great pillage that Derg touched European fame.

The visions that a knight called Owen had seen there passed into many tongues, setting on fire the wonder of men and poets. One book could hardly contain all that was written about Derg, for men are always greedy of such, and in those days he came to be reckoned a poor storyteller who had no marvel to relate of Saint Patrick's Purgatory.

Princes and rulers came bringing letters from the King of England and the Patriardi of Armagh demanding entrance to the cave, either to atone for some great sin or to win a glimpse of the nether world. Among these was Perilhos, a very gentle knight of Spain, who came in armour at the head of a great company of cavaliers. To him appeared most fearfully and wonderfully his master, Juan King of Arragon. Now, Juan was dead these three years.

Another pilgrim was the Lord Rathold, of Hungary, who entered the cave with four relics of Holy Cross and portions of the tunic of Jesus Christ hung to his neck. To him appeared the devil tempting him horribly under several forms, whom the knight repulsed with his divine armoury. In the end his valour was rewarded, for Michael, captain of the host of heaven, stood by him and showed him the souls suffering in Purgatory, but more he would not let him see. The same guide told him how the souls are comforted, saying : “ Twice in each week—

on Sunday, when the Son of God was born, and again on Friday, when the same Lord God was pleased to die for sinners—I come to comfort them, saying—In a little time God will have pity on you. And they cry out all together, Jesus Christ, Son of the living God, have pity on us, as Thou wilt and knowest, so pity us, for Thy mercy is greater than our iniquity. Blessed art Thou who comest in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest and on earth." So Rathold returned with a letter from Mathew, Prior of the same place.

The record of many others who followed the same perilous quest survives. The Sire de Beaujeu, Louis de Sue, Louis of France, Malatesta of Hungary, and, not least, there came in the reign of King Henry VIII the Cardinal Legate to England, who made a toilsome journey across the swamps of Clogher till he was able to cross the lough in a hollowed tree. His letter has come to light in the correspondence of Isabella d'Este.

He crossed Ireland as the guest of the Archbishop and the Earl of Kildare. Dundalk he found in ruins, and Omagfa full of thieves. Two of his companions remained in the cave for ten days. It was the custom, he notes, for visitors to make their wills. Some he saw standing up to their necks in water. He also noticed in the book of pilgrims kept in the church the name of Guarino da Durazzo.

Then the great winter swept over the land, and, with the winter, the flail that scourged Ireland spared not Derg. The great religious houses fell an easy prey to the spoiler, and one day the spoiler stood by the shores of the lough. Rough soldiery turned the canons of St. Augustine adrift and sacked the island, but it remained, though beaten by the storms and mutilated by Acts of Parliament, the shrine of the Gael and the symbol of his own history.

Gaeldom, broken and bleeding, turned to the broken shrine, the desolate to the desolated.

In these days the children of Patrick turned from their home carrying the knowledge of their God from pole to pole.

Wherever England's argosies spread a network of Empire and commerce, the exiles of Ireland followed bearing only the pearl of great price and the secret traffics of the Kingdom of Heaven. It rested to the glory of Spain in her proudest hour to lay a new continent in the treasure of the Church, but it was reserved to Ireland, out of her poverty and abasement, to set the churches of America and Australia in the diadem of Peter.

The island of the Purgatory did not suffer so pitiably as the island of Saints, for we read in the seventeenth century of an altar there, overhung by an image of Our Lady and the Saviour, with the Crucifixion on the right and on the left the three Kings—a last view of loveliness.

The dark night following is broken only by the piteous cry of Henrietta Maria, the Catholic Queen of England, praying Wentworth to spare Derg and to allow the time-hallowed devotions to be continued. She promises that the people will use his permission modestly (I see useront sy modestement).

In those days the Franciscan lived at Derg in wattled huts, with a poor cross of twigs where silver and gold had been. In the end even the brown friars were hunted away, and then it grew very dark for Ireland. Her last treasures were torn out of her wounded hands and she ate of the bread of tears till she could weep no more. The music of a thousand years was stifled and the song of her bards sank very low. Turlough O'Carolan, the last of them, made his way to Derg in his old age. It is still remembered how the old man recognized a withered

old hand that was stretched to help him to land, as that of Bridget Cruise, a love of other days. So does a dream of beauty haunt the men of Ireland to their graves.

The pilgrimage outlived the storm. When the dawn of freedom came it found the faithful clustered round the sanctuary of Derg.

Year by year the Gaelic heart turns thither as the magnet to the north, and pilgrims come across the division of the seas. The sighs of dead generations are heavy in the air, and the very stones are steeped with their prayers.

On the red tideless water is writ the destiny of Ireland

To-day are the mountains there more desolate than ever, and even the kites and eagles are gone—

“Time will wear the very stone
Ireland’s eagles all have flown ;
Of things old her Faith alone
Stands unconquered and the same.”

Above the multitudes of the pilgrims the greater multitude of the Saints tread the storm-ridden skies.

From the watchers below a great cry still reaches to the Lady of Heaven, to Mary, the joy of the Gael, whose feet rest on Iona ; Mary, clothed with the bright treasure of the northern seas, whose loveliness yet lights the cottage homes of the west ; Mary, whose girdle is the love of Ireland, whose hair is bound with the stars that shine upon the holy lakes of Ireland.

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The Coming of Patrick

THOUGH the great rath was filled with fighting-men, yet a great silence lay in the air above, the heavy silence when the winds are at peace and men’s thoughts are turned to war. It was strange, for men of battle are not over-given to thinking. Nevertheless, around the great timbered palace that crowned the rath and among the wicker houses that crowded the slopes men were standing in moody silence. A few women folk passed along the rath-works from time to time. In the great mound by the palace lay the hostages. They, too, were silent. All that summer day the High King had been sinking. Every long-drawn hour of it he had lain unsleeping in the largest room of his palace. His large limbs, all harnessed for battle, pressed heavily on a heap of rough skins. The room had been filled with shadow, but his eyes were not yet darkened, for they looked fiercely into the passage that led to the open air beyond.

Two sullen figures stood in the dying sunlight. They were both of gaunt and angry aspect. One was the keeper of the King’s chessmen, the other was the avenger of his insults. They, too, waited in silence.

Throughout the day the younger Druids had passed to and fro in the room, whispering in low tones. They had laid healing herbs in the sword marks on the King’s body, and from hour to hour they had weighed his life upon twigs of stripped yew. Twilight had found them at their labours, and for all their wisdom the black wounds were running to the death. The cunning of their fingers failed them again and again, and the knowledge lying in the heart of each of them caused them to fail even the more. For not one but knew that the King’s

shield had moaned aloud in the battle, and with the moaning of their shields the heroes of Ireland were doomed to die.

While the sun rode in the high sky, and even while it slanted down to meet the heather hills, the hot blood kept playing about the King's heart, but with dusk the chills of death crept into his veins, and the breath was troubled in his throat.

In the end the Druids left him to his own shift and the King was thinking bitterly in his mind. He thought of all the gold and all the sword-iron he had stored in his palace to no purpose. He thought, too, of the skulls of his foemen heaped in the speckled house outside. He wondered grimly if they could know of his hap.

The warrior men were still waiting on the earthworks outside. No one moved on the paths that ran from the rath through the triple ramparts and out to the forests beyond. Their eyes looked to the quiet grey silences and the great wastes. Around them lay the waste of woodland, and the waste of bogland, and the waste of lough water. Among themselves they wondered how long they could hold their own, and their leader standing dead in the clay with a blind sword in his hand. Strange and wayward seemed the curse upon the heads of men that such a strong one might turn over to death, and the blood scarce dry on the spoils he had taken. These were rare thoughts for such warriors, whose hearts were more curious of the passing of a battle than of the burden of many years.

On a sudden a white figure rose at the lowest of the three earth-walls and came slowly up the height. He was a tall man with the crooked neck of age upon him and angry eyes in his wise face. Straight he mounted to the head of the rath, looking neither to right of him nor to left. As he passed, the fighting men turned to watch him, but shivered as they let him by. "It is Torna, the Druid," they whispered. He had reached the palace door by now. Under the heavy log lintels he passed, with his white robe gathered in his fingers.

The King lay in a restless slumber, and saw not his silent visitor entering. In his hard agony he turned this way and that. Gouts of blood crawled down his stiffening limbs and dyed the badger skins and fox skins of his bed. Torna waited beside him as an old water crane that stands near the ebbing tide. At last the King woke, and knew his visitor with a weary look in his red eyes.

"Torna, I am very glad of thy coming ; Torna, I have cried for thee since I was borne from the battle."

"I am not glad," replied the old Druid ; " little glad am I to see the hand that was once full of gifts hard bitten by the sword." There was a pause of time, and the King spoke.

"Torna, there are strange clouds gathering over mine eyes, not the joyous mist that rises in the wine cup, but the blackness as of rain in the night-time ; speak to me, Torna, Druid of Druids, Torna, wiser than wisdom. Is it death that is come upon me ?"

"A smaller wisdom than mine can see that thy cloud is one that cometh but once over a man." The Druid spoke with no sign on his face.

With a cry the King turned back to his troubled slumbers. He seemed to mutter, and after a while his mutterings passed to the shape of words and he spoke clear—

“ Strange dreams lie before and behind me, Torna, for already I think that I see my own spirit sitting at the cold hearths of the dead, and it is not well with them. Again, I see strangers sitting among the High Kings of Ireland that are to be, and it is not well with them.”

“ Strangers, O King ! there must be in Ireland till the wearing away of time.”

Then the King spoke yet more slowly.

“ Torna, I see grief for you and for all the white magic of the Druids.”

“ Long have I known that grief is coming upon us, O King! and others have known too. There cometh an adze-head, with a crook-head staff in his hand, and he will chant a song unholy from his table, and his household will be answering, Amen, Amen.”

“ I see a Druid that is no Druid sitting with the wise men of Ireland and his robe is as brown as the peat.”

“ That is he, O King ! that is Patrick, the fisher of men.”

“ Who is Patrick, and what is the way of his fishing ?”

“ He is the love friend of Jesus, whom men call the King of the Wounds, but I can tell thee little of his fishing, save that he hath nets laid over the high hills of Ireland.”

“ Torna, would my sword be easy cutting the nets of Jesus ?” and the King fondled his cold bedfellow, for in those days the Kings of Ireland honoured their swords by night as well as by day.

“ No, O King ! your sword cannot avail you, for the Queen of Heaven has woven them out of the floating treasure of the sea, and the spirits of men will be lying in them like the silver herrings in the folds of a rope-net.”

Then the King turned on his side and lay still, while the darker twilight fastened upon the sky. The sun was away now, but no man thought to light a fire. It would be enough to wait on the King’s burial. The rath lay in darkness.

For the last time the old warrior drew himself up from his clotted couch, with the half-dreams playing in the eyes.

“ Torna, what is the wild music that reaches my ear from every hill in Ireland ? I know well the red music that plays men into battle and the white music that sings to us feasting, but this is neither one or the other.”

“ It is the bells that the friends of Jesus are ringing through the land.”

“ And for what is their ringing ?”

Then the Druid sobbed angrily between his words—“ They are ringing them against the death of the Druids.”

Long the two waited in silence. The King still gazed into the dark before him, then he said —

“Eagles have flown into the winds and black fowl of the sea.”

“They have come to tear the nets of Patrick,” said the Druid, “but we shall not see the day.”

“Torna, there is a lough between the cloven hills and the water in it runs red.”

The Druid leapt from his seat. “It is red, red with the blood of the friends of Jesus,” he cried, passionately.

“Speak on, Torna, is their death bitter? Surely there is a bitterness in their, death.”

“Bitter-sweet it is, very bitter and yet very sweet, for I can see their blood under the starlight of a long cold night. It is a great sorrow to them that they have got the King of Wounds over them.”

“Why talk of their sorrow, when I can only see my own sorrow?” moaned the King. “Let them bury me upright and my face set against the men of Connact. Give my sword to my hand. I have given it a soft feeding all these years. It must starve now. Oh! it is bitter that my wheel-brooch must lie on the breast of another. It is hard to die like an ox on the straw. Would I had never left the red field.”

There was a long quiet and the King spoke for the last time, “Only let me hear the harp-music ere I die.”

Then Toma, the Druid, plucked the royal harp from the wall and played of life and of death, of all the wonders in Ireland and of the greatness of Kings and of the sorcery of the Druids, but how an equal end cometh unto all. Out of the perishing twilight he played into the grim night, and he remembered the fierce blood songs of Ulster, till the fighting men outside roared out for the love of killing that came to them, and no King to be leading them out. And in the mound near by the hostages heard the playing, and moaned like small birds in their nest.

Little the old man heeded, for he played fiercely anon and anon he played sadly. His hooked fingers crept among the harp strings like sickles moving in the wheat.

Fiercely he played because of the dying of the High King and sadly because of the heavy nameless doom that was on the race of the Druids.

With that singing the dark had passed into the greater night, but the High King had long ceased to hear him, for his spirit was sitting beside the dead fighting men of Ireland.

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The Vision of Dabheoc

Now, how Patrick, the love-friend of Jesus, came in his wanderings to Derg and remained for forty days and forty nights on the island is well remembered in Ireland, and how the loneliness of God came upon him, and how, for all his trial and sorrow, he saw visions beyond the dreams of men.

Fewer have remembrance of Dabheoc, the gilly of Heaven, who came on Patrick's footsteps and stayed to pray till his own death. With Dabheoc came others of a like mind and served him in the rough house of stone he had built. By the beauty of their living and by the power of their penance they had the most of the people won away from the Druids. But the fight between them was a fierce and quenchless one while it raged, for the old hill sorcery was hard for the Saints to conquer. For a while the terrible Druids had been seen moving in the mountains near by and their rites were still offered amid the trembling thickets, but Dabheoc feared them little, and held his own. Do what they might, he laid altar against blood-stone, and chant against rune, and prayer against curse, till in the end the old Druids wandered away, and the last of them died alone upon the hills.

So was the first battle of the Faith won, and as years slipt by only Dabheoc was left of those warrior monks, for some had died by the wild elements and others by their hard penances, and others very fearfully in the fire of the Druids.

There was a long band of young men who made their way over the mountains to join the rule. Though they found it hard to the body, it seemed sweet enough to the soul. But their number increased, and no little strength and prosperity was added to them. The younger brethren built wicker huts of strong woven twigs, and laid out an apple-garden and a herb garden. Above all the work of their hands was the great chapel of timber wood. They had raised it, every beam, by their own labour, and they had filled it with the untiring song of their lips. Day by day, like the bee-folk in the heather, they followed out their chosen rule and kept their lives sweet with activity. Some had turned to the digging of soil, and planted seeds and herbs, till they had won to themselves the wisdom of plants and the healing of leaves.

Others betook them to writing on parchments and painting the Gospels with colours they had picked off the rocks. In those days the making of books was long and troublesome, even to the wearing away of men's lives. First, there were the designs to be pencilled by the best craftsman in the monastery. And then the others would, sit day upon day over one smooth page spreading the little rivers of red and yellow through and round the lettering, little rivers that wound about the pages, with bright purple banks curling and folding in and out, yet never breaking over the line or letting a purple sod drop into the yellow stream.

It was on the initial of Christ that they lavished the whole wealth of their brushes. Round the Sacred Letter with an unbroken exactitude they twined the glorious broidery, line upon line, curve out of curve, wreath into wreath. They gathered into the one page the colours of the sky and the beauty of the earth, the burnished mail of dragons, and the slender shapes of the mountain grass. If men wonder to this day at the love and endurance that wrought such books to perfection, it is because they do not understand the mind of writers who would have deemed their whole lives too short, and the very blue of heaven and the red of their own blood unworthy stuff to emblazon the Name of the Eternal.

Year in and year out they fashioned their Gospels and sent them hanging around the necks of missionaries into the broad world beyond. In aftertime these same books and their metal coverings were found as far apart as the plains of Italy and the white floes of Iceland. A strange and lovely witness to those same children of Patrick, who mingle their sleep in the vineyards of the south and in the ice-beds of the north. Summer and winter, it was always harvest time to them, and the while they laboured, their brethren in the monasteries of Ireland fashioned the wherewithal of their reaping.

It was over such as these that Dabheoc ruled till he reached his old age, great and honoured among all the houses of Ireland. Calm were his last years, but, although he told it

not, there was a dark grief in the well of his heart. He was troubled because he was soon to go out of the world, and yet he had never seen any vision of the world that was to come. He had spent his life, as the other saints of Ireland, in holy combat with his own soul. Many had he trained to bear the brown robe and the heavy cord. Many had already reached heaven in the light of his counselling. Still the vision that he yearned was lacking to his eyes. Often he had felt in his heart the Holy Powers that move in the world and above the world, but never once had any passed into the sight of his eyes. Visions had come upon the other brethren. Some had seen the faithful sitting in great joy, and others had seen the souls in Purgatory wrestling to their perfection. Even among the youngest of them was one who had seen the angel folk standing on the white hills at sunrise. But Dabheoc stretched out his hand in vain to gather the dream-fruit that hangs from the wall of another world. It was not for him, though he had kept vigil in his high mountain seat that lies this day between Derg and Erne. No whisper came to the weary ears of the watcher of the lakes. No sign entranced his eyes. His prayers, his fasts, his vigils, all seemed to break upon the bar of heaven like lost birds in a storm. Sometimes a sore weariness would come upon him, and even a smoulder of anger rise in his heart, but not for long, so well had the Saint learnt to trample his own passions into the dust, and so rule the brethren. *Beati qui non viderunt* he would often say, yet oftener would he wish that he was not so blessed.

There came a day when Dabheoc sat in his wattled cell watching the gardened slope that led down to the water edge. A well-mounded rampart ran round the close. Now and again a heavy-robed figure passed across. The hush of Vespertide had fallen, and the quiet as of many tasks done. Dabheoc turned his eyes sadly over the old book satchels that were hanging on the wall. How many hours of his were stored away in them to the use of other men? How much of his sight had been woven into those pages?

When his eyes turned back to the doorway, he saw a Pilgrim standing there. He, too, carried a brown robe, but it was thickened with the dust of white roads and His feet lay bruised between their sandals. His body seemed weak with journeying and in need of refreshment. In His eyes alone there was no weariness, they were deep and beautiful and blue as the skies of Italy.

“Enter, friend, enter; this is a house of rest,” said the Saint, “is it very far that thou hast come?”

“A long and a weary way, Dabheoc, ruler of the Culdees,” replied a voice of great sweetness.

“Is it peace that thou bearest with thee, stranger, for mine eyes are too dim to read the faces of men?”

“My peace have I brought these many years to all that would have it,” the sweet voice began again. “I have brought my peace for thee, Dabheoc, for all the fret that is on thy heart.”

“I see that thou canst read the mind of a man’s heart. Art thou ruler of a religious order?”

“Yes, of the greatest of the orders, the Order of the Wayfarers.”

“What is thy quest, dear stranger?”

“I have come to find my friends.”

“ Who are thy friends ?”

“ My friends are all the Saints of Ireland who are born and are yet to be born.”

“ I do not understand what thou wouldst say, but I see that thou art older than any here though thou hast come as a Pilgrim, perchance thou hast memory of our holy Father Patrick ?”

“ Before Patrick was, I am.” The voice of the Pilgrim spoke like a bell far off.

Then the old Saint felt that it was no ordinary man his old eyes were striving to see. His whole soul struggled out to meet the Stranger standing at the doorway. A feeling of peace and yet delirious joy was upon him. He could only see the two eyes that they looked upon him with love. It seemed then as if his poor spirit were fluttering over those pools of calm unmoved Divinity. Then the wondrous vision past from his eyes and he was looking dimly to the blue waters beyond.

He rose and went down to the water side as fast as his old age would let him. As he crossed the mound he inquired of each brother he met if they had seen which way the Pilgrim had passed, but no one had seen ought on the island that day. Not once, but several times, the old man passed up the island with tears of joy brimming from his eyes. There was no foot-print to be seen, but on a bare rock he saw a little wisp of thorn and the red drops falling into the dust beside.

That summer Dabheoc died at Derg, with the vision still in his dark sight, and he was buried under the thorn tree by the other brethren.

Beautiful was the stone cross they carved above him, Dabheoc, the Saint of Derg, who had seen the Holy Wayfarer in the twilight of his years.

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