

**THE EARLY IRISH CHURCH; OR, A SKETCH  
OF ITS HISTORY AND DOCTRINE. IN TWO  
PARTS. PART 1. ITS  
HISTORY, ENDWMENTS, MISSIONS, & C.  
PART. II. ITS DOCTRINE AND RELIGION,  
PROTESTANTISM, INDEPENDENCE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649566709

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

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**M. W. FOYE**

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PART I.  
ITS HISTORY, ENDOWMENTS, MISSIONS, SCHOOLS, &c.

PART II.  
ITS DOCTRINE AND RELIGION, PROTESTANTISM, INDEPENDENCE, &c.

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LONDON:  
SEELEY, BURNSIDE, AND SEELEY, FLEET STREET  
EDWARDS AND HUGHES, AVE MARIA LANE.  
BIRMINGHAM:  
E. HUNT AND SONS, 75, HIGH STREET.  
1845.

The Reader will perceive that reference is made in the following pages by letters to the foot notes, and by figures to the Appendix.



## PREFACE.

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THE HISTORY OF THE EARLY IRISH CHURCH is interesting on many accounts, but on none more than for its long independence of, and actual opposition to, the Church of Rome. Like the early British Church, and, indeed, like all those planted by the first heralds of the gospel and their early successors; which, though united in the bonds of faith and love, and a common hope and interest, yet were all alike independent of each other, and governed by their own ecclesiastical rulers, the Irish Church knew no master but Christ, and acknowledged no jurisdiction but that of her own synods and her own metropolitan. What more interesting than the fact, that the Church now established in Ireland is the literal descendent in succession and doctrine, and, consequently, the rightful heir of the endowments, of the early Irish? What more interesting than the fact, that it was not till the latter half of the twelfth century that the Irish Church first formally connected herself with the see of Rome, and became enslaved to a foreign master? And what more solemn than the lesson that the Irish people have not enjoyed a day's national peace or comfort since? These are important truths; and it is well they should be universally known and considered; and more especially so at the present crisis. Even intellectually considered, the facts are interesting; but religiously considered, they are extremely important. They are of themselves a refutation of all Romanism. We need not go to the remote regions of Asia for instances of primitive and independent Churches. We have one at home in our own land as it were, planted while Christianity was yet fresh and pure, growing up and flourishing for a long succession of ages, apart from Rome; the retreat of sacred learning and piety, the abode of saints, and the teacher of Europe; preserving the simplicity of her first faith; maintaining her right to be free; and remaining substantially the same, after nearly a thousand years, as she was when she was first planted.

The object of the following few chapters is to put some of the evidence of these important *facts* briefly, yet clearly before the reader. The subject was first handled by the author

in two lectures, delivered to the Members of St. George's Instruction Society, in Birmingham; and afterwards revised and committed to the press at the earnest request of those members, and that of the clergy who were present. It is presented under a two-fold aspect; first, that of the history, and next, that of the doctrine and religion, of the early Irish Church. The author has consulted the best authorities on the subject, and gives vouchers for every statement. He has been very sparing of comments; and the only merit his little work claims is that of avoiding the legends and fables with which the hagiologists and *saint-makers* of a late age have darkened the subject, and of aiming at a faithful compilation and lucid arrangement of authentic documents; from which the reader will be able to form his own judgement. No inference is drawn by the writer, but such as is amply borne out by the very words of the authors which he quotes. In the appendix the passages are given in the original, in all cases of importance; and no pains have been spared, consistently with brevity, to render the little work permanently useful, to make the character of the early Irish Church popularly known, and bring *the facts* of the case within the reach of every ordinary reader. From the proofs alleged it will be clearly seen, that that Church was for ages the same as the Church now established in Ireland: shall I say, in all respects, doctrinally and substantially, the same? the same, affirmatively and negatively? yes, the reader will judge. He will see that she was not only truly orthodox and evangelical, but *literally* protestant; not merely independent of, but actually opposed to, the see of Rome; and that it was only after a long series; first, of secret plotting and deception; then, of open agitation; and, finally, of impious war and merciless violence upon an unoffending people; that popery was at length propagated in Ireland, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

The author will only add, that if he could indulge a hope that any of his brethren, in his dear "father land," would *allow* themselves to read and ponder these pages with candor, he feels persuaded that, under God's blessing, they, too, would see, with deep penitence and sorrow, how widely they have swerved from the faith of their fathers, and what a bad and blind devotion that is with which they now cling to a religion, which was first *insidiously* brought in amongst them by the intrigue and cunning; and, finally, *forced* upon them by the treachery and violence, of the bishop of Rome. God grant that they may at length open their eyes to these things.



## FIRST CHAPTER.

### THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIANITY IN IRELAND.

1. THAT Christianity was early planted in Ireland we know on unquestionable ancient testimony, though at what precise time the Gospel was first preached there, or who were its first heralds, it is now impossible to ascertain. But Ireland has fared no worse in this respect than many other countries, in which the origin of christianity is involved in similar remote obscurity. However, that the Christian Church was there before the time of Patrick, its reputed Apostle, we know, on the authority of Patrick himself. In a tract addressed to the Irish people, and to be noticed farther on, he says—"I journeyed in all directions for your sake, even to those remotest corners of your Isle, to which no one had gone before me, to baptize or ordain ministers." Here you see Patrick does not claim the Apostleship of the whole of Ireland; but plainly intimates that some, at least, of the less remote places, had already been blessed with the Christian religion. We also know the same on the authority of a contemporary Latin Father. Two years before St. Patrick entered upon his labours, a missionary had been sent to Ireland by Pope Celestine; and Prosper, a friend of that Pope, recording this fact, has these words in his chronicle, A. D. 430, "Palladius is ordained by Pope Celestine, and sent as first (or chief) bishop to the Scots believing in Christ." (1) Here, then, is positive ancient testimony to the fact that there was a Christian Church in Ireland before the mission of Palladius, and consequently before that of St. Patrick. "*The Scots believing in Christ.*" Now, as some of our northern neighbours below the Tweed have been so rash or vain as to claim this testimony of Prosper, as referring to themselves, it is important to notice here, once for all, that the name Scotia (a) was anciently appropriated to Ireland. In truth, no other country was known

a The present Scotland was called Albania, Caledonia, or the Country of the Pieta. A colony, however, from the North of Ireland, having possessed themselves of Argyll and Ayrshire, and set up a new kingdom there, A. D. 563, under the two royal brothers, Fergus and Learn, these also, not long after, began to be called "Scots"; but at first generally with the distinction "Scots of Albania," or Albin Scots," the Irish still retaining the original name "*the Scots.*" Subsequently the distinction grew to be "Irish Scots," "Albin Scots." And so the distinction continued even so late as the thirteenth century. This is now admitted by all who have given any attention to the matter. See *Chalmers' Caledonia, Vol. 1, Book 2, c. 6.*

by that name up to the twelfth century; as Archbishop Usher has clearly shown, who adds—"I think there cannot be produced from the whole of the first eleven centuries a single writer who has called Albania by the name of Scotia." (De Primord, c. 16.) So that when Prosper says "Palladius is sent to preside as chief bishop over the Scots believing in Christ;" there can be no mistake as to what people is meant, nor any doubt of there being already a Church of Christ among them.

2. Now, to this we must not hesitate to add another interesting fact, bearing upon the same point; which we read of in the lives of the Irish Saints, and which, though mixed up with fable and folly, and anachronism, like every thing else which legendary Monks have put their hands to, yet we have no right to disbelieve, seeing it is thus amply borne out and confirmed by this authentic and joint testimony of Prosper and Patrick. That fact is this, that prior to the time of Patrick there were not only several Christian Churches, but several Christian bishops also, in the southern and eastern parts of Ireland; at Adimore, Lismore, and Emily, in Munster, and at Beg-Erin and Ossory, in Leinster; though, at the same time, it appears that the whole of the northern and western provinces continued still pagan; while, nevertheless, we must not forget to add, that even in some of these latter, St. Patrick is said to have discovered traces of a former but extinct Christianity. The names of these Prelates were Kieran, Ailbe, Declan, and Ibar; their memories are still perpetuated and greatly venerated in those parts, and though much ingenuity has been resorted to with a view of discrediting their history, in consequence of the arrant folly with which it has been blended; yet the fact itself of their existence and labours, is borne out by every document connected with the history of the early Irish Church.

3. But this is not all: there are some other very interesting and well-known facts, which not only prove that the Church of Christ existed at an early period in Ireland, but moreover, very clearly indicate that, though narrow in her limits, yet she was nothing inferior in vigour to any of her sisters on the continent. They are facts connected with the Pelagian heresy. We read that the propagators, though not the first authors, of this novelty, (which originated at Rome about the close of the fourth century, and which denied the doctrine of original sin and the necessity of renewing and sanctifying grace,) were Pelagius and Celestius, that is, Morgan(b) and Kelly, the former a Briton and the latter an Irishman. They are expressly so called by their contemporaries and opponents,

§ Pelagius is simply the Latin for Morgan; *Mor*, the Welch word for *See*, being the same as Pelagus in Latin. Celestius is the Latin for Cellaugh or Kelly.

Jerome, Augustin, Mercator, Prosper (2); and, as a proof that they did not imbibe their errors at home, they are represented as having come to Rome while their faith was pure, and as having already long resided there (mark! before the year 400) in the enjoyment of the highest reputation for learning and piety, and in the closest intimacy with the most eminent men of the age. And, what is still more important to the case we are proving, we are furthermore informed, that Morgan was at the head of one of the Roman schools; that Kelly was his assistant; that the latter was a man of noble birth and Christian parents; that he was brought up, when young, in a monastery; that, while in that monastery, his faith was sound; that "he wrote three epistles, as large as little books, to his parents, full of piety, and necessary to the edification of all who love God;" that having come to Rome, and there formed acquaintance with Morgan and Rufinus, (Rufinus was the secret, or concealed, author of the heresy,) (c) he imbibed their pernicious principles, and, being a man of sharp wit and great abilities, he soon stood forth at the head of the sect, and became the master" (says Jerome) "rather than the disciple of the heresiarch, and the leader of the whole heretical band." (d)

These then, you will see at once, are important facts, plainly indicating the eminence, at this early age, of the respective Christian Schools which produced these two distinguished but unfortunate characters.

4. And lastly, of equal weight and interest is another fact which we must add, and it is this:—that one of the most able opponents of the Pelagian heresy was also an Irishman, the contemporary of Celleagh, and decidedly one of the most distinguished theologians and Latin poets of the age. This was the celebrated Sedulius, that is, Shiel. He calls himself "Sedulius Scotigena," that is, Irish-born; and, what is quite to our point, he is thus described by Trithemius—"Sedulius, the presbyter, was a Scot, and, from his youth up, a disciple of Hildebert, Archbishop of the Scots. He was a man eminently versed in the knowledge of the sacred Scriptures, of great accomplishments in human learning, and had an excellent taste both in prose and verse. Having left Scotia, he travelled into France, &c, &c., and at length settled in Italy, where he was greatly admired for his wonderful learning." Among the poetical works of this eminent Irish divine "are some of the most beautiful hymns that are read in the Church," says Dr. Lanigan; and in his prose works

c So Marius Mercator. See Dupin, under Mercator.

d Jerome calls the Pelagian heresy, "gula Scotorum," that is, "Scotch porridge," or "Irish Summer." He compares Morgan to Pluto, and Kelly to his dog, Cerberus; and Orosius calls the former Goliath, and the latter "his armour-bearer, who supplies (says he) all the weapons of iron and brass." See O'Conor's *Berum Hibernicarum*, vol. 1. *Procl.* 1, p. 74.