

**SAINT PATRICK: APOSTLE OF IRELAND IN THE
THIRD CENTURY; THE STORY OF HIS MISSION
BY POPE CELESTINE IN A.D. 431, AND OF
HIS CONNEXION WITH THE CHURCH OF ROME
PROVED TO BE A MERE
FICTION: WITH AN APPENDIX, CONFESSION
AND EPISTLE TO COROTICUS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649507900

Saint Patrick: Apostle of Ireland in the Third Century; The Story of His Mission by Pope Celestine in a.D. 431, and of His Connexion with the Church of Rome Proved to Be a Mere Fiction: With an Appendix, Confession and Epistle to Coroticus by R. Steele Nicholson

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R. STEELE NICHOLSON

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APOSTLE OF IRELAND

IN THE

Third Century.

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PROVED TO BE A MERE FICTION:

WITH AN APPENDIX,

CONTAINING

HIS CONFESSION AND EPISTLE TO COROTICUS,

TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH.

BY

R. STEELE NICHOLSON / M.A., T.C.D.

DUBLIN: M'GLASHAN AND GILL, 50, UPPER SACKVILLE STREET.

LONDON: JOHN RUSSELL SMITH, 36, SOHO SQUARE, W.

BELFAST: ARCHER & SONS, 20, WELLINGTON PLACE.

1868.



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SAINT PATRICK.

THE history and antiquities of Ireland have of late years attracted an unusual amount of attention : of that history, the introduction of Christianity must always form the most important portion ; and, connected with the introduction of Christianity, St. Patrick must always occupy the most prominent position, and whatever relates to him will always form a most interesting study.

The history of the Saint is wrapped in so much mystery, and is surrounded by such a dense mist of fable and falsehood, that any attempt to dispel that mist, and to introduce the light emanating from a better acquaintance with the ancient records of Ireland—which, thanks to the learned men of the present day, are now open to every one—should be regarded as praiseworthy service in the cause of historical truth.

The numerous lives of the Saint written in the eighth century (we have no account of any of an earlier date, excepting one called the "Hymn of Fiech," supposed to have been written in the sixth century) were so full of fable and fiction, that they could only be regarded as mere legends. The learned historian Gibbon says, "The sixty-six lives of St. Patrick which were extant in the ninth century must have contained as many thousand lies."* All these lives, with the exception of four which have been preserved to our times, are supposed to have been destroyed by the Norwegians and Danes during the period of their incursions into, and partial occupation of, the island—a circumstance which we can only regret in so far as it involves the certainty of the destruction of many valuable records and documents connected with the true history

* Vol. V., p. 228, Note.

of Ireland in general, and of St. Patrick in particular. These four lives, so preserved, have formed the groundwork of three more lives of the Saint, which, like those whence they derive their origin, are so full of fable and fiction, that in the estimation of most writers of acknowledged learning and judgment—both Protestant and Roman Catholic—no reliance whatever can be placed on them as historical documents, further than this, that many of the incidents recorded in them as having happened in the life of the Saint, may be, and probably are, in the main true, and founded on facts which really occurred in the course of his life and missionary labours.*

The statements made by the annalists and writers of acknowledged authority concerning the Saint are equally unsatisfactory. They are so contradictory, and so inconsistent with each other, some of them so clearly false, and all of them taken together forming a story so incredible, and irreconcilable in its parts as a chronologically accurate narrative, all, if combined, spreading the duration of his life over the incredible space of 132 years,—that some very learned men have been led, not only to question, but even to deny altogether, the existence of such a person as St. Patrick, and to treat him as a purely fabulous personage. This is not without good reason, as there is scarcely a single fact related of him that is not wholly irreconcilable with some other facts recorded of him by the same parties;—whilst there are in their statements such glaring inconsistencies and so many obviously flagrant discrepancies, that it is by no means surprising that the very learned and acute Dr. Ledwich and others have been led to deny his existence altogether. The simple solution of the question thus raised as to the existence of St. Patrick is, as the writer believes, and as he hopes to prove, that the Saint did not exist during the period in which he was so reported to have lived. Dr. Ledwich came to a perfectly sound and just conclusion, when he refused to give credit to the story of St. Patrick's life and mission in the fifth century; he only erred in so far as he denied his existence altogether.

In order to prove how absolutely irreconcilable are the statements of the chroniclers respecting St. Patrick, it is only necessary to quote from William of Malmesbury, who relates that the Saint returned from a successful mission to Ireland in A.D. 433, and took up his abode in Glastonbury, where he remained for the next and

* See "History of The Church in Ireland," by Robert King, A. B.

last thirty-nine years of his life, and died there in the year 472 at the age of 111 years; and was buried in the old Church of Glastonbury, "of which he was the first abbot, and the Apostle of Ireland:"—and from the "Annals of Ulster," and the "Annals of Ireland by the Four Masters," both of which agree in the statement that the Saint commenced his labours as a Missionary in Ireland in the year 432, and that he died, according to the former of these authorities, in A.D. 492, and according to the latter, in A.D. 493, and was buried at Dun-daethglas, now called Downpatrick. We have thus his birth fixed by one chronicler to the year 361; and his death, by another, to the year 493—thus extending his life between them over the intermediate space of 132 years; and we have the successful *termination* of his mission recorded by the first-cited authority at the same date, as the two latter give for the *commencement* of his labours as a Christian Missionary. Numerous instances of equally conflicting statements might be adduced, which it is unnecessary to introduce here, as the writer may find occasion to refer to them hereafter.

That learned scholar and antiquary, the late Sir William Betham, was the first person who propounded a rational theory on the subject. The conclusion at which he arrived, after a close examination of ancient records, was, that Ireland had been Christianised by St. Patrick long before the year 432, the date assigned by most of the annalists and the writers of his Lives for the commencement of his labours in Ireland. For his arguments in support of his opinion, the reader is referred to his "Antiquarian Researches."

The conclusion to which the writer of the following pages has come, is, that St. Patrick commenced his labours as a Christian Missionary in Ireland nearly two centuries before the year 432, the date usually, but incorrectly, assigned to that event. That, about that time—viz., in 431—Palladius was ordained a bishop by Pope Celestine, and sent to the Irish people, not for the purpose of converting them to Christianity, but for the purpose of attempting to bring them, then a Christian people, into the pale of the Church of Rome:—that the Popes, successors of Celestine, during the remainder of the fifth century, sent over several other persons with the same object in view:—that Palladius and his successors, emissaries of the Church of Rome, founded several monasteries in Ireland in connection with their Church:—and that, in process of time, and