

XXVI. THE BISHOP OF IRELAND.

SHORTLY after the Roman legions had left Britain, and during one of their first raids over the wall of Severus, the Picts carried off into captivity a boy named Patrick, who was then about sixteen years of age. He was the son of a deacon, and was busy plowing when the marauders fell upon him.

The Picts, after taking young Patrick back to their mountain homes, conveyed him over the Irish Sea to Ireland, where they sold him into slavery. Patrick was obliged to watch his master's sheep on the hillside, and it was a miserable existence for the boy, as you might well imagine. Lonely in the hills, having no friend, not knowing the Irish tongue, and often in cold and hunger, Patrick turned to the God of whom he had often heard his father speak, and thus spent his lonely days in prayer, comforted by none save God alone.

After he had been a slave in Ireland for six years, Patrick dreamed a man was telling him to go to the coast, where a ship was waiting to take him home. Now death was the punishment meted out to runaway slaves, but Patrick plucked up his courage, and began walking to the coast. Miraculously, no one stopped to ask him what his business was or where he was going, so he arrived there without incident, after a journey of some two hundred miles. After hiding for a time among the reeds by the shore, he found a ship in harbor bound for Gaul, and was granted passage thither.

When they arrived at the coast of Gaul, however, they found no human being alive, or any farms anywhere, for this was the year of one of the great barbarian invasions, of which you have already heard. Finding no food, the sailors turned to Patrick, and asked since he was a Christian, whose God was all-powerful, what were they to do, since they were all starving? Patrick answered, "From the bottom of thy heart, turn trustingly to the Lord my God, for nothing is impossible to Him. And today He will send thee food for thy journey until thee are filled, for He has an abundance everywhere." No sooner had Patrick counseled thus, than a herd of pigs came rushing down the road toward them.

After many such adventures, Patrick finally arrived back in Britain, where his family, who had given him up for dead, welcomed him home. But one night shortly thereafter he had a vision of a man who handed him a letter, on which were written the words, *Vox Hi-ber-i-on'a-cum*, which is in Latin, The Voice of the Irish. The letter was from a mul-

titude of the Irish, crying, “We pray thee, holy youth, to come and henceforth walk among us.” Patrick, now a young man full of faith, was much affected by this plea, and resolved to return to them if he could.

He studied hard to become a priest, and when he was ordained, he was appointed by the bishop of Rome—who was now the spiritual head of the Christian Church in the lands of the old Roman Empire of the West—as bishop to the Irish. So it came to pass that many years later, Patrick finally made his way back to the country whence he had once escaped as a slave.

With a few followers, he landed on the Irish coast. Thence he made his way on foot to Meath, where a pagan Irish king was holding a great festival. It was the custom, at that time, that no fire should be lighted until the king had given the signal by kindling his. But Patrick, not knowing this, and stopping to keep Easter on the hill of Slane, made a bright fire there.

When its light was seen, the Irish king sent a messenger to Patrick, bidding him come and explain how he dared to light his fire before the king. An old writer tells us that Patrick immediately set out with the messenger, but that, as he went along, many prodigies took place. First, darkness fell upon the earth; then the ground shook beneath their feet; and when some of the Irish magicians would fain have stopped Patrick, they were seized by invisible hands and tossed up in the air.



Ancient Irish
Cross.

When Patrick appeared before the angry king, he began to preach to him, and such was this missionary’s eloquence that he converted not only the ruler, but also the whole clan. Journeying about from place to place, Patrick is said to have converted all Ireland, to have baptized more than twenty thousand converts with his own hand, and to have founded more than three hundred churches.

As Patrick lived so long ago, and as no record was kept of his life, many things are told about him which cannot be known whether they are true or not. Stories are told of his driving all the snakes out of Ireland into the sea, and of his working many other miracles.

The only thing of which we are sure is that he converted the Irish, and founded churches and monasteries in the island. In the monasteries he established schools, which were visited by students from all parts of the world.

The learned men trained there became missionaries, and preached in Scotland, England, France, Germany, Switzerland, and Italy, lands which were still pagan, or were newly settled by pagan Germans, as you have heard. The Irish missionaries were so enthusiastic and so earnest that they converted many of the remaining pagans, just as they had been converted by Patrick, and did a great deal of good.

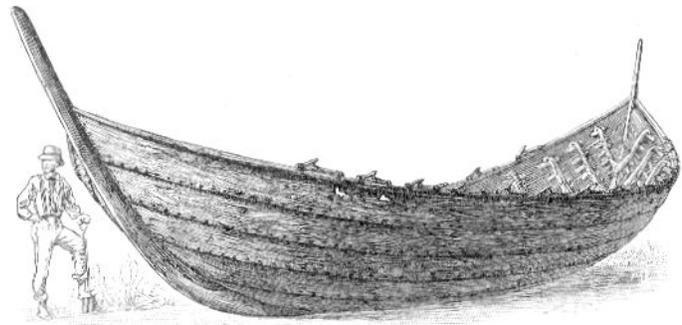
Thus the schools founded by Patrick, the first bishop of Ireland, were the foremost in Europe for about three centuries. The man who founded them is now called Saint Patrick, and he is considered the patron saint of the island where he was, in turn, slave, priest, and saint. His birthday, celebrated on the 17th of March, is one of the greatest festivals in Ireland.



XXVII. THE ANGLO-SAXONS.

YOU have seen how the poor Britons had vainly appealed to the Roman general in Gaul to come and deliver them from the Picts and Scots, who were ravaging the whole country and driving them into the sea. When the Britons realized that the Romans could not help them, they began to look around them for other aid.

In the days of the Romans, light willow barks, covered with skins, had sometimes visited the shores of the island. These boats carried hardy warriors, who came from the shores of the Baltic Sea. They belonged to the German tribes of the human family—tribes never subdued by the Romans, as you have already heard—who were then masters of nearly all the known world.



Jutish Boat.

These men were so brave that Vor'ti-gern, the Briton chief, begged some of them to come over to Britain and help him drive back the Picts and Scots. One of the Teutonic tribes, the Jutes, consented; and about the year 449 a whole fleet of little ships came dancing over the sea, which the Teu-