

THE CONFESSION OF ST PATRICK.

THERE are some points in the *Confession* of St Patrick that will, perhaps, never be cleared up. An attempt will be made in this paper to throw some additional light on four of the most important passages in the *Confession* which are intimately connected with the life and mission of the saint. These will be taken in the order of time rather than in the order of the narrative.

I

§ 26. Deum oro ut non illis in peccatum reputetur *occasio*.

§ 27. *Nam* post annos triginta invenerunt *et me* adversus verbum quod confessus fueram antequam essem diaconus.

Dr Newport White, in his edition of the text of the Latin writings of St Patrick, published by the Royal Irish Academy (1905), notes that the group of MSS C F₃ F₄ R (the Cotton, Fell or Bodleian (2) and Rouen) have *occasionum*, while B, the Bollandist MS now in the Public Library of Arras, reads *occasio. Nam*. He himself suggests 'Non illis in peccatum reputetur. Occasionem post annos triginta invenerunt et adversus verbum quod confessus fueram', &c. But the fact that *me* is read by the available MSS (A the *Book of Armagh* omitting the whole passage) after *invenerunt* is a serious objection to its acceptance. The point of St Patrick's complaint is also obscured by this emendation. That point was the *occasio*, the unfair attack of his friends. This *occasio* he prays may not be imputed to them for sin (cf. Rom. iv 3 Vulg. 'reputatum est illi ad iustitiam'). Describing it he says, 'For after thirty years they raked up against me a word which I confessed before I was made deacon'. It was the unearthing of this word, confessed at a most sacred time to his dearest friend, his *anmchara* or soul-friend of whom he says 'cui ego credidi animam' (§ 32), that constituted the *occasio* which had stirred the soul of the saint. He wonders what came over that friend ('unde venit illi?') that he should publicly bring discredit upon him with regard to the office of bishop which he had previously voted to him ('indulserat') with gladness. This gives us to understand that his enemies had been on Patrick's trail for some time, seeking some handle against him. Their action would thus explain the inconsistency of that friend upon whom pressure was brought to bear. Such a reply (*tale responsum*) he never expected from that friend. Reply to what, and when? we ask, unless during *defensio illa* to which St Patrick refers (§ 32), when searching questions were put by the *seniores* to that friend as to St Patrick's previous life; and that friend made so poor a defence. That response, that finding of the word

against him, was, therefore, the *occasio*, the advantage unfairly obtained—*occasio* having here a distinctly sinister meaning—against Patrick.

The emendation offered here makes but little alteration in the text. It is to retain *me* which is in all the available MSS, and to omit *et* which is not found in B, the best of the available MSS. The misplacement of *adversus*, which should precede *me* instead of following it, might be due to a confusion with *versus*, which follows the word it governs, and would thus be in keeping with Patrick's unfinished Latinity.

It is true that St Patrick used *adversus* correctly in § 50, 'dicite adversus me et reddam vobis', but he is there quoting 1 Sam. xii 3, after the Latin of Irenaeus.

The passage would then run :—

Deum oro ut non illis in peccatum reputetur occasio.

Nam post annos triginta invenerunt me adversus verbum quod confessus fueram antequam essem diaconus.

II

§ 26. Et quando temptatus sum ab aliquantis senioribus meis qui venerunt et contra laboriosum episcopatum meum.

Dr Bury (*Life of St Patrick* p. 318) writes: 'It is clear that this attack was made in Ireland. It seems probable that the persons described as *seniores mei* were ecclesiastics in Ireland.' Patrick refers in another passage to these *seniores*. He writes (§ 37): 'Et offendi illos, necnon contra votum, aliquantos de senioribus meis.' But he speaks of them as offended by his *contemplated* journey to Ireland; and they went so far as to form a combination to prevent it—'quia multi hanc legationem prohibebant' (§ 46). Behind his back they said, 'Why doth this fellow thrust himself into danger among enemies (*hostes*) who know not God?' (§ 46). Unsuccessful in dissuading the bishop, whoever he was, from sending Patrick, they had as a last resource questioned his friend about his early life, and at the meeting urged against his election to a charge full of dangers and troubles, as it promised to be—*laboriosum episcopatum*, with future significance—the sins of his youth. *Laboriosum* in this sense quite expresses the hypocritical concern these *seniores* affected to have for Patrick. He is ignorant; why should he imperil his life among the *hostes*?—a name which clung to our ill-starred race for many centuries (§ 46). He is a weak brother; why should he be placed in a position of so much peril and hardship? Patrick was much harassed; 'prope deficiebam', he writes (§ 28), but his mission to Ireland was not frustrated. The purpose of such opposition after he had commenced his missionary work in Ireland would be inexplicable, unless indeed Patrick had shewn himself in any objectionable way 'the

bearer of the Roman idea', but in that case the opposition would have come from the *hostes* rather than from the *seniores*.

We may not lay too much stress on the exact order in which events are narrated in this *Confessio*. Patrick wished to relate the leading facts of his life, his captivity, escape, appointment to Ireland and work there; but like a speaker or writer who has learnt more from nature than from art, he tells his story piece by piece and describes the end before he unfolds the circumstances that led up to it; e. g. §§ 37, 38 discuss the preliminary situation of which the climax is found in §§ 26, 27, 29, and the result in § 28.

III

The shame of that unhappy day when the *seniores*, who through jealousy had been working against his appointment, succeeded in making public property the secret of his life, in order to prevent his appointment to an episcopate fraught with so much labour, was branded upon the man's soul. The fact that he was *episcopus designatus* made the situation all the more bitter. Dr Newport White, in *Latin Writings of St Patrick* p. 292, makes the statement that 'designate' 'cannot mean "bishop-designate" since he was already a bishop'. In support of his theory he refers to the words *laboriosum episcopatum meum*. But these, we have seen, have a future and not a past reference. That night, however, the bishop-designate was comforted by a vision, which is described in § 29. Here again the reading is doubtful. Dr Newport White's text gives: 'Ad noctem illam *vidi in visu noctis*. Scriptum erat contra faciem meam sine honore (in visu noct. [vidi], *Boll*; *om. erat Boll*).' *Noctis* after *noctem* is doubtful, and seems due to the influence of 'vidi in visu [in sinu, A.] noctis', § 25. *Erat*, too, is doubtful. The divine response 'Male vidimus faciem designati *nudato nomine*', a little lower down, may contain the solution of the problem. Reading 'Ad noctem illam vidi in visu *nomen* scriptum contra faciem meam sine honore', 'In that night I saw in a vision a name without a title written over my face,' we should find some significance for *nudato nomine*. The substitution of *noctis* for *nomen* before *scriptum* and after *noctem* would be an error easy to explain.

Strengthened by that vision, Patrick undertook his mission to Ireland, from which he never again departed, for he was, as he says, *alligatus Spiritu* (§ 43), bound by the Spirit to its shores, even though he longed to go to Britain to visit his fatherland and parents, and as far as Gaul ('usque ad Gallias') to see his brethren. In the *Letter to Coroticus* (§ 10), he asks, 'Did I come to Ireland without God or according to the flesh? Who compelled me? I was bound by the Spirit (*alligatus Spiritu*: Acts xx 22) not to see any of my kindred'. These statements of Patrick's—of which the former was made at the end of his mission ('before I die'), and the latter after he had laboured many years in Ireland

—militate strongly against Dr Bury's theory of a visit to Rome. He writes (*Life of St Patrick* p. 153), 'It was in the year after his elevation that Patrick, according to the conclusion to which our evidence points, betook himself to Rome.' The evidence consists of a passage in the *Ulster Annals*—*probatus est in fide catolica Patricius episcopus*—which does not of necessity imply a visit at all, and the statement in Tírechán's memoir that 'he (Sachellus) went away with Patrick to study thirty years, and he ordained him in the city of Rome and gave him the name of Sachellus and wrote for him the book of the Psalms which I saw, and he (Sachellus) carried from him part of the relics of Peter and Paul, Laurence and Stephen, which are in Armagh'. It is admitted that there is some mistake in the 'thirty years'. And that mistake, joined with the fact that Patrick never spoke of relics in his writings and his ordination of Sacchellus in the Roman diocese, is sufficiently serious to render the whole passage unworthy of credence. It is also a remarkable fact that Muirchu, the other biographer of Patrick, says nothing of this visit, of which he could have made much use.

IV

§ 14. *Sine timore fiducialiter Dei nomen ubique expandere ut etiam post obitum meum exagallias relinquere fratribus et filiis meis quos in Domino ego baptizavi.*

The difficulty of this passage in the word *exagallias* (A). Dr Newport White's critical note on the word is 'A *has in marg.*, incertus liber *and z* with *~* over *g*; *exgallias* BCF₃; *ex gallicis* F₄ *corr.*; *gallias* R.' Dr Whitley Stokes understood the reading *exgallias* as *exagallias* (legacies) (*Tripartite Life* pp. 361, 673); Sir S. Ferguson renders it 'bequests' and Dr Newport White says: 'This is most certainly the same as *exagella*, which is explained by Ducange as *trutina* (balances).' But it is quite possible that *exagallias*, which has only the authority of the *Book of Armagh*, may itself be corrupt. As all the other MSS appear to hover between *Gallias* and *Galliis*, I, once thought that *ex Galliis* might have been the original reading, Patrick meaning to institute a contrast between his *fratres* who were in Gaul (cf. § 43), *sed etiam usque ad Gallias visitare fratres*, and who might be described as 'from Gaul', and his *filií* who were in Ireland (cf. *Epistola* § 2 'quos ego innumeros Deo genui'). Patrick's careless use of *ex* and *in* would give some colour to this suggestion, while the object of the sentence might be understood out of the words *Dei Nomen expandere*, which mean, *pace* Dr Bury, rather to expound than to spread abroad the name of God; cf. Lucretius i 127 '*rerum naturam expandere dictis*', and Irenaeus II xxviii 7 '*nunc in tantam audaciam venire uti pandamus Deum et quae nondum inventa sunt*'—a passage which concerns the exposition of God and not the

propagation of His Name. The sense of the passage would then be: 'So that after my death I may bequeath it (i. e. this Exposition) both to my brethren from the Gauls and to my sons whom I have baptized in the Lord.'¹ But we have a phrase that practically corresponds with *fratribus et filiis meis quos in Domino ego baptizavi* in *Epistola* § 16 *amantissimi fratres et filii quos in Christo genui*, where there is no reference to the Gauls. It is possible that the cause of the corruption of the word represented by *exagallias* and *exgallias* was either the desire to introduce a reference to the Gauls in this passage or the influence of § 43 *usque ad Gallias visitare fratres*. It has been suggested to me by the Editor that the Greek word *ἐξαγγελία* (*exaggeliá*) is behind *exagallias*; and Sophronius († 638) uses the word in the sense of 'confession of sins'. The sinister significance of the word as used in classical times had certainly disappeared in the Christian era, e. g. in 1 Peter ii 9 *ἐξαγγελητε* means 'proclaim'. It would not be impossible for this word to have been current coin in Patrick's day (as *exhomologesis* was from an early time), and it might well have been used in a wider sense than that of confession *of sins*. The sense of confession or proclamation of faith is just what is wanted in this passage. For Dr Bury's remark (printed on p. 321 of Dr Newport White's edition of the *Confession*) concerning the passage under consideration—'Doctrine is quite irrelevant to the context'—is not convincing in view of the opening words of the paragraph, 'In mensura itaque fidei Trinitatis oportet distinguere'. He suggests that *distinguere* means 'to decide', and construing the following infinitives as governed by it, renders 'Depending then on the measure of my religious faith, it behoves me to decide to spread', &c. But *oportet* seems to govern *distinguere*, *notum facere*, and *expandere*, which, as we have already suggested, refers to exposition. *Distinguere* may be used here in this sense of teaching, a possible secondary theological significance; for the theologian draws distinctions, arranges (for *distinguere* in this sense see Seneca *Troades* 884) his subject and teaches. The whole passage might then be rendered: 'And therefore it behoves me to teach in the full-proportioned faith of the Trinity, to make known the gift of God and His eternal consolation without the restraining dread of danger; and without fear, nay with all confidence, to expound everywhere the Name of God, so that after my departure I may leave my confession to my brethren and to my sons whom I have baptized in the Lord.'

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¹ § 14. In mensura itaque fidei Trinitatis oportet distinguere, sine reprehensione periculi notum facere donum Dei et consolationem aeternam, sine timore fiducialiter Dei Nomen expandere ut etiam post obitum meum exagallias relinquere fratribus et filiis meis quos in Domino ego baptizavi, tot milia hominum.