

FIECH SAINT SLETTY

A HYMN ON THE LIFE,
VIRTUES AND MIRACLES
OF ST. PATRICK

Fiech Saint Bishop of Sletty
A Hymn on the Life, Virtues
and Miracles of St. Patrick

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*A Hymn on the Life, Virtues and Miracles of St. Patrick / Composed by his
Disciple, Saint Fiech, Bishop of Sletty:*

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Saint Fiech

A Hymn on the Life, Virtues and Miracles of St. Patrick / Composed by his Disciple, Saint Fiech, Bishop of Sletty

SAINT FIECH, BISHOP OF SLETTY

As this specimen of the language spoken in Ireland about 1200 years ago, is here published, not only for the elucidation of our apostle's history, but also for the gratification of the lovers of Irish literature in general; the Irish original is accompanied, on the opposite page, with an English translation of the whole.

In this translation, the literal meaning, and idiomatic expression of the words and phrases, are adhered to in all such stanzas as the editor (with the aid of some members of the Gaelic Society, particularly conversant with subjects of this sort) could fully understand: for he acknowledges that neither he nor these gentlemen are so vain or disingenuous as to pretend that they comprehend the whole of this very ancient composition.

In order to obviate any objection which may be made against

the passages in which the editor differs from the author of the version of this hymn, in Colgan's collection of our patron saint's lives, the Latin translation adopted in *his* edition, is also subjoined to the poem, at the bottom of each page.

To the hymn are added some short notes, illustrative of the subject.

Vindication of St. Fiech's Hymn, in Answer to Dr. Ledwich's Objections

Respecting the authenticity and antiquity of this curious specimen of our language about the commencement of the sixth century, some doubts were entertained by the sagacious Bollandists, who, consequently, considered St. Fiech to have lived long after our saint's time. This opinion, those learned Jesuits founded on Fiech's referring to other *histories* for the truth of what he relates with regard to his master, St. Patrick, during the first sixty years of his life previously to his arrival on the mission of Ireland.

This plausible objection has been adopted and urged by Dr. Ledwich, against St. Patrick's existence, with that dogmatical tone of magisterial positiveness so conspicuous in his volume of invectives against the ancient splendour, sanctity, and literature of his native country, declaring that Fiech and Sedulius's poems on our saint "are the wretched productions of some cloistered ecclesiastic."

To this, the only remaining one of these formidable objections, adduced by the doctor against our apostle's existence, we answer, that Fiech lived and composed this hymn some time after St. Patrick's death, in the 120th year of his age, and 60th of his apostleship. Now supposing Fiech to have lived to the 84th year of his age, and to have composed this hymn in 600, seven years after his master's death, which he so circumstantially relates in the poem; Fiech must consequently have been no more than about 17 years of age when our saint commenced his mission here. Where, or whence, then, except by divine revelation, or from St. Patrick himself, or from the revelation of others, could his disciple derive his information with respect to St. Patrick's parents and ancestors, who lived in a foreign country? or sacred Tours, in Gaul, the place of our saint's nativity? or his original name Succoth? or his voyages and travels by sea and land, after his escape from servitude in Ireland? or his insular retreats or studies under the spiritual guidance of St. German of Auxerre? &c. &c. &c.

Now, Fiech very justly informs his readers, that all these transactions, wrought before he was born, and in a foreign country, during the first 60 years of his great master's life, were ascertained in *skelaiv*, (STORIES,) as in the first stanza; or *Fiadhaid*, *testified to us*, as he says in the sixth stanza of his poem, the only two places where Fiech appeals to others for the foreign actions performed in the early period of St. Patrick's life: of whom, though there were many lives written and published

during his existence, yet it is uncertain whether Fiech obtained his account from written or oral documents, for either may be denoted by the Irish word *Scealaw* (stories.) The term by which the translator of this hymn into Latin has rendered it, may also denote either oral or written information. In English, too, the word *history* often imports oral narration: thus Pope says:

"What *histories* of toil could I declare,
But still, long-wearied nature wants repair."

INNUIN PATRAIC

I

Genair Patraic i nem Thur,¹
Asseadh ad fét hi scēlaibh,
Macan sé m-bliadharn decc
An tan do bhreth fo dheraibh.

II

Succat a ainm hitrubhradh

¹ In the Latin translation accompanying Colgan's edition of this Hymn Neim Thur, or *Holy Tours*, is rendered into *Nemthur*, as if the two words were but one, designating a place of that name. In the fifth and ninth stanzas, the word *Lethu* or *Letha*, is rendered by *Latium* or *Italy*: upon which absurd translation, Colgan, without rectifying the mistake, observes that *Nisi Germanus dicatur degisse in eis (insulis Tyrreni maris) videtur hic preposterus ordo*; "except St. German be said here to have lived in them, (the islands of the Tyrrhenian sea,) the order of time seems preposterous." So contradictory does this appear to the Latin translator, that he has totally mistranslated the 17th and 18th verses, in which *Letha* again occurs, by his omitting the word altogether. The editor's reason for deviating from the Latin translation may be seen, at full length, in the preceding work.

Cidh a atair ba fisse,
Mac calpuirn mic Otide
Ho Deocain Odisse.²

III

Baisë bliadhna bi foghnamh
Maise doine nīs tomledh
Bitar le cothraighe,³
Ceathar trebha dia fognadh.

² Colgan, from the psalter of Cashel, traces back St. Patrick's pedigree to the 17th progenitor, thus: From the names of the above list, if they could be depended on, it would appear that St. Patrick's ancestors were of Roman origin.

³ As Father Michael Clery, one of the annalists called the four masters was employed for fifteen years previously to the Anglo-Cromwellian invasion in collecting Irish manuscripts, and translating them into Latin for Colgan's Lives of the Irish Saints, it is very probable he was the translator of this Hymn into Latin at the same time. He was also the author of an Irish dictionary of difficult words. To the translation of such a scholar, made also at a time when the language was regularly studied in the seminaries of Ireland, great deference must be paid. In this third stanza, however, the editor has ventured to deviate from his version, which runs thus, according to the Latin words "St. Patrick was six years in slavery, during which he eat not the food of the (heathenish) people. For this reason he was called Cathraige, because he served four masters." Now, as *Cothraighe* may also mean a supporter, maintainer, protector, &c. this last import of the word is adopted in the English translation.

IV

As bert Uictor fri gniadh
Milcon, teseadh far tonna
Forruibh a chois for sind leic
Maraidh dia aes ni bronna.

V

Do faidh tar ealpa uile⁴
De mhuir, bo hamhra reatha
Comdh fargaibh la *Gearman*
Andeas an deiscort leatha.

VI

An-innsibh mara toirrian

⁴ Instead of St. Patrick's running over the Italian "Alps," as the Latin translator affirms here, he travelled over all the mountains from the north to the south of Ireland, whence he took shipping for his native country; for *Ealpa uile* denotes all mountains in general.

Ainis indibh, ad rimhe,
Lëghais cannóin la *Gearman*
Is eadh ad fiadhad line.

VII

Do cum n-Erenn dod fetis
Aingil *de* hi fithis,
Menic it chithe ifisibh
Dos mcfed arithisi.

VIII

Ro po cobhair don D-Eren
Tichta Patraic for Oclat:
Ro clos cian son an garma
Macraidhi caille fochlad.

IX

Gadhadair co tisseadh in noebh

Ar a nimthised lethu,
Ar atin taradh o cloean
Tuath a h-Eren do bheathu.

X

Tuata h-Eren Tairchantais
Dos nicfead Sithlaith nua,
Meraidh co ti amartaige
Bidh fás tír temhrach.

XI

A Dhruidh ar Laoghaire
Tichta Patraic ni cheiltis,

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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