



"THEY ENTERED THE COURT TOGETHER."



IS a bright, blithe day in the city of Tours; joy-bells are merrily ringing;
The burghers are out, the school-boys shout, the girls are skipping and singing;
The champions ride in their knightly pride to ask the Bishop's blessing;
Each knight since dawn, to a friar shorn, his sins has been confessing.
By each, on breast and shield and crest, the Holy Cross is worn;
For to bear in faith that blessed sign to lands on which its light divine
Has never yet been made to shine each knight a vow has sworn.

They are going to fight for truth and right, to put down all deceivers;
Their battle-ground is Heathenry, their foes all misbelievers.
There rides Sir George with his scarf of blue; there rides Saint Andrew pale,
With his blood-red pennon and gleaming cross which lights up his rusty mail.
The good Sir Anthony follows next, with one of his steel-clad hands
Carressing his courser's glossy neck—a foal of the desert sands.
Next follows Sir Denis, gallant and gay, resplendent in gold and silk;
Saint James is there, with his silver hair, on his charger white as milk;
His armor (save only Saint Andrew's cross) shines brightest of all the seven,
A scallop-shell is his chosen crest, and his eyes are raised to heaven.
Alone and apart Sir David rides, stolid and strong and tall,
A leek in his cap of steel he wears, and the common voice of the band declares
He is stoutest of them all;
He is ever the foremost in bold attack, and ever the last to ride slowly back
On his mountain pony, shaggy and black, when he hears the sharp recall.

But where, O, where is their best-loved knight, the fiery Sir Patricius,
With his jesting word, and his ready sword, true knight, though oft capricious?
His very name asserts his claim to be of the oldest blood,
And some men say that his ancestry he can trace beyond the flood.
He has lingered to gird on a jewelled sword by a lady's scarf round his waist,
And the pavements ring with his galloping as he rides to his tryst in haste.
But what besides flies fast as he rides, some gibberish wildly crying,
With rags of frieze that float on the breeze, two brawny legs stripped bare to the knees,
And howls, like an owl's in the church-yard trees, and long hair wildly flying!

Over his head the branch of a tree, knotted and gnarled and stout, shakes he;
Well up with the war-siege on he flies, hatless and breathless, with eager eyes.
Of the seven knights in that company Sir Patricius was proudest of all, and he
Was the one least likely, as you can see,
To have picked up a follower looking like that, with no shirt, no shoes, no breeches,
no hat.
However, they entered the court together, the man hanging on to his stirrup leather.

When Saint Martin solemnly took up his word the savage's voice in a shout was heard:
Holy Lord Bishop! he roared out, stay! Don't give him your blessing! Don't send him away!
Paynimus and devils and foes galore he may find to fight on his native shore.
So, your Reverence darling, just bid him come and look after the heathen that's living at home.

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I'm his foster-brother—I'm Thaddy O'Shea—and I promised I'd bring him back over the sea.
I have followed him far and I've followed him fast, and now when I come on his tracks at last
He is off to the ends of the world, you see, and won't listen at all to the likes of me.
O holy Lord Bishop, he'll listen to you! Just try, for the Lord's sake, what you can do.
My son, said the Bishop, can this be so? Are you shirking your life work because it is low?
Have you taken the cross, have you girt on your sword, to get rid of—not further—the work of the Lord?
Or, to put it more mildly (no need would I bruise), are you willing to serve Him—so far as you choose?

My lord, my ancestral towers stand on a lone grim rock in my native land.
Round its foot are the huts of poor fishers rude, whose thoughts never soar above work and food;
And under the stone at my threshold, they say, a loathly Serpent lies night and day;
The ruin is turned to a devil's den: my vow is only to fight with men.

And because these fishers are rude and poor, and the Foul Fiend lurks at your very door,
You turn your back on your native land, and would fight for God on some foreign strand?

Go back, Sir Patrick, subdue your pride, learn the lesson taught by your Lord who died,
That whoso aspires to serve Him best must be servant and helper to all the rest.
Then the Bishop blessed all by their several names—Sir George and Sir Denis, Sir David, Saint James,
Saint Andrew, Sir Anthony—bidding each knight go whither the Lord might lead him;
But Sir Patrick stood unblessed and apart, with rage and pride in his stubborn heart,
And no man cried "God speed him!"



"A BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN WITH PITYING EYES CAME AND GAZED IN HIS FACE, TO HIS GLAD SURPRISE."

II.

That night, when his comrades all were gone, Sir Patrick walked by the Loire alone.
A beautiful maiden with pitying eyes came and gazed in his face, to his glad surprise.
Her green scarf girded his mail-clad breast, and hers was the favor he wore in his crest.

I am going, she said, to yon cloister gray, to pray for a sinner night and day.
Nothing can place him, however he fares, beyond the reach of my woman's prayers.
They will win him God's succor in peril and strife, they will soothe him in sorrow, will brighten his life.
Apart yet together, we two shall be one; he as the champion, I as the nun,
Till we sing *Nunc dimittite*, our victory won, our warfare accomplished, our triumph begun.

She vanished. Sir Patrick never knew whether her presence was vision or true.

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"LO! THUS I CONSECRATE THIS SWORD."

III.

Again all Tours keeps holiday, again church-bells are ringing;
Again the cathedral's walls give back the echoes of Christian singing.
A knight has taken the frock and cowl, and asks Saint Martin's blessing.
His sin of pride, which once defied the teachings of the Crucified,
With lowly tears confessing.

His armor on the altar lay—helm, cuirass, gauntlets, shield—
But his knightly hand still grasped the brand he had borne on many a field;
Its hilt in the form of a cross was wrought, and it glittered with jewels from India brought.

My lord, said he, one grace grant me—this sword I pray you leave me;
With it I hope, by God's good grace, to strike some stroke that may efface
The burning shame of my disgrace.
Ere Death, God's chamberlain, shall come and bid me to that higher room
Where Christ himself shall shrieve me.

Slowly the Bishop shook his head, and long he pondered ere he said:
I know not. Jewelled swords, my brother, befit thy hand no more. Far other
Must be thy weapons in God's sight; His servitor, and not His knight.
But this I promise, brother mine, no hand shall wield this sword but thine.
Go! seek some altar poor and bare, and hang this glittering bauble there.
Its sheen perchance new hope may dart into some troubled earth-bound heart,
Teaching it better to understand that the day of the Lord is nigh at hand,
When each faithful soul shall shine as a gem in some gate of the New Jerusalem.
Meantime, if God needs help of thine, by His own hand, my son, not mine,
This brand to thy hand shall be restored. Lo! thus I consecrate this sword:

I bless thee, O sword, in the name of the Lord;
I bless thee to conquer the Fiend abhorred
In whatever form he may walk abroad.
I bless thee, and blessing I dimly foresee
A day when the Seed of the Serpent shall be
Crushed, sword of Sir Patrick, by him and by thee!

The Bishop paused, his eyes shone bright with a sudden gleam of prophetic light;
He had meant to bless, but his closing words had been put in his mouth by some will
of the Lord's.

Father, said Patrick, bowing low, in penitence and hope I go
To lay this sword the Rood before, of a lowly church on a savage shore.
No lace, no gold, no jewelled sheen, have there by human eyes been seen,
Though perchance on the steps of its altar bare the tears of peasant women in prayer
For the souls and the safety of fishers at sea have shone brighter in God's sight than
diamonds to me.

IV.

It is Easter Day in Killala Bay: no joy-bells ring at dawn,
But the bell of the chapel rude and gray into the country far away



"CLANGS A NOTE OF DISMAL WARNING."

Clangs a note of dismal warning;
For two black ships in the offing lay, long serpents they from Norway,
Seen by the sexton at break of day, steering straight for Killala Bay
In the gray of a bright spring morning.

The frightened fishers round their priest, their much-loved priest, are pressing:
But, father, you can give no aid in this extremity, they said,
Beyond your prayers and blessing.

In other lands the castle stands a hiding-place in danger,
But our liege lord wields his good sword in strange lands for the stranger.
While under his castle door stone hides the Worm with the speckled skin,
No man in the stronghold would venture out, and no man will venture in.
If our knight were here we would not fear, but he wades in Paynim gore,
Nor strikes one stroke for the lowly folk who dwell by his castle door.

Then suddenly out of the wailing crowd sprang Thaddy O'Shea, and cried:
Sure I'd never have given the secret tongue till the blessed day that I died,
If it hadn't have been for those pirate ships that comes sailing over the sea.
Sir Patrick, give me the leave to speak, and don't you be mad with me.

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Good people, I say, here's our lord this day; this holy priest is he:
And sure I know, for didn't I go and bring him back over the sea.
And whose lays blame on Sir Patrick's name he'll have to settle with me!
There hangs his sword with its jewelled cross over our Rood of wood.
Bid him unloose it from the wall, and slay till its blade drips blood.
Then bid him, sword in hand, go stand on the top of the Castle Hill;
Bid him attack the Worm abhorred—I heard the Bishop speak the word—
Sir Patrick darlin'! you know, dear lord, that by the aid of this blessed sword
You may slay the Worm if you will!

No, children, answered the knightly priest: I swore I would lay this brand
Upon this altar till the Lord restores it to my hand.
The leathly Snake till then must make its fowl den where it may.
Tarry the leisure of the Lord, the Holy Scriptures say.
We will wait on His will, though He tarrieth still. My children, let us pray.

The two black ships came sailing in while the priest these words was saying,
And the Devil kept whispering in his heart: More of a knight than a priest thou art;
Take down the sword, and do thy part by fighting, not by praying.

But calm on his knees before the Rood, Saint Patrick kept his station,
And the flash of the jewelled cross shone more brilliant than ever it shone of yore,
And he prayed as he never had prayed before, Lord, lead us not into temptation!

V.

The Vikings hurried ashore; they took of the fisher folk no heed;
They made their way to the castle gray; they mounted the hill with speed.
In their train they bore to that savage shore three captives—holy nuns—
And their leaders that night had sworn to fight for the choice of those helpless ones;
And one of the three, from over the sea, was Saint Bridget, the story runs.

When the Vikings saw the Snake at the gate, Jarl Guttorm his javelin threw.
It struck the scales on the monster's back, and then it rebounded; and, ah!—good lack!—
It pierced Jarl Guttorm through.
Then stout Jarl Eric unsheathed his brand, and over it muttered a spell:
But never a stroke did he strike; for, lo! as he poised himself for a deadly blow,
His sword-arm palsied fell.

On that out spake a Christian page who had run by Jarl Guttorm's knee:
Attend, my lord, to a tale that last night your holy woman told me,
As she and I sat in the bows in the dark and gazed out over the sea.
She told of a knight—the bravest knight, she said, of the Champions Seven—
Who laid aside his armor bright, and took the robe of an anchorite,
To do the will of Heaven.
She told how the Bishop had blessed his sword all spells of the Devil to break,
And how, true to his word, he laid that sword on an altar for Jesus' sake—
For Jesus' sake—the Great White Christ; and then she added a wonder—
That that very sword, to this very day, hangs here in a church by Killala Bay—
That very church we see therewith in the bight of the cove down yonder.

Never a word said the Norse King then, but he strode forth, followed by all his men.
They entered the church, where the wailing crowd shivered and shuddered and moaned
aloud.

The Jarl marched boldly up the aisle with unbending brow and a haughty smile;
But as he drew near the chancel rail his strength and his courage began to fail.
Could it be fear that he felt when he faltered and stumbled and sank on his knee,
As the priest, by a sudden impulse stirred, held out his hand to his long-lost sword?
The sword dropped lovingly into his grasp, and he held it firm in an iron clasp.
He turned and strode toward his castle grim, Danes, Vikings, and Christians following him.

VI.

The leathly Snake grew rigid with fear. It glared on the saint as his steps drew near
With the evil glare of its evil eye;
For though the future unknown may be to Satan as well as to us, yet he
Is always conscious sooner than we when the wrath of God is nigh.

But no long time was the Worm afraid. Swiftly descended Saint Patrick's blade,
And the poisonous head to such distance flew that where it descended none ever knew.

The stone rolled back of itself; and lo! a wondrous sight could be seen below.
Thousands and thousands of snakes were there. 'Twas a devil's den; 'twas a serpents'
lair.
Green, and yellow, and speckled, and red, and every serpent raised its head;
But not a snake had power to coil, though they spat out venom as thick as oil.

Saint Patrick turned his face inland, led by a power he could not withstand;
And after him followed, under the spell, the army of serpents all pell-mell.
They came like the rats in Hamelin town, wriggling and writhing, but hurrying on,
Led by the saint and his glorious sword, impelled thereto by the will of the Lord.

The stern Norse warriors stood aghast as the army of reptiles wriggled past;
The nuns fell down on their knees before the jewelled cross that Saint Patrick bore;
And tears in Saint Bridget's soft eyes shone—her prayers had been answered, her life-
work was done.
None dimittis! she sang, until its echoes resounded from hill to hill;
None dimittis! Saint Patrick heard as he followed rather than held the sword.
Brighter and brighter its jewels shone, and faster and faster it hurried them on.

VII.

They reached a lake—a still, lone lake, all blue and bright and beaming,
With scarcely a ripple to ruffle its breast, and a golden sunset glow from the west
On its placid waters streaming;

And as they neared it, over the crest of a hill (like angels from heaven)
Came six knights riding with cross on breast—six knights come over the seas in quest
Of the comrade that each one had loved the best in that glorious band of Seven.



"ALL IN A MOMENT THE CROSS-CROWNED BRAND BROKE AWAY FROM ITS MASTER'S HAND."

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VIII.

As Saint Patrick reached the lake there came a sudden flash and a burst of flame.
All in a moment the cross-crowned brand broke away from its master's hand;
Into the light in the lake it flew, and hissing sank in the waters blue.
A moment after, and every snake that had followed the sword to the edge of the lake

The same swift plunge was compelled to take.

Pressing and hurrying madly on, till on Erin's soil there remained not one.

The wondering Norsemen saw the sign, and shouted: Our gods we resign;
Teach us, O priest, to worship thine. We yield to the White Christ Divine!

IX.

For six glad days nuns, champions, saint, the Christian faith stand preaching:

For six glad days the Danish host, that terror of the Irish coast,
Humbly receives their teaching.

Then came a day when in the lake, till sunset from sunrising,
The champions, till the light grew faint, stood in the water by the saint,
Exhorting and baptizing.

Ah! dear Saint Patrick, would that thou once more couldst reappear in
Thy native isle, and chase away the poisonous snakes that in our day
Infest the land of Erin!

Murder and hate, mistrust, unthrift, eviction, persecution—
E'en Pity turns her eyes away, and Wisdom has no word to say.
If thou canst help us, send, we pray, to the sad problem of to-day
The Gospel's own solution!



CHARACTER SKETCHES IN WESTERN IRELAND—CHILDREN CARRYING LUMPS OF PEAT TO PAY FOR THEIR SCHOOLING