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# St. Patrick and the Druid Priests

(or, "The Day of Tara")

from ["The History of the Scottish Nation" chapter 16](#)

-- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Voice/St.Patrick.of.Ireland/St.Patrick.of.Ireland.8.html> --

by J. A. Wylie

(1808-1890)

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## Introduction

by Tom Stewart

Since the times of the Apostles, it is difficult to find more drama than St. Patrick's confrontation with the Druidic priests of ancient Ireland. "Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men" (1Kings 18:22). With a modern resurgence of Neo-Paganism, Druidism, a fascination with the occult, Stonehenge, and the coming of the Antichrist, St. Patrick's confrontation with the Druidism of 5th Century Ireland, is especially instructional to the Modern Saints. "3 And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of Antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world. 4 Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is He that is in you, than he that is in the world" (1John 4:3-4). The Saints must always stand fast in the Promise of the Power and Strength of the Almighty. "For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (5:4). "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our LORD Jesus Christ" (1Corinthians 15:57). [See our editorial, "[St. Patrick: The Trinity and the Shamrock](#)" -- [http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Fellowship/Edit\\_Trinity.and.Shamrock.html](http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Fellowship/Edit_Trinity.and.Shamrock.html) --, to see that Patrick belongs to Christianity, and is *not* the property of the Roman Catholic Church.]

["The History of the Scottish Nation" chapter 16](#) -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Voice/St.Patrick.of.Ireland/St.Patrick.of.Ireland.8.html> -- by [James A. Wylie](#) -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Fellowship/James.A.Wylie.html> --,

gives an account of St. Patrick's encounter with the religion of the Druids. The occasion was the annual Festival of Tara, also known as Baal's Fire. "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word" (1Kings 18:21). [Read the illustrated "[Elijah and the Prophets of Baal](#)" -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/Stories/Stories.of.Faith/Elijah.Prophets.of.Baal.html> --, in our "[Stories of Faith](#)" -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/WStS.Stories.html#Stories of Faith> -- series.]

Wylie writes:

"Fiacc records a prediction of the poets of Erin, similar to the vaticination that prevailed among the classic nations previous to the advent of the Saviour, to the effect that a King would arise who should sway His scepter over all the earth, and establish peace among all nations. And he adds, that no sooner did Patrick appear preaching than the Druids told King Logaire that the time for the fulfillment of the prophecy was come, and that Temor, the place of their great annual festival, was about to be deserted. We give below an extract from the hymn of Fiacc... The diviners of Erin predicted

New days of PEACE shall come;  
Which shall endure for ever,  
The country of Temor shall be deserted.  
His Druids from Logaire,  
The coming of Patrick concealed not  
The predictions were verified,  
Concerning the KING whom they foretold.

And again in a very ancient dialect of the Irish language, and preserved by the scholiast on Fiacc's hymn, is the following prophecy:

He comes, he comes, with shaven crown, from off the storm-tossed sea,  
His garment pierced at the neck, with cork-like staff comes he,  
Far in his house, at its east end, his cups and patens lie,  
His people answer to his voice, amen, amen, they cry. Amen,  
Amen."

Little is known of the Druids. It is believed that the name Druid signifies *oak wisdom*. This pagan identification with the groves was known in Old Testament Israel. "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and forgot the LORD their God, and served Baalim and the groves" (Judges 3:7). The paganism of Baal worship is linked to ancient Babylonianism and the modern onslaught of Babylon the Great. [See our series, "[Babylon the Great](http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/WStS.Timeline.html#Babylon)" -- <http://WhatSaithTheScripture.com/WStS.Timeline.html#Babylon> --, for a historic and prophetic perspective of this enemy.] Modern defenders of Druidism cite Julius Caesar's writings on the Druids of Gaul as one of the few surviving descriptions of their bent to human sacrifice, pointing out Caesar's probable prejudice against these enemies of Rome, but forgetting that Rome practiced as bloody a rite as the Druids, if the crucifixion of Christ is considered. "And they crucified [Jesus], and parted His garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted My garments among them, and upon My vesture did they cast lots" (Matthew 27:35).<sup>14</sup> I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint: My heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of My bowels. <sup>15</sup> My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and My tongue cleaveth to My jaws; and Thou hast brought Me into the dust of death. <sup>16</sup> For dogs have compassed Me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed Me: they pierced My hands and My feet. <sup>17</sup> I may tell all My bones: they look and stare upon Me. <sup>18</sup> They part My garments among them, and cast lots upon My vesture" (Psalm 22:14-18).

Julius Caesar wrote of the Druids of Gaul:

"The whole nation of the Gauls is greatly devoted to ritual observances, and for that reason those who are smitten with the more grievous maladies and who are engaged in the perils of battle either sacrifice human victims or vow so to do, employing the druids as ministers for such sacrifices. They believe, in effect, that, unless for a man's life a man's life be paid, the majesty of the immortal gods may not be appeased; and in public, as in private life they observe an ordinance of sacrifices of the same kind. Others use figures of immense size whose limbs, woven out of twigs, they fill with living men and set on fire, and the men perish in a sheet of flame. They believe that the execution of those who have been caught in the act of theft or robbery or some crime is more pleasing to the immortal gods; but when the supply of such fails they resort to the execution even of the innocent."

"20 Moreover thou hast taken thy sons and thy daughters, whom thou hast borne unto Me, and these hast thou sacrificed unto them to be devoured. Is this of thy whoredoms a small matter, 21 that thou hast slain My children, and delivered them to cause them to pass through the fire for them?" (Ezekiel 16:20-21).

Read Wylie's following account of St. Patrick's victory over Druidism and rejoice that the same victory that Patrick saw over Satan, will be the victory of the Saints over Babylon the Great. "And they overcame him by the Blood of the Lamb, and by the Word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death" (Revelation 12:11).

"The LORD God omnipotent reigneth" (Revelation 19:6)!

Maranatha!

--Tom Stewart

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by J. A. Wylie

The "Day of Tara," the greatest day in the career of Patrick. This day transferred the scene of his labours from the rural hamlet, with its congregation of rustics, to the metropolitan Temor, with its magnificent gathering of the clans and chieftains of Ireland. The year when the event we are about to relate took place, it is impossible to fix. The legends of fourteen hundred years leave in great uncertainty both the object of the festival and the season of the year when it was usually celebrated. The modern writers who have attempted to clear up the matter, after hazarding a multitude of guesses, and expending no little critical lore, have left the matter very much where they found it. We shall not follow their example by indulging a profitless discussion over the subordinate circumstances of an

event, the substance and issues of which are all that concern us; and in these all are agreed. Like all the great festivals of the age, that of Tara was, probably partly religious, partly political; the priesthood, to whom the regulation of such affairs was mainly committed, taking care, doubtless, to make the former character predominate. We shall keep as clear as possible of the mythicism of legend, and guide ourselves by the probabilities of the case.

The great annual festival of Tara, called "Baal's fire," was at hand. No other occasion or spot in all Ireland, Patrick knew, would offer him an equal opportunity of lifting his mission out of provincial obscurity and placing it full in the eye of the nation. The king, accompanied by the officers of his court, would be present. To Tara, too, in obedience to the annual summons, would come the chieftains of the land, each followed by his clan, over which he exercised the power of a king. The priests would there assemble, as a matter of course; nor would the bards be wanting, the most influential class, after the priests, in the nation. The assembly would be swelled by a countless multitude of the common people out of all the provinces of Ireland. Patrick resolved to lift high the standard of the cross in presence of this immense convocation. The step was a bold one. If he should convince the monarch and his people that Druidism was false, and that the Gospel alone was true, the victory would be great, and its consequences incalculable. But should he fail to carry the assembly on Tara with him, what could he expect but that he should become the victim of Druidic vengeance, and die on the altar he had hoped to overthrow? That his blood should fall on the earth was a small matter, but that the evangelization of Ireland should be stopped, as it would be should he perish, was with Patrick, doubtless, the consideration of greatest moment. But full of faith, he felt assured that Ireland had been given him as his spiritual conquest. So girding up his loins, like another Elijah, he went on to meet the assembled Druids at Tara, and threw down the gage of combat in the presence of those whom they had so long misled by their arts, and oppressed by their ghostly authority.

Mixing with the multitudes of all ranks which were crowding to the scene of the festival, Patrick pursued his journey, and arrived in the neighbourhood of Tara without attracting observation. He and his attendants immediately began their preparations. Ascending the hill of Slane, which, though distant from the scene of the festival, was distinctly visible from it, the little party collected the broken branches and rotten wood which were lying about and piling them up on the summit of the hill, they applied the torch and set the heap in a blaze. The flame shot high into the air. Its gleam cast a ruddy glow far and wide over the country around. On that night the fire on every hearth in Ireland must by law be extinguished. If even a solitary lamp were seen to burn, the rash or profane man who had lit it drew down upon himself the heavy penalties which fenced round the great annual solemnity of Tara. And yet on yonder hill of Slane, growing ever the brighter as the dusk deepened, a bonfire was seen to blaze. How came this? Some impious hand had kindled this unhallowed flame! The priests beheld the inauspicious portent with surprise and indignation. The ancient and venerable rites of Tara had been mocked, and the great act of worship, the solemn celebration of which, year by year, called together the whole nation of Ireland, had been studiously and openly outraged. Terrible calamity was sure to follow so flagrant an act if permitted to go unpunished. If the altar was thus contemned, how long would the throne continue to receive the reverence and obedience of the people? Let the king look to it. So reasoned the priests. They loudly demanded that the perpetrator of this odious deed should be sought for and made answerable for his crime. The fire that continued to blaze on the summit of Slane guided the pursuers to the man whom the king and the Magi sought. Nor was Patrick loath to accompany the messengers to the presence of the king, seeing it was with this

object that he had kindled this fire, to Druid so prophetic and ill-omened.

At last we behold Patrick at the gates of the citadel of Irish idolatry. If he shall succeed in storming this stronghold and replacing the black flag of the Druid, which for ages has floated over it, with the banner of the Cross, Patrick will have enlisted in the service of Christianity a race rude and unprofitable at this hour, but rich in noble gifts, which need only to be awakened by the Gospel to burst into the fair blossoms of literature, and ripen into heroic deeds of faith and grand evangelistic enterprises. The apostle of Ireland now maintains the great controversy between Druidism and Christianity in presence of the king, the priests, the chieftains, and the septs of Ireland. No chronicle records the arguments he employed on this great occasion. Tradition has forgotten to carry down these, though it has carefully treasured up and transmitted a load of prodigies and wonders which transform the preacher of truth who yields only the "Sword of the Spirit" unto a necromancer who conquers by magic. Not so the man who now stood before Logaire, the reigning king.

The monarch beheld in Patrick a man plain in dress, like one who dwelt more in the wilderness than in cities, his features roughened by exposure to sun and storm, yet stamped with an air of great dignity. On his brow the close-knit gathered lines of resolve; in his eye the fire of a lofty zeal; his voice strung with energy; his words courageous, but calm and wise; every step and movement of his person betokening self-possession. No such man had Logaire ever before looked upon. Rugged, weather-beaten though he was, no one of all the Druids at his court had ever inspired him with such awe as this prophet-like man. He must hear what he has to say. The king motions to the courtiers to stand aside and let the strange figure approach; he bids the Druids be still. There is silence, and Patrick speaks. Respectfully, yet not flatteringly, fearlessly, yet not offensively, does Patrick address Logaire. To know what is in man is to possess the secret of moving and ruling him. Patrick knew that in the heart of the monarch, as in that of the serf, is a deep-seated sense of guiltiness, and an equally deep-seated foreboding of punishment, and that no sooner does reason unfold than this burden begins to press. It is a shadow that will not depart.

To find a region where this specter cannot follow one, a region where the heart, weary of its burden, may lay it down, is the object of desire and pursuit to all living. But before showing Logaire how this craving of his heart was to be met, Patrick must first stir yet more deeply the sense of guiltiness within him. He must awaken his conscience. With this view he appeals to his sense of sin; and what is this sense but just the being within himself testifying that there is a law which he has transgressed. He points to the forebodings and terrors which haunt him; and what are these but witnesses that cannot lie, and that will not be silenced, that there is a penalty attached to transgressions, a judgment to come. Thus does the preacher avail himself of the monitions of the moral sense, the lights of nature, not yet wholly extinguished, to lead his vast audience around him through the deep night that enshrouds them to a clearer light.

He asks them whether it is not these fears this pale specter which has driven them to the altars and sacrifices of the Druid? whether they have not sought these bloody oblations in the vague hope of expiation and relief? Well, have you found the rest you seek? At the altar of the Druid, has the sense of guilt left you? Has the blood that streams on it washed out the stain? If you shall permit your hearts to speak, they will answer, No, the sin is still unpurged, and the terror is still unconquered. Why, multiply rites which are as profitless as they are cruel? Flee from these altars whereon never yet came

victim that could avail for expiation.

Cease from these sacrifices of blood, which pollute, but do not cleanse, the offerer. Listen to me. I will tell you of a better altar, and a greater Priest, a Priest who has opened to you the road to the skies. I will tell you of a Father who sent His Son to be a sacrifice in your room. That Son, having offered His sacrifice, and returned from the tomb, as the conqueror of death, has ascended into the heavens, and now sitteth on the right hand of His Father, the crown of an everlasting dominion on His head. He is sending His ambassadors to all nations to proclaim that there is not a wanderer on the face of the earth, there is not one of the sons of men, the humblest, the vilest, the guiltiest, who is not welcome to return, and who shall not be received by the Father, coming by that Priest, who, having no sin of His own, was able to make a real and complete expiation of the sin of others.

On these lines, doubtless, did Patrick proceed in announcing the "good news" to this great assembly. With a Divine message there ever comes the co-operating influence of a Divine power. That power meeting the sense of guilt within, opened, doubtless, not a few hearts for the entrance of that message of a grace and love so stupendous, of a compassion and benignity so boundless, surpassing even in its scope and grasp the wide extent of their own vast misery and helplessness, that they felt that such a purpose could have its origin in no human heart; it infinitely surpassed the measure of man; it could originate only in the bosom of the great Father. On that bosom did many of those now around Patrick cast themselves. Turning away from the fires of Baal, and the altars of the Druids, they clung to the one sacrifice and the one Saviour whom Patrick had preached to them.

Among the converts of the day of Tara were some who held high rank and enjoyed great consideration in the nation. The king remained unconverted, but the queen and her two daughters transferred their faith from the altars of the groves to the Cross of Calvary. A few days after the queen's conversion, the Christian party in the royal court was reinforced by the accession of the king's brother, Connal, who was not ashamed to confess himself a disciple of the Saviour. There followed, lower in rank, but perhaps higher in influence, Dubbach, chief of the bards, whom we should now call poet laureate, but who possessed an authority far beyond any known to this functionary in our day. To these is to be added a name not less eminent than any of the preceding ones, that of Fiecc. Logaire remained on the side of the old religion, though, it would seem, cooled in his attachment to it.

If the address of Patrick had not resulted in the conversion of the monarch, it had at least overcome his scruples to having the Gospel preached throughout his dominions. The Druids, it is said, had assured him that if this new doctrine should prevail, his throne would not be secure. The king had listened, but had failed to discover any ground other than illusory, for the fears with which it was sought to inspire him. Patrick might go wherever he would throughout his territories and proclaim the new faith. If his people should embrace it, well, the Druid might be less potential, but his subjects would be none the less loyal, nor his own throne any the less secure. These were the triumphs of the day of Tara.

**The End**

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