

How Dark Patrick Saved the Honour of Ireland.

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AT that time Ireland was known and noted far and near, through the length and the depth of the known and the unknown world, as the saith of I'arnin'.

It would take a man a June day to count the colleges of it, and the common schools were as plentiful as blackberry bushes. The greatest school, and the grandest of them all then, and the far-famedest, was the Great High School of Munster, which was heard about and envied everywhere the wind blew. To the High School of Munster princes and potentates from all countries of the world flocked in flights like starlings, fetchin' to it heads as empty as milk-crocks in March, and bringin' them away again as full of I'arnin' as an egg's full of mait.

For centuries, and long, and hundreds of years besides, this was the way; and the High School of Munster was cock of the walk, holdin' for Ireland the honours of the world. But after it had populated the English nation with I'arned scholars, the English King, beginnin' for to get covetious of the honours that had for hundreds of years been going to Ireland, built a Great High School for England in the heart of London, and he stocked it with the primest scholars that could be coaxed or co-arc'd, brought, bought, or bribed, from any of the world's countries, not by no means forgettin' Ireland—from where he drew the bulk of the best of them. And at long last there is no denying but that he had reared up a staff of professors who certainly banged, every man in his own branch of knowledge, anything to be found in the High School of Munster. Sore this put upon Munster and Ireland when they come to admit it to themselves, and sorest of all on the King of Munster, the apple of whose eye was the High School.

Now the King of England, he come over to tour in Ireland, an' travellin' to all arts and parts in the country, he come to Munster. Of course, he was lodged with the King there, and great festivities entirely was given for him, and there was kings and chieftains, bishops, doctors, and scholars, sat down to the table in his honour.

And when they had the wine in, the King of England and the King of Munster went to

variance as regards which of their schools was the greatest. And he dared the King of England to contest the matter afore the world. The King of England jumped at the challenge, said it was a bargain, an' there an' then clinched it afore the King of Munster would get time to rue. There was a day and a date fixed for the great argument atween the scholars. And then the King of England went home with happiness in his heart to prepare his men for the contest.

To make the disgrace of Ireland all the deeper, too, he advertised the thing over all the known and unknown world. And all the world was on its toes to see if the wonderful High School of Munster was at last to go under.

In Ireland they lost heart of hope, for they knew there was no denying the superiority of the High School of England; and every man blamed everyone else, and all men blamed the King of Munster. And the professors of the High School of Munster had to be tied down in their beds, or they'd go stark, staring mad through woods at thought of the terrible exposure that was going to come upon their famous school. The nearer, too, it came to the awful day, the worse became the state of the country, and the trouble and grief that was weighin' down the people's hearts was deplorable to witness.

It was now that a stout little black-haired, black-whiskered man, and poor man, who went by the name of Dark Patrick at home in Donegal, and was known and noted among the neighbours a long way round for his wisdom and for his wonderful clever intelligence—it was now, I say, that this little dark man suddenly put in his appearance in Munster, headin' for the High School, for which he had pushed out from his home a week afore when he heard how bad things had got an' how black things were looking—with a red bundle on the stick over his shoulder. On this dark little man no one passed any remark—only directed him the way he inquired for; and he, for his part, had nothing to say either about himself or the arrand he was on, and had no boast or no brag with him—for Dark Patrick's good word upon himself never during a long lifetime had parted his lips. On the very evenin' before the great day of the contest the little man, weary-worn and travel-stained, reached the

High School at last—just when it was in the deepest depths of despair and there was nothing but woe and wailing within it and without. He pushed his way in through the gatherings of people that blocked the way, crying for company in crowds, an' he asked for to see the head man of all the college. When he come into his presence he said to Dark Patrick :—

“Who are you, me good man? or where are you from? or what can I do for you? Hurry yourself up,” says he, purty curt that way, “for I have little time to waste on you.”

Says Dark Patrick, says he, “Who I am doesn't matter much, nor where I come from—though I am not ashamed to own that it is Donegal. I don't think,” says he, “sir, that you can do much for me, though I thank you all the same. I have come,” says he, “hearin' of the great trouble that you and your college and all the people are in—come to see if I can find a way out of it for ye.”

The professor looked at Dark Patrick, and looked at the little red bundle on the stick which he had placed on the ground beside him, an' he put out of him a guffaw that was both long and loud—the first laugh that he had given for thirteen weeks. And when the people heard the head man laughing like this they crowded into the great hall where he was with Patrick to find what was the matter, anyway; and when they saw the little man and heard the arrand he had come

upon, they opened their throats and laughed ten times louder again. And their laugh reached the ears of the King of Munster, who come running in then to find if a miracle had happened. Patrick, he sat upon his chair as cool as a trout in a pool, lookin' modestly upon the ground and saying never a word. The great professors pointed out Patrick to the King of Munster, telling him the arrand he was come upon—to save the

name and fame of their college and the honour of Ireland. And then they roared with laughin' again until they thought their sides would split. But the King of Munster he never laughed at all, at all, as they expected he would, but he listened to them awhile in astonishment, and he told them that for so far he saw no reason for laughter whatsoever. And said that, though they did not think it, he could assure them that men who had never entered a college sometimes had brains too, an' sometimes could raison out things, and do things, that would surprise ye.

And then he turned to Patrick, an' he questioned him, very gentlemanly, and with a deal of respect, that made the ignorant professors gape in their wonder,

an' he asked him what plan he proposed to save the name and the fame of the High School of Munster and the honour of Ireland. Patrick in reply asked how and when the seven English professors was expected; and the King he told him that they were due at the High School on the stroke of twelve



“THEY CROWDED INTO THE GREAT HALL TO FIND OUT WHAT WAS THE MATTER.”

o'clock the next day. And Dark Patrick then requested to know if he could have three picked professors of the High School of Munster at his disposal two hours afore that time. And the King of Munster said he surely could—thirty-three if he wished. That satisfied Patrick, and he said, "We'll see what we'll see in the mornin'." He was the only man who slept in Ireland that night.

And in the mornin' all the professors were gathered by command of the King of Munster, and Patrick was brought in and told for to take his pick and choice. And Patrick requested for their first Latin scholar, and their first Greek scholar, and their first Hebrew scholar to step out. And this was done. And then he requested three suits of very ragged labourers' clothes, an' three nappin' hammers for breakin' stones. These things was soon all

produced. Then Patrick gave to each of the three great professors one of the ragged suits, and he told them to step into a private room and peel off them their professors' dresses, an' get themselves into the labourers' clothes without no waste of time. The three professors, when they heard this, got the colour of a crow in the countenance, and instead of obeying would have given Patrick the worst word in their jaw, only that they found the King of Munster looking hard at them. And he said to them sharp and

short, "Get off with yous, sirs, and do as the gentleman bids yous." So they went off, dogged enough, into a private room, and changed their clothes, an' come out again, looking spectacles for all the world. And only no man dared laugh for feard of the King of Munster, all the other professors would have laughed the roof off the house with the roar that they were now doing their best to

try to smother inside of them. Then Patrick, taking the three stone-br'akers' hammers in his hand, said to the three lads:—

"Now, please, come with me."

Then, with the three great scholars decorated as I'm tellin' ye, Patrick set out along the road that the London professors was very soon expected to come. They journeyed only a mile from the college, when they come to a cross-roads, and at this cross-roads there was as usual an old man sittin' on a heap of stones br'akin' them, and Patrick put this ould man off the heap, an' he beckoned the Hebrew scholar, an' he put a hammer into his fist, an' mounted him upon the heap in the old man's place, and told him to bang away as if he was breakin' for a wager. And then he whispered into his ear some private directions that scattered



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the doggedness from the Hebrew scholar's countenance in a jiffy and made him smile to the back of his neck. And then he went forward with the other two professors. And at the next cross-roads he met, which was three miles from the college, he put a hammer into the fist of the Greek scholar an' put him on top of the heap of stones that was there, chasin' away the ould fellow that was on it, an' he told the Greek scholar to bang away at the stones hard. And he whispered something private into his ear

likewise, that made him laugh with wonder. And then with the third man he went forward till he met the third cross-roads, which was six miles from the college. And into this man's hand, which was the Latin scholar, he put the last hammer he had, and placed him on the heap of stones there, and told him to bang away also; and whispered to him his private directions likewise, making him

roar till he rolled off the heap with laughter. And Patrick, who was as grave now as he had been every minute of his life, picked him up and set him on top again.

Lo and behold ye! the last man wasn't long banging at his heap of stones, till along the road comes tearin' the coach with the seven picked scholars from London, the greatest and most renowned scholars in the world. And when they come as far as the cross-roads, not knowing which road to take, they made the coachman haul up, and they looked about them, an' they, of course, observed the lad banging at the heap of stones, and says they, "Here's an ould stone-br'aker on this heap of stones will direct us on the right way." So they put time o' day on the ould stone-br'aker, an' they axed him if he would please direct them on the right road to the High School of Munster. Back again to them

the ould stone-br'aker gave time of day, and likewise directions concerning the right way to the High School of Munster, *all in Latin!*

When they heerd this the seven lads in the coach gasped for breath, an' fell back dumfounded for five minutes. They had come all the way from London in the height of high spirits at the prospect of overcomin' the High School of Munster and winning in the world's eyes first fame for their own school for all time. But now for the first time since the challenge had been taken up their courage begun for to give way.

They were brave, detarmined fellows, though, that the devil couldn't daunt. So they called

on their coachman to go ahead on the right diraction for the High School of Munster; an' they pulled out their note-books, in which they were keeping a record of all the happenings of their journey, and the seven of them wrote down in these: "Six mile from the gates of the High School of Munster the stone-br'akers on the roadsides spaiks Latin only in ordinary conversation."

An' they lay back in their seats, thinkin', till they came to the next cross-roads. And here they were in a quandary again regarding which was the right road to take. And they looked out of the window, and they saw an ould stone-br'aker banging away at a heap of stones. An' one of them called out to him givin' him time o' day, an' asked if he would please put them on the corrract road to the High School of Munster. The ould stone-br'aker looked up from his work an' gave them time of day back again an'

the proper directions on the road that led to the High School of Munster, *all in Greek!*

When they heerd this the seven poor men groaned as one and turned white in the countenance; an' they didn't let the coachman move a step now until they first consulted amongst themselves what was best to do, or whether it was wiser to go ahead towards the High School, or turn an' make a clean run for the Port of Dublin and home. They disputed on it—some of them for still going ahead an' some of them for turning the coach an' hurrying back with all haste to where they come from. And they put it to the vote. And there was threë for goin'



"ONE OF THEM CALLED OUT TO HIM GIVIN' HIM TIME O' DAY."

ahead, an' three for goin' back, an' one man was in swithers; but being an extra brave fellow he couldn't anyhow be daunted or dared; so he at last threw in his vote for goin' ahead likewise. And, after, they wrote down in their note-books: "Three mile from the gates of the Great High School of Munster the stone-br'akers on the roadsides spaiks Greek only in ordinary conversation."

And then they directed their driver to drive ahead. The hearts of the poor men were near a'most as low as their heels, goin' forward; and they wished to Heaven it was the seven men they hated most in the High School of London that had been sent on this arrand instead of themselves.

But, behold ye! within a mile of the High School of Munster they come upon another cross-roads, an' the coach was dhrrawn up here too, for there was no tellin' which was the correct way to take. One of them looked out, an' beheld an ould stone-br'aker on a heap here, breakin' away at stones for the dear life. He put time of day on him, and asked him if he would please direct them upon the proper road to the High School of Munster. And the ould stone-br'aker lifted his head from his work, and made his bow back to him, an' give him time of day an' all directions for reachin' the High School of Munster, *completely in Haybreew.*

The seven l'arned professors shoved their heads all together out of the coach windows and roared at the dhriver to dhrive like the divil for Dublin. Then they fell back and fainted in one another's arms. And when they found themselves rolling along far away from Munster, and safe again, an' got command enough of their narves, they drew out their note-books an' wrote down in them:—

"One mile from the gates of the Wonderful High School of Munster the very stōne-

br'akers on the roadsides scorn to spaik anything but Haybreew in their ordinary conversation. By a clean race we saved from everlasting disgrace the name and the fame of the High School of London."

The roars of joy that went up from the High School of Munster when they heerd of the flight of the Englishmen is past my poor powers for to describe. And the joy of Munster's King—and of all of the people, too, within bounds of Ireland—surpasses anything that ever was known afore or since, for that the name of their High School was saved, and likewise the honour of their country.

Under cover of all the noise Dark Patrick mounted his bundle on his stick and started off for home again. And when the King of Munster come to himself, and asked to have the little dark man brought into his presence, and l'arned that he was departed, he sent after him eminent gentlemen of his Court on

horseback, an' a gilt coach along with them, to overtake him an' command him to come back in triumph, that he might bestow on him the honours, and the rank, and the wealth, that he 'arned so richly and so well desarved. And when these men overtook Patrick while he was tramping along a bare road far north, and told him the grand news they had for him, Patrick paused, and advanced modestly an' humbly, an' told them to go back and thank their King for him for his kind intentions, and to tell him that he neither 'arned nor desired honours, rank, nor riches; that he had only done what was any plain man's duty to do, and that the only one request in the world he had to ask of kings was to

leave him to peace and content—both which were his in his little cabin, on his little hillside, in Donegal. Then he bid the gentlemen God-speed, and bent his face north again.



"DARK PATRICK MOUNTED HIS BUNDLE ON HIS STICK AND STARTED OFF FOR HOME AGAIN."