



PATRON SAINTS OF THE BRITISH ISLES

BY

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*By virtues three,
Love, obedience, humility,
Poor men saints may be.*

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Editor's Note:

The reader is reminded that these texts have been written a long time ago. Consequently, they may use some terms or express sentiments which were current at the time, regardless of what we may think of them at the beginning of the 21st century. For reasons of historical accuracy they have been preserved in their original form.

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[Sculptor]

[J. Miller, Chipping Campden]

ST. GEORGE

(Figure from Chester War Memorial)

PATRON SAINTS OF THE BRITISH ISLES

ST. GEORGE

A long, long time ago, a young Roman noble rode through Palestine to take up his appointment as Governor of the city of Lydda. As he drew near the town all the people came out to welcome him, and brought him in with great rejoicing. The Emperor's proclamation was read aloud; the new Governor sacrificed to the gods, and afterwards went to his own house. On the way he passed a villa, in which, instead of signs of joy and welcome, there was every token of great mourning, and upon enquiry he was told that it was the house in which lived the widow of his predecessor.

The Roman Governor dismounted and asked for an audience, and the mistress of the house received him, with her little son by her side. The Governor was so pleased with the bearing of this small boy, who acted as his mother's protector throughout the interview, that he offered to take him into his household and train him to be a soldier.

So the small boy, who afterwards became St. George of England, went with his new friend, and grew up as a Roman soldier in the service of the Emperor. But having been born of Christian parents, he held to his own faith, and the Governor suffered this, for he cared for none of those things, but was anxious only to make the boy a good soldier. In fact, in those days in the Empire no one cared much what a man's faith might be, provided that he was a good citizen and kept the laws.

Thus St. George grew up, loved by his friends and feared by his enemies. He was of a happier nature than most Romans, perhaps because his parents had been Greek, and fife for him was one long triumph. He was so strong and brave and splendid that everyone who knew him loved him, and he made life seem a finer thing than other people found it. Moreover, he had great possessions and used them well, and when he came to manhood the world lay as much at his feet as it had lain at the feet of Caesar.

St. George took his share of work and responsibility in the true Roman fashion. He learned to endure hardness as a good soldier. He knew the weight of the heavy Roman shield, slung from the shoulders on the long marches; the pressure of the helmet's rim across his forehead; the burning thirst of the desert, and the bitter cold of the hills. He learnt the pitiless, unvarying step of the Roman legion, three miles an hour, eight hours a day, till the end was reached. And he marched where his orders took him, from Lydda to Byzantium, from Byzantium to the Persian frontier, and back from there in two years' time when the campaign was over, to the court at Nicomedia. There he became a great favourite with the Emperor Diocletian, who loved him for his fearless spirit and his upright mind. At length, orders came again, and St. George marched westward by way of Illyrica to Rome itself. He stayed in Rome a long while and saw many things, until one day a command went forth, and he took his men through the streets and halted them at the Flaminian Gate to salute the altar of Victory which stood there. (St. George could not help that. The men would not have followed him without it. They forgave him his Christianity because they knew he could fight.) So he led them forth along the old Flaminian way, northward through Italy, by Caesar's road to Marsilia, and up through Gaul, till there came a day when he looked out over a grey and choppy sea to an island called Britannia, and for a short while after that he was very ill indeed.

Now there ruled in Britain at that time a kind of sub-Emperor called Constantius Chlorus. He held his court in the city of York. His son, afterwards Constantine the Great, became a friend of St. George, for they were both of the Christian faith. Constantine was not a particularly good

Christian. In fact, he was not particularly good at anything. He had his place in the scheme of things long afterwards, and he got more credit than he deserved.

When St. George had been at York for a year or two, news came through from the southern parts of the Empire that Diocletian had ordered a great persecution of the Christians. They had always been persecuted more or less severely, but this was a sterner edict than usual. It involved everyone who held the Christian faith, and though nobody bothered much about it up in Britain, the Christians in the other parts of the Empire suffered severely.

When St. George heard of this persecution he was faced with a great dilemma. Hitherto his faith had cost him little, but this matter of a general decree against Christians, simply as Christians, touched his honour because it was so unfair. There were any number of other religious sects and societies within the Empire, and none of their adherents was persecuted unless they broke the law. St. George felt that he ought to be sharing in the troubles of his fellow-Christians, but his duty called him two ways, and he knew not how to choose between right and right. On the one hand there was his honour as a soldier which bound him to obey the Emperor's commands, and upon the other there was his faith as a Christian which bade him stand fast and declare the truth. And at last it seemed right to him to give up the work he loved and the friends and comrades who loved him, in order to go and plead with the Emperor in the cause of Christianity.

At this stage St. George did the most natural thing in the world. He confessed his trouble to his friend. They were standing on the ramparts of York, and Constantine opened his eyes wide and played with the tassel of his toga. (He did not wear armour in hot weather.)

“You're mad,” he said at last. “Why it means your whole career.”

That was just what it did mean, and St. George knew it.

“Besides,” added Constantine, after a pause, “Diocletian would never listen. You know what he's like, when he once gets an idea into his head. You could do no good. And one can't help persecutions. They happen everywhere. After all, what are these people to you?”

“They are my brethren,” answered St. George shortly, and he walked along to the end of the rampart and stood there, looking out over the country with his chin in his hand.

Constantine watched him for a while, and shrugged his shoulders. He had no use for brethren of that sort. After a time he went down to the hall and called for a cup of wine. He was not really a bad man, but he just had not got it in him to appreciate the best.

The end of the struggle was that St. George asked for leave of absence to go home and look after his estates. He did not dare to tell his men the real reason. So all through the long, hot summer days he rode southward through Gaul, going from city to city, and seeing wherever he went the signs and tokens of Rome's power and glory. All the things he had ever known and cared for passed before him on that journey; all the traditions in which he had been reared, the symbols he loved and honoured, which were as much a part of him as his own hands and feet. He saw the bridges and roads and aqueducts built by Rome. He saw the Legions marching from station to station, and the posts galloping from end to end of the Empire. He saw the way in which the barbarians came to Rome for equity and justice, and wherever he went he came across the results of her rule and training, in which he had been so proud to bear a part. For he was a free-born Roman although his parents had been Greek, and the things that Rome stood for were part and parcel of his life.

Therefore he rode slowly on horseback along the straight, paved, Roman road, and he noticed all the little things to which he had been accustomed; the salutations in the market-place; the deference paid him as a Roman officer; the instant obedience to his slightest

command. He had taken such things for granted until now, and it seemed as though he could not face life without them. Moreover he loved riding, and knew that he might never ride again. But the worst thing of all was when he saw the Eagles flying over some camp or battlement, and turned aside that he might not have to salute them because he felt himself a traitor to all that they meant.

In due time he arrived at Lydda, and when he reached home his mind was made up. The first thing he did was to resign his command. Then he sold all that he had, freed his slaves, said good-bye to his friends (who all thought him demented) and started out on foot to carry through his quest. He went in the clothes of an ordinary citizen, for he was no longer entitled to wear armour, but since it was not safe to travel without a weapon of some sort, he took an old cross-hilted sword which had belonged to his father, and in this fashion he journeyed through Palestine.

Now going on foot through a hostile country (for the persecutions were in full swing and no man feared to attack him) St. George came after many dangers to the city of Silene, and beheld a maiden in great distress standing without the gate.

St. George stopped and asked the cause of her trouble, and heard that she was placed there as the victim of a dragon which devoured the inhabitants of Silene.

“This may not be,” said St. George, frowning, “and I marvel that they should send a maid to such a fate. Are there no men in Silene?”

“There are but few left,” replied the maiden, “and they are our sole defence, so my father the king dares not let them go. Therefore it behoves the women to die and the lot hath fallen to me.”

“Now by my faith,” cried St. George, “this is an evil thing, and I will fight it as best I may.” And he turned and went forth to seek the dragon.

To fight a dragon in such wise, and with no armour save a sword, seemed certain death, but St. George held on his way, and the Princess saw him disappear over the nearest hill. Then she waited a long time, standing just where she had been placed, being too fearful to go forward and too proud to go back; and presently she saw St. George coming towards her dragging the head of the beast behind him.

“How did ye vanquish the dragon?” she cried out.

“By the power of the cross,” answered St. George, and he held up his sword.

Then the Princess ran to the city gates crying out that the dragon was slain, and all the people came out to hear and rejoiced exceedingly. They brought St. George in with great triumph, and feasted him royally, and he stayed awhile in Silene. And as he stayed he became conscious of a fresh trouble, for he had thought himself proof against all temptations until his quest should be ended, and he found that this was not so. Honours and friendship and the respect of men he had given up, and at the bottom of his heart he knew that few men could have done so, and he gloried in the sacrifice. But in Silene he discovered that there were still things he wanted and cared for, things which came between him and the work he was called to do. So day after day he meant to go and night after night he stayed, until it became common talk among the citizens of Silene that he would wed the Princess.

At length the King approached him in the great hall and offered him the Princess’s band in marriage, and at that St. George got to his feet and faced the people. He told them that he was a Christian and that his purpose was to seek out the Emperor and beg for mercy on those of the Christian faith; and he explained how to this end he must leave all things behind him having no glory save in God. The people heard him in silence, and when St. George had finished speaking and had thanked them for their hospitality, he passed down the hall and out

of the great door, and no man stopped him. But he left his heart behind him and travelled none the lighter on that account.

After many weeks of journeying St. George reached Nicomedia, and there the first thing which he saw was the decree against the Christians posted up on the city wall. He stepped forward, tore it down and rent it in pieces.

They took him before the Emperor then, as he had hoped, and he spake boldly, showing that the Christians harmed no man, but were a peaceable people who worshipped the one true God and loved their neighbours. But Diocletian would not listen, and St. George's efforts were useless. He lay for many weeks in prison, facing the bitterness of failure, and knowing that all his sacrifice had been in vain. Then they tortured him as they did all Christians who would not abjure their faith, but St. George held firm. Next they offered him his freedom, together with promotion in the army, if he would deny Christianity, but he refused the temptation. Neither failure nor torment nor loneliness could overcome him, and having given up all of his own free will he ended by laying down his life for his friends.

For many years the death of St. George was a matter of no moment save to those who had loved him, but in the course of time young Constantine of York became Emperor of the Romans, and coming to Rome with much pomp and ceremony he bethought him of the young companion who had given up so much for his faith. Then the Emperor caused a costly tomb to be erected at Lydda, and decreed that his friend should henceforth be known as "Saint George, the Champion of the Christian Faith." And for some seven hundred years St. George was the guardian saint of all Christian warriors, and his emblem, the rose, was grown in the graveyards of the churches dedicated to his memory.

When the age of chivalry came into being, and the knights of Arthur's court and Charlemagne's rode out, "to break the heathen and uphold the Christ," they had ever before their minds the image of St. George who from being a Roman soldier and a Christian saint became for them the mirror of true knightliness. So they called on his name as they rode into battle, and since all the knights of those days bore devices on their shields, they accorded to St. George the device of a Red Cross, indicating the blood he had shed for the sake of the cross of Christ. So he became known as the Red Cross Knight and all the poor and weak and needy called to him for aid.

When the Christian knights went forth to the Crusades they too called on St. George as was their custom, but the Saracens were so strong that the Christians were often defeated, and their great desire to win the Holy City seemed doomed to failure. But when all hope was nearly at an end there appeared among the English knights a shining figure in white armour, bearing aloft a white banner with a red cross. He called to the Crusaders, and, riding before them, he led them up to the very walls of the city. But when, inspired by his courage and strength, they entered in and took possession, the Knight of the Red Cross could not be found. Then those Crusaders from England, kneeling by the Holy Sepulchre, whispered to each other that it was St. George, and after that they called him their patron saint, and their rallying cry was, "St. George for Merrie England!"

So to follow in the footsteps of St. George is one of the finest things we can do and, whether the symbol be the rose or the red cross, it will remind us of the Roman soldier who stands for the Christian faith and the honour of England. And it is said of him that when the dragon of sin is vanquished at last, St. George will sheath his sword, and

*Come back again to England,
To England, April England,
He'll come borne to rest in England
where the golden willows blew.*

ST. ANDREW

It happened once that St. Matthew lay sick and in prison, and he sent to St. Andrew for help. Now St. Andrew at that time was preaching in Achaia, and it seemed to him a hard thing that he should be asked to leave the work he loved and the people he had trained, and set off on a wild goose chase to a far country. Therefore St. Andrew wrestled with temptation all night long, and in the morning he rose up and went down to the seashore.

St. Andrew had been a fisherman and he fished in the Lake of Galilee. He knew all the sudden storms and tempests of that lake, and the look of the mountains on either hand. But when he came to the sea, it lay before him vast and desolate; moreover, there was no boat, and he could not see the mountains on the other side.

Then St. Andrew said to himself:

“This thing is of God, and my brother needeth help. I will go a little farther along the beach.”

So he went on, but his heart was heavy within him, for he dared not even tell his people that he meant to leave them, nor ask them for a boat and a companion on the way.

Suddenly he saw before him a great rock, and in the pool beside it there was moored a little boat. Then St. Andrew hastened and got into the boat and made ready to sail.

Just as he was about to start, there came a Stranger down the beach, who asked him,

“What dost thou with the boat?”

St. Andrew answered,

“I go to help my brother who lies sick and in prison in a far country.”

Then said the Stranger,

“I will go with thee, for I am the pilot of this boat.”

And he stepped in and took the tiller and bade St. Andrew cast off.

So they set sail from the land of Achaia and steered for the open sea. Presently night fell, and the wind began to gather strength. The waves rose higher and higher as the storm broke over them, and the little boat was in great peril.

“Have no fear,” said the Stranger kindly, “for by morning we shall be come to the other side.”

But St. Andrew answered him, “Nay, I have no fear, for I was in a tempest once on the Lake of Galilee, and my fear was taken from me.”

And he told the Stranger the story of that tempest and much besides of the Christian faith.

At length the storm died down, and St. Andrew, who was very weary, rested his head on his arm.

“Sleep now,” said the Stranger, “and I will guide the boat.”

So St. Andrew wrapped himself in his cloak, and laid down in the bottom of the boat, but the Stranger kept his hand upon the tiller, and the little ship sped onward through the night.

When St. Andrew awoke he found himself alone, and before him were the mountains of the other side. Then he knew who had been with him through the night, and he gave thanks and

steered for the land. And coming presently to a great city, he made enquiry there, and found that it was indeed the place where St. Matthew lay.

Then St. Andrew called the people of that city together and preached them the gospel, and at first they were angered and would have slain him, but afterwards they repented and were baptised, So they released St. Matthew and the two friends met again.

When they had talked together a long while after the manner of friends, they went down to the coast, and suddenly St. Matthew asked,

“Brother, how earnest thou hither?”

St. Andrew, looking far out to sea, replied,

“I came by the grace of God, and now I would fain return to my own people.”

“Then our ways part here,” said St. Matthew sadly, “for my path lies yonder.”

And he pointed back to the city in which he had suffered imprisonment.

So they parted there upon the beach, each going his own way (and both ways led to death), and St. Andrew went down to the harbour and found a ship which was going part of the way back to Achaia, and took passage in her. Thus began his second journey: and as before he had travelled by grace a long way in a short while, so now he journeyed by faith, waiting often, and encountering many difficulties and dangers by the way.

“Slow or quick,” said St. Andrew, “it is all one to God.” And he summoned his courage and his own good sense and faced each trouble as it came; until at last, after many months of wandering, the way of faith brought him back to his own people, and one morning he saw before him the snow-clad mountains of Achaia.

When St. Andrew returned he found that nearly all his work had to be done over again, for many of the Christians had fallen from the faith, and the rest blamed him for his long absence. So he had to start once more at the beginning, and the second time was far harder than the first. Moreover, Ægeas, the pro-consul of Achaia, persecuted the Christians and threatened the saint. To all his threats St. Andrew gave but gentle answers, and this so angered Ægeas that he threw him into prison and at last condemned him to die.

So one fine morning they led St. Andrew outside the city, to a place where he could see all round him the mountains of the land he loved, and there they tied him with ropes to a diagonal cross, and after much suffering he died.

Then came a good woman named Maximilia, who took down the body of the saint, and buried it; and for many years the tomb of St. Andrew was in Achaia, among the people whom he had loved. But there was a third journey yet to come. For after nine hundred years, a monk named Regulus was told in a vision to take the bones of St. Andrew to Scotland, and for love of those unknown northern folk whom he had never seen, Regulus did as he was bid. He chose certain companions, and they travelled across Europe and took ship from Holland; but as they neared their destination a great storm broke over them and they were wrecked upon the coast. So, by way of the sea, St. Andrew came to Scotland, and Angus, King of the Picts, gave Regulus a tract of land, where he buried the saint’s bones and built a tomb above them, and that place is called St. Andrews to this day.

Now, a short while after, the Picts and Scots found cause to fight the Saxons, and on the night before the battle there appeared in the sky a shining diagonal cross. Then all the people cried out that it was the cross of St. Andrew and that his goodwill was with them, and when they had won the victory they went barefoot in procession to his shrine, and prayed him to become their patron saint.

Thus St. Andrew became the saint of Scotland, and his three journeys were ended; for by grace, by faith, and by love are men guided to do the will of God. And because the starry cross shone out that winter evening against the dim, blue northern sky, they made his flag a white cross on a blue field. Some say that it shows his path across the waters, and others say that the white cross is the token of a pure life shining out among the lives of other men. But this much is truth indeed: that he was a fisherman of Galilee, and that he left his work and home and kindred to go out across unknown seas, and carry the good tidings of the gospel of peace. And he is the patron saint not only of Scotland, but of all those who “go down to the sea in ships and exercise their business in great waters.”

ST. PATRICK

Long, long ago, a little shepherd boy guarded his father's flock among the mountains of Western Britain. His life had few comforts or pleasures, yet he did not think himself miserable on that account, but was happy enough lying out on the rocks, watching the shadows come and go upon the hills. He was a very gentle, dreamy, small boy, and sometimes he would be so busy looking at the clouds and colours in the sky that he forgot to watch the sheep. Then his mother scolded him and he was sorry. His name was Patrick.

For the first sixteen years of his life St. Patrick guarded his father's sheep, and helped upon the farm. Then suddenly everything was changed. One night a pirate ship anchored in the bay, and before it sailed again the homesteads were burning, the cattle raided and slaughtered, and Patrick with other boys from the neighbourhood was a prisoner in the hold.

The pirates took their captives to Ireland and sold them there as slaves. St. Patrick was bought by a man called Meliucc, and taken to a wild country in the north-west of Connaught. There he herded the swine, and lived as a slave lived, driven from task to task, sleeping little, and treated worse than an animal.

But St. Patrick was a Christian, and for six years, living in misery, alone and with no hope of freedom, he kept his faith and his courage. And as time passed by the dreamy boy grew into a quiet, thoughtful man, who had no bitterness in his heart for those who treated him so harshly, but helped all whom he could, with gentle words and swift hands, until men marvelled at the peace in his face and the love that he bore to children and to all who could not help themselves.

St. Patrick was conscious of this change within him, and felt that he was born to serve God and man. Therefore he held himself ready for what might come. And when the Druids kept their great festivals, and the people of Ireland trembled before heathen gods, St. Patrick was moved to pity, and prayed for his tormentors and for the land where he was a captive.

At the end of six years a chance came, and he escaped. He went back to his old home, but when his kinsmen begged him to remain with them, he shook his head.

"I have other work to do," he said, and he travelled far south to a monastery upon an island in the Mediterranean. There for many years he studied to become a priest, for the call within him was to teach, and in those days there was no other way of becoming a teacher than by entering the priesthood.

So for a long while St. Patrick pursued his studies, storing up knowledge of the ways of God with men, that he might have wisdom to teach he knew not whom. Year after year he held to his purpose, until he became first a priest and then a bishop. But although as a bishop he had many to teach and much to do, he still felt that the real meaning of his life was hidden from him, until one night he heard in a dream the voices of his old Irish captors calling: –

"Come back! Come back to us! Patrick, return!"

Then day and night he heard that same call, "Patrick, return!" He heard it in his dreams, he heard it in the chanting of the services, he heard it in the voices of his friends. If he walked by the seashore, the waves called to him, "Patrick, return!" If he journeyed by land he heard ever the same cry. And at last St. Patrick, kneeling at his window, vowed to return to Ireland and carry there the Word of Peace.

So he chose certain monks who had worked with him in his bishopric, and set sail, and as he drew near the coast of Ireland, the cry came clearer and clearer, "Come back to us!" And he

answered, "I come!" And at length one dark night in the spring time he set foot again upon Irish soil, and his work began.

Now St. Patrick returned upon the Feast of Tara, which that year happened to fall at the same time as Easter, and upon the Feast of Tara every hearth in Ireland was quenched. From coast to coast not a flame flickered, not a log smouldered, not a spark flashed for the thousandth part of a second. The whole of Ireland lay plunged in darkness, waiting until at Tara, where the King held his court, the Druids kindled the sacred flame beneath the Ash Tree, Yggdrasil, and portions of that flame were carried by swift messengers east and west and north and south, until throughout all Ireland the people received anew the gift of fire.

When St. Patrick landed all was dark, and he guessed the meaning of that darkness. He led his monks straight inland, bidding them gather what brushwood they could find, until they came to the foot of a great hill. Up that hill they scrambled in the dark, stumbling over rocks and stones until they reached the summit. St. Patrick looked over into the valley beyond, and he knew from old times that down there in the darkness the Druids were about their work. Then he hastened and took the brushwood and lit a tiny fire in the hollow of the hill. The flame rose up, clear and bright, visible to all the country round as the monks piled on the wood. The Druids below paused in their work to mark the cause of this sudden light, and high upon Mag Ben they saw the flame of St. Patrick's fire shining in the darkness.

Then they came in haste up the hill, the King and the Druids and the people, to kill the maker of that fire, and found St. Patrick and the monks kneeling in the ring of light, while before them, wedged in a rock, with the flame flickering up and down upon it, stood a wooden cross.

The Druids and the people with them fell back amazed, dazzled by the flames. Only the King spoke.

"What means this?" he asked.

And St. Patrick answered him,

"God has kindled the true light in Ireland, the Light which lighteth all the world. Therefore cast away the works of darkness, for behold, the day dawns."

And as he spoke he pointed over their heads, where the first faint streaks of morning showed in the sky.

"It is Easter Day," said St. Patrick, and standing there in the gathering light he told them the meaning of Easter, and they heard him amazed. At last the King said:

"Come down to Tara, for we would hear more."

Then St. Patrick went down, taking his life in his hands, and though the Druids tried to kill him, he persuaded the King and the people, so that they forsook their old gods and the ash groves, and came willingly to be baptised. And St. Patrick taught them very simply all that they needed to know, and when they could not understand the meaning of the Trinity, he plucked a shamrock which grew in the grass at his feet, and showed them its three petals that yet were one.

So year after year he taught them, journeying up and down the country, preaching the gospel; and all the long slow years of preparation yielded their fruit. The Irish in the end heard him gladly and loved him much. And St. Patrick grew to be a very old man, so old that he could travel no longer, but sat looking out upon the hills, as he had done when he was a little shepherd boy. Day by day the people came to him, and were happy if they could touch his garment and receive his blessing.

At last one day St. Patrick raised his eyes, and looked out over the western sea to where, far away in the distance, lay the Islands of the Blest. He saw their shores clearly in the sunset light, and knew by the token that his time had come. Then he lifted up his hands and laid a blessing upon Ireland, and upon all those who should love and serve her truly, and the people wept at his passing.

Although St. Patrick left them, the Irish did not forget. He became their patron saint, for before him no man had cared enough for Ireland to bring her the Light. And long years afterwards they adopted as his flag a red cross on a white field, to show how he bore the message of the Cross to the four corners of the land he loved.

ST. DAVID

When the Roman Empire broke into pieces the people of Europe were left in a state of chaos and darkness which was known ever after as the Dark Ages. During this time the light of wisdom and learning was kept alive in the monasteries, which were the only schools that existed. Here men were trained to the Christian faith, and also in book learning, in craftwork and agriculture and the care of the sick. In this way knowledge was preserved and handed down to more civilised times. The monasteries were often built in lonely places and among the heathen tribes, and the monks risked their lives to teach the people around them the truth of the Gospel. Their way of living was extremely hard, but often their lives were so holy that this dark time has also been called the Age of the Saints.

In this wild time the Celtic tribes in the most distant parts of Wales were taught Christianity by pioneer monks who came to what was then the western edge of the world with their message of joy and peace. For at least two hundred years before St. Augustine set foot in Britain the Church was a living fact among the people of Wales. Especially on the south coast there were centres of learning and piety which had links with foundations in Europe and across the sea in Ireland. And in the middle of the Dark Ages, in this far outpost of Christianity, was born a child who grew up to become a light for all time to his own nation and to the Church, St. David of Wales.

David (or Dewi in the Welsh tongue) was born in the middle of a violent storm which raged round the coast, and tradition says that the mother and child had no shelter save a thorn tree growing on the cliff, and that beneath the tree all was quiet and still as a summer's day. The boy's father was a chieftain of Ceredigion, and his mother a holy woman named Non. The place of his birth is marked still by St. Non's Chapel. When he was baptised a spring of water, known as David's font, filled a hollow in the rocks which before then was a dry place, and an old blind man who held the child for the baptism received his sight.

David was educated first at Henfynyw, Cardiganshire, under an uncle of his who was a Bishop called Giustilianus. Later he was taught by Paulinus, a venerable scribe, who maintained a monastery school at a place now unknown. When the old man's sight failed him, David placed his hands upon the blind eyes and restored them to their full strength. Then Paulinus blessed David with all the gifts of the Spirit, and the monks knew that David's life was consecrated to the service of God. He learned to read and write and to sing the offices of the Church, to work with his hands, to dig and plant and care for the land. He was so happy that other people were happy in his company, and as he grew his life was filled with wisdom and strength of purpose.

When he was old enough David became a monk, and after that he passed twelve years in prayer and hard study. Then suddenly he received a strange summons. He was called from his monastery to preach at Llanddewi Brefi to a great synod which was disputing about the government of the Church. The Bishops and leaders were in despair. It looked as though the whole gathering would break up in confusion. Then a saintly old Bishop who had taught David as a boy said, "Send for the monk named Dewi, for the grace of God is with him," and two messengers hastened to find David in his monastery by the sea.

"Come with us," they pleaded, "and speak to the assembly, for our unity is at stake."

But David was a humble man of prayer, and did not know that he had in him the power to preach the Word of God. "Let me rather stay here and pray," he said.

But they pressed him to go, and at length he agreed, saying: "I will come for the love of God, but I have no power to speak. I will simply pray, and God will give us His wisdom and help."

So he journeyed to the great meeting, and when he arrived the assembly gathered about him, and the crowd was so great that no single voice could be heard by all who were present. Moreover, David could hardly be seen.

Then the blessing of old Paulinus became manifest, for David opened his mouth and spoke the word of God. Then those who had been disputing, drew together in understanding and goodwill, and a flame of love was kindled in their hearts for God and for each other. So the peace of the Church remained unbroken.

It was said afterwards that a white dove flew down from the sky and alighted on David's shoulder, and that from that hour the Spirit of God was with him.

He began to teach, and people came from far and near to learn from him. He taught them how to live to the glory of God, and especially he taught the poor people, whose lives were hard and grim. For these he had a special care. He encouraged them to till the land and live on the produce of their farms and gardens, and (which was unusual for those days) to give special food to tiny children and to elderly and sick people. He visited them constantly, and worked among them, showing them that the service of the land was good, and part of God's order for society. His own life was very simple, and he drank only water. He travelled extensively through North and South Wales, and founded fifty-three new monasteries in the south alone. He could have travelled much farther, for he knew many languages, but he chose to serve his own country, and he always wrote and spoke in Welsh.

The enlightenment and security of the whole of Wales was David's chief concern. He started schools in many of his monasteries, and insisted on strict discipline and a high standard of learning. Gradually he became the central figure and the most outstanding personality in Wales. He personified not only the care of the Church, but the Welsh character transformed by the Christian faith, and when an Archbishop was needed for the whole country David was called to that great office.

So all his life long David laboured for his people, and under his wise and holy rule the Welshmen lived in peace. At length he grew too old to travel, and remained in his own monastery by the sea, whose church in later centuries was to bear his name. There, Sunday by Sunday, he blessed and taught the people, and one year, when the Spring came, he knew that his call was near. So he asked to be carried into the Church for his death, and as the twilight fell he died before the altar, with the words, "Raise me, O Lord, after Thee."

David died on 1st March in the year 588. Before long the whole Church revered him as a saint, and he became the patron saint of Wales. The cathedral church of St. David still stands to his memory, and on 1st March each year his countrymen do honour to his name.