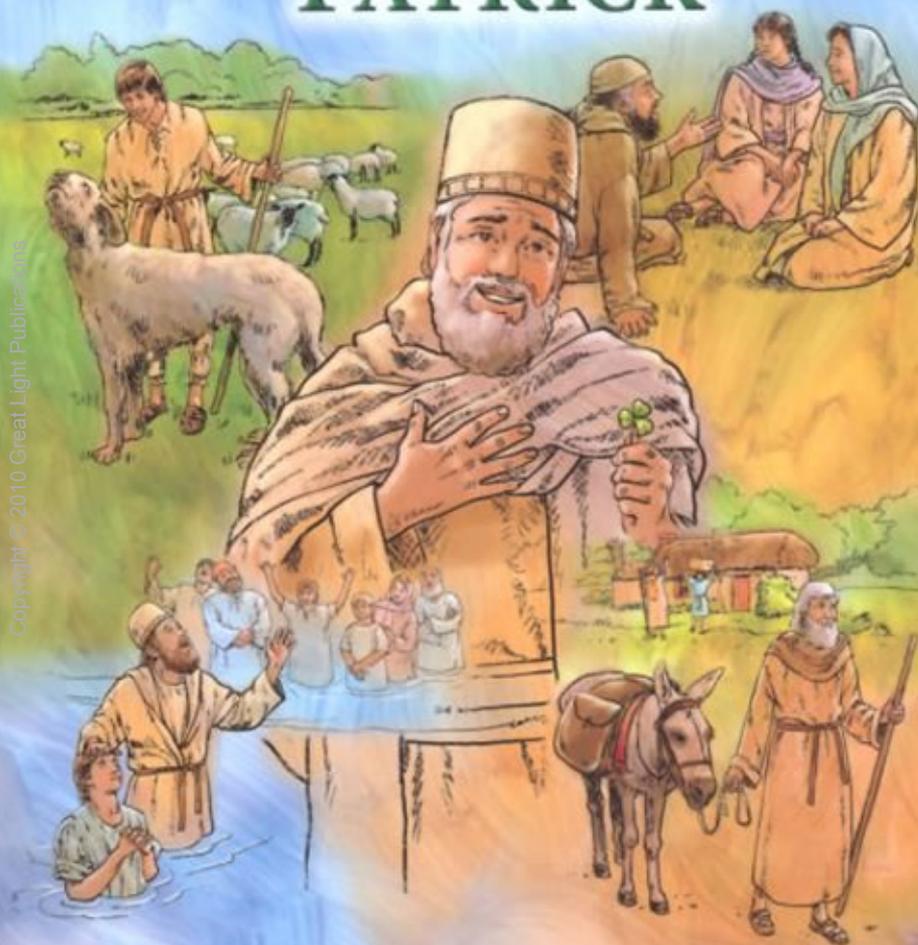


THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF SAINT PATRICK



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CHAPTER ONE

A Meeting in Down

“The meeting should be somewhere near this region,” thought the seasoned missionary as he continued to follow a crude path through the Irish countryside. On and on he pulled his tired donkey, as he stroked his graying hair in an effort to clear his head. This weary traveler had already managed to get lost on three separate occasions during the earlier portion of the day, and by this point, he was beginning to wonder if he was ever going to make it to his final destination.

“Perhaps one of the local shepherds or farmers might know how to direct me to the place called Down,” mumbled the perplexed missionary, as though there were someone else around to hear him but his donkey. A short time later, this plain looking man determined to lead his animal in the direction of a tiny thatched cottage that sat in the distance in order to obtain needed direction.

“Lord,” prayed the aged servant of Christ, “may you grant me the opportunity to speak of your dear Son to those souls who dwell at this spot, and to gain the hospitality and guidance that I need at this hour.”

Minutes later, the sound of a faint voice could be heard as a middle aged woman with ruffled hair slowly walked out of a small stone shed to greet the unfamiliar visitor who was rapidly approaching her humble dwelling.

“Now if it is a work ye will be needin, we have none; and we don’t have money to buy nothing either,” declared the woman in a blunt fashion. “I don’t want to be rude to peddlers, but

we don't take kindly to strangers in these parts. What's your business?"

"I mean no harm dear lady, and I can assure you that I come in peace," began the robed visitor. "I am a wee bit turned around, however, and need help to find my way to Down."

"Stranger," responded the woman, "now that I think on it, you do not have the look of a peddler. I am, in point of fact, inclined to believe that you are a man of the cloth. Tell me, are ye one of the preachers who was lately sent here by the Church in Rome, or are you one of the sons of the Irish church?"

"Why do you ask?" inquired the curious minister.

"Because I see that you stand in need of more than some good directions," added the lady as she straightened her shawl. "You could also use some hospitality. Every now and then, I will get one of you holy men to pay me a visit, and I have noticed that the Irish men care more about their own comforts and food, while the visitors from Rome are more concerned about the feed and care of their donkeys."

"Very well then, since you asked," replied the man of God. "I am a son of Pictland (Scotland) by birth; but at heart am a son of the Irish Church in very truth. My donkey, on the other hand, is from Rome."

Something like a smile quickly appeared on the woman's face as she slowly began to lower the spear that she had been carrying in a position of readiness.

"I must say, dear woman, that I am more than grateful to see that weapon pointed in a safer direction. Now, can you help me find a proper road that would take me to the place called Down. It would be a sad day if I missed my meeting with the people of God."

"I can't say for sure what road would be best," replied the woman. "As I am sure you know, there are few roads in this country to begin with, except those for the sheep and cows. I will, however, guide you to a well-traveled neighbor of mine who should be able to guide you in the right direction."

"A thousand thanks for your kindness," responded the grateful visitor. "Might I be so bold, then, as to ask the way to this neighbor's dwelling? As you surely know, the weather is