St. Patrick's Itinerary Through County Limerick.

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From the beginning of the present century, in particular, many scholars have devoted a considerable amount of their time to the study of the life and works of Ireland's National Apostle, St. Patrick. Besides discussing problems relating to his parentage, education, captivity, clerical training and apostolate, they have sought to throw additional light on the place of his birth and the various places he honoured by his missionary visits. Though Munster cannot claim a major share of his apostolic activities, it is not without its historic sanctuaries. Of these Limerick can claim quite a large number.

According to the Tripartite Life, St. Patrick proceeded from Cashel through Munscraighe Bréagáin (S. Tipperary) to the eastern borders of the modern County Limerick. On his westward trek he passed Pallas Green (Grian) and Kilteely (Cell Tidil) in the barony of Coonagh (Uí Cuanach). Thence he pursued his journey to find the king of the Uí Fidgente at Mullach Cae. This hill is known in modern geography as Knockea, and situated to the south of the much-mentioned hill of CahernARRY (Carnd Feradaig), which is only a few miles to the south-east of Limerick City. Knockea shows signs of early habitation and may have secrets of its own to reveal, but we must await the archaeologist who alone can discover and divulge them. At all events, this meeting of Patrick and Lónán, king of the Uí Fidgente, was of capital importance, for the Uí Fidgente together with the Déise (in Déis Tuaiscirt and in Désis Deiscirt) controlled practically the entire territory now comprised in the County Limerick. By winning the goodwill of Lónán the Apostle would gain access to a wide area for his apostolic labours. That he succeeded in doing so is evident from the Tripartite Life. Lónán, it says, welcomed the Saint and had a feast prepared in his honour.

From the hill-fortress of Lónán Patrick moved on to another hill, overlooking the Shannon. On it the Saint founded a church from which it has taken its name, viz., Domhnach Mór Maige Aine. Domhnach Mór is likewise the name of the parish; the modern parish church stands beside the ancient

1. Dr. Begley has already treated this subject very thoroughly; see his article in The Irish Ecclesiastical Record (1896), vol. xviii, p. 317 f., and his opinions in The Diocese of Limerick, vol. I. (1906), p. 130 f.
2. Tirechan mentions Patrick's visit to Cashel, but does not give any further information about his itinerary in Munster. See Liber Ardmachanus, ed. John Gwynn, Dublin, 1613, 30b.
4. In his article in Ér}, vol. XI, p. 34, Dr. MacNeill does not discuss the movements of St Patrick in Uí Fidgente.
site. Here, according to the Tripartite Life, St. Patrick received contingents from Tuathmumu, which, in the present context, is synonymous with the modern county of Clare.(6) These contingents consisted mainly, if not exclusively, of Déise (later to be known as Dáil Chais) from the eastern portion of the county, facing Domnach Mór. They were baptised by the National Apostle himself at a place near by called Tir Glass. Like so many other places of historical interest, Tir Glass seems to have been renamed, and cannot now be identified with certainty. It is to be sought for to the south-east of Domnach Mór.

Leaving Domnach Mór and Tir Glass, St. Patrick faced north-west to another hill called Finnine to bless Tuathmumu (County Clare); a gesture of gratitude, according to the Life, for the enthusiasm with which its people flocked to greet him at Domnach Mór.(7) At this point the Tripartite Life introduces the baptism of Carihenn mac Blait, king of Déis Tuaiscirt.(8) The ceremony took place at Saingel (Singland)—the low-lying spur of land to the south-east of the City, which is washed by the Shannon. Though the description of the large numbers crossing from Clare savours of literary embellishment, there can be no doubt that a goodly number embraced the Faith both at Tir Glass and Saingel. The memory of Patrick’s visit to Singland is preserved to the present day, for the parish which includes it is appropriately called St. Patrick’s.

To return to Finnine, it remains to determine its situation, and review the opinions of those who have already offered solutions. In the Tripartite Life it is closely associated with the activities of St. Patrick in the region of Domnach Mór, the baptism of Carihenn mac Blait at Saingel, and the baptism of those who crossed from the Clare side at Tir Glass.(9) Two points in particular call for precision, namely, the position of Finnine itself, and the provenance of the people who crossed the Shannon to meet St. Patrick.

While it would be dangerous to dogmatize concerning the situation of Finnine, it is clear that there are sufficient data in the Tripartite Life to determine it with a fair amount of accuracy. It is said to be north-west of Domnach Mór; moreover, it is stated that St. Patrick ascended the hill in order to impart his blessing to their land across the river. From this it would appear that Domnach Mór, Tir Glass, Saingel and Finnine were in the same locality.


7. Luide iarom hi Finnine fri Domnach Mór anuartual, todach asa n-aestar in tuaath fri Luimneach anuatha, ce tarat bendachtain for Tuathnumain ara dudrachaígi dodechtar co n-imbiud a ngabal ar chenn Pátraic. Íbíd.


9. See foregoing notes.
Dr. O Donovan identified Finnine with Cahernarry to the north of Knockea.\(^{(10)}\) Certainly this hill commands an excellent view of County Clare—from it no doubt the Déise of Limerick first saw that country and were tempted to proceed with its conquest—and is but a short distance from Domhnach Mór, but it does not lie to the north-west of it. This is a stipulation of our guide (Tripartite Life), and consequently we must seek for a more suitable substitute. Fr. Hogan was nearer the mark when he suggested that Finnine was “probable Mount St. Alphonsus or Mount St. Vincent or Mount Kennett or Laurel Hill, which are all on the same high ground at Limerick.”\(^{(11)}\) Against this selection of Fr. Hogan it may be said that none of the hills mentioned are very imposing, and while they cannot be rejected outright, they may be dubbed less likely.

Dr. Begley put forward a theory of a decidedly sweeping character. He identified Finnine with Knockpatrick, overlooking Foynes. This hill is situated in the parish of Robertstown and the barony of Shanid in West Limerick. It has one factor in its favour, namely, that it is west of Domhnach Mór. Against it, however, many objections may be urged. First of all, it is too far distant from Domhnach Mór to fall in with the sequence of events, as outlined in the Tripartite Life; they, as we have seen, suggest that Patrick’s ascent of Finnine was linked up with the visit of the river-borne party from Tuathmumu and baptism of Cailthenn mac Blait at Saingel, and, consequently, were in the vicinity of Domhnach Mór. Now Knockpatrick, which is some 22 miles to the west, cannot be taken into account if we accept the obvious implication of the text. In rejecting Knockpatrick as conflicting with the ordinary straightforward sense of the Tripartite text, we are but following Dr. Begley’s own line of criticism at an earlier stage of St. Patrick’s journey through Limerick. When confronted with a choice between Knockea in the parish of Fedamore and Knockea in the parish of Ardpatrick, he decided in favour of the former; and he did so because Knockea in the parish of Ardpatrick was “too far distant from Knockany to answer the description of the author of the Tripartite.”\(^{(12)}\) Secondly, Dr. Begley changes the order of events as recorded in the Tripartite Life by placing the visit of the people from Tuathmumu after the baptism of Cailthenn mac Blait; nay more, he makes the miracle which St. Patrick is said to have performed in favour of Cailthenn’s son, Echub Balderg, the motive which impelled these people to flock from the other side: “The fame of this miracle spread from one tribe to another, and influenced the men of North Munster, to the north of Luimnnech, to come in fleets of boats southwards as far as Donaghmore of Magh-aíne—that is, Dun Nocefene—to meet St. Patrick; and he baptized them at Terryglass, where he was at the time.”\(^{(13)}\) Thirdly, he attaches an exaggerated importance to an alleged prophecy concerning St. Senan, and draws unwarranted conclusions from it. The following passage from the Life of St. Senan, Dr. Begley maintains, is another record of the same prophecy, together with the circumstances in which it was made, and “helps us to identify the locality whence the men of North Munster came, as well as the place where they met St. Patrick.”

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“Now, the chief prophet and chief apostle whom God sent to preach to Ireland, even St. Patrick, prophesied St. Senan’s birth. For when Patrick was preaching to the Ul Figenti, and baptizing them, at Donoghmore of Cineal Dine, the Corca Baiscinn came, with their king, Bolc, son of Derc, in a great fleet over Luimnech, from the north; and they besought Patrick to preach to them on that day, and baptize them at once . . . . St Patrick repeats the order of Baptism on the river . . . . Patrick said to the Corca Baiscinn:

‘Is there a place near from whence your district will be clear to me, so that I myself may descry it from my seat, and bless it from that spot?’ ‘There is, forsooth,’ they say. ‘The hill there; that is, Fidne.’ St Patrick then went to the top of Fidne, and said to them: ‘Is this your district to the north of Luimnech, as far as the ocean in the west?’ ‘It is,’ they say. ‘Doth your territory,’ said Patrick, ‘reach . . . Sliabh Elbe, in the district of Conmoread, in Ningueus?’ ‘It reached not,’ saith they. ‘It shall reach before the judgment,’ saith Patrick. ‘Doth your territory reach the mountain there in the east; that is, Echthge, in the territory of the Desa?’ ‘It reached not,’ saith they. ‘It shall reach after a long time,’ saith Patrick . . . .’ Then Patrick blessed Corca Baiscinn, and said: ‘Ye need me not to go with you into your country, for ye have a child in a woman’s womb, and unto him your country has been given by God. After him shall ye be, and him shall ye serve, and the race of the Ul Figenti . . . .’”

“From both these narratives (Tripartite and Life of St. Senan),” comments Dr. Begley, “we infer, that the men of North Munster were natives of Corca-Baiscinn . . . . They came southwards across the Luimnech . . . . and must have landed somewhere in the vicinity of Foynes. Then they proceeded to Donaghmore of Magh-aíne or Cineal Dine.” This view is not tenable, because the record of the events quoted from the Life of St. Senan is far from being another version of that found in the Tripartite Life of St. Patrick. In fact, it is nothing more than a subsequent concoction designed to connect the Corco Baiscinn with St. Patrick and the events centring round Finnine. This is clear from a comparison of the two accounts. According to the Tripartite Life, St. Patrick met the people who came from Tuathmummu at Domnach Mór and baptized them at Tir Glass, baptized Cairthenn mac Blait of the Déis Tuaiscirt at Singland, blessed the lands on the north side of the Shannon from the hill of Finnine, and foretold the advent of St. Senan.

In the Life of St. Senan, however, Corco Baiscinn is substituted for Tuathmummu, and Bolc of Corco Baiscinn for Cairthenn of Déis Tuaiscirt; the prophecy concerning St. Senan is given undue prominence, and a number of new and irrelevant details introduced, which have no place in the Tripartite text. Therefore, the passage in the Life of St. Senan cannot be called a genuine parallel to that of the Tripartite Life; at most it is a fabrication of a later period modelled on the Tripartite Life, and too artfully constructed to carry conviction. In fairness to Dr. Begley, it must be remarked that he noted a difficulty which we have already referred to, namely, the distance between

15. IER., Ibid., p. 322.
Knockpatrick and Donaghmore. To obviate this he was driven to search for a second Donaghmore in West Limerick. He writes: "They (Corco Baiscinn) proceeded to Donaghmore of Magh-aine or Cinel Diue. These descriptive epithets look as if they were added to distinguish this Donaghmore from another in the same territory. It might have been in the district of Shanagolden, but was destroyed during the Danish wars." (16)

From this it is clear that Dr. Begley was so impressed by the traditional lore which linked St. Patrick with Knockpatrick that he was led to believe the account afforded by the Life of St. Senan, and recognize it as an authentic version of that given in the Tripartite Life. In his enthusiasm, he overlooked the discrepancies between the two versions, and was prepared to supplement even the traditional sources in order to overcome the difficulties arising out of the Life of St. Senan.

To return to the Tripartite Life, it is clear that Cairthen mac Blait was baptized at Singland and that it was his people (the Déise of Déisi Tuaiscirt, later commonly called Dál Chais) who are mainly, if not exclusively, mentioned as coming from the shores of the river Shannon to Domhnach Mór. Hence, the hill of Finnine is to be sought for in the neighbourhood of and to the north-west of Domhnach Mór. The hill of Ballysheedy is, therefore, most probably the Telach Finnine referred to in the Tripartite Life. It is situated to the north-west of Domhnach Mór, is only a short distance from it, and commands a wide view of County Clare—the territory 'fri Luimnueh antuatha', and 'im Luimnueh siar 7 fotuaith', as the text has it.

St. Patrick neither crossed the Shannon nor the Luachair Mountains into Kerry, but turned south-eastwards to the Déisi Descrit (S.E. portion of Limerick, including the barony of Small County, and the greater portions of Cashma and Coshlea). His route is not indicated. Notwithstanding initial opposition from Derball and Firgair, he succeeded in founding a church on Tulach na Fémne, which thenceforth became better known as Ard Pátraic. (17) An event which took place in the twelfth century emphasizes the Patrician origin of Ardpatria and its continued subjection to Armagh. It is recorded as follows in the Annals of Ulster: —"Ceallach, successor of Patrick, son of purity and eminent bishop of the West of Europe and the one head to whom served the Goidhil and the Foreigners, laics and clerics, after ordaining bishops and priests and persons of every (church) grade besides and after the consecration of many churches and cemeteries; after bestowing of treasures

16. Ibid.


Luid iarom hisin Déis descirt. Folarbairg congobail i nArdd Pátraic, agus ata lecc Pátraic and, agus torand a chhill. Fristuchaid do ass Derball maci Aeda. Asbert Derball fri Pátraic: 'Dia cumasaigthe in sliab isin maigin si co n-acchin Loch Lungae taris fades hi Feraib Maige Fene, no creifind.' Cend Erbrat ainm int stéibh, 7 Belach Legtha ainm in belaig ro legal and. Dixit Derball fri Pátraic q thairiscan in sliab légad: Cia dogned, níbh ní airi,' Asbert Pátraic fri Derball: 'Ni bia rí na episcope dot eilein e co bráth, 7 bid dilmain do feraib Mumun far lonrad ceoth scichtmad bliadain do gréas amal folch héip.

and of wealth; after enjoining of rule and good conduct upon every one, both laic and cleric; after a Mass-celebrating, fasting, prayerful life; after Uction and choice penance, he sent forth his spirit into the bosom of the angels, in Ard-Patrick in Munster, on the Kalends (1st) of April, on the 2nd feria, and in the 24th year of his abbacy, and in the 50th year of his age.”(13)

From the foregoing discussion it is clear that St. Patrick left lasting traces of his visit to the territories—Uí Cuanach, Uí Fidgente, in Déis Tuaiscirt, in Deis Deiscirt, etc.—now comprised in the county of Limerick. Enough has been gleaned from the Tripartite Life to show that he made a circuit of the county, establishing churches at key points in the various petty states of the time. Some of the centres he visited have since been renamed and their identification has been rendered less certain, some are still known by names quite similar to those they bore in the Saint’s own time, while fortunately not a few preserve his own name to the present day. Taken all in all, the places he hallowed by his presence make the plan of his mission clear—that mission which brought Limerick within the pale of Christendom and the jurisdiction of Christ’s Vicar in Rome.

18. S. a. 1129. Cf. ALC., AFM., etc.