

# The Curse of Saint Munchin

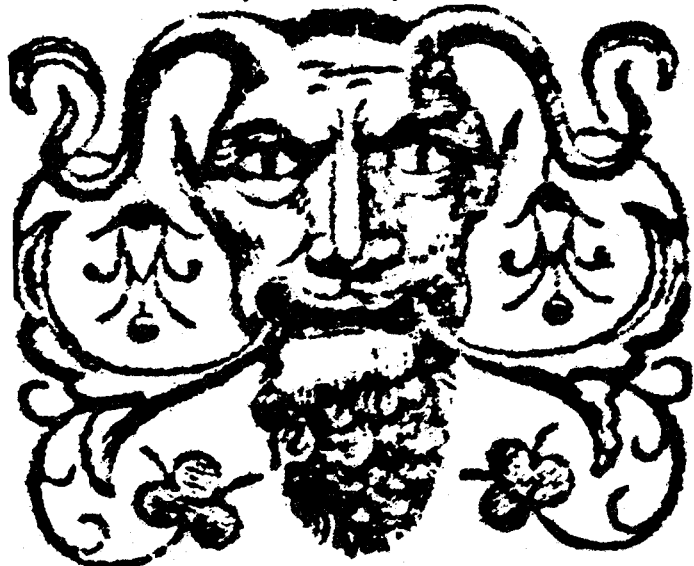
by Michael Hogan

The workmen employed on the building of the ancient church of St. Munchin were one day striving to raise a very heavy block of stone to a certain part of the work. The saint who, at that time, was standing by, called on some of the citizens to help the men to put the stone in its desired position. These, having refused to lend their aid, the saint appealed to some strangers who were passing, who readily lent their assistance, whereupon St. Munchin fervently thanked them and prayed that the strangers may always prosper in Limerick and the natives be unfortunate and unsuccessful. This story has been well confirmed from time to time by the fact of affairs turning out as the saint devoutly wished. (Michael Hogan, *Shawn-a-Scoob*, 1868).

When Saint Munchin was building his Church –  
Sure he was the first that began one –  
With its steeple, and windows, and porch,  
Looking down on the waves of the Shannon.  
The good Saint in temper was rank,  
Such a stock of devotion he'd got in;  
But he kept no account at the Bank,  
So his workmen were working for nothing;  
Sure 'twas well to get something to do.

Yet he kept a few masons on hire –  
They were not *Free Masons*, I'll warrant,  
But true ones, who'd toss up a spire,  
Or fling a bridge over a torrent.  
In those times good builders were few,  
By reason their guild was diminished;  
Because they had nothing to do,  
For all the Round Towers were just finished,  
And mortar and stones were damn scarce.

There was a large quoin-stone, one day,  
To be rolled to the top of the building;  
And the Saint always took his own way  
With his stone-work, and painting, and gilding;  
So he called on his neighbours to come,  
And give help where 'twas instantly needed;  
But they all stared as if they were dumb,  
And his call or his cry was not heeded,  
For they were too lazy to hear him.



An angry St. Munchin. From an early edition of the poem.



Michael Hogan. From a painting by Dermot O'Brien.

“Oh, ye worthless and weak herd of rogues!”  
Roared the Saint, in a wild fit of passion;  
“Ye are graceless and *lazy Caubogues* –  
May ye never leave off ye're bad fashion!  
And I solemnly pray!” says the Saint,  
With his hands and eyes raised in aversion;  
“May ye're trade, like an *ould* woman, faint,  
And ye're commerce become an abortion,  
To smother ye all with *meyah!*”

May ye always want something to wear,  
And always want something to buy it;  
And always have nothing to share,  
And always have ways to supply it!  
And may every pound of ye're bread  
Have the flavour of sawdust and clinkers;  
While ye gang, like poor gipsies, to bed,  
And get up in the morning, like tinkers,  
With fleas dancing round ye, like goats.

And the devil will send ye a pest,  
In shape of a Thief-Corporation;  
Who from striking big rates will not rest,  
Till they *murder* ye dead with taxation.  
No other good works will they do,  
But robbery, ruction, and jobbery;  
Pandemonium can't show such a crew  
For base, brutal bombast and snobbery,  
To damn ye're unfortunate town.

And ye'll feast on each other's bad luck,  
 With the sweetest of sweet animosity.  
 And ye'll never be out of the muck  
 Of poverty, *pride* and pomposity.  
 And ye'll love one another, like sharks,  
 When they meet in the depths of the ocean;  
 While ye act to ye're neighbours, like Turks,  
 In the beautiful garb of devotion,  
 Ye sly, creeping, low-cowering clods!

And ye're harbours shall lose their big ships,  
 'Till ye're state shall be laughed at, for pity.  
 And the beer that ye'll raise to your lips,  
 Shall be brewed far away from your city.  
 For your breweries, and marts, and trade-halls,  
 Will run dry, like an *ould*, empty puncheon;  
 When ye look at their bare, shivering walls,  
 Ye'll remember the curse of Saint Munchin,  
 While ye flock to the poorhouse, like crows.

And the poor house will clench ye're amounts  
 Of felicity, to the last fraction;  
 Where ye'll swallow the shortest accounts,  
 By the science of double subtraction.  
 Troth, 'tis there ye will' get the right taste  
 Of sublime christian civilization;  
 And, if ye don't die in great haste,  
 Ye'll get a foredose of Salvation —  
 Black *docks* and the devil to eat!"

He was just in the heat of his curse,  
 When some Danes and Norwegians were passing;  
 He hailed them for better or worse,  
 And to each one he pumped a good glass in.  
 He asked them to help up the stone;

And he found them obliging, good people;  
 For they never would let it alone,  
 'Till they tumbled it up on the steeple,  
 And would roll it up to the clouds.

Saint Munchin was pleased with the job,  
 And he laughed with devout satisfaction;  
 Then he gave every stranger a *bob*  
 Along with his best benediction.  
 "May strangers henceforward!" he cried,  
 "In Limerick fast prosper and flourish;  
 While, like the bad froth of the tide,  
 The Natives will dwindle and perish,  
 With *plenty of nothing to do!*"

Thus, from that day to this, 'tis well known  
 How strangers in Limerick are thriving;  
 While the natives all backward are thrown,  
 Or headlong to ruin are driving!  
 Och, troth, 'twas a very droll stone,  
 To cause them so bitter a luncheon;  
 Filched, fleeced, starved, and stripped to the bone,  
 By the curse of the blessed Saint Munchin;  
 And 'tis every day growing worse.

But he hadn't all things his own way,  
 For, in spite of his good, holy doings,  
 The Danes came from Denmark, one day,  
 And they tumbled his Church into ruins;  
 And Brian Boru *leathered* their race,  
 For molesting such fine, pious people;  
 Then the Protestants took the Saint's place,  
 And soon built up another big steeple;  
 But devil a curse did they give.



Thomond Bridge, with the old St. Munchin's Church in the background.