

**THE LIFE OF SAINT
GRELLAN, PATRON OF
THE O'KELLYS AND OF
THE TRIBES OF HY-MAINE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649248377

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Cover @ 2017

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JOHN O'HANLON

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THE LIFE
OF
SAINT GRELLAN,

PATRON OF THE O'KELLYS,

AND OF THE

TRIBES OF HY-MAINE.

BY THE

REV. JOHN O'HANLON, M.R.I.A.

Dublin:
JAMES DUFFY & SONS, 15 WELLINGTON QUAY,
AND 1A PATERNOSTER ROW, LONDON.
1881.

C 679.15



*Gift of
William Endicott, Jr.*

DORRIS:

**PRINTED BY BURRELL AND GALLAGHER,
61 & 62 GREAT STRAND STREET.**

Dedication.

—
TO THE

RECOGNISED LIVING REPRESENTATIVE

OF HIS

DISTINGUISHED FAMILY AND NAME,

CORNELIUS J. O'KELLY,

Count of the Holy Roman Empire,

GALLAGH CASTLE, COUNTY OF GALWAY,

The Present Memoir

OF HIS PATRON SAINT

IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED

BY THE AUTHOR.

LIFE OF ST. GRELLAN.

BESIDES the universal reverence and love, with which Ireland regards the memory of her great Apostle, St. Patrick, most of our provincial districts and their families of distinction have patron saints, for whom a special veneration is entertained. Among the latter, St. Grellan's name is connected with his favoured locality. The extensive territory of Hy-Many is fairly defined,¹ by describing the northern line as running from Ballymoe, county of Galway, to Lanesborough, at the head of Lough Ree, on the River Shannon, and in the county of Roscommon. It extended nearly due east and west, taking in all the southern part of this last-named county. The eastern boundary ran along the River Shannon's course, from Lanesborough to Scariff, in Clare county, and west of Lough Derg. Thence, the southern and western boundaries proceeded by Feacle, on Lough Graney, county of Clare, and passed some distance west of Loughrea to Athenry; thence, they continued through Killererin parish, near Tuam, and on to Ballymoe. All of these last-mentioned localities are situated within the

¹ See "The Topographical Poems of John O'Dubhagain and Giolla na Naomh O'Huidhrin," edited by John O'Donovan, LL.D.-M.R.I.A. In this work may be found O'Dubhagain's poetical description of this territory, in the original Irish, with the editor's translation, at pp. 68 to 73, with the explanatory notes, 338 to 362, pp. xliv. to xlv.

county of Galway.¹ The earliest noted aboriginal inhabitants of this great extent of country were the Fírbolgs, who were also a race of people tributary to the Kings of Connaught.² These are thought to have been the successors of Partholan and his followers, who are regarded as being the earliest colonists of Ireland;³ but all of whom perished in a great plague that came into the island.⁴ Before this occurred, however, their rule had been disturbed by the Fomorians, thought to have been pirates from Africa. The northern as well as eastern nations most generally commenced their historic pedigree with a deity; or at least, they ascribe to their first founders heroic qualities or virtues, closely bordering on the possession of supernatural powers. So have we a variety of bardic stories, giving very circumstantial accounts, regarding the migrations of our ancient colonists; but, we have good reasons for supposing those narratives are largely mythological in character. Legends are framed for the acts of our earlier

¹ According to an accurate map of this district, prefixed to the "Tribes and Customs of Hy-Many," by Mr. O'Donovan, the foregoing lines and places designated the former boundaries of that territory. The Irish tract in question was edited by him, from a copy in the Book of Lecan, fol. 90 to 92. An English translation, with notes, he has also given.

² It was supposed, by John O'Donovan, that the Book of Hy-Many was in the possession of a private collector in England, A.D. 1843, and that it was a distinct compilation from what had been published.

³ According to the O'Clerys, following the chronology of the Septuagint, Partholan arrived, A.M. 2520 years. Sir Dr. O'Donovan's "Annals of the Four Masters," vol. i. pp. 4, 5.

⁴ Dr. Jeffrey Keating, who quotes the Psalter of Cahel and Ninus, gives an account of this expedition. See Dermot O'Connors, Keating's "General History of Ireland," part i.

heroes, as history fails to shed light on their period, now so remote from our own times.

About the year of the world 2029,¹ a Scythian² hero, known as Nemed or Nenidh, signifying "the holy one," brought a number of colonists with him into Ireland. He is said to have been remotely related to Partholan, if not a direct descendant. His name has been Latinized in latter days into Nemethus or Nemidius. With four sons, and a fleet of thirty-four ships, each containing thirty persons, he arrived in Ireland, from the Euxine Sea. Finding the island without inhabitants, these took possession and settled therein; at the same time, they began to clear away the thick woods in many places, and to improve the soil by cultivation.³ We are told, likewise, that Nemed employed master-builders, distinguished by the name Fomhoraicc, to erect royal seats for his purpose. After a time, his people were much annoyed by pirates called Fomorians. These wasted the coasts by their inroads, and the interior they even harassed. Nemed fought four battles with them; he was successful in the first three; but he was defeated in the last battle, when his son Art, who had been born in Ireland, was slain, with most of his people.⁴ This so afflicted the king that he died of grief.⁵ Should we follow the authority of bardic history, the Nemedians were exterminated. Ireland was again left

¹ See O'Flaherty's "Ogygia," Pars. ii. p. 65.

² See Sir James Ware's "De Hibernia et Antiquitatibus ejus Disquisitiones," Cap. ii., p. 6.

³ According to Dr. Jeffrey Keating.

⁴ See L'Abbé Ma-Geoghagan's "Histoire de l'Irlande." Tome I., chap. iii. p. 60.

⁵ See Sir William Betham's "The Gael and Cymbri," p. 427.

to its native woods, and a wilderness¹ during two hundred years or more; while, according to certain computations, four hundred and twelve years² passed away, before it was again inhabited. O'Flaherty does not say a word respecting the fate of the Foghmoraice,³ by some confounded with the Fomorian, and by others distinguished from them. After a succession of ages, the Scuits, Scythians, or Scots, who had migrated to Ireland, are also called Gaidelians and Phenians; while these appellations denote a mixture of Celts, Scythians, and Pœnicians from that part of the Continent whence these arrived.⁴ In the remote periods, dialectic incorporations were common among the Celts and Scythians, especially in Spain, where the latter settled, and whence the Scoto-Milesian colony came.

Frequent mention of the Firbolgs, or Bolgæ, occurs in our ancient Irish poems and annals. Whether they preceded or followed the Celts in Ireland has been a matter of controversy among modern historians.⁵

The Firbolgs are called also Sial m Bolgæ, and Sliocht m Bealidh. These people were invaded by the Tuatha De Danann, known as the People of the Gods of Danann, daughter of Dalbaoid, and said to have been descended from Nemed. Her sons are thought to have

¹ See William F. Skene's "Celtic Scotland: a History of Ancient Alban," Vol. I., Book I., chap. iv. p. 173.

² See O'Flaherty's "Ogygia," Pars ii. p. 73.

³ See Wood's "Inquiry concerning the Primitive Inhabitants of Ireland." Introduction, p. 17.

⁴ See Mr. Charles O'Connor's "Dissertations on the Origin and Antiquities of the Ancient Scots," p. xxx.

⁵ See Thomas Moore's "History of Ireland," Vol. i. chap. i. pp. 2, 3.