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**Life of St.  
Declan of Ardmore**

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## Life of St. Declan of Ardmore

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**Author(s):** Declan of Ardmore, St.

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**Description:** This 12th century text is one of the only accounts of Declán of Ardmore's life. In the late 5th century, Declán converted the people of the feudal lands in southern Ireland to Christianity, later founding a monastery there. The saint's work likely primed Ireland for the work of the iconic St. Patrick a little over one hundred years later. Not only a biography of Declán, this text offers up rare historical insights into medieval culture in the British Isles, as it often references unique cultural mythologies.

Kathleen O'Bannon  
CCEL Staff

**Subjects:** Irish

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# **Life of St. Declan of Ardmore**

(Edited from MS. in Bibliotheque Royale, Brussels).

**Translated from the Irish  
With Introduction**

by

**Rev. P. Power, M.R.I.A.**

[Member, Royal Irish Academy]

University College, Cork.

London:

Irish Texts Society, 20, Hanover Square, W.,  
David Nutt, 17, Grape Street, New Oxford Street, W.C.

&c.

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## Introduction

"If thou hast the right, O Erin, to a champion of battle to aid thee thou hast the head of a hundred thousand, Declan of Ardmore" (Martyrology of Oengus).

Five miles or less to the east of Youghal Harbour, on the southern Irish coast, a short, rocky and rather elevated promontory juts, with a south-easterly trend, into the ocean [ $\pm 51^{\circ} 57' N / 7^{\circ} 43' W$ ]. Maps and admiralty charts call it Ram Head, but the real name is Ceann-a-Rama and popularly it is often styled Ardmore Head. The material of this inhospitable coast is a hard metamorphic schist which bids defiance to time and weather. Landwards the shore curves in clay cliffs to the north-east, leaving, between it and the iron headland beyond, a shallow exposed bay wherein many a proud ship has met her doom. Nestling at the north side of the headland and sheltered by the latter from Atlantic storms stands one of the most remarkable groups of ancient ecclesiastical remains in Ireland—all that has survived of St. Declan's holy city of Ardmore. This embraces a beautiful and perfect round tower, a singularly interesting ruined church commonly called the cathedral, the ruins of a second church beside a holy well, a primitive oratory, a couple of ogham inscribed pillar stones, &c., &c.

No Irish saint perhaps has so strong a local hold as Declan or has left so abiding a popular memory. Nevertheless his period is one of the great disputed questions of early Irish history. According to the express testimony of his Life, corroborated by testimony of the Lives of SS. Ailbhe and Ciaran, he preceded St. Patrick in the Irish mission and was a cotemporary of the national apostle. Objection, exception or opposition to the theory of Declan's early period is based less on any inherent improbability in the theory itself than on contradictions and inconsistencies in the Life. Beyond any doubt the Life does actually contradict itself; it makes Declan a cotemporary of Patrick in the fifth century and a cotemporary likewise of St. David a century later. In any attempted solution of the difficulty involved it may be helpful to remember a special motive likely to animate a tribal hystorographer, scil.:—the family relationship, if we may so call it, of the two saints; David was bishop of the Deisi colony in Wales as Declan was bishop of their kinsmen of southern Ireland. It was very probably part of the writer's purpose to call attention to the links of kindred which bound the separated Deisi; witness his allusion later to the alleged visit of Declan to his kinsmen of Bregia. Possibly there were several Declans, as there were scores of Colmans, Finians, &c., and hence perhaps the confusion and some of the apparent inconsistencies. There was certainly a second Declan, a disciple of St. Virgilius, to whom the latter committed care of a church in Austria where he died towards close of eighth century. Again we find mention of a St. Declan who was a foster son of Mogue of Ferns, and so on. It is too much, as Delehaye (*"Legendes Hagiographiques"*) remarks, to expect the populace to distinguish

between namesakes. Great men are so rare! Is it likely there should have lived two saints of the same name in the same country!

The latest commentators on the question of St. Declan's period—and they happen to be amongst the most weighty—argue strongly in favour of the pre-Patrician mission (*Cfr.* Prof. Kuno Meyer, *Learning Ireland in the Fifth Century*). Discussing the *way* in which letters first reached our distant island of the west and the *causes* which led to the proficiency of sixth-century Ireland in classical learning Zimmer and Meyer contend that the seeds of that literary culture, which flourished in Ireland of the sixth century, had been sown therein in the first and second decades of the preceding century by Gaulish scholars who had fled from their own country owing to invasion of the latter by Goths and other barbarians. The fact that these scholars, who were mostly Christians, sought asylum in Ireland indicates that Christianity had already penetrated thither, or at any rate that it was known and tolerated there. Dr. Meyer answers the objection that if so large and so important an invasion of scholars took place we ought have some reference to the fact in the Irish annals. The annals, he replies, are of local origin and they rarely refer in their oldest parts to national events: moreover they are very meagre in their information about the fifth century. One Irish reference to the Gaulish scholars is, however, adduced in corroboration; it occurs in that well known passage in St. Patrick's "Confessio" where the saint cries out against certain "rhetoricians" in Ireland who were hostile to him and pagan,— "You rhetoricians who do not know the Lord, hear and search Who it was that called me up, fool though I be, from the midst of those who think themselves wise and skilled in the law and mighty orators and powerful in everything." Who were these "rhetorici" that have made this passage so difficult for commentators and have caused so various constructions to be put upon it? It is clear, the professor maintains, that the reference is to pagan rhetors from Gaul whose arrogant presumption, founded on their learning, made them regard with disdain the comparatively illiterate apostle of the Scots. Everyone is familiar with the classic passage of Tacitus wherein he alludes to the harbours of Ireland as being more familiar to continental mariners than those of Britain. We have references moreover to refugee Christians who fled to Ireland from the persecutions of Diocletian more than a century before St. Patrick's day; in addition it is abundantly evident that many Irishmen—Christians like Celestius the lieutenant of Pelagius, and possibly Pelagius himself, amongst them—had risen to distinction or notoriety abroad before middle of the fifth century.

Possibly the best way to present the question of Declan's age is to put in tabulated form the arguments of the pre-Patrician advocates against the counter contentions of those who claim that Declan's period is later than Patrick's:—

For the Pre-Patrician Mission.	Against Theory of Early Fifth Century period.
1 —Positive statement of Life, corroborated by Lives of SS. Ciaran and Ailbhe.	1 —Contradictions, anachronisms, &c., of Life.
2 —Patrick's apparent avoidance of the Principality of Decies.	2 —Lack of allusion to Declan in the Lives of St. Patrick.
3 —The peculiar Declan cult and the strong local hold which Declan has maintained.	3 —Prosper's testimony to the mission of Palladius as first bishop to the believing Scots.
	4 —Alleged motives for later invention of Pre-Patrician story.

In this matter and at this hour it is hardly worth appealing to the authority of Lanigan and the scholars of the past. Much evidence not available in Lanigan's day is now at the service of scholars. We are to look rather at the reasoning of Colgan, Ussher, and Lanigan than to the mere weight of their names.

Referring in order to our tabulated grounds of argument, *pro* and *con*, and taking the *pro* arguments first, we may (I.) discard as evidence for our purpose the Life of St. Ibar which is very fragmentary and otherwise a rather unsatisfactory document. The Lives of Ailbhe, Ciaran, and Declan are however mutually corroborative and consistent. The Roman visit and the alleged tutelage under Hilarius are probably embellishments; they look like inventions to explain something and they may contain more than a kernel of truth. At any rate they are matters requiring further investigation and elucidation. In this connection it may be useful to recall that the Life (Latin) of St. Ciaran has been attributed by Colgan to Evinus the disciple and panegyrist of St. Patrick.

Patrick's apparent neglect of the Decies (II.) may have no special significance. At best it is but negative evidence: taken, however, in connection with (I.) and its consecraria it is suggestive. We can hardly help speculating why the apostle—passing as it were by its front door—should have given the go-bye to a region so important as the Munster Decies. Perhaps he sent preachers into it; perhaps there was no special necessity for a formal mission, as the faith had already found entrance. It is a little noteworthy too that we do not find St. Patrick's name surviving in any ecclesiastical connection with the Decies, if we except Patrick's Well, near Clonmel, and this Well is within a mile or so of the territorial frontier. Moreover the southern portion of the present Tipperary County had been ceded by Aengus to the Deisi, only just previous to Patrick's advent, and had hardly yet had sufficient time to become absorbed. The whole story of Declan's alleged relations with Patrick undoubtedly suggests



some irregularity in Declan's mission—an irregularity which was capable of rectification through Patrick and which *de facto* was finally so rectified.

(III.) No one in Eastern Munster requires to be told how strong is the cult of St. Declan throughout Decies and the adjacent territory. It is hardly too much to say that the Declan tradition in Waterford and Cork is a spiritual actuality, extraordinary and unique, even in a land which till recently paid special popular honour to its local saints. In traditional popular regard Declan in the Decies has ever stood first, foremost, and pioneer. Carthage, founder of the tribal see, has held and holds in the imagination of the people only a secondary place. Declan, whencesoever or whenever he came, is regarded as the spiritual father to whom the Deisi owe the gift of faith. How far this tradition and the implied belief in Declan's priority and independent mission are derived from circulation of the "Life" throughout Munster in the last few centuries it is difficult to gauge, but the tradition seems to have flourished as vigorously in the days of Colgan as it does to-day. Declan's "pattern" at Ardmore continues to be still the most noted celebration of its kind in Ireland. A few years ago it was participated in by as many as fourteen thousand people from all parts of Waterford, Cork, and Tipperary. The scenes and ceremonies have been so frequently described that it is not necessary to recount them here—suffice it to say that the devotional practices and, in fact, the whole celebration is of a purely popular character receiving no approbation, and but bare toleration, from church or clergy. Even to the present day Declan's name is borne as their prænomen by hundreds of Waterford men, and, before introduction of the modern practice of christening with foolish foreign names, its use was far more common, as the ancient baptismal registers of Ardmore, Old Parish, and Clashmore attest. On the other hand Declan's name is associated with comparatively few places in the Decies. Of these the best known is Relig Deaglain, a disused graveyard and early church site on the townland of Drumroe, near Cappoquin. There was also an ancient church called Killdeglain, near Stradbally.

Against the theory of the pre-Patrician or *citra*-Patrician mission we have first the objection, which really has no weight, and which we shall not stop to discuss, that it is impossible for Christianity at that early date to have found its way to this distant island, beyond the boundary of the world. An argument on a different plane is (I.), the undoubtedly contradictory and inconsistent character of the Life. It is easy however to exaggerate the importance of this point. Modern critical methods were undreamed of in the days of our hagiographer, who wrote, moreover, for edification only in a credulous age. Most of the historical documents of the period are in a greater or less degree uncritical but that does not discredit their testimony however much it may confuse their editors. It can be urged moreover that two mutually incompatible genealogies of the saint are given. The genealogy given by MacFirbisigh seems in fact to disagree in almost every possible detail with the genealogy in 23 M. 50 R.I.A. That however is like an argument that Declan never existed. It really suggests and

almost postulates the existence of a second Declan whose Acts and those of *our* Declan have become mutually confused.

(II.) Absence of Declan's name from the Acts of Patrick is a negative argument. It is explicable perhaps by the supposed irregularity of Declan's preaching. Declan was certainly earlier than Mochuda and yet there is no reference to him in the Life of the latter saint. Ailbhe however is referred to in the Tripartite Life of Patrick and the cases of Ailbhe and Declan are *a pari*; the two saints stand or fall together.

(IV.) Motives for invention of the pre-Patrician myth are alleged, scil.:—to rebut certain claims to jurisdiction, tribute or visitation advanced by Armagh in after ages. It is hard to see however how resistance to the claims in question could be better justified on the theory of a pre-Patrician Declan, who admittedly acknowledged Patrick's supremacy, than on the admission of a post-Patrician mission.

That in Declan we have to deal with a very early Christian teacher of the Decies there can be no doubt. If not anterior to Patrick he must have been the latter's cotemporary. Declan however had failed to convert the chieftain of his race and for this—reading between the lines of the "Life"—we seem to hear Patrick blaming him.

The monuments proper of Declan remaining at Ardmore are (*a*) his *oratory* near the Cathedral and Round Tower in the graveyard, (*b*) his *stone* on the beach, (*c*) his *well* on the cliff, and (*d*) *another stone* said to have been found in his tomb and preserved at Ardmore for long ages with great reversion. The "Life" refers moreover to the saint's pastoral staff and his bell but these have disappeared for centuries.

The "Oratory" is simply a primitive church of the usual sixth century type: it stands 13' 4" x 8' 9" in the clear, and has, or had, the usual high-pitched gables and square-headed west doorway with inclining jambs. Another characteristic feature of the early oratory is seen in the curious antae or prolongation of the side walls. Locally the little building is known as the *beannacán*, in allusion, most likely, to its high gables or the finials which once, no doubt, in Irish fashion, adorned its roof. Though somewhat later than Declan's time this primitive building is very intimately connected with the Saint. Popularly it is supposed to be his grave and within it is a hollow space scooped out, wherein it is said his ashes once reposed. It is highly probable that tradition is quite correct as to the saint's grave, over which the little church was erected in the century following Declan's death. The oratory was furnished with a roof of slate by Bishop Mills in 1716.

"St. Declan's Stone" is a glacial boulder of very hard conglomerate which lies on a rocky ledge of beach beneath the village of Ardmore. It measures some 8' 6" x 4' 6" x 4' 0" and reposes upon two slightly jutting points of the underlying metamorphic rock. Wonderful virtues are attributed to St. Declan's Stone, which, on the occasion of the patronal feast, is visited by hundreds of devotees who, to participate in its healing efficacy and beneficence, crawl laboriously on face and hands through the narrow space between the boulder and the

underlying rock. Near by, at foot of a new storm-wall, are two similar but somewhat smaller boulders which, like their venerated and more famous neighbour, were all wrenched originally by a glacier from their home in the Comeragh Mountains twenty miles away.

"St. Declan's Well," beside some remains of a rather large and apparently twelfth century church on the cliff, in the townland of Dysert is diverted into a shallow basin in which pilgrims bathe feet and hands. Set in some comparatively modern masonry over the well are a carved crucifixion and other figures of apparently late mediaeval character. Some malicious interference with this well led, nearly a hundred years since, to much popular indignation and excitement.

The second "St. Declan's Stone" was a small, cross-inscribed jet-black piece of slate or marble, approximately—2" or 3" x 1½". Formerly it seems to have had a small silver cross inset and was in great demand locally as an amulet for cattle curing. It disappeared however, some fifty years or so since, but very probably it could still be recovered in Dungarvan.

Far the most striking of all the monuments at Ardmore is, of course, the Round Tower which, in an excellent state of preservation, stands with its conical cap of stone nearly a hundred feet high. Two remarkable, if not unique, features of the tower are the series of sculptured corbels which project between the floors on the inside, and the four projecting belts or zones of masonry which divide the tower into storeys externally. The tower's architectural anomalies are paralleled by its history which is correspondingly unique: it stood a regular siege in 1642, when ordnance was brought to bear on it and it was defended by forty confederates against the English under Lords Dungarvan and Broghil.

A few yards to north of the Round Tower stands "The Cathedral" illustrating almost every phase of ecclesiastical architecture which flourished in Ireland from St. Patrick to the Reformation—Cyclopean, Celtic-Romanesque, Transitional and Pointed. The chancel arch is possibly the most remarkable and beautiful illustration of the Transitional that we have. An extraordinary feature of the church is the wonderful series of Celtic arcades and panels filled with archaic sculptures in relief which occupy the whole external face of the west gable.

St. Declan's foundation at Ardmore seems (*teste* Moran's Archdall) to have been one of the Irish religious houses which accepted the reform of Pope Innocent at the Lateran Council and to have transformed itself into a Regular Canonry. It would however be possible to hold, on the evidence, that it degenerated into a mere parochial church. We hear indeed of two or three episcopal successors of the saint, scil.:—Ultan who immediately followed him, Eugene who witnessed a charter to the abbey of Cork in 1174, and Moelettrim Ó Duibhe-rathre who died in 1303 after he had, according to the annals of Inisfallen, "erected and finished the Church" of Ardmore. The "*Wars of the Gaedhil and Gall*" have reference, circa 824 or 825, to plunder by the Northmen of Disert Tipraite which is almost certainly the church of Dysert by the Holy Well at Ardmore. The same fleet, on the same expedition, plundered Dunderrow (near Kinsale), Inisshannon (Bandon River), Lismore, and Kilmolash.

Regarding the age of our "Life" it is difficult with the data at hand to say anything very definite. While dogmatism however is dangerous indefiniteness is unsatisfying. True, we cannot trace the genealogy of the present version beyond middle of the sixteenth century, but its references to ancient monuments existing at date of its compilation show it to be many centuries older. Its language proves little or nothing, for, being a popular work, it would be modernised to date by each successive scribe. Colgan was of opinion it was a composition of the eighth century. Ussher and Ware, who had the Life in very ancient codices, also thought it of great antiquity. Papebrach, the Bollandist, on the other hand, considered the Life could not be older than the twelfth century, but this opinion of his seems to have been based on a misapprehension. In the absence of all diocesan colour or allusion one feels constrained to assign the production to some period previous to Rathbreasail. We should not perhaps be far wrong in assigning the first collection of materials to somewhere in the eighth century or in the century succeeding. The very vigorous ecclesiastical revival of the eleventh century, at conclusion of the Danish wars, must have led to some revision of the country's religious literature. The introduction, a century and-a-half later, of the great religious orders most probably led to translation of the Life into Latin and its casting into shape for reading in refectory or choir.

Only three surviving copies of the Irish Life are known to the writer: one in the Royal Library at Brussels, the second in the Royal Irish Academy Collection (M. 23, 50, pp. 109-120), and the third in possession of Professor Hyde. As the second and third enumerated are copies of one imperfect exemplar it has not been thought necessary to collate both with the Brussels MS. which has furnished the text here printed. M. 23, 50 (R.I.A.) has however been so collated and the marginal references initialled B are to that imperfect copy. The latter, by the way, is in the handwriting of John Murphy "na Raheenach," and is dated 1740. It has not been thought necessary to give more than the important variants.

The present text is a reproduction of the Brussels MS. plus lengthening of contractions. As regards lengthening in question it is to be noted that the well known contraction for *ea* or *e* has been uniformly transliterated *e*. Otherwise orthography of the MS. has been scrupulously followed—even where inconsistent or incorrect. For the division into paragraphs the editor is not responsible; he has merely followed the division originated, or adopted, by the scribe. The Life herewith presented was copied in 1629 by Brother Michael O'Clery of the Four Masters' staff from an older MS. of Eochy O'Heffernan's dated 1582. The MS. of O'Heffernan is referred to by our scribe as *seinleabar*, but his reference is rather to the contents than to the copy. Apparently O'Clery did more than transcribe; he re-edited, as was his wont, into the literary Irish of his day. A page of the Brussels MS., reproduced in facsimile as a frontispiece to the present volume, will give the student a good idea of O'Clery's script and style.

Occasional notes on Declan in the martyrologies and elsewhere give some further information about our saint. Unfortunately however the alleged facts are not always capable of reconciliation with statements of our "Life," and again the existence of a second, otherwise unknown, Declan is suggested. The introduction of rye is attributed to him in the Calendar of Oengus, as introduction of wheat is credited to St. Finan Camm, and introduction of bees to St. Modomnoc,— "It was the full of his shoe that Declan brought, the full of his shoe likewise Finan, but the full of his bell Modomnoc" (*Cal. Oeng.*, April 7th). More puzzling is the note in the same Calendar which makes Declan a foster son of Mogue of Ferns! This entry illustrates the way in which errors originate. A former scribe inadvertently copied in, after Declan's name, portion of the entry immediately following which relates to Colman Hua Liathain. Successive scribes re-copied the error without discovering it and so it became stereotyped.

## **Life of St. Declan or *Betha Decclain***

1. The most blessed Bishop Declan of the most noble race of the kings of Ireland, *i.e.*, the holy bishop who is called Declan was of the most noble royal family of Ireland—a family which held the sceptre and exacted tribute from all Ireland at Tara for ages. Declan was by birth of noble blood as will appear from his origin and genealogy, for it was from Eochaidh Feidhleach, the powerful Ardrigh of Ireland for twelve years, that he sprang. Eochaidh aforesaid, had three sons, *scil.*:—Breas, Nar, and Lothola, who are called the three Finneavna; there reigned one hundred and seven kings of their race and kindred before and after them, *i.e.* of the race of Eremon, king of Ireland,—before the introduction of Christianity and since. These three youths lay one day with their own sister Clothra, daughter of the same father, and she conceived of them. The son she brought forth as a consequence of that intercourse was marked by three red wavy lines which indicated his descent from the three youths aforesaid. He was named Lugaidh Sriabhdearg from the three lines [*sriabaib*] in question, and he was beautiful to behold and of greater bodily strength in infancy than is usual with children of his age. He commenced his reign as king of Ireland the year in which Caius Caesar [Caligula] died and he reigned for twenty-six years. His son was named Criomthan Nianair who reigned but sixteen years. Criomthan's son was named Fearadach Finnfechtach whose son was Fiacha Finnolaidh whose son again was Tuathal Teachtmhar. This Tuathal had a son Felimidh Reachtmhar who had in turn three sons—Conn Ceadcathach, Eochaidh Finn, and Fiacha Suighde. Conn was king of Ireland for twenty years and the productiveness of crops and soil and of dairies in the time of Conn are worthy of commemoration and of fame to the end of time. Conn was killed in Magh Cobha by the Ulstermen, *scil.*:—by Tiopruid Tireach and it is principally his seed which has held the kingship of Ireland ever since. Eochaidh Finn was second son to Felimidh Reachtmhar and he migrated to the latter's province of Leinster, and it is in that province his race and progeny have remained since then. They are called Leinstermen, and there are many chieftains and powerful persons of them in Leinster. Fiacha Suighde moreover, although he died before he succeeded to the chief sovereignty, possessed land around Tara. He left three sons—Ross, Oengus, and Eoghan who were renowned for martial deeds—valiant and heroic in battle and in conflict. Of the three, Oengus excelled in all gallant deeds so that he came to be styled Oengus of the poisonous javelin. Cormac Mac Art Mac Conn it was who reigned in Ireland at this time. Cormac had a son named Ceallach who took by force the daughter of Eoghan Mac Fiacha Suighde to dwell with him, *i.e.* Credhe the daughter of Eoghan. When Oengus Gaebuaibhtheach ("of the poisonous javelin") heard this, *viz.*, that the daughter of his brother had been abducted by Ceallach he was roused to fury and he followed Ceallach to Tara taking with him his

foster child, scil.:—Corc Duibhne, the son of Cairbre, son of Conaire, son of Mogha Lamha whom Cormac held as a hostage from the Munstermen, and whom he had given for safe custody to Oengus. When Oengus reached Tara he beheld Ceallach sitting behind Cormac. He thrust his spear at Ceallach and pierced him through from front to back. However as he was withdrawing the spear the handle struck Cormac's eye and knocked it out and then, striking the steward, killed him. He himself (Oengus) with his foster child escaped safely. After a time Cormac, grieving for the loss of his son, his eye and his steward at the hands of Oengus of the poisonous javelin and of his kinsmen, ordered their expulsion from their tribal territory, *i.e.* from the Decies of Tara, and not alone from these, but from whole northern half of Ireland. However, seven battles were fought in which tremendous loss was inflicted on Cormac and his followers before Oengus and his people, *i.e.* the three sons of Fiacha Suighde, namely, Ross and Oengus and Eoghan, as we have already said, were eventually defeated, and obliged to fly the country and to suffer exile. Consequent on their banishment as above by the king of Ireland they sought hospitality from the king of Munster, Oilill Olum, because Sadhbh, daughter of Conn Ceadcathach was his wife. They got land from him, scil.: the Decies of Munster, and it is to that race, *i.e.* the race of Eoghan Mac Fiacha Suighde that the kings and country of the Decies belong ever since.

2. Of this same race of Eoghan was the holy bishop Declan of whom I shall speak later scil.: Declan son of Eirc, son of Trein, son of Lughaidh, son of Miaich, son of Brian, son of Eoghan, son of Art Corp, son of Moscorb, son of Mesgeadra, son of Measfore, son of Cuana Cainbhreathaigh, son of Conaire Cathbuadhaigh, son of Cairbre, son of Eoghan, son of Fiacha Suighde, son of Felimidh Reachtmhar, son of Tuathal Teachtmhar. The father of Declan was therefore Erc Mac Trein. He and his wife Deithin went on a visit to the house of his kinsman Dobhran about the time that Declan's birth was due. The child she bore was Declan, whom she brought forth without sickness, pain or difficulty but in being lifted up afterwards he struck his head against a great stone. Let it be mentioned that Declan showed proofs of sanctification and power of miracle-working in his mother's womb, as the prophet writes:—"De vulva sanctificavi te et prophetam in gentibus dedi te" [Jeremias 1:5] (Before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee and made thee a prophet unto the nations). Thus it is that Declan was sanctified in his mother's womb and was given by God as a prophet to the pagans for the conversion of multitudes of them from heathenism and the misery of unbelief to the worship of Christ and to the Catholic faith, as we shall see later on. The very soft apex of his head struck against a hard stone, as we have said, and where the head came in contact with the stone it made therein a hollow and cavity of its own form and shape, without injury of any kind to him. Great wonder thereupon seized all who witnessed this, for Ireland was at this time without the true faith and it was rarely that any one (therein) had shown heavenly Christian signs. "Declan's Rock" is the name of the stone with which the Saint's head came into contact. The water or rain which falls into the

before-mentioned cavity (the place of Declan's head) dispels sickness and infirmity, by the grace of God, as proof of Declan's sanctity.

3. On the night of Declan's birth a wondrous sign was revealed to all, that is to the people who were in the neighbourhood of the birthplace; this was a ball of fire which was seen blazing on summit of the house in which the child lay, until it reached up to heaven and down again, and it was surrounded by a multitude of angels. It assumed the shape of a ladder such as the Patriarch, Jacob saw [[Genesis 28:12](#)]. The persons who saw and heard these things wondered at them. They did not know (for the true faith had not yet been preached to them or in this region) that it was God who (thus) manifested His wondrous power (works) in the infant, His chosen child. Upon the foregoing manifestation a certain true Christian, scil.:—Colman, at that time a priest and afterwards a holy bishop, came, rejoicing greatly and filled with the spirit of prophecy, to the place where Declan was; he preached the faith of Christ to the parents and made known to them that the child was full of the grace of God. He moreover revealed to them the height of glory and honour to which the infant should attain before God and men, and it was revealed to him that he (Declan) should spend his life in sanctity and devotion. Through the grace of God, these, *i.e.* Erc and Deithin, believed in God and Colman, and they delivered the child for baptism to Colman who baptised him thereupon, giving him the name of Declan. When, in the presence of all, he had administered Baptism, Colman spoke this prophecy concerning the infant "Truly, beloved child and lord you will be in heaven and on earth most high and holy, and your good deeds, fame, and sanctity will fill all (the four quarters of) Ireland and you will convert your own nation and the Decies from paganism to Christianity. On that account I bind myself to you by the tie of brotherhood and I commend myself to your sanctity."

4. Colman thereupon returned to his own abode; he commanded that Declan should be brought up with due care, that he should be well trained, and be set to study at the age of seven years if there could be found in his neighbourhood a competent Christian scholar to undertake his tuition. Even at the period of his baptism grace and surpassing charity manifested themselves in the countenance of Declan so that it was understood of all that great should be the goodness and the spiritual charm of his mature age. When Dobhran had heard and seen these things concerning his kinsman Erc he requested the latter and Deithin to give him the child to foster, and with this request Erc complied. The name of the locality was "Dobhran's Place" at that time, but since then it has been "Declan's Place." Dobhran presented the homestead to Declan and removed his own dwelling thence to another place. In after years, when Declan had become a bishop, he erected there a celebrated cell in honour of God, and this is the situation of the cell in question:—In the southern part of the Decies, on the east side of Magh Sgiath and not far from the city of Mochuda *i.e.* Lismore. For the space of seven years Declan was fostered with great care by Dobhran (his father's brother) and was much loved by him. God wrought many striking miracles through



Declan's instrumentality during those years. By aid of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him he (Declan)—discreet Christian man that he was—avoided every fault and every unlawful desire during that time.

5. On the completion of seven years Declan was taken from his parents and friends and fosterers to be sent to study as Colman had ordained. It was to Dioma they sent him, a certain devout man perfect in the faith, who had come at that time by God's design into Ireland having spent a long period abroad in acquiring learning. He (Dioma) built in that place a small cell wherein he might instruct Declan and dwell himself. There was given him also, to instruct, together with Declan, another child, scil., Cairbre Mac Colmain, who became afterwards a holy learned bishop. Both these were for a considerable period pursuing their studies together.

6. There were seven men dwelling in Magh Sgiath, who frequently saw the fiery globe which it has been already told they first beheld at the time of Declan's birth. It happened by the Grace of God that they were the first persons to reveal and describe that lightning. These seven came to the place where Declan abode and took him for their director and master. They made known publicly in the presence of all that, later on, he should be a bishop and they spoke prophetically:—"The day, O beloved child and servant of God, will come when we shall commit ourselves and our lands to thee." And it fell out thus (as they foretold), for, upon believing, they were baptised and became wise, devout (and) attentive and erected seven churches in honour of God around Magh Sgiath.

7. Declan remained a long time with Dioma, the holy man we have named, and acquired science and sanctity and diversity of learning and doctrine, and he was prudent, mild, and capable so that many who knew his nobility of blood came when they had heard of the fullness of his sanctity and grace. Moreover they submitted themselves to him and accepted his religious rule. Declan judged it proper that he should visit Rome to study discipline and ecclesiastical system, to secure for himself esteem and approbation thence, and obtain authority to preach to the (Irish) people and to bring back with him the rules of Rome as these obtained in Rome itself. He set out with his followers and he tarried not till he arrived in Rome where they remained some time.

8. At the same period there was a holy bishop, *i.e.* Ailbe, who had been in Rome for a number of years before this and was in the household of Pope Hilary by whom he had been made a bishop. When Declan with his disciples arrived in Rome Ailbe received him with great affection and gladness and he bore testimony before the Roman people to his (Declan's) sanctity of life and nobility of blood. He (Declan) therefore received marks of honour and sincere affection from the people and clergy of Rome when they came to understand how worthy he was, for he was comely, of good appearance, humble in act, sweet in speech, prudent in counsel, frank in conversation, virtuous in mien, generous in gifts, holy in life and resplendent in miracles.

9. When Declan had spent a considerable time in Rome he was ordained a bishop by the Pope, who gave him church-books and rules and orders and sent him to Ireland that he might preach there. Having bidden farewell to the Pope and received the latter's blessing Declan commenced his journey to Ireland. Many Romans followed him to Ireland to perform their pilgrimage and to spend their lives there under the yoke and rule of Bishop Declan, and amongst those who accompanied him was Runan, son of the king of Rome; he was dear to Declan.

10. On the road through Italy Bishop Declan and Patrick met. Patrick was not a bishop at that time, though he was (made a bishop) subsequently by Pope Celestinus, who sent him to preach to the Irish. Patrick was truly chief bishop of the Irish island. They bade farewell to one another and they made a league and bond of mutual fraternity and kissed in token of peace. They departed thereupon each on his own journey, scil.:—Declan to Ireland and Patrick to Rome.

11. Declan was beginning mass one day in a church which lay in his road, when there was sent him from heaven a little black bell, (which came) in through the window of the church and remained on the altar before Declan. Declan greatly rejoiced thereat and gave thanks and glory to Christ on account of it, and it filled him with much courage to combat the error and false teaching of heathendom. He gave the bell for safe keeping and carriage, to Runan aforesaid, *i.e.* son of the king of Rome, and this is its name in Ireland—"The Duibhin Declain," and it is from its colour it derives its name, for its colour is black [*dub*]. There were manifested, by grace of God and Declan's merits, many miracles through its agency and it is still preserved in Declan's church.

12. When Declan and his holy companions arrived at the Sea of Icht [English Channel] he failed, owing to lack of money, to find a ship, for he did not have the amount demanded, and every ship was refused him on that account. He therefore struck his bell and prayed to God for help in this extremity. In a short time after this they saw coming towards them on the crest of the waves an empty, sailless ship and no man therein. Thereupon Declan said:—"Let us enter the ship in the name of Christ, and He who has sent it to us will direct it skilfully to what harbour soever He wishes we should go." At the word of Declan they entered in, and the ship floated tranquilly and safely until it reached harbour in England. Upon its abandonment by Declan and his disciples the ship turned back and went again to the place from which it had come and the people who saw the miracles and heard of them magnified the name of the Lord and Declan, and the words of the prophet David were verified:—"Mirabilis Deus in Sanctis Suis [[Psalm 67\(68\):36](#)] (God is wonderful in His Saints)."

13. After this Declan came to Ireland. Declan was wise like a serpent and gentle like a dove and industrious like the bee, for as the bee gathers honey and avoids the poisonous herbs so did Declan, for he gathered the sweet sap of grace and Holy Scripture till he was filled therewith. There were in Ireland before Patrick came thither four holy bishops with

their followers who evangelized and sowed the word of God there; these are the four:—Ailbe, Bishop Ibar, Declan, and Ciaran. They drew multitudes from error to the faith of Christ, although it was Patrick who sowed the faith throughout Ireland and it is he who turned chiefs and kings of Ireland to the way of baptism, faith and sacrifice and everlasting judgment.

14. These three, scil.:—Declan, Ailbe and Bishop Ibar made a bond of friendship and a league amongst themselves and their spiritual posterity in heaven and on earth for ever and they loved one another. SS. Ailbe and Declan, especially, loved one another as if they were brothers so that, on account of their mutual affection they did not like to be separated from one another—except when their followers threatened to separate them by force if they did not go apart for a very short time. After this Declan returned to his own country—to the Decies of Munster—where he preached, and baptized, in the name of Christ, many whom he turned to the Catholic faith from the power of the devil. He built numerous churches in which he placed many of his own followers to serve and worship God and to draw people to God from the wiles of Satan.

15. Once on a time Declan came on a visit to the place of his birth, where he remained forty days there and established a religious house in which devout men have dwelt ever since. Then came the seven men we have already mentioned as having made their abode around Magh Sgiath and as having prophesied concerning Declan. They now dedicated themselves and their establishment to him as they had promised and these are their names:—Mocellac and Riadan, Colman, Lactain, Finnlaoc, Kevin, &c. [Mobi]. These therefore were under the rule and spiritual sway of bishop Declan thenceforward, and they spent their lives devoutly there and wrought many wonders afterwards.

16. After some time Declan set out to visit Aongus MacNatfrich, king of Cashel, to preach to him and to convert him to the faith of Christ. Declan however had two uterine brothers, sons of Aongus, scil.: Colman and Eoghan. The grace of the Holy Ghost inspiring him Colman went to Ailbe of Emly and received baptism and the religious habit at the latter's hands, and he remained for a space sedulously studying science until he became a saintly and perfect man. Eochaid however remained as he was (at home)—expecting the kingdom of Munster on his father's death, and he besought his father to show due honour to his brother Declan. The king did so and put no obstacle in the way of Declan's preaching but was pleased with Declan's religion and doctrine, although he neither believed nor accepted baptism himself. It is said that refusal (of baptism) was based on this ground: Declan was of the Decies and of Conn's Half, while Aongus himself was of the Eoghanacht of Cashel of Munster—always hostile to the Desii. It was not therefore through ill will to the faith that he believed not, as is proved from this that, when the king heard of the coming to him of Patrick, the archbishop of Ireland, a man who was of British race against which the Irish cherished no hate, not only did he believe but he went from his own city of Cashel to meet him, professed Christianity and was immediately baptised.

17. After this Declan, having sown the word of God and preached to the king (although the latter did not assent to his doctrines), proceeded to his own country and they (the Desii) believed and received baptism except the king alone and the people of his household who were every day promising to believe and be baptised. It however came about through the Devil's agency that they hesitated continually and procrastinated.

18. Other authorities declare that Declan went many times to Rome, but we have no written testimony from the ancient biographers that he went there more than three times. On one of these occasions Declan paid a visit to the holy bishop of the Britons whose name was David at the church which is called Killmuine [Menevia] where the bishop dwelt beside the shore of the sea which divides Ireland from Britain. The bishop received Declan with honour and he remained there forty days, in affection and joy, and they sang Mass each day and they entered into a bond of charity which continued between themselves and their successors for ever afterwards. On the expiration of the forty days Declan took leave of David giving him a kiss in token of peace and set out himself and his followers to the shore of the sea to take ship for Ireland.

19. Now the bell which we have alluded to as sent from heaven to Declan, was, at that time, in the custody of Runan to carry as we have said, for Declan did not wish, on any account, to part with it. On this particular day as they were proceeding towards the ship Runan entrusted it to another member of the company. On reaching the shore however the latter laid the bell on a rock by the shore and forgot it till they were half way across the sea. Then they remembered it and on remembrance they were much distressed. Declan was very sorrowful that the gift sent him by the Lord from heaven should have been forgotten in a place where he never expected to find it again. Thereupon raising his eyes heavenward he prayed to God within his heart and he said to his followers:—"Lay aside your sorrow for it is possible with God who sent that bell in the beginning to send it now again by some marvellous ship." Very fully and wonderfully and beautifully the creature without reason or understanding obeyed its creator, for the very heavy unwieldy rock floated buoyantly and without deviation, so that in a short time they beheld it in their rear with the bell upon it. And when his people saw this wondrous thing it filled them with love for God and reverence for their master. Declan thereupon addressed them prophetically:—"Permit the bell to precede you and follow it exactly and whatsoever haven it will enter into it is there my city and my bishopric will be whence I shall go to paradise and there my resurrection will be." Meantime the bell preceded the ship, and it eased down its great speed remaining slightly in advance of the ship, so that it could be seen from and not overtaken by the latter. The bell directed its course to Ireland until it reached a harbour on the south coast, scil.:—in the Decies of Munster, at an island called, at that time, High Sheep Island [*Aird na gCcaorac*] and the ship made the same port, as Declan declared. The holy man went ashore and gave thanks and praise to God that he had reached the place of his resurrection. Now, in that island de-

pastured the sheep [*cáoirigh*] belonging to the wife of the chieftain of Decies and it is thence that it derives its Irish name—Ard-na-Ccaorac, scil.:—there was in it a high hill and it was a promontory beautiful to behold. One of the party, ascending the summit of the hill, said to Declan:—"How can this little height support your people?" Declan replied:—"Do not call it little hill, beloved son, but 'great height' [*ard mór*]," and that name has adhered to the city ever since, scil.:—Ardmore-Declain. After this Declan went to the king of the Desii and asked of him the aforesaid island. Whereupon the king gave it to him.

20. Declan next returned to Ait-mBreasail where, in a haven at the north side, were the shipping and boats of the island, plying thither and backwards. The people of the island hid all their boats not willing that Declan should settle there; they dreaded greatly that if Declan came to dwell there they themselves should be expelled. Whereupon his disciples addressed Declan:—"Father," said they, "Many things are required (scil.: from the mainland) and we must often go by boat to this island and there will be (crossing) more frequently when you have gone to heaven and we pray thee to abandon the place or else to obtain from God that the sea recede from the land so that it can be entered dry shod, for Christ has said:—'Whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in my name He will give it to you' [[John 15:16](#)]; the place cannot be easily inhabited unless the sea recede from it and on that account you cannot establish your city in it." Declan answered them and said:—"How can I abandon the place ordained by God and in which He has promised that my burial and resurrection shall be? As to the alleged inconvenience of dwelling therein, do you wish me to pray to God (for things) contrary to His will—to deprive the sea of its natural domain? Nevertheless in compliance with your request I shall pray to God and whatever thing be God's will, let it be done." Declan's community thereupon rose up and said:—"Father, take your crosier as Moses took the rod [[Exodus 14:16](#)] and strike the sea therewith and God will thus show His will to you." His disciples prayed therefore to him because they were tried and holy men. They put Declan's crosier in his hand and he struck the water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost and made the sign of the cross over the water and immediately, by command and permission of God, the sea commenced to move out from its accustomed place—so swiftly too that the monsters of the sea were swimming and running and that it was with difficulty they escaped with the sea. However, many fishes were left behind on the dry strand owing to the suddenness of the ebb. Declan, his crosier in his hand, pursued the receding tide and his disciples followed after him. Moreover the sea and the departing monsters made much din and commotion and when Declan arrived at the place where is now the margin of the sea a stripling whose name was Mainchin, frightened at the thunder of the waves and the cry of the unknown monsters with gaping mouths following the (receding) water, exclaimed:—"Father, you have driven out the sea far enough; for I am afraid of those horrid monsters." When Declan heard this and (saw) the sea standing still at the word of the youth it displeased him and turning round he struck him a slight blow

on the nose. Three drops of blood flowed from the wound on to the ground in three separate places at the feet of Declan. Thereupon Declan blessed the nose and the blood ceased immediately (to flow). Then Declan declared:—"It was not I who drove out the sea but God in His own great power who expelled it and He would have done still more had you not spoken the words you have said." Three little wells of clear sweet water burst forth in the place where fell the three drops of blood at the feet of Declan, and these wells are there still and the colour of blood is seen in them occasionally as a memorial of this miracle. The shore, rescued from the sea, is a mile in width and is of great length around (the island) and it is good and fertile land for tillage and pasture—lying beneath the monastery of Declan. As to the crosier which was in Declan's hand while he wrought this miracle, this is its name—the Feartach Declain, from the miracles and marvels [*fertaib*] wrought through it. I shall in another, subsequent, place relate some of these miracles (narrated).

21. After the expulsion of the sea by this famous Saint, scil.: Declan, whose name and renown spread throughout Erin because of his great and diverse miracles, he commenced to build a great monastery by the south side of the stream which flows through the island into the sea. This monastery is illustrious and beautiful and its name is Ardmor Declain, as we have said. After this came many persons to Declan, drawn from the uttermost parts of Ireland, by the fame of his holy living; they devoted themselves, soul and body to God and Declan, binding themselves beneath his yoke and his rule. Moreover he built himself in every place throughout the territory of the Decies, churches and monasteries and not alone in his own territory (did he build) but in other regions of Ireland under tribute to him. Great too were the multitudes (thousands) of men and women who were under his spiritual sway and rule, in the places we have referred to, throughout Ireland, where happily they passed their lives. He ordained some of his disciples bishops and appointed them in these places to sow the seed of faith and religion therein. Gentleness and charity manifested themselves in Declan to such an extent that his disciples preferred to live under his immediate control and under his direction as subjects than to be in authority in another monastery.

22. After this the holy renowned bishop, head of justice and faith in the Gaelic island came into Ireland, *i.e.* Patrick sent by Celestinus, the Pope. Aongus Mac Nathfrich went to meet him soon as he heard the account of his coming. He conducted him (Patrick) with reverence and great honour to his own royal city—to Cashel. Then Patrick baptised him and blessed himself and his people and his city. Patrick heard that the prince of the Decies had not been baptised and did not believe, that there was a disagreement between the prince and Declan and that the former refused to receive instruction from the latter. Patrick thereupon set out to preach to the prince aforesaid. Next, as to the four bishops we have named who had been in Rome: Except Declan alone they were not in perfect agreement with Patrick. It is true that subsequently to this they did enter into a league of peace and harmonious actions with Patrick and paid him fealty. Ciaran, however, paid him all respect

and reverence and was of one mind with him present or absent. Ailbe then, when he saw the kings and rulers of Ireland paying homage to Patrick and going out to meet him, came himself to Cashel, to wait on him and he also paid homage to him (Patrick) and submitted to his jurisdiction, in presence of the king and all others. Bear in mind it was Ailbe whom the other holy bishops had elected their superior. He therefore came first to Patrick, lest the others, on his account, should offer opposition to Patrick, and also that by his example the others might be more easily drawn to his jurisdiction and rule. Bishop Ibar however would on no account consent to be subject to Patrick, for it was displeasing to him that a foreigner should be patron of Ireland. It happened that Patrick in his origin was of the Britons and he was nurtured in Ireland having been sold to bondage in his boyhood. There arose misunderstanding and dissension between Patrick and Bishop Ibar at first, although (eventually), by intervention of the angel of peace, they formed a mutual fellowship and brotherly compact and they remained in agreement for ever after. But Declan did not wish to disagree at all with Patrick for they had formed a mutual bond of friendship on the Italian highway and it is thus the angel commanded him to go to Patrick and obey him:—

23. The angel of God came to Declan and said to him "Go quickly to Patrick and prevent him cursing your kindred and country, for to-night, in the plain which is called Inneoin, he is fasting against the king, and if he curses your people they shall be accursed for ever." Thereupon Declan set out in haste by direction of the angel to Inneoin, *i.e.* the place which is in the centre of the plain of Femhin in the northern part of the Decies. He crossed Slieve Gua [Knockmaeldown] and over the Suir and arrived on the following morning at the place where Patrick was. When Patrick and his disciples heard that Declan was there they welcomed him warmly for they had been told he would not come. Moreover Patrick and his people received him with great honour. But Declan made obeisance to Patrick and besought him earnestly that he should not execrate his people and that he should not curse them nor the land in which they dwelt, and he promised to allow Patrick do as he pleased. And Patrick replied:—"On account of your prayer not only shall I not curse them but I shall give them a blessing." Declan went thereupon to the place where was the king of Decies who was a neighbour of his. But he contemned Patrick and he would not believe him even at the request of Declan. Moreover Declan promised rewards to him if he would go to Patrick to receive baptism at his hands and assent to the faith. But he would not assent on any account. When Declan saw this, *scil.:*—that the king of the Decies, who was named Ledban, was obstinate in his infidelity and in his devilry—through fear lest Patrick should curse his race and country—he (Declan) turned to the assembly and addressed them:—"Separate yourselves from this accursed man lest you become yourselves accursed on his account, for I have myself baptised and blessed you, but come you," said he, "with us, to Patrick, whom God has sent to bless you, for he has been chosen Archbishop and chief Patron of all Erin; moreover, I have a right to my own patrimony and to be king over you as that man (Ledban)

has been." At this speech they all arose and followed Declan who brought them into the presence of Patrick and said to the latter:—See how the whole people of the Deisi have come with me as their Lord to thee and they have left the accursed prince whose subjects they have been, and behold they are ready to reverence you and to obey you for it is from me they have received baptism." At this Patrick rose up with his followers and he blessed the people of the Deisi and not them alone, but their woods and water and land. Whereupon the chiefs and nobles of the Deisi said:—"Who will be King or Lord over us now?" And Declan replied:—"I am your lord and whomsoever I shall appoint offer you as lord, Patrick and all of us will bless, and he shall be king over you all." And he whom Declan appointed was Feargal MacCormac a certain young man of the nation of the Deisi who was a kinsman of Declan himself. He (Declan) set him in the midst of the assembly in the king's place and he was pleasing to all. Whereupon Patrick and Declan blessed him and each of them apart proclaimed him chieftain. Patrick moreover promised the young man that he should be brave and strong in battle, that the land should be fruitful during his reign. Thus have the kings of the Deisi always been.

24. After these things Declan and Feargal Mac Cormac (king of the Deisi) and his people gave a large area of land to Patrick in the neighbourhood of Magh Feimhin and this belongs to his successors ever since and great lordship there. And the place which was given over to him is not far from the Suir. There is a great very clear fountain there which is called "Patrick's Well" and this was dear to Patrick. After this, with blessing, they took leave of one another and Patrick returned to Cashel to Aongus Mac Natfrich and Declan went with him.

25. A miracle was wrought at that time on Declan through the intercession and prayers of Patrick for as Declan was walking carelessly along he trod upon a piece of sharp iron which cut his foot so that blood flowed freely and Declan began to limp. Ailbe of Emly was present at this miracle and Sechnall a bishop of Patrick's and a holy and wise man, and he is said to be the first bishop buried in Ireland. The wound which Declan had received grieved them very much. Patrick was informed of the accident and was grieved thereat. He said:—"Heal, O Master (*i.e.* God), the foot of your own servant who bears much toil and hardship on your account." Patrick laid his hand on the wounded foot and made over it the sign of the cross when immediately the flow of blood ceased, the lips of the wound united, a cicatrix formed upon it and a cure was effected. Then Declan rose up with his foot healed and joined in praising God. The soldiers and fighting men who were present cried out loudly, blessing God and the saints.

26. As Patrick and the saints were in Cashel, *i.e.* Ailbe and Declan with their disciples, in the territory of Aongus Mac Nathfrich, they made much progress against paganism and errors in faith and they converted them (the pagans) to Christianity. It was ordained by Patrick and Aongus Mac Natfrich in presence of the assembly, that the Archbishopric of Munster should belong to Ailbe, and to Declan, in like manner, was ordained (committed)



his own race, *i.e.* the Deisi, whom he had converted to be his parish and his episcopate. As the Irish should serve Patrick, so should the Deisi serve Declan as their patron, and Patrick made the *rann*:—

"Humble Ailbe the Patrick of Munster, greater than any saying, Declan,  
Patrick of the Deisi—the Decies to Declan for ever."

This is equivalent to saying that Ailbe was a second Patrick and that Declan was a second Patrick of the Decies. After that, when the king had bidden them farewell and they had all taken leave of one another, the saints returned to their respective territories to sow therein the seed of faith.

27. Declan and Fergal Mac Cormac, king of the Deisi, with his army and followers, met one another at Indeoin and they made still more strong on the people the bond of Christian obligation. The king we have already mentioned, *scil.*:—Ledban, the recusant to the Christian name, was rejected of all and he came to nothing, leaving no knowledge (memory) of his history, as is written of the enemies of the faith:—"Their memory perisheth like a sound" [[Psalm 9:7](#)]. Moreover Declan and Fergal and the chief men of the Deisi decreed this as the place where the king of the Deisi should be inaugurated for ever thenceforward, because it was there Patrick and Declan blessed the king, Fergal; moreover tradition states that it was there the kings were crowned and ruled over the Deisi in pagan times.

28. At that time there broke out a dreadful plague in Munster and it was more deadly in Cashel than elsewhere. Thus it affected those whom it attacked: it first changed their colour to yellow and then killed them. Now Aongus had, in a stone fort called "Rath na nIrlann," on the western side of Cashel, seven noble hostages. It happened that in one and the same night they all died of the plague. The king was much affected thereat and he gave orders to have the fact concealed lest it should bring disgrace or even war upon him, for the hostages were scions of the strongest and most powerful families in Munster. On the morrow however Declan came to Cashel and talked with Aonghus. The king welcomed him heartily and addressing him said to him in presence of persons of his court, "I pray you, Declan, servant of God, that in the name of Christ you would raise to life for me the seven hostages whom I held in bondage from the chieftains of Munster. They have died from the plague of which you hear, and I fear their fathers will raise war and rebellion against me, for they are men of strength and power, and indeed we are ashamed of their death, for they will say that it is we ourselves who killed them." Declan answered the king, saying to him:—"Such a matter as this—to raise one to life from death—belongs to Omnipotence alone—but I shall do whatever is in my power. I go where the bodies lie and pray to God for them and let Him do in their regard what seems best to Him." Next, Declan, with a multitude and his disciples together with the king's councillors, went to the place where the corpses of the young men lay. The king followed after them until he came in sight of the bodies. Declan, full of divine

faith, entered the house wherein they lay and he sprinkled holy water over them and prayed for them in the presence of all, saying:—"O Lord Jesus Christ, only Son of the living God, for thine own name's sake wake the dead that they may be strengthened in the Catholic faith through our instrumentality." Thereupon, at Declan's prayer, the group (of corpses) revived and they moved their eyelids and Declan said to them "In the name of Christ, our Saviour, stand up and bless and glorify God." And at his words they rose up immediately and spoke to all. Declan then announced to the king that they were alive and well. When people saw this remarkable miracle they all gave glory and praise to God. The fame of Declan thereupon spread throughout Erin and the king rejoiced for restoration of his hostages.

29. After this the people of Cashel besought Bishop Declan to bless their city and banish the plague from them and to intercede with God for those stricken with sickness who could not escape from its toils. Declan seeing the people's faith prayed to God and signed with the sign of Redemption the four points of the compass. As he concluded, there was verified the saying of Christ to His disciples when leaving them and going to heaven:—"Super aegros imponent manus et bene habebunt" [Mark 16:18] ("I shall place my hands on the sick and they shall be healed"). Soon as Declan had made the sign of the cross each one who was ill became well and not alone were *these* restored to health but (all the sick) of the whole region round about in whatsoever place there were persons ailing. Moreover the plague was banished from every place and all rejoiced greatly thereat as well as on account of the resurrection of the dead men we have narrated. The king thereupon ordered tribute and honour to Declan and his successors from himself and from every king who should hold Cashel ever after. Upon this the glorious bishop Declan blessed Aongus together with his city and people and returned back to his own place.

30. One night Declan was a guest at the house of a wealthy man who dwelt in the southern part of Magh Femhin; this is the kind of person his host was, scil.:—a pagan who rejected the true faith, and his name was Dercan. He resolved to amuse himself at the Christians' expense; accordingly he ordered his servants to kill a dog secretly, to cut off its head and feet and to bury them in the earth and then to cook the flesh properly and to set it before Declan and his company as their meal. Moreover he directed that the dog should be so fat that his flesh might pass as mutton. When, in due course, it was cooked, the flesh, together with bread and other food, was laid before Declan and his following. At that moment Declan had fallen asleep but he was aroused by his disciples that he might bless their meal. He observed to them:—"Indeed I see, connected with this meat, the ministry of the devil." Whereupon he questioned the waiters as to the meat—what kind it was and whence procured. They replied: "Our master ordered us to kill a fat ram for you and we have done as he commanded." Declan said, "Our Master is Jesus Christ and may He show us what it is that connects the ministry of Satan with this meat and preserve thy servants from eating forbidden food." As he spoke thus Declan saw in the meat the claw of a dog, for, without intending it,

they had boiled one quarter of the dog with its paw adhering; they thought they had buried it (the incriminating limb) with the other paws. Declan exclaimed, "This is not a sheep's but a dog's foot." When the attendants heard this they went at once to their master and related the matter to him. Then Dercan came to Declan, accepted his faith and received Baptism at his hands, giving himself and his posterity to Declan for ever. Moreover he gave his homestead to Declan and his people were baptised. After this Dercan requested that Declan should bless something in his homestead which might remain as a memorial of him (Dercan) for ever. Then Declan blessed a bell which he perceived there and its name is Clog-Dhercain ("Dercan's Bell"); moreover, he declared: "I endow it with this virtue (power) that if the king of Decies march around it when going to battle, against his enemies, or to punish violation of his rights, he shall return safely and with victory." This promise has been frequently fulfilled, but proud (men) undertaking battle or conflict unjustly even if they march around it do not obtain victory but success remains with the enemy. The name of that homestead was Teach-Dhercain ("Dercain's House") and its name now is Coningean, from the claw [*con*] of the hound or dog aforesaid. To this place came the saintly concourse, scil.—Coman and Ultan, MacErc and Mocoba and Maclaisren, who dedicated themselves to (the service of) God and placed themselves under the spiritual rule and sway of Declan.

31. Thereupon Declan established a monastery in that place, scil.—in Coningin—and he placed there this holy community with a further band of disciples. Ultan however he took away with him to the place whither he went.

32. On another (subsequent) occasion Declan visited Bregia, *i.e.* the original territory which belonged to his race previous to the expulsion of his ancestors. There he was treated with particular honour by the king of Tara and by the chieftains of Meath by whom he was beloved, since it was from themselves (their tribe and territory) that his forbears had gone out, for that region was the patrimony of his race and within it lies Tara. Declan instituted therein a monastery of Canons, on land which he received from the king, and it is from him the place is named. Moreover he left therein a relic or illuminated book and a famous gospel which he was accustomed to carry always with him. The gospel is still preserved with much honour in the place and miracles are wrought through it. After this again he turned towards Munster.

33. Declan was once travelling through Ossory when he wished to remain for the night in a certain village. But the villagers not only did not receive him but actually drove him forth by force of arms. The saint however prayed to God that it might happen to them what the Sacred Scripture says, "Vengeance is mine I will repay" [[Deuteronomy 32:35](#)]. The dwellers in the village, who numbered sixty, died that same night with the exception of two men and ten women to whom the conduct of the others towards the saint had been displeasing. On the morrow these men and women came humbly to the place where Declan was and they told him—what he himself foreknew—how miserably the others had died. They

themselves did penance and they bestowed on Declan a suitable site whereon he built a monastery and he got another piece of land and had the dead buried where he built the monastery. The name of that monastery is Cill-Colm-Dearg. This Colm-Dearg was a kind, holy man and a disciple of Declan. He was of East Leinster, *i.e.* of the Dal Meiscorb, and it is from him that the monastery is named. When he (Declan) had completed that place he came to his own territory again, *i.e.* to the Decies.

34. On a certain day Declan came to a place called Ait-Breasail and the dwellers therein would not allow him to enter their village; moreover they hid all their boats so that he could not go into his own island, for they hated him very much. In consideration however of the sanctity of his servant, who prayed in patience, God the All-Powerful turned the sea into dry land as you have already heard. Declan passed the night in an empty stable out in the plain and the people of the village did not give him even a fire. Whereupon, appropriately the anger of God fell on them, who had not compassion enough to supply the disciple of God with a fire. There came fire from heaven on them to consume them all [together with their] homestead and village, so that the place has been ever since a wilderness accursed, as the prophet writes: "civitates eorum destruxisti" [[Psalm 9:7](#)], *i.e.* the dwellings of the unmerciful are laid waste.

35. On yet another occasion Declan was in his own region—travelling over Slieve Gua in the Decies, when his horse from some cause got lame so that he could proceed no further. Declan however, seeing a herd of deer roaming the mountain close to him, said to one of his people: "Go, and bring me for my chariot one of these deer to replace my horse and take with you this halter for him." Without any misgiving the disciple went on till he reached the deer which waited quietly for him. He chose the animal which was largest and therefore strongest, and, bringing him back, yoked him to the chariot. The deer thereupon obediently and without effort carried Bishop Declan till he came to Magh Femhin, where, when he reached a house of entertainment, the saint unloosed the stag and bade him to go free as was his nature. Accordingly, at the command of the saintly man and in the presence of all, the stag returned on the same road back (to the mountain). Dormanach is the name of the man aforesaid who brought the stag to Declan and him Declan blessed and gave him a piece of land on the north of Decies close by the Eoghanacht and his posterity live till now in that place.

36. On another occasion, Declan, accompanied, as usual, by a large following, was travelling, when one member of the party fell on the road and broke his shin bone in twain. Declan saw the accident and, pitying the injured man, he directed an individual of the company to bandage the broken limb so that the sufferer might not die through excess of pain and loss of blood. All replied that they could not endure to dress the wound owing to their horror thereof. But there was one of the company, Daluadh by name, who faced the wound boldly and confidently and said: "In the name of Christ and of Declan our patron I

shall be surgeon to this foot"; and he said that jestingly. Nevertheless he bandaged the foot carefully and blessed it aright in the name of God and Declan, and in a little while the wound healed and they all gave praise to God. Then Declan said to Daluadh: "You promised to be surgeon to that foot in Christ's name and in mine and God has vouchsafed to heal it at these words: on this account you will be a true physician for ever and your children and your seed after you for ever shall also possess the healing art, and whomsoever they shall practise healing upon in God's name and mine, provided there be no hatred [in their hearts] nor too great covetousness of a physician's fee to him, God and myself shall send relief." This promise of Declan has been fulfilled in the case of that family.

37. On another occasion, as Declan was travelling in the northern part of Magh Femhin beside the Suir, he met there a man who was carrying a little infant to get it baptised. Declan said to the people [his *muinntear*, or following]: "Wait here till I baptise yonder child," for it was revealed by the Holy Ghost to him that he [the babe] should serve God. The attendant replied to him that they had neither a vessel nor salt for the baptism. Declan said: "We have a wide vessel, the Suir, and God will send us salt, for this child is destined to become holy and wonderful [in his works]." Thereupon Declan took up a fistful of earth and, making prayer in his heart to God, he signed the clay with the sign of the cross of redemption. It (the handful of earth) became white, dry salt, and all, on seeing it, gave thanks and honour to God and Declan. The infant was baptised there and the name of Ciaran given him. Declan said: "Bring up my spiritual son carefully and send him, at a fitting age, for education to a holy man who is well instructed in the faith for he will become a shining bright pillar in the Church." And it was this child, Ciaran Mac Eochaidh, who founded in after years a famous monastery (from which he migrated to heaven) and another place (monastery) besides. He worked many miracles and holy signs and this is the name of his monastery Tiprut [Tubrid] and this is where it is:—in the western part of the Decies in Ui Faithe between Slieve Grot [Galtee] and Sieve Cua and it is within the bishopric of Declan.

38. On another day there came a woman to Declan's monastery not far from the city where she dwelt. She committed a theft that day in Declan's monastery as she had often done previously, and this is the thing she stole—a *habellum* [possibly an item of tribute]; she departed homewards taking it with her and there met her a group of people on the highway, and the earth, in their presence, swallowed her up, and she cast out the tabellum from her bosom and it was quickly turned into a stone which the wayfarers took and brought with them to Declan. Declan himself had in supernatural vision seen all that happened to the woman in punishment of her theft, and the name of Declan was magnified owing to those marvels so that fear took possession of all-those present and those absent. The stone in question remains still in Declan's graveyard in his own town of Ardmore-Declan, where it stands on an elevated place in memory of this miracle.

39. A rich man named Fintan was childless, for his wife was barren for many years. He himself, with his wife, visited Declan and promised large alms and performance of good works provided he (Declan) would pray that they might have children: they held it as certain that if Declan but prayed for them God would grant them children. Declan therefore, praying to God and blessing the pair, said: "Proceed to your home and through God's bounty you shall have offspring." The couple returned home, with great joy for the blessing and for the promise of the offspring. The following night, Fintan lay with his wife and she conceived and brought forth twin sons, scil.: Fiacha and Aodh, who, together with their children and descendants were under tribute and service to God and Declan.

40. When it was made known to a certain holy man, scil.:—Ailbe of Emly Iubar, chief bishop of Munster, that his last days had come, he said to his disciples: "Beloved brethren, I wish, before I die, to visit my very dear fellow worker, scil.:—Declan." After this Ailbe set out on the journey and an angel of God came to Declan notifying him that Ailbe was on his way to visit him. On the angel's notification Declan ordered his disciples to prepare the house for Ailbe's coming. He himself went to meet Ailbe as far as the place which is called Druim Luctraidh [Luchluachra]. Thence they came home together and Ailbe, treated with great honour by Declan and his people, stayed fourteen pleasant days. After that the aged saint returned home again to his own city, scil.:—to Emly Iubar. Declan came and many of his people, escorting Ailbe, to Druim Luchtradh, and Ailbe bade him return to his own city. The two knew they should not see one another in this world ever again. In taking leave of one another, therefore, they shed plentiful tears of sorrow and they instituted an everlasting compact and league between their successors in that place. Ailbe moreover blessed the city of Declan, his clergy and people and Declan did the same for Ailbe and they kissed one another in token of love and peace and each returned to his own city.

41. On a certain day the Castle of Cinaedh, King of the Deisi, took fire and it burned violently. It happened however that Declan was proceeding towards the castle on some business and he was grieved to see it burning; he flung towards it the staff to which we have referred in connection with the drying up of the sea, and it (the staff) flew hovering in the air with heavenly wings till it reached the midst of the flame and the fire was immediately extinguished of its own accord through the grace of God and virtue of the staff and of Declan to whom it belonged. The place from which Declan cast the staff was a long mile distant from the castle and when the king, *i.e.* Cinaedh, and all the others witnessed this miracle they were filled with amazement and gave thanks to God and to Declan when they came to know that it was he who wrought it. Now the place where the castle stands is not far from the Suir, *i.e.* on the south side of it and the place from which Declan cast the staff is beside a ford which is in the Suir or a stream which flows beside the monastery called Mag Laca [Molough] which the holy virgins, daughters of the king of Decies, have built in honour of God. There is a pile of stones and a cross in the place to commemorate this miracle.

42. On another occasion there approached a foreign fleet towards Declan's city and this was their design—to destroy and to plunder it of persons and of cattle, because they (the foreigners) were people hostile to the faith. Many members of the community ran with great haste to tell Declan of the fleet which threatened the town and to request him to beg the assistance of God against the invaders. Declan knew the man amongst his own disciples who was holiest and most abounding in grace, scil., Ultan, already mentioned, and him he ordered to pray to God against the fleet. Ultan had pity on the Christian people and he went instantly, at the command of Declan, in front of the fleet and he held his left hand against it, and, on the spot, the sea swallowed them like sacks full of lead, and the drowned sailors were changed into large rocks which stand not far from the mouth of the haven where they are visible (standing) high out of the sea from that time till now. All Christians who witnessed this rejoiced and were glad and they gave great praise and glory to God and to Declan their own patron who caused the working of this miracle and of many other miracles besides. Next there arose a contention between Ultan and Declan concerning this miracle, for Ultan attributed it to Declan and Declan credited it to Ultan; and it has become a proverb since in Ireland when people hear of danger or jeopardy:—"The left hand of Ultan against you (the danger)." Ultan became, after the death of Declan, a miracle-working abbot of many other holy monks.

43. The holy and glorious archbishop, *i.e.* Patrick, sent one of his own followers to Declan with power and authority (delegation) from the archbishop. And proceeding through the southern part of Decies he was drowned in a river [the Lickey] there, two miles from the city of Declan. When Declan heard this he was grieved and he said: "Indeed it grieves me that a servant of God and of Patrick who sent him to visit me, having travelled all over Ireland, should be drowned in a river of my own territory. Get my chariot for me that I may go in haste to see his corpse, so that Patrick may come to hear of the worry and the grief I have undergone because of his disciple's death." The body had been recovered before the arrival of Declan by others who were close at hand and it had been placed on a bier to be carried to Ciaran for interment. Declan however met them on the way, when he ordered the body to be laid down on the ground. They supposed he was about to recite the Office for the Dead. He (Declan) advanced to the place where the bier was and lifted the sheet covering the face. It (the face) looked dark and deformed as is usual in the case of the drowned. He prayed to God and shed tears, but no one heard aught of what he said. After this he commanded:—"In the name of the Trinity, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost whose religious yoke I bear myself, arise to us for God has given your life to me." He (the dead man) rose up immediately at the command and he greeted Declan and all the others. Whereupon Declan and his disciples received him with honour. At first he was not completely cured but (was) like one convalescent until (complete) health returned to him by degrees again. He however accompanied Declan and remained some time with

him and there was much rejoicing in Declan's city on account of the miracle and his (Declan's) name and fame extended over the country generally. This disciple of Patrick was named Ballin; he returned with great joy and he told him (Patrick) that Declan had raised him from the dead. To many others likewise he related what had happened to him. Patrick, in presence of many persons, hearing of the miracle gave glory and thanks to God and the name of Declan was magnified.

44. With this extraordinary miracle wrought by Declan we wish to conclude our discourse. The number of miracles he wrought, but which are not written here, you are to judge and gather from what we have written. And we wish moreover that you would understand that he healed the infirm, that he gave sight to the eyes of the blind, cleansed lepers, and gave "their walk" to cripples; that he obtained hearing for the deaf, and that he healed many and various diseases in many different places throughout Ireland—(things) which are not written here because of their length and because they are so numerous to record, for fear it should tire readers to hear so much said of one particular person. On that account we shall pass them by.

45. When Declan realised that his last days were at hand and that the time remaining to him was very short he summoned to him his own spiritual son, scil., MacLiag (residing) in the monastery which is on the eastern side of the Decies close to the Leinstermen in order that, at the hour of death, he might receive the Body and Blood of Christ and the Sacraments of the Church from his hands. Thereupon he foretold to his disciples the day of his death and he commanded them to bring him to his own city, for it was not there he dwelt at the time but in a small venerable cell which he had ordered to be built for him between the hill called Ardmore Declain and the ocean—in a narrow place at the brink of the sea by which there flows down from the hill above a small shining stream about which are trees and bushes all around, and it is called Disert Declain. Thence to the city it is a short mile and the reason why Declan used go there was to avoid turmoil and noise so that he might be able to read and pray and fast there. Indeed it was not easy for him to stay even there because of the multitude of disciples and paupers and pilgrims and beggars who followed him thither. Declan was however generous and very sympathetic and on that account it is recorded by tradition that a great following (of poor, &c.), generally accompanied him and that moreover the little cell was very dear to him for the reason we have given, and many devout people have made it their practice to dwell therein.

46. When Declan fell ill and became weak in body, but still strong in hope and faith and love of God, he returned to his own city—his people and disciples and clergy surrounding him. He discoursed to them on the commands of God and he enjoined on them to live holily after his death, to be submissive to authority and to follow as closely as possible the way he had marked out and to preserve his city in a state of piety and under religious rule. And when they had all heard the discourse it grieved them greatly to perceive, from what he had



said, he realised that in a short time he would go away to heaven from them. But they were consoled by his gentle words and then there came to him the holy man, to wit, MacLiag, at his own request, already referred to. He [Declan] received the Body and Blood of Christ and the Sacraments of the Church from his [MacLiag's] hand—surrounded by holy men and his disciples, and he blessed his people and his dependents and his poor, and he kissed them in token of love and peace. Thus, having banished images and the sacrifices to idols, having converted multitudes to the true faith, having established monasteries and ecclesiastical orders in various places, having spent his whole life profitably and holily, this glorious bishop went with the angels to heaven on the ninth day of the Kalends of August and his body was blessed and honoured with Masses and chanting by holy men and by the people of the Decies and by his own monks and disciples collected from every quarter at the time of his death. He was buried with honour in his own city—in Declan's High-Place—in the tomb which by direction of an angel he had himself indicated—which moreover has wrought wonders and holy signs from that time to now. He departed to the Unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost in *Saecula Saeculorum; Amen*. FINIS.

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The poor brother, Michael O'Clery originally copied this life of Declan in Cashel, from the book of Eochy O'Heffernan. The date, A.D., at which that ancient book of Eochy was written is 1582. And the same life has now been re-written in the Convent of the Friars at Duiske, the date, A.D., 27th February, 1629.

And this Life of St. Declan was transcribed electronically for the public domain by Dennis McCarthy, a layman, in the city of Atlanta in Georgia of the United States of America. He copied this life from the 1914 translation from the Irish to the English tongue by Rev. P. Power of University College, Cork. Dennis has completed this work on February 27 in the year of Our Lord 1997, and prayerfully dedicated it to the memory of his deceased siblings.

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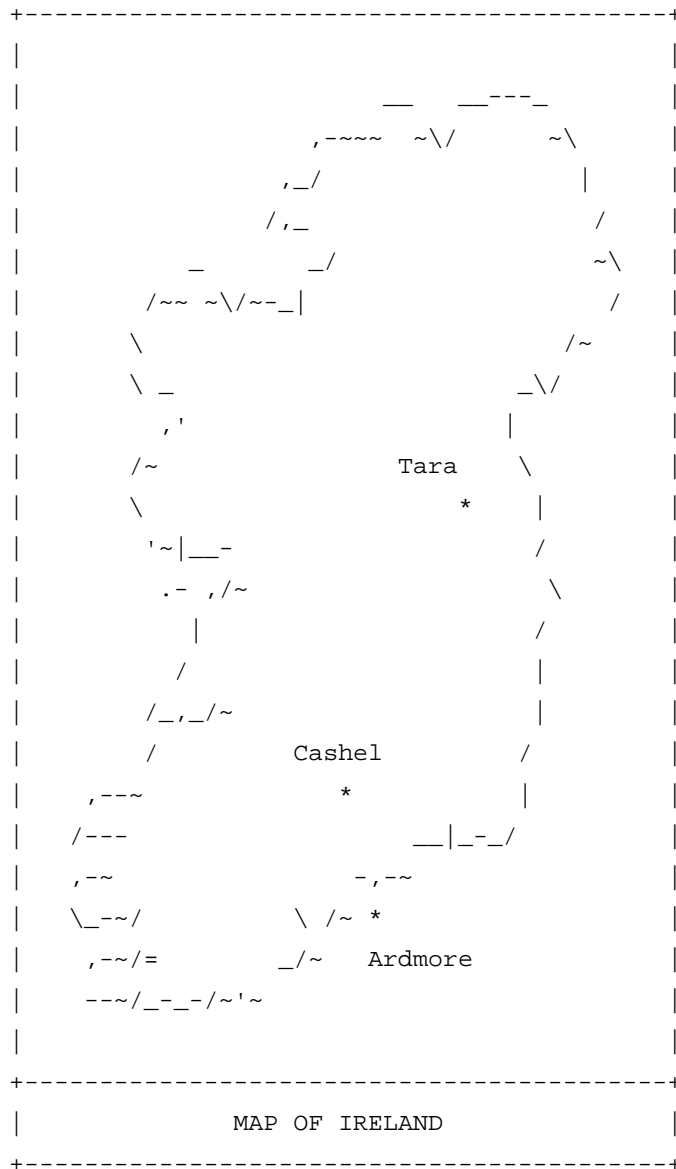
#### **Note**

The Irish text of the *rann* from paragraph 26 reads:

Ailbe umal; Patraicc Muman, mó gacrath,  
Déclan, Patraicc na nDéisi: na Déisi ag Declan gan brat.

And the Latin rendering:

Albeus est humilis dixit Caephurnia proles;  
Patriciusque esto hinc Ailbee Momonia.  
Declanus pariter patronus Desius esto;  
Inter Desenses Patriciusque suos.



**Source:**

Rev. P. Power. Life of St. Declan of Ardmore, and Life of St. Mochuda of Lismore.  
London: Irish Texts Society, 1914.

[Manuscript 4190-4200, Royal (Burgundian) Library, Brussels]

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**About This Text:**

The source for this text includes an introduction, Irish text & English translation on facing pages, and notes. The introduction and the notes are quite lengthy and should take longer to transcribe than the English text. Except for the part of the introduction specific to the Life of Declan and a few notes transplanted in brackets to the body of the text I have not transcribed them. Due to inexperience with the Irish language and its alphabet/font I have decided not to attempt to transcribe the Irish text. Hopefully someone with the appropriate talent and interest will undertake that task some day. I have corrected the errata as indicated in the source and a few obvious printer errors. Please note that this text is full of variant spellings of names and words sometimes inconsistently applied.

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