

# King O'Toole and St. Kevin

*A Legend of Glendalough*

By Samuel Lover

By that lake, whose gloomy shore  
Skylark never warbles o'er,  
Where the cliff hangs high and steep,  
Young Saint Kevin stole to sleep.  
—Moore.

Who has not read of St. Kevin, celebrated as he has been by Moore in the melodies of his native land, with whose wild and impassioned music he has so intimately entwined his name? Through him, in the beautiful ballad whence the epigraph of this story is quoted, the world already knows that the skylark, through the intervention of the saint, never startles the morning with its joyous note in the lonely valley of Glendalough. In the same ballad, the unhappy passion which the saint inspired, and the “unholy blue” eyes of Kathleen, and the melancholy fate of the heroine by the saint’s being “unused to the melting mood,” are also celebrated; as well as the superstitious finale of the legend, in the spectral appearance of the lovelorn maiden:

And her ghost was seen to glide  
Gently o'er the fatal tide.

Thus has Moore given, within the limits of a ballad, the spirit of two legends of Glendalough, which otherwise the reader might have been put to the trouble of reaching after a more roundabout fashion. But luckily for those coming after him, one legend he has left to be

—touched by a hand more unworthy—

and instead of a lyrical essence, the raw material in prose is offered, nearly *verbatim* as it was furnished to me by that celebrated guide and bore Joe Irwin, who traces his descent in a direct line from the old Irish kings, and warns the public in general that “there’s power of them spalpeens sthravaigin’ about, sthrivin’ to put their comether upon the quol’ty, (quality)<sup>1</sup> and callin’ themselves Irwin (knowin’, the thieves o’ the world, how his name had gone far and near, as the rale guide), for to deceave dacent people; but never to b’lieve the likes—for it was only mulvatherin people they wor.” For my part, I promised never to put faith in any but himself; and the old rogue’s self-love being satisfied, we set out to explore the wonders of Glendalough. On arriving at a small ruin, situated on the southeastern side of the lake, my guide assumed an air of importance, and led me into the ivy-covered remains, through a small square doorway, whose simple structure gave evidence of its early date; a lintel of stone lay across two upright supporters after the fashion of such remains in Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> The Irish peasantry very generally call the higher orders “quality.”

“This, sir,” said my guide, putting himself in an attitude, “is the chapel of King O’Toole—av coorse y’ iv often heerd o’ King O’Toole, your honour?”

“Never,” said I.

“Musha, thin, do you tell me so?” said he; “by gor, I thought all the world, far and near, heerd o’ King O’Toole—well! well!! but the darkness of mankind is ontellible. Well, sir, you must know as you didn’t hear it afore, that there was wanst a king, called King O’Toole, who was a fine ould king in the ould ancient times, long ago; and it was him that owned the Churches in the airly days.”

“Surely,” said I, “the Churches were not in King O’Toole’s time?”

“Oh, by no manes, your honour—throth, it’s yourself that’s right enough there; but you know the place is called ‘The Churches,’ bekase they wor built *afther* by Saint Kavin, and wint by the name o’ the Churches iver more; and, therefore, av coorse, the place bein’ so called, I say that the king owned the Churches—and why not, sir, seem’ ’twas his birthright, time out o’ mind, beyant the flood? Well, the king, you see, was the right sort—he was the *rale* boy, and loved sport as he loved his life, and huntin’ in partic’lar; and from the risin’ o’ the sun, up he got, and away he wint over the mountains beyant afther the deer: and the fine times them wor; for the deer was as plinty thin, aye throth, far plintyer than the sheep is now; and that’s the way it was with the king, from the crow o’ the cock to the song o’ the redbreast.

“In this counthry, sir,” added he, speaking parenthetically in an undertone, “we think it onlooky to kill the redbreast, for the robin is God’s own bird.”

Then, elevating his voice to its former pitch, he proceeded:

“Well, it was all mighty good, as long as the king had his health; but, you see, in coorse o time, the king grewn ould, by raison he was stiff in his limbs, and when he got sthricken in years, his heart failed him, and he was lost intirely for want o’ divarshin, bekase he couldn’t go a-huntin’ no longer; and, by dad, the poor king was obleeged at last for to get a goose to divart him.”

Here an involuntary smile was produced by this regal mode of recreation, “the royal game of goose.”

“Oh, you may laugh, if you like,” said he, half affronted, “but it’s thruth I’m tellin’ you; and the way the goose divarted him was this-a-way: you see, the goose used for to swim across the lake, and go down divin’ for throut (and not finer throut in all Ireland, than the same throut), and cotch fish on a Friday for the king, and flew every other day round about the lake divartin’ the poor king, that you’d think he’d break his sides laughin’ at the frolicksome tricks av his goose; so, in coorse o’ time, the goose was the greatest pet in the counthry, and the biggest rogue, and divarted the king to no end, and the poor king was as happy as the day was long. So that’s the way it was; and all went on mighty well, antil, by dad, the goose got thricken in years, as well as the king, and grewn stiff in the limbs, like her mather, and couldn’t divart him no longer; and then it was that the poor king was lost compleate, and didn’t know what in the wide world to do, seem’ he was gone out of all divarshin, by raison that the goose was no more in the flower of her blume.

“Well, the king was nigh hand broken-hearted, and melancholy intirely, and was walkin’ one mornin’ by the edge of the lake, lamentin’ his cruel fate, an’ thinkin’ o’ drownin’ himself, that could get no divarshin in life, when all of a suddint, turnin’ round the corner beyant, who should he meet but a mighty dacent young man comin’ up to him.

“‘God save you,’ says the king (for the king was a civil-spoken gintleman, by all accounts),

“‘God save you,’ says he to the young man.

“ ‘God save you kindly,’ says the young man to him back again; God save you,’ says he, ‘King O’Toole.’

“ ‘Thru for you,’ says the king, ‘I am King O’Toole,’ say he, prince and plennypennytinchery o’ these parts,’ says he; ‘but how kem ye to know that?’ says he.

“ ‘Oh, never mind,’ says Saint Kavin.

“ ‘For you see,’ said old Joe, in his undertone again, and looking very knowingly, “it *was* Saint Kavin, sure enough—the saint himself in disguise, and nobody else. ‘Oh, never mind,’ says he, ‘I know more than that,’ says he, ‘nor twice that.’

“ ‘And who are you?’ said the king, ‘that makes so bowld—who are you, at all at all?’

“ ‘Oh, never you mind,’ says Saint Kavin, ‘who I am; you’ll know more o’ me before we part, King O’Toole,’ says he.

“ ‘I’ll be proud o’ the knowledge o’ your acquaintance, sir,’ says the king, mighty p’lite.

“ ‘Troth, you may say that,’ says Saint Kavin. ‘And now, may I make bowld to ax, how is your goose, King O’Toole?’ says he.

“ ‘Blur-an-agers, how kem you to know about my goose?’ says the king.

“ ‘Oh, no matther; I was given to understand it,’ says Saint Kavin.

“ ‘Oh, that’s a folly to talk,’ says the king; ‘bekase myself and my goose is private frinds,’ says he, ‘and no one could tell you,’ says he, ‘barrin’ the fairies.’

“ ‘Oh, thin, it wasn’t the fairies,’ says Saint Kavin; ‘for I’d have you to know,’ says he, ‘that I don’t keep the likes o’ sitch company.

“ ‘You might do worse then, my gay fellow,’ says the king; ‘for it’s *they* could show you a crock o’ money as aisy as kiss hand; and that’s not to be sneezed at,’ says the king, ‘by a poor man,’ says he.

“ ‘Maybe I’ve a betther way of making money myself,’ says the saint.

“ ‘By gor,’ says the king, ‘barrin’ you’re a coiner,’ says he, ‘that’s impossible!’

“ ‘I’d scorn to be the like, my lord!’ says Saint Kavin, mighty high, ‘I’d scorn to be the like,’ says he.

“ ‘Then, what are you?’ says the king, ‘that makes money so aisy, by your own account?’

“ ‘I’m an honest man,’ says Saint Kavin.

“ ‘Well, honest man,’ says the king, ‘and how is it you make your money so aisy?’

“ ‘By makin’ ould things as good as new,’ says Saint Kavin.

“ ‘Is it a tinker you are?’ says the king.

“ ‘No,’ says the saint; ‘I’m no tinker by thrade, King O’Toole; I’ve a betther thrade than a tinker,’ says he. ‘What would you say,’ says he, ‘if I made your ould goose as good as new?’

“ ‘My dear, at the word o’ making his goose as good as new, you’d think the poor ould king’s eyes was ready to jump out iv his head. ‘And,’ says he, ‘troth thin I’d give you more money nor you could count,’ says he, ‘if you did the like; and I’d be behoulden to you into the bargain.’

“ ‘I scorn your dirty money,’ says Saint Kavin.

“ ‘Faith then, I’m thinkin’ a thrifle o’ change would do you no harm,’ says the king, lookin’ up sly at the old *caubeen* that Saint Kavin fiad on him.

“ ‘I have a vow agin it,’ says the saint; ‘and I am book sworn,’ says he, ‘never to have goold, silver, or brass in my company.

“ ‘Barrin’ the thrifle you can’t help,’ says the king, mighty ‘cute,<sup>2</sup> and looking him straight in the face.

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<sup>2</sup> Cunning—an abbreviatron of acute.

“ ‘You just hot it,’ says Saint Kevin; ‘but though I can’t take money,’ says he, ‘I could take a few acres o’ land, if you’d give them to me.’

“ ‘With all the veins o’ my heart,’ says the king, ‘if you can do what you say.’

“ ‘Thry me!’ says Saint Kevin. ‘Call down your goose here,’ says he, ‘and I’ll see what I can do for her.’

With that, the king whistled, and down kern the poor goose, all as one as a hound, waddlin’ up to the poor ould cripple, her masther, and as like him as two *pays*. The minute the saint clapt his eyes an the goose, I’ll do the job for you,’ says he, ‘King O’Toole!’

“ ‘By Jaminee,’ says King O’Toole, ‘if you do, but I’ll say you’re the cleverest fellow in the sivin parishes.’

“ ‘Oh, by dad,’ says Saint Kevin, ‘you must say more nor that—my horn’s not so soft all out,’ says he, ‘as to repair your ould goose or nothin’; what’ll you gi’ me, if I do the job for you?—that’s the that,’ says Saint Kevin.

“ ‘I’ll give you whatever you ax,’ says the king; ‘isn’t that fair?’

“ ‘Divil a fairer,’ says the saint; ‘that’s the way to do business. Now,’ says he, ‘this is the bargain I’ll make with you, King O’Toole: will you gi’ me all the ground the goose flies over, the first offer,<sup>3</sup> afther I make her as good as new?’

“ ‘I will,’ says the king.

“ ‘You won’t go back o’ your word?’ says Saint Kevin.

“ ‘Honour bright!’ says King O’Toole, howldin’ out his fist.”

Here old Joe, after applying his hand to his mouth, and making a sharp, blowing sound (something like “*thp*”), extended it to illustrate the action.<sup>4</sup>

“ ‘Honour bright,’ says Saint Kevin, back again, ‘it’s a bargain,’ says he. ‘Come here!’ says he to the poor ould goose, ‘come here, you unfort’nate ould cripple,’ says he, ‘and it’s I that ’ill make you the sportin’ bird.’

“With that, my dear, he tuk up the goose by the two wings—’criss o’ my crass an’ you,’ says he, markin’ her to grace with the blessed sign at the same minute—and throwin’ her up in the air. ‘Whew!’ says he, jist givin’ her a blast to help her; and with that, my jewel, she tuk to her heels, flyin’ like one o’ the aigles themselves, and cuttin’ as many capers as a swallow before a shower of rain. Away she wint down there, right forninst you, along the side o’ the clift, and flew over Saint Kevin’s bed (that is where Saint Kevin’s bed is now, but was not thin, by raison it wasn’t made, but was conthived afther by Saint Kevin himself, that the women might lave him alone), and on with her undher Lugduff, and round the ind av the lake there, far beyant where you see the watherfall (though indeed it’s no watherfall at all now, but only a poor dhribble iv a thing; but if you seen it in the winther, it id do your heart good, and it roarin’ like mad, and as white as the dhruven snow, and rowlin’ down the big rocks before it, all as one as childher playin’ marbles)—and on with her thin right over the lead mines o’ Luanure (that is where the lead mines is *now*, but was not *thin*, by raison they worn’t discovered, *but was all goold in Saint Kaauin’s time*). Well, over the ind o’ Luanure she flew, stout and studdy, and round the other md av the little lake, by the Churches (that is, av coorse, where the Churches is now, but was not

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<sup>3</sup> First effort or attempt.

<sup>4</sup> This royal mode of concluding a bargain has descended in its original purity from the days of King O’Toole to the present time, and is constantly practised by the Irish peasantry. We believe something of *luck* is attributed to this same sharp blowing we have noticed, and which, for the sake of “ears polite,” we have not ventured to call by its right name; for, to speak truly, a slight escapement of saliva takes place at the time. It is thus hansel is given and received; and many are the virtues attributed by the lower order of the Irish to “fasting spittle.”

thin, by raison they wor not built, but aftherwards by Saint Kavin), and over the big hill here over your head, where you see the big clift—(and that clift in the mountain was made by *Fan Ma Cool* where he cut it across with a big sword, that he got made a-purpose by a blacksmith out o' Rathdrum, a cousin av his own, for to fight a joyant [giant] that darr'd him and the Curragh o' Kildare; and he thried the sword first an the mountain, and cut it down into a gap, as is plain to this day; and faith, sure enough, it's the same sauce he sarv'd the joyant, soon and suddent, and chopped him in two like a pratie, for the glory of his sowl and ould Ireland)—well, down she flew, over the clift, and flutterin' over the wood there at Poulanass (where I showed you the purty watherf all—and by the same token, last Thursday was a twelve-month sence, a young lady, Miss Rafferty by name, fell into the same watherfall, and was nigh hand drowned—and indeed would be to this day, but for a young man that jumped in afther her; indeed a smart slip iv a young man he was—he was out o' Francis-street, I hear, and coorted her sence, and they wor married, I'm given to undherstand—and indeed a purty couple they wor). Well—as I said—afther flutterin' over the wood a little bit, to plaze herself, the goose flew down, and lit at the fut o' the king, as fresh as a daisy, afther flyin' roun' his dominions, just as if she hadn't flew three perch.

“Well, my dear, it was a beautiful sight to see the king standin' with his mouth open, lookin' at his poor ould goose flyin' as light as a lark, and betther nor ever she was: and when she lit at his fut, he patted her an the head, and '*mavourneen*,' says he, 'but you are the *darlint* o' the world.'

“‘And what do you say to me,’ says Saint Kavin, ‘for makin' her the like?’

“‘By gor,’ says the king, ‘I say nothin' bates the art o' man, barrin'<sup>5</sup> the bees.’

“‘And do you say no more nor that?’ says Saint Kavin.

“‘And that I'm behoulde to you,’ says the king.

“‘But will you gi'e me all the ground the goose flew over?’ says Saint Kavin.

“‘I will,’ says King O'Toole, ‘and you're welkim to it,’ says he, ‘though it's the last acre I have to give.’

“‘But you'll keep your word thru?’ says the saint.

“‘As thru as the sun,’ says the king.

“‘It's well for you,’ says Saint Kavin, mighty sharp, ‘it's well for you, King O'Toole, that you said that word,’ says he, ‘for if you didn't say that word, *the devil receive the bit o' your goose id ever fly agin*,' says Saint Kavin.

“Oh, you needn't laugh,” says old Joe, half offended at detecting the trace of a suppressed smile; “you needn't laugh, for it's thruth I'm telling you.

“Well, whin the king was as good as his word, Saint Kavin was plazed with him, and thin it was that he made himself known to the king. ‘And,’ says he, ‘King O'Toole, you're a dacent man,’ says he; ‘for I only kern here to thry you. You don't know me,’ says he, ‘bekase I'm disguised.’<sup>6</sup>

“‘Troth, then, you're right enough,’ says the king, ‘I didn't perceave it,’ says he; ‘for indeed I never seen the sign o' sper'ts an you.’

“‘Oh! that's not what I mane,’ says Saint Kavin; ‘I mane I'm deceavin' you all out, and that I'm not myself at all.’

“‘Musha! thin,’ says the king, ‘if you're not yourself, who are you?’

“‘I'm Saint Kavin,’ said the saint; blessin' himself.

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<sup>5</sup> Barring is constantly used by the Irish peasantry for except.

<sup>6</sup> A person in a state of drunkenness is said to be disguised.

“ ‘Oh, Queen iv Heaven!’ says the king, makin’ the sign o’ the crass betune his eyes, and fallin’ down on his knees beforer the saint. ‘Is it the great Saint Kavin,’ says he, ‘that I’ve been discoorsin’ all this time without knowin’ it,’ says he, ‘all as one as if he was a lump iv a *gossoon*?—and so you’re a saint?’ says the king.

“ ‘I am,’ says Saint Kavin.

“ ‘By gor, I thought I was only talking to a dacent boy,’<sup>7</sup> says the king.

“ ‘Well, you know the differ now,’ says the saint. ‘I’m Saint Kavin,’ says he, ‘the greatest of all the saints.’

“For Saint Kavin, you must know, sir,” added Joe, treating me to another parenthesis, “Saint Kavin is counted the greatest of all the saints, bekase he went to school with the prophet Jeremiah.

“Well, my dear, that’s the way that the place kern, all at wanst, into the hands of Saint Kavin; for the goose flewn round every individyial acre o’ King O’Toole’s property you see, *bein’ let into the saycret* by Saint Kavin, who was mighty ‘*cute*’; and so, when he done the ould king out iv his property for the glory of God, he was *plazed* with him, and he and the king was the best o’ frinds iver more afther (for the poor ould king was doatin’, you see), and the king had his goose as good as new, to divart him as long as he lived: and the saint supported him afther he kern into his property, as I tould you, antil the day iv his death—and that was soon afther; for the poor goose thought he was ketchin’ a throun one Friday; but, my jewel, it was a mistake he made—and instead of a throun, it was a thievin’ horse-eel;<sup>8</sup> and, by gor, instead iv the goose killin’ a throun for the king’s supper,—by dad, the eel killed the king’s goose—and small blame to him; but he didn’t ate her, bekase he darn’t ate what Saint Kavin laid his blessed hands on.

“Howsumdever, the king never recovered the loss iv his goose, though he had her stuffed (I don’t mane stuffed with praties and inyans, but as a curiosity), and presarved in a glass-case for his own divarshin; and the poor king died on the next Michaelmas-day, which was remarkable.—*Throth, it’s throth I’m tellin’ you*—and when he was gone, Saint Kavin gev him an illigant wake and a beautiful berrin’; and more betoken, he *said mass for his sowl and tuk care av his goose.*”

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<sup>7</sup> The English reader must not imagine the saint to have been very juvenile, from this expression of the king’s. In Ireland, a man in the prime of life is called a “stout boy.”

<sup>8</sup> Eels of uncommon size are said to exist in the upper lake of Glendalough: the guides invariably tell marvellous stories of them: they describe them of forbidding aspect, with manes as large as a horse’s. One of these “Slippery Rogues” is said to have amused himself by entering a pasture on the borders of the lake, and eating a cow—maybe ’twas a bull.