Lorica

Gildas the Wise (c. AD 500–570)

SermonIndex.net / Church Fathers

English translation

THE LORICA OF GILDAS.

GILDAS composed this lorica to drive away those demons which attacked him. To him an angel came, and the angel said to him: If any man repeats that lorica often, there shall be added a seven years' portion to his life, and the third part of his sins shall be blotted out. Whatever day he recites this prayer . . . men or demons, and enemies can do him no injury; death on that day touches him not. Laidcend, son of Buith the Victorious, came from him to the island of Ireland; he brought over and carried it to be placed on the altar of St. Patrick, bishop, to make us safe. Amen. The metre is of eleven syllables, which is also called bracicatalecticon, because it consists of eleven syllables; the scansion is so. Help unity of trinity, have pity trinity of unity; Help me, I pray, thus placed as in the peril of a great sea, So that the plague of this year draw me not with it, nor the vanity of the world. And this very petition I make unto the high powers of the heavenly warfare, that they leave me not to be harried by enemies, but defend me with their strong armour; that, before me in the battle, go those armies of the heavenly warfare, Cherubim and Seraphim with their thousands, Gabriel and Michael with like ones. May thrones, powers, archangels, principalities, dominions, angels, defend me with their thick array, and be strong to overthrow my enemies. Then also the other arbiters of the strife---- patriarchs four, prophets four, Apostles, watchmen of the ship of Christ, And the athlete martyrs all----I ask, And adjure also all virgins, faithful widows, and confessors, that safety compass me by them, and every evil perish from me. May Christ make with me a strong covenant, He whose terror scares away the foul throngs.

[The end of the First Prologue, of grades of angels and patriarchs, apostles and martyrs with Christ. Beginning of the Second Prologue, respecting all parts of the body down to the knees.] God the unconquerable guardian, defend me on every side by thy power. Free Thou all limbs of mine, with Thy safe shield protecting each, so that the fell demons brandish not against my sides, as is their wont, their darts. Skull, head, hair and eyes, forehead, tongue, teeth and their covering, neck, breast, side, bowels, waist, buttocks and both hands. For the crown of my head with its hair, be Thou the helmet of salvation on the head; For forehead, eyes, triform brain, nose, lip, face, temple, For chin, beard, eye-brows, ears, cheeks, lower cheeks, internasal, nostrils, For the pupils, irides, eyelashes, eyelids, chin, breathing,

cheeks, jaws, For teeth, tongue, mouth, throat, uvula, windpipe, bottom of tongue, nape, For the middle of the head, for cartilage, neck----Thou kind One, be near for defence.

[I pray Thee, Lord Jesus Christ, by the Nine Orders of holy angels,] Lord be Thou safest lorica, for my limbs, for my entrails, that thou mayest thrust back from me the invisible nails of stakes, which enemies fashion. Cover, therefore, O God, with strong corslet, along with shoulder blades, shoulders and arms. Cover elbows with elbow-joints and hands, fists, palms, fingers with their nails. Cover back-bone and ribs with their joints, hind-parts, back, nerves and bones. Cover surface, blood and kidneys, haunches, buttocks with the thighs. Cover hams, calves, thighs, knee-caps, houghs and knees. Cover ankles, shins and heels, legs, feet with the rests of the soles. Cover the branches that grow ten together, with the toes with the nails ten. Cover chest, its join, the little breast, paps, stomach, navel. Cover belly, reins, genitals, and paunch, and vital parts also of the heart. Cover the triangular liver and fat, spleen, armpits with covering (?). Cover stomach, chest with the lungs, veins, sinews, gall-bladder with..... Cover flesh, groin with the inner parts, spleen with the winding intestines. Cover bladder, fat and all the numberless orders of joints. Cover hairs, and the rest of my limbs, whose names, may be, I have passed by. Cover me all in all with my five senses, and with the ten doors formed (for me), so that, from my soles to the top of the head, in no member, without within, may I be sick; that, from my body, life be not cast out by plague, fever, weakness, suffering, Until, with the gift of old age from God, I blot out my sins with good works; And, in departing from the flesh, be free from stain, and be able to fly to the heights, and, by the mercy of God, be borne in joy to the heavenly cool retreats of His kingdom.

Introduction

APPENDIX C. — GILDAE LORICA. THE LORICA OF GILDAS.

THE name Lorica is applied to this Hymn and to a number of others of like character, as implying a prayer of invocation for supernatural protection against the evils of life, but more particularly against pestilence and other dangers of death. The idea underlying the name is probably derived from Ephes. vi, 14, where the Apostle bids his readers stand, ”having put on the breast-plate of righteousness,” which words in the Latin version read induti lorica iustitiae. With these words in mind, the writer of the Hymn makes use of lorica twice in the course of his prayer; so that, as the idea grew that the recitation of the prayer, or similar ones, did provide protection against the dangers of pestilence or sickness, the Hymn itself acquired this appellation. It is called a Lorica; it is called the ”Lorica of Gillas” in the Preface which precedes it in the Irish MS. called the Leabhar Breac (in Welsh, Y Llyfr Brych, or Speckled Book), now in the library of the Royal Irish Academy at Dublin. Now Gillas, or Gillus, is a common form for Gildas, especially in Irish documents, as, for instance,

” The ite of Cluain Credail Gillasque,” in the Annals of Tigernach, or ”Gillas obiit,” in the Annals of Ulster; the Bern MS. of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s Historia Regum Britanniae, xii, 6, reads, ” cum Gillas historicus testatur.” We may, therefore, take the evidence of the writer of this Preface, so far as it goes, that there was an early tradition in Ireland which connected the Lorica printed in this volume with Gildas, the author of the De Excidio. The colophon in the MS. from which Mone first of all printed the Hymn attributes it to ” Lathacan the Irishman ” (Explicit hymnus quem Lathacan Scotigena fecit), and the same, we can hardly doubt, is the meaning of Lodgen .... constitute, in the. Preface of another MS. If we look at the first-mentioned Preface, as printed below, we see that it involves the chronological error of making Gildas and Laidcenn contemporaries, whereas a whole century intervened between them. Zimmer suggests a way of avoiding this by a very plausible conjectural emendation, but such errors are by no means uncommon. If we accept another solution, which is, in fact, suggested in the punctuation adopted by the editors of The Irish Liber Hymnorum, by supplying eam from hanc orationem of the previous sentence as object to transtulit et portavit, we have a couple of probable facts set before us. This means, in the first place, that the Hymn, or part of it, was composed by Gildas sometime during the years 540-550, because of the plague which ravaged Britain and Ireland about that time; then,

secondly, that the Hymn was brought over from Britain (venit ab eo) to Ireland by Laedcenn, son of Baeth the Victorious, and placed upon the altar of St. Patrick for public or liturgic use. The words salvos nos facere (to give us deliverance) appear to imply such a purpose.

It will be convenient to mention here the previous printed editions of this Lorica. 1. It was first published by Mone, with the title Hymnus luricae, from a MS. preserved then at Darmstadt, in his Hymni Latini Medii Aevi, Friburgi, vol. i, 367 (1853). In his notes he refers to it as an interesting example of Irish hymnology of the seventh century. The MS. he dates of the eighth century. 2. In 1855 Antonius Schmid helped Daniel to decipher a Vienna MS. of the sixteenth century, from which the hymn was printed, with the title Hymnum Lyricae, in vol. iv, 364, of the Thesaurus Hymnologicus. On p. 111 Daniel has also printed Mone's transcript with notes. 3. Dr. Stokes published the text of the hymn found in the Leabhar Breac, which belongs to " the latter part of the fourteenth century." This MS. has numerous Irish glosses written between the lines and on the margin; these also Dr. Stokes has printed in full, with translations and notes. Irish Glosses, Dublin, 1860.

4. In 1864 Mr. Cockayne published Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England, Rolls Series; vol. i, p. lxviii, contains this Lorica from the Book of Cerne, a MS. preserved in the University of Cambridge, belonging originally to the Abbey of Cerne in Dorsetshire. 5. For the Hampshire Record Society, the Book of Nunitaminster was edited, in 1889, by Mr. de Gray Birch; this hymn appears on p. 91. 6. In 1893, Dr. Zimmer published the hymn from Mone's MS., (which is now at Cologne), after a fresh collation, at the end of his Anhang to Nenitius Vindicates (1893). 7. The hymn is published in The Irish Liber Hymnorum (Henry Bradshaw Society), 1898, from the text of the Leabhar Breac, which the editors call B, after a fresh collation of the same, as well as of the Book of Cerne and the Book of Nunnaminster. The present edition is a transcript from No. 7.

We find the name Lorica applied to several hymns, or prayers in verse, for protection in dangers of any kind----"Schutzgebete," as they are called by Bellesheim. But it seems natural to infer that the name at first arose from this very Hymn that is ascribed to Gildas. In the MS. from which Mone printed it, in his Hymni Latini Medii Aevi, and Zimmer in Nennius Vindicatus (1893), as well as Daniel's MS. for his edition of it, in Thesaurus Hymn. iv, 364, there appears the short suggestive title, " Hymn of the Lorica" (Hymnum Loricae). The reason is evident from vv. 57, 61; God, in the former, is asked to be, for him that prays, a breast-plate, or cuirass, or corslet, and the words " with the strong lorica," of the latter verse, are understood in every petition of the fifteen succeeding couplets beginning with " cover" (tege). At that time, therefore, the Hymn itself is not called a Lorica. The preface to the Lorica of St. Patrick, as it is called on p. 381 of the Tripartite Life? is thus translated: "Patrick made this Hymn. In the time of Loegaire MacNeill it was made.

And the cause of its composition was to protect himself, with his monks, against the deadly enemies that lay in ambush for the clerics. And this is a lorica of faith for the protection of body and soul against demons and human beings and vices. When any person shall recite it daily with pious meditation on God, demons shall not dare to face him; it shall be

a safeguard to him against all poison and envy; it shall be a guard to him against sudden death; it shall be a Lorica for his soul after his decease. . . . And ' Deer's Cry ' is its name." The account of the deer incident, which is the foundation for this explanation of the name Faed Fiada, is found on p. 48; but another interpretation is also proposed, based on the fact that the MSS. read not faed but faeth, and that "feth fiada was a spell peculiar to druids and poets, who by pronouncing certain verses made themselves invisible"; the Irish title of this noted Lorica, in this way, arose from the use of the Hymn " as a charm or incantation to secure invisibility." Here again, though the hymn of prayer for protection is said to be a cuirass or corslet, a lorica (lurech, cf. Welsh llurig), yet the latter word is no name for it; nevertheless, at the time when the earlier Prefaces to Gildas' Hymn printed below were written, it had become the ordinary appellation for it and for similar prayers, almost, it may be added, with the constant implication of a charm or incantation.

Other specimens of this kind of Hymns, called Loricae, are given in the Irish Liber Hymnorum, such as the Hymn Sen De of St. Colman mac Ui Cluasaig, written, as is supposed, at the beginning of the "Yellow Plague," which spread over Ireland during the later years of the seventh century. Others also are mentioned by Mone; some are unpublished; a translation of a portion of one such, by Mr. E. J. Gwynn, is given on p. 210 of the Liber Hymnorum, which will certainly be helpful for comparison with our Lorica: " God be with me against every sorrow, even the One noble Three, The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit! . . . . . The Trinity be my protection against swarms of plagues, Against sudden death, against terror, against treacheries of marauders! May high Jesus keep me against the Red Plague! Against demons of all times, the Son of God is my shield, 10 Against disease, against hurts, against thunder, against fire. . . . . 20 Every chaste disciple who was tortured for Christ, Every meek, every gentle, every candid, every pure person, Every confessor, every soldier, who happens to live under the sun, ... 31 May they protect me henceforth from the demons of the mist, ... 36 May I be under the hand of God in every danger."

But a fragment, without any title whatever, has come to light lately, which, in,some respects, bears a far closer resemblance to the Lorica of Gildas than any known before. It was published, with valuable comments, by Dr. V. H. Friedel in the Zeitschrift fur Celtische Philologie, Band ii, I s., 64 ff. (1898), from a Leyden MS., under the title La Lorica de Leyde. This valuable piece of Celtic Latinity has, certainly, remarkable points of similarity when compared with our Lorica, chiefly in the detailed enumeration of parts of the human body expressed in very rude Latin terms, of the origin of which, and the meaning, in fact, it is extremely difficult to give account. Several of these are common to the two Hymns, and, as we shall note presently, to other fragments and writings acknowledged to be of Celtic origin and character. In addition to this, the style of invocation has a partial resemblance to that of Gildas. with a notable difference: there are the same invocations addressed to angelic hosts, patriarchs, confessors, apostles and martyrs, but the invocation of the Trinity, found in Gildas' Lorica and found in other Loricae, is wanting. I am strongly inclined to believe that the Leyden piece is not a Lorica in the true sense, that is as a prayer for

protection; it repeats two petitions only, first, that the body in all its members be searched; secondly, that heavenly powers and saints cleanse the heart of him (or her, n.b. illam) who makes use of the prayer. There is here no idea that we connect with a Lorica. The direction, however, given in the first line for the recitation or reading of Psalm 101 (102 of the English or Welsh version) may imply that the Psalm itself is the Lorica, while the fragment is the prayer of a penitent. ...

[The remainder of the introduction was not available to place online owing to the absence of pp.294-5 from the photocopy used for the online edition.]

Source. English translation: an older public-domain translation as collected in the Writings-Database (HistoricalChristianFaith), mostly from the Ante-Nicene, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers and similar nineteenth-century editions. SermonIndex has only divided it into chapters and short sections; the wording is the translator's own. Square brackets, Greek or Latin words and footnote-free text are as the source file prints them, and a transcription error may remain. No Greek or Latin text is shown beside it yet, and no modern English version has been made.