

ST. ASICUS.

DIED ABOUT THE YEAR, D. 420.

First bishop of Elphin—A disciple of St. Patrick—His austere life and retreats—Found almost dead—The angel's visit to his mountain cell—St. Patrick has a vision about the same time—They travel into Connaught—Conversion of the two princelings—St. Patrick founds the church of Elphin, and places Asicus over it.



ELPHIN,* or Elfin, is situated in a pleasant part of Connaught, and the first church was founded there by St. Patrick about the year 440, who placed over it as bishop his disciple Asicus.

Asicus was a man of extraordinary piety, and led a life of the greatest austerity. He followed his great master in most of his missionary excursions, and partook of all his labors, hardships, and dangers. He was accustomed to return sometimes to some solitary cave or cavern in the mountains, and there spend days in prayer, meditation, and fasting; sleeping on the cold ground, and existing upon berries and herbs. On one occasion he was so prostrated by fasting and penitential observances that he became faint, and would have died had not some of his brother-disciples discovered him. On another occasion he had retired to the mountains of Slieve-

* The popular belief is, that this place takes its name from a hugestoss there called the stone of Fin-MacCushail—*Fin* signifying stone, and *Mac* or *Fin*, white. It is said that this stone fell to the ground in the year 1675, and that the day and hour of its falling were prophesied, and that several persons witnessed the occurrence. The ancient name of the place was Imleach-Ona. It being the donation or gift of a petty prince named Ona to St. Patrick.



League, in Donegal, actuated by this penitential spirit. He had selected a hollow in the rocks for his cell and bed, and there spent several days and nights in works of penance and prayer. One night, as he lay down, the cell suddenly filled with a celestial light, and the heart of the anchorite beat within him, for he felt that he was surrounded by heavenly messengers. On opening his eyes he beheld at his side a young man of most heavenly appearance, who smiled on him and said, "Arise, Ascius, and follow Patrick, for you are to be the head of a great house, from which much blessings will flow." So saying, the angel disappeared, and in the morning Ascius joined his master, and followed him on his mission. He told the Saint of his vision. About the same time St. Patrick had the vision in which he heard the voices of the people of Connaught calling on him to come and save them. Ascius accompanied Patrick into Connaught, as related in the Saints Life.

While in Connaught St. Patrick founded the church of Elphin,* a site for the purpose having been given him by a Magus, called Ona. Over this church he placed his disciple Ascius as bishop, he thus being the first bishop of the diocese of Elphin. Ascius had great skill as a goldsmith, and beautified with taste the cathedral. He also embellished for St. Patrick, books, chalices, and other articles. Ascius died at Rathcunnell, in Tirconnell, about the year 470.

* Elphin was, in the twelfth century, one of the richest sees in Ireland, and had subject to it seventy-nine parish churches. Upon the annexation of the see of Roscommon, in the twelfth century, it was enriched by many estates. The sees of Ardara, Drumcliffe, and others of less note, were also annexed to it. It anciently had the following twelve prebendaries, namely, Tyrebrewer, Corcaghlin, Artagho, Dunciff, Killmacall, Clonoonagher, Ballyntobber, Varen, Killybegnet, Killyquin, Killyowell and Termonberry.