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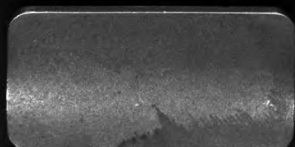
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Saint Columba

Edward Alexander
Cooke

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"To the student of early Church history of the British Isles the life of one whose work made such a lasting impression on the paganism of the old Picts and Scots is especially valuable, and none can read this book without much profit and real enjoyment."

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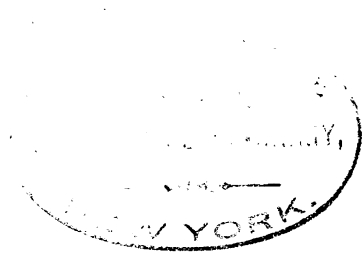
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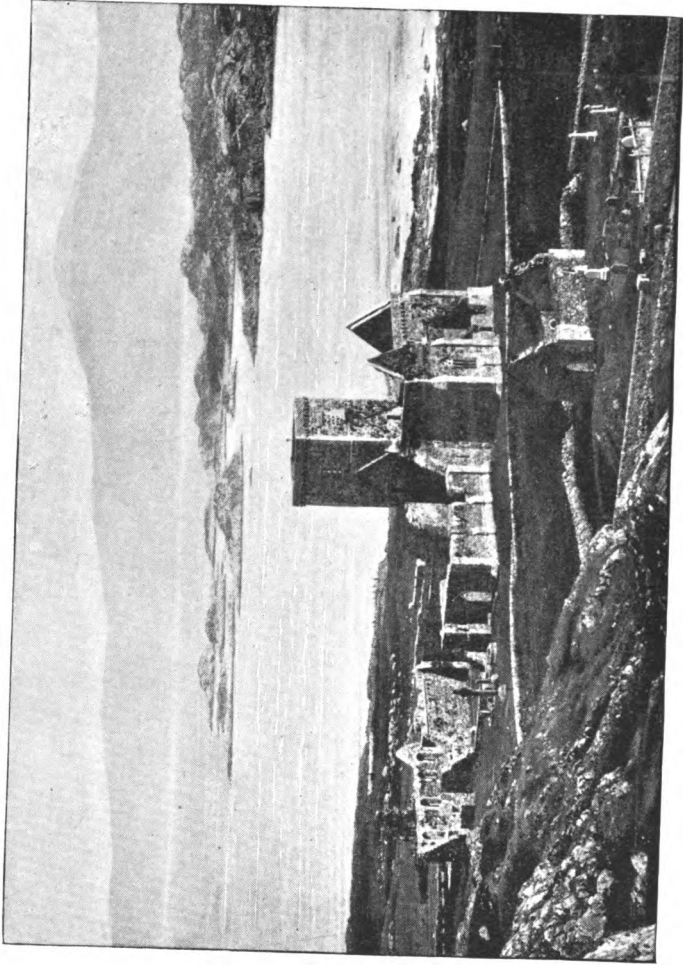
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SAINT COLUMBA





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SAINT COLUMBA

HIS LIFE AND WORK

BY THE

REV. EDWARD ALEXANDER COOKE, M.A.

VICAR OF REDDAL HILL, DIOCESE OF WORCESTER
AUTHOR OF "DIOCESAN HISTORY OF KILLALOE"

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PREFATORY NOTICE.

IN a biography intended more especially for English and Scottish readers, and within the compass of a small volume, it would not be possible to give anything like an elaborate historical account of one who, whether we regard him as a scholar, a founder of monasteries, or a Christian leader, was one of the most remarkable men of the early Celtic Church.

It has rather been my aim to write, with simplicity and conciseness, a memoir of the saint based on facts drawn from genuine and authentic sources. In furtherance of this aim I consulted almost every branch of Columban literature, with the result that, whilst many of the various *Lives* of St. Columba which have been handed down to us are interesting and more or less valuable, those only about which no doubt has been entertained are one by Adamnan, and that known as the *Old Irish Life*. These are the two chief sources from which I have derived information.

The first, by Adamnan, the most distinguished of the saint's successors in the abbacy of Hy, was written (Dr. Reeves thinks between 688 and 697) in compliance with the urgent request of his brethren, as he himself states in the Preface:—"In beginning, with the help of Christ,

in compliance with the urgent requests of my brethren, to write the life of our blessed patron, I shall take care to warn, in the first place, others who may read it to believe the facts which it records, and to attend more to the matter than to the words which, as I think, sound harsh and barbarous. Let them remember that the Kingdom of God consisteth not in richness of eloquence but in the blossoming of faith, and let them not for any names of men, or tribes, or obscure places in the base Scotie (Irish) tongue, which, as I think, seem rude when compared with the various languages of foreign nations, despise a record of useful deeds wrought not without the help of God. We must also warn our readers that many other things regarding this man of blessed memory, well worthy of being told, have been omitted for the sake of brevity; in order not to tire their patience, a few only out of many have been recorded here.* He further tells us much of his information was derived from the consistent narrative of his predecessors in the abbacy of Hy, trustworthy and discerning men, and that the saint's memoir was founded either on written authorities anterior to his own time, or on what he himself heard from some learned and faithful ancients, unhesitatingly attesting facts, the truth of which they themselves diligently inquired into.† Not only were his materials of a fragmentary kind, gathered here and there from those who had frequently conversed with and known the great saint,

* *Adamnan*, Pref. 1.

† *Ibid.* Pref. 11.

but there is internal evidence that a book called the *Virtues of St. Columba*, written by Cumme the Fair, formed the basis of Adamnan's Third Book, in which the prediction of the saint regarding Aidan, his children, and his kingdom occurs. Again, at the end of the memoir, he tells of a vision which, he says, was not only found in writing, but was heard related with the utmost freedom by several well-informed old men to whom it was told, and who solemnly assured Adamnan of its truth.* Thus we have had presented to us not only an admirable account of contemporary manners and customs, but also, as a writer of the present century declared, "the most complete piece of sacred biography that all Europe can boast of, not only at so early a period, but even through the whole middle ages." †

The second source is an ancient Irish memoir, commonly called *The Old Irish Life of St. Columba*. Dr. Reeves thinks it is a composition as old as the tenth century, and that it was originally compiled to be read as a discourse on Columba's festival, on the text "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house into a land that I will show thee." ‡

Speaking of Abraham and other pilgrim fathers, it says, "Multitudes of the faithful servants of the Lord, moreover, both of the Old and New Testaments, have perfectly observed this profitable council, viz.—left their country

* *Adamnan*, bk. III. c. xxiv.

† Pinkerton's *Enquiry*, vol. i. Edin. 1814. ‡ Dr. Reeves' *Pref. to Adamnan*.

and land, their patrimony and kindred, for the sake of the Lord of the elements, and went into voluntary pilgrimage to far distant countries in the same way as Columba observed it, and abandoned his natural inheritance for the love and fear of the Lord—the eminent saint and eminent sage, and the son chosen of God, for whom there is a festival and commemoration at the occurrence of this season and time, *id est, presbyter sanctus Columba.*” This book has been literally translated from three manuscripts by W. M. Hennessy, Esq., M.R.I.A.; one, the *Leabar Breac*, in the library of the Royal Irish Academy; another preserved in the *Book of Lismore*, in the possession of the Duke of Devonshire; and a Gaelic MS. in the Advocates’ Library, Edinburgh.

Those who wish for a more general and complete knowledge of Columba will find all that is required in Dr. Reeves’ (late Bishop of Down) invaluable edition of *Adamnan*, printed for the Irish Archæological Society in 1857. This edition is a wealth of learning and research; and as a contributor to Celtic literature Dr. Reeves’ memory must ever be universally held in veneration. Of more modern works on the subject I would refer the reader to Burton’s *History of Scotland*, chaps. vii. and viii., and Dr. W. F. Skene’s *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii., the help of which I thankfully acknowledge. I must also add that I received much help (but from a different point of view) from Montalembert’s *Monks of the West*.

E. A. C.

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SAINT COLUMBA.

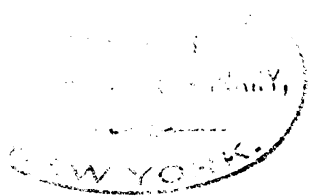
CHAPTER I.

The Pre-Columban Age.

TO UNDERSTAND and fully appreciate the life and work of any great man we should know something of the country that gave him birth, the complexion of the times in which he was born, and the circumstances which moulded and controlled his character. And therefore it is necessary at the outset to inquire, so far as the earliest authentic records permit, into the state of religion in Ireland prior to Columba's time.

Whether any successful attempt was made to propagate the Gospel in Ireland, or a pure type of Christianity existed there during the first four centuries, there is no historical evidence to indicate; but we are told that in the middle of the fourth century there was a Christian Irishman among the Pelagian leaders, whom St. Jerome abused as "an unlearned calumniator, a most stupid fellow, overloaded with the porridge of the Scots" (Irish). Not a very dignified accusation! At this time Paganism was dominant, and the Pelagian heresy, brought over by Agricola, son of the Pelagian bishop Severianus, had sadly corrupted the faith of

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the Irish. Then again, there is reasonable ground for believing that, as early as the second century, during the Roman occupation of Britain, Christianity existed.

Bede* makes mention of a British chieftain named Lucius sending to Eleutherius, bishop of Rome, entreating that by his command he might be made a Christian; that he soon obtained his request; and the Britons preserved the faith, uncorrupted and entire, in peace and tranquillity, until the time of the Emperor Diocletian, when, as we know, the first British martyr, St. Alban, fell. It is said that, having concealed a preacher named Amphibelus, the proto-martyr was brought before one of the Roman governors, and, there confessing himself a Christian, was beheaded near his native town of Verulum in Herts, and where was subsequently built a beautiful cathedral dedicated to the saint.

But inasmuch as the British Church observed the Asiatic practice in keeping of Easter, and held many ritual points agreeing with its Churches, it may be reasonably inferred that it derived its Christianity from Gaul, with which it was more immediately connected.

It was not till the year A.D. 397, when the Roman dominion in Britain was fast drawing to a close, that any real attempt was made at evangelisation in North Britain.

While the teaching of Pelagius † was making great

* *H. E.* bk. i. c. iv.

† Pelagius (or Morgan, a name equivalent in Welsh to Pelagius in Greek) was of British extraction, but resided principally in Rome. He disseminated his opinions freely in Palestine and Italy, where they found favour with many; but in his native land his sentiments caused great troubles. Pelagius taught that the sin of Adam merely consisted in following the bad example of disobedience which he set his race, rather than as the natural corruption of mankind.

advances, his countryman and contemporary, St. Ninian, appeared, of whom it may be truly said that he was the earliest labourer in the Scottish mission field. We learn from Bede's statement* that he was "a most reverend bishop and holy man of the British nation, who had been regularly instructed at Rome in the faith and mysteries of the truth." Although a Briton, he is said to have been brought up and educated at Rome, and had studied there with St. Martin of Tours, by whom Ninian was ordained. He prosecuted his missionary labours along the north shore of the Solway Firth, extending from the Nith to the Irish Sea, and through his preaching the southern Picts, reaching from Galloway to the Grampian Hills, forsook the errors of idolatry and embraced the Truth. In Galloway he built a church of stone, which, being an unusual thing among the Britons, gained for it the name of White Stone (*Candida Casa*), and is now traditionally identified with Whithorn in Wigtownshire.†

If the old Irish *Life of St. Ninian*, written by Ailred of Rievaulx in the twelfth century, is to be trusted, Ninian left Britain and spent the last years of his life in Ireland, where he introduced the Faith, and founded a church in Leinster called Cluain Conaire.

About this time (A.D. 429) the Pelagian heresy, which some few years before was introduced by Agricola, was absolutely refused, as Bede tells us,‡ by the Britons,

* *H. E.* bk. III. c. iv.

† Usher supposes that Ninian's diocese extended from the modern Glasgow to Stanmore Cross, on the borders of Westmoreland. Bishop Nicholson, on the other hand, is of opinion that the bishops of Scotland had anciently no fixed sees, but that every prelate exercised his episcopal office indiscriminately in whatever part of the country he resided.—*Scottish Hist. Lib.* p. 74.

‡ *H. E.* bk. I. c. xvii.

who would not embrace so perverse and blasphemous a doctrine against the grace of God. Finding that they were not of themselves able to confute its subtlety by force of argument, they communicated the fact to the Gallican bishops, by whom a Synod was held, when it was resolved to send Germanus, bishop of Auxerre, and Lupus, bishop of Troyes, to Britain to confute the growing heresy, and, as Bede further tells us, with great success. "The apostolical priests filled the island of Britain with the fame of their preaching and virtues; and the Word of God was by them daily administered, not only in the churches, but even in the streets and fields, so that the Catholics were everywhere confirmed, and those who had gone astray corrected."* According to the *Chronicles of Prosper Aquitanus* we learn that two years after, in 431, Palladius was ordained by Pope Celestine, and sent to the "Scots that believed in Christ to be their first bishop," and thus made the barbarian island Christian.† Whether the mission of Palladius was intended by Celestine to be permanent, or merely with the object of checking the Pelagian heresy which prevailed, is not known with any degree of certainty; but there is reasonable ground for believing that the Irish absolutely refused to receive his doctrine, and, without leaving behind him any permanent result of his missionary labours, he left Ireland with the intention of proceeding to Rome, but being cast ashore on the coast of Scotland, he founded the church of Fordoun, and died there.

Shortly after (about the year 436) Palladius had passed away from the scene of his short and unsuccessful

* *H. E.* bk. i. c. xvii.

† Prosper, *Chronicles*; Bede's *H. E.* bk. i. c. xiii.

career, the darkness which seemed to have spread over the sister island during the latter part of the fourth and early part of the fifth centuries was brightened to a great extent by the arrival of St. Patrick, who, with twelve companions, landed at Wicklow, a locality which anciently bore the name of Inbher Dea, in the territory of the Coolenni, the tribe of Cualaun. To three* remarkable documents we are indebted for most that is known of the life and work of the great apostle to whom is attributed the conversion of the whole of Ireland—a work for which, he himself tells us, he had been preparing during twenty years.

Of the missionary labours of St. Patrick it is unnecessary for our present purpose to write. The story of his life has been ably told by the Rev. Dr. Todd in his *St. Patrick, Apostle of Ireland*, and more recently by Mr. Newell's *St. Patrick, His Life and Teaching* (Fathers for English Readers Series).

It may be briefly but truthfully said that the saint's life was one long record of successes, achieved, it is true, amidst unparalleled hardships, opposed by every hostile savage power directed against soul and body; but, notwithstanding, he bravely persevered in his work—preaching the word, baptizing new converts, and building monasteries in various parts of the island, to which were attracted multitudes of students from Britain and Gaul.

Notable among those monasteries were Clonard and Bangor (Co. Down). The former, founded by Finian, is said to have numbered 3000 inmates, and from it

* *Confession of St. Patrick*, his *Epistle to Coroticus*, and *Book of Armagh*. In addition to these there appeared in the fifth centuries, two admittedly genuine documents, viz., *Litany of Angus the Culdee* and *A Catalogue of the Saints in Ireland*.

went forth the famous Columba whose influence upon the Christianity of Britain and Ireland is remarkable.

“These monasteries,” writes Dr. A. K. H. Boyd, “were places of education; they were schools, the only schools known for many a day. And, while printing was unknown, here a constant work went on of multiplying copies of the holy scriptures; but for which the Bible might almost have perished. Nor need we forget, we (Presbyterians) who miss it so sadly, the ever-recurring hour of prayer and praise; the Psalms, notably, from beginning to end, kept familiar as they are to very few of us.”*

Colgan † tells us in his life of St. Senanus, of fifty Romans who came to Ireland for the purpose of leading a life of stricter discipline, or improving themselves in the study of the scriptures, then much cultivated, and became pupils of those fathers who were most distinguished for sanctity of life and the perfection of monastic discipline. And from Bede ‡ we learn that when a sudden pestilence depopulated the northern coasts of Britain, and ravaged the province of the Northumbrians, “many of the nobility of the lower ranks of the English nation were taken there at that time, who in the days of Finian and Colman, forsaking their native island, retired thither, either for the sake of divine studies, or of a more continent life; and some of them presently devoted themselves to a monastic life, others chose rather to apply themselves to study, going about from one master’s cell to another. The Scots (Irish) willingly received them all, and took care

* *St. Giles’ Lectures*, 1st series, p. 39.

† *Acta Sanctorum*, p. 533.

‡ *H. E.* bk. III. c. xxvii.

to supply them with food, as also to furnish them with books to read, and their teaching without any charge." By such immigrations as this, writes Canon Kingsley,* it may be Ireland became—as she certainly was for a while—the refuge of what ecclesiastical civilisation, learning, and art the barbarian invaders had spared; a sanctuary from whence, in after centuries, evangelists and teachers went forth once more, not only to Scotland and England, but to France and Germany.

In tracing the course of events which controlled the religious movement in Ireland from the earliest times, the important fact ought not to be overlooked that at the beginning of the sixth century Paganism had practically disappeared from the Roman Empire, that in the year A.D. 410 Britain ceased to acknowledge Rome as its spiritual or temporal head, that an intimate connection subsisted between the Churches of Britain and Ireland in the sixth and seventh centuries, and that neither of these Churches were under foreign superintendence. And further, they did not care to apply to the see of Rome to get their metropolitans consecrated, or receive directions from them for discipline, but had the spiritual sovereignty within themselves.

There are three important characteristic features which distinguished the Celtic Church of this time—namely, the mode of keeping Easter, the order of saints, and its monastic character. In the celebration of Easter, which was a source of much controversy in the Christian Church, a diversity of opinion prevailed between the Irish and the Roman branches. The Romans kept the memorial of our Lord's resurrection

* *The Hermits*, p. 249.

upon the Sunday which fell between the 15th and 21st day of the moon next after the 21st day of March, and in reckoning the age of the moon they followed the Alexandrine cycle of nineteen years, as it was explained to them by Dionysius Exiguus: whereas the northern Irish and Scottish, together with the Picts, observed the custom of the Britons, keeping their Easter upon the Sunday that fell between the 14th and 20th day of the moon, and following in their account not the nineteenth year's computation of Antolius, but according to the cycle of eighty-four years calculated by Sulpicius Severus. In confirmation of this statement we have the testimony of Laurentius, successor of Augustine in the see of Canterbury, who was himself a missionary from Rome, contained in a letter* which he sent to the Irish when he found their course of life was not truly ecclesiastical, and that they did not conform to the customs of the Roman Church in the observance of Easter. "We held," he says, "both the Britons and Scots (Irish) in great esteem for sanctity, believing that they had proceeded according to the custom of the universal Church, but coming acquainted with the errors of the Britons, we thought the Scots had been better; but we have been informed by Bishop Dagan † coming into this aforesaid island, and the Abbot Columbanus ‡ in France, that the Scots in no way differ from the Britons in their behaviour; for Bishop Dagan, coming to us, not only refused to eat with us, but even to take his repast in the same house where we were entertained." Thus it appears that, in the

* Bede's *H. E.* bk. ii. c. iv.

† Dagan is said to have come from the monastery of Bangor, Ireland.

‡ Columbanus was founder of the monasteries in Italy and France.

mode of keeping Easter, to which may be added the use of the tonsure, * and a peculiar liturgy, the abbots and monks of the early Irish Church, together with their disciples of Iona, were independent of Roman intervention.

Another peculiar feature of the early Irish Church is the order of Catholic saints, well described in the *Catalogue of the Saints*, first published by Usher from two MSS., said to be the work of Tirechan, the author of the Annotations on the life of St. Patrick in the *Book of Armagh*. This *Catalogue* clearly marks three different periods of the Church during the century and a half dating from the time of St. Patrick.

During the first period there were bishops, scattered among the tribes, and who seem to have had no territorial jurisdiction. They are said to have been famous and holy, full of the Holy Ghost, 350 in number, founders of Churches. They had one head, Christ, and one chief, St. Patrick, shining like the sun. They excluded from the churches neither laymen nor women, because, founded on the Rock of Christ, they feared not the blast of temptation. This order reigned till the year 534, when it was succeeded by that of Catholic presbyters, or monastic clergy, under St. Columba, shining like the moon. They had one head, our Lord; they refused the service of women, separating them from the monasteries. This order lasted to the year 572. The saints of this order are represented as going to

* The Roman clergy shaved the crown of the head, supposed to represent a crown of thorns worn by Christ, which they said had descended to them from St. Peter, and called it *tonsuram Petri*. The Irish clergy permitted the hair to grow on the back of the head, but shaved the fore part in the form of a crescent, which the Romans called in derision, *tonsuram Simonis Magi*.

Britain for their religious instruction and training, chiefly in the monastery of St. David's, where they had received a mass from the eminent Welsh fathers, David, Gillas the historian, Docus, and Cadoc.

The third order was of a somewhat different kind. They were holy presbyters and few bishops, one hundred in number; they dwelt in desert places, and lived on herbs and water; they despised all earthly things, and wholly avoided whispering and backbiting; they had different rules, masses, and tonsures. These lived during four reigns, and continued to the great mortality in 664, when a sudden pestilence (yellow fever) depopulated the southern coasts of Britain, and, after extending into the province of the Northumbrians, ravaged the country far and near, and destroyed a great multitude of men. This plague did no less harm in the island of Ireland.*

But the most remarkable feature of the Irish Church at this period was its monasticism. It was this which gave a peculiar form to its organisation. It was this element which affected not only the Christian community generally, but greatly influenced the secular and eremitical orders. It led, as a recent writer† has truly said, to that remarkable outburst of missionary zeal, which sent from the shores of Ireland a stream of Christian missionaries, invading the Continent in every direction, converting the people, and founding monasteries among them, of whom Columbanus was the forerunner.

Whether in Ireland or Britain, the monastery was the centre of ecclesiastical work, and all the pres-

* *H. E.* bk. III. ch. xxvii.

† W. F. Skene, *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 40.

byters, with the deacons, cantors, lectors, and other ecclesiastical orders, along with the bishop himself, were subject in all things to the monastic rule.*

The great system of monasticism which spread so rapidly, and took such an irresistible hold upon the whole Roman Empire, deserves more than a passing notice, for it presents features of interest to every student of Church history, but especially of the Anglo-Saxon Churches, in which it was intensely popular. It grew out of a system of aceticism, which found its way at an early period into Christianity. It began in Egypt, where, in the early part of the fourth century, Pachomius, who was the founder of cœnobitic establishments there, wrote a code of laws for the regulation of the lives of his 1400 disciples.†

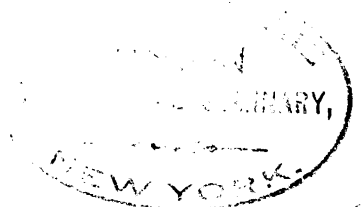
Dean Milman‡ tells us that the Jews had both their hermitages and their cœnobitic institutions. Anchorites swarmed in the deserts near the Dead Sea; and the Essenes, in the same district, and the Egyptian Therapeutæ, were strictly analogous to the Christian monastic establishments.

In the neighbourhood of many of the Eastern cities were dreary and dismal wastes, incapable of, or unimproved by, cultivation, which seemed to allure the enthusiast to abandon the haunts of men and the vices of society. Egypt especially, where everything excessive and extravagant found its birth, or ripened with unexampled vigour, seemed formed for the encouragement of the wildest anchoritism. Such a life had a marvellous fascination for the early Christians,

* Bede's *Life of St. Cuthbert*, c. xvi.

† It is said that 7000 acknowledged his jurisdiction.

‡ *Hist. of Christianity*, vol. iii. c. xi.



and we find it spreading, together with Christianity, throughout the length and breadth of the land. St. Basil (who died in 378) introduced the institution into Asia Minor. We are told,* in a letter which he wrote to Eustathius of Sebaste, that he spent many years in vanity, and had devoted a laborious youth to the wisdom of this world, which God has made foolish; but that at last, as waking from a dream, he looked to the glorious light of the Gospel, and saw the uselessness of the wisdom of this world, which comes to nought. Reading his Bible, and finding there that it was a great assistance to perfection that he should sell his goods, and distribute to his poorer brethren, he decided to abandon his property, and so, repairing to Egypt, he found there many who were practising the ascetic life. His fame attracted many around him, and monasteries sprang up on every side.

To Jerome has been attributed the introduction of monasticism into the Western Empire in the fourth century. When quite a young man he visited the East, where he became deeply imbued with, and embraced, aceticism. Here he laboured with zeal; and by his eloquent epistles, descriptive of the purity of the system, he kindled a passion for pilgrimages to the Holy Land amongst his friends in Rome, and after a time this particular form of Christianity dominated throughout Western Christendom. But it is to St. Martin of Tours, who did so much for the conversion of Gaul to Christianity, we are indebted for its introduction into the Irish Church. In 361 he founded the monastery of Ligugé at the gates of Poitiers, and subsequently a monastery near the city of Tours, which became the centre of monastic life in Gaul; and from

* See also Tillemont's *Vie de S. Basil.*

it the institution reached the Irish Church through two great channels, namely, St. Ninian's Monastery in Galloway, which mainly effected the northern part of Ireland, and the Welsh monasteries, where Finian (himself an Irishman) spent thirty years in training, and eventually founded the school of Clonard, in Meath, which counted amongst its 3000 monks the famous Columba, and to whose monastery in Iona the greater part of England owes its Christianity.

The same pattern of Christian excellence which characterised those early saints of the Celtic Church was copied everywhere—whether it was Aidan in the Farne Islands, Columbanus in Switzerland, Kilian in Thuringia, Fridolin in Alsace, or Columba in Scotland, they were all prompted by the same intense love for God, and desire for the conversion of souls. “They did not merely believe, but see, in the misery and confusion,” writes Canon Kingsley, “the desolation and degradation around them, that all that was in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, was not of the Father, but of the world . . . and that the world in general—above all, its kings and rulers, the rich and luxurious, were treasuring up for themselves wrath, tribulation, and anguish against a day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who would render to every man according to his works.”* In bringing this chapter to a close, we cannot do better than quote the views of two eminent scholars and writers, belonging to two different schools of thought, but who are one in their estimate of the character of the Columban Church, which, like the Irish Church, was essentially monastic.

* *The Hermits*, p. 6.

Dr. A. K. H. Boyd, of St. Andrews, says: "Only the utmost prejudice, founding on the utmost ignorance, will deny the good work done by monasteries and a monastic clergy in their day of purity, energy, and self-devotion; or will deny that they were admirably fitted to do the work they did. The Christian Church needed not only dissemination, but also strong centres. Amid the terrible insecurity of life, and the utter disregard of right and wrong, which we can discern to have been characteristics of heathenism, here was comparative security, here were truth and righteousness!" *

And Professor Wace, writing in *Good Words* (p. 684, 1878):—"As to the monastic life itself, even if this extreme form, before its adoption at that time by a man naturally inclined for it (alluding to St. Antony), be adversely criticised, it would demand serious consideration whether, in a state of society steeped in corruption to an extent which, probably, we can none of us realise, some vehement revolt of this kind against the ordinary life of the world was not equally imperative and serviceable. It was, perhaps, the most conspicuous and influential factor in Christian life at the time."

* *St. Giles' Lectures*, 1st series, p. 8.

CHAPTER II.

Columba's Birth and Early Life.

IN the barony of Kilmacrenan, six miles from Letterkenny, on the face of a hill which overhangs a small lake called Laugh-na-Calliagh, with a view of Laugh Breagh on the right, and Laugh Akibbon on the left, lies the little village of Gartan (*little field*), where St. Columba was born in December A.D. 521. Gartan and its immediate neighbourhood are rich in ecclesiastical remains, which have become interesting through the memory of the saint. There may be seen in the centre of a burying-ground the remains of an ancient monastery; here, rudely-carved crosses which time has disfigured; there, the remains of a small church known as "St. Columkille's Chapel"; here, a holy well; and there, a flag upon which it is reported the saint was born. Nor have the legends of the district been forgotten,* for to this day crowds of emigrants resort to this stone on the eve of their departure, believing that whoever sleeps on it a night will be free from home

* "Their legends, full of Irish poetry and tenderness, and not without touches here and there of genuine Irish humour, lie buried now, to all save antiquaries, in the folios of the Bollandists and Colgan; but the memory of their virtue and beneficence . . . is rooted in the heart and brain of the Irish peasantry; and who shall say altogether for evil? For with the tradition of their miracles has been entwined the tradition of their virtues, as an enduring heirloom for the whole Irish race, through the sad centuries which part the era of saints from the present time."—Kingsley's *The Hermit*, p. 253.

sickness when he goes abroad. It is also believed that Gartan clay, when possessed, is a preventative against fire and shipwreck; but it must be raised by one of the clan of O'Firghils, who were the ancient herenachs of the Church lands there, and were descended from Eoghan, brother of St. Columba. In connection with his birth and work enthusiastic writers have vied with one another in relating prophecies and visions which, however fantastic they may appear, were very popular during the Middle Ages, and have thrown much light on his subsequent history. It is related how one of the Irish priests, Mochta of Louth, prophesied of the saint one hundred years before his birth; for on one occasion Mochta's cook went with a cup of nuts for him, whereupon the master said, "Not mine is the land from which these nuts were brought; preserve them until the person comes whose land it is." "When will that time come?" asked the cook. "At the end of one hundred years," said Mochta. And when the priest turned his face toward the north to pray, his people asked him why he did so, and he said to them, "A youth shall be born out of the north, with the rising of the nations; Ireland shall be made fruitful by the great flame, and Alban friendly to him." Again, when St. Patrick was blessing Conall and his son Fergus at Sith-Aedha, he uttered the following stanza:—

"A youth shall be born of his tribe,
 Who'll be a sage, a prophet, and a poet:
 Beloved, the bright clear luminary
 That will not utter falsehood.
 He'll be a sage, and will be devout;
 He'll be an abbot with the king of royal graces;
 He'll be lasting and ever good;
 The eternal kingdom be mine by his protection."

And on the very day that Columba was born, Buite, the founder of Monasterboice, uttered the remarkable words: "A child illustrious before God and men shall be born to-night. Twelve men, moreover, will be his company; and he it is that will discover my grave and measure my cemetery; and our union shall be in heaven and in earth."*

As the birth of Columba was thus predicted, so also was it manifested in visions and dreams. On a certain night before his birth an angel of the Lord appeared to his mother in dreams, bringing to her, as he stood by her, a large garment of extraordinary beauty which, we are told, reached from Innisimod † to Caernambrocc, ‡ and there was not, of all the colours, a colour that was not in it. After a short time the angel asked it back, and took it out of her hands, and having raised it and spread it out, he let it fly through the air. But she being sad at the loss of it, said to the angel, "Why dost thou take this lovely cloak away from me so soon?" He immediately replied, "Because this mantle is so exceedingly honourable that thou canst not retain it longer with thee." When this was said the woman saw that the robe was gradually receding from her in its flight; and that then it expanded until its width exceeded the plains, and in all its measurements was larger than the mountains and forests. Then she thought the angel came to her and said, "Woman, do not grieve, but rejoice and be glad, for thou shalt bring forth a son of so beautiful a character that he shall be reckoned among his own people as one of the prophets

* Ware MSS. in British Museum.

† The group of islands in Clew Bay, on the west coast of Mayo.

‡ Supposed to be Burg Head, on the north-east coast of Scotland. See *Adamnan*, p. 191, note e.

of God, and hath been predestined by God to be a leader of innumerable souls to the heavenly country, and Erin and Alban will be full of his teaching." *

Fedhlimidh, the father of Columba, belonged to the clan which occupied, and gave name to, the territory around Gartan; he was a member of the royal family of Ireland, and was closely allied to that of Dalriada, in Scotland. His half-uncle, Muircertach, was on the throne when he was born, and he lived during the successive reigns of his cousins Domhnall and Fergus, Eoehaidh, his first cousins Ainmire and Baeden, and of Aedh, son of Ainmire. Thus he was eligible, according to family, to the sovereignty of Ireland, and probably it would have been offered to him had he not abandoned it for God. His mother, Ethne, was of Leinster extraction, and claimed descent from Cathaer Mor, who was King of Ireland in the early part of the second century. There was, therefore, combined in him the two races of nobility, which, together with his own innate piety and wisdom, contributed to his success. An instance of uprightness of character and loyalty to his mother's memory is found in a short dialogue in the *Book of Lecan*, between King Aedh and Columba. "O cleric," said the king, "obtain for me from the Lord that, my trophy (*i.e.*, my head or scalp) be not gained by the Leinstermen." "That is difficult for me," said the saint, "because my mother is of them; and they came to me at Durrow, and by fasting urged me to bestow the gift of a sister's son. And what they requested of me was that their trophies should not be carried off by a stranger king; and I promised them that."

Immediately after his birth he was taken to the

* *Adarnan*, bk. III. c. ii.; *Old Irish Life*.

illustrious presbyter Cruithnechan, son of Cellachan, to whose care he was confided, to be baptized, which, according to the tradition of the country, is supposed to have been at a place called Tulach-Dubhglaise, now Temple Douglas, situated in a charming valley under Cockatee Hill, at the bottom of which flows the rivulet Dubh-glas ("black stream"), which gave name to the place. At his baptism he was given the name of *Colum*, which was a common one in his day, and there are several saints in the Irish Calendar so called.

In continental hagiology Columba is a feminine appellation; whereas among the Irish, with a few trifling exceptions, it belongs to the opposite sex.* But though its sound is different in three languages, yet its signification is the same in all. What in Hebrew is *Iona*,† in the Greek language is called *Peristera*, and in the Latin there are various forms of the name, such as *Columba*, *Columbanus*, *Columbus*, and *Columb*. Such and so great a name was not given, it is believed by his biographers, to this man without a special providence; "for according to the faith of the Gospels, the Holy Ghost is shown to have descended on the only-begotten Son of the Eternal Father in the form of a dove; and hence for the most part in the sacred books ‡ the dove is known to designate in a mystical sense the Holy Ghost. Hence also our Saviour in His Gospel has ordered His disciples to preserve the simplicity of the dove ingrafted in a pure heart, for the dove is a simple and innocent bird. By that name, therefore, it was meet that the simple and innocent man should be

* *Adamnan*, Pref. II. Note h.

† The word, in the original Hebrew, for Isle is *I*, and for Islands, *Iim*, and the word for Dove is *Yonah*, hence *Iona*, or *Hy*.

‡ Isaiah lx. 89; Gen. viii. 8, 9, 10; Canticles vi. 9; Ps. lxxiv. 20; Matt. x. 16.

called, who gave to the Holy Ghost a dwelling-place in himself by his dovelike ways; a name to which may with propriety be applied what is written in the Proverbs, 'A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.' Justly, therefore, not only from the days of his infancy, was our president, by the gift of God, honoured by this special name, but even many long years before his birth it was given to him as a child of the promise in the wonderful prophecy of a soldier of Christ to whom it was revealed by the Holy Ghost.* When the time arrived that Colum should learn, Cruithnechan went to a certain prophet who was in the country to ask him when it would be right for the boy to begin. As soon as the prophet observed the heavens, he said, "Write now for him his alphabet." It was then written in a cake; and the way it was eaten by Colum was thus: the half of it at the east side of the water, and the other half at the west side. The prophet said, "Thus shall this boy's land be, namely, the half of it to the east of the sea, that is in Alban, and the other half of it to the west of the sea, that is, Erin." It was not long after this that he and his guardian went to Raymoghly, county of Donegal, to be instructed by Bishop Brugael. When they arrived, Cruithnechan was commanded by the bishop to perform the office of priest in that place on the festival; but, for some unknown cause, the priest was unable to recite the psalm † appointed for the occasion. Colum was then invited to read it, which he did, although he had learned but his alphabet before that time; "so that," says his biographer, ‡ "the name of God and Colum were magnified

* *Adamnan*, Pref. II.

† The 100th Psalm.

‡ *Old Irish Life*.

through the great miracle." The story is told that one night as Cruithnechan was returning home from the church after service, he found his house illuminated with a bright light, and saw a ball of fire standing over the face of little Colum as he lay asleep. At the sight he at once shook with fear, and fell down with his face to the ground in great amazement, well knowing, as the saint's biographer says, that it indicated the grace of the Holy Spirit poured out from heaven upon his young charge.* About this time the addition of *Cille* ("of the church") was given to Colum because of the frequency of his coming from the cell, or church, in which he read his psalms, to meet the neighbouring children. And what they used to say among themselves was, "Has our little Colum come to-day from the cell?" (that is, Temple Douglas). Amongst the many gifts which Columba is said to have possessed from his boyhood was that of a powerful and sonorous voice. On one occasion when passing through a thicket in company with his guardian to visit a sick person, the presbyter's foot slipped on the path so that he fell and suddenly died. Thinking he was asleep, the saint put his hand under his head and began to rehearse his lessons so loudly that he was heard by the nuns in the church. Dagan Forgaill, the chief bard of Ireland at the time, tells us there was a mile-and-a-half between him and the church, and the sound of his voice was heard at that distance. The bard said of him:—

"The sound of the voice of Colum-cille
Great its sweetness above all clerics:
To the end of fifteen hundred paces,
Though great the distance, it was distinctly heard." †

* *Adamnan*, bk. III. c. iii.

† *Old Irish Life*.

Another instance is given of the power of his voice which is said to have taken place near the fortress of King Brude. When Columba was chanting the evening hymns with a few of his brethren, as usual, outside the king's fortifications, some Druids, coming near to them, did all they could to prevent God's praises being sung in the midst of a Pagan nation. On perceiving this the saint began to sing the forty-fourth Psalm; and at the same moment so wonderfully loud did his voice become, that king and people were struck with terror and amazement.* The time at length arrived when he bade farewell to the kind guardian who baptized, fostered, and brought him up in Christian training, in the study of wisdom, and at whose house he learned those lessons of purity and humility which distinguished his life. With talents of the highest order, and with consummate prudence, he failed not to remember that no knowledge was worth pursuing which did not advance the divine life in the soul. Leaving Kilmacrenan, where, with Cruithnechan, he had spent the principal portion of his boyhood, he travelled southwards to Moville at the head of Strangford Lough, and became a pupil at the school of the famous bishop, St. Finian. This Finian must not be confounded with the other of the same name. Both were famous abbots, and were successively teachers of Columba; one, the founder of the school of Moville in the county of Down; the other, of Clonard in Meath, to which he subsequently went. At Moville he was ordained deacon, and to this period of his life is referable the following anecdote by his biographer. It happened that on a festival day no wine was to be had for the celebration of the Holy

* *Adamnan*, bk. I. c. xxix.

Communion. Hearing the ministers complain among themselves of this want, Columba took the vessel and went to the fountain that, as a deacon, he might bring pure spring water for the celebration of the sacrament.* The saint then blessed in faith the element of the water taken from the stream, invoking as he did so the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in Cana of Galilee had changed the water into wine: and the result was that by His operation in this miracle also, an inferior element was changed into one of more excellent kind by the hands of Columba. Then returning from the fountain and entering the church, he placed beside the Lord's table the vessel containing this liquid, and to the ministers he said, "Here is the wine, which the Lord Jesus has sent for the celebration of His holy mysteries." Finian and his ministers, says the biographer, having ascertained the fact, returned most ardent thanks to God.† With that innate restlessness and love of travelling so characteristic of the Irish, we next find the youth, while yet in deacon's orders, arriving in Leinster, where he placed himself under the instruction of an aged bard called Gemman, where no doubt that keen love of study and taste for poetry, to which he had been so devoted, was fostered and encouraged.

Of Gemman we know very few personal particulars, except that he was probably a Christian bard of the same class as Dallan Forgaill, Columba's panegyrist, and, being an inhabitant of Meath, was brought into communication with St. Finian, whose school was the

* "The duty here performed by the deacon was that which in the Western Church was usually assigned to the acolyte."—*Dr. Reeves*.

† *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. i.

principal one in the territory.* At this stage of the saint's life an incident occurred which brings vividly before us a picture of the state of early society in Ireland, and the dangers to which life and property were exposed. It happened one day that a pitiless and unfeeling oppressor of the innocent was pursuing a young girl who fled before him on a level plain. As she chanced to observe the aged Gemman reading on the plain she ran straight to him as quickly as she could. Being alarmed at such an unexpected occurrence, the bard called on Columba, who was reading at some distance, that both together might defend the girl from her pursuer; but the ruffian came up, and without any regard to their presence, stabbed the girl with his lance, and, leaving her lying dead at their feet, turned to run away. Then the old man, in great affliction, turning to Columba said, "How long, holy youth Columba, shall God, the just Judge, allow this horrid crime and this insult to us to go unpunished?" Then the saint at once pronounced this sentence on the perpetrator of the deed: "At the very instant the soul of this girl whom he hath murdered ascendeth into heaven, shall the soul of the murderer go down into hell."

And scarcely had he spoken the words, adds the biographer, when the murderer of the innocent, like Ananias before Peter, fell down dead on the spot before the eyes of Columba. The news of this terrible and sudden vengeance was soon spread abroad throughout many districts of Ireland, and with it the wonderful fame of the deacon.†

* Colgan's *Act. SS.* p. 395; *Adarnan*, bk. II. p. 137.

† *Adarnan*, bk. II. c. xxvi.

Without documentary evidence it is not easy to form a just idea of the particular kind of education Columba received during the first period of his life, but no doubt much can be gathered from the peculiar habits and customs prevalent in his time. Under his able and godly teacher, Cruithnechan, he had imparted to him the rudiments of a literary education, which was accompanied, we may be sure, by a study of the Holy Scripture and rhetoric. We learn from Adamnan that the saint never could spend even one hour without study, prayer, or writing, or some other occupation, and so incessantly was he engaged night and day in the unwearied exercise of fasting and watching that the burden of each of these austerities seemed beyond the power of all human endurance. That caligraphy was taught and practised by him we learn from the same biographer, who tells of a book of hymns for the office of every day in the week which was written by Columba. In connection with this, the story is told that on one occasion the book having slipped, with the leather satchel which contained it, from the shoulder of a boy who fell from a bridge, was immersed in a river in the province of Leinster. The book lay in the water from Christmas Day till the end of Easter, and was afterwards found on the bank of the river by some woman who was walking there, and was brought by her in the same satchel, which was not only soaked but even rotten, to a priest named Jogman, to whom it formerly belonged. On opening the satchel the priest found his book uninjured, clean, and dry, as if it had not fallen into the water.* Although Latin was very extensively taught in the monastic school, Columba did not neglect to cultivate

* *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. viii.

his own native language, for we learn from the *Old Irish Life* that because he composed many eulogies of God's people, the poet said :—

“Thrice fifty noble lays the apostle made,
Whose miracles are more numerous than grass ;
Some in *Latin*, which were beguiling ;
Some in *Gaelic*, fair the tale.”

As we have seen, the saint seems to have been a diligent student from his boyhood, and we may naturally suppose that the teaching imparted in the homes of Cruithnechan, Gemman, and Finian of Moville, moulded the habits of his whole life. With new principles of life growing within him, a mature mind, and a heart full of emotion, he begins to consider in what way he can best serve God, and, desiring to lead a stricter and purer life of Christianity, he resolves, on leaving Gemman, to embrace monasticism, and enter the seminary of Clonard, over which St. Finian presided.

CHAPTER III.

The School of Clonard.

ON the north-west side of the river Boyne stands the village of Clonard, in the county of Meath, where, in A.D. 520, Finian founded the famous religious establishment which is said to have contained not less than three thousand monks, and which became in course of time the most important seat of learning and training school in Ireland, whence proceeded the distinguished founders of the Celtic and many of the continental Churches.

Before touching upon the monastic character of the district, a brief account of the place so closely connected with the name of Columba will not be without interest. Clonard, or, as it should be properly written, *Cluain-foraid*, was more anciently called *Rossfinnchuill*. In an old Irish tale, *Cathreim Dathi Mic Fiachrach*, mention is made of Ros-na-Riogh, now known as Rosnarea, a townland on the Boyne, in the parish of Knockcommon, and it is added, "Ross Finnchuill, of Cluain Diotrach, where youths and greyhounds used to be, was a dark wood, royal its gifts, for the hunting of Dathi Mic Fiachrach. Beibhim, the daughter of powerful Brian, was mother of Dathi. It was she, as I have heard here, who obtained the meadows round the fair Ross. The Esgar of Braunan, son of Eochaidh, the grave of Conn of the hundred battles, was a dark oak forest until now,

for the chase of Finnchuill, of Clan-Diothraigh."* Here Finian established his monastery; and afterwards it became the seat of a small diocese, to which, before 1152, were added the bishoprics of Trim, Ardraccan, Dunshaughlin, and Slane, but their common see was fixed at Clonard. On the death of Ethri O'Miadachain, in 1174, his successor, Eugene, substituted the title of Meath for that of Clonard; but the bishop's see remained at the latter place till 1206, when Simon Rochfort, an Englishman, forsaking the old cathedral of Clonard, made the abbey of Newtown his cathedral. A great part of the abbey erected by Finian was burned in 764, and after repeated pillages and incursions by the Danes, the town, together with the abbey, and its churches, was wholly consumed in 1045. Eugus O'Candelbain, Prince of Hy Loegaire, while a monk there, was killed by Mac Cairthen O'Muobruain, Lord of Delbna. It is further recorded that, in 1113, Connor, king of Munster, plundered Meath, and forcibly carried off the riches of the whole province, which had been lodged for safety in the abbey church; and shortly afterwards the inhabitants of Leitrim and Cavan plundered and sacked the town, maltreated Constantine O'Daly (at that time the chief poet of Ireland), and took from the abbey a sword which, it is said, belonged to St. Finian.†

Besides the above numerous calamities, the town and the abbey were frequently burned and pillaged in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. About 1175, Walter, son of Hugh de Lacy, erected an Augustinian monastery on the ruins of the ancient abbey. In 1200 the English of Clonard slew Mathglamhain, the son of Fitzpatrick O'Ciardha, who in revenge burnt the town. For cen-

* Reeves' *Adannan*, p. 235, note.

† Lewis's *Topogr. Dict.*

turies the Irish seem to have had no law or protection. Property was insecure, the means of support was withheld from the laity, and churches stripped of their ornaments to supply the rapacious demands of legates and nuncios. By the Kilkenny Statutes of 1367, no Irishman was to be admitted to any cathedral, collegiate church, or benefice among the English in Ireland by provision, collation, or presentation by any person, and if any were admitted it was held void, and the king should have the presentation.

By these same laws people were forbidden to marry with the Irish, or to give their children to be nursed by them. Indeed, so great was the hatred and contempt in which they were held by the Anglo-Normans, they considered it no sin whatever to kill an Irishman.* In the year A.D. 1641, Clonard acquired considerable celebrity from the gallant defence of the castle of Tycroghan made by Lady Fitzgerald.

During the disturbances of 1798 a party of three thousand insurgents, under the command of William Aylmer, marched to this place, but met with so obstinate resistance from Lieut. Tyrell with twenty-seven yeomanry in a fortified house, that they were detained till help arrived from Mullingar, and were then obliged to retire.

But to return to St. Finian. Very few particulars respecting his early life have come down to us; but his biographer † tells us he was of the race of Cruithnigh, or Irish Picts, who occupied Dalriada in the modern counties of Antrim and Down, and had extended their dominions towards Derry. After having been taught in his youth by Fortchun of Trim, he crossed over to Kilmuine, where he found the princely hermit Cadoc of Llancarvan, David,

* *Leland's History of Ireland.* † See Colgan's *Vita St. Finianus.*

the founder of the church of Menevia (now St. David's), and Gildas, the historian. Having spent nearly thirty years in the monasteries of Wales, he returned to Ireland at the age of sixty, and set to work to build his *cluain* (retreat). In the *Old Irish Life* of the saint we are told that "after this a desire seized Finian to go to Rome, when he had completed his education. But an angel of God came and said unto him, 'What would be given to thee at Rome shall be given to thee here. Arise and renew sound doctrine and faith in Ireland after Patrick.'"* In the *Martyrology of Donegal*, St. Finian is described as a "doctor of wisdom, and tutor of the saints of Ireland in his time, for it was he that had three thousand saints at one school at Clonard, as is evident in his life, and it was out of them the twelve apostles of Erin were chosen." To this place Columba came, and was numbered with a class of students who afterwards attained great eminence as fathers and teachers of the Irish Church. Clonard was not merely a refuge for those who had adopted a life of penance and aceticism, but it was also a training school where they might conquer temptation and learn lessons of piety and true wisdom. In the same school were educated Mobhi Clairnach, who founded the monastery of Glasnevin on the banks of the river Finglas (or "fair stream"), near Dublin; Ciaran, or Kiaran, called Mac-an-tsaor, or "son of the carpenter," who founded the celebrated abbey of Clonmacnoise, † on ground given by Dermot Mac-Cervail, king of Ireland, which afterwards obtained the episcopal authority usually

* Quoted in Dr. Skene's *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 51.

† It was originally called *Druim Tipraid*, but from its schools, which were attended by children of the neighbouring princes, it obtained the appellation of *Cluain-Mac-Nois*, signifying in the Irish language the "Retreat of the sons of the noble."

attached to such establishments ; another Ciaran, who founded the monastery of Sarghir in Munster ; Columba, son of Crimthan, who founded the abbey of Terryglas ; Ninnidh, whose monastery was on an island called Inismacsaint in Lough Erne ; Molaisse of Deverish ; and the Brendans of Birr and Clonfert, the latter presiding, like his teacher St. Finian, over three thousand monks. Somewhat later were Cainnech, or Canice of Aghaboe and Kilkenny, Ruadhan of Lothra, and Senell of Cluaininnis.

According to the Irish memoirs, when Columba completed his education he left Clonard and joined Mobhi Clairnach at his monastery at Glasnevin, where he found fifty persons receiving instruction, including his old fellow-student Comgall, who founded the monastery of Bangor in 558,* where Columbanus, the friend of Columba, was educated, and from whom the cloister of Luxeuil derives its origin. Having been judged worthy of admission to superior orders, Columba was sent to Etchen, bishop of Clonfad, by whom he was ordained priest. The account† of his ordination, as translated, is as follows :—

Bishop Etchen is venerated in Clonfad in Fearabile in West-Meath, and it was to him Columba went to have the order of a bishop conferred upon him. Columba sat under the tree which is on the west side of the

* The following account of it is given in his *Life* :—“So great a multitude of monks then came to Comgall that they could not be maintained in one place, and hence they possessed several cells and many monasteries, not only in the region of the Ultonians, but throughout the other provinces of Ireland ; and in these different cells and monasteries three thousand monks were under the care of the holy father Comgall ; but the greater and more memorable of them was the monastery of Bangor.”—Boll. A.S.S. in *Vit. St. Comgalli*.

† In the scholia or annotations on the *Felire* of Angus the Culdee, translated by Dr. Todd. See his *Life of St. Patrick*, p. 71.

church, and asked where the cleric was. "There he is," said a certain man, "in the field where they are ploughing." "I think," said Columba, "that it is not meet for us that a ploughman should confer orders on us; but let us test him." Then Columba went up to the cleric, and, after having tested him, told him what he came for. "It shall be done," said the cleric. The order of priest was then conferred upon the saint, although it was the order of bishop he wished for. "I regret," said Columba, "that thou hast conferred this order upon me; but I shall never change it whilst I live; for this reason, however, no person shall ever again come to have orders conferred upon him in this church." This tale does not appear in *Adamnan*, or in the *Old Irish Life*. The whole story seems a fiction of a later age, and supposes the degree or order to depend on the volition of the officiating minister. "It is probably a mere attempt," writes Dr. Skene, "to explain why so great a saint was merely a presbyter, but his master, Finian of Clonard, was a presbyter-abbot, and his disciples would naturally follow his example in what indeed was the main characteristic of this second order of the saints." Many of the accounts which we have of the miracles performed, and the prophecies spoken, by Columba, will doubtless appear to the reader much exaggerated, and be received with no small amount of incredulity; but it ought to be borne in mind that most great religious movements bring with them doubt, excitement, and exaggeration. The early fathers and missionaries were men of strong faith and indomitable courage. They were deeply impressed with the truth that with God all things are possible, and that His strength was made perfect in their weakness. We have

very little information respecting Columba during his residence at Glasnevin, but there are one or two incidents worth noticing. On one occasion when the bell struck for matins the saint went to the church, but in order to reach it he had to cross the river, which was greatly flooded; nevertheless he went through it with his clothes on. "Bravely dost thou come here to-night, descendant of Niall," said Ciaran and Mobhi. "God is able," said the saint, "to ward off the labour from us."

Again, his biographer tells the story that when a large church was finished, which was built by Mobhi, and the clerics were considering what each of them would like to have the church full of, "I would like," said Ciaran, "its full of sons of the Church who frequent the canonical hours." "I should like," said Cainnech, "its full of books to be used by 'sons of life.'" "I should like," said Comgall, "its full of sickness and diseases to be in my own body, to my subjugation and chastisement." Columba, however, chose its full of gold and silver to make reliquaries and monasteries therewith. Mobhi said that it should not be so; but that Columba's community would be richer than every other community, both in Erin and Alban.*

An event now occurred in the saint's life which, in all probability, regulated to a great extent his future career. The time at last arrived when he was no longer permitted to remain in comparative obscurity, for God, who moves in mysterious ways, had greater work for him to do. A violent distemper appeared in the neighbourhood of Glasnevin about the year 544, and Mobhi told his pupils to leave the place; the community was consequently broken up, and Columba returned to the

* *Old Irish Life.*

north. This distemper belonged to a class called by the Irish "yellow disorder," and was known by the specific name of *Crom Chonaill* or *Buidhe Chonaill*, from some person named Conall who died of it, but of whose history no other record now remains than that contained in the *Obits and Martyrology of Christ Church*.* Adamnan gives an account of this plague, which in 664 depopulated the southern coasts of Britain, afterwards extending into the province of the Northumbrians and to Ireland, ravaged the country far and near, and destroyed multitudes of people. He says: "What we are about to relate concerning the plague, which in our own time twice visited the greater part of the world, deserves, I think, to be reckoned among not the least of the miracles of St. Columba. For, not to mention the other and greater countries of Europe, including Italy, the Roman States, and the Cisalpine provinces of Gaul, with the States of Spain also, which lie beyond the Pyrenees, these islands of the sea, Ireland and Britain, have twice been ravaged by a dreadful pestilence throughout their whole extent, except among the two tribes, the Picts and Scots of Britain, who are separated from each other by the Dorsal mountains of Britain. And although neither of these nations was free from those grievous crimes which generally provoke the anger of the eternal Judge, yet both have been hitherto patiently borne with and mercifully spared. Now to what other person can this favour granted them by God be attributed unless to St. Columba, whose monasteries lie within the territories of both these people, and have been regarded by both with the greatest respect up to the present time? But what I

* Skene's *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 481, note 6.

am now to say cannot, I think, be heard without a sigh, that there are many very stupid people in both countries who, in their ignorance that they owe their exemption from the plague to the prayers of the saint, ungratefully and wickedly abuse the patience and goodness of God. But I often return my most grateful thanks to God for having, through the intercession of Columba, preserved me and those in our islands from the ravages of the pestilence, and that in Saxonia also, when I went to visit my friend King Alfrid, where the plague was raging and laying waste many of his villages, yet both in its first attack, immediately after the war of Ecfriidus, and in its second, two years subsequently, the Lord mercifully saved me from danger, though I was living and moving about in the very midst of the plague. The divine mercy was also extended to my companions, not one of whom died of the plague, or was attacked with any other disease.*

On his way from Glasnevin, Columba, with his companions Comgall, Cainnech, and Ciaran, crossed the Bior, now called the Mayola Water, an inconsiderable stream which runs into Lough Neagh on the north-west, which divides the dioceses of Armagh and Derry. Thus it was the boundary between the Airghialla and the Cinel Eoghain branch of the northern Hy Neill; and hence, perhaps, in the biography of a Neillian, it was represented as a boundary of disease.† It is said that in crossing the river, Columba exclaimed, "*Bior against fochainne*" (the river against diseases), and the plague did not, therefore, reach beyond that.‡ Such is the briefest outline of the little that is known of

* *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. xlvi. ; *Bede, Hist. Eccl.* bk. III. c. xxvii.

† *Adamnan*, Pref. p. lxxiii. note.

‡ *Old Irish Life.*

Columba during the first twenty-five years of his life, and up to this time nothing is recorded beyond the simplest disconnected details which have been gathered together. Hitherto the saint lived more as a private individual than a leader of men. But the moment at length arrived when his incomparable missionary spirit began to show itself; and such was his earnestness that whatever he did, he did it with his might. As the monastic system of the Irish Church is almost identical with that of Iona, it will be considered in connection with the saint's work at that place. His manner of living was regulated by a *Rule* which he himself compiled from the ancient oriental monastic institutes of all the old British and Irish monastic orders, and which he afterwards settled in the hundred or more establishments founded in Scotland and Ireland.*

* For *Rule of St. Columba*, see Appendix.

CHAPTER IV.

The Monasteries of Derry, Durrow, and Kells.

IMMEDIATELY after the death of Mobhi, which occurred in A.D. 545, Columba went to Derry, that is, to the royal fort of Aedh, son of Ainmire, who was king of Ireland at that time. The king offered the fort to the saint, but he refused it because of Mobhi's command not to receive land until permitted by him. On his coming out of the fort, however, he met two of Mobhi's people bringing him the girdle, with his consent that the saint should accept the grant of territory, Mobhi having died.

Columba then settled in the fort, and founded a church there. It was originally, and is still, popularly called Derry, from the Irish *Doire*, which signifies literally "a place of oaks," but is likewise used to express a "thick wood." By the ancient Irish it was also called *Doire-Calgaich*, "the oak wood of Calgach"; *Darrich* in the old Roman provincial; but Adamnan invariably calls it *Roboretum Calgagi*. About the middle of the tenth century the Pagan part of the compound gave place to a Christian equivalent, and the name became *Derry Columbkille* of succeeding times from an abbey for canons regular of the order of St. Augustine founded here by that saint. But when the place grew

in importance above every other place having the same meaning (such as Durrow, &c.), the distinguishing epithet was rejected. The English prefix *London* was imposed in 1613, on the incorporation of the Irish Society by charter of James the First, and was for a long time retained by the colonists, but it has likewise fallen into popular disuse. As we have seen, the city is indebted for its origin to the abbey founded by Columba, on or near the site granted by King Aedh. In 783 and 812 this abbey and the town were partially destroyed by fire; and at a later period, according to the *Annals of Ulster*, the predatory Danes heightened the horrors of the conflagration by a massacre of the clergy and students.

The place must have been speedily restored, as the Danes were driven with great slaughter from the first siege of Derry by Niall Caille, king of Ireland, and Murchad, prince of Aileach, in 832. At the close of the tenth century the shrine of Columba was carried away by the Danes, by whom the place was again devastated.* In 1158 Flahertagh O'Brolchain, abbot of the Augustinian monastery, was raised to the episcopacy, and appointed supreme superintendent of all the abbeys under the rule of Columba by a synodical decree of the Irish clergy assembled at Brigmactaidhg, in the county of Meath.

O'Brolchain immediately commenced preparations for the erection of a new church on a large scale, and in 1162 he enclosed the old abbey with a circular wall. Two years later "the great church" was built, and the original abbey church was thenceforward distinguished

* Lewis's *Topogr. Dict.*; see O'Donnell's *Life* for account of the history of Derry.

as the *Dubh-regles*, or "black church," to which there is reference in the ancient lines cited by Tighermach:—

"Three years without light was
Colum in his black church ;
He passed to angels from his body,
After seven years and seventy."*

But to return. Columba probably remained at Derry until he founded the monastery of Durrow in 553. We may be sure that his visit was not barren or unprofitable either to himself or his followers, and here, as elsewhere, he gave an example of humility, and as much as in him lay he strove to allow no moment of his time to pass without employing it in the service and worship of God, principally in praying, reading, preaching, and writing. The notices we possess of his life during this period are but slight and fragmentary, but there are a few passages which furnish us with excellent examples of his many virtues, miracles, and extraordinary gift of prophecy. The story is told that there was a certain very fruitful apple tree in the immediate vicinity of the south side of the monastery. When the inhabitants of the place were complaining of the exceeding bitterness of the fruit, Columba one day in autumn came to it, and, seeing the boughs bearing to no purpose a load of fruit that injured rather than pleased those who tasted it, he raised his hand and blessed it, saying, "In the name of the Almighty God, O bitter tree, let all thy bitterness depart from thee ; and let all the apples, hitherto so very bitter, be now changed into the sweetest." "At that very instant," says Adamnan, "the apples lost their bitterness, and even changed into an amazing sweetness."† Again, there is another curious incident as showing the materials

* Tighermach's *Chronicles*.

† *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. I.

used in building churches at the time. One day he sent his monks into the wood to cut wattles or slender twigs to make a church for himself. The twigs were taken off the land of a certain young man, who was very indignant and annoyed with the saint for allowing his timber to be removed without his permission. When Columba, therefore, heard of the man's complaint, he said to his people, "Take him the value of his timber of barley grain, and let him put it in the ground where the wood was cut." It had then passed beyond the middle of summer. The grain was subsequently taken to the young man, who put it in the ground, and it was ripe about Lammas, the time when the loaves made of new wheat are offered as an oblation or first-fruits of the harvest.* His biographers have dwelt much on the miraculous side of his character, and they have given us many instances of his display of power. Here is one that reminds us of the rock of Horeb, from which Moses caused water to rush to supply the necessities of the people when they were encamped before Rephidim.

On one occasion when he was in Derry a little child was brought to him by its parents to be baptized; and because there was no water to be found in the neighbourhood, he turned aside to a rock that was near, and, kneeling down, prayed for a short time; then, rising up from his prayer, he made the sign of the cross on the face of the rock, from which there immediately gushed out an abundant stream of water; and there he forthwith baptized the child, concerning whom he spoke the following prophecy, saying, "This child shall live to a very great age; in his youth he will indulge freely the desires of the flesh; afterwards he will devote himself to the

* *Old Irish Life.*

warfare of a Christian until the very end of his life, and thus depart to the Lord in a good old age." All this happened, Adamnan tell us, to a man named Lugucencalad, whose parents were from Ardnamurchan, in Scotland, where there was seen, in Adamnan's time, a well dedicated to Columba.*

There is one more event in connection with this visit to Derry. In the *Old Irish Life* it is briefly stated that the saint went to Tours and brought away the Gospel that lay on Martin's breast in the ground for a hundred years, and left it in Derry. In the twelfth century this Gospel was the chief reliquary of the Church of Derry, and we find recorded in the *Annals of Ulster* at 1166, the violation of the contract which had been solemnised in presence of the Coarb of Patrick, with the *crozier Jesu* and the Coarb of Columba, with the *Gospel of Martin*.

The legend concerning the invention of this manuscript is borrowed by O'Donnell from the *Acts of SS. Eugenius and Mochonna*. It relates that the people of Tours had not the clue to the exact spot where St. Martin's remains were buried, and that on the occasion of St. Columba visiting their city, they applied to him to point out the place where the body of their patron saint lay, which he consented to do on the condition that he should receive for his portion everything found in the grave except the bones of Martin. "Now, though it is very unlikely," writes Dr. Reeves, "that Columba ever travelled beyond the British islands, the above legend is interesting as an indication of the early connection which existed between Ireland and the Church of Tours. St. Martin is represented as St. Patrick's grand-uncle, and as a principal agent in his mission to Ireland. In the next

* *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. ix. ; *Old Irish Life*.

age his body is reported to have been discovered by the monastic patron of Ireland, and his ritual transferred from Tours to Derry. And in later times the holy wells of Derry, called *Tobar Martain*, *Tobar Adhamhuain*, and *Tobar Coluim*, preserved the local association of his name with those of the fathers of the Columban order.”*

Leaving Derry, the saint proceeded to the county of Donegal, where, in the neighbourhood of his own native place, he founded the monastery of Raphoe, anciently called *Rathboth*. It appears to have derived both its earliest and present importance from the foundation of this establishment, which, after its restoration by Adamnan, continued to flourish, and was soon afterwards made the seat of a bishopric. The scene of Columba's labour is now changed, and we next find him on a visit of instruction to Aed Mac Brenagnn, king of Teaffia, a large territory in the county of West-Meath.

The king gave him the place which is now called Durrow, or *Dair-mag* (“field of oaks”). Here he built a sumptuous monastery, which was one of the earliest and most important, but not the most enduring, of the saint's foundations in Ireland. An abbey of the Augustinian canons was subsequently founded and dedicated to the Blessed Virgin and St. Columba. This was endowed by the king; and in 832 was plundered by Fethlemid, son of Crimthan, who slew the monks and burned the town; and after having been repeatedly destroyed by fire, was, at the end of the twelfth century, plundered by the English, who laid waste the adjacent country. Hugh Lacy, while superintending the erection of a castle on the ruins of a monastery founded by the saint, was killed by one of the labourers,

* *Adamnan*, Appendix, p. 324.

who, indignant at the profanation of the sacred spot, struck off his hand with an axe while he was stooping down to give directions.* Before leaving Durrow Columba blessed it, we are told, and left Cormac, grandson of Lethan, there, in charge of his people. Of this man, Cormac, the following anecdote, so full of strange adventure, is related by Adamnan:—In his desire to find a desert in the ocean, Cormac left the coast of Ireland at full sail, and after he had gone far from the land, Columba, who was then staying at Drumalban in Scotland, recommended him in the following terms to King Brude, in the presence of the ruler of the Orkneys: “Some of our brethren have lately set sail, and are anxious to find a desert in the pathless sea; should they happen, after many wanderings, to come to the Orkney islands, do you carefully instruct this chief, whose hostages are in thy hand, that no evil befall them within his dominions.” The saint undertook to give this direction, because he knew that after a few months Cormac would arrive at the Orkneys. After the lapse of a few months, whilst Columba was at Iona, Cormac’s name was mentioned one day unexpectedly in his presence by some persons in conversation, who were observing that it was not yet known whether the voyage of Cormac had been successful or otherwise. Upon hearing this, Columba said, “You shall see Cormac arrive here to-day.” After about an hour he unexpectedly arrived, and proceeded to the oratory, whilst all gave thanks to God.

There is another equally remarkable instance of Columba’s prophetic knowledge regarding Cormac’s

* *Lewis's Topogr. Dict.*

third voyage. When crossing the ocean he was exposed to imminent danger. For fourteen days in summer, and as many nights, his vessel sailed with full sails before a south wind in a straight course from land into the northern regions, and his voyage seemed to be extended beyond the limits of human wanderings. Accordingly, after the tenth hour of the fourteenth day, certain dangers of a most formidable and almost insurmountable kind presented themselves. A multitude of loathsome insects, such as had never been seen before, covered the sea in swarms, and struck the vessel so violently, that it seemed as if they would wholly penetrate the leather covering of the ship. According to the accounts afterwards given, says Adamnan, by those who were there, they were about the size of frogs; they could swim, but were not able to fly; their stings were painful, and they crowded upon the handles of the oars. When Cormac and his fellow-voyagers had seen these and other monsters they were filled with fear and alarm, and, shedding tears, they prayed to God to help them in their trouble. At the same hour Columba, although far away in body, was present in spirit with Cormac in the ship. He gave the signal, and calling the brethren to the oratory, entered it, and, addressing those present, uttered the following prophecy: "Brethren, pray with all your usual fervour for Cormac, who by sailing too far hath passed the bounds of human enterprise, and is exposed at this moment to dreadful alarm and fright, in the presence of monsters which were never before seen, and are almost indescribable. We ought, therefore, to sympathise with our brethren and associates who are in such danger,

and pray to the Lord with them. Behold, at this moment Cormac and his sailors are shedding copious tears, and praying with intense fervency to Christ; let us assist them by our prayers, that God may take compassion upon us, and cause the wind, which for the past fourteen days has blown from the south, to blow from the north, and this north wind will deliver Cormac's vessel out of all danger." Having said this he knelt down, and in a plaintive voice poured forth his prayers to God. Then he arose quickly, and, wiping away his tears, joyfully gave thanks to God, saying, "Now, brethren, let us congratulate our dear friends for whom we have been praying, for God will now change the south wind into a north wind, which will free our associates from their perils, and bring them to us here again." As he spoke the south wind ceased, and Cormac's ship was enabled to gain the land; and coming ashore he hastened to Columba, and in God's bounty they looked on each other again face to face, to the extreme joy and wonder of all.

Among the numerous relics of Durrow, which include a curiously sculptured cross and a holy well, the most interesting is the *Book of Durrow*, a beautiful manuscript now preserved in the Library of Trinity College, Dublin. An ancient Irish poem is extant supposed to have been composed by the saint on the occasion of his departure from Durrow for the last time. His early administration of the monastery is alluded to in the following verses:—

" Beloved the excellent seven
Whom Christ has chosen to His kingdom,
To whom I leave, for their purity,
The constant care of this my church.

“ Three of whom are here at this side,
Cormac, son of Dima, and Ængus,
And Collon of pure heart,
Who have joined themselves to them.

“ Libren, Senan, comely Corach,
The son of Ua Chein, and his brother,
Are the four besides the others,
Who shall arrive at this place.

“ They are the seven pillars,
And they are the seven chiefs
Whom God has surely commanded
To dwell in the same abode.”*

In the absence of any attempt at chronological order, we are unable to ascertain from the biographies the precise dates of the foundation of the saint's other churches, but in all probability he was diligently employed till A.D. 561 in planting the monastic system in Ireland. From the two monasteries, Derry and Durrow, many others had their beginning, the principal one being that of Kells. This place, formerly called *Kentis*, acquired at a very early period a considerable degree of importance. When Columba arrived at the door of the fort, or royal seat, Dairmait Mac Cubhaill, king of Ireland, he delayed, and began to predict what would be the fate of the place afterwards, and said to Becc Ma De (who was the king's prophet), “Tell me, O Becc-broadgrassed Cenandas,† what clerics shall possess it, what young warriors shall abandon it.” The prophet answered, “The clerics who are on its floor sing the praises of a king's son; its young men depart from its

* *Brussels MS.* (Bodleian Library).

† The oldest written form of Kells, which means “Headfort.” See the *Old Irish Life*.

threshold ; a time shall be when 'twill be sure." The saint then marked out the town in extent as it now is, and blessed it, and said it would become the "most illustrious possession he would have in the lands, although it would not be there his resurrection should be." As he was uttering this prophecy he turned his face to the south-west, and laughed very much. Boithin asked him the cause of the joy. "A son of life," said Columba, "that shall be born to the Lord in this solitary place." This, we are told in the *Old Irish Life*, was fulfilled afterwards in the person of Grafaun of Cillsaire, who is supposed to have been the author of a chronicle called the *Book of Dubhdaleithe*, quoted in the *Annals of Ulster*.*

Notwithstanding the repeated disasters by conflagrations and the ravages of the Danes, Kells appears to have been the head of a small surrounding diocese which subsequently merged into that of Meath. The monastery was restored in A.D. 806 by Cellach, abbot of Iona, who had taken refuge here on account of the dangers and sufferings to which the community of Iona was exposed by the Norwegians ; but Kells was never free from disasters of various kinds till after the arrival of the English. In A.D. 1152 the memorable synod of the Irish clergy, at which Cardinal Paparo distributed the four palls to the archbishops, was assembled here ; and in four years afterwards the whole town, with all its sacred edifices, was destroyed by fire. The monastery, after its restoration, was plundered in A.D. 1172 by Dermot Mac Murrrough ; but in the year following Hugh de Lacy bestowed on it such ample grants of land as to entitle him to be regarded as its second founder. Like

* *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 485.

the other places associated with the name of Columba, there are many relics, and several indications of its ancient importance still remaining, notably the famous literary monument known as the *Book of Kells*. It is an *Evangeliarum* somewhat resembling the *Book of Durrow*, but far surpassing it in its brilliancy and in elaborateness of execution.*

* "This wonderful MS. was preserved at Kells in the county of Meath. It had existed there for many centuries, and was traditionally called the *Book of Columcille*. The costly shrine with which it was enclosed nearly proved its destruction in the beginning of the eleventh century, as we learn from the *Annals of Ulster*, as also the *Four Masters* at 1006, when it is related that '*The Great Gospel of Columcille* was stolen at night from the western sacristy of the great Church of Cummanus. This was the principal relic of the western world, on account of its remarkable cover. And it was found after two months and twenty days, its gold having been stolen off, and a sod over it.' Fortunately the MS. itself sustained little injury (it received more from the *plough* of a modern bookbinder), and in the course of the following century its blank pages were considered a fit depository for copies of certain charters of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, connected with the endowment of Kells. Archbishop Usher became possessed of this MS., and after his death it was in great danger of being lost, but it escaped; and on the Restoration it came, with what remained of the archbishop's library, '*ex dono Caroli II.*' into the custody of Trinity College, Dublin, where it remains, the admiration and astonishment of every one who examines it."—*Bishop Reeves*.

CHAPTER V.

The Cathach: Synod of Teltown.

IN the year following the events related in the preceding chapter, and in his fortieth year of age, Columba paid a visit to his old friend and teacher, St. Finian, at Dromin, on the borders of Ulster. Whether he went there with any specific object is not told us; but at all events his meeting with the venerable bishop was a heartily welcome one. When Finian saw him coming to him he observed also an angel of the Lord accompanying him, and as he proceeded, we are told, he made it known to certain brethren who were standing by, saying to them, "Behold, look now to Columba as he draweth near; he hath been deemed worthy of having an angelic inhabitant of heaven to be his companion in his wanderings." An incident now occurred which, whilst it exhibited an enthusiastic desire for knowledge, presented symptoms of an obstinate and resentful temper. Columba had a great taste for transcribing manuscripts. On this occasion he was anxious to borrow Finian's copy of the Book of Psalms, but not wishing to ask his permission, fearing lest he might be refused, he resolved upon effecting his purpose by stealth. Every day he repaired to the church, and when the people had all left, remained behind and transcribed as much

as he could of the volume. The circumstance did not escape the notice of Finian, but he determined to say nothing about the matter till Columba had concluded his labours, whom he sent for, and demanded the book, reminding him that as the original was his, so also was the copy which he had made without Finian's permission. Columba was indignant, and refused to comply. Words followed, and it was agreed to refer the dispute to Diarmaid, king of Ireland.* The case was heard, and this is the decision which Diarmaid made, which afterwards became a proverb in Ireland: "To every book belongs its son-book (or copy), as to every cow belongs her calf. Therefore, the book you wrote, O Columba, belongs by right to Finian." "That is an unjust decision, O Diarmaid," was the saint's reply, "and I will avenge it on you." Shortly afterwards the son of Diarmaid's steward and Curnan, son of the king of Connaught, were playing the game of hurley ón the green in front of the king's palace. A dispute arose between them, the royal hostage struck the other boy, killed him, and then fled for protection to Columba, who was in the king's palace. But the king ordered him to be dragged away, and slain upon the spot, for violating one of the most cherished privileges — the right of sanctuary.

* This book which Columba copied from Finian's original was the Psalter, but having been the cause of the battle of Cooldrevny, it was afterwards known as the *Cathach*, or *Book of Battle*, and now forms, with its silver case, the ancient relic of the O'Donnell clan. Even as late as 1497 it was carried to battle by the O'Donnells to ensure victory, but in the engagement was seized by the MacDermotts. They restored it in 1499, and this famous book is now in the Museum of the Royal Irish Academy, "It is questionable," writes Dr. Reeves, "whether the writing of the MS. be as old as St. Columba's age, though its claim to be considered in the handwriting of St. Columba derives some weight from the great veneration in which it was formerly held, notwithstanding the total absence of decoration."

At this insult Columba left the place in a rage, and went to his native mountains of Donegal. Here he mustered the Clana Neill of the north, and returned at the head of a large army to Cooldrevny, between Sligo and Drumcliffe, where a great battle took place, which ended in the discomfiture of Diarmaid and the Connaughtmen. In consequence of his having been the cause of so much bloodshed, Columba now became the subject of ecclesiastical censure. A synod of the saints of Ireland assembled at Teltown* in Meath, summoned, probably, at the instigation of the defeated king, and presided over by Molaisi of Devinish. It was agreed that the saint, as a man of blood, ought to leave his country and win from Paganism as many souls as had been slain in battle. Molaisi went further than the others in his condemnation, and imposed on him the penance of perpetual exile from Ireland, "whose shores his eyes were not again to see, and whose soil his feet were not again to tread." In this sentence all present concurred except Brendan of Birr and Finian of Moville, with whom he had the difference about the Psalter, but who nevertheless testified his sense of admiration for one who had been his pupil. The story is touchingly told that, after the meeting of the synod, when Brendan saw Columba approaching in the distance, he quickly arose, and with head bowed down, reverently

* This place, under the name of *Taltion*, is celebrated in traditional history for the periodical assemblage of vast numbers from all parts for the purpose of traffic, sports, and social intercourse; the custom is said to have been established or revived by King Tuathal. It appears to have derived its name from St. Teallean who founded the church called *Teachtelle*, or *Teallean*. In St. Patrick's time it was one of the strongholds of Paganism; and there the "Apostle of Ireland" went from Tara to contend with Coirpriticus, brother of King Laoghair, who, we are told, desired to slay Patrick on his arrival, and cause his followers to be scourged in the river Sele.

kissed him. When some of the seniors in the assembly, going apart from the rest, were finding fault with him, and saying, "Why didst thou not decline to rise in presence of an excommunicated person, and to kiss him?" (*Quare coram excommunicato surgere et eum osculari non renueris?*) Brendan replied, "If you had seen what the Lord this day thought fit to show to me regarding this His chosen one whom you dishonour, you would never have excommunicated a person whom God not only doth not excommunicate, according to your unjust sentence, but even more and more highly esteemeth." "How, we would wish to know," said the seniors, "doth God exalt, as thou sayest, one whom we have excommunicated not without reason?" "I have seen," said Brendan, "a most brilliant pillar wreathed with fiery tresses preceding this same man of God whom you treat with contempt; I have also seen holy angels accompany him on his journey through the plain. Therefore I do not dare to slight him whom I see fore-ordained by God to be the leader of His people to life." When he said this they desisted, and so far from daring to hold the saint any longer excommunicated, they treated him with the greatest respect and reverence.* We thus find from the above accounts that Columba was the subject not only of ecclesiastical but also of political censure; but what the real motive was which prompted him to undertake his mission to Scotland, it is rather difficult to determine. That he was directly or indirectly the cause of the battle of Cooldrevny there can be little doubt, for, besides the sentence of Molaisi (who imposed upon him perpetual exile) recorded by Keating, Adarnan twice mentions this battle, and on

* *Adarnan*, bk. III. c. iv.

both occasions in connection with Columba's departure for Scotland. It is not likely that Diarmaid's decision in reference to the transcript of the Psalter affected him, or the sentence of excommunication by the synod of Teltown, for that, by the attitude of Brendan, was not persisted in. Connected as he was with the line of the Dalriadic kings who had colonised a portion of the west of Scotland about sixty years before, and who had recently suffered a defeat at the hands of the northern Picts, it is natural to suppose his mission was undertaken to some extent from political motives ; and, " while his missionary zeal impelled him to attempt the conversion of the Picts, he must have felt that, if he succeeded in winning a Pagan people to the religion of Christ, he would at the same time rescue the Irish colony of Dalriada from a great danger, and render them an important service by establishing peaceable relations between them and their greatly more numerous and powerful neighbours, and replacing them in the more secure possession of the western district they had colonised." * He felt that the only way to establish good government among the Picts and Scots, who were at enmity with each other, was to carry the Gospel into their midst, upon their acceptance of which their temporal greatness depended. He did not separate between the secular and the sacred, between what was political and what was religious. Nor can we separate them. For it is upon the teaching of God's Word that England has built her government and national institutions. From its teaching she has derived those principles which have made her the example of the nations of the world. And it is just in proportion as we, individually and collectively, imbibe the spirit of the Bible, that we

* Skene's *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 84.

shall preserve that greatness to which we have already attained.

Columba, looking upon himself as devoted to labour for the conversion of the Picts from Paganism to Christianity — from darkness to light — and being at liberty to follow the heavenly call, would not allow himself any repose so long as he saw souls perishing in the shades of darkness. Having, therefore, made a circuit of Ireland where he had sown the seed of the Gospel, baptized multitudes, and founded churches, he resolved on carrying into effect the determination made at the beginning of his life namely, to go in pilgrimage to a foreign land for the love of Christ.

CHAPTER VI.

Expedition to Jona: Monastic Life.

ACCOMPANIED by twelve companions,* Columba set out on his long intended journey to the western coast of Scotland in the early part of the year A.D. 563, and the seventh of the reign of Brude, son of Malcolm, the most powerful king of the Picts, whose nation the saint afterwards converted, under God, from Paganism to the faith of Christ. After a short trip in his osier boat covered with skins, he found himself in possession of an island about three miles and a half in length, and about a mile and a half in breadth, lying north-east and south-west, and separated from the Ross of Mull by a channel of about a mile broad. This island, which originally bore the name of Ia or Hii, is now called Iona, at the south end of which is a small bay called *Port-na-Churaich*, or “bay of the osier bark,” and where, tradition states, the saint cast anchor. On the highest point of the island, overlooking the western sea is the cairn called *Cul-ri-Erin*, which marks the spot where he is said to have ascended for the purpose of ascertaining whether he

* When Palladius and St. Patrick went to Ireland they were accompanied by twelve companions, its being a common thing for the chief to be thus joined in the prosecution of any Christian enterprise, after the example, no doubt, of the Lord and His Apostles.

could discern from it the shores of Ireland,* but perceiving no trace of his beloved country on the horizon, he silently resolved that here his monastery should be built. There is extant a poem attributed to him which graphically describes this spot and its surrounding scenery, and his own emotions. It bears the title *Columcille fecit*, and it has been thus translated†—

Delightful would it be to me to be in *Uchd Ailiun*,
 On the pinnacle of a rock,
 That I might often see
 The face of the ocean ;
 That I might see its heaving waves
 Over the wide ocean,
 When they chant music to their Father
 Upon the world's course ;
 That I might see its level sparkling strand,
 It would be no cause of sorrow ;
 That I might hear the song of the wonderful birds,
 Source of happiness ;
 That I might hear the thunder of the crowding waves
 Upon the rocks ;
 That I might hear the roar by the side of the church
 Of the surrounding sea ;
 That I might see its noble flocks
 Over the watery ocean ;
 That I might see the sea monsters,
 The greatest of all wonders ;
 That I might see its ebb and flood
 In their career ;
 That my mystical name might be, I say,
Cul-ri-Erin [Back turned to Ireland] ;
 That contrition might come upon my heart
 Upon looking at her ;

* Skene's *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 91, 93, note.

† The original is in one of the Irish MSS. in the Burgundian Library at Brussels. See *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii.

That I might bewail my evils all,
 Though it were difficult to compute them ;
 That I might bless the Lord
 Who conserves all ;
 Heaven with its countless bright orders,
 Land, strand, and flood ;
 That I might search the books all,
 That would be good for my soul ;
 At times kneeling to beloved heaven ;
 At times at psalm-singing ;
 At times contemplating the King of Heaven,
 Holy the chief ;
 At times at work without compulsion ;
 This would be delightful.
 At times plucking *dùilisc* from the rocks ;
 At times at fishing ;
 At times giving food to the poor ;
 At times in a *carcair* (solitary cell),
 The best advice in the presence of God
 To me has been vouchsafed.
 The King, whose servant I am, will not let
 Anything deceive me.

Here, we are told, Columba founded his church on Whitsun Eve, which in A.D. 563 fell on the 12th of May. When he arrived two bishops who were in the island came to lead him by the hand out of it, but God now revealed to him that they were not true bishops, whereupon they left the island to him when he told them their history and their true adventures.* That they were the remains of a more ancient Church there can be little doubt, for Bede † tells us that, long before Columba came to Iona, the southern Picts had forsaken the errors of idolatry and embraced the truth by the preaching of Ninias, “a most reverend bishop and holy man of the British nation.” Bede does not here refer to the

* *Old Irish Life.*† *H. E.* bk. III. c. iv.

whole Pictish nation at large, but merely to the southern portion, which had already been occupied by the Irish Dalriadans. When Columba came it was to preach the Word of God in the provinces of the northern Picts, who had not embraced the Christian faith, and were separated from the southern parts by steep and rugged mountains now known as the Grampian Hills, the highest part of which is called Drum-Alban. To understand the saint's life and work in Scotland it will be necessary to inquire at some length into the history of the place and people. Without entering into the question as to the original inhabitants of Ireland, being at a period far beyond authentic history, it is a generally-accepted fact that the Scots were the first settlers, which from them derived the name of *Scotia*, or "Insula Scotorum" by the writers of the sixth and seventh centuries.

They were a colony from Spain who invaded Ireland in an early age, and probably were of Scythian origin, for both names seem to be derived from the same Saxon word *scytan*, "to shoot"; in which martial exercise all the northern nations excelled. As to the origin of the Picts, there is a diversity of opinion among historians, who variously derive them from the Germans, Scythians, and the Agathyrsi; but the majority are of opinion they were originally Britons who fled into the northern parts of the island from the Roman invasions. At least they were established there long before the Scots. Bede * tells us that the Picts, putting to sea in a few long ships, were driven by the winds beyond the shores of Britain, and arrived on the northern coasts of Ireland, where, finding the nation of the Scots, they begged to be allowed to settle among them, but could not succeed in

* *H. E.* bk. i. c. i.

obtaining their request. The Scots said that the island could not contain them both; but "we can give you good advice what to do; we know there is another island not far from ours, to the eastward, which we often see at a distance when the days are clear. If you will go thither, you will obtain settlement; or, if they should oppose you, you shall have our assistance."

The Picts accordingly sailed over into Britain, and began to inhabit the northern parts, for the Britons were already in possession of the southern. Some time after the Picts, or northern Britons, seeing themselves threatened by the Saxons, who had conquered the southern part of the island, seem to have invited over the Scots from Ireland to their assistance. In A.D. 503 a portion of the family of Eirc, part possessors of Dalriada (now known as the northern half of the county of Antrim, and the senior representatives of Cairbre Righfada, called Reuda) passed over with a considerable body of followers to the nearest part of Argyllshire, where they settled and founded the kingdom of the Dalriadans,* or British Scotia, which includes the provinces of Kintyre, Argyll, Cowal, Lorn, and the islands of Islay, Arran, and Iona.† Up to this time the colony of the Dalriadans, which was barely sixty years settled in Scotland when Columba arrived, had not acquired much strength, for, according to the *Irish Tract on the Men of Alba*, only one hundred and fifty men were the emigrants that went forth with the sons of Eirc, and these must have felt, in countless

* From *Dal*—a part, and *Reuda*—their leader.

† The Scots and Picts lived on good terms till A.D. 840, when Kenneth II., king of the Scots, in a battle, slew Drusken, the Pictish king, and conquered the whole country north of the Graham's Dyke. About the middle of the tenth century the Scots became masters of the rest of the country, which from that time took the name of Scotland.

ways, the influence of constant feuds and wars. Columba's first object, having once arrived, was to obtain a grant of some island on which to build a monastery after the model of those founded in Ireland, and which would become the centre of religious life. At this time the island of Hy was on the confines of the Scotie and Pictish jurisdiction, but whether he occupied it on the invitation of King Conall, to whom he was allied by blood, or on that of Brude, king of the Picts, is uncertain, historians not being unanimous upon the subject.

Adamnan tells us that, in the second year after the battle of Cooldrevny (*i.e.*, in A.D. 563) and in the forty-second year of his age, the saint, resolving to seek a foreign country for the love of Christ, sailed from Ireland to Britain.* And in the same year, which is again noticed by Adamnan as being two years after the above battle, it happened on the very day and at the same hour when the battle of Coleraine was fought, Columba was then living in Britain with King Conall, son of Comgall, and told him everything, as well about the battle itself, as also about those kings to whom the Lord granted the victory over his enemies.† Bede says, "Columba came into Britain in the ninth year of the reign of Brude, who was the son of Malcolm and the powerful king of the Pictish nation, and he converted the nation to the faith of Christ by his preaching and example, whereupon he also received of them the island for a monastery, for it is not very large, but contains about five families, according to the English computation." And in the preceding chapter: "The island belongs to Britain, being divided from it by a small arm of the sea, but had been long since given by the Picts who inhabit those parts of

* *Adamnan*, Pref. 11.

† *Ibid.* bk. 1. c. 111.

Britain, to the Scottish (Irish) monks, because they had received the faith of Christ through their preaching.* And the old annalist, Tighernach (who lived three hundred years after Bede), in recording the death of King Conall in A.D. 574, adds that "it was he who immolated the island of Hy to Columba." †

These accounts, though involving apparent contradictions, are substantially correct, and in no way affect our present purpose. Before settling down to real missionary labour, Columba's first care was to build a retreat, which consisted of several small buildings or huts constructed entirely of wattles and wood. These had no pretence to durability or architecture, hence they rapidly crumbled away and gave place to a more substantial monastery, which was for ages the chief seminary of North Britain, and afterwards the burying-place of innumerable saints and kings of Scotland. Before noticing in chronological order the principal events in connection with the saint's mission to Scotland, it will be well to look at some of the elements that constituted the monastic system. The life and discipline of the Columban Church of Iona resembled in almost every respect that of the Irish Church, which seems to have been based upon the rule of the Benedictine order; and there can be little doubt that the character of such monastic schools as Finian's of Clonard, and Comgall's of Bangor, with their three thousand members each, influenced not only the conventual system of Celtic Scotland, but also the religion of Northumberland, the East Saxons, and Mercia, which included a large part of central and southern England.

When the saint founded the monastery on the island of Hy, he placed there one hundred and fifty persons for

* *H. E.* bk. III. c. III. iv.

† *Chron. Picts and Scots*, p. 67.

meditation under monastic rule, and sixty persons for manual labour, as the writer says in the *Old Irish Life*—

“ Illustrious the soldiers who were in Hy,
Thrice fifty in monastic rule,
With their curachs across the sea ;
And for rowing three score men.”

The monastery proper was the place enclosed by a rampart, which included a chapel, dormitory for the missionaries, refectory, kitchen, hospital ; and outside the rampart, a byre for cows, a barn and storehouse for the grain, and other appendages occupying different situations according to local convenience. The most important portion of the building was the church (*sacra domus*), where, Adamnan tells us, one of the brethren entered on a winter's night alone to pray while the others were asleep, “and he prayed fervently in a little side chamber attached to the walls.” *

Adjoining the refectory, which was for dining purposes, we might expect to find the kitchen ; and there was, most likely, a chamber for the preservation of books, among which were the sacred scriptures, ecclesiastical writings, and profane authors.† Within the enclosure were the lodgings of the community. These appear to have been detached huts originally formed of wattles. Adamnan makes frequent mention of the abbot's house or hut, at some distance from each other, built with planks and situated on an eminence. In one of these Columba sat and wrote or read, having an attendant or two who occasionally read to him, or stood at the door awaiting orders. The land at the east side of the island was used as pasture, while the tillage was conducted in the more productive plain on the west. To the latter in

* *Adamnan*, bk. III. c. xx.

† *Ibid.* bk. III. c. xix.

the harvest time the brethren repaired in the morning and returned in the evening carrying to the monastery loads of corn on their backs. According to their rule, active outdoor work was required of the members. They tilled the ground, sowed the seed, reaped the harvest, milked the cows, cultivated land generally, and built monasteries. Indeed they fully realised the truth contained in the words, " 'Tis not on flowery beds of ease we shall be carried to the skies." In every branch of work Columba, a man of practical power and wide humanity, took his part. " Like one of Homer's old heroes he could turn his hand to every kind of work. He could turn the hand-mill, work on the farm, heal the sick, and command as a practised sailor the little fleet of coracles which lay hauled up on the strand of Iona ready to carry him and his monks on their missionary voyages to the mainland or the isles." * Now that he had established himself in the island, and when the monastery was finished which was henceforth to become his home, he next turned his attention to administration, based on a system of rule drawn up, it is said, by himself. In organising his community he brought into it all those monastic features which were characteristic of the second order of saints to which he belonged. " This order," writes Dr. Reeves, " may be regarded as the development of a native ministry whose system possessed more nationality than that of their predecessors, and took a deeper impress from the custom and condition of the country." Its principal characteristics were—few bishops and many presbyters, a preference being given to the latter; their observance of the old-fashioned Easter; seclusion from female society; and the anterior Eastern tonsure. A military

* Kingsley, *The Hermits*, p. 284.

tone pervaded the whole conventual system, and it was considered as a special Christian warfare. Those who adopted it were looked upon as soldiers of Christ in reference to their Leader, and fellow-soldiers as regarded one another. Each one professed his readiness to become a "living sacrifice to God" by withdrawing from the world, and a willingness to spend and be spent for Christ.

Adamnan tells of two strangers that presented themselves at the monastery, and the saint, after embracing them, asked them the object of their journey. "We are come," they said, "to reside with thee for this year." "With me, as you say, you cannot reside for a year," said Columba, "unless you take first the monastic vow." When those who were present heard these words addressed to strangers who were only newly arrived they wondered very much. But the elder brother, in answer to the saint's remarks, replied, "Although we never up to the present hour entertained the thought before, yet we shall follow your advice, believing that it cometh from God."

That very moment they entered the chapel with the saint, and on bended knees devoutly took the monastic vow. Columba then turned to the monks and said: "These two strangers who are presenting themselves a living sacrifice to God, and within a short time are fulfilling a long term of Christian warfare, shall pass away in peace this very month to Christ the Lord."*

Another element in the system was its social connections. The monastery was a centre of family relation presided over by an abbot or "father" of the society. The family consisted of brethren whom the founder called "my beloved monks," and endearingly addressed

* *Adamnan*, bk. I. c. xxvi.

them "my dear children." They were at first twelve in number, and natives of Ireland, but their society soon increased, and included Britons and Saxons. Those brethren who were advanced in years, and whose devotion was tried, were called seniors ; and their chief duty was to accompany the saint in his walks, read to him, attend the services of the church, and transcribe the scriptures. Those who were stronger and more suitable for labour were termed working brothers (*operarii fratres*) ; and a third class consisted of those who were under instruction, called *alumni*.

Besides the congregation of professed members, there were generally present strangers termed proselytes, or penitents, whose sojourn was of varied length. Over this community Columba presided. He had his seat at the mother church in Iona, the principal island of the society, but his jurisdiction extended equally over the affiliated churches which either he in person or his disciples founded in Ireland or Scotland. In ecclesiastical rank he was a priest, officiated at the Holy Communion, and pronounced the benediction, but not as a bishop. Bede* tells us that from Columba, who was never bishop, it continued a custom that the island and the whole province, even the bishops, by an unusual law, were subject to the abbot. But although he did not usurp the functions of a bishop, his abbatical office gave him all the jurisdiction of the episcopate without its responsibilities ; and a veneration for the saint introduced a superiority of civil jurisdiction over the bishops, who were taken from among his monks and disciples, and retained their former respect for their old superior, the abbot. Still the essential function of the episcopal office was maintained ; when

* *H. E.* bk. III. c. iv.

a presbyter was to be ordained the bishop was called in ; when a distant province was to be brought within the Christian pale, a bishop was consecrated for the creation of a local ministry, and successors to him ordained and sent forth from time to time. Columba set the example of veneration for the episcopate, and disclaimed all pretensions to equality with one of the episcopal rank.

On one occasion Bishop Cronan came to Iona in disguise, so that nobody might know he was a bishop. But his rank could not be hidden from Columba, for on next Lord's day the saint invited him, as the custom was, to consecrate the elements at the celebration of the Eucharist. Cronan asked Columba to join him that, as two priests, they might break the bread of the Lord together. The saint went to the altar accordingly, and suddenly looking into the stranger's face, thus addressed him : "Christ bless thee, brother ; do thou break the bread alone, according to the episcopal rite, for I know now thou art a bishop. Why hast thou disguised thyself so long, and prevented us giving thee the honour we owe thee ?" *

Columba was wont on extraordinary occasions to summon the brethren to the oratory, even at the dead of night, and there address them from the altar, and solicit their prayers. Occasionally he instituted a festival, published a holiday, enjoined the celebration of the Holy Communion, and, when he thought fit, he despatched a chosen brother on a distant mission or for monastic purposes. He inaugurated the first independent king of Scotch Dalriada in Iona in the person of his cousin Aidan, the saint being selected to perform the ceremony of coronation. He also selected his own

* *Adamnan*, bk. i. c. xxxv.

successor as abbot of Iona ; and in subsequent elections the preference was given to the founder's kin. Hence it happened that of his eleven immediate successors there were only two whose descent was from another house. When the old manner of keeping Easter was discontinued in A.D. 715* the family prescription was broken down, and the abbacy became an open appointment ; but notwithstanding these changes Columba left successors renowned for their continency, their love of God, and observance of monastic rules. As we have said, the discipline of the island was modelled according to the rule of Benedict, but regulated and adapted by Columba.

Like the Apostles, the members had all things common, and regarded one another as fellow-soldiers of Jesus Christ, and their life as a continual warfare with the world, the flesh, and the devil. Their rule required of them obedience to the abbot, and strict observance of the monastic system. Hence we find the brethren occasionally summoned to the oratory by the abbot even in the dead of night, on which occasions he would address them as they stood in their places, and having asked their prayers, kneel down, and sometimes pray with tears.†

The monastery was a place of hospitality, and a large portion of Adamnan's anecdotes refer to the entertainment of strangers. The story is told of a crane which beautifully illustrates, but in a higher sense, the kind of reception which was always in store for the visitor. Columba called one of the brethren and thus addressed him : "In the morning of the third day from this date thou must sit down and wait on the shore on the western side of this island, for a crane, which is a stranger from the

* Bede's *H. E.* bk. III. c. iv.

† *Adamnan*, bk. I. c. vii.

northern region of Ireland, and hath been driven about by various winds, shall come weary and fatigued, after the ninth hour, and lie down before thee on the beach quite exhausted. Treat that bird tenderly; take it to some neighbouring house where it may be kindly received and carefully nursed and fed by thee for three days and three nights. When the crane is refreshed, and unwilling to abide any longer with us, it shall fly back with renewed strength to the pleasant part of Ireland from which it originally hath come. This bird do I consign to thee with such special care, because it cometh from our own native place." The brother obeyed, and on the third day, after the ninth hour, he watched as he was bidden for the arrival of the expected guest. As soon as the crane came and alighted on the shore, he took it up gently in its weakness and carried it to a dwelling that was near, where he fed it. On his return to the monastery Columba without any inquiry, but as stating a fact, said to him, "God bless thee, my child, for thy kind attention to this foreign visitor that shall not remain long on its journey, but return within three days to its old home."*

Almsgiving was another feature in monasticism. An instance of this is recorded. One day the saint called two of his brethren and told them to set sail over to the island of Mull, and near the sea-shore they would find a robber who came alone in secret from the island Colonsay and stole away the seals. They proceeded at once, and found the robber hid in the very spot that was indicated, and they brought him to the saint, who said: "Why dost thou transgress the commandment of God so often by stealing the property of others? If thou art in want

* *Adarnan*, bk. i. c. vii.

at any time come to us, and thy needs shall be supplied." He then ordered some sheep to be killed and given to the robber in place of the seals, that he might not return empty. A short time after, the saint saw in spirit that the death of the robber was at hand, and he ordered Baithen, then steward in Tiree, to send a fat sheep and six pecks of corn as a last gift. Baithen sent them at once, but found that the robber had died suddenly the same day, and the presents were used at his burial.*

Divine service was held morning and evening, in which the members were required to join, except those employed on the farm, whose fatigue after labour would probably demand unbroken sleep at night. Fasting was enjoined, in which, it is said, Columba was incessantly engaged night and day in the unwearied exercise, and often the burden of these austerities seemed beyond the power of human endurance. Every Wednesday and Friday, except between Easter and Whitsuntide, was a fast day, and no food was partaken of before three o'clock in the afternoon. The principal service was the celebration of the Holy Communion which took place on the Lord's day (*dies Dominica*). It is termed by Adamnan "the sacred mysteries of the Eucharist,"† and according to their custom, the brethren rested from labour on that day, and used better food. The priest, standing before the altar, consecrated the elements. When several priests were present one was selected for the office, who might invite a brother priest to break bread with him in token of equality. When a bishop officiated he broke the bread alone in token of his superior office. The brethren then approached and partook of the Eucharist.‡

* *Adamnan*, bk. I. c. xxxiii.

† *Ibid.* bk. III. c. xiii.

‡ *Ibid.* bk. I. c. xxxv. ; bk. II. c. xl.

Besides the religious services, which occupied the chief place in the order of the monastery, the members' studies were not neglected. The primary subject of study was holy scripture, and in particular the Book of Psalms, which was diligently committed to memory ; and besides this there was the study of the Latin and Greek languages and of the ecclesiastical writings. Writing also formed a most important part of their occupations, and many anecdotes are told of Columba's devotion to the work of transcription, for which he was distinguished. On one occasion a brother named Molua came to the saint whilst he was writing, and said to him, "This knife which I hold in my hand I beseech thee to bless." Columba, without turning his face from the book out of which he was writing, extended his hand a little with the pen in it, and blessed the knife by signing it. But when Molua departed with the knife the saint said, "What sort of knife have I blessed for that brother?" Diormit, his attendant, replied, "Thou hast blessed a knife for killing bulls or oxen." But the saint said, "I trust in my Lord that the knife I have blessed will never wound men or cattle." This word of the saint, writes Adamnan, received the strongest confirmation, for Molua went beyond the enclosure of the monastery and attempted to kill an ox, but, although he made three strong efforts with all his strength, yet he could not even cut the skin. When this came to the knowledge of the monks they melted down the iron of the knife, and applied a thin coating of it to all the iron tools used in the monastery. And such was the abiding virtue of the saint's blessing that these tools could never afterwards inflict a wound on flesh.*

* *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. xxx.

That Columba exercised great care in transcriptions, and also in their preservation when finished, may be gathered from the following occurrence. One day Baithen, his disciple and immediate successor in the abbacy of Iona, came to the saint and said, "I want some one of the brethren to look over with me and correct the Psalter which I have written." Hearing this, Columba said, "Why give me this trouble without any cause? In that Psalter of thine of which thou speakest there is not one superfluous letter to be found, nor is any wanting except the one vowel *I*." And accordingly, when the whole Psalter was read over, what the saint had said was found to be true.* Besides the supply of service books for the numerous churches that sprang into existence, great labour was bestowed upon the ornamentation of some manuscripts, especially the sacred writings. Although not the work of Columba's own hand, the Books of Kells and Durrow are wonderful specimens of the skill and patience of his followers who were taught in the Columban schools of the sixth and seventh centuries. Columba's own manner of living, which was always most austere, differed in no way from that of his brethren. In each and all of the various employments he set a noble example. Tall of stature, and of a vigorous frame, he was ever ready to render aid in any emergency. His countenance always appeared cheerful, which bespoke to all with whom he conversed a serenity of soul and an unspeakable joy with which it overflowed.† Such, in the briefest outline, is a description of the monastic life of Iona, and

* *Adamnan*, bk. I. c. xvii.

† For the information respecting the constitution and discipline of the community at Iona, contained in the foregoing pages, I am indebted to the Introduction in Dr. Reeves' *Adamnan*.

the little circle of Christian workers of which Columba was the central and ruling figure. Up to this time no attempt was made by him to approach the powerful King Brude, but nevertheless the little colony rapidly increased in numbers and usefulness, and in a short time their influence was felt in the neighbouring districts of Ardnamurchan, Morven, and Lochaber, which were separated from the Pictish kingdom by the mountain range of Drumalban. Adamnan tells us that while travelling through the rough and rocky country of Ardnamurchan, Columba heard his companions speaking on the way of the two kings, Baitan and Eochoid, and addressed them in these words, "O my dear children, why do you talk thus foolishly of these men? Both of these kings of whom you are now conversing are lately slain, and have had their heads cut off by their enemies. And this very day some sailors shall come here from Ireland and tell you the same about these kings." The same day sailors arrived from Lismore and told the two companions how these kings had been slain, and thus the prophecy of the saint was fulfilled.* On another occasion, at Lochaber, a very poor man named Nesan received Columba as his guest; and after he had entertained him as hospitably as his means would afford for one night, the saint asked him the number of his heifers. Nesan answered, "Five." Then Columba said, "Bring them to me that I may bless them." And when they were brought he said, "From this day thy five little heifers shall increase to the number of one hundred and five cows." And to Nesan, who was of humble condition, having a wife and children, the saint added this blessing: "Thy seed shall be blessed in thy children and

* *Adamnan*, bk. i. c. viii.

grandchildren." And all this, says Adamnan, was completely fulfilled without any failure, according to the word of the saint.*

It would be difficult to imagine a scene more impressive than the sea-girt home at Iona. Though living according to a strict monastic rule, the members of the community had all the characteristics of a family group. Presided over by one whom they called "father," there was a common bond of brotherhood between him and the brethren, whom he variously styled "my dear children," "my beloved brethren." They were given to hospitality and good works. In entertaining strangers they followed the apostolic precept in its strict literalness. In their intercourse with one another they were rational and courteous. Between St. Columba and the brethren there appears to have been no restraint; and as regards society at large, the objects of their system were too practical, and their engagements too much characterised by common sense, to impose any restraint in conversation but such as conduced to the purity or decorum of the members.† Their domestic virtues could not be better summed up than in the language of the poet Wordsworth:—

"Temperance, proof

Against all trials; industry severe
And constant as the motion of the day;
Stern self-denial round them spread, with shade
That might be deemed forbidding did not there
All generous feelings flourish and rejoice;
Forbearance, charity in deed and thought,
And resolution competent to take
Out of the bosom of simplicity
All that her holy customs recommend." ‡

* *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. xx. † *Ibid.* App. p. 344. ‡ *The Excursion*, bk. VII.

CHAPTER VII.

Columba's Mission to King Brude: Druidism.

IT is now the year A.D. 565. Two years have elapsed since Columba first set foot on the island of Iona. During that period he has been the means of converting the greater part of the people of the districts of Lochaber and Ardnamurchan. His fame as a missionary having spread throughout the length and breadth of the land, large numbers of strangers flocked to the island for spiritual comfort and material help in the form of alms, food, and medicine. Finding the monastery too small to contain the large numbers that sought admission, he resolved to extend his sphere of labour, and sent the brethren to the neighbouring islands, where they built monasteries and evangelised the country. Having already converted the Scots, and being anxious to conciliate the favour of powerful neighbours, we next find him crossing the border of the Pictish kingdom, through Breadalbane, Atholl, and the Grampians, until he reached Loch Ness, where was situate the principal fortress and royal palace of the Pictish chief, King Brude, son of Malcolm. This spot, now known as *Craig Phadrick* (long rock) is a natural eminence of considerable height, situate on the banks of the river Ness, and about two miles south-west of Inverness. On the summit is a level

space of oval form enclosed by a parapet, which, though very much reduced in height and regularity, still affords evidence of its original outline, and of the solidification of its parts by the action of fire. It is one of those rude structures called *vitriified forts*, and which are regarded by some as peculiar to the old Pictish inhabitants. The ascent of the hill is rendered difficult by the dense plantation with which its sides are clothed, a species of ornament better suited to the neighbouring eminences of Tomnahurich than to the hill fort of the Pictish kings.* When Columba made this, his first journey to King Brude, it happened that the latter, elated by the pride of royalty, acted haughtily, and was unwilling to open his gates to the missionary. Columba observed this, and, approaching the folding doors with his companions—having first formed upon them the sign of the cross, he knocked at and laid his hand upon the gate, which instantly flew open of its own accord, the bolts having been driven back with great force. The saint and his companions then passed through the gates thus rapidly opened.† We are not informed by Adamnan who the companions were, but one of the later historians ‡ tells us they were the distinguished saints Comgall, of Bangor, and Cainnech, of Agaboe; and adds that Comgall made the sign of the cross upon the gates of the castle, and they immediately fell broken to the ground. Cainnech made the sign over the hand of the king, which held a sword, and his hand was instantly withered; and it so remained till he believed in God, and being made faithful to Him, his hand was restored. In relating the same occurrence, the *Old Irish Life* says that “the door

* *Adamnan*, p. 151, note.

† *Ibid.* bk. II. c. xxxvi.

‡ *Vita St. Comgalli*, c. xliiv.

of the fort was closed against him, but the iron locks of the place opened instantly through the prayers of Columba." No wonder, therefore, that the king and his counsellors, when they heard what had occurred, were filled with alarm, and, immediately setting out from the palace, advanced to meet the saint with due respect, whom they addressed in the most conciliatory language; and ever after from that day the king held him in very great honour. We are not told by any of the biographers whether the king on this occasion embraced the Christian faith; but it is so inferred on the authority of the *Pictish Chronicle*, which says that Columba baptized King Brude in the eighth year of his reign; and it is quite probable that the presence of Comgall and Cainnech, who belonged to the race of the Irish Picts, materially aided Columba in his mission.* But much as the king regarded the saint's visit with favour, it failed to secure for him the friendship of the native priests, who were Druids,† for we learn from the *Old Irish Life* that shortly after the above visit no less a person than Malcolm, the king's son, came with his Druids to contend against Columba through Paganism, but they perished through the words of the saint, both the king's son and his Druids with him, and the names of God and Columba were magnified

* See *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 106.

† The old Celtic word for Druid is *druí* (dree), which has its equivalent in the Greek word *druis* (*δρῦς*), and the Latin *magi*, the Latin being always used in the acts of the Irish saints. The Greek and Latin borrowed this word from the Celts, and through them it has found its way into English in the form *Druid*. Notwithstanding the lapse of time since the extinction of Druidism, the word *druí* is still a living word in the Irish language. In the Irish MSS. of St. Paul's Epistles at Wurtzburg, the gloss on James and Jambres in 2 Tim. iii. 8, is *duo Druidæ Ægyptiaci*; and in the ancient hymn, ascribed to Columba, we find the expression, "Christ the Son of God is my *Druid*." See *Adamnan*, p. 74, note, and Joyce's *Irish Names of Places*, p. 96.

through it. To rightly understand the system of Paganism which he had to encounter among the Picts, it will be well to notice some of its leading features which are gathered from Adamnan and other ancient writers.

In Cæsar's *Commentaries* we have, probably, the oldest and fullest account of the so-called Druidical religion which preceded Christianity both in Ireland and Scotland, and for centuries was the all-powerful order of the Celtic race; "but if the Druids did not influence to any great extent the *inner religious life* of the people, they exercised enormous influence in another way; for they were depositaries of all the available knowledge of the times, and they were believed to be prophets and magicians possessed of tremendous supernatural powers. In some of the old historical romances, we find the issues of battles often determined not so much by the skill of the commanders or the valour of the combatants as by the magical powers of the Druids attached to the armies. Both the Druids themselves, and the popular belief in them, however, gradually sank before the influence of Christianity."*

According to Cæsar, who had numerous opportunities of becoming acquainted with them, the Druids were divided into three orders, viz. :—The Druid, properly so-called, who lived apart from the world in mountain caves, and had for his temple the wide-spreading oak or the hill top with its altar-stone. He possessed a knowledge superior to the others, and was variously designated by the Greeks philosopher, historian, or storyteller. Next, the Bard, or "gleeman," who was the depositary of the national tradition, and by his inspired

* Joyce's *Irish Names of Places*, p. 96.

spirit was supposed to move the human soul. The third class was the Priesthood, who studied the laws of phenomena and the mysteries of the stars, and foretold the future by means of the flight of birds. "Under their various divisions," writes Dr. Maclear, "they were at once the ministers of a theocracy and the judges and legislators of the people. Enjoying an immunity from service in the army and the obligation to pay taxes, they instructed the youth of the nation in the mysteries of learning, the majority of which they veiled in inviolable secrecy, and did not suffer to be committed to writing."* Their chief doctrine seems to have been the immortality of the soul—that when the time of the present existence was past the soul of man migrated into other bodies and returned to life. "They will have it," writes Cæsar, "that souls do not die, but that after death they pass from one to another." "O Druids," exclaims Lucan, "you who dwell in the sacred recesses of the woods, you alone know the nature of the gods and the powers of heaven, or you alone know them not. For if we are to believe you, the shades depart not to seek the gloomy shades of Erebus. The same spirit governs other bodies in another sphere, and death is the entrance to a long life." And Strabo, another classical writer, says: "They believe that the world and souls are immortal, but that there are periodical revolutions brought about by water and fire." In the legends of the Celtic Church we find the same characteristics of the Druidical system, and they are quite in harmony with the classical testimonies. One of the obstacles St. Patrick had to encounter in Ireland was the opposition of the Druids.

* *Apostles of Mediæval Europe*, p. 11.

In an ancient *Life* of St. Patrick, Fiace of Sleibhte says of him:—

“He preached three score years
The Cross of Christ to the *Tuatha* of Feni.
On the *Tuatha* of Erin there was darkness.
The *Tuatha* adored the *Sidhe*.
They believed not the true Godhead
Of the true Trinity.”*

From the *Book of Armagh* we learn that these *Sidhe* were supposed to be gods of the earth, or a phantasm who dwelt in the mountain or the valley, in the heavens or in the earth, and were conciliated by Tuathal Teachmhar, a mythic monarch of Ireland, and his tribe called *Tuatha*, who received as pledges from the nation “sun and moon, and every power which is in heaven and in earth, that the sovereignty should be for ever allowed in his family.” In an ancient tract, contained in the *Leabhar nah Uiahri*, we are told that these demons (sun, moon, water, &c.) used to tempt the people in human bodies, and that they showed them secrets and places of happiness where they should be immortal; and it was in that way they were believed.†

The accounts given by Adamnan of Columba’s mission to the Picts are pervaded by the same Pagan system. Thus we find on one occasion when the saint was tarrying for some days in their province, a certain peasant, who, with his whole family, had listened to and learned the Word of Life through his preaching, believed and was baptized, together with his wife, children, and domestics. A few days after his conversion one of his sons became dangerously ill and was brought to the point

* Whitley Stokes’ *Gædelica*, p. 131.

† O’Curry’s *Lectures*, vol. ii. p. 198

of death. When the Druids saw him in a dying state they began with great bitterness to upbraid his parents, and to extol their gods as more powerful than the God of the Christians, and thus to despise God as though He were weaker than their gods. When this was told to Columba he proceeded to the house of the afflicted parents, where he found the son dead. On seeing their grief he exhorted them not to doubt the omnipotence of God, and, falling upon his knees, prayed to Christ. Then rising, he turned his eyes towards the deceased and said, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, arise and stand upon thy feet." At the sound of his voice the child that was dead opened his eyes and revived, and, placing him in a standing position, the saint restored him to his parents. Upon this, says the biographer, the cries of the applauding multitude broke forth, sorrow was turned into joy, and the God of the Christians glorified.* About the same time, from motives of humanity, he besought Broichan the Druid, and tutor to King Brude, to liberate a female slave, and when he refused to part with her, the saint said to him, "Know, O Broichan, and be assured that if thou refuse to set this captive free thou shalt die suddenly, before I take my departure again from this province."

Having said this in presence of King Brude, he departed from the royal palace and proceeded to the river Ness. From this he took a pebble and, showing it to his companions, said: "Behold this white pebble by which God will effect the cure of many diseases among the heathen nation. Broichan is grievously chastised at this moment, for an angel, being sent from heaven and striking him severely, hath broken into many pieces the

* *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. xxxiii.

glass cup in his hand from which he was drinking, and hath left him gasping deeply for breath, and half dead. Let us await here a short time, for two of the king's messengers who have been sent after us to request us to return quickly and help the dying Broichan, who, now that he is terribly punished, consenteth to set the girl free." While the saint was speaking there arrived the two horsemen who were sent by the king, and who related all that had occurred to Broichan in the royal fortress, and added, "The king and his friends have sent us to thee to request that thou wouldest ease his foster father Broichan, who lieth in a dying state." Having heard these words, Columba sent two of his companions to the king with the pebble which he had blessed, and said, "If Broichan shall first promise to set the maiden free, then at once immerse this little stone in water, and let him drink from it, and he shall be instantly cured; but if he break his vow and refuse to liberate her he shall die that instant." In obedience to the saint's instructions the two persons proceeded to the palace, and announced their message to the king and Broichan, who were so dismayed that they immediately liberated the captive to the messengers. The pebble was then immersed in water, and contrary to the laws of nature, says Adamnan, the stone floated on the water like a nut or apple. Broichan drank from the stone as it floated on the water, and instantly returning from the verge of death, recovered his perfect health and soundness of body.* Shortly after this wonderful incident another miracle is recorded by which Columba overcame Broichan. The Druid informed the saint that he would prevent him from making his voyage along Loch Ness,

* *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. xxxiv.

by causing the winds to be unfavourable, and a great darkness to envelope him in its shade. That same day the saint, accompanied by a large number of his followers, went to the lake of the river Ness. Then the Druids began to exult, seeing that it had become very dark, and that the wind was violent and contrary. "Nor should we wonder," says Adamnan, "that God sometimes allows them, with the aid of evil spirits, to raise tempests and agitate the sea." Columba therefore, seeing that the sea was agitated and the wind unfavourable, called upon Christ the Lord, and embarked in his small boat. No sooner were the sails raised than the vessel ran with extraordinary speed against the wind, which after a short time veered round to help them on their voyage, to the intense astonishment of all. And thus throughout the remainder of that day the light breeze continued favourable, and the boat was carried safely to the wished-for haven.* "We thus see," writes Dr. Skene, "that the Paganism which characterised the Irish tribes and the nations of the northern Picts exhibits precisely the same features; and all the really ancient notices we possess of it are in entire harmony with each other in describing it as a sort of fetichism which peopled all the objects of nature with malignant beings, to whose agency its phenomena were attributed, while a class of persons termed *Magi* and *Druadh* exercised great influence among the people from a belief that they were able through their aid to practise a species of magic or witchcraft, which might either be used to benefit those who sought their assistance, or to injure those to whom they were opposed.

"How unlike this is in every respect to the popular

* *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. xxxv.

conception of what is called the Druidical religion, will be at once apparent. The process by which this monstrous system has been worked was simply to invest these same *Druadh* with all the attributes which Cæsar and the classical writers give to the Druids of Gaul, and to transfer to those northern regions all that they tell of Druidism in Gaul; to connect that with the stone monuments—those silent records of a remote age, and possibly of a different race, which have outlived all record of their time—and to assume that the stone circles and cromlechs, which are undoubtedly sepulchral monuments, represent temples and altars. Add to this some false etymologies of terms which are supposed to contain the name of Bel or Baal, and we have at once the popular conception of the Druidical religion, with its hierarchy of Archdruids, Druids, Vates, and Eubates, and all its paraphernalia of temples, altars, human sacrifices and the worship of Baal.”*

* *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 118.

CHAPTER VIII.

Conversion of the Northern Picts.

Now that Columba had gained the friendship and protection of King Brude, notwithstanding all the efforts of the Druids to oppose him, he began his work of conversion amongst the provinces of the northern Picts which were formally granted or substantially confirmed to him by the monarch. There can be no doubt that the conversion of so powerful a king, together with his consent to the occupation of Iona and other portions of his dominions, materially contributed to and greatly facilitated the work of spreading the truth and the establishment of monasteries. Of the numerous places where Columba founded churches in Scotland, Adamnan preserves some names, as Ethica, Elena, Hymba, and Scia, but has given no dates, so that their origin must be collectively referred to the period of thirty-four years ending with his life in A.D. 597, during which time, as his biographer tells us, he lived a soldier of Christ.* It is unfortunate he has given us so little information respecting the conversion of the Picts from Paganism; but he has at all events preserved and handed to us a curious record of miracles and prophecies which, if they do not enlighten us as to the saint's real history, at

* *Adamnan, Pref.*

least throw much light upon his character, and compel us to admit that God bestowed peculiar gifts upon him for the purpose of manifesting His glorious name before a heathen people.

As we have seen in the foregoing pages, his biographies abound with miraculous tales, prophetic utterances, and apparitions of angels which either he received regarding others, or others saw regarding him. No attempt has been made at classification or chronological order, and it is therefore difficult to know where to begin. We must only select a few of these curious stories out of many. When Columba was staying for some days in the island of Skye, he struck a spot of ground near the sea with his staff, and said to his companions, "Strange to say, my children, this day an aged heathen, whose natural goodness has been preserved through all his life, will receive baptism, die, and be buried on this very spot." About an hour after, a boat came into the harbour, on the prow of which sat a decrepit old man, the chief of the Geona cohort. Two young men took him out of the boat and laid him at the feet of the saint. After being instructed in the Word of God by the saint, through an interpreter, the old man believed and was at once baptized by him; and when the rite was duly administered he instantly died on the same spot, and was buried there by his companions, who raised a heap of stones over his grave.* Here is another of the same kind. When the saint was travelling near Loch Ness he was suddenly inspired by the Holy Spirit, and said to the brethren that accompanied him, "Let us go quickly to meet the holy angels who have been sent from the realms of the

* *Adamnan*, bk. i. c. xxvii.

highest heaven to carry away with them the soul of a heathen, and now await our arrival there that we may baptize this man who hath preserved his natural goodness through all his life, even to extreme old age." And having said this much the saint hurried, with his companions, to the district of Arochdan (now called Glen Urquhart), and there he found an aged man, named Emchat, at the point of death, who, on hearing the Word of God preached by Columba, believed and was baptized, and immediately after, full of joy and safe from evil, and accompanied by the angels who came to meet him, passed to the Lord. His son Virolec also believed, and was baptized with all his house. It was commonly believed among the Picts that the Druids exercised great power through their earth gods, which sometimes appeared in the form of demons dwelling in woods, rivers, and fountains. On one occasion Columba heard there was a certain fountain famous among the heathen people which foolish men, having their senses blinded by the devil, worshipped as a god. For those who drank of this fountain, or purposely washed their hands or feet in it, were allowed by God to be struck by demoniacal art, and went home either leprous or purblind, or at least suffering from weakness or other kinds of infirmity. By all these things the Pagans were seduced, and paid divine honour to the fountain. Having ascertained this, Columba went to it; and the Druids, whom he had often sent away from him vanquished and confounded, were greatly rejoiced, thinking that he would suffer like others from the touch of the baneful water. But he, having first raised his hand and invoked the name of Christ, washed his hands and feet, and then with his companions drank of the

water he had blessed. And from that day, says Adamnan, the demon departed from the fountain, and people, instead of being injured, were cured of many diseases by it.*

There is another story which is an evidence of his unlimited sympathy for others, the efficacy of prayer, and a remarkable trust in God's omnipotence. When residing for some days in the province of the Picts, the saint was obliged to cross the river Ness, and on reaching the bank he saw some of the inhabitants burying a man who a short time before, when swimming, was severely bitten by a monster. The body of the man was, though too late, taken out with a hook by those who came to his assistance in a boat. Columba, on hearing this, was so far from being dismayed, that he directed Lugne Mocu-min, one of his companions, to swim over to the opposite bank. But the monster, when he felt the water disturbed above by the man swimming, rushed out and pursued the man as he swam in the middle of the river. Then Columba raised his hand, while the brethren and strangers were terror-stricken, and, invoking the name of God, formed the sign of the cross in the air, and commanded the monster, saying, "Thou shalt go no further, nor touch the man; go back with all speed." At the voice of the saint the monster fled, and Lugne was rescued. Then the brethren, seeing what had occurred, were struck with admiration, and gave glory to God. Even the barbarous heathens who were present, adds the biographer, were forced by the greatness of this miracle, which they themselves had seen, to magnify the God of the Christians.†

Similar anecdotes of legendary character could be

* *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. x.

† *Ibid.* bk. II. c. xxviii.

multiplied ; but we are tempted to add one more incident, narrated by Adamnan, showing the influence which the saint exercised over these old Druids, whose power was attributed to their earth gods. While Columba was residing in Iona, he went to seek in the woods a place more remote from men, and fitting for prayer. And there, when he began to pray, he suddenly beheld, as he afterwards told a few of his brethren, a very black host of demons fighting against him with iron darts. These wicked demons wished, as the Holy Spirit revealed to the saint, to attack his monastery, and with the same spears kill many of the brethren. But he, singlehanded, against innumerable foes of such a nature, fought with the utmost bravery, having received the armour of the Apostle Paul. And thus the contest was maintained on both sides during the greater part of the day ; nor could the demons, countless though they were, vanquish him, nor was he able by himself to drive them from his island, until the angels of God (as the saint afterwards told certain persons), and those few in number, came to his aid, when the demons in terror gave way.

“Of the monasteries which must have been founded by Columba in the Pictish territories east of the Drumalban range, Adamnan gives us no account,” writes Dr. Skene, “nor does he even mention any by name ; but of the foundation of one we have an instructive account in the Book of Deer, which shows that they extended as far as the eastern sea. The tradition of the foundation of the churches of Aberdour in Banffshire and of Deer in the district of Buchan are thus given : ‘Columcille and Drostan, son of Cosgrach, his pupil, come from Hy, or Iona, as God hath shown to them, unto *Abbordoboir*, or Aberdour, and Bede the *Cruithnech*, or Pict, was

mormaer of Buchan before them; and it was he that gave them that *cathair*, or town, in freedom for ever from mormaer and toisech. They came after them to the other town; and it was pleasing to Columcille, because it was full of God's grace, and he asked of the mormaer—viz., Bede—that he should give it him, and he did not give it; and a son of his took an illness after refusing the clerics, and he was nearly dead. Then the mormaer went to entreat the clerics that they should make prayer for the son, that health should come to him, and he gave an offering to them from *Cloch in tipart* to *Cloch pette mie Garnait*. They made the prayer, and health came to him. Then Columcille gave to Drostan that *cathair*, and blessed it, and left as his word, "Whosoever should come against it, let him not be many-yearred victorious." Drostan's tears came on parting with Columcille. Said Columcille, "Let Deer be its name henceforward." In this traditional account, preserved by the monks of Deer, we have a type of the mode in which these monasteries, or Christian colonies, were settled among the heathen tribes—the grant of a *cathair*, or fort, by the head of the tribe, and its occupation by a colony of clerics—which is quite in accordance with what we learn as to the settlements of this monastic Church in Ireland. The church of *Rosmarkyn*, now Rosemarky, on the northern shore of the Moray Firth, and that of *Muirthillanch*, or Mortlach, in the vale of the Fiddich, were dedicated to Malnog of Lismore, and were probably founded by him, as was that of Kildonan in Sutherland, by Donnan.*

* *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 134.

CHAPTER IX.

Coronation of Aidan: Convention of Drumceatt.

FOR nearly nine years after the conversion of King Brude, Columba was principally engaged in the work of evangelisation among the Picts, but by the death of Conall, king of Dalriada, in A.D. 574, his work assumed a different phase, and the political object of his mission was attained. As a result of the battle between the Picts and Scots of Dalriada in A.D. 570, the territories occupied by the latter were restricted, including only those parts known as the Dalriada kingdom. Conall's rule was therefore limited. Whether the island of Iona was previously occupied and unclaimed when Columba arrived is a matter of conjecture, but at all events Conall promised not to disturb him, and Brude gave to the infant institution all the right and title which the weight of his sanction could confer.* By the law of tanistry, Eogan, son of Gabran and cousin of Conall, was the rightful heir to the kingship, and one for whom Columba had a great affection; but the saint, who was selected to make the appointment and afterwards to perform the ceremony of coronation, was of opinion that his brother Aidan would suit his purpose better. He was probably led to this decision by means of a vision which Adamnan relates. On a certain night when Columba was

* *Adamnan*, App. 436.

staying in the Hymba island he saw in an ecstasy an angel sent to him from heaven, and holding in his hand a book of glass regarding the appointment of kings. Having received the book from the hand of the angel he began to read it, but being reluctant to appoint Aidan king as the book directed, the angel said: "Know for certain that I am sent to thee by God with the book of glass, that in accordance with the words thou hast read therein thou mayest inaugurate Aidan into the kingdom." This was repeated three times, and the saint, in obedience to the command of the Lord regarding the appointment of the kings, sailed across to Iona and there ordained Aidan. During the words of consecration he declared the future regarding Aidan, his posterity, and his kingdom in the following manner: "Believe me, unhesitatingly, O Aidan, none of thine enemies shall be able to resist thee, unless thou first act unjustly towards me and my successors. Wherefore direct thou thy children to command to their children, their grandchildren and their posterity, not to let the sceptre pass out of their hands through evil counsels. For at whatever time they turn against me or my relations who are in Ireland, the hearts of men shall turn away from them, and their foes shall be greatly strengthened against them." *

By this solemn rite of consecration Aidan became ruler of the whole Dalriadic kingdom. He threw off the rank of a lord for that of a king, and by his great ability and address at once established his independence, and laid the foundation of the Scottish monarchy.

* The prophecy was fulfilled in the battle of Magh Rath, fought in A.D. 637, when Domnall Brecc, the grandson of Aidan, ravaged without provocation the territory of Domnall, grandson of Aimnuiseag.

Hitherto the Irish monarch looked upon the Dalriads as a tributary colony in consequence of Fergus, the Irish king, having erected their kingdom, which extended beyond the peninsula of Kintyre; but now that Aidan was king he renounced all subjection, and boldly refused to act as a substitute to the Irish king. In order to make an amicable adjustment of these differences, Columba took advantage of a convention to be held at Drumceatt, a mound on the river Roe, and not far from the saint's monastery at Derry. This convention was summoned by Aedh, son of Ainmire, king of Ireland, and was attended by Columba, King Aidan, and a retinue of petty kings and clerics who are thus described by the poet Dallan Forgaill:—

“Forty priests was their number,
 Twenty bishops, noble, worthy,
 For singing psalms, a practice without blame,
 Fifty deacons, thirty students.”

According to the ancient tract *Amra Columcille*, there were three causes for which Columba came to Ireland—viz., to make peace between the men of Scotland and the men of Ireland regarding Dalriada; to retain the poets in Ireland, for they were in banishment on account of their burdensomeness, there being thirty in the company of each *ollamh* or chief poet, and fifteen in the company of each *anrad* or poet next in rank; and the third cause was to release Scannlan Mor, son of Cendfaelad, king of Ossory, whose father had given him as a hostage into the hands of King Aedh. The main cause, however, was that of Dalriada, and the question was—should it, as a colony, continue to pay tribute and service to the mother country? When Columba came to the meeting, Colman, son of Comgall, whom the

saint, when departing from Ireland, had met as a boy at Coleraine, accompanied him, and the abbot of Iona was requested to give judgment. But he declined to give an opinion, saying: "It is not I that shall give it, but yonder youth," pointing to Colman, who was famous for his legal knowledge. Colman then gave judgment, and the decision was as follows:—"Their expeditions and hostages to be with the men of Erin always, for hostages always belong to the parent stock. Their tributes, gains, and shipping to be with the men of Alban. And when one of the men of Erin or Alban should come from the east, the Dalriada to entertain them, whether few or many; and the Dalriada to convey them on if they require it." In other words, the men of Alban were to be freed from all tribute to the men of Erin, but they were to join in expeditions and hostings. And thus Alban obtained a formal recognition of independence.

Another object sought by King Aedh in holding the convention was to procure from the chiefs of Ireland a formal sentence of banishment against the order of Ollamhs or bards, who were the representatives, under Christianity, of the old Pagan *magi* or Druids of Ireland. They were a very influential class at all times, and from their numbers, when superadded to the clergy, a very oppressive one. "With the princes and the Druids, they took part in the great national assemblies; they ranked next to the monarch himself, had a fixed title to the chieftain's territory, besides ample perquisites for themselves and their attendants, and by carrying or sending their wand to any person or place they conferred a temporary sanctuary from injury or arrest."* The chief cause of complaint against them seems to have been the

* Maclear's *Apostles of Mediæval Europe*, p. 12.

annoyance given to the king and others by their exorbitant demands, and the circulation of satirical verses which pleased the people, but exasperated the influential chiefs about whom they were written. They are said to have been in danger, on three occasions, of expulsion from the kingdom, and each time to have found in a king of Ulster a successful advocate of their cause.* At the meeting, Columba, himself a poet, appeared as the bards' apologist, and mediated between them and the chiefs. "Our demand must be granted," said the saint. "You shall get it truly," answered the king, for, though he was anxious to have them suppressed, he stood up for the order. "The poets must be retained," said Columba. "It shall not be done," answered the king, "for the evils against us are great." "Say not so," the saint replied, "for the praises they will sing for thee shall be enduring as the praises the poets sung for Cormac were. And the treasures that were given for them were transitory, while the praises live after them." "Then it is not I who will expel them," said the king. Columba's advice at length prevailed, and he procured a compromise of suppression in a limitation of their number and demands, but their order should be preserved. In his effort to obtain the release of Scannlan Mor he was not successful. The saint, however, visited him in prison, where he was kept by King Aedh, and he blessed and comforted him saying, "Son, do not distress yourself, but rather rejoice and take courage, for the king, who has you a prisoner, will go out of this world before you, and after some time of exile you shall reign in your own nation for thirty years. And you shall be driven from your kingdom, and be in

* *Adamnan*, p. 79, note.

exile for some days ; and after that you shall be called home again by your people, and shall reign for three short terms." All this, his biographer tells us, was fully accomplished, for in thirty years he had to leave his throne and continued in exile for some time ; and then being recalled by his people, he reigned not for three years, as he expected, but three months, at the end of which he died.*

According to a tradition contained in the *Old Irish Life*, "great anxiety seized the men of Erin to see Columba and speak with him before he died, and messengers went from them to meet him, that he might come to speak with them at the great convention of Drumceatt, that he might bless them in that place, men, boys, women, and that he might heal their diseases and pestilences." And Adamnan tells us that at this time Conall, bishop of Coleraine, collected a large number of presents from the people of the plain of Maghelne, on the river Bann, to give a hospitable reception to Columba and the vast multitude that accompanied him on his return from the assembly. Many of these presents were laid out in the paved court of the monastery, that the saint might bless them on his arrival ; and as he was giving the blessing he specially pointed out one present, the gift of a wealthy man. "The mercy of God," said he, "attendeth the man who gave this, for his charity to the poor, and his munificence." Then he pointed out another of the many gifts, and said, "Of this wise and avaricious man's offering I cannot partake until he repent of his sin of avarice." This saying was quickly circulated among the crowd, and on reaching the ears of Columb,

* *Adamnan*, bk. i. c. viii.

son of Aedh, his conscience reproached him, and he ran immediately to the saint, and on bended knees repented of his sin, promising to forsake his former greedy habits and to be liberal ever after, with amendment of life.* On an occasion shortly after the convention, Columba, accompanied by abbot Comgall, returned to the sea coast and sat down to rest near the fort of Drumceatt. Then water was brought to the saint from a well that was close by to wash their hands. When Columba received the water he said to Comgall: "A day shall come, O Comgall, when the well whence this water came will be no longer fit for man's use. It shall be filled with human blood; for thy relations and mine—that is, the people of the Cruithni and the race of Niall—shall be at war in the neighbouring fortress of Cethirn [now called the Giants' Sconce, near Coleraine]. Whence, at this same well an unhappy relative of mine shall be slain, and his blood, mingling with that of many others, shall fill it up." This prophecy was probably fulfilled, for in A.D. 579, a question arose between these two ecclesiastics concerning a church in the neighbourhood of Coleraine, which was taken up by their respective races—Dalriada and Niall—and engaged them in sanguinary strife. Again, in A.D. 587, a battle was fought at Cuilfedha, near Clonard, in which Columba was deeply interested.

"Thus we find Columba," writes Dr. Reeves, "directly or indirectly concerned in these battles, the earliest of which occurred the year but one before his retirement to Britain, and the others at later periods, one of them after he had been twenty-four years in the abbacy of Hy. The first his biographers and panegyrists acknowledge to

* *Adamnan*, bk. i. c. xxxv.

have been the grand error of his life, for which he paid the penalty of pilgrimage ; but to save his character after he became the apostle of the northern Picts, and the religious exemplar of the Albanian Scots, the device is resorted to of antedating the other occurrences in which the failing of his nature betrayed itself ; and whereas his participation in these evils could not be denied, it was thrust back into the irresponsible part of his life, rather than allow it to be numbered among the acts of his maturity. That Columba, closely allied to the principals in these deeds of strife, and within one step himself of the object they were contending for, should look on with indifference, is not to be expected—especially in an age of revolution, and among a people whose constitution and national construction rendered civil faction almost inseparable from their existence.” *

* *Adamnan*, p. 254, note.

CHAPTER X.

Columba Returns to Scotland.

HAVING returned from his long cherished mission, greatly comforted and encouraged by the victory he had achieved in establishing the Irish colony of Dalriada in the full possession of its territories and the independence of Aidan, he resumed his missionary labours, and, with the exception of a few occasional visits to Ireland, he devoted the remainder of his life to the task of founding monasteries among the islands surrounding Iona, which seems to have been Columba's peculiar conception of missionary enterprise. Adamnan mentions some of these islands, but gives no information as to the dates of their foundation. It is most probable the principal ones were founded previous to his attending the convention of Drumceatt. The most important islands are those termed by Adamnan "Ethica Insula" and "Hymba"; the former being identified with the fertile island of Tiree, which lies north-west of Iona. Of the monasteries in Tiree Adamnan mentions two. One he calls *Campus Lunge* (now known as Port-na-lung), which seems to have been founded at an earlier period than the others. The following incidental notices of them are found in Adamnan. A penitent called Teachna came from Ireland to Iona, and confessed before the

brotherhood certain offences of which he had been guilty. He was received with kindness by the saint, and after a few days was sent by him to Baithene, who was at that time superior at Campus Lunge, and afterwards Columba's immediate successor in the abbacy of Iona. Again, the saint, having detected a robber called Erc, who lived in the little island of Colonsay, in an attempt to commit a depredation, took pity on him, and, to supply his necessities despatched a message to Baithene, who was then at Campus Lunge, directing him to send off a sheep and six measures of wheat to the unhappy man.

On another occasion it is stated that Baithene, having set sail from Iona early in the morning, arrived at the harbour of Campus soon after nine o'clock, through favour of the south wind which speedily bore him across the broad sea to the land of Tiree. One, Libran, who had been a bondsman in Ireland, fled from his master, and, coming to Iona, threw himself down at Columba's feet, professing his readiness to undergo any penance which he might impose. Upon which the saint pronounced that he should spend seven years in the land of Tiree in devotional exercises, and forthwith sent him to the monastery of Campus. At the expiration of that time he again presented himself at Iona, seeking for further directions, and was instructed to return to Ireland where he soon fulfilled the object of his mission, and, having received the saint's blessing, resumed his place in the monastery of Campus, and there continued to reside many years after Columba's death. Another time, Columba, perceiving in spirit that a party of evil spirits were making an invisible assault upon his brotherhood,

encountered them, and during the entire day maintained the conflict with doubtful success. At last he was reinforced by the angels of God, and drove from his island the enemy, who reached the land of Tiree in their flight, and then assailed the communities of the brethren, smiting them with a pestilential disease, of which many died. But Baithene, through the divine assistance, brought it to pass that the congregation over which he presided in Campus Lunge were, through prayer and fasting, sheltered from the assault of the evil ones, so that only one of his whole fraternity died, whereas in the other monasteries of the island many sank under the prevalent disease. The second monastery on the island is called *Artchain* which was founded by a follower of Columba named Findchan, and resembled the Columban model in having a presbyter as superior, "who in this capacity," writes Dr. Reeves, "exercised jurisdiction over a bishop, though incapable of performing his functions."*

The other important island, which Adamnan calls *Hymba*, has been identified with Elachnave, which forms one of a group of six islands usually termed the Grave-lochs. It was over this monastery Columba sent his uncle Ernan, an aged priest, to preside. We are told that on his departure Columba embraced him affectionately, blessed him, and then foretold what would by and by happen to him, saying, "This friend of mine I never expect to see alive again in this world." After a few days Ernan became very ill and died. In this monastery penitential discipline seems to have been enforced, for we find the saint on one occasion visiting *Hymba* and ordering that the penitents should enjoy some indulgence

* *Adamnan*, p. 304.

in respect of their food ; and Adamnan particularly mentions a penitent named Neman who, though ordered by the saint, declined to accept his offer of indulgence. It is also related that when he was excommunicating some sacrilegious persons, among whom were the sons of Conall, one of their wicked associates attacked him with a spear, but was prevented by Findluga, one of the brethren, who put on St. Columba's cowl and interposed. In a wonderful way, says Adamnan, the saint's garment served as a kind of impenetrable fence which could not be pierced by the thrust of a sharp spear.* It was at Hymba Columba saw the vision regarding the appointment of kings, and which resulted in his deciding in Aidan's favour. In the small space at our disposal it would be impossible to give an account of all the monasteries founded by the saint himself, and, during his life, by others. Their name is legion. In reference to the numerous churches which were established, either by his disciples, or by himself directly, he is styled by Adamnan, "The father and founder of monasteries"; and mention is made of his "monasteries that lie within the territories of the Picts and Scots."

In the *Old Irish Life* the number of his churches is stated as very great—"Three hundred he marked out, without defect." Although they were scattered over different parts of Ireland and Scotland, their members were spiritually related to one another; they regarded that of Iona as the mother church; the congregations of all were included in one general denomination, or "family of Columba"; and the abbot of Iona was their common head. The year A.D. 584 was an eventful one in the life of the saint. Hitherto his work lay among the islands

* *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. xxv.

on the coast of Scotland and within the Pictish territories west of the Drumalban range, but now that his friend King Brude was dead, a new field of missionary labour was opened up among the southern Picts. This nation, as Bede tells us,* had, in the early part of the fifth century, forsaken the errors of idolatry, and embraced the truth by the preaching of St. Ninian, "a most reverend bishop and holy man of the British nation," who maintained the Catholic faith for some time when the teaching of Pelagius, his contemporary and countryman, was making great advances; "but the Christianity established among them had no permanence, and they gradually fell off, till hardly even the semblance of a Christian Church remained."† King Gartnaidh, who succeeded Brude, founded a new monastic Church where the earlier Church had been, and this not only took place during Columba's life, but is, in the ancient tract called the *Amra Choluimchille*, directly attributed to his preaching.

Dr. Skene says that in his work among the southern Picts the saint was assisted by his friend Cainnech, whose Pictish descent would render his aid more effective. Cainnech appears to have founded a monastery in the east end of the province of Fife, not far from where the river Eden pours its waters into the German Ocean, at a place called *Rig-Monadh*, or the royal mount, which afterwards became celebrated as the site on which the church of St. Andrew was founded, and as giving to that church its Gaelic name of *Kilrimont*. The churches dedicated to Malnog, to Drostan, to Machut the pupil of Brendan, and to Cathan, and those founded at Dunblane by Blaán of Cinngaradh, to the son of King Aidan and

* *H. E.* bk. III. c. IV.

† *Celtic Scotland*, vol. II. p. 136.

nephew of Cathan, show the spread of the Columban Church in the territory of the southern Picts.*

In the year A.D. 585 we find Columba residing for a few months in the midland part of Ireland, and after visiting Durrow, one of his earliest foundations, he dwelt for a short time in the celebrated monastery of Clonmacnoise, where he was received with the warmest tokens of respect. As soon as it was known that he was near, all flocked from their little grange farms near the monastery, and, along with those who were within it, ranged themselves with enthusiasm under Alither, who was fourth abbot of the place; then advancing beyond the enclosure of the monastery, they went out as one man to meet Columba as if he were an angel of the Lord, and humbly bowing down with their faces to the ground, they kissed him most reverently, and, singing hymns of praise as they went, they conducted him with all honour to the church. Over the saint, as he walked, a canopy made of wood was supported by four men walking by his side, lest he should be troubled by the crowd of brethren pressing upon him.†

We are unable to discover in what way he occupied his time after his return to Scotland; but it is very probable that, as he was now advanced in years and having a presentiment of his approaching end, he spent the remainder of his life in strengthening and confirming the brethren in the monasteries surrounding Iona. In the year A.D. 593, four years before his death, whilst in Iona, he had a vision of angels whom he saw coming to meet his soul, as if to show that it was about to leave the body. His countenance was lighted up with strange transports of joy, but suddenly changed into a mournful

* See *Celtic Scotland*, vol. II. p. 137. † *Adarnan*, bk. I. c. iii.

sadness. At the same time two men—of whom the one was Lugne Mochablaí, and the other a Saxon named Pílu—were standing at the door of his hut, which was built on the higher ground, and asked the cause of this sudden joy and the sorrow which followed. Columba said to them, “Go in peace, and do not ask me now to explain the cause of either that joy or that sorrow.” On hearing this they humbly asked him, kneeling before him in tears, to grant their desire of knowing something of what he saw revealed to him. Seeing them so much afflicted, he said, “On account of my love to you I do not wish you to be in sadness; but you must first promise me never to disclose to any one during my life the secret you seek to know.” They made the promise at once according to his request, and then the venerable man spoke to them thus:—“On this very day thirty years of my sojourn in Britain have been completed, and meanwhile for many days past I have been devoutly asking of my Lord to release me from my dwelling here at the end of this thirtieth year, and to call me thither to my heavenly fatherland. And this was the cause of that joy of mine of which in sorrowful mood you ask me. For I saw the holy angels sent down from the lofty throne to meet my soul when it is taken from the flesh. But, behold, now how they are stopped suddenly, and stand on a rock at the other side of the sound of our island, evidently being anxious to come near and deliver me from the body. But they are not allowed to come nearer, because that thing which God granted me after praying with my whole strength, namely, that I might pass from the world to Him on this day, He hath changed in a moment in His listening to the prayers of so many churches for me. These churches have no doubt prayed

as the Lord hath granted, so that, though it is against my ardent wish, four years from this day are added for me to abide in the flesh. Such a sad delay as this was fitly the cause of the grief to-day. At the end of these four years, then, which by God's favour my life is yet to see, I shall pass away suddenly without any previous bodily sickness, and depart with joy to the Lord, accompanied by His holy angels, who shall come to meet me at that hour." *

* *Adarnan*, bk. III. c. xxiii.

CHAPTER XI.

Last Days of his Life : His Death.

IT is the year A.D. 597. The time has now come (which was predicted four years before) when his thirty-four years' pilgrimage in North Britain is to be brought to a close with his life.* Towards the end of May the old man, worn out with age and carried in a cart, visited some of his brethren who were at work on the western side of Iona, and addressed them, saying: "During the

* Regarding the saint's birth, authorities vary as to the year, ranging from A.D. 518 to 523. The *Annals of Ulster* waver between 518 and 522. At the former date they say: "Nativitas Coluimcille eodem die quo Buite mac Bronaigh dormivit"; at the latter, "Vel hic nativitas Coluimcille. *The Four Masters* fix St. Buite's (the founder of Monasterboice) death at 521. A copy of his life is preserved in one of the Wars MSS. in the British Museum, from which we gather that St. Columba was born on the very day St. Buite died, i.e., 521. Tighernach places it in the same year with the battle of Detna, in 518. Bede's statement is that St. Columba died at the age of 77, about 32 years after he came into Britain to preach ("cum esset annorum lxxvii post annos circiter xxx et duos ex quo ipse Brittaniam prædicaturus adiit.")—*H. E.* bk. III. c. iv. O'Donnell fixes his birth at 520: Colgan adopts 519 (*Tr. Th.* p. 486 a); Usher, 522 (*Britt. Eccl. Ant. Index Chron.*); while Lanigan adopts 521 (*Eccl. Hist.* vol. ii. p. 106). So much for external evidence. Now, if we turn to Adamnan, we find the calculation from his *data* gives 521 as that most likely to be the true period of the saint's birth. In the second preface Adamnan states that in the second year after the battle of Cooldrevny (fought A.D. 561), and in the forty-second year of his age, Columba sailed from Ireland to Britain ("Hic anno secundo post Culedrebinae bellum, ætatis vero sæe xlii de Scotia ad Britanniam pro Christi peregrinari volens enavigavit"). If we add to this his thirty-four years' sojourn in Britain ("per annos xxxiv insulanus miles conversatus"), we get the date 597 as the year of his death.

Paschal solemnities in the month of April now past I could have desired to depart to Christ our Lord, as He had allowed me, but lest a joyous festival should be turned for you into mourning my departure from the world has been put off for a little longer." Hearing these sad words the beloved monks, as Adamnan calls them, were greatly afflicted, but he endeavoured as well as he could to cheer them with words of consolation. Then he turned his face to the east,* still seated in his cart, and blessed the island with its inhabitants. After the words of blessing he was carried back to the monastery. "From that day to the present," writes Adamnan, "the venomous reptiles could do no manner of harm to man or beast." A few days afterwards while he was celebrating the solemn offices of the Eucharist as usual on the Lord's day, the brethren observed an expression of rapture upon his countenance, and when they inquired as to the cause of the joy with which he was inspired, the saint, looking upwards, answered "Wonderful and unspeakable is the subtlety of the angelic nature! For lo, an angel of the Lord, who was sent to demand a certain deposit dear to God, hath, after looking down upon us within the church and blessing us, departed without leaving any trace of his passage out." On the Saturday following, the venerable man, who had a presentiment that that day would be his last on earth, called his attendant Diormit and went to bless the *sabhall* or barn, which was near at hand. When he entered in he blessed it and two heaps of winnowed corn that were in it, and gave thanks in these words, saying, "I heartily congratulate my beloved monks that this year also, if I am obliged

* According to the *Old Irish Life* "he turned his face *westwards* and blessed the island with its inhabitants."

to depart from you, you will have a sufficient supply for the year."

On hearing this the attendant felt sad, and said, "This year at this time, father, thou very often vexest us by so frequently mentioning your leaving us." But the saint replied, "I have a little secret to tell thee, and if thou wilt promise me faithfully not to reveal it to any one before my death, I shall be able to speak with more freedom about my departure." When the attendant had on bended knees made the promise, the venerable man solemnly said, "This day in the holy scriptures is called *Sabbatum*,* or rest; and truly it is a rest to me, for it is the last day of my present laborious life, and on it I rest after the fatigues of my labours; on this night at midnight which commenceth the solemn Lord's day, I shall, according to scripture, go the way of our fathers; for already my Lord Jesus Christ deigneth to invite me, and He Himself hath revealed it to me." After this the saint left the barn, and in going back to the monastery rested half-way at a place where a cross was subsequently erected. While he was resting there came to him a white pack-horse that was used by the monks in the island for carrying milk-vessels from the cow-shed to the monastery. It came up to the saint, laid its head upon his bosom, began to utter plaintive cries, and, like a human being, to shed copious tears.

His friend Diormit, seeing this, began to drive the weeping mourner away, but the saint forbade him, saying, "Let it alone as it is so fond of me—let it pour out its bitter grief into my bosom. Lo! thou, as thou art a man and hast a rational soul, canst know nothing

* The practice of calling the Lord's day the Sabbath commenced about a thousand years after this date.

of my departure hence except what I myself have just told you, but to this brute beast devoid of reason the Creator Himself hath evidently in some way made it known that its master is going to leave it." And saying this the saint blessed the work-horse, which turned away from him in sadness.

Then leaving this spot he ascended the hillock which overhangs the monastery, and, as he stood there with upright hands, uttered the prophetic words: "Small and mean though this place is, yet it shall be held in great and unusual honour, not only by Scotie kings and people, but also by the rulers of foreign and barbarous nations, and by their subjects; the saints also of other Churches shall regard it with no common honour."* After this he descended the hill, and, returning to the monastery, he sat in his cell and transcribed the Psalter. When he came to the ninth verse of the thirty-fourth Psalm, where it is written, "There is no want to them that fear Him," "Here," said he, "at the end of the page I must stop; and what follows let Baithene write." Having thus written the verse at the end of the page, Columba went to the church to celebrate the nocturnal vigils of the Lord's day; and as soon as this was over he returned to his chamber, and spent the remainder of the night on his bed, where he had for his couch the bare ground, and for his pillow a stone. While reclining there he gave his last words of instruction to his brethren, saying, "These, O my children, are the last words I address to you—That ye be at peace and have unfeigned charity among yourselves; and if you

* Among the ruins of the old cloister of St. Columba there remains a churchyard in which are the tombs of numerous kings of Scotland Ireland, and Norway, and the noble families of the Western Islands

thus follow the example of the holy fathers, God, the Comforter of the good, will be your Helper; and I, abiding with Him, will intercede for you, and He will not only give you sufficient to supply the wants of this present life, but will also bestow on you the good and eternal rewards which are laid up for those that keep His commandments." Having said these words, and as the hour of his departure approached, he became silent.

A short time before, he had attended the nocturnal vigil, and now, on the turn of midnight, the bell rang for matins, which were celebrated, according to ancient custom, a little before daybreak. Columba arose hastily, went to the church, and running more quickly than the rest, he entered alone and knelt down in prayer beside the altar. At the same moment his attendant Diormit, following more slowly, saw from a distance the whole interior of the church filled with a heavenly light; but as he drew near to the door the same light, which had also been seen by some of the brethren, quickly disappeared. On entering the church Diormit cried out in a mournful voice, "Where art thou, father?" And feeling his way in the darkness (the lights not having yet been brought in by the brethren) he found Columba lying before the altar, and, raising him up a little, sat down beside him and laid the saint's head on his bosom. Meanwhile the rest of the brethren ran in, and, beholding their dying father whom they loved so much, burst into lamentations. Before the soul of the saint departed he opened wide his eyes and looked around him from side to side, with a countenance full of wonderful joy and gladness, as if seeing the holy angels coming to meet him. Diormit then raised the saint's right hand,

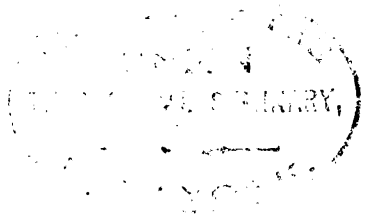
that he might bless the assembled brethren, but Columba himself moved his hand as well as he was able, that, as he could not in words, he might at least by the motion of his hand be seen to bless them. And having given them his benediction, he immediately passed away to share in eternal triumphs and to be numbered with the tens of thousands of white-robed saints, who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb—

“To lie down
With patriarchs of the infant-world—with kings,
The powerful of the earth—the wise, the good,
Fair forms, and hoary seers of ages past,
All in one mighty sepulchre.”*

When his soul had departed, writes Adamnan, and the matin hymns were finished, his body was carried by the brethren, chanting hymns, from the church back to his chamber, from which a short time before he had come alive; and his obsequies were celebrated with all due honour and reverence for three days and three nights. And when these sweet praises to God were ended, the body of Columba was wrapped in a shroud of fine linen, and, being placed in a coffin prepared for it, was buried with all due veneration, to rise again with lustrous and eternal brightness. †

* W. C. Bryant.

† It is quite evident the saint's remains lay undisturbed for many years, for Adamnan, who wrote his life nearly a century after, says (bk. III. c. xxiv.), “Even after the departure of his most kindly soul from the tabernacle of the body, until the present day the place where his sacred bones repose (“*Locum in quo ipsius sancta pausant ossa*”), as has been clearly shown to certain chosen persons,” &c. The grave of the saint is, undoubtedly, in the island of Iona, but where the particular spot is there is no evidence to show.



CHAPTER XII.

Columba's Character : His Writings.

IN estimating the character of Columba, it will be necessary to bear in mind the peculiar condition of society in his day, and the feelings and prejudices he had to encounter. The foregoing account of the saint's work has been given from biographical records of undoubted genuineness. Many of his acts are strangely curious, and to us, in this century of comparative ease and luxury, almost incredulous. But it must be remembered he lived in a rude and uncivilised age, when even women were required to enter the battle-field, and ecclesiastics were called upon to arbitrate in disputes between kings; rewards of public service were unjustly distributed; domestic ties were severed, females outraged, and innocent children butchered; strong men trampled on the weak; the Gothic and Teutonic races were shattering the very fabric of the Empire to pieces; the generous feelings of freedom were well nigh extinct; barbarians were admitted into the chief military commands; "confusion, corruption, despair, and death were everywhere; social dismemberment seemed complete. Authority, morals, arts, sciences, religion herself might have seemed condemned to irremediable ruin."* At such a time something was needed

* Montalembert, *Monks of the West*, vol. ii. p. 1.

to restrain the barbaric system, and preserve the inheritance of the old world; and hence monasticism grew out of the necessities of the time, and, in the providence of God, succeeded where so-called secular organisation failed. It ennobled and exalted the preconceived motives for seclusion; it gave a kind of conscious grandeur to inactivity, and substituted an elevating love for the Deity for contemptuous misanthropy, as the justification for the total desertion of social duty. Instead of precipitating the fall of the Roman Empire, by enfeebling in a great degree its powers of resistance, it enabled some portion of mankind to escape from the feeling of shame and misery. Amid the evils and the wretchedness that could not be averted, it was almost a social benefit to raise some part of mankind to a state of serene indifference, to render some at least superior to the general calamities.* It would be wrong to say that Columba was faultless, or his system perfect—what system is?—but no unprejudiced person can deny that monasticism was for centuries the bulwark of the Church, and owed its success to the purity, devotion, and energy of its clergy, who, amid insecurity of life, did a good work; and “he who is ignorant of, or despises, their services,” writes Leibnitz, “has only a narrow and vulgar idea of virtue, and stupidly believes that he has fulfilled all his duties towards God by some habitual practice accomplished with that coldness which excludes zeal and love.”

It has been observed that great men have often the shortest biographies; their real life is in their books. In Columba's case the first part of this statement is true, for his biographer, Adamnan, throws very little light upon the saint's real history; and of his various qualities,

* Milman's *History of Early Christianity*, bk. III. c. xi.

both mental and bodily, we have not much information, unless what may be gathered from his miracles, upon which some biographers have too much depended, and therefore led to form a questionable estimate of his character. Adamnan says of him: "From his boyhood he had been brought up in Christian training, in the study of wisdom, and by the grace of God had so preserved the integrity of his body and the purity of his soul that, though dwelling on earth, he appeared to live like the saints in heaven. For he was angelic in appearance, graceful in speech, holy in work, with talents of the highest order and consummate prudence; he lived a soldier of Christ during thirty-four years on an island. He never could spend the space of even one hour without study, or prayer, or writing, or some other holy occupation. So incessantly was he engaged night and day in the unwearied exercise of fasting and watching, that the burden of each of these austerities would seem beyond the power of all human endurance. And still, in all these, he was beloved by all, for a holy joy ever beaming on his face revealed the joy and gladness with which the Holy Spirit filled his inmost soul." *

Dallan Forgail, Columba's panegyrist, describes his people mourning him who was "their souls' light, their learned one—their chief from right—who was God's messenger—who dispelled fears from them—who used to explain the truth of words—a harp without a base chord—a perfect sage who believed Christ—he was learned—he was chaste—he was charitable—he was an abounding benefit of guests—he was eager—he was noble—he was gentle—he was the physician of the heart of every sage—he was to persons inscrutable—he was a shelter to the

* *Adamnan*, Pref. II.

naked—he was a consolation to the poor; there went not from the world one who was more continual for the remembrance of the cross.”*

And in the eloquent language of Montalembert, who bases his eulogy on O'Donnell's *Life of Columba*: “He was vindictive, passionate, bold, a man of strife, born a soldier rather than a monk, and known, praised, and blamed as a soldier—so that even in his lifetime he was invoked to fight; and continued a soldier of Christ, even upon the island rock from which he rushed forth to preach, convert, enlighten, reconcile, and reprimand both princes and nations, men and women, laymen and clerks. He was at the same time full of contradictions and contrasts—at once tender and irritable, rude and courteous, ironical and compassionate, caressing and imperious, grateful and revengeful—led by pity as well as by wrath, ever moved by generous passions, and among all passions fired to the very end of his life by two which his countrymen understand the best, the love of poetry and the love of country. Little inclined to melancholy when he had once surmounted the great sorrow of his life, which was his exile; little disposed, save towards the end, to contemplation or solitude, but trained by prayer and austerities to triumphs of evangelical exposition; despising rest, untiring in mental and manual toil, born for eloquence, and gifted with a voice so penetrating and sonorous that it was thought of afterwards as one of the most miraculous gifts that he had received of God; frank and loyal, original and powerful in his words, as in his actions—in cloister, and mission, and parliament, on land and on sea, in Ireland as in Scotland; always swayed by the love of God and of his neighbour,

* *Amra Choluimchille*, by O'Beirne Crome.

whom it was his will and pleasure to serve with an impassioned uprightness. Such was Columba."*

If we may judge from the accounts handed down to us, Columba, like many of the Irish saints, was very impatient of contradiction, resentful of injury, and was indisposed to receive injuries in silence. On one occasion, at Ardnurchan, when he met a robber returning to his vessel laden with plunder, the saint reproached him for his evil deeds, and advised him to give up the plunder; but the robber remained hardened and obstinate; and thus mocking and laughing at the saint, he embarked in his boat which lay at the water's edge. Columba, however, pursued him with curses, and followed him in the sea until the water reached to his knees.† On another occasion we find him cursing a miser who despised him and showed no hospitality, saying, "But the riches of that niggardly man, who hath despised Christ in the strangers that came to be his guests, will gradually become less from this day, and be reduced to nothing; and he himself shall be a beggar; and his son shall go about from house to house with a half-empty wallet; and he shall be slain by a rival beggar with an axe, in the pit of a threshing floor."‡ Among the saint's peculiarities he had a remarkable power of observation and skill in interpreting the signs of the weather. Adamnan tells us that Baithene and Columban asked him to obtain for them from the Lord a favourable wind on the next day, though they were to set sail in different directions. Columba replied, "To-morrow morning, Baithene, setting sail from the harbour of Iona, shall have a favourable wind until he reaches Tiree." And to Columban he said,

* *Monks of the West*, vol. iii. p. 269.

† *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. xxiii.

‡ *Ibid.* bk. II. c. xxii.

“Baithene has now happily arrived at the wished-for haven, prepare thou then to set sail to-day; the Lord will soon change the wind to the north.” The Lord wrought this miracle, says Adamnan, in answer to the prayer of the illustrious man, according as it is written, “All things are possible to him that believeth.” * Dallan Forgail says: “Seasons and storms he perceived, that is, he used to understand when calm and storm would come—he perceived its race with the branching sun—the sea course, that is, he was skilful in the course of the sea—he would count the stars of heaven.” † Another remarkable feature was his sonorous voice. Adamnan relates a well authenticated story told, as he says, by those who heard it. When singing in the church with the rest of his brethren, Columba raised his voice so wonderfully that it was sometimes heard from four to eight furlongs off. But what is stranger still, to those who were with him in the church his voice did not seem louder than that of others; and yet, at the same time, persons more than a mile away heard it so distinctly that they could mark each syllable of the verses he was singing, for his voice sounded the same whether far or near. It is, however, admitted that this wonderful character in the voice of the saint was but rarely observable, and even then it could never happen without the aid of the Holy Spirit. Writing was an employment to which Columba was devoted, but unfortunately that exercise consisted in transcription rather than composition. Three Latin poems of considerable beauty are attributed to him; and in the ancient *Liber Hymnorum*, where they are preserved, each is accompanied by a preface describing the occasion on which it was written. There are also in

* *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. xiv. † *Anra Choluimehille*, pp. 43, 45.

print his "Farewell to Aran," a poem of twenty-two stanzas; and another poem of seventeen stanzas, which he is supposed to have written on the occasion of his flight from King Diarmaid. Besides these there is a collection of some fifteen poems, bearing his name, in one of the O'Clery MSS. preserved in the Burgundian Library at Brussels. But much the largest collection is contained in an oblong manuscript of the Bodleian Library at Oxford (Laud, 615), "which embraces everything," writes Dr. Reeves, "in the shape of poem or fragment that could be called Columba's which industry was able to scrape together at the middle of the sixteenth century."* Space will not permit of our inserting more than two of the saint's poems, which will help to give some idea of the style of metre adopted by many of the leading fathers of the Church. The following poem is in the form of a dialogue between Columba and Cormac, and, according to Dr. Reeves, the scene seems to have been laid at Durrow:—

COLUMBA.

Cormac, offspring of Liathan, of aspect bright,
The champion of heaven and of earth,
Came out of his southern, warm country,
Upon a visit, upon a pilgrimage.

Two wild oxen of noble appearance
Conveyed the devout cleric
From the south, from the broad rapid Lui †
To Cormac's cross at Caindrum.

Druim-cain was the first name of the height
Where Durrow stands, according to history;
Durrow is its name now;
The country of Conall, offspring of Fergus.

* See Dr. Reeves' *Adarnan*, Appendix, p. 79.

† The river Lee which flows past Cork.

When the blooming sweet man had arrived
 At Cormac's cross at the church,
 They rang the soft-toned bell
 Here at Catamael's city.

That pleasant divine then celebrated service,
 Cormac, son of the noble-faced Dinia ;
 And to meet him came together
 Our devout, steadfast congregation.

Thou art welcome here, thy face is pleasant,
 O Cormac, since thou art devout :
 Thy coming hither with speed
 Was a long time since foretold.

Abide here, for thou art a perfect divine,
 O Cormac, of character unbroken,
 That thou mayest be the proper guardian,
 That shall be in my devout city.

CORMAC.

How can I be here, said he,
 Thou noble son of Fedhlimidh,
 Among the powerful northern tribes,
 In this border territory, O Colum ?

COLUMBA.

Restrain all subordinates, all rash ones,
 All chieftains, who require it ;
 And I will restrain all actual kings,
 All those present and at a distance.

Let us therefore form our union,
 As Christ has ordained, in the flesh ;
 Not to be dissolved till the judgment day,
 By us, O Cormac, offspring of Liathan.

Bind up the thumbs of my hands,
 O Cormac of many dignities,
 The coils of our noble union,
 As long as beautiful-coloured Durrow shall last.

Perversely hast thou attacked me,
 If it be not willed by the King of heaven ;
 Thou hast taken off from me all my thumb ;
 O good saint, O good man.

Sharply hast thou attacked me, O Momonian,*
 O Cormac, of memorable sense ;
 Wolves shall eat thy body
 For this deed, without any mercy.

CORMAC.

Though many be the joints of my body,
 Said Cormac the just, from Corc's Cashel,
 There shall be a church for every one of them,
 And they shall be yours, O fair-famed Colum.

COLUMBA.

I well know what will be the result
 Of cutting me, of mutilating me :
 Mine honour shall rest with my thumb in my church,
 As long as pointed Erin shall exist.

Procure for me tribute from thy race,
 O thou descendant of Oilill Olum,†
 That I may not visit vengeance
 On the virtuous posterity of Liathan.

Here is another, attributed to St. Columba, containing many interesting allusions to his native and adopted countries ; and although Dr. Reeves says there is internal evidence to prove that it was composed in an after age, yet its language is very old, and it serves as an early metrical record of his principal Irish churches :—

Delightful to be on Ben-Edar ‡
 Before going o'er the white sea :
 The dashing of the wave against its face,
 The bareness of its shore and its border.

* The tribe Ua Liathan from which Cormac came.—Dr. Reeves.

† King of Munster, died 234 A.D.

‡ The peninsula of Howth, near Dublin, was known by the name *Edar*, and the highest part by the name above, signifying "the Peak of Edar."—Reeves.

Delightful to be on Ben-Edar,
After coming o'er the white-bosomed sea,
To row one's little coracle,
Ochone! on the swift-waved shore.

How rapid the speed of my coracle;
And its stern turned upon Derry;
I grieved at my errand o'er the noble sea,
Travelling to Alba of the ravens.

My foot in my sweet little coracle
My sad heart still bleeding:
Weak is the man that cannot lead;
Totally blind are all the ignorant.

There is a grey eye
That looks back upon Erin;
It shall not see, during life,
The men of Erin nor their wives.

My vision o'er the brine I stretch,
From the ample oaken planks;
Large is the tear of my soft grey eye,
When I look back upon Erin.

Upon Erin my attention is fixed;
Upon Loch Levin; upon Line;
Upon the lands the Ultonians own;
Upon smooth Munster; upon Meath.

Numerous in the east are tall champions,
Many the diseases and distempers there,
Many they with scanty clothes,
Many the hard and jealous hearts.

Plentiful in the west the apple fruit;
Many the kings and princes;
Plentiful its luxuriant sloes,
Plentiful its noble, acorn-bearing oaks.

Melodious her clerics, melodious her birds,
Gentle her youths, wise her seniors,
Illustrious her men, noble to behold;
Illustrious her women for fond espousal.

It is in the west sweet Brendan is,
 And Colum, son of Crimthaun ;
 And in the west fair Baithin shall be,
 And in the west shall Adamnan be.

Carry my inquiries after that
 Unto Comgall, of eternal life ;
 Carry my inquiries after that
 To the bold king of fair Emania.

Carry with thee, thou noble youth,
 My blessing and benediction ;
 One half upon Erin, sevenfold,
 And half on Alba at the same time.

Carry my benediction over the sea
 To the nobles of Ireland of the Gaedhil ;
 Let them not credit Molaisi's words,
 Nor his threatened prosecution.

Were it not for Molaisi's words
 At the cross of Ath-Imlaise,*
 I should not now permit
 Disease or distemper in Ireland.

Beloved to my heart, also in the west,
 Drumcliff, at Culcinne's strand,
 To behold the fair Loch Feval : †
 The form of its shores are delightful.

Delightful is that, and delightful
 The salt main on which the sea-gulls cry,
 On my coming from Derry afar ;
 It is quiet, and it is delightful,

Delightful.

* Now *Ahamlish*, in the county of Sligo.

† Now pronounced Lough Foyle.

CHAPTER XIII.

Columba's Biographer, Adamnan.*

ADAMNAN, the biographer of St. Columba, and ninth abbot of Iona, was born in Ireland about the year A.D. 624, just twenty-seven years after the saint's death; and though there is no express record of the parish which gave him birth, there is good reason for supposing that he was a native of that part of the territory known as the "land of Aedh," so called from Aedh, son of Ainmire, who, in common with Adamnan, was descended from Sedna, grandson of Conal Gulban. His father Ronan was, therefore, in virtue of his birth, related to Columba and many of the sovereigns of Ireland. Ronnat, the mother of Adamnan, was descended from Enna, a son of Niall, whose race possessed themselves of the tract lying between the channels of the Foyle and Swilly, which was called the "land of Enna," now known as the barony of Raphoe. Concerning Adamnan's early history we possess no information save what is told in the following anecdote in the life of Finnachta the Festive, a chief of the southern Hy Neill, and subsequently monarch of Ireland: "Not long after this,

* By the kind permission of the late Bishop Reeves I have been enabled to add a biographical sketch of Adamnan, and have made free use of his *Memoir*, as also of the short notice of him in the first volume of Smith's *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Biography*, both of which are based on the Life given in the *Acta Sanctorum* from the pen of Constantinus Snyskenus.

Finnachta came with a numerous cavalcade to the house of his sister, whither he was invited to be her guest. As they were riding along the way they met Adamnan, then a schoolboy, who was travelling upon the same road, with a jar of milk upon his back. And as he fled from the way before the cavalcade, he knocked his foot against a stone and stumbled, and the jar fell from his back and was broken, upon which Finnachta said, 'Thou shalt receive protection, O student, from me,' and he prayed him not to be sorrowful. Then said Adamnan, 'O good man, I have cause for grief, for there are three goodly students in one house, and three more of us are attendants upon them. And how we act is this: one attendant from among us goes out in turn to collect sustenance for the other five; and it was my turn to-day, but what I had gathered for them has been spilled upon the ground; and, what grieves me more, the borrowed jar is broken, and I have not wherewith to pay for it.'

Such is the story which, Dr. Reeves thinks, was the creation of a later age to introduce a historical reality, the intimacy of Adamnan with Finnachta, and his subsequent interference with him. It transports Adamnan, in his youth, from Donegal to Meath; but this is no violence, for St. Columba before him studied at Clonard in Meath, and read with Gemman in a plain of Leinster; nor was it inconsistent with the severity of monastic discipline to derive its sustenance from charitable sources.

The abbot under whom he was admitted into the brotherhood was probably Seghine, for he lived until Adamnan was twenty-eight years old. During the incumbency of the former and that of the three succeeding

abbots, he, no doubt, acquired such a character as rendered him eligible, and such a reputation for learning as recommended him to the presidency of the Columban order, now in the meridian of celebrity and influence. With the exception of his skill in Latin, his acquaintance with other languages and branches of education is more a subject of inference than of express declaration.

An old bardic composition says that Adamnan, after the accidental introduction mentioned in the above anecdote, was invited to Finnachta's court, and subsequently became his spiritual adviser; and that is the reason why he made so conspicuous a figure during his reign. On the death of Failbhe, in A.D. 679, Adamnan was elected to the abbacy of Iona, being now fifty-five years of age. Brude, son of Bile, the most valiant of the Pictish kings since the reign of his namesake, the son of Malcolm, preceded the abbot in his elevation but one year, so that Adamnan's incumbency is set down in the Chronicle of the Scottish Kings as the ecclesiastical parallel of his reign. "During the first six years of his abbacy," writes Dr. Skene, "the rule of the Angles, under King Egfrid, still extended as far as it did during the reign of his father Osuin. After the ejection of Wilfrid from the diocese in this its fullest extent, it was divided between Bosa and Eata, the latter being appointed bishop of the northern part; and three years afterwards it was still further divided, Trumuin being appointed bishop over the province of the Picts which was subject to the Angles. The defeat and death of King Egfrid, however, at the battle of Dunnichen in the year A.D. 685, terminated this rule of the Angles, and with it the interference of the Anglic bishops with the Columban Church. The Scots of Dalriada recovered their

independence. The southern Picts were relieved from the more direct yoke of the Angles, and Trumuin fled from his diocese.* The new king, Alfrid, whom the Irish knew by the name of Flam Fiona, was now an exile in Ireland. He had probably been led thither, as Dr. Reeves thinks, through his mother's alleged connection with the chief family of the north, and here probably it had been that Adamnan became so intimate with Alfrid, that it caused the Irish to call him the "foster son of Adamnan." This intimacy proved serviceable to the teacher when the pupil ascended the throne. The "war of Ecgfrid," as Adamnan terms the fatal expedition against the Picts in A.D. 685, restored Alfrid to his country and the enjoyment of his hereditary rights, so that when the abbot of Iona, in the following year, went on a mission to the Northumbrian court to ask the release of the Irish captives, whom Berct, King Ecgfrid's general, had carried away from the plain of Breg in Meath, † he found a ready answer to his petition. It may be that he undertook the errand at the instance of King Finnachta, on whose patrimonial territory the descent had been made by the Saxons, possibly at the instance of the Leinster men.

The circumstances of Adamnan's journey and the route he took, are thus related in his *Irish Life*:—"The

* *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 170.

† In the year A.D. 684, Ecgfrid, king of the Northumbrians, sending Berct, his general, with an army, into Ireland miserably wasted that harmless nation which had always been most friendly to the English; insomuch that in their hostile rage they spared not even the churches or monasteries. Those islanders, to the utmost of their power, repelled force with force, and imploring the assistance of Divine mercy, prayed long and fervently for vengeance; and though such a curse cannot possess the kingdom of God, it is believed that those who were justly cursed on account of their impiety did soon suffer the penalty of their guilt from the avenging hand of God.—Bede's *H. E.* bk. iv. ch. xxvi.

north Saxons went to Erin and plundered Magh Breg as far as Beal-achduin; and then carried off with them a great prey of men and women. The men of Erin besought Adamnan to go in quest of the captives to Saxonland. Adamnan went to demand the prisoners, and put in at *Tracht-Romra*.* The strand is long, and the flood rapid; so rapid that if the best steed in Saxonland, ridden by the best horseman, were to start from the edge of the tide when it begins to flow, he could only bring his rider ashore by swimming, so extensive is the strand, and so impetuous is the tide."

The Saxons now were unwilling to permit Adamnan to land upon the shore. "Push your curachs," said he to the people, "for both their land and sea are obedient to God, and nothing can be done without God's permission." The clerics did as they were told. Adamnan drew a circle with his crosier around the curachs, and God rendered the strand firm under their curachs, and he formed a high wall of the sea about them, so that the place where they were was an island, and the sea went to her limits past it, and did them no injury. When the Saxons had observed this great miracle, they trembled for fear of Adamnan, and they gave him his full demand. His demand was, that a complete restoration of the captives should be made to him, and that no Saxon should ever again go upon a predatory excursion to Erin; and Adamnan brought back all the captives. The secret of his success is told by Adamnan himself when relating the plague which prevailed in Europe, but from which the Picts and Scots were providentially exempted: "I often return my most

* The name is now unknown, but the graphic description is very applicable to Solway Firth.—Dr. Reeves.

grateful thanks to God for having, through the intercession of Columba, preserved me and those in our islands from the ravages of the pestilence; and that in Saxonia also, when I went to visit *my friend* King Alfrid, when the plague was raging and laying waste many of his villages, yet both in its first attack, immediately after the war of Ecgfrid, and in its second, two years subsequently, the Lord mercifully saved me from danger though I was living and moving about in the very midst of the plague."*

The object of his visit is not stated by himself, but, as Dr. Reeves says, it was probably some matter of international policy which he was chosen to negotiate. The fact that he sailed direct to Ireland, with the sixty liberated captives, seems to justify the reference of the following statement of Bede to a later date when he returned to Iona, and subsequently crossed over to Ireland: "At this time a great part of the Scots in Ireland, and some also of the Britons in Britain, through the goodness of God, conformed to the proper and ecclesiastical time of keeping Easter. Adamnan, priest and abbot of the monks that were in the island of Hy, was sent ambassador by his nation to Alfrid, king of the English, where he made some stay, observing the canonical rites of the Church, and was earnestly admonished by many, who were more learned than himself, not to presume to live contrary to the universal custom of the Church, either in relation to the observance of Easter, or any other decrees whatsoever, considering the small number of his followers, seated in so distant a corner of the world. In consequence of this he changed his mind, and readily preferred those things

* *Adamnan*, bk. II. c. xlvii.

which he had seen and heard in the English churches, to the customs which he and his people had hitherto followed. For he was a good and wise man, and remarkably learned in holy scripture. Returning home, he endeavoured to bring his own people that were in the isle of Hy, or that were subject to that monastery, into the way of truth which he had learned and embraced with all his heart; but in this he could not prevail."*

In this monastery he received Arculf, a French bishop, who had gone to Jerusalem for the sake of the holy places; and, having seen all the Land of Promise, travelled to Damascus, Constantinople, Alexandria, and many islands, and returning home was driven by a violent storm on the west coast of Britain, and made his way to Iona and passed the winter there. In reference to this visit, Bede gives the following interesting account of Adamnan's tract on *The Holy Places*:—"After many other accidents, Arculf came to the aforesaid servant of Christ, Adamnan, who, finding him to be learned in the scriptures, and acquainted with the holy places, entertained him zealously, and attentively gave ear to him, insomuch that he presently committed to writing all that Arculf said he had seen remarkable in the holy places. Thus he composed a work beneficial to many, and particularly to those who, being far removed from those places where the patriarchs and apostles lived, know no more of them than what they learn by reading. Adamnan presented this book to King Alfrid, and through his bounty it came to be read by lesser persons. The writer thereof was also well rewarded by him, and sent back into his

* *H. E.* bk. v. c. xv.

country. I believe it will be acceptable to our readers if we collect some particulars from the same, and insert them in our history,"* Bede then devotes two chapters to extracts from his work. To the same visit Ceolfrid alludes in his letter to Naitan, king of the Picts, where, speaking of those who differed from him on the question of the observance of Easter, he writes: "Of which number is Adamnan, the abbot and renowned priest of Columba, who, when sent ambassador by his nation to King Alfrid, came to see our monastery, and, discovering wonderful wisdom, humility, and religion in his words and behaviour, among other things, I said to him in discourse, 'I beseech you, holy brother, who think you are advancing to the crown of life, which knows no period, why do you, contrary to the habit of your faith, wear on your head a crown that is terminated, or bounded? And if you aim at the society of St. Peter, why do you imitate the tonsure of him whom St. Peter anathematised? and why do you not rather even now show that you imitate to your utmost the habit of him with whom you desire to live happy for ever?' He answered, 'Be assured, my dear brother, that though I have Simon's tonsure, according to the custom of my country, yet I utterly detest and abhor the Simoniacal wickedness; and I desire, as far as my littleness is capable of doing it, to follow the footsteps of the most blessed prince of the apostles.' I replied, 'I verily believe it as you say; but let it appear by showing outwardly such things as you know to be his, that you in your hearts embrace whatever is from Peter the apostle. For I believe your wisdom does easily judge, that it is much more proper to estrange your countenance, already dedicated to God, from resem-

* *H. E.* bk. v. c. xv.

blance to him whom in your heart you abhor, and of whose hideous face you would shun the sight ; and, on the other hand, that it becomes you to imitate the outward resemblance of him whom you seek to have for your advocate with God, as you desire to follow his actions and instructions.'

"This I then said to Adamnan, who indeed showed how much he had improved upon seeing the statutes of our churches, when, returning into Scotland, he afterwards by his preaching brought great numbers of that nation over to the Catholic observance of the Paschal time ; though he was not yet able to gain the consent of the monks that lived in the island of Hy, over whom he presided. He would also have been mindful to amend the tonsure, if his authority had extended so far."*

Returning to his island, after having celebrated Easter canonically, he most earnestly inculcated the observance of the Catholic time of Easter in his monastery, yet without being able to prevail. In the year after his return to Iona the death of Iolan, bishop of Cinngaradh, or Kingarth in Bute, is recorded ; † and in A.D. 692 Adamnan again visited Ireland, and the object of his journey seems to have been one of importance, for the annalists, every word of whom, writes Dr. Reeves, is full of meaning, in recording the event state that it occurred fourteen years after the death of his predecessor Failbhe. On this occasion he seems to have had political as well as ecclesiastical matters to engage his attention. His friend the sovereign of Ireland, Fínachta, had incurred, if the bardic accounts are to be credited, the displeasure of the Hy Neill race by impairing the honours which he was expected to uphold, in

* *H. E.* bk. v. c. xxi.

† *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 172.

remitting to the Leinster men the tribute which they had been in the habit of annually paying to the chief of the existing dynasty. Finnachta had fought the Lagenians and routed them, so that his indulgence to them does not seem to have been extorted by force. The secret probably lies in the monarch's title of the "Festive." Poems ascribe the exemption to the pleading of St. Moling, a Leinster ecclesiastic of great celebrity, who took advantage of the ambiguous meaning of the word *Luan*, which is either *Monday* or *the day of judgment*, to convert the term of a temporary respite to a perpetual surrender of the claim. Adamnan gets the credit of being the great champion for the maintenance of the demand; and a poem of some length is attributed to him, wherein he calls Finnachta "the old grey king without teeth," and indulges in such sentiments as these:—

"Were I a king, with reddened spears
I would humble mine enemies;
I would exalt my high places,
My combats should be frequent."

The Irish *Life of Adamnan* says that a proclamation had been made by Finnachta to the effect that the lands of Columba should not enjoy the same privileges as those of Patrick, Finian, and Ciaran, whereupon Adamnan said: "The life of the king who made this proclamation shall be short; he shall fall by fratricide; and there shall be no king of his race for ever." Finnachta fell by the hand of his cousin in A.D. 695. During his sojourn in Ireland Adamnan preached to the people, and by modestly declaring the time of Easter he reduced many of them, and almost all that were not under the dominion of those of Iona, to the Catholic unity, and

taught them to keep the legal time of Easter.* In the year A.D. 697 Adamnan again visited Ireland (his previous visit being of short duration), and was accompanied by Brude, son of Derile, king of the Picts.† His object was to bring about a social reformation, by which women were exempted from the burden, laid upon all, of attending hostings and expeditions.

In order to procure a national enactment a Synod was held at Tara, within an enclosure called *Rath-na-Senadh*, or "Rath of the Synods," which was attended by thirty-nine ecclesiastics, presided over by Flann Febhla, the abbot of Armagh, and forty-seven chiefs of various territories, at the head of whom was Loingsech, son of Aengus, monarch of Ireland. The enactments of the Synod were afterwards called *Lex Adamnani*, or *Cain Adhamhnain*, which means "tribute of Adamnan," because among its results was the privilege, which was conceded to him and his successors, of levying pecuniary contributions under certain conditions. It was possibly on the same occasion, writes Dr. Reeves, that the question of Easter was publicly discussed, and the usage advocated by Adamnan adopted. At this time also may have been promulgated those eight canons which bear his name. Ecclesiastical considerations, however, if entertained at this meeting, were not of sufficient importance in the eyes of the Irish to merit an entry in a journal, and the absorbing subject seems to have been the civil enactment which afterwards became a source of profit, and for this reason had special claims upon the memory.

From A.D. 697 till the year of his death Adamnan seems to have remained in Ireland, for, though "the

* Bede's *H. E.* bk. v. c. xv. † *Celtic Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 173.

social improvement which he effected is despatched in a few words in the Annals," writes Dr. Reeves, "we can hardly conceive that so vital a measure was brought about without much exertion and preparatory solicitation. The success of his Paschal advocacy among a people naturally attached to old prejudices, in communities widely spread and subject to many antagonistic influences, must have required a longer period for its completion than the words of Bede would at first sight seem to imply. The narrative of Adamnan's proceedings, from his first visit to the court of Alfrid down to his last stay in Ireland, as given in Mac Firbis's MS. Annals, is so amusingly characteristic of native simplicity that it is entitled, notwithstanding its looseness, to find a place among more explicit records:—

"*An.* 896 [*reste.* 796]—'In this year the men of Erin consented to receive jurisdiction and one rule from Adamnan respecting the celebration of Easter on Sunday, on the fourteenth of the moon of April; and the coronal tonsure of Peter was performed upon the clerics of Erin, for there had been great variance in Erin on these questions until then, inasmuch as some of the clerics of Erin were in the habit of celebrating Easter on Sunday the fourteenth of the moon of April, and had the coronal tonsure of Peter the Apostle, following in the steps of Patrick; others, following Columcille, celebrated Easter on the fourteenth moon of April, whatever day of the week that fourteenth should happen to fall, and had the coronal tonsure of Simon Magus. A third party followed neither the sect of Patrick nor the sect of Columcille, so that the clergy of Erin held many Synods, and they used to come to these Synods with weapons, so that pitched battles used to be fought

between them, and many used to be slain; so that many evils ensued to Erin from this, namely, the Bear-mor,* and the very great dearth, and many diseases; and external tribes injured Erin. They continued thus for a long period, and even to the time of Adamnan. He was the ninth abbot who succeeded to the government of Ia after Columcille. A great spoil was carried off by the Saxons from Erin. Adamnan went to demand a restitution of the spoil, as Bede relates in his history. The greater part of the bishops of all Europe assembled to condemn Adamnan for having celebrated Easter after the fashion of Columcille, and for having upon him the tonsure of Simon Magus, that is, from ear to ear. Bede says that though many were the wise men in that Synod, Adamnan excelled them all in wisdom and eloquence; and Adamnan said it was not in imitation of Simon Magus that he had this tonsure, but in imitation of John of the Breast,† the foster son of the Redeemer, and that this was the tonsure which he had upon him, and that though Peter loved the Saviour, the Saviour loved John; and that it was on the fourteenth of the moon of April, on whatever day of the week that should fall, the Apostles celebrated Easter. Then an old senior rising up said, "Though Columcille himself were present here we would not leave him until he should be of the same rule with ourselves." Adamnan made answer unto him and said, "I shall be of the same rule with you." "Be tonsured, therefore, accordingly," said the bishops. "It will be sufficient that I do so," said Adamnan, "at my own monastery." "No," said they; "but immediately."

* Probably a mistake for *Bo-ar-mor*, "the great cow mortality."—Dr. Reeves.

† The Irish name for John the Evangelist, borrowed from St. John xiii. 23, 25.

Adamnan was then tonsured, and no greater honour was ever shown to man than was given to him on this occasion; and that great spoil was restored to him, and he came straight home to his own monastery of Ia. It was a great surprise to his congregation to see him with that tonsure. He then requested of the congregation to receive the tonsure, but they refused. Now Adamnan came afterwards to Erin, and his fame spread throughout the land, but that one regulation of Easter and of the tonsure was not received from him until this year, anno Domini 696, and Adamnan died in the year 703, in the 78th year of his age.”

Such is the account given in Mac Firbis's Annals. Bede records the last stage in his life as follows:—“He departed this life before the next year came round, the Divine goodness so ordaining it, that as he was a great lover of peace and unity, he should be taken away to everlasting life before he should be obliged, on the return of the time of Easter, to quarrel still more seriously with those that would not follow him in the truth.”*

Of the character of Adamnan for learning, and the graces of the Christian ministry, we have the highest testimony in the contemporary statements of Bede and Coelfrid. The Irish *Life* ascribes to him the combined virtues of Patriarchs and Apostles, while the Four Masters sum up the evidence thus: “Adamnan was a good man, according to the testimony of St. Bede, for he was tearful, penitent, given to prayer, diligent, ascetic, temperate; he never used to eat except on Sunday and Thursday; he made a slave of himself to these virtues; and, moreover, he was wise and learned in

* *H. E.* bk. v. c. xv.

the clear understanding of the holy scriptures of God." Among his many virtues, diligence in his calling seems to have been one. The energy of his character has left its impress on the traditions of the country in the many journeys which he undertook, and the Synods which he held; and he himself bears testimony to the multiplicity of his labours in the epilogue of his tract on *The Holy Places*. Filial piety was another of his virtues, and out of his character for it grew the following legend taken from the *Leabhar Breac*, and *Book of Lecan*. Adamnan happened to be travelling one day through the plain of Breg, with his mother on his back, when they saw two armies engaged in mutual conflict. It happened then that Ronnat, his mother, observed a woman with an iron reaping-hook in her hand dragging another woman out of the opposite battalion with the hook fastened in her breast, for men and women went equally to battle at that time. After this his mother sat down and said, "Thou shalt not take me from this spot until thou exemptest woman for ever from being in this condition, and from excursions and hostings." Adamnan then promised, and, as we have seen, he and the principal part of the clergy of Ireland attended the Synod of Tara, and had the women exempted.

The undoubted writings of Adamnan are, his tract on *The Holy Places*, which is extant, and the *Life of Saint Columba*. The authorship of the former is proved beyond all question by Bede. The latter wants the external evidence which the tract on *The Holy Places* possesses, but there is an accumulation of internal evidence in the *Life* which should satisfy any mind of its authenticity, and the more so, writes Dr. Reeves, as it is for the most part undesigned and incidental. For

instance, Adamnan himself declares: "I, Adamnan, had this narrative from the lips of my predecessor, the abbot Failbhe, who solemnly declared that he had himself heard King Oswald relating the same vision to Seghine the abbot."* And again,† in relating a vision seen by Virgnous, he says: "Another vision also given at the same hour, under a different form, was related to me—Adamnan—who was a young man at the time, by one of those who had seen it, and who solemnly assured me of its truth." Numerous instances could be multiplied, but these will suffice. It is not known with accuracy at what period Adamnan wrote the *Life of Columba*, but most probably it was compiled between the interval after his visit to King Alfrid in A.D. 688 and his visit to Ireland in A.D. 697, and, as he himself states, "in compliance with the urgent requests of my brethren."‡ The veneration of Adamnan's memory may be estimated by the number of churches dedicated to him both in Ireland and Scotland.

The dates of his foundations in the eastern districts of Scotland are not known with any degree of accuracy; "but no doubt, after the termination of the Anglie rule over the southern Picts and Scots of Dalriada," writes Dr. Skene,§ "he would be desirous to strengthen the Columban Church, and his relations with the kings of the Picts, who reigned after the overthrow of the Angles, were cordial and friendly. In this work he appears to have been assisted by the family who had already evangelised the rugged district termed the 'Rough Bounds,' as the churches dedicated to them and him are found adjacent to each other. Among the northern

* *Adamnan*, bk. I. c. I. and bk. II. c. xlv.

† *Ibid.* bk. III. c. xxiv.

‡ *Ibid.* Pref. I.

§ *Celtic Scotland*, vol. II. p. 174.

Picts, Adamnan's principal church was that of Forglen, on the east bank of the river Deveron, in which the *Brecbannoch*, or banner of Columba, was preserved; and separated from it by the same river is Turriff, dedicated to Comgan. South of the range of the Mounth Adamnan's most important foundation was the monastery of Dull in the district of Atholl, which was dedicated to him, and to which a very extensive territory was annexed; and closely contiguous to it was the district of Glendochart, with its monastery dedicated to Fillan, whose name is preserved in Strathfillan. Fillan again appears in Pittenweem, on the south coast of the peninsula of Fife; and in the Firth of Forth, which it bounds, is Inchkeith, 'on which St. Adamnan the abbot presided.'"

APPENDIX.

The Rule of Saint Columba.*

THE RULE OF COLUMCILLE BEGINNETH.

BE alone in a separate place near a chief city, if thy conscience is not prepared to be in common with the crowd.

Be always naked in imitation of Christ and the Evangelists.

Whatsoever little or much thou possessest of anything, whether clothing, or food, or drink, let it be at the command of the senior, and at his disposal, for it is not befitting a religious to have any distinction of property with his own free brother.

Let a fast place, with one door, enclose thee.

A few religious men to converse with thee of God and His Testament; to visit thee on days of solemnity; to strengthen thee in the Testaments of God and the narratives of the Scriptures.

A person too who would talk with thee in idle words, or of the world; or who murmurs at what he cannot remedy or prevent, but who would distress thee more, should be a tattler between friends and foes, thou shalt

*The Rule was first printed by Dr. Reeves from a MS. in the Burgundian Library at Brussels, with a translation by the late Professor O'Curry, in the Appendix to Primate Colton's *Visitation of Derry*, printed for the Irish Archaeological Society. It was again printed in *Hadden and Stubb's Councils*, vol. ii. p. 119, from which it is now copied.

not admit him to thee, but at once give him thy benediction should he deserve it.

Let thy servant be a discreet, religious, not tale-telling man, who is to attend continually on thee, with moderate labour of course, but always ready.

Yield submission to every rule that is of devotion.

A mind prepared for red martyrdom.

A mind fortified and steadfast for white martyrdom.

Forgiveness from the heart to every one.

Constant prayers for those who trouble thee.

Fervour in singing the office for the dead, as if every faithful dead was a particular friend of thine.

Hymns for souls to be sung standing.

Let thy vigils be constant from eve to eve, under the direction of another person.

Three labours in the day, viz., prayers, work, and reading.

The work to be divided into three parts, viz., thine own work, and the work of thy place, as regards its real wants; secondly, thy share of the brethren's work; lastly, to help the neighbours, viz., by instruction, or writing, or sewing garments, or whatever labour they may be in want of, *ut Dominus ait*, "*Non apparebis ante me vacuus.*"

Everything in its proper order; *Nemo enim coronabitur nisi qui legitime certaverit.*

Following almsgiving before all things.

Take not of food till thou art hungry.

Sleep not till thou feelest desire.

Speak not except on business.

Every increase which comes to thee in lawful meals, or in wearing apparel, give it for pity to the brethren that want it, or to the poor in like manner.

The love of God with all thy heart and all thy strength.

The love of thy neighbour as thyself.

Abide in the Testaments of God throughout all times.

Thy measure of prayer shall be until thy tears come ;

Or thy measure of work of labour till thy tears come ;

Or thy measure of thy work of labour or of thy genuflexions until thy perspiration often comes, if thy tears are not free.

Chronological Table.

A.D.

- 520 Birth of St. Columba.
- 544 Plague breaks out at Glasnevin. Columba returns to the north.
- 545 Death of Mobhi Claraineach, abbot of Glasnevin.
- 546 Columba founds the church of Derry.
- 549 Death of St. Finian of Clonard.
- 553 Columba founds the monastery of Durrow.
- 561 Columba implicated in the battle of Cooldrevny.
- 562 Convention of Teltown. The saint is censured.
- 563 Departs for Scotland. Commences his labours in the island of Hy. Battle of Mona-daïre-Lothair, or Ondemone, between the Picts and Hy-Neill of the north.
- 565 Death of Diarmait, son of Cerbhall, king of Ireland, having been slain at Rathbeg by Aedh, son of Snibhne. Comgall founds a church in Terra Heth (Tiree).
- 573 Death of Brendan of Birr, and festival instituted at Hy by Columba in commemoration of his day.
- 574 Death of Conall, lord of Dalriada. Coronation of Aidan as king.
- 575 Convention of Drumceatt. Independence of British Dalriada declared.
- 577 Death of Brendan of Clonfert.

A.D.

- 578 Death of Bishop Eichen of Clonfad.
579 Death of St. Finian of Moville.
580 Expedition against the Orkneys by Aidan, son of Gabhran. Death of Galam Cennaleph, king of the Picts.
582 Battle of Manonn, or Slamannan, in which Aidan, son of Gabhran, was victorious.
584 Death of Brude, son of Malcolm, king of the Picts.
585 Columba visits Durrow, Clonmacnoise, and other monasteries in Ireland.
586. Death of Baedan, son of Ninnedha, king of Ireland.
587 Battle of Cuilfedha, near Clonard, in which Aedh, son of Ainnine, was victorious.
588 Conversion of Constantine, founder of the church of Govan, on the Clyde.
589 Death of Aedh, son of Brendan, king of Teffa, who bestowed Durrow on Columba.
592 Death of Molna, or Molnag, founder of Lismore, in Scotland, and patron saint of the diocese of Argyll.
593 St. Columba becomes sick.
597 Death of St. Columba on the 9th of June.
624 Birth of Adamnan.
675 Finnachta Fledach succeeds as monarch of Ireland.
679 Adamnan elected to the abbacy of Iona.
685 The defeat and death of King Egfrid at the battle of Dunnichen.
686 Mission of Adamnan to King Alfrid in Northumbria, to ask release of the Irish captives, who had been carried off by the north Saxons.
687 Adamnan conducts sixty captives to Ireland.
688 Second Mission of Adamnan to King Alfrid.

K

A.D.

- 692 Adamnan again visits Ireland.
- 697 Accompanied by Brude, son of Derile, king of the Picts, Adamnan attends the Synod of Tara for the purpose of obtaining the sanction of the Irish people to a law exempting women from attending expeditions and hostings.
- 703 Adamnan celebrates the canonical Easter in Ireland.
- 704 Death of Alfrid, son of Ousin, king of Northumbria.
Death of Adamnan on the 23rd of September.

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