

Columba, an emigrant

Saint Columba : apostle of Caledonia

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ST COLUMBA, the apostle and monastic hero of Caledonia, has had the good fortune to have his history written by another monk, almost a contemporary of his own, whose biography of him is as delightful as it is edifying. This biographer, Adamnan, was the ninth successor of Columba as abbot of his principal establishment at Iona, and in addition was related to him. Born only a quarter of a century later, he had seen in his childhood the actual companions of Columba and those who had received his last breath. He wrote at the very fountain head, on the spot where his glorious predecessor had dictated his last words, surrounded by scenes and recollections which still bore the trace of his presence, or were connected with the incidents of his life. A still earlier narrative written by another abbot of Iona, and reproduced almost word for word by Adamnan, forms the basis of his work, which he has completed by a multitude of anecdotes and testimonies collected with scrupulous care, and which altogether, though unfortunately without chronological order, forms one of the most, living, attractive, and authentic relics of Christian history. [1]

Like twenty other saints of the Irish calendar, Columba bore a symbolical name borrowed from the Latin, a name which signified the dove of the Holy Ghost, and which was soon to be rendered illustrious by his countryman Columbanus, the celebrated founder of Luxeuil, with whom many modern historians have confounded him. To distinguish the one from the other, and to indicate specially the greatest Celtic missionary of the British Isles, we shall adopt, from the different versions of his name, that of Columba. His countrymen have almost always named him *Columb-kill* or *cille*, that is to say, the *dove of the cell*, thus adding to his primitive name a special designation, intended to recall either the essentially monastic character of the saint, or the great number of communities founded and governed by him. He was a scion of one of those great Irish races, of whom it is literally true to say that they lose themselves in the night of ages, but which have retained to our own day, thanks to the tenacious attachment of the Irish people to their national recollections, through all the vicissitudes of conquest, persecution, and exile, a rank more patriotic and popular than that of mere nobility or aristocratic lineage. This was the great race of the Nialls or O'Donnells (*clan Domhnaill*), which, native to and master of all the north-western part of the island (the modern counties of Tyrconnell, Tyrone, and Donegal), held sovereign sway in Hibernia and Caledonia, over the two shores of the Scottish sea, during the sixth century. Almost without interruption, up to 1168, kings, springing from its different branches, exercised in Ireland the supreme monarchy that is to say, a sort of primacy over the provincial kings, which has been compared to that of metropolitan over bishops, but which rather recalls the feudal sovereignty of the Salic emperors, or of the kings of the family of Capet over the great vassals of Germany and France, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Nothing could be more unsettled or stormy than the exercise of this sovereignty. It was incessantly disputed by some vassal king, who generally succeeded by force of arms in robbing the supreme monarch of his crown and his life, and replacing him upon the throne of Tara, with a tolerable certainty of being himself similarly treated by the son of the dethroned prince. Besides, the right of succession in Ireland was not regulated by the law of primogeniture. According to the custom known under the name of *Tanistry*, the eldest blood-relation succeeded every deceased prince or chief, and the brother in consequence preceded the son in the order of succession.

After the English conquest, the warlike and powerful race of Nialls was able to maintain, by dint of dauntless perseverance, a sort of independent sovereignty in the north-west of Ireland. The names of the O'Neills and O'Donnells, chiefs of its two principal branches, and too often at war with each other, are to be found on every page of the annals of unhappy Ireland. After the Reformation, when religious persecution had come in to aggravate all the evils of the conquest, these two houses supplied their indignant and unsubdued country with a succession of heroic soldiers who struggled to the death against the perfidious and sanguinary despotism of the Tudors and Stuarts. Ten centuries passed in such desperate struggles have not weakened the traditions which link the saint whose history we are about to tell to those champions of an ancient faith and an outraged country. Even under the reign of Elizabeth, the vassals of young Hugh O'Donnell, called Red Hugh, so renowned in the poetical records and popular traditions of Erin, and the most dangerous antagonist of English tyranny, recognised in him the hero indicated in the prophetic songs of Columbkille, and thus placed his glory and that of his ancestors under the wing of the *Dove of the cells*, as under a patronage at once domestic and celestial.

The father of Columba was descended from one of the eight sons of the great king Niall, of the Nine Hostages, who was supreme monarch of all Ireland from 379 to 405, at the period when Patrick was brought to the island as a slave. Consequently he sprang from a race which had reigned in Ireland for six centuries; and in virtue of the ordinary law of succession, might himself have been called to the throne. His mother belonged to a reigning family in Leinster, one of the four subordinate kingdoms of the island. He was born at Gartan, in one of the wildest districts of the present county of Donegal—where the slab of stone upon which his mother lay at the moment of his birth is still shown. He who passes a night upon that stone is cured for ever from the pangs of nostalgia, and will never be consumed, while absent or an exile, by a too passionate love for his country. Such at least is the belief of the poor Irish emigrants, who flock thither at the moment when they are about to abandon the confiscated and ravaged soil of their country to seek their living in America, moved by a touching recollection of the great missionary who gave up his native land for the love of God and human souls.

Before his birth, his mother had a dream, which posterity has accepted as a graceful and poetical symbol of her son's career. An angel appeared to her, bringing her a veil covered with flowers of wonderful beauty, and the sweetest variety of colours; immediately after she saw the veil carried away by the wind, and rolling out as it fled over plains, woods, and mountains: then the angel said to her, "Thou art about to become the mother of a son, who shall blossom for heaven, who shall be reckoned among the prophets of God, and who shall lead numberless souls to the heavenly country." This spiritual power, this privilege of leading souls to heaven, was recognised by the Irish people, converted by St Patrick, as the greatest glory which its princes and great men could gain.

The Irish legends, which are always distinguished, even amidst the wildest vagaries of fancy, by a high and pure morality, linger lovingly upon the childhood and youth of the predestined saint. They tell us how, confided in the first place to the care of the priest who had baptised him, and who gave him the first rudiments of literary education, he was accustomed from his earliest years to the heavenly visions which were to occupy so large a place in his life. His guardian angel often appeared to him; and the child asked if all the angels in heaven were as young and shining as he. A little later Columba was invited by the same angel to choose among all the virtues those which he would like best to possess. "I choose," said the youth, "chastity and wisdom;" and immediately three young girls of wonderful beauty, but foreign air, appeared to him, and threw themselves on his neck to embrace him. The pious youth frowned, and repulsed them with indignation. "What!" they said; "then thou dost not

know us ?” “ No, not the least in the world.” “ We are three sisters whom our father gives to thee to be thy brides.” “ Who, then, is your father ?” “ Our father is God, he is Jesus Christ, the Lord and Saviour of the world.” “ Ah, you have, indeed, an illustrious father. But what are your names ?” “ Our names are Virginity, Wisdom, and Prophecy ; and we come to leave thee no more, to love thee with an incorruptible love.”

From the house of the priest, Columba passed into the great monastic schools, which were not only a nursery for the clergy of the Irish Church, but where also young laymen of all conditions were educated. Columba, like many others, there learned to make his first steps in that monastic life to which he had been drawn by the call of God. He devoted himself not only to study and prayer, but also to the manual toil then inseparable, in Ireland and everywhere else, from a religious profession. Like all his young companions, he had to grind overnight the corn for the next day’s food : but when his turn came, it was so well and quickly done that his companions suspected him of having been assisted by an angel. The royal birth of Columba procured him several distinctions in the schools which were not always to the satisfaction of his comrades. One of the latter, named Kieran, who was also destined to fill a great place in Scotie legend, became indignant at the ascendancy of Columba ; but while the two students disputed, a celestial messenger came to Kieran and placed before him an auger, a plane, and an axe, saying, “ Look at these tools, and recollect that these are all thou hast sacrificed for God, since thy father was only a carpenter ; but Columba has sacrificed the sceptre of Ireland, which might have come to him by right of his birth and the grandeur of his race.”

We learn from authentic documents that Columba completed his monastic life under the direction of two holy abbots, both bearing the name of Finnian. The first, who was also a bishop, ordained him deacon, but seems to have had him for a shorter time under his authority than the second Finnian, who, himself trained by a disciple of St Patrick, had long lived in Cambria, near St David. Columbia’s first steps in life are thus connected with the two great monastic apostles of Ireland and Cambria, the patriarchs of the two Celtic races which up to this time had shown the most entire fidelity to the Christian faith, and the greatest predilection for monastic life. The Abbot Finnian, who ordained Columba priest, ruled at Clonard the monastery which he had founded, and of which we have already spoken one of those immense conventual establishments which were to be found nowhere but among the Celts, and which recalled to recollection the monastic towns of the Thebaïd. He had made of his monastery one great school, which was filled with the Irish youth, then, as always, consumed by a thirst for religious instruction ; and we again find here the favourite number, so often repeated by Celtic tradition, of three thousand pupils, all eager to receive the instructions of him who was called the Master of Saints.

While Columba studied at Clonard, being still only a deacon, an incident took place which has been proved by authentic testimony, and which fixed the general attention upon him by giving a first evidence of his supernatural and prophetic intuition. An old Christian bard (the bards were not all Christians), named Gemmaïn, had come to live near the Abbot Finnian, asking from him, in exchange for his poetry, the secret of fertilising the soil. Columba, who continued all his life a passionate admirer of the traditionary poetry of his nation, determined to join the school of the bard, and to share his labours and studies. The two were reading together out of doors, at a little distance from each other, when a young girl appeared in the distance pursued by a robber. At the sight of the old man the young fugitive made for him with all her remaining strength, hoping, no doubt, to find safety in the authority exercised throughout Ireland by the national poets. Gemmaïn, in great trouble, called his pupil to his aid to defend the unfortunate child, who was trying to hide herself under their long robes when her pursuer reached the spot. Without taking any notice of her defenders, he struck her in the neck with his lance, and was making off, leaving her dead at their feet.

The horrified old man turned to Columba. “How long,” he said, “will God leave unpunished this crime which dishonours us?” “For this moment only,” said Columba, “not longer: at this very hour, when the soul of this innocent creature ascends to heaven, the soul of the murderer shall go down to hell.” At the instant, like Ananias at the words of Peter, the assassin fell dead. The news of this sudden punishment, the story goes, went over all Ireland, and spread the fame of the young Columba far and wide.

It is easy to perceive, by the importance of the monastic establishments which he had brought into being even before he had attained the age of manhood, that his influence must have been as precocious as it was considerable. Apart from the virtues of which his after life afforded so many examples, it may be supposed that his royal birth gave him an irresistible ascendancy in a country where, since the introduction of Christianity, all the early saints, like the principal abbots, belonged to reigning families, and where the influence of blood and the worship of genealogy continue, even to this day, to a degree unknown in other lands. Springing, as has been said, from the same race as the monarch of all Ireland, and consequently himself eligible for the same high office, which was more frequently obtained by election or usurpation than inheritance nephew or near cousin of the seven monarchs who successively wielded the supreme authority during his life he was also related by ties of blood to almost all the provincial kings. Thus we see him, during his whole career, treated on a footing of perfect intimacy and equality by all the princes of Ireland and of Caledonia, and exercising a sort of spiritual sway equal or superior to the authority of secular sovereigns.

Before he had reached the age of twenty-five he had presided over the creation of a crowd of monasteries. As many as thirty-seven in Ireland alone recognised him as their founder. The most ancient and important of these foundations were situated, as was formerly that of St Bridget at Kildare, in vast oak-forests, from which they took their name. The first Durrow (*Dair-mach Roboreti campus*), where a cross and well bearing the name of Columba are still to be seen, was erected in the central region called the *umbilical*, or sacred middle of Ireland. The other, Derry (*Doire-chalgaich Roboretum Calgachi*), is situated in the northern part of the island, in Columba’s native province, in the hollow of a bay of that sea which separates Ireland from Scotland. After having long been the seat of a great and rich Catholic bishopric, it became, under its modern name of Londonderry, one of the principal centres of English colonisation, and was, in 1690, the bulwark of the Protestant conquest against the powerless efforts of the last of the Stuart kings. But nothing then indicated the possibility of those lamentable changes, nor of the miserable triumphs of inhuman force and wicked persecution.

The young Columba was specially attached to Derry, where he habitually lived. He superintended with care not only the discipline and studies of his community, but external matters, even so far as to watch over the preservation of the neighbouring forest. He would never permit an oak to be cut down. Those which fell by natural decay, or were struck down by the wind, were alone made use of for the fire which was lighted on the arrival of strangers, or distributed to the neighbouring poor. The poor had a first right, in Ireland, as everywhere else, to the goods of the monks; and the Monastery of Derry fed a hundred applicants every day with methodical regularity.

At a more advanced age our saint gave vent to his tenderness for his monastic creations in songs, an echo of which has come down to us. The text of these songs, such as has been preserved, is probably later than Columba; but it is written in the oldest Irish dialect, and it expresses, naturally enough, the sentiments of the founder and his disciples:—

“Were all the tribute of Scotia [2] mine,
From its midland to its borders,

I would give all for one little cell
In my beautiful Derry.
For its peace and for its purity,
For the white angels that go
In crowds from one end to the other,
I love my beautiful Derry.
For its quietness and its purity,
For heaven's angels that come and go
Under every leaf of the oaks,
I love my beautiful Derry.

My Derry, my fair oak grove,
My dear little cell and dwelling,
O God in the heavens above !
Let him who profanes it be cursed.
Beloved are Durrow and Derry,
Beloved is Raphoe the pure,
Beloved the fertile Drumhome,
Beloved are Sords and Kells !
But sweeter and fairer to me
The salt sea where the sea-gulls cry ;
When I come to Derry from far,
It is sweeter and dearer to me—
Sweeter to me.”

Nor was it only his own foundations which he thus celebrated : another poem has been preserved which is attributed to him, and which is dedicated to the glory of the monastic isle of Arran, situated upon the western coast of Ireland, where he had gone to venerate the inhabitants and the sanctuaries :—

“ O Arran, my sun ; my heart is in the west with thee. To sleep on thy pure soil is as good as to be buried in the land of St Peter and St Paul. To live within the sound of thy bells is to live in joy. O Arran, my sun, my love is in the west with thee.”

These poetic effusions reveal Columba to us under one of his most attractive aspects, as one of the minstrels of the national poetry of Ireland, the intimate union of which with the Catholic faith, and its unconquerable empire over the souls of that generous people, can scarcely be exaggerated. Columba was not only himself a poet, but lived always in great and affectionate sympathy with the bards who, at that time, occupied so high a place in the social and political institutions of Ireland, and who were to be met with everywhere, in the palaces and monasteries, as on the public roads. What he did for this powerful corporation, and how, after having been their brother and friend, he became their protector and saviour, will be seen further on. Let us merely state at present that, himself a great traveller, he received the travelling bards in the different communities where he lived ; among others, in that which he had built upon an islet of the lake which the Boyle traverses before it throws itself into the Shannon. He confided to them the care of arranging the monastic and provincial annals, which were to be afterwards deposited in the charter-chest of the community ; but, above all, he made them sing for his own pleasure and that of his monks ; and the latter reproached him energetically if he permitted one of those wandering poets to depart without having asked to hear some of his chants, accompanied by his harp.

The monk Columba was, then, a poet. After Ossian and his glorious compeer of the Vosges, he opens the series of two hundred Irish poets, whose memories and names, in default of their works, have remained dear to Ireland. He wrote his verses not only in Latin, but also and more frequently in Irish. Only three of his Latin poems survive ; but two centuries ago eleven of his Irish poems were still in existence, which have not all perished, and the most authentic of which is dedicated to the glory of St Bridget, the virgin slave, patroness of Ireland and foundress of female religious life in the Isle of Saints. She was still living when Columba was born. Through the obscure and halting efforts of this infantine poetry, some tones of sincere and original feeling may yet be disentangled :—

“ Bridget, the good and the virgin,
Bridget, our torch and our sun,
Bridget, radiant and unseen,
May she lead us to the eternal kingdom !
May Bridget defend us
Against all the troops of hell,
And all the adversities of life ;
May she beat them down before us.
All the ill movements of the flesh,
This pure virgin whom we love,
Worthy of honour without end,
May she extinguish in us.
Yes, she shall always be our safeguard,
Dear saint of Lagenia ;
After Patrick she comes the first,
The pillar of the land,
Glorious among all glories,
Queen among all queens.
When old age comes upon us,
May she be to us as the shirt of hair,
May she fill us with her grace,
May Bridget protect us.”

It seems thus apparent that Columba was as much a bard as a monk during the first part of his life ; he had the vagabond inclination, the ardent, agitated, even quarrelsome character of the race. Like most Irish saints and even monks whom history has kept in mind, he had a passionate love for travelling ; and to that passion he added an other which brought him more than one misadventure. Books, which were less rare in Ireland than everywhere else, were nevertheless much sought after, and guarded with jealous care in the monastic libraries, which were their sole depositories. Not only an excessive value was put upon them, but they were even supposed to possess the emotions and almost the passions of living beings. Columba had a passion for fine manuscripts, and one of his biographers attributes to him the laborious feat of having transcribed with his own hand three hundred copies of the Gospel or of the Psalter. He went everywhere in search of volumes which he could borrow or copy, often experiencing refusals which he resented bitterly. There was then in Ossory, in the south-west, a holy recluse, very learned, doctor in laws and in philosophy, named Longarad *with the white legs*, because in walking barefoot his legs, which were covered with white hair, were visible. Columba, having gone to visit him, asked leave to examine his books. The old man gave a direct refusal ; then Columba burst forth in denunciations—“ May thy books no longer do thee any good, neither to thee nor to those who come after thee, since thou takest occasion by them to show thy inhospitality.” This curse was heard, according to the legend. As soon as old Longarad died his books became unintelligible. They still exist, says an author

of the ninth century, but no man can read them. The legend adds that in all the schools of Ireland, and even in Columba's own cell, the leathern satchels in which the monks and students carried their books, unhooked them selves from the wall and fell to the ground on the day of the old philosopher's death.

A similar narrative, more authentic but not less singular, serves as an introduction to the decisive event which changed the destiny of Columba, and transformed him from a wandering poet and ardent bookworm into a missionary and apostle. While visiting his ancient master, Finnian, our saint found means to make a clandestine and hurried copy of the abbot's Psalter, by shutting himself up at night in the church where the Psalter was deposited, lighting his nocturnal work, as happened to I know not what Spanish saint, by the light which escaped from his left hand while he wrote with the right. The Abbot Finnian discovered what was going on by means of a curious wanderer, who, attracted by that singular light, looked in through the keyhole, and while his face was pressed against the door had his eye suddenly torn out by a crane, one of those familiar birds who were permitted by the Irish monks to seek a home in their churches. Indignant at what he thought a theft, Finnian claimed the copy when it was finished, on the ground that a copy made without permission ought to belong to the master of the original, seeing that the transcription is the son of the original book. Columba refused to give up his work, and the question was referred to the king in his palace at Tara.

King Diarmid or Dermott, supreme monarch of Ireland, was, like Columba, descended from the great King Niall, but by another son than he whose great-grandson Columba was. He lived, like all the princes of his country, in a close union with the Church, which was represented in Ireland, more completely than anywhere else, by the monastic order. Exiled and persecuted in his youth, he had found refuge in an island, situated in one of those lakes which interrupt the course of the Shannon, the chief river of Ireland, and had there formed a friendship with a holy monk called Kieran, who was no other than the son of the carpenter, the jealous comrade of Columba at the monastic school of Clonard, but since that time his generous rival in knowledge and in austerity. Upon the still solitary bank of the river the two friends had planned the foundation of a monastery, which, owing to the marshy nature of the soil, had to be built upon piles. "Plant with me the first stake," the monk said to the exiled prince, "putting your hand under mine; and soon that hand shall be over all the men of Erin;" and it happened that Diarmid was very shortly after called to the throne. He immediately used his new power to endow richly the monastery which was rendered doubly dear to him by the recollection of his exile and of his friend. This sanctuary became, under the name of Clonmacnoise, one of the greatest monasteries and most frequented schools of Ireland, and even of Western Europe. It was so rich in possessions and even in dependent communities, daughters or vassals of its hierarchical authority, that, according to a popular saying, half of Ireland was contained within the enclosure of Clonmacnoise. This enclosure actually contained nine churches, with two round towers; the kings and lords of the two banks of the Shannon had their burying-place there for a thousand years, upon a green height which overlooks the marshy banks of the river. The sadly picturesque ruins may still be seen, and among them a stone cross, over which the prince and the abbot, holding between them the stake consecrated by the legend, are roughly sculptured.

This king might accordingly be regarded as a competent judge in a contest at once monastic and literary; he might even have been suspected of partiality for Columba, his kinsman and yet he pronounced against him. His judgment was given in a rustic phrase which has passed into a proverb in Ireland—*To every cow her calf*, and, consequently, to every book its copy. Columba protested loudly. "It is an unjust sentence," he said, "and I will revenge

myself." After this incident a young prince, son of the provincial king of Connaught, who was pursued for having committed an involuntary murder, took refuge with Columba, but was seized and put to death by the king. The irritation of the poet-monk knew no bounds. The ecclesiastical immunity which he enjoyed in his quality of superior and founder of several monasteries ought to have, in his opinion, created a sort of sanctuary around his person, and this immunity had been scandalously violated by the execution of the youth whom he protected. He threatened the king with prompt vengeance. "I will denounce," he said, "to my brethren and my kindred thy wicked judgment, and the violation in my person of the immunity of the Church ; they will listen to my complaint, and punish thee sword in hand. Bad king, thou shalt no more see my face in thy province until God, the just Judge, has subdued thy pride. As thou hast humbled me to-day before thy lords and thy friends, God will humble thee on the battle day before thine enemies." Diarmid attempted to retain him by force in the neighbourhood ; but, evading the vigilance of his guards, he escaped by night from the court of Tara, and directed his steps to his native province of Tyrconnell. His first stage was Monasterboyce, where he heard from the monks that the king had planted guards on all the ordinary roads to intercept him. He then continued his course by a solitary path way over the desert hills which lay between him and the north of Ireland ; and as he went upon his lonely way, his soul found utterance in a pious song. He fled, chanting the Song of Trust, which has been preserved to us, and which may be reckoned among the most authentic relics of the ancient Irish tongue. We quote from it the following verses :—

“ Alone am I on the mountain,
O royal Sun ; prosper my path,
And then I shall have nothing to fear.
Were I guarded by six thousand,
Though they might defend my skin,
When the hour of death is fixed,
Were I guarded by six thousand,
In no fortress could I be safe.
Even in a church the wicked are slain,
Even in a isle amidst a lake ;
But God’s elect are safe
Even in the front of battle.
No man can kill me before my day,
Even had we closed in combat ;
And no man can save my life
When the hour of death has come.
My life !
As God pleases let it be ;
Nought can be taken from it,
Nought can be added to it :
The lot which God has given
Ere a man dies must be lived out.
He who seeks more, were he a prince,
Shall not a mite obtain.
A guard !
A guard may guide him on his way ;
But can they, can they, guard
Against the touch of death ? . . .
Forget thy poverty a while ;
Let us think of the world’s hospitality.

The Son of Mary will prosper thee,
 And every guest shall have his share.
 Many a time
 What is spent returns to the bounteous hand,
 And that which is kept back
 Not the less has passed away.
 O living God !
 Alas for him who evil works !
 That which he thinks not of comes to him,
 That which he hopes vanishes out of his hand.
 There is no *Sreod* [3] that can tell our fate,
 Nor bird upon the branch,
 Nor trunk of gnarled oak. . . .
 Better is He in whom we trust,
 The King who has made us all,
 Who will not leave me to-night without refuge.
 I adore not the voice of birds,
 Nor chance, nor the love of a son or a wife.
 My Druid is Christ, the Son of God,
 The Son of Mary, the great Abbot,
 The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.
 My lands are with the King of kings ;
 My order at Kells and at Moone.”

“ Thus sang Columba,” says the preface to this ‘Song of Trust,’ “ on his lonely journey ; and this song will protect him who repeats it while he travels.”

Columba arrived safely in his province, and immediately set to work to excite against King Diarmid the numerous and powerful clans of his relatives and friends, who belonged to a branch of the house of Niall distinct from and hostile to that of the reigning monarch. His efforts were crowned with success. The Hy-Nialls of the North armed eagerly against the Hy-Nialls of the South, of whom Diarmid was the special chief. They naturally obtained the aid of the king of Connaught, father of the young prince who had been executed. According to other narratives, the struggle was one between the Nialls of the North and the Picts established in the centre of Ireland. But in any case, it was the north and west of Ireland which took arms against the supreme king. Diarmid marched to meet them, and they met in battle at Cool-Drewny, or Cul-Dreimhne, upon the borders of Ultonia and Connacia. He was completely beaten, and obliged to take refuge at Tara. The victory was due, according to the annalist Tighernach, to the prayers and songs of Columba, who had fasted and prayed with all his might to obtain from Heaven the punishment of the royal insolence, and who, besides, was present at the battle, and took upon himself before all men the responsibility of the bloodshed.

As for the manuscript which had been the object of this strange conflict of copyright elevated into a civil war, it was afterwards venerated as a kind of national, military, and religious palladium. Under the name of *Cathac*, or *Fighter*, the Latin Psalter transcribed by Columba, enshrined in a sort of portable altar, became the national relic of the O’Donnell clan. For more than a thousand years it was carried with them to battle as a pledge of victory, on the condition of being supported upon the breast of a clerk pure from all mortal sin. It has escaped as by miracle from the ravages of which Ireland has been the victim, and exists still, to the great joy of all learned Irish patriots.

Columba, though victor, had soon to undergo the double reaction of personal remorse and the condemnation of many pious souls. The latter punishment was the first to be felt. He was accused, by a synod convoked in the centre of the royal domain at Teilte, of having occasioned the shedding of Christian blood, and sentence of excommunication was in his absence pronounced against him. Perhaps this accusation was not entirely confined to the war which had been raised on account of the copied Psalter. His excitable and vindictive character, and, above all, his passionate attachment to his relatives, and the violent part which he took in their domestic disputes and in their continually recurring rivalries, had engaged him in other struggles, the date of which is perhaps later than that of his first departure from Ireland, but the responsibility of which is formally imputed to him by various authorities, and which also ended in bloody battles.

Columba was not a man to draw back before his accusers and judges. He presented himself before the synod which had struck without hearing him. He found a defender there in the famous Abbot Brendan, the founder of the Monastery of Birr. When Columba made his appearance, this abbot rose, went up to him, and embraced him. "How can you give the kiss of peace to an excommunicated man?" said some of the other members of the synod. "You would do as I have done," he answered, "and you never would have excommunicated him, had you seen what I see a pillar of fire which goes before him, and the angels that accompany him. I dare not disdain a man predestined by God to be the guide of an entire people to eternal life." Thanks to the intervention of Brendan, or to some other motive not mentioned, the sentence of excommunication was withdrawn; but Columba was charged to win to Christ by his preaching as many pagan souls as the number of Christians who had fallen in the battle of Cool-Drewny.

It was then that his soul seems first to have been troubled, and that remorse planted in it the germs at once of a startling conversion and of his future apostolic mission. Sheltered as he was from all vengeance or secular penalties, he must have felt himself struck so much the more by the ecclesiastical judgment pronounced against him. Various legends reveal him to us at this crisis of his life, wandering long from solitude to solitude, and from monastery to monastery, seeking out holy monks, masters of penitence and Christian virtue, and asking them anxiously what he should do to obtain the pardon of God for the murder of so many victims. One of these, Froëch, who had long been his friend, reproached him with affectionate severity for having been the instigator of that murderous fight "It was not I who caused it," said Columba with animation; "it was the unjust judgment of King Diarmid—it was his violation of ecclesiastical immunity which did it all." "A monk," answered the solitary, "would have done better to bear the injury with patience than to avenge it with arms in his hands." "Be it so," said Columba; "but it is hard for a man unjustly provoked to restrain his heart and to sacrifice justice."

He was more humble with Abban, another famous monk of the time, founder of many religious houses, one of which was called the *Cell of Tears*, because the special grace of weeping for sin was obtained there. This gentle and courageous soldier of Christ was specially distinguished by his zeal against the fighting men and disturbers of the public peace. He had been seen to throw himself between two chiefs at the moment when their lances were crossed at each other's breasts; and on another occasion had gone alone and unarmed to meet one of the most formidable rieviers of the island, who was still a pagan and a member of a sovereign family, had made his arms drop from his hands, and had changed first into a Christian and then into a monk the royal robber, whose great-grandson has recorded this incident. When Columba went to Abban, he said, "I come to beseech thee to pray for the souls of all those who have perished in the late war, which I raised for the honour of the Church. I know they will obtain grace by thy intercession, and I conjure thee to ask

what is the will of God in respect to them from the angel who talks with thee every day.” The aged solitary, without reproaching Columba, resisted his entreaties for some time, by reason of his great modesty, but ended by consenting ; and after having prayed, gave him the assurance that these souls enjoyed eternal repose.

Columba, thus reassured as to the fate of the victims of his rage, had still to be enlightened in respect to his own duty. He found the light which he sought from a holy monk called Molaise, famed for his studies of Holy Scripture, who had already been his confessor, and whose ruined monastery is still visible in Innishmurry, on the coast of Sligo, one of the isles of the Atlantic. This severe hermit confirmed the decision of the synod ; but to the obligation of converting to the Christian faith an equal number of pagans as there were of Christians killed in the civil war he added a new condition, which bore cruelly upon a soul so passionately attached to country and kindred. The confessor condemned his penitent to perpetual exile from Ireland. Columba bowed to this sentence with sad resignation “ What you have commanded,” he said, “ shall be done.”

[1] Adamnan, who was born in 624, must have written the biography of St Columba between 690 and 703, a period at which he gave up the liturgical traditions of the Scots and the direction of the Monastery of Iona to settle near the Anglo-Saxon king of Northumbria, Aldfrid.

[2] Let us repeat here that the names of *Scotia*, *Scotti*, when they occur in works of the seventh to the twelfth century, are almost exclusively applied to Ireland and the Irish, and were extended later to Scotland proper, the north and west of which were peopled by a colony of Irish Scots, only at a later period. From thence comes the name of *Erse*, *Erysche*, or Irish, retained up to our own day, by the Irish dialect, Otherwise called Gaelic. In Adamnan, as in Bede, *Scotia* means Ireland, and modern Scotland is comprehended in the general title of *Britannia*. At a later period the name of *Scotia* disappeared in Ireland, and became identified with the country conquered and colonised by the Scots in Scotland, like that of *Anglia* in Britain, and *Francia* in Gaul.

[3] An unknown Druidical term, probably meaning some pagan superstition of the same description as the flight of birds and the knots in the trees, mentioned immediately after.

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