

## LECTURE II.

THE time and mode of the introduction of Christianity to Britain are shrouded in obscurity. The first distinct statement about the existence of British Christians is Tertullian's often-quoted mention of places in this island "unreached by the Romans, and yet subdued by Christ," in proof of the wide extension of the Church in his day.<sup>1</sup> The statement is quite consonant with the reasonable probabilities of the case. When Tertullian wrote, the Romans had subdued and occupied Southern Britain for more than a hundred years; and some eager herald of the Cross may have ventured to proclaim the name of Christ in the wilder regions to which the imperial forces had not penetrated. In his Epistle to the Philippians S. Paul speaks of his converts among the prætorian guard and

<sup>1</sup> Tertullian, *Adversus Judæos*, chap. vii. Tertullian wrote in the latter half of the second or beginning of the third century.

the emperor's household;<sup>1</sup> and it is no extravagant supposition that there were in the army Christian soldiers, through whom some knowledge of the faith might reach friendly natives, and be carried by them to their homes. Roman commerce, also, may have helped the work of evangelisation. A large and active trade in cattle, grain, and metals, followed the Roman occupation, and might bring Christian dealers and merchants to the British shores. A Church of Roman settlers and native converts was formed; and its protomartyr, Alban, suffered in the Diocletian persecution, in the year 286. The tale of his martyrdom is told by Bede<sup>2</sup> with a particularity which suggests carefully preserved local tradition. (And local tradition among a people who have no literature is generally to be trusted. With the spread of education and access of books, the value of the local memory as a receptacle and channel of folk-lore and historical tradition is seriously impaired.) To what extent the new religion introduced into Southern Britain influenced the northern part of the island it is hard to determine. Rome cannot be said to have taken any firm hold of the territory on this side of the Solway until Agricola's invasion in 79 A.D. It

<sup>1</sup> Phil. i. 13 and iv. 22, R.V.

<sup>2</sup> Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, book i. chap. vii.

was he who erected the line of fortified posts, the traces of which, and of the connecting rampart of stone and sod raised forty years later, can still be marked between the Forth and Clyde. The barbarians who lived in the fastnesses to the north of this bulwark were so formidable that in 120 A.D. Hadrian reared another barrier against them, by building his great wall from the Solway to the Tyne. The province lying between these two lines of defence was, though still liable to incursions from its northern neighbours, amenable to the Roman rule and protected by the Roman garrisons. About the year 360, when it had been under the imperial administration for more than 200 years, this region was fiercely invaded by the Scots of Erin. Theodosius, the father of the great emperor, expelled the invaders, cleared and settled the province, and, in honour of his master Valentinian, named it Valentia.

It is in Valentia that we discover the first authentic proofs of a native Christianity. One, at least, of the princes or chiefs living there when the country was overrun by the Scots was a Christian; and if the chief was such, his serfs or clansmen were no doubt Christians also. This chief had a son born about the year 360, whose name was Nynias or Ninian. He was baptised, and brought up as a Christian; but as years advanced, either feeling

that he did not see the religion of Christ at its best in Valentia, or knowing that it had reached Britain through Roman agency, he resolved to visit the great city, whose ancient glory was still the pride of the world's dominant empire, and which was the seat of a bishop, of whom the Latin Christians spoke with unwonted reverence. To Rome Ninian accordingly repaired — travelling, no doubt, through Britain and Gaul, and thence by the great Aurelian road, till he reached the Eternal City.

The reluctance shown by some historians to acknowledge his connection with Rome, and the undoubted fact of the Roman commission granted to such a man as Ninian, is somewhat unreasonable. In those days few of the grosser corruptions and errors of the Church of Rome had developed themselves; nor had its claim of universal jurisdiction over the whole Church been seriously advanced. And nothing could be more natural than the interest exhibited by the great Bishop of Rome in the Church of the Roman colonists and military stations in Britain, and in the missionary efforts made by the Romanised and Christianised Britons (of whom Ninian was a type) to evangelise the heathen who lay around the borders of what still were, or had recently been, Roman possessions. It was obviously with the desire of learning “the way of the Lord more

perfectly," and of returning to evangelise his native country, that Ninian left it for a time.

After due residence and study at Rome, he was consecrated as bishop in 397, and sent back to Britain. On his way through Gaul he turned aside to the city of Tours, upon the Loire, where S. Martin, now in his eightieth year, was still attracting pilgrims to his monastery by the fame of his sanctity and repute as a worker of miracles. After conference with the aged saint he pursued his journey home, taking with him a band of masons trained by Martin to build in stone—a craft Ninian wished to introduce in Valentia, where the ordinary material was clay, or turf, and wattles. On his return he betook himself to the south-west corner of Galloway, and set his masons to build there the first stone church in Scotland,—the “Candida Casa,” or White House, of the monkish chroniclers. While it was a-building he heard of Martin’s death, and he dedicated the church to him as its patron saint.

Let us pause for a moment over a name now so familiar to our domestic associations, but of whose history and of the cause of its connection with our own Church most of us are probably ignorant. One day during Julian’s campaign in Gaul, when the imperial bounty was being distributed to the troops, a soldier, leaving the ranks, marched straight up to where Julian stood and

said, "Cæsar, hitherto I have served *you*; now let me serve *God*. Let him who wishes to fight under your banner take your pay; as for me, I wish henceforth to be Christ's soldier alone. Fighting is no longer lawful for me." Taunted with cowardice, the soldier offered to pass through the enemies' ranks, unarmed, in the name of the Lord Jesus, and with no weapon save the sign of the cross: but he was not put to this trial; nor was he punished for his boldness with the Cæsar, who, inquiring about him, heard that he was brave and dutiful, and much beloved by his comrades, among whom a story was current of his having torn his military cloak into two halves one freezing night, and given one half to a shivering beggar. The youth's name was Martin. Years afterwards he became the famous Bishop of Tours, and was visited by Ninian on his way, as I have just said, homewards from Rome. The saint was adopted as the patron of many Scottish churches besides that of Whitherne; and his festival of Martin's Mass, with the familiar "term" of that date, keeps his name alive in Scotland till this day.

At Whithern—which name, slightly changed, its site still bears—Ninian, following Martin's example, gathered round him a company of religious followers, who lived together according to a monastic rule. He opened schools for the

children of the chiefs and notables. He wrote commentaries and meditations on the Scriptures, and *catenæ* of sentences from the Fathers, for the use of his scholars and candidates for the ministry. He travelled not only through Galloway, but through the length and breadth of the whole province of Valentia, preaching the Gospel and appointing pastors. He is even said to have carried his mission beyond the wall which barred the way of the marauding Picts of the north; but of this we have no sure evidence. Bede states in general terms that those whom he calls the "Southern Picts," and describes as dwelling to the south of the "steep and uncouth mountains," were among his converts. If the number and locality of the churches dedicated to him be any indication, we should say that he had been as far north as Elgin and Wick, but was hardly, if at all, known west of the Grampians. There were at least sixty-six churches, chapels, and altars consecrated to his memory: of these the great majority are in the midland counties, but in the western islands only three—one in Sanda, one in Bute, and one at Kilnininian in Mull—and only one on the western mainland, at Kildonan in Argyllshire. It is probably fair to conclude that he produced no impression on, and indeed had no access to, the Northern Picts, and that his mission lay mainly

among the Britons of the south-west, with possibly occasional visits to the Southern Picts of Angus, Mearns, and Aberdeen. That any religious impression he produced on these Picts was not permanent we may infer from the words of S. Patrick, who, in a letter to the subjects of the Welsh prince Coroticus, or Caradoc, speaks of the "apostate Picts." The Northern Picts had never been Christianised: those of the Southern Picts who were, must have got their Christianity from Ninian. But, in point of fact, the religion which he had been able to plant or foster in Valentia drooped and decayed as the tide of aggressive barbarism swelled and rolled southward on the track of the retreating Romans. It had no hold of the Picts, by which generic term were designated the independent tribes beyond the Forth and Clyde. Of the people of Valentia the Christianised elements were the imperial troops and the public officials with their dependents,—a numerous but always lessening band as the evacuation of the province was carried on, and it was left to its native Britons, who trembled before the rude incursions of the Scots from Erin. Ninian's influence, however, was not confined to the eastern side of the Channel. The repute of his training school at Whithern was well known in Ireland; and though the tradition which says he visited that

island is vague, there is no doubt that his establishment had many visitors from Erin, among them Finnian, afterwards the head of the great monastery of Moville, of whom we shall hear more by-and-by.

The date of Ninian's death is uncertain—it was probably in or near the year 432; and for about a century afterwards darkness broods over the face of the land, through which we dimly discern the visionary figures of Palladius, said to have been sent from Rome as a missionary to the Scots, and of S. Serf, the solitary of Culross. According to a tradition preserved in the Breviary of Aberdeen, this old saint was discovered by Palladius, who, finding that his Christianity was not of the Roman type, was moved to instruct him in the true faith as held at Rome, and to ordain him hishop according, says the Breviary, “to the Catholic custom of the Roman Church.” This Serf, or Servanus, is an interesting though shadowy personage, as testifying, from the description given of him, to the existence here and there of a British Christian, who had derived his Christianity from a source which differed in rite and usage from the model of contemporary Rome. As Ninian had been trained at Rome, and no doubt brought back with him, as exactly as he could, every detail of ritual and creed in which he had been instructed, it would appear that such solitaries

as S. Serf had not come under his teaching, but must have inherited the traditions of an early British Christianity, which was unconscious of the developments that were taking place at the headquarters of ecclesiastical life.

But another interest attaching to S. Serf is his alleged relation to S. Kentigern. The story of Kentigern's youth, as given in the Aberdeen Breviary, is full of incidents that are obviously unhistorical; but local names and traditions impart a certain colour of possibility, if not of probability, to the residence at or near Culross of this old native Christian, with whom Kentigern's name was early associated. That name, indeed, along with the more familiar "Mungo," is said to have been given to the patron saint of Glasgow by the old man; "Kentigern"—*Cean Tighernach*—meaning "lord in chief," and "*Manghu*," Mungo—"darling, or dear friend,"—both significant of his love and admiration for his pupil. For such, according to the legend, Kentigern was. His mother, Thanew, whose name is curiously mixed up with the Arthurian legends, was said to be the daughter of Loth, King of Lothian, whose wife, according to one of the mythical genealogies, was the sister of "the blameless king"—Arthur of the Round Table. Thanew has been canonised, and her name, under a quaint corruption,

is preserved in the church dedicated to her in this city—popularly called S. Enoch's, but really S. Thanew's Church. Thanew was turned adrift by her father, Loth, the victim of cruel ill-usage and unjust suspicions, and voyaged in a coracle up the Forth to Culross, where S. Serf sheltered her and her child. Kentigern, when he had grown up, weary of quiet Culross, and eager for new scenes and work, travelled westward till he came to where a thick grove marked the site of a burying-ground, said to have been consecrated by Ninian, beside the clear stream of the Molendinar. Here he halted, chose the place for his hut, as such early saints generally did, hard by a well (now enclosed in the crypt of the Cathedral), and began to exercise his gifts in sowing among the rude people the seeds of Christian truth and morality, as he had received these from S. Serf. The fame of his powers spread through all the "regio Cambrensis," by which name rather than that of Valentia the tract of country stretching south of the Forth and Clyde was now known. A British "kingdom" had arisen there early in the sixth century on the ruins of the Roman dominion; and the "king" of it, along with such of his people as were Christian, came to Kentigern and besought him to be their bishop. Jocelin of Furness, in his life of Kentigern, describes this king as reigning over the

whole country between the Clyde and the Wall of Hadrian, and speaks of Kentigern's "diocese" as coextensive with the kingdom. But, in point of fact, there was in those days no such thing as a diocese.

What idea the king and his people connected with a bishopric it were hard to tell. Jocelin, writing more than five hundred years after the days of Kentigern, and enlivening his pages with a curious farrago of miraculous incidents, cannot be accepted as a safe guide in matters ecclesiastical. We may conclude, however, that the natives wished Kentigern to remain among them in the definite capacity of their religious head. He made some demur, chiefly on account of his youth and inexperience, but at last he was persuaded, and allowed them—so goes the story—to fetch a bishop from Ireland to consecrate him. This, as stated by Jocelin, is interesting, as testifying to the knowledge, in his time, of an early fraternal intercourse between the Christians of Erin and those of Scotland, and also to the fact of a diversity between their usages and those of the churches that owned the authority of Rome. He apologises for the consecration by one bishop instead of by the canonical three that were necessary on the Continent, by the explanation that the British and Scots being islanders, out of the world, and infested by pagans, were ignorant of

the canons. Kentigern's ministry does not appear to have suffered from this irregularity in his consecration, but to have grown year by year in earnestness, zeal, and exemplary purity and self-denial. Its course, in Jocelin's pages, is studded with miracles of a more or less childish and incredible sort,—such as the causing a stag and a wolf to drag his plough; his finding the ring in the mouth of the salmon, and so on; but there is no mistaking the traces throughout his history of a memorable life of a noble and apostolic type.

After a time Kentigern, in consequence of strained relations with the Strathclyde potentate, migrated to Wales, where beside the river Elwy he founded a large monastery, in which he trained a race of monks and evangelists. Among them the most notable was the young Asaph, who succeeded him in the charge of the monastery, and by whose name the cathedral church of the Welsh diocese is still known. About the year 573, another monarch having gained the sovereignty of Strathclyde and invited Kentigern to return to his kingdom, the saint left his Welsh establishment to Asaph's care, and went back to the north, accompanied by a retinue of six hundred of the brethren and disciples who had gathered round him on the Elwy. He renewed his apostolic labours with undiminished zeal, travelling up and down the country, uprooting idolatry, re-

claiming the lapsed, instructing the ignorant, sending his emissaries to preach and plant the cross in regions which he could not reach himself, among the Picts of the Highlands, and even—if Jocelin is to be believed—across the northern seas. But he was not destined to be the Apostle of the Northern Picts. That honour was reserved for COLUMBA—the true founder of the Scottish Church. A visit of Columba to Kentigern is picturesquely related by Jocelin, not without miraculous accompaniments, such as the conversion to stone of the head of a ram feloniously stolen from the bishop's flock and beheaded by certain of Columba's gillies, while the saints were engaged in religious conversation. Had the meeting really taken place, it is hardly credible that Columba's biographer, Adamnan, who wrote within a century of his death, should have wholly omitted all mention of it, as he does. The much later narrative of Jocelin has no corroboration beyond the fact that a *cambo*, or pastoral staff, said to have been given by Columba to Kentigern, was until the fifteenth century preserved as a relic in the Cathedral of Ripon. The story of the ram's head also, though in its miraculous parts evidently mythical, exhibits an acquaintance, on Jocelin's part, with the habits of the western islanders which may have had historical foundation. But the weight of evidence is too slight to

make us believe—as we gladly would—that these two great missionaries and benefactors of our race ever saw each other in the flesh. It was not until he had attained a great age that Kentigern ceased from his manifold labours. The day of his death is said to have been a Sunday—the 13th of November—early in the seventh century. He was carried by his monks to his wooden church and buried at the right side of the altar. Beside him, within a year, was laid his friend King Roderick. The saint's tomb became a place of pilgrimage, and cures were believed to be wrought on the diseased who visited it. No church in Scotland is dedicated to him in his proper name of Kentigern; but under the familiar "Mungo," which passed into the popular use and affection, there are at least fifteen dedications north of the Solway, and seven in Cumberland.<sup>1</sup>

"Of Ninian," says the late Principal Shairp, in an exquisite sketch of Kentigern, published several years ago, and now little known—"of Ninian there is no visible memorial save that poor roofless chapel on the bleak promontory; of Columba, only those forlorn walls, bleaching in

<sup>1</sup> Yet "Kentigern" appears to have been retained in legal documents, as considered more formally correct. In Crawford's 'History of Renfrewshire' a deed is quoted, granted by the Earl of Montrose in 1560, conveying the lands of Orchil "Kentigerno Graham, filio suo"—"*id est*," says the quoter, "Mungo Graham."

the damp sea-mists and moist Atlantic winds: Kentigern has two lasting monuments, the cathedral built round his grave, and the city built round the cathedral. But for Kentigern and the reverence that gathered round him, no cathedral had ever been there; and but for the cathedral no city. The charters are still extant which show the process by which the city grew in the twelfth century under shadow of the cathedral, 'here a burgess of Haddington taking a house, there the monks of Melrose taking a grant of land; here a toft and a net's fishing in Clyde assigned to the Knights Templar, there a weekly market fixed for Thursday, and "the king's peace" obtained by the bishop for the burgesses, and his protection for their chattels.' And yet, though without doubt the saint is historically the cause of Glasgow, and all the commerce that now rolls through that mighty mart, the link between the ancient saint and the modern Glasgow merchant seems so remote, we so little expect to find the Kentigern of the sixth century develop into the Glasgow merchant of the nineteenth, that we cannot wonder the historical connection should be long since forgotten.

"But no such incongruity arises between the associations of the cathedral and the cell of the saint. The one is the natural outcome of the other. As we stand amid the venerable gloom of that dim crypt, or wander through massive pier

and pillar, arch and arcade, and look here on the grave of Mungo, there on the unlettered stone that hides Edward Irving, do we not feel that the fire which glowed in the Apostle of Strathclyde burned on in the great preacher of our own age, and that we, though living in so changed a world, and looking forth on all things with so different eyes, are yet knit to all the Christian people of those early ages, their spiritual descendants, heirs of the faith in which they lived and died ?”

Ninian received his orders at Rome, and exercised his mission as a missionary bishop, in direct communion with the Roman Church. His work was engulfed in the darkness and confusion which rolled over Southern Scotland

“When the Roman left us, and their law  
Relaxed its hold upon us, and the ways  
Were filled with rapine.”

Ninian left but little abiding trace behind him. Kentigern, baptised and instructed by a native British Christian, was “consecrated” by an Irish bishop; and his work both in Strathclyde and in Cambria was more permanent in its results. The south-western region of Scotland never fell wholly back into paganism. The true vine took root in the soil in which Kentigern planted it.

But the real Apostle of the North, the founder of the Scottish Church, was COLUMBA—the

Irish missionary who, crossing from the north of Ireland to the west of Scotland, became the spiritual father of the whole country. Columba, a scion of the great clan of the O'Donnells, was born on the 7th December 521, at Gartan, in Donegal. As far as we can trace the course of his education, he attended in his boyhood and youth the monastic school founded by Finnian or Finnan of Moville, and was there ordained a deacon. He next apprenticed himself—if we may use the term—to the bard Gemman, one of the national guild consisting of the professional chroniclers and poets of Ireland. From him he acquired the literary training which has left its traces in the Latin hymns and the Celtic poems ascribed to his pen. Of the former the most remarkable is that entitled the “Altus” (from the first word of the first line), recently edited, with a prose translation and some scholarly notes, by the Marquess of Bute. On parting from Gemman he betook himself to the most famous Irish seminary of those days—the monastery of Clonard, with its more than two thousand scholars, under the presidency of another Finnian, for Finnian was a common Irish name. In these two great schools—of Moville and Clonard—Columba became acquainted with the monastic system, and the educational cur-

riculum of two illustrious seminaries on the eastern side of the Channel. For Finnian of Moville had studied in the school founded by Ninian at Whitherne; and Finnian of Clonard had been a scholar in that of Menevia, under the Welsh S. David. He was thus all the better fitted in the future to understand the position of the Christian remnant in Valentia, after he had crossed over to the Scottish shore, and the more encouraged to develop in the north of Scotland the free and elastic system of Church life and work, which he knew was already in some degree germane to the soil.

At Clonard Columba remained for several years, and here he was admitted to the priesthood. A story is told about his ordination, which, whether true or false, is ancient, and is thus a testimony to the singular position of the Celtic bishops, and the wide difference between it and that of their Roman brethren. Finnian, the Abbat of Clonard, himself a presbyter, wished to retain Columba beside him as his domestic bishop, and having no bishop on the premises at the time who could ordain, he sent him to the neighbouring monastery of Clonfad, where they had one. Columba went over to Clonfad, and asking for the bishop, was told he was on the farm ploughing. He found him, "like Elisha, at

the plough," and imparted his errand, on which the worthy prelate bestowed ordination as desired; but either through misunderstanding or hurry, it was ordination to the priesthood and not to the episcopate. Columba did not seek to have the error rectified; and soon afterwards he left Clonard, and having visited some of the other monasteries and schools, began a course of zealous Church extension, founding establishments of the same kind as well as churches in every district of Ireland. His churches are said to have numbered three hundred.

The greatest of his monasteries were Durrow, Kells, and Derry. One of the favourite occupations in the monasteries was the copying and illuminating of MSS., in which accomplishment the Irish monks attained a skill and delicacy of penmanship and colouring rarely, if ever, excelled in Italy, France, or Germany. Columba himself was a master of this art, and practised it to the day of his death. S. Finnian of Moville was also a famous scribe, and Columba borrowed from him a Latin psalter, of which he took a copy. Finnian regarded this as a violation of copyright, and insisted that Columba should hand over the copy along with the original. On his refusal the case was referred to the King of Meath, one of the Irish monarchs,

who, quoting the principle of the Brehon law (the native Celtic code), that "to every cow belongs her calf," decided that to every book belongs its copy, and that Columba's handiwork therefore must be surrendered to Finnian. Columba was furious; and, with true Celtic unreasonableness and passion, he summoned his fellow-clansmen to help him in maintaining his "rights," which, like a patriotic Irishman, he regarded as paramount to all laws or judicial decisions. His priesthood and his monasticism had neither quenched the fiery spirit of the Celtic clansman in his own breast, nor the enthusiasm with which the clan were ready to answer to the call to combat. Columba the monk was still Columba O'Donnell, and the honour of the tribe was not to be insulted in his person. There was a hot and bloody quarrel, which ended in a pitched battle at Cooldrevny, near Sligo, in which the men of Ulster fighting for Columba beat the men of Meath fighting for Finnian, with heavy slaughter. This was the turning-point of Columba's history. The scandal and horror of this feud and bloodshed appear to have sunk into his heart.

On the island of Inismurray, off the coast of Sligo, a small *cœnobium* had been formed—a group of beehive cells with a little church in the middle of the group. Their abbat was Molassius

—to use the Irish phrase—the “soul-friend,” or —to use the modern phrase—the confessor of Columba. Thither Columba retired. A synod of the Irish Church excommunicated him as a man of blood and tumults. The natural man would have resented this sentence and defied the Synod; but the natural man had undergone a change. Molassius counselled his friend to withdraw from Erin, to cross over to Pictland, and to prove his penitence for the blood he had shed, and the scandal he had brought on the Christian name, by trying to convert the Northern Picts to Christ. There was sound policy in the counsel. Columba would be safer away from Ireland for a time. There were hosts of monks all over the country who would be ready to follow him across the Channel, if he could but offer them a work to do. Above all, there was a motive, at once Christian and patriotic, that urged a mission to the heathen of the North. In the west of Alban, as it was then called, there was still that remnant of the Christian Britons of Strathclyde who formed Kentigern’s flock, and there was also a company of Scots who had crossed from Erin and formed a small colony in the south of Argyll. Both of these had suffered grievously at the hands of the Picts. It was a question whether they could long hold out against fresh incursions.

Could the Picts be Christianised, the Christian Britons and the Irish Scots would have a chance of peace! Other emigrants might go over and colonise the wasted lands. A Christian community might grow up and restore the civilisation which had dwindled away since the retreat of the Romans. So Columba, humbled by the memory of his violence and warfare unbecoming a Christian and a monk, and transformed in the spirit of his mind, from the mere scribe and scholar and zealous propagator of churches and monasteries into the apostle and pioneer of a new mission to a land as yet almost utterly pagan, and fired with an enthusiasm which drew his Celtic fervour from personal quarrels and trivial feuds into the nobler channels of Christian philanthropy and devotion to the work of Christ—Columba, thus changed, thus animated, travelled from Inismurray to his favourite monastery of Derry, and there embarking, with twelve followers, in one of the coracles—the like of which you may yet see on the west coast of Ireland—crossed over to Oronsay; but finding he could still discern from thence the dark-blue outline of his native island on the horizon, he sailed on to IONA, and landed there on the evening of Whit-Monday 563.

The country now called Scotland was at that

time roughly divided into four principal regions. The kingdom of Strathclyde extended from the northern Roman wall to Cumberland, or farther to the south-west, but did not include Galloway, which was held by a Pictish colony called the "Niduari." On the east of the kingdom of Strathclyde, stretching from the Forth to the Tweed, lay the northernmost part of the kingdom of Bernicia, which extended to the south of the Tweed. North of the Forth and Clyde was Pictland, the country of the Picts. The West Highlands from Cantyre to Lochaber were, in part, occupied by the Scots who had from time to time crossed from Erin. The inhabitants of the Bernician territory were Saxons and Angles, as yet heathen, like the Northern Picts. Those of Strathclyde had retained more or less of the Christianity impressed on that district by Kentigern.

Before Columba's advent, at least one other Irish missionary had tried to shed the light of the Cross on the dark places of the Hebrides. Brendan of Clonfert had founded a church and *cœnobium* in Tiree. His name is still preserved in that of the parish of Kilbrandon and the Sound of Kilbrannan; but his work appears to have been unproductive.

Columba's choice of one of the western islands for his headquarters may have been influenced

by the fact of his relationship to Connal, King of Dalriada, by which name the Scotie settlers had called the region of Argyll. Connal subsequently bestowed the island of Hy or Iona on his kinsman. For about two years Columba occupied himself in erecting his buildings, organising his monastic family, bringing the soil of Iona into cultivation, and generally establishing his settlement on a secure basis. His idea—the best of all missionary ideas—was to make his mission the model of a Christian community, industrial and educational as well as evangelistic, where a company of Christian men should present to those who lived around them the picture of what Christian religion and civilisation really meant. The brotherhood was not formed that it might spend its life in a self-centred routine of devotions, meditations, fastings, and penitential exercises; but that it might propagate, by teaching, and still more by example, the morality, the culture, the pure faith of the Christian. The same principle has guided the Moravian Brethren, the most successful of all modern missionaries. It has been adopted by our own missionaries in Eastern Africa,—in this true, though at a late date, to the earliest traditions of our Church as exemplified by its great founder.

At the end of two years the abbat, having by this time acquired a sufficient knowledge of the

Pictish language (a Gaelic dialect), and having gathered under him a family of about two hundred persons, resolved to enter on the definite enterprise which had from the first been in his mind—the conversion of the Northern Picts. He adopted the usual plan, one specially advantageous in dealing with a race which was but little civilised,—he went straight to headquarters and addressed himself to the Pictish king. This was Brude, who kept his Court at Craig Phadrick, close to the eastern outlet of the chain of lochs and glens now penetrated by the Caledonian Canal. Brude was no friend to the Scots of Dalriada, with whom indeed he had already been at war; and when he heard that Columba and his friends were at hand he said, “These men come from our enemies the Scots—they shall not enter here.” In this resolution he was encouraged by Broichan, the chief of the Druids, who was with him in his stronghold. But Columba was not to be withstood. According to Adamnan, he had only to advance to the bolted gate and make the sign of the cross, when the bolts flew back, the portal opened, and the awestricken king came forward to meet the great missionary with words of peace.

It is difficult to disentangle the legendary and the actual in Adamnan's narrative; but be the

admixture of the miraculous what it may, it is evident that Columba's mission was rapidly and wholly successful. King Brude took him into his friendship and confidence, and was promptly converted to Christianity. The Abbat of Iona was endowed with that strange force of personal ascendancy which is often the special talent of men of masterful will and strong character; and Brude appears to have been won over by his vigorous individuality, before it was possible for him to understand the Gospel this new teacher came to preach. One of his gifts, which he sometimes used to the wonder of his friends and the terror of his enemies, was a voice of such compass and power that we could hardly credit the feats ascribed to it, did we not know that marvels of the same kind have been, within living memory and on authentic evidence, attributed to the voice of Edward Irving. "The sound of the voice of Columcille," says his *Irish Life*—"great its sweetness above all other clerics': to the end of 1500 paces, though great the distance, it was distinctly heard." When once the king had accepted the teaching—or perhaps we should rather say had bowed to the influence—of Columba, his people naturally followed his example; and the work of planting Christianity in the Highlands went on apace.

The first and most obvious of the results of his

work was that the reign of heathen violence was arrested. The Scot of Dalriada and the Briton of Strathclyde need no longer dread the lawless neighbour ever ready to carry fire and sword across their borders. The missions of Columba laid the first foundation of intertribal peace throughout Northern Britain, and so paved the way for the consolidation of the Picts, Scots, Britons, and Saxons into one nation. It is not an exaggeration to say that not only the Scottish Church but the Scottish State recognises its founder in Columba. While he was unwearied in his own labours, he possessed and exercised the rare gift of enlisting in his service zealous and capable assistants, who were helpful in his work, and many of whom have left their names in the pious memory of the glens and islands of the north and west. Such were Kainnech or Kenneth, who is commemorated in Inch Kenneth in the Hebrides and the great Abbey of Cambuskenneth on the Forth; Donan, who founded a monastery in the island of Eigg, and gives his name to nine or ten Kildonans; Comgall, who came from Ireland to accompany Columba in his first visit to King Brude, and who held in his own island the high office of abbat of the monastery of Bangor, in County Down, with its 3000 monks; Cormac, "Cormac of the Sea," the most adventurous of all the brotherhood, constantly

voyaging among the Hebrides, and as far as the Orkneys and the Shetlands, some say even to Iceland; Drostan, Columba's nephew, and the founder of the Abbey of Deer in Buchan; Machar, who gave his name to the Cathedral of Aberdeen; Mundus, or Mun, who is remembered at Eilean Mun in Lochleven and Kilmun on the Clyde; Blane of Bute, the founder of Dunblane. These, and many more, "true yoke-fellows," willing friends and servants, owned the authority and carried out the plans of Columba—each yielding an implicit obedience to the abbat, but each allowed to exercise, and exercising, the utmost individual freedom of judgment and action in the execution of his mission. Under Columba's sway there was full scope for every individuality to assert itself. This individual liberty, combined with corporate fidelity to an absolute chief, is a striking feature of the Columban system. The personal independence was no less marked than the unity and obedience of the brotherhood as a whole. This characteristic became possible in a community where the uniting bond was not a written rule, nor an authority founded on sacerdotal claim or ecclesiastical tradition, but was devotion to a head chosen and raised to his headship in virtue of his personal qualities, his strong character, his recognised ability to rule. This apostolic characteristic of

independence, of free play of individuality, of capacity of generous loyalty to a capable leader, early impressed upon the Scottish Church, is one that, after all its vicissitudes, it still retains—one of the notes of that continuity which links these latter days to the very dawn of its history.

You will have noticed that three, at least, of the places I have mentioned as the sites of Columban churches are not in the Highlands proper, and lie to the east of the Grampian range, which bounded what was strictly the Pictish territory. Deer, Aberdeen, and Cambuskenneth, however, were not solitary instances of the extension of Columba's mission into the east and midlands. On the death of his steady friend King Brude the Pictish throne was secured by Gartnaidh, who was a Southern Pict, living at Abernethy on the Tay. To Abernethy the seat of Pictish sovereignty was transferred, and the erection of a church there is attributed to Columba's influence. The church and monastery of Kilrymont (the Celtic name of St Andrews) are said to have been founded by his disciple Kenneth; and Blane, the son of Aidan, whom Columba selected as King of Dalriada, built, as I have already said, the church of Dunblane. So that not only in the Highlands, but in Buchan, Fife, Perthshire, and Stirlingshire, outside the Highland line, we find clear traces of his Christian work.

I have alluded to Columba's choice of a king for Dalriada, and said that the State no less than the Church of Scotland may look on him as its founder. His history proves it. He not only converted the Picts from Druidism. He largely controlled the secular affairs, not of Pictland alone but of Dalriada, for which his policy secured the friendly alliance of the Picts. In Dalriada his influence was strong enough to govern the succession to the sovereignty, and to readjust the constitution of the kingdom. The Dalriadan king died. Columba, with a statesman's instinct and a churchman's authority, recognised the incapacity of the legal successor; so he set him aside, and promoted Aidan, a more capable prince, though out of the regular order of succession, as was permissible by the Brehon law. This Aidan was not only chosen, but, according to old tradition, was consecrated by Columba—his consecration being the first instance, in Western Europe, of the religious ceremony of anointment or ordination confirming the secular elevation to the throne. The tradition further bears, that during this ceremony Aidan sat on that "Stone of Destiny" which was afterwards transferred, first to Dunstaffnage, and then to Scone, and is now part of the coronation chair in Westminster Abbey. Be that as it may, there is no doubt that the Dalriadan king-

dom, to which Aidan was appointed by Columba, was the real germ of the kingdom of Scotland. While the Pictish monarchy declined, the Dalriadan advanced in arts, in civilisation, in power and importance, until the year 842, when Kenneth Macalpine, a descendant of Aidan, is found ruling over a prosperous realm—to whose ruler the Picts both northern and southern submitted; and he established the Scottish monarchy over a united people. The line of the Celtic kings, of whom Kenneth was the ancestor, continued to reign until a fatal fall from his horse on the cliffs at Kinghorn cut short the life of the last of them, Alexander III., in 1285. The succession then passed over to the dynasties of Bruce and Stuart, which were descended in the female line from the Celtic kings. In the seventeenth century the Stuarts mounted the English throne; and again on the death of Queen Anne the succession came through the female line, and the house of Hanover acquired the sovereignty. It is through that house her present gracious Majesty can trace an unbroken descent from King Aidan of Dalriada and King Kenneth of Scotland, which constitutes her sole hereditary title to the crown of Great Britain and Ireland and the empire of India.

It was to Columba also, we must note in passing, that the Dalriadan kingdom owed the achieve-

ment of its independence of the kings of Ireland. His maintenance of a regular intercourse with Ireland, through which he still exercised a practical control over the monasteries he had founded there, was only one instance of that inexhaustible energy and versatility which seemed to combine in his one person the Saxon's dogged capacity for hard work with the spiritual fervour and enthusiasm of the Celt. He was evidently, as has been said of him, "one of the unresting, unhasting men," who find time for all things, and whose capacity of sympathy and of work no single object or set of objects can exhaust. A life so eager, so laborious, so full of sympathy with others and effort for their highest good, was of itself a Christian mission of the noblest sort; but it was a life that made constant demands upon its own vitality. Yet Columba's marvellous vigour, tried as it was by many toils, hardships, and austerities, did not give way till after he had passed his threescore years and ten. He was over forty when he quitted Ireland, and he spent thirty-four years in Iona, dying in 597, in—as we calculate—the seventy-sixth year of his age.

The account of the closing scenes, as given by Adamnan, is one of the most simple, touching, and evidently truthful, narratives to be found in monkish literature. In some slight details there

seems to be an introduction of the legendary or miraculous element, but only to a very small extent. It is easy to understand how this should have tinged the affectionate reminiscences of the family of Iona, and transferred itself from the oral tradition of the brethren to the MS. of Adamnan.<sup>1</sup> Early on the morning of Sunday the 9th of June 597 he passed to his well-earned rest and reward,—the noblest type of that Scoto-Celtic race that has played so prominent a part in our national history; the founder of the Scottish Church, and, in a real sense also, the founder of the Scottish nation: for had the Dalriadan kingdom fallen into unworthy hands at the time when Columba named the energetic and able Aidan as its king, and had its delivery from Irish vassalage not been achieved through his persuasion, at the assembly of Drunceatt, one or other of two things would have happened, either of them fatal to Scottish independence and the development of a pacific nationality in which Pict, Scot, Briton, and Saxon should form harmonious elements;—Scotland still feudatory to Ireland would have become a mere appendage to that island; or, divided between hostile tribes of Picts and Scots,

<sup>1</sup> It may be found in full detail in Montalembert's 'Monks of the West,' vol. iii., and in the 'Church of Scotland, Past and Present,' vol. i.

it would have fallen a prey to the Saxon aggressors from the east and south. But what Columba did for our country, ecclesiastically and politically, was efficient and permanent, because he had done still more for it, in the sphere of moral reformation and spiritual enlightenment. He had given it a true religion. He had taught the people to believe in Christ, and had shown them the pattern of the Christian life, and so had brought light into their heathen darkness, order into their social chaos, the ideas of peace on earth and goodwill among men into the arena of their senseless and savage feuds. He had revealed to them the beauty of social purity, of personal self-control, of righteous dealing of one with another. He had, in fact, laid the moral foundations of a national character, of an orderly society, alongside of the firm basis of the Christian faith. And so his work endured, and still endures, as all honest work, established and carried out on true principles and in faithful zeal, is sure to do.

Columba passed away, but, though their head was gone, the family of Iona never faltered in their devotion to the great enterprise he had begun. They went about "everywhere preaching the Word," and founding and confirming churches. Iona became year by year a more widely acknowledged centre of a vast educa-

tive and missionary organisation, and at the same time, in virtue of its being the scene of Columba's labours, of his rule and death, a shrine of pious pilgrimage, and the home of a far-reaching ecclesiastical authority, owned by scores of dependent monasteries throughout the length and breadth of Alban.