

On the Life of St. Columba

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Exi de terra tua et de cognatione tua et de domo patris tui et vade in terram quam tibi monstravero. „Leave thy country, and thy land, thy kindred in the flesh, and thine own home, for My sake, and get thee into the country that I will shew thee.“

The Lord Himself gave this friendly counsel unto the head of the perfect Faith and of the complete Belief, to wit, unto Abraham son of Terah, that he should leave his own country and land, to wit, the country of Chaldea, and that he should go in pilgrimage into the country which God shewed him, to wit, the Land of Promise.

Now Moses son of Amram, chief of God's people, the man who was filled with the grace and the favour of the Holy Ghost, it was he that wrote this

consecrated text there in Genesis of the Law that it might abide perpetually with the Church, this friendly counsel which the Lord himself gave to Abraham to enjoin pilgrimage on him, when He said unto him: Exi de terra. „Leave the country and thy land for My sake.“

Haec quidem historia nota est. Abraham a Domino praeceptum fuisse ut terram Caldeorum desereret et terram repromissionis adiret. It is an conspicuous tale in the scripture: the Lord himself enjoining Abraham to leave the country of Chaldea, which was his own fatherland, and to go on a pilgrimage into the Land of Promise, because of the good which was to accrue thereof to himself and to his children, and to their descendants after them.

Iste autem Abraham caput fidei est et pater omnium fidelium sicut dicunt apostoli. The man, therefore, to whom God gave this counsel, to wit, Abraham, it is he that is accounted in the scripture as the father of all faithful, as the apostle certifieth and saith: „Omnes qui sunt ex fide hi sunt filii Abraham“. „The sons of Abraham, in truth,“ saith the apostle, „are all who resemble him in perfect faith.“

Quod hautem patri fidelium praeceptum hoc omnibus filiis ejus implendum relinquitur, ut terram suam deserant et carnalem patriam derelinquant. The good, then, which God enjoined here on the father of the faithful, to wit, on Abraham, it is incumbent on his sons after him, namely, on all the faithful, to fulfil it, to wit, to leave their country and their land, their wealth and worldly delight, for the sake of the Lord of the Elements, and to go into perfect pilgrimage in imitation of him.

Tres autem sunt modi vocationis. Now, in three ways are men-folk cited to knowledge and to the friendship of the Lord.

Primus ex Deo. The first way is the urging and the kindling of men by the Divine Grace till they come to serve the Lord, after the example of Paul, and of Antony the monk, and of the other faithful monks who served God there in Egypt.

Secundus per hominem. Men-folk, again, are cited in the second way, through a human being, to wit, through the holy preachers who preach the divine scripture to the men-folk after that example of Apostle Paul, who preached to the Gentiles until he brought them by the line of the Gospel to the harbour of Life.

Tertius ex necessitate. Men-folk, then, are cited in the third way through necessity, that is, when they are constrained to serve God through tribulations and through dangers of death, or by separation from the temporal good wherein they sojourn, after that example of the people of Israel, who often returned to the Lord from the worship of idols and images which they met with from the outland tribes; as is told in the Holy Scripture: Hinc David dicit Wherefore to proclaim that, the Prophet David declareth: „Clamaverunt ad dominum cum tribulabantur et de necessitatibus eorum liberavit eos.“ Whenever the people of Israel underwent tribulations and great dangers, they used to beseech and pray the Lord to free them from those hardships.

Abrahm, ergo etc.. Abraham, therefore, the head of the perfect Faith and of the complete Belief, when he was urged by the Divine Grace, fulfilled the command which was enjoined on him by the Lord, to wit, he went into the country of Chaldea as far as Haran, where his father died, and he came thereout to the Land of Promise.

Tribus autem modis patria deseritur, uno inutili et duobus utilibus. Now, three ways there are in which one leaveth his fatherland when he goeth into pilgrimage, and there is one of these for which no reward is gotten from God, and two for which (reward) is gotten. Aliquando enim patria corpore tantum relinquitur, nec mens a carnalibus studiis alienatur, nec bona opera appetuntur. Sometimes a person leaveth his fatherland in the body only, and his mind severeth not from sins and vices, and he desireth not to practice virtues or good deeds. In tali ergo perigrinatione nihil nisi afflictio corporis fit, nullus vero animae perfectus. The pilgrimage, therefore, that is made in that wise, there groweth thereof neither fruit nor profit to the soul; but it is a labour and disturbance of the body in idleness, for it little profiteth a man to abandon his fatherland if he doeth not good away from it. Nam et postquam Abraham corpore patria exivit tunc et Dominus dixit. For even unto Abraham himself, on leaving his own country and on separating from it in the body, the Lord gave this counsel, when He said: Exi de terra tua. „Take thy heed henceforth off country and land, and let not thy mind be for turning thereto again.“ Acsi aperte diceret carnalia vitia patriae in qua fueras corpore, mente simul et corpore devita, as if what God himself had manifestly said to Abraham was—: „Shun both body and soul henceforth, in thy pilgrimage, the sins and vices of the land wherein thou hast aforetime dwelt in the body; for it is the same to anybody as if he dwelt in his home should he copy in his pilgrimage the customs of the his home.“ Non enim in via pedum sed in via morum proximatur ad Dominum. For it is not by path of feet, nor by motion of body, that one draws nigh to God, but it is through practice of good customs and virtues.

Aliquando mente tantum patria relinquitur. Another time, a person leaveth his home in desire of heart and of mind, though he leaveth not in the body, as it happens to the ordained, who spend their lives in their own countries till death, for laymen and clergy detain them in the lands wherein they dwell, because of their great profitableness to all; and since it is not for the sake of the body they abide in their fatherland, their good will shall avail them with the Lord as a pilgrimage.

Aliquando mente et corpore, ut sunt hi quibus dicitur. At another time, then, a man leaveth his fatherland completely in body and in soul, even as the twelve Apostles left, and those of the perfect pilgrimage for whom the Lord foretold great good in the gospel, when he said: Vos qui dereliquistis omnia propter me, etc.. „Take heed of this,“ saith Jesus, „ye few of many who have forsaken for me your land and your fleshly kindred, your wealth and your worldly happiness, that ye shall receive an hundred-fold of good from me here in the world and in the life everlasting yonder after the sentence of Doom.“

Hi sunt veri perigrini qui cum psalmista possunt dicere: These are they of the perfect pilgrimage in truth, it is in their person that the prophet spake in praise and in thanks to God. Advena sum apud te, domine, et perigrinus sicut omnes per mundum. „I give thee thanks for it, O God,“ saith the prophet, „I have pilgrimage and exile in the world even as the elders who went before.“

Many of the faithful servants of the Lord, both in Old Law and the New Testament, fulfilled perfectly this kindly profitable counsel, to wit, they left their country and their land, their home and their kindred in the flesh, for sake of the Lord of the Elements, and they went into willing pilgrimage in far-off lands with monks, even as he fulfilled it and left his native country for the love and fear of the Lord, he the high saint and the high sage and the son chosen of God,

for whom there is a festival and commemoration at the occurrence of this season and of this time, to wit, sanctus presbyter Columba, to wit, the noble priest of the Island of the Gael, the focal ball which was set forth with the diverse talents and gifts of the Holy Ghost, to wit, the holy Colomb Cille son of Fedilmith.

The time at which the Christians celebrate the festival and hightide of Colombcille's death is on the fifth of the ides of June, as to the day of the solar month, every year on this very day.

Now, the wise men of the Gael relate at that season every year a small abridgment of the setting-forth of the noble kin and noble descent of holy Colombcille, and of the marvels and miracles innumerable which the Lord wrought for him here in the world, and of the completion and special end which he gave at last to his victorious career, namely, the attaining to his true home and his own true heritage, to the abode of Paradise in the presence of God forever.

Noble, in sooth, was the kin of Colombcille as regards the world, to wit, of the kin of Conall son of Niall, is he. He had in right of kin, a choice of the sovereignty of Ireland, and it would have been given to him had he himself not put it from him for the sake of God.

It is manifest, moreover, that he was a chosen son of God, because Ireland's elders had been prophesying of him before his birth.

Firstly, the eldest of the priests of Ireland, namely, old Mochtai of Louth, foretold Colombcille an hundred years before his birth; for once upon a time Mochta's cook (Macrith was his name) came to him with a mess of nuts in his hand for him, whereupon Mochta said to him: „To me belongeth not the land whence those nuts have been brought. Keep them until he whose land it is shall come.“ „When will he come?“ saith the cook. „At the end of a hundred years,“ saith Mochta.

Mochta, again, was wont to turn his face to the north when praying. His household would ask him why he did so, and he said to them,

1. A manchild will be born in the north
At the uprising of the ...
Ireland grows fruitful, (a splendid flame)
And Scotland ... his.

The father of baptism and teaching of the Gael, namely Patrick, when he was blessing Conall at Sith Aeda, then he placed his two hands on Conall and on his son Fergus son of Conall, to wit, his right hand on the head of Fergus and his left on the head of Conall. Conall wondered thereat, and he asked him why he placed his hands in that wise, so Patrick sang this stave:

1. A manchild shall be born of his family,
He will be a sage, a prophet and a poet, etc.
He will be a sage, and he will be pious,
He will be an abbot with the King of the royal ramparts,
He will be steadfast and he will be ever good,
He will be in the eternal kingdom for his consolation.

Brigit foretold him and said:

1. Manchild of longsided Ethne,
He is bright, he is a blossoming,
Colombcille, clear with blemish,
It was not over soon to perceive him.

Bishop Eogan of Ardstraw foretold him, when he said,

1. A son will be born unto Fedlimith,
he will be a diadem over every train.
Fedlimith son of Fergus,
son of Conall, son of Niall.

At the hour of his death, Bóite son of Bronach foretold Colombcille, when he said to his household: „There hath been born this very night a son, splendid, venerable before God and men, and he will come here in thirty years from tonight. Twelve men, moreover, will be his company, and it is he that will make manifest my grave and mark out my cemetery, and in heaven and on earth our union shall abide.“

Even as Colombcille's birth was foretold by Ireland's elders so was it figured in visions and dreams. Even so it was figured in the vision which appeared to his mother, namely, her-seemed that a great cloak was given her which reached from the Isles of Mod to Caer nam-Brocc, and of hues there was not a hue that was not therein. And a youth perceived the radiant vesture and took away from her the cloak into the air, and Ethne was sorrowful thereat, and her-seemed that the same youth came again unto her and said unto her: „O good woman,“ said the youth, „thou hast no need to grieve, but meeter for thee were joyance and delight, for what this cloak portendeth is that thou wilt bear a son, and Ireland and Scotland will be full of his teaching.“

In like wise the woman saw a vision, namely, the birds of the air and of the land, as her-seemed, bore Ethne's bowels throughout the borders of Ireland and Scotland. Ethne herself gave judgement on this vision, and thus said she then: „I shall bear a son,“ she saith, „and his teaching shall reach throughout the borders of Ireland and Scotland.“

As was foretold by Ireland's elders, and as was seen in visions, so was Colombcille born. Now Gortán is the name of the place wherein he was born. On the seventh of the ides of December, as regards the day of the solar month, he was born. On Thursday, of the days of the week.

Wonderful, in sooth, was the son that was born there—a son of the King of heaven and earth, to wit, Colombcille, son of Fedlimith, son of Fergus, son of Conall Gulban, son of Niall, of the nine hostages. His mother was of the Corprige of Leinster, to wit, Ethne the Great, daughter of Dimma mac Noe.

After his birth he was straightway taken to be baptised by Cruithnechán, son of Cellachán, the noble priest, and he fostered him afterwards, being so bidden by an angel of God.

Now, when came the time for him to read, the cleric went to a certain spaeman, who was biding in the country, to ask him when the boy ought to begin. When the spaeman had scanned the sky, he said, „Write for him his alphabet now.“ It was thereafter written on a cake, and in this wise Colombcille ate the cake, to wit, half thereof to the east of the water and the other half to the west of the water. The spaeman said, through the gift of spaedom, „So shall

the territory of this son be, to wit, half thereof to the east of the sea, that is in Scotland, and the other half to the west of the sea, that is in Ireland.“

Not long thereafter he and his fosterer went at Christmas to Brugach son of Deg, the bishop, to the Ramparts of Mag Enaig in Tir Enda. It was entrusted to his fosterer the cleric to perform a priest's duties in that place during the hightide. But bashfulness seized him so that he could not (chant) the psalm that came to him to chant: Misericordias Dei was that psalm. Howbeit the gifted son Colombcille sang the psalm in his fosterer's behoof. And yet theretofore he had read his alphabet only. And God's name and Colombcille's were magnified through that great miracle.

At another time he, (Cruithnechán) went to watch by a sick person. As they were going through a wood, the cleric's foot slipt on the path and thereof he suddenly died. Colombcille put his cowl under the cleric's head, thinking he was asleep, and takes to rehearsing his lesson, so that certain nuns heard him as far as their cell. The learned compute that there was a mile and a half between them and the sound of his voice was often heard at that distance, ut dixit (poeta):

1. The sound of Colombcille's voice—
Great (was) its sweetness above every train,
To the end of fifteen hundred paces,
Through great the distance, it was clear.

Then came the nuns and found the cleric dead before them, and they told Colombcille to bring the cleric back to life for them. Straightway went he to bring the cleric to life. The cleric arose out of death at Colombcille's word even as if he had been asleep. Thereafter Colombcille offered (himself) to the Lord of the Elements, and begged three boons of Him, to wit, chastity and wisdom and pilgrimage. The three were fully granted him.

He then bade farewell to his fosterer, and the fosterer gave him leave and a fervent blessing.

Then he went to learn wisdom to the high bishop, namely, to Finden of Movilla.

At a certain time wine and bread were lacking unto Finden for the mass. Colombcille blessed the water and it turned to wine, and was put into the offertory-chalice. God's name and Colombcille's were magnified through that miracle.

He then bade farewell to Finden and went to Gemman of Mag S...

Once while he was reading his lesson to Gemman, they saw a girl fleeing towards them before a certain manslayer, and she fell down in their presence and the ... killed her. Colombcille set a word of banning upon him, and he died forthwith.

He then bade farewell to Gemman and went to Finden of Clonard. He asked Finden where he should build his booth. Said Finden: „Make it in the door of the church.“ He then built his booth, and it was not in the door of the church at that time. He said, however, that it would afterwards be the door of the city, which thing was also fulfilled.

Each of the apostles used in turn to grind night's meal in a quern. An angel of God of heaven used to grind on behalf of Colombcille. That was the honour

which the Lord rendered him, because of the nobleness of his kin beyond the others.

At another time there appeared unto Finden a vision, to wit, two moons arose from Clonard, a golden moon and the other a silvery moon. The golden moon fared into the north of the island, and Ireland and Scotland glistened thereby. The silvery moon fared on till it stayed by the Shannon, and Ireland at her centre glistened thereby. Colombcille (was the golden) with the gold of his noble kin and his wisdom, and Ciaran the Wright's son was the silver moon, with the refulgence of his virtues and his righteous deeds.

Colombcille then bade farewell to Finden and went to Glasnevin, for there were fifty studying that place with Mobii, together with Cainnech, and with Comgall, and with Ciaran. Now their huts were to the west of the water. One night the bell for the nocturns was rung. Colombcille fared to the church. There was a great flood in the river that night. Nevertheless, Colombcille fared through it with his raiment. „Bravely comest thou there to-night, O descendant of Niall!“ said Mobii: „God is able (?)“ said Colombcille, „to take the labour from us.“ When they were coming out of the church, they saw the booths to the east of the water near to the church.

Once upon a time a great church was built by Mobii, and the clerics were a-thinking what full (thereof) each of them would wish to have with him in the church. „I should like,“ said Ciaran: „it's full of church-students to attend at the (canonical) hours.“ „I should like,“ said Cainnech, „it's full of books for the service of the Sons of Life.“ „I should like,“ said Comgall, „it's full of affliction and disease to be in my body, to subdue and to repress me.“ Colombcille chose it's full of gold and silver to cover God's relics and shrines. Mobii said that it should not be so, but that Colombcille's congregation should be wealthier than any congregation, both in Ireland and Scotland.

Mobii told his fosterlings to leave the stead wherein they were, for that there would come an unknown pestilence, to wit, the Buide Chonail, and he said, besides, to Colombcille, that he should not take territory until he permitted him. They fared forth, thereafter, each of them his own way. Colombcille fared into Tirconnell as far as over the river the name whereof is Biur. There he said: „Biur against tribulation!“ And the pestilence did not go past that, and it is an ever-living miracle still, because any pestilence that is carried over it follows no farther than that, according to Colombcille's word.

Then fared Colombcille to Derry, to the chief stronghold of Aed son of Ainmire, who was King of Ireland at that time. The King offered that stronghold to Colombcille, and he refuseth it, because of Mobii's command. Howbeit, on his coming forth out of the stronghold he met with two of Mobii's household, having Mobii's girdle for him and consent to take the territory, Mobii having died. So Colombcille said:

1. Mobii's girdle
Rushes were not round ...(?)
It never was opened against surfeit:
It never closed on lies.

Colombcille thereafter settled in Aed's stronghold and founded a church there and wrought many miracles therein.

Once upon a time he sends his monks into the wood to cut wattling for building a church for him in Derry. Where the wattling was cut in a certain warrior's land which lay near the cell. Now he was vexed that the timber was cut in his land without his own consent. So when Colombcille heard of that he said to his household: „Take him,“ saith he, „the price of his wood in barley-grain, and put it into the earth.“ Now at that time it had passed midsummer. The grain, however, was brought to the warrior. He cast it into the ground, and it grew and was ripe on Lammas-day thereafter.

Once when he was in Derry, a little child was brought to him to be baptized. There was no water near to him. He made the sign of the cross over the rock that lay before him, and a wellspring of water brake therefrom, and therewith the child was then baptized.

Another time afterwards he was in Derry, and he thought of going to Rome and Jerusalem.

He went at another time from Derry to Tours of Martin, and brought away the gospel that had lain on Martin's breast an hundred years in the ground, and he left it in Derry.

Many were the marvels and miracles which God wrought for Colombcille in Derry. He loved that city greatly and said,

1. For this do I love Derry,
For its stillness, for its purity,
For it is quite full of white angels
From one end to the other.

Thereafter Colombcille founded Raphoe. It was there he brought back from death to life the wright who had been drowned in the millpond.

In Raphoe, moreover, his household lacked a ploughshare, whereupon he blessed the hands of the little boy that was with him (Fergna was his name), and Fergna made the share, and he was skilful in smithwork thenceforth through Colomb's blessing.

He went afterwards on a preaching round to the King of Teffia. Aed son of Brenann was his name, and Aed gave him the site whereon is Durrow this day, and a cell was built by him there. In Durrow, moreover, bitter apples were brought to him and he blessed them, and they became sweet. And it was from Durrow that a sained sword was taken from him to Colman the Great, son of Diarmait. The virtue that lay in that sword was that none could die in its presence. And it was afterwards begged by a certain man who was in sickness, and the sword was given to him, and he had it. A year was that sword with him, and during that time he was not alive, and he was not dead. Wherefore the sword was afterwards taken away from him, and he died at once. So, therefore Colombcille blessed Durrow, and left therein a warden (one) of his household, namely, Cormac decendant of Liathan.

Then he went to Aed Slaine son of Diarmait. He came to the place where Cenannus stands at this day; it was the King of Ireland's stronghold at that time, the stronghold of Diarmait son of Cervall. When Colombcille was delaying at the door of the stronghold, he began to foretell what should befall the place afterwards, and he said to Becc son of Dé, Diarmait son of Cervall's chief-spaeman:

1. O Becc, tell thou to me,
Cenannus the wide, pure-grassed,
Whether clerics dwell in it,
Whether warriors abandon it?

Ut dixit Becc—

1. The trains who are amidst it
shall sing praises of the Lord's Son,
Its warriors shall depart from its threshold,
there will be a time when it will be secure.

He then marked out that city in the manner in which it is, and blessed it vehemently, and said it would be the noblest church-building he should have on earth, although his resurrection would not be therein. And when he was making that prophecy he set his face to the south-west, and laughed greatly. Boethín asked the cause of gladness. „Fifty sons of Life,“ said Colombcille, „will be born in one night to the Lord in this border (?) to the west.“ It was Grafann of Cellscire he foretold then, as was afterwards fulfilled.

There was a great oak under which Colombcille rested, while he abode in that place. That oak lived for a very many ages, until it fell through the crash of a mighty wind; and a certain man took somewhat of its bark to tan his shoes withal. Now when he did on his shoes after they had been tanned, leprosy clave to him from sole to crown.

Colombcille then went to Aed Slaine, and made prophecy for him, and said that he would be long-lived, unless he were parricidal. If, however, he should commit parricide he was to live but four years after.

So Colombcille hallowed a cowl for him and said he would not be wounded while that cowl was on him. Howbeit, Aed Slane wrought parricide, against the word of Colombcille, on Suibne son of Colmán. At the end of four years after, he went upon a foray: he forgot his cowl: he is killed on that day.

Thereafter Colombcille founded many churches in Bregia. He left two elders and many relics therein. He left Ossíne son of Cellach in Clonmore. He went thereafter to Manister-Bóiti. It was there that his staff touched the ladder of glass, whereby Bóite had ascended to heaven, so that its sound was heard throughout the whole church, and he shewed Bóite's grave, and he marked out his church, as Bóite himself had foretold on the day of his death. For many were the churches he marked out and the books he wrote, to wit, three hundred cells and three hundred books, as said the poet—

1. He marked out, without loosening,
three hundred fair churches, it is true;
And three hundred gifted, lasting (?),
bright, noble books he wrote.

Though any book that his hand would write were ever so long under water, not a single letter therein would be drowned.

He founded a church in Rachra in the east of Bregia, and left deacon Colmán therein. Once on a time that they were in that church, namely, Colombcille and Comgall and Cainnech, Comgall said that Colombcille should make an offering

of Christ's Body and his Blood in their presence. Colombcille did service for them as to that. Then it was that Cainnech beheld a pillar of fire over Colombcille's head while at the offering. Cainnech told that to Comgall, and then they both beheld the pillar.

He founded a church in the stead where Swords is at this day. He left an ancient man of his people there, namely, Finán Lobur, and he left the gospel which his own hand wrote. There, too, he marked out a well named Sord, that is, pure, and sained a cross; for it was his wont to make crosses and satchels and wallets for books and all church gear; ut dixit poeta—

1. He sained three hundred victorious crosses,
Three hundred wellsprings that were swift,
An hundred booksatchels...,
With an hundred croziers, with an hundred wallets.

One day Colombcille and Cainnech were biding on the brink of the sea, when a great tempest was on the main. Said Cainnech, „What singeth the wave?“ Said Colombcille: „Thy household were in peril some time ago on the sea, and one of them hath perished, and the Lord will bring them unto us to-morrow morning to this bank wheron we are.“

Brigit was one time wending through the Currach of Liffe, and when the virgin saw the delightful shamrock-flowering plain before her, she said in her mind that if she had power over the plain, she would offer it to the Lord of the Elements. That is manifested unto Colombcille in his cell at Swords, whereupon he said with a loud voice: „Well is what hath happened to the holy Virgin! For it is the same to her with the Lord as if the land she hath offered were her own of right.“

Thereafter he fared to the Leinstermen and left many churches which he founded with them, together with Druim Monach and with Moen and with other churches in plenty.

Thereafter Colombcille fared to Clonmacnois, with the hymm which he had made for Ciaran: for he made many praises for God's house, ut dixit poeta—

1. Noble thrice fifty, ...
the number of miracles are the grass-blades,
Some in Latin which was eloquent (?),
others in Gaelic, fair the tale.

Now, it was in Clonmacnois that the little boy came unto him and stole a small hair from his raiment without being perceived by him. Howbeit, God manifested that matter to him. He prophesised for the boy that he would be a sage and pious. He is Ernán of Cluain Deochra at this day.

Thereafter Colombcille fared into the borders of Conaught on his preaching round, and he founded many churches and holy dwellings in that province, together with Ess mic Eirc and Druim Cliab.

He left Mothoria in Druimcliab and left him a crozier which himself had made.

Colombcille then fared over Assaroe and founded many churches with Conall and Eogan. He founded Torach and left an elder of his house hold therein, to wit, Ernaine.

Now when Colombcille had made round of all Ireland, and when he had sown faith and belief, and when numerous hosts and been baptized by him, and when he had founded churches and holy dwellings, when he left elders and reliquaries and relics therein, the determination which he had resolved on from the beginning of his life came to his mind, namely, to go into pilgrimage. He then minded to go over sea to preach God's word to Highlanders and to Britons and Saxons.

So he fared forth on expedition. Forty-two years was his age went he went. Thirty-four he lived in Sotland. Seventy-seven was his full age. And the number that went (with him) was twenty bishops, forty priests, thirty deacons, fifty students; ut dixit—

1. Forty priests was their number,
Twenty bishops, a noble strength!
For the psalmody without work.
Thirty deacons, fifty boys.

He fared then in happy mood till he came to the stead which to-day is named Hii of Colombcille. On the night of Pentecost he reached it. Two bishops who were bidding in the island came to cast him out of it. But God revealed to Colombcille that in truth they were not bishops, whereupon they left the island to him when he told of them their story and what they ought to perform.

Then said Colombcille to his household, „It is well for us that our roots should go under earth here“; and he said to them, „It is permitted to you that some one of you go under the mould of this island to consecrate it.“ Odran rose up readily, and this he said: „If thou wouldst accept me,“ saith he. „I am ready for that.“ „O Odran,“ saith Colombcille, „thereof shalt thou have the reward, namely, to none shall his request be granted at my grave, unless he shall seek it first of thee.“ Odran then fared to heaven.

Colomb then founded the church of Hii. Thrice fifty monks had he therein for contemplation and sixty for active life, as said (the poet)—

1. Wondrous the warriors who abode in Hii,
Thrice fifty in monastic rule,
With their boats along the sea,
Three score men a-rowing.

When Colombcille had founded Hii, he fared on his preaching throughout Scotland and Britons and Saxons; and he brought them to faith and belief after many miracles had been wrought by him, after bringing the dead to life out of death.

Now there was bidding in the country a certain man to whom Colombcille had preached, and he, with all his household, believed in the Lord. The devil was envious of that thing, so he smote the son of this man with a sore disease, whereof he died. Then the heathen were reviling Christ and Colombcille, whereupon he made fervent prayer to God, and awoke the dead son out of death.

As Colombcille was on a certain day preaching to the hosts, a certain man fared from them over the river which was near them, so that he should not be listening to the word of God. The snake strikes him in the water and killed him

forthwith. His body was brought into Colombcille's presence, and he makes a cross with his crozier over his (the dead man's) breast, whereupon he at once arose.

A sore disease came to his servant (Diarmait was his name), and he died; and Colombcille made prayer for him, and awoke him out of death; and not that alone, but he asked for a life of seven years for Diarmait after himself.

On a time Cainnech came away from him out of Hii. He forgot his crozier in the east. When he had reached hither, he found his crozier before him here, and a shirt of Colombcille's along with it, to wit, Cainnech's quota for his windingsheet; and Colombcille did that because he knew that Cainnech was near unto his death.

A great flash came to him once in Hii. They asked him the cause of the flash. „The fire of God from heaven,“ saith he, „hath even now come on three cities in Italy, and hath killed three thousand men, besides women and boys and girls.“

At another time he heard a call in the port of Hii. Then he said—

1. A shepherd is in the port with his crook in his claw.
He will come to my little horn and spill my ink.
2. He will stoop down to my pax,
And will knock against my little horn, will leave it empty.

As to Colombcille at another time, Boethin left him cooking a cow for the reapers. They had an old whilom-hero of the men of Ireland, Maeluma son of Boethin was he. Colombcille asked him, how much was his meal when he was a young warrior? Said Maeluma, „When I was a young warrior I used to eat a fat cow to my full meal.“ Colombcille commanded him to eat his fill. Maeluma did that for him, and ate the whole cow. Thereafter Boethin came and asked if what should be eaten were ready. So Colombcille ordered Maeluma to gather all the bones of the cow into one place, and so it was done. Colombcille then blessed the bones, and their own flesh was upon them after that, and they were given to the reapers.

One day in the month of May, Colombcille went to see the plowmen in the north of the island. He was comfortable and teaching them. „Well now,“ saith he, „at the Easter that went into the month of April, then was I fain to have gone to heaven, but I did not wish you to have grief or sorrow after your toil, wherefore I have staid with you to comfort you from Easter to Pentecost.“

When the monks heard these words they were sorrowful exceedingly. He then turned his face westwards, and blessed the ... of the island with its indwellers, and banished toads and snakes out of it.

When he had blessed the island he then came to cell and not long after came the ends of the sabbath and the beginning of the Sunday. And when he raised his eyes on high there came a great glow to his countenance and to his face, and the brethren beheld that. An angel of God, moreover, tarried above him then.

Thereafter he went to bless the barn, and he said to his servant Diarmait that on Saturday night he would depart unto heaven. After that the venerable old man, Colombcille, sat down on the edge of the path, for weariness had come to him, though his wayfaring had been but short; seventy-seven years was his age at that time. Then came unto him the nag which the monks had in the island, and weeps in the breast of the cleric, so that his raiment became wet. The

servant, Diarmait, sought to drive the nag away from him. „Let him be, O Diarmait,“ saith Colombcille, „until he sufficeth himself with tears and sorrow in lamenting me.“

Overmany to recount and declare are the marvels and miracles which God wrought on earth for Colombcille; for there is no one who could recount them fully unless his own angel or an angel of God of heaven came to declare them; but we think these enough of them to give for a sample.

Now there never was born to the Gael offspring nobler, not wiser, nor of better kin, than Colombcille. There hath not come of them another who was meeker, or humbler, or lowlier. Surely it was great lowliness in Colombcille that he himself used to take off his monks' sandals and wash their feet for them. He it was that often carried his quota of corn on his back to the mill, and ground and brought it home to his house. He it was that never put flax nor wool against his skin. He it was that slept not until his side came against the bare mould: nought was under his head save a pillar-stone for a bolster. And he slept only so long as Diarmait his fosterling used to be chanting three chapters of the Beatus. He would rise up after that, and would cry and beat his hands together like a loving mother lamenting her only son. He would chant thrice fifty (psalms) after that, till morning in the sand of the strand, ut dixit poeta—

1. The three fifties—sore the watching—in the night—great was the pain.
In the sea beside Scotland before the sun had risen,
Clear ... in the sand, it was great labour,
The trace of his ribs through his raiment was manifest when the wind
blew.

That was his nightwork. In the daytime he attended to the canonical hours: he offered Christ's Body and his Blood: he preached his gospel: he baptized: he consecrated: he anointed; he healed lepers and the blind and lame and folk of every disease besides: he raised the dead to life.

Now when Colombcille drew nigh to his ending days, and when the bell for nocturn was struck on the night of Pentecost Sunday, he fared before the rest to the church, and knelt and made fervent prayer at the altar. At that moment an angelic radiance filled the church around him from every side, and then the venerable elder sent forth his spirit to heaven in delight and in joyance of heaven's household altogether.

His body is here on earth in honour and veneration from God and menfolk, with daily marvels and miracles; and, though great is his honour at present, greater will it be at the Assembly of Doom, when like an unsullied sun shall shine the ... of his body and soul.

There shall he have that great glory and elevation: in union with nine orders of heaven that have not transgressed; in union with apostles and disciples of Jesus Christ; in union with the Godhead and Manhood of God's Son; in union that is noblest of all unions, union with the Holy Trinity, noble, venerable, almighty, Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

I implore the mercy of Almighty God, through holy Colombcille's intercession, that we may all reach that union, that we may deserve it, that we may dwell therein, in saecula saeculorum. Amen!

Sampling Declaration

The present text represents pages 91-125 of the volume. All editorial introduction, translation, notes and indexes have been omitted.

Hyphenation

Soft hyphens are silently removed. When a hyphenated word (hard or soft) crosses a page-break the break is marked after the completion of the hyphenated word.

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