

cross the Alps and extend the sphere of his usefulness to Italy. His companions continued the work which he had begun in Switzerland, and the city of Gall and the Canton of the same name, commemorate to this day the labours of these Irish missionaries.

Reaching Milan, Columbanus and his solitary companion, were received by Agilulf, the Lombard king, who bestowed upon them a territory called Bobbio, situated in a gorge of the Appenines between Genoa and Milan. While at Milan our Saint wrote his celebrated letter to Pope Boniface IV, an extract from which will show what Columbanus thought of Papal Supremacy; "For we Irish" writes the saint "are disciples of St Peter and St Paul . . . Amongst us neither Jew, heretic nor schismatic can be found, but the Catholic Faith entire and unshaken precisely as we have received it from you who are the successor of the Apostles. For as I have already said we are attached to the Chair of St Peter: and although Rome is great and renowned, yet with us it is great and distinguished only on account of that apostolic chair. Through the two Apostles of Jesus Christ ye are almost celestial, and Rome is the head of the Churches of the world."

Columbanus found ample scope for his missionary zeal in the refutation of the Arian heresy which had many followers amongst the Lombards. In the territory of Bobbio which had been given to him, there was an old church dedicated to St Peter. This he set about repairing and erected a monastery by its side which was destined to become one of the most celebrated in the middle ages. In this place he wrote his tracts against the Arians,

which unfortunately are no longer extant.

After some years, feeling his end approaching, in order to prepare himself the better for the last journey he sought out a cavern in the side of a great rock on the opposite shore of the Trebbia, and transformed it into a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. Here he spent the last days of his life in prayer and fasting:—

"Reaping immortal fruits of joy and love,
Uninterrupted joy, unrivalled love,
In blissful solitude."

The Apostle of France, Burgundy, Switzerland and Lombardy died on Nov. 21st, 615.

The above is but a slight sketch of the labour of Columbanus, and will give but a faint idea of what Irish missionaries did for Europe in those days. Columbanus was but one of the many thousand Irishmen who flocked through the Continent at a time when all science and piety were threatened with extinction. Fr. Thebaud in his *Irish Race* thus speaks of the labours of the Irish monks in Europe. "It has been calculated that the Irish monks held from the 6th to the 9th century 13 monasteries in Scotland, 7 in France, 12 in Amorice Gaul, 7 in Lotharingia, 11 in Burgundy, 9 in Belgium, 10 in Alsatia, 16 in Bavaria, 15 in Rhetia, Helvetia, and Suevia, besides several in Thuringia and on the left bank of the Rhine. Ireland was then not only included in, but at the head of, the European Movement," and Montalembert observes that "the exertions of the Irish monks at that time were so undeniable as to leave France, Switzerland and Belgium under a debt of everlasting gratitude."

M. M. O'Brien O.M.I.

