

THE APOSTLE COLUMBA.

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It is remarkable in what obscure places the seed is often sown which feeds distant generations. Bethlehem Ephrata was but little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of her came He who was to rule Israel. And in no less an humble and obscure place did he labor and pray who is, in some sense, the parent of Teutonic Christianity, the only type of Christian belief and life in modern times which is in any respect worthy to be called Christian. A bit of land amid the lashing waters of the Irish Sea—a basalt reminiscence of awful geological disturbance—a dank, stern islet shrouded in Hebridean mists, and yet the home of a saint of Hebraic earnestness, of a ruler whose sceptre was religion, and whose kingdom was the rough hearts of whole septs of barbarians, of a prophet who, with his Keltic contemporaries, laid deep foundations for the blessing of mankind in the succeeding thirteen hundred years.

Of all places, how was it that Iona should have been chosen as the fulcrum for Columba's activities? What site more bleak, more forbidding, more isolated? The story is interesting. Somebody has called attention to the fact that every Irishman who has distinguished himself has done so either on the battle-field or in the courts of law. Columba was no exception. His unregenerate days were spent in foray and feud. The saint was, in the first instance, a red-handed kern, and it may have been penitential and remorseful reminiscence which made this lonely spot so congenial to him; but the immediate impulse to settlement there came from his legal entanglements; for the record is that before his migration from Ireland to Iona, the future saint—his soldier life being abandoned for that of a priest—became involved in a lawsuit with his bishop. The Irish fighting instinct was not yet crowded out of the converted soul. Yet the cause of the trouble was so manifestly the bishop's unreasonableness, that we cannot refrain from giving Columba our sympathies, or from palliating his offence in deviating from the apostolic injunction with which the sixth of Corinthians opens. It seems that Columba, with unwearied enthusiasm, had thrown himself into the task of copying large portions of the Bible *verbatim et literatim* from the precious episcopal manuscripts. When the work was completed the bishop claimed the copy as a sort of property-plagiarism. This led to litigation, and the judge (an original Dogberry) decided in the bishop's favor, on the ground that *he who owned the cow owned her calf*. Thereupon Columba determined to shake the dust of the homeland from his feet. With a few followers he embarked in a boat of hides, and coasting along the stormy shores of the Scotch islands, landed finally upon Iona, there to begin his noble career of evangelization.

Not a very remarkable incident this, taken by itself. As if, for example, a chieftain of the Shire Highlands should become enraged with his