

Abbot of Iona from 679 till 704, Adamnan was a remarkable man for those times, a scholar who could write Latin and was acquainted with Hebrew and Greek, a diplomat who persuaded the Celtic Church to make several important changes in its government and who secured the "lasting liberation of the women of the Gaels" from taking part in battle. These points are mentioned to show that Adamnan was not merely a monk on a lonely island, but one of the representative men of his time. It was at the request of his brethren that he undertook to write the life of the founder of the Columban Church, a document which is the earliest piece of historical literature connected with the Highlands—"the most complete piece of such biography Europe can boast of, not only at so early a period, but through the whole Middle Ages."

It may be asked why, when that *Life* still exists, there is any occasion for this one. The answer is that Adamnan's so-called *Life* is not a biography. It is a collection of anecdotes not arranged in chronological order and not complete. Adamnan does not tell us all he knows; he tells us nothing he considers derogatory to his hero, and most of his stories are chosen because they lead up to a miracle or a vision. History is of little importance to Adamnan, what he wants to do is to give a portrait of Columba as he saw him. Consequently although his *Life* is a priceless document of antiquity, there is a great deal which it does not tell us as it might conceivably have done. To the student of Celtic antiquity, of early religion, and particularly of the pre-Christian religion of our own country, Adamnan's *Life of Columba* is as full of riddles as it is of information. It gives us a bright and fresh picture of one particular phase of Scottish life in those early times: we see the monastic system as it was practised in Ireland and then in Scotland in the sixth century of our era, painted in vivid colours with a considerable amount of detail, but as to what lay outside of monastic life we gain from it very little information. A bright