

an expedition at any rate that suited his innate love of adventure. In the year 563, when forty-two years old, accompanied by twelve companions, Columba embarked in a frail open boat of wicker work covered with hides. He steered a northern course, intending to land at the nearest point in Scotland, from which his loved native land could not be seen. They landed on Colonsay, but on ascending its heights the hill-tops of Ireland were still to be seen. So they re-embarked and rowed or sailed further north. At length they landed upon the small island of Hy, now Iona, but long familiarly known as Icolmkill—the Isle of Colum of the Cell. It lies off the south-west angle of Mull, separated from it by a narrow sound. There he found a sheltered landing place, abundant pasturage, and enough tillable land on which to raise food for his little colony. From the highest point of it, looking in the direction of Erin, nothing could be seen but the Atlantic ocean. It was out of the busy world, yet near enough to suit his purpose. Here he would not be molested in his work. His first step was to secure a grant of the island from his kinsman, Conal McComgail, king of Argyll. This done, Columba built his cell of wicker and wattle, and one for each of his companions, whom he subjected to a strict routine of monastic discipline. The Abbot's hut was on a knoll overlooking the encampment. Next arose a little chapel, built of logs, with its altar at the east end, and its sacristy in which hung the small bell to summon the brotherhood to prayer. To this were added the library, the refectory, or dining-hall, and the kitchen, where the fire would be made on the middle of the earthen floor. A stable and a barn were also erected; then, last of all, "God's acre," where they were to lay their bones, was measured off and enclosed, and the monastery was complete.

Two years having been spent in these preliminaries, Columba, attended by some of his monks, set out on their first missionary expedition, to convert the Picts who lived on the north-eastern coasts of Scotland. They made a straight course for the castle of Brude, the Pictish king, near Inverness, one hundred and fifty miles distant from Hy. "They shall not enter here," said Brude; "close the gates!" Columba draws near, makes the sign of the cross on

the barred doors, strikes them with his hand; they immediately fly open! The awe-struck king comes forth to meet the missionary, listens devoutly to his words, is converted and baptized. So runs the story. Dismissing this miraculous legend, it is certain that during the thirty-four years in which Iona was his home, he made frequent visits to the mainland, and that he covered the whole of the northern Highlands with a network of mission stations, at every one of which a small cell or chapel was built and a monk placed in charge of it. He is said to have founded one hundred monasteries and three hundred cells. However that may be, Columba was a man of boundless activity and influence. He is represented as a man of splendid physique, with a piercing gray eye, a sonorous voice, and of noble bearing; a scholar and a poet. Impressive and hot-tempered, he was yet tender-hearted and generous. He claimed for himself the rank of a Presbyterian, but it may be frankly admitted he was not a Presbyterian either in his theology or his church polity. He was bound by no ecclesiastical creed. There is proof that his disciples practiced auricular confession, the invocation of saints, held to transubstantiation, fasting and penance; they made prayers for the dead, and attached superstitious importance to the sign of the cross. On the other hand, they rejected the worship of images and the Virgin Mary, and did not acknowledge the authority of Rome.

The accounts of the last days of St. Columba are very touching. The time came when he must lie down with his fathers. A few days before the end, the old Abbot was taken into the field in which his monks were at work. Raising himself to his full height, with a heavenly halo irradiating his face, he blessed the island and its inhabitants. On the last day of the week he said to his faithful servant Diarmaid: "This Saturday will be a Sabbath indeed to me, for it is to be the last of my laborious life, in which I shall rest from all its troubles. Even now, my Lord Jesus deigns to call me, and at his call I shall go." On Sunday morning, the 9th of June, 597, he rose from his couch and entered the chapel alone. When the brethren came, Columba was found lying before the altar. A crowd of weeping monks stood around the dying Abbot. Once more his eyes were opened, and