

PREFACE

MY modest purpose in writing this book is to give a simple account of the life of St Columba, of the times in which he lived, and of his influence on the history of our islands. So far as I am aware, the facts contained in the various early lives of the Saint and the results arrived at by the researches of modern scholars have never yet been gathered together and presented in the form of a connected narrative. That seems to me a task worth attempting, for Columba was the founder of the Scottish nation as well as of the Scottish Church, and his labours and achievements deserve to be the more widely recognized, that the story of his battles, his voyages, his conquests, and his life at Iona, forms one of the most romantic pages of history.

Though the mists of time have closed down to some extent on those early days, Adamnan wrote his *Life of Columba* only a hundred years after the Saint's death. Cuimine the Fair was abbot at Iona when Adamnan was there as a monk, and Cuimine had known Columba, had been trained under him as a lad and had himself written a short Life, *De virtutibus sancti Columbæ*, which Adamnan quotes almost entire in his Third Book. Adamnan had therefore every advantage for the writing of Columba's life: he lived soon after the Saint among those who had known him; he had all the manuscript records of the monastery to draw upon; he wrote at Iona amid the scenes and in the atmosphere in which Columba had lived, probably even in the very hut he had occupied. And Adamnan was a native of Connacht; he belonged to the same royal race as Columba and was born only twenty-seven years after the Saint's death.

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