

Saint Columbanus
Thesis for History 6.
Jan 20. 1903.
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Saint Columbanus.

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I Introduction.

A study of the life of St. Columbanus opens the way to several interesting questions. The stories concerning his birth and education give us a glimpse of early Christianity in Ireland. His later life throws some light on the life of the Gauls during that interesting period, when the Gauls were absorbing the new factors of their life, viz - civilization and Christianity. It also reveals something of the slow but persistent process of weaving these countries together under the influence of the one great Church. It shows us something of that threadwork of monastic systems which exerted such an influence

in reuniting together the facts of the Catholic Church. It takes us within the monasteries, and permits us to see something of the monastic life of the period.

While these aspects are interesting, it is apparent that this brief paper must confine itself to a limited subject. To attempt, therefore, will be made to go beyond the narration of the events of St. Columbanus' life, and to present some conception of his monastic system, and why it was absorbed by the system of Benedict.

The early history of Christianity in Ireland is rather hazy and enveloped in a cloud of legends

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and toler of miracles, which
may or may not have a basis
of fact. The somewhat melo-
dramatic story of St. Patrick's life
and the introduction of Christ-
ianity into Ireland, adds some-
what to our interest in the events
but fails to throw very much light
upon what actually happened. In
as much as the stories say nothing
of war or conquest, we may be-
lieve that Christianity came to
Ireland in a quiet peaceable
manner. Perhaps, as the legends
suggest, it was introduced by
two missionaries of rather humble
conditions. Whatever way there
has been the means, the fact remains
that by the middle of the sixth

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century Christianity had become quite firmly established in Ireland. * "The Catholic - the Roman - faith reigned thus without limitations in the great and numberless communities which constituted the chief strength of the church founded by Patrick and his British fellow-labourers."

Of course this statement is naturally colored by the point of view of the writer, but Dr. Twiss says: - Among the great monastic foundations of the sixth century, that of Finnian, the monastery of Clonard in Meath is pre-eminent. To it 9,000 monks are said to have belonged, i. e., in the different monastic settlements

"Monks of the West. Vol III. P. 85"
Twiss. Ch. Hist. Vol II. P. 48.

which were dependant on Clouard."

Perhaps the whole situation is more clearly expressed thus, - ^{1st} These expressions all point to an effete and decaying church, restored through the medium of Finnian and his monastic school of Clouard, and to a great revival and spread of Christianity through a new and living organization based upon the monastic institutions."

Then there was another famous monasticery known as Bangor, established by St. Columba. Here no less than 3000 Irish monks followed the leadership of one man, and submitted to his command and ruling.

¹Celtic Scotland, W. F. Skene Vol. II, P. 51.

Grouping these various statements we are able to estimate the general conditions of Ireland at the time of the birth, and during the boyhood of our good St. Columban. It seems then that Christianity had passed through its first stage of superficial enthusiasm. There had been a period of relaxation and decay. Now at the time of the growth of these monasteries, it had gotten its second breath, and was ready for good long solid work. It had been put out the outside, had worked in, and was now getting back to the surface again.

Also the general atmosphere of this monastic life must be seen.

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sidered. It was rather the outward-
sphere of a religious university. It
served not only as a training for
the works in religious questions
and religious practices, but
was a center of art, culture and
training, which had a great
influence on the manners and
customs of the inhabitants.¹

¹ There, also, (i. e. in the universities) were trained an entire population of philosophers, of writers, of architects, of carvers, of painters, of sculptors, of musicians, poets and historians; but, above all, of missionaries and preachers destined to spread the light of the Gospel

II Columbanus' Life.

Into this atmosphere, and into these conditions Columbanus was born at Leinster. Writers seem to hesitate about the date, but those who are most consistent in other things say that he was born in the year 543. If the legend concerning his birth be true, there must have been great excitement over the event. The story is told by his first biographer, Jerome, the work of Bobbio. It is at

And of Christian education, not only in all the Celtic countries, of which Ireland was always the nursing mother, but throughout all Europe among all the Sautonic races...."

works of the West. Vol 3. P. 86.

least interesting because it illus-
 trates the nature of the legends
 which in the course of time
 were collected about the facts of
 his life. ^I "For when his mother,
 after having conceived, was bearing
 him in her womb, suddenly in a
 tempestuous night, while she was
 buried in sleep, she saw the sun
 rise from her bosom, and issu-
 ing forth resplendent, furnish
 great light to the world. At
 length she was told by those who had
 wisely considered the matter, that
 she was carrying in her womb
 a man of remarkable genius who
 would provide what would be
 useful for her own salvation and

¹ *Journal of Columbus*, p. 2. In "Lives and
 portraits of European Hist. Vol II.

for that of the neighbors." Regarding of this story as historic fact, we turn to learn something of the lock youth. Very early in his life he became interested in learning and showed evidence of scholarship. He devoted himself to sciences and letters, and studied faithfully all through his boyhood.

But as a young man he seems to have been severely tempted, and to avoid temptations he left his native place. Just what is the truth of the story one could hardly determine, but the general movement seems to indicate some indiscrete love affair which made it seem advisable for him to leave his native place, called Logunac. (Luzina)

He went to live with a holy woman named *Sevelis* who was distinguished for his holy life, and his knowledge of the scriptures²

He remained a long time with this woman *Sevelis*, studying, and then entered the monastery at Bourton (Bangor) where he came under the leadership and direction of the famous St. Curgoll. It seems that by this time he had fully decided to become a monk. Probably he came to this decision during his life with *Sevelis*. He went to *Sevelis* rather to escape what was behind, now he comes to Bangor to prepare himself for the Christian ministry, or rather a Christian teacher. His life here

1-2- Jones. Life. P. 4.

was well adopted to that purpose, Fast-
ing and prayer gave him control
over himself.

Here he remained many years,
(probably about ten) absorbing all
the wealth of knowledge which
was to serve him so well in
later years.

F. "Here Columbus gave himself
entirely to fasting and prayer,
to bearing the easy yoke of Christ
to mortifying the flesh.....
that he who was to instruct
others might also instruct
himself." Page 5,

But he tired of Burger, and longed to go to foreign lands, where he might teach the Gospel.

About the 31th^x year of his life is about 573, he left Burger for the continent together with twelve followers.[#] Passing through Brittany, the thirteen monks came to Gaul, where there awaited a great work for them. The conditions of the Frankish Church at this time were rather defensible to say the least. Christianity had been accepted as the German people accepted all civilizing influences. It was fast on, then given a chance to work & some work, say 20 yrs, but evidently have no support.

Jour. P. 6.

in, and then slowly came to the surface again. At the time when Columbus and his work appeared among them, the Franks had passed through the first stage of Christianity. The newness had worn off, and they were living in a period of relaxation and weariness. They had taken on new influences, but had not yet observed the deeper meaning. The conditions are well stated in the following. ¹"In the regulations of monastic life, down to the end of the sixth century, . . . there was no definite rule: that of Benedict had as yet won no influence, and the different monasteries stood in no close alliance. The Mueller, p. 64.

of the age had desivilized the monasteries also; even Lerium once so highly esteemed had fallen a victim to its influence since 537 under Frankish rule." Jones also says. "at that time either because of the numerous enemies from without, or on account of the scandalousness of the Bishops, the Christian faith had almost deserted from that country."

Into these conditions Columban and his companions came. First they settled at Araguay. but their numbers so increased that they founded a new monastery at Luxeuil. Here, too, his following so increased that he had to open a second convent known as Fontaines. Jones, P. 6.

The monastery of Luxeuil was situated in the most inaccessible defiles of the Vosges mountains. C'est par ses mines de ses steep civilisations que nait s'inflante la grande métropole monastique de l'Austrasie et de la Bourgogne. Alongside of the fame of Luxeuil, the famous Mercurius faded. Indeed Luxeuil became the center of all monastic life in these regions for a long period of years.

But it seems that in spite of all his influence and power, he was greatly disturbed by the intrigues of Brunhilde, the grandmother of Theodebert, ruler of Austrasia and Theoderich, ruler of Burgundy. *Wiss. d. L. Occident. Vol. 2. 429.*

It seems that Columban brought Thenu-
derich to account for his immoral life^I
and refused to give blessing to some
illegitimate children, when Brun-
hilde requested him to. She refused
with him heavily, for at the instigation
of Brunhilde, the King brought about
his expulsion from the Kingdom. At first
Columban protested strongly, writing
a very severe letter to the King,
threatening him with excommunication. But
finally under escort he was taken
from his monastery, and carried to
Besançon into banishment.² This
was in the year 610.

During this period of his life Columban
had built up a monastic system which
not only had an influence in
Burgundy, but also in all of West-
Europe. See. 32.

² See Jones, Sec. 31-34, and *Windsch. Geschichte*, Vol 2, p. 236-242

in Europe. It is true that his system was observed by the Benedictine movement, but it doubtless greatly modified it. Besides the three monasteries, Aragnay, Luxeuil, and Fontaines, it seems that several branches were established, which still remained under his control.

His departure from Luxeuil in 610 marks the beginning of a new and widely different kind of a life. During the remaining years of his life, he is traveling, and becomes more or less mixed up in the political complications of the Franks.

Arriving at Besançon, he is confined in the town a free prisoner, but finally his longing for Luxeuil

overcomes him, and he returns, but is again forced into exile. Compelled to leave Burgundy, it is probable that he had set his mind on returning to Ireland. ^I Deterred from this plan, he starts for a missionary journey among the people who live in the regions near the Rhine. This carried him into a new kind of life. Up to this time he had been working entirely among Christians but he now goes among people who worshipped the God Woden*. St. Gallus was his companion during this time. They seem to have met with some success in this effort. This is especially true at Braganz, where a church was founded. Here he remained about three years.

Jonas. Lec. 38

* Les Voies de l'Occident. p. 456

But the fortunes of war at this time
 made it necessary for him to leave
 Bregenz. In the battle of Tolbiae
 Thundaric, Columbus's supporter, was
 defeated. Austrasia joined into the
 control of Thundaric and Brun-
 hilde. To escape their pursuit, he
 crossed the Alps into Italy.

In Italy he is welcomed by
 King Agilwulf in a friendly and
 cordial manner. He was given
 a tract upon which to found a
 monastery. As a result of his lost
 work, the monastery Bobio was
 established in a gorge of the Alps
 between Genoa and Lubbio.

After a year of quiet life in
 Bobio Columbus died there
 in the year 615 Nov. 14.*
 * Jones, p. 36

IV General Character: writings.

"Modesty and moderation, meekness and mildness adorned them all in equal measure." Thus four characteristics of the monks who went from Ireland to Gaul. To these characteristics as applied to Columban I suppose we must assent. It does not say all however. His monastic system, for example, is a witness of a powerful executive ability, and personal influence. We must add, too, force and courage. His clear treatment of the King and the Popery, point to an unflinching courage, and a strong determination. While his letters to the Pope are in form humble and meek, they are strong and fearless.

Imos. P. 6.

His message to King Theoderich, sent by the King's cousin, is a fair example of his frankness in speech. "I know that you want to keep your oath of fidelity to King Theoderich, and you will be glad to take my message to your lord and friend, if you serve King Theoderich, therefore, announce to Theoderich that he and his children will die within three years, and his entire family will be exterminated by the Lord."²

Again his threatening of the King with excommunication shows that his strength could serve him even when he was losing. In short we have to acknowledge him to be very much a man of strength and power as well as one of humility and meekness.

Evans Dec. 43.

Such of his writings as have been preserved, may be found in Vol 80 of the Patrologiae. They consist of the "Regula Coenobialis" (Monastic Rules), upon the basis of which his monastic communities were regulated: "De Penitentiarum mensura taxanda liber"; seven teen sermons; six letters.

The "Regula Coenobialis" comprises ten short chapters concerning the regulation of monastic life. Ch. 1. is upon "Obedience"; ch. 2 is upon "Silence"; ch. 6. upon "Charity"; ch. 10 is upon the "Variety of Punishments".

Then his "De Penitentiarum mensura" These mark what is considered to be the most characteristic and

distinguishing feature of his system. The seventeen sermons are upon what would now be termed spiritual topics. The six letters are also very interesting and throw a lot of light upon the work life. The first one is to Gregory I. and has to do with the controversy which stirred him so much trouble, viz. the Easter and Lenten customs.

In addition to these writings there are a few poems, "Ad Hunc: album Egistola", "Venerabili" etc.

His style is simple, clear and to the point, at least, I think that it must be, because I find that I can translate the things quite easily.

V. System of Columbo vs. Benedict's System.

It seems rather strange that a system apparently so strong and so well founded as Columbo's was, should be overruled and for entirely under the rule of the Benedictine monastic system within a few years after Columbo's death. This ^{is} what happened "In spite of the great impulse which proceeded from Columbo, his rule was soon obliged to retire before the growth of the Benedictine Rule..."^x Here we have Columbo's Rules securely and well established, in monasteries of his own development, then along comes Benedict's Rule and deliberately pushes Columbo's rule aside, and establishes itself in his monasteries.

x Wocell. Vol II. P. 70.

There are, I think, no less than five influences which combined to bring about this change:-

1st Nature of Columbian Rule.

2nd . . . Benedict's Rule

3rd Political complications of Columbus.

4th His attitude towards Gregory X and Boniface VIII.

5th He was outside of the direct stream of influence of the Roman Papacy.

1st The monastic Rule of Columbus presents some peculiarities, while it is essentially of the same nature as other systems, it has certain distinguishing characteristics. It is negative in its whole atmosphere. Its whole command would be expressed in these words "Suffer and stand out."

The headings of the "Rules" suggest this negative conception; *de silentio*, *de obedientia*; *de fastidioso*, *de cupiditate*; *de vanitate colenda*; *de mortificatione*.¹ Even the word "Colenda" suggests suppression. The section "de perfectione monachi" is essentially negative in its conception.¹ Here we have a clear cut case of fine negation. It is slapping out, and suppressing that works

¹ "Monachus in monasterio non est sub iure disciplinae Patris, cuius obsequium multum, ut ob alio dicit humilitatem, ob alio fortitudinem; non cum silentio, alio dicit mansuetudinem; non facit quod vult, sed dicit

Columbo's Rule.

But perhaps the negative value of the Rule appear even more noticeably in the "De fontentiarium", which consists of a list of no less than 42 groups of of enforcements of wovetic's rule, with a definite faculty attached. It is a harsh hard, inflexible system, this is the weakness of the system.

quod jobetur; habet quantum
 acceptat, opus sui futurum per
 solvat; subjicitur in son vult;
 lassus ad statum veniat, am=
 bulansque dormitat, nec dum
 ex flecto summo surge confell=
 otur; farus injuriam, tacet?"
 Patologicae, Vol. 80, P. 216.

It may not have appeared during the life of Columbo, when his personality seemed to bring out the positive side of the woman's life. After Columbo's death, and the system was left to run upon the basis of his will, the mechanism appeared. This was one of the factors which helped to supplant Columbo's Rule with Benedict's.

2nd Nature of Benedict's Rule.

Comparing Benedict's Rule with Columbo's, even a superficial comparison, one is struck with the marked change from the negative to the positive atmosphere. Even the subjects treated suggest something positive. They are less severe and exacting, and

at the same time supply this lack of severity and exactness with an atmosphere of work, not merely the mere hard manual labor which exhausts the vitality, but literary labor which feeds the work's mind, and turns his thoughts away from things evil. The fundamental idea of Benedict's system is to keep the monks busy.

Indeed, the strict obedience exacted by the Rule is tempered throughout by an elasticity and consideration which contrast strongly with the inflexible rigor of similar institutions!

This positive, something-to-do Rule, would afford much more strength to the monks in general than the mere negative Rule of Columbanus.

In short here is another factor
 Rise of Christian Monasticism, Gregory Smith
 p. 69

which were influential in getting
to one side Columbus Rule.

3rd Political Conflicts of Columbus.

Of course the very fact that
Columbus was on intimate terms
with the Kings,¹ and even seems
to have^{been} an adviser for them not
only in spiritual and moral² things
but also in political³ and state³
affairs, speaks of the strength of his
mind, the extent of his influence
and the general respect in which
he was held. But he was dealing
with dangerous people. The strained
relations which spring up between
Columbus and Bunchida forced
him to leave the country. How deep
and lasting an offense this seemed
¹ Jones. See 43. ² Jones See 32
³ Jones. Page 89

To Brunhilde and Thenderich it shows in later developments. After the defeat of Theobert, and Austravia had fallen into the hands of Thenderich, we find Columbus again forced to leave the country. There seems to have been no delay upon his part, but immediately he set out for Italy. Thus he left behind him an opposition. To be sure Thenderich did not long hold power, yet the whole affair must have left an influence, which was still another influence against the success of Columbus's Rule.

4th His Attitude towards Gregory I and Boniface IV.

Columbus among the Gauls still clung to the customs and us =

ages of the church of his native Ireland. It is true that the points of unlikeness were not many or seemingly important, yet the slightest difference was of great importance at this time when the Papacy was being formed and developed into a unitary machine. St Columban's method of determining the day for celebrating Easter, also his customs of Lent were somewhat out of harmony with the prevailing customs of the church. This led to some opposition, and evidently some interference on the part of the Papacy. Columban, in a letter which in form is very humble, but in content is quite independent and self-assertive, maintains

the right of his position as against
the Roman position. His letter to
a French Council which was
called in 602 or 3 for the purpose of
discussing this question of difference,
is also marked by a strong inde-
pendent tone, but still we wish
to force his customs upon others
He simply stands for the right and
privilege of doing as he wishes
in his own country. He also
treats of the same subject in another
letter to Boniface III. Just how
this controversy ended I cannot
determine, but apparently the question
was solved in the natural
course of events, as Columbanus
Rule was superseded by Benedict's
Rule. Here, too, is a very

powerful factor in this change from one Rule to another. To have accepted Columbus's Rule would have implied the possibility of two methods of determining Easter. This would be absolutely incompatible with the idea of unity in the Church. Columbus's strength, and self assertiveness in forcing his claims, too, would have no other result than to wake him self, something of an eyesore in the eyes of the Popes. His system and Rule was not their system and Rule, therefore his must go. Columbus's Rule could not have the support of the Papacy on account of the certain differences of customs.

5 - Columbus was outside the direct stream of influence of the Roman Papacy.

Even if Columbus's customs and habits had all been in strict conformity to the Papacy, yet he would have remained an outsider.

Whatever in the days of Rome flourished, had succeeded, must first have been stamped with the approval of Rome. In these days when the Empire was weak, the real power rested in the Papacy. Whatever institution would have more than local, and temporary force must first through the Roman Church, and receive the approval of the Papacy. That was its trade mark.

Now Columban's Rule or system did
 not have that stamp of approval.
 Columban had come from a country
 where the church, at the time of his
 coming was not in direct
 relations with the Roman Catholic
 Church. He represented rather
 an offshoot, which had not yet
 been recognized. He built up
 his system upon his own finci-
 flen, seeking no support from
 Rome. When the time came there-
 fore to decide either for or
 against the Rule, the Papacy
 would not support an outsider.
 Columban's system had to fall.

* The Council of Aachen in 788 A. D.
 ordered the Benedictine Rule to
 be observed, and no other, in
 Smith's Rise of Monasticism. Page 82

the Empire of Charles and his son." This is but the culmination of a tendency. Columbus was not under the influence of the Pope and consequently his Rule was set aside for a Rule which had their stamp of approval.

These five influences were plainly at work, just what proportion of influence each one had it is difficult to imagine.

It is sufficient to know that the combine overcame Columbus's Rule.

II. Columbus.

In Columbus there appears every interesting thing. A man of strength, courage, ability and leadership. Born and brought up in what we then call out of the way country he goes into the very center of activity in Europe. He establishes a mercantile system which exerted a nice and deep influence in Europe.

The very forces and capacities which were of value in making him successful, in making his mercantile system successful, worked against him, when the question of the ultimate success of his Rule was raised.

Because he was strong, and
conqueror he succeeded,
and because of these same
qualities his message was
not accepted by the Roman
Church, and Columbus forced
into obscurity, with his Pele.