

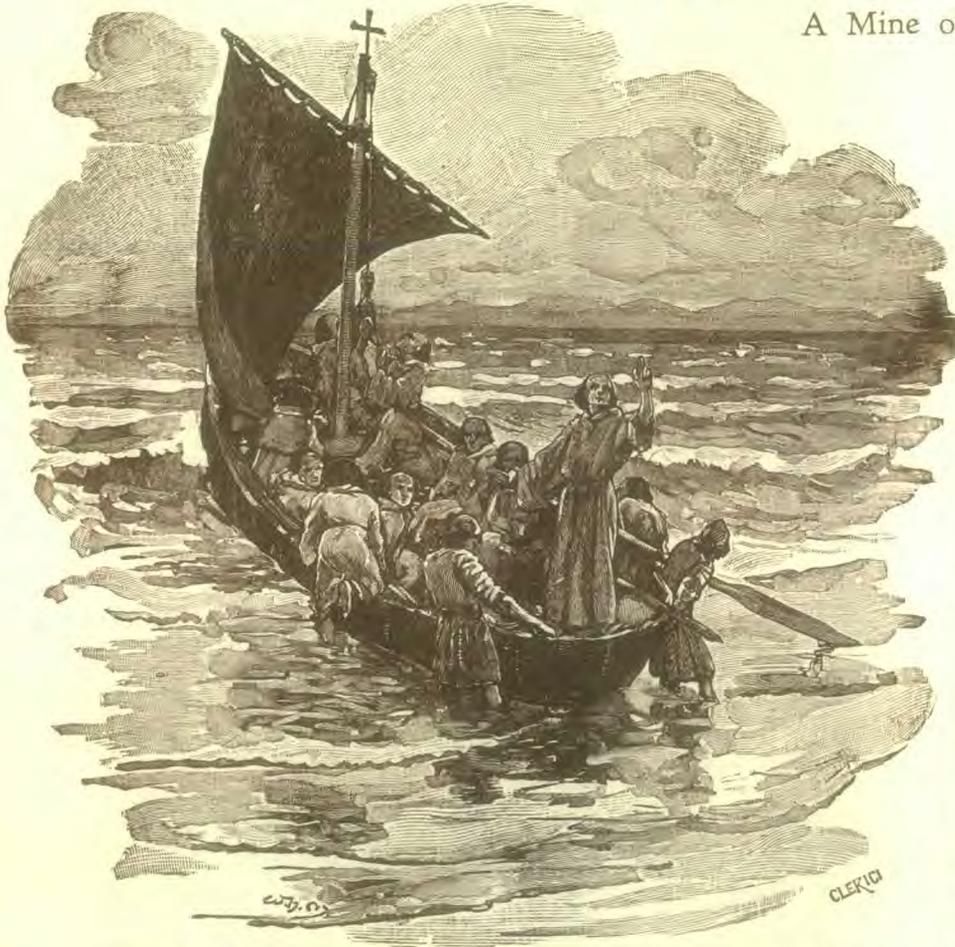
# Rome Did NOT Convert Britain

The Truth About the Beginning of Christianity in the British Isles

*PART IV.—How Ireland and Scotland Were Evangelized*

A Mine of Priceless Facts By

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*Columba, the apostle of Scotland, and his companions setting sail on their missionary voyage*

WHEREVER the Gospel takes root in the hearts of men there is generated the missionary spirit. Those who have tasted of the riches of divine grace glow with desire to pass on their new-found joy to others still in ignorance of it.

As soon, therefore, as Christianity became established in Britain, teachers began to go forth to those still in the darkness of heathenism.

Some crossed the narrow seas

which separated Britain from the mainland of Europe and took up the uncompleted work there, founding missionary churches in many of the lands whither they travelled.

As early as the end of the first century Beatus, a noble Briton, is said to have established a mission at Undersevern on Lake Thun in Switzerland and founded the Helvetian church. Early in the second century Mansuetus, also a Briton,

founded the Lotharingian church in Gaul, and then pushed on into Illyria, where he was martyred. The cathedral St. Cadval at Tarentum, in Italy, is named after a British missionary who is said to have established a church there in A.D. 170!

From the fifth century the British church cared for their kinsmen in Brittany, which for a long time was untouched by the Gallican church. Many of the place names there, such as St. Malo, St. Brieux, and St. Gildas, have perpetuated the memory of some of these early British missionary pioneers.

The missionaries of the British church were evidently appreciated in those early days, for many were appointed to foreign sees. The founder bishop of Treves, Marcellus, was a Briton. Cataldus became a later bishop of Tarentum. Donatus of Lupiae in South Italy and another Donatus, bishop of Fiesole in North Italy, were also of British origin.

## *How Ireland Received the Gospel*

The most important missionary endeavours of the early British church, however, were the evangelization of Ireland and Scotland. From Britain Ireland received the faith, and then from Ireland the message of salvation

penetrated to the remotest regions of Scotland and into the islands on the west and north of the mainland, until eventually the church was spread over the whole of the British Isles. The name which shines brightest among the pioneers of the Gospel in Ireland is that of Sukkat or Patrick, who later became the patron saint of Erin's Isle.

Prior, however, to the mission of Patrick there was an abortive mission from Rome.

Coelestine, an Irishman living in Rome, brought Ireland to the notice of Coelestius, bishop of Rome, about the year A.D. 431. The latter commissioned Palladius, archdeacon of St. Germain, to proceed to Ireland as its first bishop. Palladius landed in what is now County Wicklow, but opposition was so strong that he was quickly expelled. Driven out to sea he followed the British coast as far as Kincardineshire in Scotland, where he landed only to meet further persecution which culminated in his martyrdom, probably at Fordun.

One year after Palladius was driven from the Irish shores, Patrick landed in the north.

Patrick was a Scottish boy, the son of a deacon and the grandson of a priest, born at Kilpatrick in Dumbartonshire somewhere about the year A.D. 395. The Gospel had thus evidently already penetrated and become established at least as far north in Scotland as this place.

#### *Conversion of Patrick*

At the age of sixteen he was taken captive, together with his sister and some thousands of his countrymen, during an Irish raid, and was carried back to Antrim as a slave. For six years he toiled as a herd-boy in the service of Milchu, son of the heathen king of North Dalraida. During this long time he forgot the religion of his parents, but at last, like the prodigal son in

the parable, he was brought back, in his need, to God.

He was "reformed by the Lord," he tells us in his *Confession to the Irish People*, and became impressed that he was to be used of God to carry the Gospel to others who knew it not.

Soon after he succeeded in escaping from the land of his captivity and returned home to Scotland, only, however, to be captured again. He escaped again, and on reaching home the second time, there appeared to him in the night season a sound as of many voices from across the water calling: "We beseech thee, child of God, come and again walk among us." His friends and relatives sought to restrain him from this apparently mad enterprise, but obedient to what he regarded as a heavenly call, Patrick set off for the third time, now of his own free will, for the shores of Ireland, landing, as we have said, just one year after Palladius had been expelled from the island.

For thirty years Patrick preached Christ to the Irish people, during which time he covered the whole land from County Down in the north to Tara in the south. His first convert, Benignus, became his co-labourer, and after his death carried on the work as Elisha took up the work of Elijah his father in the faith.

#### *A True Gospel Missionary*

Patrick's methods were akin to those of modern Protestantism. He preached Christ from the Scriptures with great power, pressing home conviction to individual hearts, not seeking merely the outward baptism of great masses of people which seemed to satisfy the missionaries of Rome. He preached in the language of the people, and invented an alphabet which he taught to the young that they might learn to read and under-

stand the Word of God for themselves.

Everywhere the Gospel was favourably received he established schools, where the converts were instructed in the faith, the most promising being trained to carry the Gospel into still remoter parts.

Having spread the light of the Gospel over the whole of central and southern Ireland he completed his evangelization of the land by the conversion of Ulster and the establishment of his northern centre at Druin-sailech, the "hill of the willows." Around the church which he built there grew up the city of Armagh which, sad to say, in later times was captured by the papal church and became the seat of the Roman jurisdiction in Ireland. Well would it have been if the later bishops of Armagh had followed in the illustrious steps of its founder.

#### *Columba, the Apostle of Scotland*

Among the noble young men attracted to the Gospel by the successors of Patrick and Benignus was Colum or Columba, whose father was Feidlimid, a member of a reigning family in Ireland, and his mother Eithne of Leinster, also the descendant of an illustrious provincial ruler. Born in A.D. 521 he grew up amid the hills of Donegal and was sent to be educated first in the schools of Finnian of Molville and then under Finnian of Clonard, two of the most famous Christian teachers of the time. He became a deacon, and finally was ordained. At once he set out for the north, and on the shores of Loch Foyle established a "monastery" or Christian colony which grew into the city of Londonderry. Another he founded at Durrow in King's County, and perhaps still more in other places.

The Providence which years before had sent a Scottish youth

with the message of salvation to the Irish people now impressed the Irish Columba with a burden for the unentered regions of Scotland and in the year A.D. 563 he set out with twelve companions to attempt this perilous enterprise.

The missionaries landed at Hy or Iona, a rocky islet off the coast of Scotland, and established there a church and monastery. Two years later they crossed over to the Picts on the mainland. Following the lakes now forming the Caledonian Canal they reached the capital of Brude, one of the fierce northern kings, on the site of the present city of Inverness. Brude responded to the preaching of the Gospel, became a Christian, and gave his aid to their further work. By A.D. 574 they had covered the whole land as far north as Buchan in Aberdeenshire and had erected churches and monasteries in many places.

In their frail coracles they

sailed out to the Hebrides, the Orkney and Shetland Isles, and even as far as Iceland. Hardly a rock is to be found in all these northern seas where there are not some remains indicating the visit of one or more of these intrepid pioneers. Well says Schaff in his *History of the Christian Church*:

"We can form no adequate conception of the self-denying zeal of these heroic missionaries of the extreme north, who, in a forbidding climate and exposed to robbers and wild beasts, devoted their lives to the conversion of savages." —*Medieval Christianity*, I, 67, sec. 18.

#### *Greater than Augustine*

The Rev. C. Hole pays a glowing tribute to the tireless energy of Columba and his zealous companions. "Columba," he says, "occupies in missionary history the entire generation preceding the arrival of Augustine." Moreover, he adds, he "laboured much longer, in a much wider sphere, and personally with more success as well as prodigiously

more romance than the first archbishop of Canterbury."

And Montalembert says of the permanence of Columba's work at Iona:

"Iona was for two centuries the nursery of bishops, the centre of education, the asylum of religious knowledge, the point of union among the British Isles, the capital and metropolis of the Celtic race."

The vigorous missionary life of Columba was brought to a close on Sabbath, June 9, A.D. 597. Active to the last he died, like Bede in later years, transcribing a portion of the Scriptures he loved so dearly. Reaching the tenth verse of the thirty-fourth Psalm, "They that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing," he laid aside his pen saying, "The next words, 'Come, ye children, hearken unto me,' belong to my successor rather than to me," and thereupon passed peacefully away.

(*Next Time: "Evil Days, and How Good Came Out of Them."*)