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The Life of St. Columban, by Mrs. THOMAS CONCANNON, M.A., published by the
Catholic Truth Society of Ireland, 5/- net.

From somewhere in Leinster to Bobbio extended the far-flung battle front along which Columban, miles christi, struggled unto the imperishable crown. His name is illustrious and his memory dear in distant lands. In Italy a great town, San Columbano, is called for him; he is patron of the diocese of Bobbio; in the Library of Milan are ancient books on his life, his monasteries, and his monks. Luxeuil in France was founded anew by him, and neither the history of Europe or of the Catholic Church can be written, or read, without reference to his labours, his learning, and his piety. Columban was born in Leinster; he was of the noble line of the Hy-Bairrche, his parents are unknown. He entered Sinell's school of Cluain-inis on Lough Erne in or about his seventeenth year, anno Domini 557. Here he remained two years, when he followed Conghall to Bangor on the shores of Lough Laoigh (now called Belfast Lough) where for thirty years he laboured as monk and professor, and contributed perhaps more than even its great founder to the glory of "Benchuir of the excellent rule." In the year 589 he with twelve companions set out on his mission; in 591 they entered the "desert of the Vosges," and then began that great work which shall through all time be for a testimony of Europe's indebtedness to Ireland. In 610 he and the Irish of his community were driven from their monastery home of Luxeuil and forbidden the kingdom, by Theuderic. Thus a second peregrinatio pro Christo was begun; five years later it happily ended at Bobbio, where he died on Sunday 23rd November 615 A.D. He had founded monasteries at Annegray, Luxeuil, Fontaines and Bobbio.

Above all, one is anxious to know what manner of man Columban was, and Mrs. Concannon's book, page after page, in continuing testimony shows him Irish of the Irish. Many miracles he wrought—let this one instance his tenderness: "a little boy, Domoal, was attached to his service (as the little boys of the monastery school seem to have been in turn). His duty was to bring messages between Columban when in his mountain retreat, or 'carcair,' and the monks below; another duty was to bring up water to the master. This latter taxed his little body overmuch, and he naturally lamented the hardship, and wished there were a spring beside the cave, Columban, understanding his mind, though the boy did not reveal it, bade him make a little hollow in the rock near by; the boy did so, and forth gushed, as once at the prayer of Moses for the people of Israel, a clear spring of water."—page 142.

Another instance of his qualities: Changoald, afterwards Bishop of Leon, relates that when as a little boy he came with messages from the monastery "he used to see the birds flying about the saint, and perching on his shoulders, and feeding from his hands, and chirping joyously all the time; the wild things, like hares and rabbits, would be standing quietly by while the gentle hand stroked them, and a squirrel would drop from the tree-tops and climb on his hand and hang around his neck and nestle in his bosom."—page 144.

As an instance of his courage: Columban by his fearless denunciation of the king's sinful life, drew upon himself and his monastery the anger of Theuderic, which materialised in a very effectual boycott. Columban set out to the king's palace. The king sat at the banquet table; when Columban arrived he bade him be admitted, the saint refused to enter; he then ordered that a royal repast be prepared, and carried out, the saint refuses to touch it, saying: "It is written God rejects the gifts of the impious, it is not fitting indeed that the lips of the servants of God be polluted with the food of him who denies to the servants of God the approach, not alone to his own dwelling, but to that of others." And as he said this, the vessels, viands and wines were mysteriously smashed and scattered. At daybreak the stern old saint was still on the threshold of the king, he would not budge an inch till the hurtful restrictions were withdrawn, and withdrawn they were, and even with promises of future amendment of life by the king.

An instance, too, of his Irish temper is preserved: After his expulsion from Luxeuil we find him at Tours partaking of the hospitality of Bishop Leuparius. At the bishop's table were a number of distinguished guests, amongst them Chrodoaldus, a liegeman of King Theuderic. The bishop put the rather maladroit question to Columban, why he was returning to Ireland? and Columban flashed back, Chrodoaldus notwithstanding: "That dog of a Theuderic has driven me from my brothers." A final instance: In a letter addressed to Athala filled with fearfulness and anxiety and much exhortation and advice for his brethren in face of the storms

he foresees will break upon them, he winds up with a message for Waldonlenus, "to whom do thou give that farewell kiss which in the hurry of departure I had not time to bestow." The fatherliness of St. Paul!

Now, as to the book itself. There is a pleasant air of romance about its being. About three years ago the Irish bishops were enabled, through the generosity of one who would be unnamed, to offer £200 for the best life of St. Columban; the book was to be a critical work, and not "three big bad volumes full of undigested correspondence and undiscerning panegyric." The Bishops appointed the following distinguished board of judges:—Most Rev. Dr. Healy, LL.D., Monsignor Hogan, Canon MacCaffrey, Ph.D., George Sigerson, M.D., F.R.U.I., and the Right Hon. M. Cox, M.D., P.C. On their recommendation the prize was awarded to the present work. The generous scholar who kept in the background till the work itself revealed him, is the Most Rev. Dr. Thomas J. Shahan, Bishop of Germanicopolis—one of the sea-divided Gael.

To write the life of St. Columban was no easy task, but Mrs. Concannon wrote with this advantage, as being heir to all the ages. The basis is, of course, the Latin "*Vita S. Columbani*" of Jonas, monk of Bobbio, of which there have been three editings—that of Bruno Krusch, of Utique, and of the martyred friar Patrick Fleming, fellow-worker with the Four Masters, and a Tallanstown man. Dr. Lanigan in his "*Ecclesiastical History of Ireland*," Montalambert in his "*Les Moines d'Occident*," Dr. Healy in his "*Ireland's Ancient Schools and Scholars*" treat at length of St. Columban, and are worthy forerunners of the gifted authoress. When all is said and done, as the phrase is, there is very little known about Columban while yet in Ireland; and the first five chapters of Mrs. Concannon's book more than justify its sub-title: "*A Study of Ancient Irish Monastic Life*"; but the substitution is done with a literary sleight-of-hand that makes us forget, or, adverting, almost cease to regret, that the earlier materials are as scanty as they are. The chapter on the Merovingian Kings is a *mise-en-scène* hardly to be rivalled. There are eight Appendices given to critical matter; in these the readers of the Louth Archæological Journal will positively revel. There are also a Foreword, an Introduction of twenty-five pages, Bibliographical notes, and an Index. The book is altogether commendable in everything but the binding. But it is not the last word; for we shall make bold, even here and now, to add to it the skeleton of another chapter.

In the year 1908 and on August the 14th of that year, a party of Irish gentlemen might have been seen lunching at the Restaurant of the Alpine Railway Station of Greige. They had come from Lucerne that morning and had yet to cross the Fürka Pass and be far down the valley of the Rhone by sunset if their strenuous day was to be filled according to plan. Wherefore, that luncheon was receiving more serious attention than is the wont of Irishmen to give such matters. Anyhow, they arose to find that the Royal Mail Diligence had departed, Ireland not represented among the passengers. Accordingly, new arrangements were made, and a private conveyance was chartered, and a new programme was taken on, with, it must be admitted, a suspicious absence of regret. The sunset hour saw them driving into Andermatt, a beautiful old town brown with age and set most cosily in its immemorial foundations. A rich dark tapestry of pine forest hangs down behind it from a hidden mountain peak, a bright green hill is on the right, a valley of slumbrous little fields is on the left, mountains that cut the sky-line stand beyond, a great hump-backed bridge unites the fraternal but chance-placed houses that a noisy mountain stream comes down to sever. Here our Irishmen at once resolve to stay, for most beautiful is Andermatt in the sunset. And here, when they have had time to exercise their inquisitiveness, they find that two other Irishmen have arrived before them, who are Saints Columban and St. Gall. That leading street of the town is called St. Gall, that little grey building with the wooden spire half way up the bright green hill is the chapel of S. Columban. Columban's chapel at Andermatt would afford comfortable accommodation to hardly more than fifty, but it is not now in use, save on the Feast Day. Above the altar is the inscription: "*St. Columbanus Plarrer des Thales*," over the chancel arch the inscription: "*Wer glaubt und getauft wird Selig*," and on the face of a little granite pulpit set "in plano" under the centre of the chancel arch, the inscription "*Kaunzel des Ht Kolumban, Seigishert, u Plazidus, 612-634*." Here and not in a hotel in the yet distant valley of the Rhone our pilgrims said their evening prayers.

seumas ó cuinn.