

**TRANSLATIONS AND REPRINTS
FROM THE ORIGINAL SOURCES
OF EUROPEAN HISTORY, LIFE OF
ST. COLUMBAN, VOL. II, NO. 7**

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Vol. II, No. 7 by Dana Carleton Munro

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DANA CARLETON MUNRO

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LIFE OF ST. COLUMBAN.

by Jonas, monk

EDITED BY

DANA CARLETON MUNRO, A. M.

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THE use by readers and students of those original documents from which our knowledge of history is so largely drawn has come to be valued in recent times at something like its true worth. The sequence of past events, the form and spirit of institutions, the characters of men, the prevailing habits of thought, obtain their greatest reality when we study them in the very words used by the men to whom the past was the living present. Even historians who have not been characterized by a close dependence on the results of patient investigation of the sources have recognized the superiority of an appeal to original testimony. Mr. Froude says, "Wherever possible, let us not be told about this man or that. Let us hear the man himself speak, let us see him act, and let us be left to form our own opinion about him." And in "Stones of Venice," Mr. Ruskin writes, "the only history worth reading is that written at the time of which it treats, the history of what was done and seen, heard out of the mouths of the men who did and saw. One fresh draught of such history is worth more than a thousand volumes of abstracts, and reasonings, and suppositions and theories."

Experience has proved not only that the interest of students can be more readily obtained through the vividness of a direct and first-hand presentation, and that knowledge thus gained is more tangible and exact; but that the critical judgment is developed in no slight degree, and the ability as well as the interest for further study thus secured.

The utilization of the original sources of history has, however, been much restricted by their comparative inaccessibility. A great proportion of such documents as illustrate European history exist only in more or less unfamiliar languages; many are to be found only in large and expensive collections, or in works that are out of print and therefore difficult to obtain or consult.

The desire to overcome in some degree this inaccessibility, especially for their own classes, led the editors of the present series of translations and reprints from the original sources of European history to undertake its publication. During the past two years evidence has been given of the usefulness of the documents in several directions. Their most considerable use has naturally been with college classes. One or more of the issues has been used in fourteen of the principal Universities and Colleges. In addition to these and their use in lower schools, they have been found to give increased value to University Extension courses and reading circles.

During the coming year the series will be broadened somewhat in scope and the number of editors increased. The separate numbers will be edited respectively by Dana Carleton Munro, A. M., Roland P. Falkner, Ph. D., and Merrick Whitcomb, A. B., of the University of Pennsylvania, George L. Burr, A. M., of Cornell University, Edward P. Cheyney, A. M., of the University of Pennsylvania, and James Harvey Robinson, Ph. D., of Columbia College. Titles of the numbers and further particulars are given on the third cover page.

TRANSLATIONS AND REPRINTS
FROM THE
ORIGINAL SOURCES OF EUROPEAN HISTORY.

VOL. II. LIFE OF ST. COLUMBAN, BY THE MONK, JONAS. No. 7.

During the sixth and seventh centuries the greatest missionary activity was shown by the Scots, who dwelt in Ireland. In that country religion was cherished with greater zeal than elsewhere, and learning was fostered for the sake of the church. But not content with the flourishing state of Christianity in their own island, the most zealous monks often passed over to the continent. There most of the inhabitants were still pagans, and the so-called Christians were little inclined to follow the precepts of the religion, which they professed. Gaul especially attracted the attention of the bold missionaries from Ireland, and the Irish usages became well established in some parts of the country. Unfortunately almost all the accounts of the missionaries from Ireland have been lost. But for this one biography, we could form no adequate conception of what the continent owed to them.

Jonas, the author of this life, became a monk at Bobbio, in northern Italy, three years after Columban's death. He was soon employed to write this life, for which he obtained material, as he himself tells us, from the stories told by the saint's companions. Living as he did, among the latter, his account reflects their feelings faithfully, and we may be certain that he has recounted the events accurately, and has often reproduced the saint's own words. As is usual in such biographies, the miracles are numerous. For the contemporaries these formed the most valuable portions. For us, too, they are full of instruction, and throw much light on the daily life of the monks.

The language of Jonas is almost classical. But, unfortunately, he had little of the classical feeling for purity of style, and his writings are bombastic in the extreme. It is difficult to put his Latin into English. In some cases, I have been unable to determine the exact connection of some clauses with the context—if they have any. In such sentences I have translated literally, hoping that others might see a connection which I missed. In general, where I suspected any mistake, I have followed the Latin closely. A new and careful collation and transcription of the manuscripts would undoubtedly remove many of the difficulties.

I think there has been no translation of this life in any language before, except a very imperfect rendering of selected passages by Abel in the "*Geschichtschreiber der deutschen Vorzeit*." In this translation I have omitted from lack of space, the preface which has little or no importance for the life of the saint. All the rest is translated in full.

In this introduction, I refrain purposely from giving any summary of the saint's own dates. Such statements here would lessen the value of the pamphlet for geographical purposes. With the single exception of the date of Columban's death, all events can be interpreted by the data in the biography itself. On the other hand, we generally modernized the names of places, because many of our readers who far from large libraries, might otherwise lose the geographical information given. The double purpose of our series renders such compromises inevitable.

THE LIFE OF ST. COLUMBAN.

BY THE MONK JONAS.

Migne: *Patrologiæ latinæ cursus completus*, Vol. 87, cols. 1014-1046. Latin.

6. St. Columban, who is also called Columba, was born on the island of Ireland. This is situated in the extreme ocean and, according to common report, is charming, productive of various nations and undisturbed by contests with other peoples. Here lives the race of the Scots, who, although they lack the laws of the other nations, flourish in the doctrine of Christian strength, and exceed in faith all the neighboring tribes. Columban was born amid the beginnings of that race's faith, in order that the religion, which in part that race cherished uncompromisingly, might be increased by his own fruitful toil and the protecting care of his associates.

But what happened before his birth, before he saw the light of this world must not be passed over in silence. 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 issuing forth resplendent, furnish great light to the world. After she had arisen from sleep and Aurora had driven away the dark shadows from the world, she began to think earnestly of these matters, joyfully and wisely weighing the import of so great a vision; and she sought an increase of consolation from such of her neighbors as were learned, asking that with wise hearts they should examine carefully the meaning of so great a vision. 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 for that of her neighbors.

After the mother learned this she watched over him with so great care that she would scarcely entrust him even to his nearest relatives. So the life of the boy aspired to the cultivation of good works under the leadership of Christ, without whom no good work is done. Nor without reason had the mother seen the shining sun proceed from her bosom, the sun which shines brightly in the members of the church, the mother of all, like a glowing Phoebus. As the Lord says: "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father." So Debarah, with the voice of prayer, formerly spoke to the

Lord, by the admonition of the Holy Spirit, saying: "But let them that love Thee be as the sun when he goeth forth in his might."

For the milky way in the heavens, although it is itself bright, is rendered more beautiful by the presence of the other stars; just as the daylight, increased by the splendor of Phœbus, shines more benignantly upon the world. So the body of the church, enriched by the splendor of its Founder, is augmented by the hosts of saints and is made resplendent by religion and learning, so that those who come after draw profit from the concourse of the learned. And just as the sun or moon and all the stars ennoble the day and night by their refulgence, so the merits of the holy priests increase the glory of the church.

7. When Columban's childhood was over and he became older, he began to devote himself enthusiastically to the pursuit of grammar and the sciences, and studied with fruitful zeal all through his boyhood and youth, until he became a man. But, as his fine figure, his splendid color, and his noble manliness made him beloved by all, the old enemy began finally to turn his deadly weapons upon him, in order to catch in his nets this youth, whom he saw growing so rapidly in grace. And he aroused against him the lust of lascivious maidens, especially of those whose fine figure and superficial beauty are wont to enkindle mad desires in the minds of wretched men.

But when that excellent soldier saw that he was surrounded on all sides by so deadly weapons, and perceived the cunning and shrewdness of the enemy who was fighting against him, and that by an act of human frailty, he might quickly fall into a precipice and be destroyed,—as Livy says, "No one is rendered so sacred by religion, no one is so guarded, that lust is unable to prevail against him,"—holding in his left hand the shield of the Gospel and bearing in his right hand the two-edged sword, he prepared to advance and attack the hostile lines threatening him. He feared lest, ensnared by the lusts of the world, he should in vain have spent so much labor on grammar, rhetoric, geometry and the Holy Scriptures. And in these perils he was strengthened by a particular aid.

8. For as he was still meditating upon his purpose, he came to the dwelling of a holy and devout woman. He at first addressed her humbly, afterwards he began to exhort her, as far as lay in his power. As she saw the increasing strength of the youth she said: "I have gone forth to the strife as far as it lay in my power. Lo, twelve years have passed by, since I have been far from my home and have sought out

this place of pilgrimage. With the aid of Christ, never since then have I engaged in secular matters; after putting my hand to the plough, I have not turned backward. And if the weakness of my sex had not prevented me, I would have crossed the sea and chosen a better place among strangers as my home. But you, glowing with the fire of youth, stay quietly on your native soil; out of weakness you lend your ear even against your own will, to the voice of the flesh, and think you can associate with the female sex without sin. But do you recall the wiles of Eve, Adam's fall, how Samson was deceived by Delilah, how David was led to injustice by the beauty of Bathsheba, how the wise Solomon was ensnared by the love of a woman? Away, O youth! away! flee from corruption into which, as you know, many have fallen. For-sake the path which leads to the gates of hell."

The youth, trembling at these words, which were such as to terrify a youth, thanked her for her reproaches, took leave of his companions and set out. His mother in anguish begged him not to leave her. But he said: "Hast thou not heard, 'He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me?'" He begged his mother, who placed herself in his way and held the door, to let him go. Weeping and stretched upon the floor, she said she would not permit it. Then he stepped across the threshold and asked his mother not to give way to her grief; she would never see him again in this life, but wherever the way of salvation led him, there he would go.

9. When he left behind him his native place, called by the inhabitants, Lagener,¹ he betook himself to a holy man named Senilis, who at this time was distinguished among his countrymen for his unusual piety and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures. And when the holy man saw that St. Columban had great ability, he instructed him in the knowledge of all the Holy Scriptures. Nevertheless, as was usual, the master attempted to draw out the pupils under false pretences, in order that he might learn their dispositions, either the glowing excess of the senses, or the torpor induced by slothfulness. He began to inquire into Columban's disposition by difficult questions. But the latter tremblingly, nevertheless wisely, in order not to appear disobedient, nor touched by the vice of the love of vainglory, obeyed his master, and explained in turn all the objections that were made, mindful of that saying of the Psalmist, "Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it." Thus Columban collected such treasures of holy wisdom in his breast

¹ Leinster, in Ireland,

that he could, even as a youth, expound the Psalter in fitting language and could make many other extracts worthy to be sung, and instructive to read.

Then he endeavored to enter a society of monks, and went to the monastery of Banchor.¹ The abbot, the holy Congall, renowned for his virtues, was a faithful father to his monks and was held in high esteem for the fervor of his faith and the order and discipline which he preserved. Here Columban gave himself entirely to fasting and prayer, to bearing the easy yoke of Christ, to mortifying the flesh, to taking the cross upon himself and following Christ, in order that he who was to be a teacher of others might show the learning, which he taught, more fruitfully by his own example in mortifying his own body; and that he who was to instruct others might first instruct himself.

After he had been many years in the cloister he longed to go into strange lands, in obedience to the command which the Lord gave Abraham: "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, into a land that I will shew thee." Accordingly he confessed to the venerable father, Congall, the burning desire of his heart and the longing enkindled by the fire of the Lord, concerning which the Lord says: "I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled?" But he did not receive the answer which he wished, for it was hard for Congall to bear the loss of so great a comfort. At length, however, the latter began to conquer himself and to think that he ought not to consider his own need more than the necessities of others. Nor was it done without the will of the Almighty, who had educated His novice for future strifes, in order that He might win glorious triumphs from his victory and secure joyful victories from the phalanxes of slaughtered enemies.

The abbot accordingly called St. Columban, and although sorrowful, he considered the good of others before his own good, and bestowed upon him the bond of peace, the strength of solace and companions who were known for their piety.

10. Having collected a band of brethren, St. Columban asked the prayers of all, that he might be assisted in his coming journey, and that he might have their pious aid. So he started out in the twentieth²

¹ In the County of Ulster, in Ireland.

² Luke xii., 49. I have followed the King James version for the translation. The Vulgate, which is quoted here, reads *quoniam volo ut ardeat*.

³ More probably, thirtieth. The manuscripts differ.