

**BALLADS FROM
SCOTTISH HISTORY.
[EDINBURGH-1863]**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649759101

Ballads from Scottish History. [Edinburgh-1863] by Norval Clyne

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NORVAL CLYNE

EDINBURGH

EDMONSTON AND DOUGLAS

1863.

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BALLADS FROM SCOTTISH HISTORY.

I

ST. COLUMBA.

IN the history of Scotland during the first ten centuries of our era, the occurrences best authenticated are chiefly those which mark the progress of the Christian church, and the greatest name is Columba. Born in 521, nearly a hundred years after the death of St. Ninian the apostle of the Southern Picts, and preaching the gospel to the Northern Picts while the aged St. Kentigern was labouring as a bishop among the Britons of Strath-Clyde, Columba was destined to extend and complete the work of both, by his own unwearied exertions, and the judicious employment of numerous assistant missionaries and teachers. On the father's side he was of the royal line of Ulster, and his mother was the descendant of a princely house in Leinster. The purity of his childhood and youth

and the careful training he then received, admirably fitted him for the holy work that was before him as an evangelist among the Northern Picts, and the head of the Family of Iona. In 563, several years after his ordination as a presbyter, he left Ireland with twelve disciples, having obtained from his kinsman Conal, king of the Dalriadic Scots, a grant of the "Isle of Druids," one of the smallest of the Hebrides, but in after ages to be worthily distinguished as "I—the Island." Of its other names, that of "I-corm-kill," though directly connecting it with "Columba of the Cells," does not awaken our emotion like the music of "Iona—the Holy Isle." To use the words of a recent historian, "The first task of St. Columba, after taking possession of the island, was to erect a monastery and a church. These buildings were exceedingly humble. The church was probably of hewn timber, thatched with reeds, like that erected at Lindisfarne by Bishop Finan, after the manner of the Scots, as described by Bede. The monastic buildings were of a still more unpretending kind, as is implied in the whole narrative of Adamnan. They were, no doubt, of the same character with those which are known to have existed in Ireland at that time, contrasting remarkably with the magnificent structures of after ages. The

glory of those early buildings was within."—(Grub's Ecclesiastical History of Scotland.) St. Columba died after midnight, on Sunday 9th June 597, in his 76th year, and was buried in the island. Two very early lives of the saint are extant, one written by Cumin, sixth abbot of Iona, and the other by Adamnan, who was the eighth abbot, having been elected to the office in 679. The lives are printed in Pinkerton's "*Vitæ Antiquæ Sanctorum in Scotia.*" Both writers had conversed with men who had repeatedly seen their great predecessor. The interesting occurrences attending the close of Columba's life, and referred to in the following verses—the forewarning he received of the hour of his departure, his prediction of the future glory of Iona, and his death before the altar—are minutely detailed in Adamnan's work, from the information of those who were then present. He thus concludes his biography of the holy presbyter:—"Though he lived in this small and remote island in the extremity of the British ocean, his name and reputation are spread, and his sanctity honoured, not only through all Britain and Ireland, but even through Spain and Gaul, and the renown of his sanctity has also penetrated beyond the Apennine Hills into Italy, and into the city of Rome itself, the head and chief of

all other cities." So wrote his successor in the seventh century. In the nineteenth, how much farther might we not continue this climax of eulogy ! It is enough to say, that wherever the faith of Christ is preached, the memory of the Saint of Iona is had in honour ; and, as a late instance of this, the first edifice consecrated for Christian worship, west of the Mississippi, and north of the Falls of St. Anthony, among a savage Indian tribe, is the Church of St. Columba.