

# **LIFE AND WORK OF SAINT COLUMBA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649460168

Life and Work of Saint Columba by Edward Alexander Cooke

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**EDWARD ALEXANDER COOKE**

**LIFE AND WORK OF  
SAINT COLUMBA**



BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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LIFE AND WORK  
OF  
SAINT COLUMBA.

BY  
*Edward Alexander Cooke,*

VICAR OF HOLY TRINITY, ATTLEBOROUGH,  
WARWICKSHIRE.

God is praised in His Saints, as all their worth and excellency  
ought to be imputed to the Author of Grace.—*St. Hilary of Arles.*

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LONDON:  
SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, AND CO.  
DERBY:  
EDWARD CLULOW, JUN.  
1888.

~~Br 11679.2~~

~~III 14589~~

C 639.1.30

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The Author

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*PREFATORY NOTICE.*

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**I**N a biography intended for English readers, and with limited space at my disposal, it would not be possible to give anything like an elaborate historical account of one who, whether we regard him as a scholar, a founder of Monasteries, or a Christian leader, was one of the most remarkable men of the early Celtic Church.

It has rather been my aim to write, with simplicity and conciseness, a memoir of the Saint based on facts drawn from genuine and authentic sources. In furtherance of this aim I consulted almost every branch of Columban literature, with the result that, whilst many of the various "Lives" of St. Columba which have been handed down to us are interesting and more or less valuable, the only ones about which no doubt has been entertained are, one by Adamnan, and that known as the Old Irish Life. When compared with other biographies these have been found to be less affected by the ravages of time and have better stood the severe test of criticism. As these

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are the two chief sources from which I have derived information, a brief notice of each may not be without interest to the reader.

The first, by Adamnan, the most distinguished of the Saint's successors in the Abbacy of Hy, was written about the year 697 in compliance with the urgent request of his brethren, as he himself states in the preface:—"In beginning, with the help of Christ, in compliance with the urgent requests of my brethren, to write the life of our blessed patron, I shall take care to warn, in the first place, others who may read it, to believe the facts which it records, and to attend more to the matter than to the words which, as I think, sound harsh and barbarous. Let them remember that the Kingdom of God consisteth not in richness of eloquence but in the blossoming of faith, and let them not for any names of men, or tribes, or obscure places in the base Scotie (Irish) tongue, which, as I think, seem rude when compared with the various languages of foreign nations, despise a record of useful deeds wrought not without the help of God. We must also warn our readers that many other things regarding this man of blessed memory, well worthy of being told, have been omitted for the sake of brevity, in order not to tire their patience, a few only out of many have been recorded here."<sup>1</sup> He further tells us, with all candour and without any ambiguity,

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<sup>1</sup> Adamnan, Pref. I.

that much of his information was derived from the consistent narrative of his predecessors in the Abbacy of Hy, trustworthy and discerning men, and that the Saint's memoir was founded either on written authorities anterior to his own time, or on what he himself heard from some learned and faithful ancients, unhesitatingly attesting facts, the truth of which they themselves diligently enquired into.<sup>1</sup> Not only were his materials of a fragmentary kind, gathered here and there from those who had frequently conversed with and known the great saint, but there is internal evidence that a book called the "Virtues of St. Columba," written by Cummene the Fair, formed the basis of Adamnan's Third Book, in which the prediction of the Saint regarding Aidan, his children, and his kingdom, occurs. Again, at the end of the memoir, he tells of a vision which, he says, was not only found in writing, but was heard related with the utmost freedom by several well-informed old men to whom it was told, and who solemnly assured Adamnan of its truth.<sup>2</sup> Thus we have had presented to us not only an admirable account of contemporary manners and customs, but also, as a writer of the present century declared, "The most complete piece of sacred biography that all Europe can boast of, not only at so early a period, but even through the whole middle ages."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Adamnan, Pref. II.   <sup>2</sup> *Ib.*, book III., chap. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Pinkerton's *Enquiry*, vol. I., Edinb., 1814.