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bearing with those who have fallen into the sins farthest from their own nature: but if this is wonderful, must we not tolerate as natural infirmity the hardness which grows in those who have felt and overcome temptation towards those who have yielded to it? Shakespeare's Isabella is an immeasurably higher ideal than Tom Tulliver; but it were well for the world if there were no worse men in it than he. Let us not be content with thanking God that we are not as other men are—self-satisfied, self-righteous, or even as this Pharisee: but rather implore the infinite Love to forgive us all our offences—misdoings and misjudgments alike—against one another as well as against itself. If we learn each to realize and to return the love of the universal Father, then what is unlovely in each of us is in the way to die out; and then we shall none of us be extreme to mark in his brother what traces of the unlovely temper may as yet remain.

W. H. SIMCOX.

ANCIENT CELTIC EXPOSITORS.

COLUMBANUS AND HIS TEACHING.

THE existence of Greek and Hebrew learning and philosophy in the islands of the Western Ocean has hitherto formed a curious problem. In my last paper, wherein I dealt with the library of the great Celtic missionary whose name heads this article, I offered several clear proofs of that learning; while again as to the sources of it, I think they are far from mysterious, but are easily explained when viewed in connexion with the whole range and movement of monasticism. The monks in their original idea, as established in Egypt, were essentially solitaries. Their one object at first was to get away as far as possible from mankind. With this end in view they fled into the Nitrian

desert, and then ever afterwards persistently bent their course westwards. In Jerome's age they swarmed in the islands of the Adriatic and Tuscan Sea. A contemporary pagan poet, Rutilius, in his Itinerary from Rome into Gaul, written about the year 420 A.D., is very hard upon those whom he describes as inhabiting the isle Capraria, one of the Balearic group. He pictures them as shunning the light, as solitaries hating human society and the gifts of fortune, throwing in this poem a most interesting light upon monasticism as viewed from the heathen standpoint of the fifth century.

> "Processu pelagi jam se Capraria tollit,
> Squallet lucifugis insula plena viris.
> Ipsi se monachos graio cognomine dicunt,
> Quod soli nullo vivere teste volunt." [1]

Human society was indeed for the monks an enemy to be diligently avoided. This desire drove them farther and farther towards the West. St. Patrick introduced monasticism to Ireland, and this same impulse led them half a century later than Rutilius, that is, by the year 500, to the islands scattered along the west coast of Ireland, to the Skelligs off the Kerry coast, and to Arran Islands, thirty miles outside Galway, spots even now but seldom visited. The apocryphal *Acts of St. Brendan* the navigator, the founder of Clonfert, are genuine in this respect, they depict the monks of his age as seeking the most inaccessible abodes.[2] The genuine history of St. Columba by Adamnan and the

[1] See Zumpt's edition of the Poem, Berlin, 1840, lines 439–450. This poem is worth study as illustrating the struggles of paganism in the fifth century. The history of expiring Roman and Greek paganism has never been fully investigated. The question, how long did the worship of Jupiter and of the other Olympian deities survive, would furnish an interesting subject for an ambitious scholar, young and vigorous. Are there even still any remnants of that worship, as there are relics of ancient Manicheism amid the recesses of the Balkan peninsula?

[2] These *Acts* are very curious. They were published by Cardinal Moran when Roman Catholic bishop of Ossory.

life of Columbanus tell us how the monks of the sixth century and of the seventh still retained their ancient spirit. Columba demanded from Brude, king of the Picts, protection for his followers, who, not satisfied with Iona, had gone seeking a more deserted spot still in the distant Orkneys, while Columbanus, and afterwards Cuthbert at Lindisfarne, died in deserts or solitary cells away from human habitations. The course of monasticism, to adopt the celebrated language of Berkeley, ever westward holds its way, and it is still a moot question, whether some early Irish monks may not have penetrated by way of Iceland to America, ages before Columbus went there. The original impulse never suspended its force till the reaction began, and back from the borders of the Atlantic, the monastic missionaries returned to evangelize Central and Southern Europe, lying sunk in barbarian ignorance and idolatry. The problem to be solved does not now seem so difficult. In the fifth century the monks pressed westward in search of safe and solitary habitations, bringing their books—Latin, Greek, Hebrew [1]—with them. There they lay secure and unknown while the floods of barbarian invasion overflowed the fairest plains of Gaul and Italy. Is it any wonder that two centuries later we find their descendants still possessing their books and their learning, which they carried back to Bobbio, to Reichenau, and to St. Gall? [2]

[1] Hebrew was known to the ancient Irish scholars of the sixth century. Ussher mentions a Saint Cumian, who lived about A.D. 600, on Lough Derg, one of the great lakes of the Shannon. Ussher tells us that Cumian had a psalter—a part of which he had himself seen, with a collation of the Hebrew text on the upper part of the page, and short notes on the lower portion. (See Ussher, *Works* vi. 544, Elrington's edition.)

[2] In the *Academy* of Sept. 1st Professor Sanday has again opened the question as to the channel through which a knowledge of Greek came to Ireland. He seems to regard it as an accidental importation some time in the sixth or seventh centuries. I regard it as a survival from the early Gallican missionaries who laboured there in the fifth. John Cassian, St. Abraham, and numerous other Greek and Hebrew scholars from Nitria and Syria lived in Gaul in that century. Cassian's works were well known and popular in Ireland

We are not without some specimens of the expositions produced by these monastic missionaries. Columbanus studied in Ireland under two famous teachers, first at the school of Cluain Inis (Cleenish) in Lough Erne, under a certain St. Sinellus, and subsequently under St. Comgall at Bangor. Through St. Sinell he is connected with the erudition and culture of the ancient British Church, as the teacher of Sinell was St. Finian, the disciple of SS. David and Gildas at Menevia or St. David's in Wales,[1] for the doctrine and discipline of the whole Celtic Church, whether in Great Britain or Ireland, were then one and undivided. Under St. Sinell, and amid the charming surroundings and manifold windings of Lough Erne, Columbanus devoted himself to the composition of a Commentary on the Psalms, which still remains in existence, though it has never been printed in full. He must have been then a very young man. His biography was composed a few years after the death of Columbanus by a monk named Jonas, who was a boy when Columbanus was an old man. Jonas had every

and Wales. Why should not their disciples from Lerins and elsewhere have carried a knowledge of Greek to Menevia, to Clonard, and to Bangor? I have pointed out various other facts bearing on this point in *Ireland and the Celtic Church*. Greek and Hebrew were abundant in France in A.D. 450. In 500 or soon after, they are found in Ireland. The transition seems to me easy and simple enough.

[1] Cardinal Moran published in 1872 the *Acta S. Brendani*, the founder of Clonfert, to whom I have above referred. Among these documents is the "Vita S. Brendani," taken out of the *Liber Kilkenniensis* in Marsh's Library, Dublin. On p. 13 occur the following words, showing that the Welsh school of St. Gildas knew Greek: "Et habebat sanctus Gildas Missalum librum scriptum Græcis literis, et positus est ille liber super altare." Ussher, *Opp.* (Elrington's ed.) t. iv., p. 462, mentions a Greek named Dobda, who accompanied St. Virgil to Saltzburg from Ireland in the eighth century. Virgil lived at Aghabo in the Queen's County, where his Greek friend found him out. The presence of this Greek in Ireland is easily explained by the violent persecution just then—the middle of the eighth century—proceeding against the Eastern monks at the hands of the Emperor Constantine Copronymus. (See my *Ireland and the Celtic Church*, pp. 219, 246, 247.) Virgil, it will be remembered, was the first Irishman to maintain the earth's sphericity and the existence of the antipodes, for which he narrowly escaped Papal condemnation. (See Virgilius (2) in the *Dictionary of Christian Biography*.)

opportunity of learning the facts, as he was a member of his hero's own monastery of Bobbio, entering it just three years after the death of St. Columbanus. In this authorized biography we are informed that "the treasures of the Holy Scriptures were so laid up within the heart of Columbanus, that within the compass of his youthful years he set forth an elegant exposition of the Book of Psalms." It is not only elegant, it is also learned. It begins with an extract from Jerome's preface discussing the alleged division of the Psalter into five distinct books, and then proceeds to comment on the various psalms in order. Before we give a few specimens of this commentary, first let us realize the facts. Here we have a commentary written by Columbanus, when at the very utmost twenty-five years of age, for surely a more advanced age cannot be reconciled with the words of his biographer,[1] "intra adolescentiæ ætatem" as regards the period of his life when the work under consideration was composed. Probably indeed Columbanus was much younger; but still even taking the later age, we must presume a wonderful knowledge of sacred learning and literature as existing in the school of St. Sinell, amid the mountains of Fermanagh and Donegal, when this commentary could be there produced by a young student in the year 568. St. Sinell himself must have been a fine scholar. Bad masters, incompetent teachers, seldom produce first-rate pupils. It was one of the wisest sayings of Dr. Arnold that when a man ceased to read, he ceased to be fit to teach; a dictum which, if acted out in our schools, colleges, and universities, would put to flight whole coveys of incompetents who are now only hindrances not helps to learning. St. Sinell must have been a diligent teacher and

[1] The exact words of Jonas are, "Tantum Columbani in pectore divinarum thesauri Scripturarum conditi tenebantur, ut intra adolescentiæ ætatem detentus psalmorum librum elimato sermone exponeret; multaque alia, quæ vel ad cantum digna vel ad docendum utilia condidit dicta."—Fleming's *Collectanea Sacra*, p. 219.

learned scholar, well read in the Fathers and in classical studies, when his scholars were so learned and so mentally active. And then arguing backwards, we may conclude that Sinell's teacher at Clonard, St. Finnian, the tutor of Columba and of the twelve apostles of Ireland, of Kieran, of Clonmacnois, of Ruodan of Lorrha, and many others whose memory is still fresh, must have been a thorough scholar to have produced so many disciples, burning as Columba did with literary zeal. And then working still farther back, we can only conclude that Gildas and St. David, the original source of all this literary succession, and the school of Menevia, must have been a very well equipped, a very thoroughly organized, and a very active and enthusiastic body of workers in the region of sacred and secular literature some time about the year 500 A.D. This may seem a large structure to build upon the foundation of a single manuscript still existing in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, but we think our conclusion perfectly fair, logical, and scientific. Nay, we would put forward the theory, that were the remains of Celtic literature, sacred and secular, alike, duly treated in a scientific manner; if they were viewed, not merely as means for supplying correct texts of Scripture and furnishing materials for Irish lexicons—two very valuable uses indeed, yet not the only uses of those manuscripts, but if they were viewed from the standpoint of the scientific historian, they might be made to throw unexpected light upon the dark places of Celtic history. Celtic literature is fortunate in possessing several libraries like St. Gall and Bobbio, remaining or practically remaining *in situ*, having ancient catalogues and a clear, undoubted history since their foundation. These libraries contain some of the most ancient books anywhere found, with the exception of the Egyptian manuscripts. The specimens of Celtic learning which remain in them should be treated as a geologist treats a fossil, or an archæologist an inscription or

an arrow-head. Their position, place of discovery, their surroundings, their age, every circumstance about them, should be carefully noted, and then, working backwards, with the help of history much might be done towards the illumination of a very interesting, though a very obscure period.[1]

Now as to the subject matter of this Commentary of Columbanus on the Psalter. The exposition of the first psalm has been printed by Zeuss, *Grammatica Celtica*, p. 1043. I shall just give an outline of it. Columbanus first discusses the person concerning whom the psalm was composed; who in fact was the "Blessed Man" referred to in the opening words? Some maintained that it was King Jehoash, who had been brought up by Jehoiada the high priest, and meditated in God's law day and night so long as his guardian lived. This view he rejects, on the ground that a man could not be pronounced blessed, and therefore free from all error towards God, who did not put away the high places, but allowed the people to sacrifice there, as the Book of Kings expressly testifies. But this was not the only sin of Jehoash. The same Scripture testifies that when Hazael came up to attack Jerusalem, Jehoash diverted him from his purpose by a gift of the hallowed treasures which his forefathers had offered to Jehovah. Could the prophet David, speaking by Divine inspiration, pronounce, even be-

[1] My idea is, that an attempt should be made to determine what particular works were left behind them by Columbanus, St. Gall, and their companions. This will show the state of learning at Bangor, near Belfast, in the sixth century. If any of the copies of Priscian and Donatus with Celtic glosses can be traced to them, this will prove the state of grammatical studies at that seminary when St. Comgall presided over it. Dungal, an Irish monk of Charlemagne's day, gave books to Bobbio; Marcus, an Irish bishop, some fifty years later, gave others to St. Gall's library. These they must have brought with them from Ireland. They are evidences then as to the state of Irish learning in the ninth century. Sedulius has left us a Greek psalter, which Montfaucon saw and describes, giving us a specimen of the handwriting of Sedulius, in his *Palæographia Græca*, iii. 7, p. 236. Hence we may form a sound conclusion as to the state of Greek studies in the monastery of Kildare in the same ninth century. The reader may also consult the *Revue Celtique*, tome i., p. 264, for another proof of the same.

forehand, a man blessed who could thus despoil the temple and present its treasures to an unbelieving idolater. It is a moral psalm, in which the author treats concerning a search after virtue and an abstinence from vice which does not fit Jehoash. For during the time when he was a little boy and educated by the high priest Jehoiada, he could not be said to have abstained from vice by his own free will, nor to have sedulously, consciously, and of free choice meditated in the Divine law, seeing that he was wholly subject to the will of another. There are two things which lead a man to blessedness: sound faith, which conducts a man to right views of God; and sound practice, which induces to a pious life. Neither avails without the other; the one completes and accompanies the other. Faith indeed holds the chief place, as the head holds the more honourable position among the members of the body. But as the close union of the members is necessary to the perfection of man's body, so faith and practice concur to the perfection of man's life. Columbanus then enlarges upon the various relations between faith and works. But soon checks himself, saying: "Yet we must remember that brevity which we promised at the preface. For we shall aim in the present psalm and in all that follow to set forth a concise explanation, since it is not our design to expound every point at great length, but in a summary manner to touch upon the leading heads, leaving to other expositors to pursue the subject with greater minuteness."

These last words seem to indicate that Columbanus wrote his commentary for the purpose of assisting preachers—a kind of pulpit promptuary in fact—and indeed this idea is supported by the vast quantity of Celtic glosses written over and beside the Latin text which the manuscript contains. The preachers of that age evidently took the Latin text of the Scripture into the pulpit, reading out first of all the passage in Latin, as Bishop Andrewes al-

ways did in his discourses to the people, and then adding the sense in the Irish language. So too in the case of this commentary: it was evidently read in public in the Latin tongue, the preacher giving the sense as he went along, enlarging upon such points as needed exposition and fuller treatment, and finding in these glosses the hints needful where two languages are used in popular extemporary addresses.

The remainder of our Saint's exposition of the first Psalm becomes somewhat prolix when judged from our modern standpoint. Still, I am bound to say his distinctions are much more reasonable and much less of a hair-splitting character than are often heard from preachers of the present day. He distinguishes between the ungodly man and sinners. The ungodly man (*impius*) is one who has not a right faith; the sinner is one who, having a knowledge of God, departs from the paths of virtue. He enlarges upon and explains the terms "walked," stood," and "sat in the seat of the scornful," as expressions descriptive of mental states derived from bodily actions. He regards "sitting in the seat of the scornful" as indicating the worst spiritual estate, when "the soul comes to rest and delight itself in wickedness," and without shame chooses as its special friends those of like character. He then reverses the picture, and shows how that man is truly blessed whose pleasure is in God's law, because he not only abstains from evil, but strives to conform himself to the Divine likeness. The commentary on this first Psalm terminates with a comparison between the ends of the just and of the ungodly. A difficulty here arises. The prophet says "the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous." Will there then be no resurrection for the wicked? His explanation is ready, however. The psalm does not deny the resurrection of the wicked, but merely asserts they shall not stand in the judgment. They will rise, but will be immediately sentenced and

hurried away to their own place, while the righteous will abide God's examination, and in the face of assembled worlds stand and be monuments of His saving grace.

The exposition of the second Psalm is even more interesting as a specimen of the Messianic applications prevalent among the ancient Celts. We can now merely summarise it. In the second Psalm Columbanus teaches that David sketches our Lord's passion and the subsequent triumph of His resurrection. If any one doubts the application of this Psalm to Christ, Columbanus thinks his doubts should be set at rest by St. Peter's quotations in the fourth chapter of the Acts, noting at the same time the attempts made by the Jews to evade its Christian application by interpreting its language as referring to Zerubbabel and to David himself. He shows a wide learning and knowledge of Jewish customs. Expounding the 69th Psalm and the 29th verse, "Let them be wiped out of the book of the living," he notes that it was an ancient custom among the Jews to write in a book the names of distinguished men,—not only those who were alive, but also that were dead as well,—which custom was preserved in the diptychs of the Christian Church. In connexion with the 110th Psalm, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Dixit Dominus Domino Meo," he asserts that in the Hebrew text the name which is called Tetragammaton[1] (יהוה or Jahveh), by which pure Divinity is expressed, is used for Dominus and Domino alike. Whence he concludes that it cannot be understood of a human being, but is applied to Christ, who is true God and Lord of all.[2] These extracts must suffice as far as the Commentary on the Psalms is concerned. They

[1] The early opponents of Christianity held that it was by the use of the Tetragrammaton יהוה the miracles of our Lord were wrought.

[2] The Hebrew text can scarcely have been consulted by Columbanus on this point, as the first Dominus is represented by Jahveh, the second by Adonai, in the original. Both however are Divine names, the former representing simple Deity, the latter Deity revealing itself. See Buxtorf, *s.v.*

prove that St. Columbanus had a strong and vigorous grasp of the Scriptures. We cannot indeed expect him to be a modern in tone. He was but a man, and therefore was affected by the spirit of his times. But his commentary was much superior to the majority of those produced in his age and period. They were mere catenæ, strings of extracts from older authors without an original thought in an acre of writing. Our Celtic commentator is learned, original, thoughtful, and spiritual withal, without lapsing into talk that is merely goody-goody and canting.

Columbanus produced other works of a similar character which represent monastic preaching as it was exercised at Bobbio and his other foundations. There are in his collected works seventeen sermons or instructions delivered to the monastic brethren. They are not popular discourses, they are all intensely spiritual and intensely scriptural. There is not one of them which might not now be taken and delivered as a meditation or an instruction in the spiritual life during a clerical retreat or quiet day, or at a Methodist revival. The one dominant note which runs through them all is this: contempt of the world, the fashion of this world passeth away, a very useful and a very necessary thought in every age and country. These sermons build themselves on the Eternal Rock, like the Apostles' Creed and the Lord's Prayer, and all other scriptural teaching. They begin with God. The first sermon has for its title, "Concerning God one and threefold, De Deo Uno et Trino"; then follow in order discourses on mortification, on contempt of the world, on love of heaven, on earthly existence, which is not life but a road,[1] on the present life considered as a shadow, on hastening to our heavenly fatherland, concerning the last judgment, on the love of God, on Jesus Christ the Living Fountain, and

[1] There is a slight attempt at a pun in the title of this sermon, impossible to render into English: "Quod præsens vita non sit dicenda vita, sed via."

many others, whose titles are of the same type and character. An extract or two will give an adequate idea of the teaching of these sermons. They have for the most part no texts, after our present formal style. But they almost always quote some passage of Holy Scripture on which they base themselves, after a few preliminary observations. They follow however no certain rule on this point, as one of them, the eleventh, treating of the love of God, begins according to our modern fashion with a text thus, "Moses wrote in the law, God made man in His image and likeness," upon which Columbanus founded a vigorous appeal for bodily sanctity, based on the fact of this gift of the Divine Image, and following much the same line as that adopted by St. Paul in the sixth chapter of First Corinthians. "Consider I pray you the dignity of this saying. The Omnipotent God, invisible, incomprehensible, indescribable, inestimable, forming man out of the dust, has endowed him with the dignity of His image. Great is the dignity, since God has given man the image of His eternity and the likeness of His character. This Divine Image is a great dignity, if it be preserved pure. Great, on the other hand, is the loss if it be desecrated. For that which man has received from the breath of God, if it shall be turned to the opposite purposes, and its blessings be contaminated, then he corrupts and destroys the likeness of God so far as he can. But if the virtues sown in the soul be used aright, then man will be like God. Whatever virtues God has sown in our spirits in their primitive condition, He has taught us by His commandments to return to Him. This is the first commandment, Thou shalt love the Lord our God with the whole heart, because He first loved us, from the very beginning, and before that we came into existence. Now the love of God is the renewal of His Image; and that man loves God who keeps His commandments, according to His own saying, 'If ye love Me, keep My commandments.'

And this is His commandment, that we should love one another." Whence he proceeds to warn against pride, anger, lying, and uncharitable language as breaches and defilements of the Divine Image. The thirteenth sermon, on Jesus Christ the Living Fountain, on coming to Him and drinking from Him, is conceived in a highly mystical strain. It reminds one very much of the *Imitation* and of the rapturous language of a Thauler or of a George Fox. In this sermon he speaks of Christ as the true bread and the true wine of the soul, and yet he makes not a single reference to the Eucharist, a connexion in which a modern divine of any school would have been certain to treat of that subject in one direction or another. This does not imply that the theology of Columbanus was not what is usually called sacramental, for it was most decidedly so. But it simply means that Columbanus in his sermon took that high point of view in which rapt and mystical souls delight, when they contemplate the Eternal Word, Christ Jesus, as He exists in and by Himself apart from all means, instrumentalities, and ministries whatsoever; when their enthusiastic song, their abounding love, finds its fittest utterance in that ancient strain of God's Holy Catholic Church—so profound, so unselfish, so utterly abstracted from every secondary consideration: "We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee, we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory, O Lord God, heavenly King, God the Father Almighty." Columbanus delights in the spirit of this ancient strain, in descanting upon the glory and love of the Lord Jesus Christ, as in the following words of the thirteenth homily: "Lend us your ears, dearest brethren, for you are about to hear a very necessary truth. Refresh the thirst of your minds in the waves of that Divine Fountain of which we are going to speak, but you will not extinguish it. Drink, but you will not be satiated. For the Living Fountain now calls us to Himself, and says,

Whoso thirsteth, let him come unto Me and drink. The Lord Himself and our God, Jesus Christ, is the Fountain of life, and therefore invites us to Himself, that we may drink of Him. He drinks of Christ who loves Him. He drinks when he is satiated with the Word of God. Let us Gentiles eagerly drink what the Jews have abandoned. For see whence that Fountain flows, whence the Bread descends; for the same person who is Bread and Fountain is the only Son, our God the Lord Christ, after whom we ought always to hunger." We get a glimpse in these sermons of an older expositor still, as Columbanus quotes from some unknown work of his master Comgall, the founder of Bangor, leaving us the only fragment of Comgall's writings which has escaped the wreck of time. This extract will be found in the second of the homilies of St. Columbanus, which treats "Concerning the Mortification of Vices and the Acquisition of Virtues," where Columbanus, having laid down that he will not enter into deep mysteries, but will speak rather concerning practical matters pertaining to edification, then proceeds to intimate that his modesty and distrust of his own powers compel him to quote the words of his master Comgall[1] upon the means absolutely necessary for attaining strict mortification; whereupon the remainder of the homily is taken up with the extract from St. Comgall, laying down the principles of the ascetic life.

But we must draw to a close. Columbanus was a many-sided character. His theology and teaching were, like most of the ancient Celtic doctors, strictly Augustinian. There is not a word in his homilies a modern Calvinist might not

[1] See Fleming's *Collectanea*, p. 47. Columbanus calls his master Faustus, which was the Latin equivalent for Comgall, as we learn from Notker's *Martyrology*, June 9th, where Comgall is thus described: "Unum Comgellum, Latine Fausti nomine illustrem, præceptorem Beati Columbani Magistri Domini Patris nostri Galli." Notker was a ninth-century monk of St. Gall. Another explanation of Comgall is Pulchrum Pignus, Ussher's Works, v. 506. Fleming, p. 316, mentions under the writings of Comgall, his *Methodus Vitæ Regularis* (quoted by Columbanus), and epistles to the abbots of his monasteries.

utter, save one slight reference to the intercession of saints at the close of the First Instruction. He was a great organizer of monastic institutions, and his rule stands pre-eminent for its stern, unbending character. He was a great missionary, and at the same time a witness for Celtic independence of Papal jurisdiction, whom no casuistry can explain away. Finally, we trust that these articles will have shown that Columbanus can be used by the student gifted with historic instinct to reflect light back upon the state of theology and theological and classical study in the ancient Celtic Church in the age and generation next after St. Patrick. The excess or splendour of light in one generation at times throws the next into comparative darkness. The generation next after the Apostles is counted a dark one in comparison with the apostolic age. The generation after St. Patrick stands for many in much the same position. Columbanus is a light amid the darkness, showing that though St. Patrick himself may have been unlearned, his immediate successors were men of widest culture. Their lives too taught a most useful lesson. They were no mercenary students; they needed no endowments for research. They showed how to unite highest thinking with plainest living, and have thus gained an immortality of fame as unselfish seekers after truth, which every fresh investigation serves only to increase.[1]

P.S.—Since I wrote these articles I have seen Ascoli's reprint of the whole Psalter of Columbanus, with its commentary. It is however more interesting in its present shape from a philological than from an expositor's point of view. It appeared within the last few years at Milan.

GEORGE T. STOKES.

[1] I may refer the student to a learned work on this subject by Rev. T. Olden, which has appeared since these papers were written. Its title is, *The Holy Scriptures in Ireland One Thousand Years Ago* (Dublin: Hodges Figgis). Had I seen it in time I would have used it to illustrate my story.

UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS.

LUKE XVII. 7–10.

THE word here translated by "unprofitable" (ἀχρεῖος) occurs in only one other place in the New Testament; namely, in Matthew xxv. 30, where it is spoken of the "wicked and slothful servant," who was condemned to be "cast into outer darkness" for burying the talent which his master had entrusted to him, instead of turning it to the best account by trading. In the passage before us, on the contrary, it is spoken of God's servants at their very best: our Lord tells us, "When ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do." How are we to explain these two applications of the same epithet: in the one place to the servant of Christ who had made no attempt to perform his duty at all; in the other, to His servants when they have done—what no man has ever perfectly done—all their duty?

The answer appears to be, that in the passage in St. Luke our Lord is asserting the impossibility of men being profitable to God in any absolute sense; while in the passage in St. Matthew he speaks the language of parable, and illustrates the relations of men as servants of God by the relations of servants to human masters, some servants being profitable and others unprofitable: teaching that He will reward "good and faithful servants" as if their services were indeed profitable to Him.

The truth, that in any absolute sense man cannot be profitable to God, is a truth of what was formerly called natural religion; that is to say, it is, or may be, known independently of express revelation, as a necessary and obvious inference from the creative omnipotence of God: for an infinitely powerful God cannot need the services of

His creatures, nor can they be profitable to Him, because He could, if He pleased, do as well without them as with them.

> "Merit lives from man to man,
> And not from man, O Lord, to Thee."[1]

This truth was seen by Job's friend and "comforter" Eliphaz: "Can a man be profitable unto God?" (Job xxii. 2.) But Eliphaz failed to see that, though man cannot be *profitable* to God, yet man may be *pleasing* to God. He has stated his belief on the subject in the almost immediately following words: "Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that thou art righteous?"[2] meaning, of course, that it is no pleasure to Him. But we believe, not as a truth of natural religion, but as a truth expressly revealed through the prophets and by Christ, that it *is* a pleasure to the Almighty that we should be righteous; and for this saying, as well as for their slanders against the innocent and saintly Job, and for their foolish and stupid attempt to exalt the holiness and wisdom of God by the sayings that "the heavens are not clean in His sight," and "His angels He chargeth with folly" (Job xv. 15 and iv. 18), the Lord, at the end of Job's trials, said to Eliphaz and the two other "comforters," Bildad and Zophar, "My wrath is kindled against you: for ye have not spoken of Me the thing that is right" (Job xlii. 7). These two doctrines, that man *cannot* be profitable to God, and that man *can* be pleasing to God, are equally true and equally needful to remember. The false belief, that man *can be profitable* to God, is the root of superstitious and practically faithless and impious notions about human merit and "works of supererogation"; the

[1] Tennyson, *In Memoriam.*

[2] It does not appear that in Luke xvii. 10 there is any allusion to Job xxii. 2. The word in the LXX. version of Job which we translate by *profitable* is not etymologically connected with our Lord's word under consideration which we translate by *unprofitable.*

false belief, that man *cannot please* God, is the root of indifference to His service and of practical atheism of the heart and life.

But, further, though God does not part with His omnipotence, and in any absolute sense has no need of our services, yet He condescends to have need of them. Christ, at His final entrance into Jerusalem, condescended to have need of a young ass, which no doubt belonged to a disciple of His (Matt. xxi. 2); and He has told us that He regards any kindness done to "one of the least of His brethren" as done to Himself (Matt. xxv. 40).

These two mutually complementary truths—the truth that God needs not our services, and the truth that He nevertheless condescends to need them, and is pleased with them—are respectively brought out in the two parables, partly parallel and partly contrasted, of the Pounds and the Talents. In the parable of the Pounds (Luke xix. 12), a nobleman, who was going away into a far country in order to be invested with royalty, left with each of ten of his servants a sum of money equal to about three pounds sterling; and, on his return with royal power, rewarded the servant who had earned ten pounds for him with the governorship of a province containing ten cities, and the servant who had earned five pounds with the governorship of a province containing five cities. The money wherewith he entrusted his servants, and any money that they could earn, was a matter of no importance to a king; his purpose was not to increase his own riches, but to make trial of their ability, industry, and honesty in serving him. Every detail in Christ's parables has its own lesson of truth, and this is meant to show us the infinitely small value of our highest endowments and our best services when compared with the infinite riches of God. In the parable of the Talents (Matt. xxv. 14), on the contrary, the master is not described as a king or a nobleman, but only a private

person of great wealth, having many servants; among whom, when he was leaving his own country for a considerable time, he distributed his money in charge; giving to different servants different sums of one, two, or five talents, equal respectively to about one hundred and eighty, three hundred and sixty, and nine hundred pounds of our money. It is implied that these were but small portions of the master's riches; for he said to each of those who by careful trading had doubled the money entrusted to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will set thee over many things." But though he calls it "a few things," we cannot suppose that a sum equal to nine hundred pounds of our money could be a matter of no account to him whatever, or of no more importance than the few pounds entrusted to the servants were to the king in the other parable; on the contrary, these comparatively large sums are mentioned in order to teach us the great importance of the interests wherewith the Lord entrusts His servants. We are told, moreover, that the master delivered to the servants his goods, evidently meaning all his goods. This is quite unlike what is implied in the parable of the Pounds, and means that Christ has committed the care of His kingdom on earth to His servants; primarily to the apostles and those who succeed them in the ministry of the Word.

And lest the importance of the position and the responsibilities of His servants should not be esteemed highly enough, Christ has added the very remarkable incident, that of the three servants concerning whom He relates the account of their stewardship and the consequent judgment upon them, the "wicked and slothful" servant was that one to whom the least had been entrusted; signifying that one of the chief dangers to be guarded against, is the tendency to underrate the importance of our stewardship;—to think it not worth while to make the most of comparatively

small endowments and small opportunities. Arnold of Rugby, who had a right to speak on such a subject, says in a letter to one of his old pupils: "I am satisfied that a neglected intellect is far oftener the cause of mischief to a man, than a perverted or over-valued one."[1]

To return to that saying of our Lord with which we begin:—it no doubt at first sight appears almost harsh, and much less gracious than His words generally are. But the truth which it asserts is one of which men need to be reminded, though, as we have endeavoured to show, it is, when understood, seen to be self-evidently true; indeed, the idea of God thanking man is as absurd as the blasphemy of the Persian agnostic Omar Khayyam (if he is fairly represented by his translator) in offering, on man's behalf, to forgive God. In order to see the real graciousness of this saying of our Lord, it is not necessary to read between the lines; we have only to consider the words "after that thou shalt eat and drink." There is neither niggardliness nor upbraiding in this: "God giveth to all men liberally and upbraideth not" (Jas. i. 5). How much is meant by the words "thou shalt eat and drink" is shown by the saying of the Psalmist, "They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures" (Ps. xxxvi. 8). And Christ Himself says in another parable (Luke xii. 37), "Blessed are those servants, whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them sit down to meat, and come and serve them." And lest we might fear that His words had been mistaken;—lest we might fear that it is impossible for the Master to serve His servants and for God to serve man, we are told by another evangelist (John xiii. 4) that at the farewell supper the Lord

[1] Stanley's *Life of Arnold*, vol. ii., p. 83.

girded Himself, and did the work of a servant by washing the feet of His disciples.

Thus the parable under our consideration (for it is a parable in reality, though not quite so in form), not only teaches that all our service is due to God, so that when we have done all that was our duty to do we are still unprofitable servants;—but it also clearly suggests the further truth, that if we honestly make it our first aim to serve God, He will provide us with all that we need. The lesson is the same as that which the Lord has taught, without a parable, in the Sermon on the Mount: "Be not anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek first His kingdom, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. vi. 31–33).

The same truth—or rather, the still more spiritual truth, that the service of God ought to be foremost, not only in our aims, but in our thoughts and our prayers—is taught in the structure of the Lord's Prayer. If we had not this before us as a model of prayer, and if the best men were asked the question, What ought to be foremost in our prayers? it is likely that one would answer, Daily bread, both bodily and spiritual; another, Forgiveness of sins; a third, Guidance through the perplexities of life; and a fourth, Deliverance from evil. But our Lord teaches differently from all these; He teaches us first to pray that the name of our heavenly Father may be hallowed, His kingdom furthered, and His will done; and after that, to pray for the supply of our own wants; trusting God, that if we ask aright in faith, He will give us all that we need.

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