

Cluainfeartha Brennain

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III. — St. Cummian the Tall, Bishop of Clonfert.

St. Cummian, surnamed the Tall (*fada*), to distinguish him from Cummian the Fair (*finn*), Abbot of Hy, was the most learned Irish scholar of the seventh century. He took a leading part in the famous Paschal controversy, and his letter on that question, which is fortunately extant, proves that he was perfectly familiar with Church history, and deeply versed in Sacred Scripture. He was well skilled, too, in the moral theology of the times, as the *Liber de Mensura Poenitentiarum* clearly shows. He tried his hand at poetry also, but we cannot say as much for his verses as for his theology : it is rarely, indeed, that theologians are good poets—they have too much sobriety of mind. His contemporaries likened Cummian in morals and life to St. Gregory the Great, and one of his admirers, in an old *rann* preserved by the Four Masters, says he was the only Irishman of his time fit to succeed that illustrious Pontiff in the chair of St. Peter.

Yet, the birth of this holy and learned man was the fruit of an unspeakable crime, to which it is unnecessary here to make further reference. His father was Fiachna, son of Fiachra Gairine, King of West Munster. The clan were known as the Eoghanach of Lough Lein, because they were sprung from the great Eoghan More, son of Ollioll Olum, and dwelt in the woods and mountains round the beautiful lakes of Killarney. His unhappy mother was, it seems, in early youth called Flann, but she was also called Mughain or Mugania, and was sometimes known as Rim, or, as Colgan latinises it, Rima. Her identity, however, under these various names is sufficiently established by the great misfortune of her life, for which, perhaps, she may not have been responsible.

The child was born in A.D. 589, or 590, for he died in A.D. 661, at the age of seventy-two. Drumdaliter—Marianus O’Gorman tells us—was “ the name of his town,” and Aedh or Hugh was his “ proper name” at first. Shortly after his birth the infant was exposed by his parents, and left at the head of the cross in a small *Cummian* or basket near St. Ita’s Convent of Killeedy, and the holy sisterhood finding the child thus abandoned took charge of the foundling, and called him Cummian, because he was found in the basket.

The history of the lady Flann, the mother of Cummian, is very singular. The great misfortune of her life seems to have happened when she was very young, and it may have been greatly, if not entirely, against her own will. It seems, too, that she was very beautiful—in a stanza composed by Cummian himself, she is called Flann the Fair—it is said also that she was four times married, and became the mother of no less than six kings and six bishops.

After the death of her fourth husband, Flann, whether tired of the cares of married life, or anxious to do penance for the sin of her youth, consulted her son Cummian as to her future ; and he advised her to retire from the world, and spend the rest of her days in prayer and penance. She did so, and died a holy nun at an advanced age

From Killeedy, or perhaps from Killarney, young Cummian was sent to the great school of Cork, founded by St. Finnbarr about the beginning of the seventh century when Cummian would be twelve or fifteen years of age.

Among the teachers in Cork, either then, or a little later on. was Colman Mac O'Cluasaigh, who is called the "tutor" of young Cummian, to whom he became greatly attached. Colman O'Cluasaigh was, it seems, a most, accomplished scholar, and had, moreover, an Irishman's love for poetry and song. Dr. Todd [1] has published, in the first volume of the *Liber Hymnorum*, a very beautiful Irish hymn composed by Colman to invoke for himself and his pupils the protection of God and His Saints against the yellow plague, which devastated Ireland between the years A.D. 660-664. He is described in the preface to that hymn as a reader of Cork (*fer-legind*), and is said to have composed it when he was fleeing, with his pupils, from the plague, to take refuge in some island of the sea, because it was thought the contagion could not extend beyond nine waves from the land, which, even from a sanitary point of view, was likely enough. He also composed, about the same time, an elegy on the death of Cummian.

Colman inspired his pupil with his own love for poetry ; and fortunately we have, in the same Book of Hymns, a Latin poem written by Cummian, which we should reprint if the space at our disposal were not so limited.

From St. Finnbar's school Cummian seems to have gone to visit his half brother Guaire, who was King of South Connaught at this period, or a little later on. As Cummian was already famous for sanctity and learning, and belonged to an influential family, who would now be ready enough to acknowledge the relationship, we can easily conceive how his own merits and Guaire's influence, would have procured his selection for the bishopric of Clonfert. "All the Martyrologies and Annals," says Cardinal Moran, [2] "agree in styling St. Cummian Fada, Bishop and Abbot of Clonfert."

But it is not easy to fix the exact date of his appointment. We find the death of Senach Garbh, Abbot of Clonfert, marked by the Four Masters under the date of A.D. 620, and his successor Colman died, according to Archdall, in the same year which he gives as A.D. 621. As there is no other obituary of a Bishop or Abbot of Clonfert noticed in our Annals until the death of Cummian himself in A.D. 661, we may, perhaps, fairly assume that he succeeded the Abbot Colman and governed the See for forty years. Colman, King of Connaught, the uncle of Cummian and father of Guaire, was slain in A.D. 617, and Guaire, if not actually king at this date, was an influential chief, and his defeat with others at the battle of Carn Fearadhaigh in Limerick is noted by the annalists in A.D. 622, and his death in A.D. 662, so that the two brothers, the Bishop and Chieftain, were contemporaries ruling in South Connaught during a long and chequered career. This fact will help to explain the great influence which Cummian possessed, and the leading position which he occupied in the Irish Church at that period. [3] His fame as a saint and scholar spread throughout all Ireland, and attracted crowds of students to his great school at Clonfert. He appears, as we shall see further on, to have taken a leading part in the Synod of Magh Lene, held about A.D. 630, and no doubt it was at the request of the Fathers of that Synod, that he wrote his famous epistle on the Paschal Question to the Abbot Segienus of Hy, about the year A.D. 634. There is every reason to believe that Segienus and Cummian were, if not personal friends, at least well known to each other, for the Columbian Abbey of Durrow in King's County, was not far from Clonfert, and the uncle of Segienus had been Abbot of that house until he was transferred to Hy in the year A.D. 600. Segienus himself was very likely educated there under his uncle's care, and perhaps succeeded him later on in the government of the Abbey. It is at all events certain that frequent intercourse existed between Hy and Durrow ; and that Cummian must have been well known at Durrow is manifest.

About a mile and a-half from Shinrone, to the west of Roscrea, there is an old ruin, perhaps originally built by St. Cummian, which gives its name—Kilcommin—to the parish. This was *Disert Chuimin in regione Roscreensi*, to which Cummian probably retired before the Synod of Magh Lene, to devote himself to a year's study of the Paschal question. It is about

twenty-five miles from Durrow, and fifteen from Clonfert. The old church was built under the shadow of Knoekshigowna, the beautiful hill on which the Tipperary fairies hold their revels.

The knowledge of those facts will help to explain Cummian's relations with King Domhnall a few years later.

When Domhnall, King of Ireland from A.D. 628 to 642, was a mere boy, he accompanied his father to the great Synod of Drumceat. On that occasion his relative Columcille put his hands on the boy's head and blessed him, foretelling at the same time that he would survive his brothers, and become a great king, and, moreover, that he would expire peaceably and happily on his bed surrounded by his family—quite an unusual occurrence for an Irish king in those days. King Domhnall reigned and sinned, like most other kings ; so that towards the end of his life he did not feel himself well disposed to die, because, says the scholiast, he had not the gift of penance to bewail his sins. However, he had confidence in Columcille's prediction, so he sent a message to the Abbot of Hy to ask whether he should go there in person to do penance, or, if not, what soul's-friend the Abbot would recommend him. Segienus, then Abbot of Hy, sent back word to the king, that his confessor would come to him from the south, and he very likely asked, at the same time, Cummian to visit the monarch. This message was attributed, in accordance with the custom of the times, to Columcille himself. It is preserved by the scholiast on Cummian's hymn, and is to the following effect : —

“ A Doctor who shall come from the south,
It is with him (Domhnall) shall find what he wants ;
He will bring *Communion* to his house,
To the excellent grandson of Ainmire.”

There is a play on the word *Communion* which in Irish is the same, or almost the same, as *Cummian*, the man's name.

Thus, it came to pass, whether by accident or design, that Cummian, the great *Saoi* or Doctor of the south, came all the way to Derry to visit the king, and administer spiritual consolation to him. But it seems the heart of the king still continued dry and impenitent. Then Cummian had recourse to prayer, and in order to obtain the gift of tears for his royal penitent, he composed, in honour of the Apostles, the very striking hymn in the *Liber Hymnorum*. It seems that this poetic prayer was efficacious ; Domhnall became a sincere penitent, bewailing his sins with floods of tears. The prediction of Columcille was completely verified, and the Four Masters tell us that Domhnall died at Ard-folhadh, near Ballymacgrorty, in the Barony of Tirhugh, “ after the victory of penance, for he was a year in mortal-sickness, and he used to receive the body of Christ every Sunday.” As King Domhnall died in A.D. 642, we may fix this visit of Cummian at A.D. 640 or 641 ; the scholiast in the poem that caused the conversion of the king-, tells us expressly, that it was “ written in Derry,” nigh to the ancient Aileach, the royal residence of the northern kings.

By far the most important and interesting event in the life of Cummian was the part he played in the great Paschal controversy. We can at present give only the merest sketch of the history of this great discussion, so as to enable our readers to understand Cummian's share in the controversy.

Of course the system of computing the date of Easter in use both in Ireland and England at the beginning of the seventh century was that which was introduced by St. Patrick himself, and which he acquired in the schools of France and Italy. From the very beginning, however, much diversity of practice existed between the Churches of the East and West, and even between some Churches in the West itself, in reference to the date of Easter Day. With a view to secure uniformity as far as possible, the Synod of Arles, to which Cummian refers, held in A.D. 314, prescribes in its first canon that the whole world should celebrate the Easter festival

on one and the same day, and that the Pope, *according to custom*, should notify that day to all the Churches. [4] There were three British bishops present at that Synod. But the diversity of practice still continued, to the joy of the pagans and to the scandal of the faithful.

Then the Nicene Synod intervened in A.D. 325, and commanded all the Eastern Churches “which heretofore used to celebrate the Pasch with the Jews,” [5] to celebrate it in future at the same time with the Romans and with us—so say the prelates of the Synod in their circular letter to the Egyptian Churches. Constantine, the Emperor, in his own circular says that the Synod agrees that all should celebrate the Pasch on the same day, but that it should never be on the same day with the Jews; and Cyril of Alexandria states, and Leo the Great confirms the statement, that the Alexandrian Church was to calculate the dates, and then notify them to the Roman Church, which was to convey the information to the other Churches. This was virtually adopting the Alexandrian cycle of nineteen years—which was very different from the Roman cycle. Then at Alexandria the equinox was rightly fixed on the 21st March, at Rome it was the 18th; at Alexandria they celebrated Easter on the 10th day of the moon, *when the 14th was a Saturday*; at Rome they did not celebrate Easter in any circumstances before the 16th day of the moon—assuming that as the 14th day represented Good Friday, the Pasch of the Passion, Easter Sunday, the Pasch of the Resurrection, could not rightly take place before the 16th. It is curious that Cummian in his Epistle supports this opinion, although Bede makes the 15th of the moon a possible Easter Sunday, and such is still the usage. A diversity of practice, therefore, between Rome and Alexandria still continued for many years. However, the Alexandrian usage ultimately prevailed, but was finally accepted in the Western World only about A.D. 530, when explained and developed by Dionysius Exiguus.

This, the correct system, therefore, lays down three principles. First, Easter Day must be always a Sunday, never on, but *next after* the 14th day of the moon. Secondly, that 14th day, or the full moon, should be that on or next after the vernal equinox; and thirdly, the equinox itself was invariably assigned to the 21st of March.

Whilst, however, the Continental Churches aimed at uniformity after a troublesome experience of their own errors, the Irish and British Churches, practically isolated from their neighbours, tenaciously clung to the system introduced by St. Patrick. It was the system of their sainted fathers, and that was enough for them. So when Augustine and his companions, having partially converted the Saxons, came into contact with the Christians of the north of England, they were much scandalized at their celebrating Easter at a different time from the rest of the world. They remonstrated, but in vain; the Scots of England and Ireland would not change their ways; some of them would not even eat with the newcomers; the Britons of Wales refused to aid them in converting the Saxons. Colman, after his discussion with Wilfred at Whitby, refuted but not convinced, left England with his monks and sailed away to a lonely island in his native Mayo, rather than give up his Irish tonsure and his Irish Easter. Columbanus was equally obdurate in France, and the Abbots of Hy for a hundred years more tenaciously adhered to the traditions of their own great founder. But all Ireland was not equally stubborn, and the Southernns yielded first.

The English Prelates, Laurence of Canterbury, Millitus of London, and Justus of Rochester, shortly after the death of Augustine, addressed a letter to “their most dear brothers the Lords, Bishops, and Abbots throughout all Ireland (Scotia),” admonishing them to give up their “errors” in reference to Easter, and celebrate it in conformity with the Universal Church. But the Irishmen appear to have taken no notice of this document, for it looked like an attempt, to assert a spiritual supremacy over the “Scots” which they always vigorously repudiated.

Millitus afterwards went to Rome, and others, too, going there after him spoke of the errors and contumacy of the Scots in this matter of Easter as well as in some other things

also. So Pope Honorius, about the year A.D. 629, addressed an admonition to the pastors of the Irish Church, sharply rebuking them for their pertinacity in their erroneous practices, especially in reference to Easter, and calling upon them to act thenceforward in conformity with the Universal Church.

The main charge brought against the Irish, so far as we can gather from Bede and Cummian, was that they celebrated Easter from the 14th to the 20th day of the moon, thus celebrating it on the same day with the Jews, viz., the 14th, *if that should happen to be Sunday*, which was contrary to the express prohibition of the Council of Nice. Most certainly they did not celebrate it with the heretical Quartodecimans on the 14th day of the moon, no matter what day of the week it might happen to be—they never celebrated Easter on any day but a Sunday, as both Bede and Cummian expressly admit. Cummian says that St. Patrick assigned the equinox to the 21st of March, but their cycle was the older Roman cycle of eighty-four years, not the new and more correct cycle of nineteen years adopted first at Alexandria and afterwards at Rome. The main charge, however, was opposition to the Universal Church in celebrating Easter from the 14th to the 20th of the moon, because the 14th of Nisan being the Jewish festival was, by the Council of Nice, declared unlawful for the Christian festival.

How, then, could St. Patrick have come to admit the 14th of the moon in any circumstances as a lawful date for Easter Day? This is a difficult point not yet clearly determined. We rather think that this usage of celebrating Easter on the 14th of Nisan, if it fell on Sunday, was retained in several of the Gallican Churches even after the Council of Nice. The Council itself expressly tells us that it was retained up to its own time in the Eastern Churches. Now, Eastern influence and Eastern customs prevailed to a considerable extent in Southern Gaul during the fifth century. The great monastery of Lerins was founded about A.D. 410, and from its cloisters issued the greatest prelates of Southern France. John Cassian came from the East, and, as we know, was imbued with Eastern ideas—Cassian, the greatest man of his time, so holy, so learned, and so amiable, was a monk of Lerins, and in A.D. 415 founded the great monastery of St. Victor, where Eastern ideas were also prevalent. It is not unlikely that St. Patrick derived his Paschal computation from these monasteries, or from some of the great scholars who issued from their cloisters.

Be that as it may, when the Irish clergy received the admonition of Pope Honorius, they convened a National Synod, which met at a place called Magh Lene, or Campus Lene, in the ancient Feara-Ceall, close to Rahan, in the King's County. Cummian, in his epistle, incidentally tells us almost all we know of this important Synod. The successors of Ailbe, of Ciaran of Clonmacnoise, of Brendan, of Nessan, of Molua, were there assembled about the year A.D. 630. The result of their deliberations was "to receive humbly and without hesitation" the doctrines and practices brought to them from the Holy See as their forefathers had commanded them, and therefore they resolved to celebrate Easter next year, and thenceforward with the Universal Church. But shortly after a "whitened wall" rising up amongst them caused disunion, under pretext of urging them to preserve the traditions of the elders. At last a compromise was adopted, and it was resolved to send messengers to Rome to see with their own eyes what was the custom of the Holy City in reference to the celebration of Easter. The messengers returned in the third year, and told them how they saw strangers from the whole world keeping the Roman Easter in the Church of Peter. Many wondrous cures were also wrought by the relics of the martyrs which they had brought with them from Rome, so it was resolved thenceforward to celebrate Easter on the same day with "their mother the Church of Rome;" and that resolution was faithfully carried out in the southern and midland parts of the kingdom, which were principally represented at the Synod. The north still held out, mainly through the influence and example of the great monastery of Iona and its dependent houses in Ireland.

It was to try and induce Segienus, Abbot of Hy, to give up the ancient usage, and like the rest of the world, to adopt the Roman practice, that Cummian, probably at the request of the

Synod, wrote this Paschal Epistle. He was favourably known in Iona, as we have already seen ; his learning and sanctity were greatly respected there, and having given special study to the question, he not unnaturally thought, he might be able to persuade the abbot to give up the old Columbian usage. Though he failed in the attempt, his letter was carefully preserved, and either the original, or a copy, was carried by refugees from Iona to St. Gall, where it was fortunately secured for posterity.

The epistle begins with the motto or inscription : “ I confide in the Divine Name of the Supreme God”— and is addressed by its author, who calls himself a suppliant sinner, to the Abbot Segienus, successor of St. Columba, and of other saints, and to the Solitary Beccan, [6] “ my brother in the flesh and in the spirit.” The following is a brief analysis of this most interesting monument of our early Irish Church.

First of all the writer humbly apologises for presuming to address these holy men, and he calls God to witness that in celebrating the Paschal solemnity with the learned generally he does so in no spirit of pride or contempt for others. For when the new (Dionysian) cycle of 532 years was first introduced into Ireland, he did not at once accept it, but held his peace, not presuming to praise or censure either party.

For he did not think himself wiser than the Hebrews, Greeks, and Latins, nor did he venture to disdain the food he had not yet tasted ; he rather retired for a whole year into the sanctuary of sacred study, [7] to examine as best he could the testimonies of Scripture, the facts of history, and the nature of the various cycles in use. The results of this year’s study he sums up in this epistle. He first proceeds to explain from Scripture the proper date of the Jewish Pasch, which, including the days of unleavened bread, began on the 14th day of the moon, and ended on the 21st ; and he quotes St. Jerome, who declares that as Christ is our Pasch, we must celebrate *that festival* from the 14th to the 21st day of the moon (the date with us necessarily varying with the day of the week). But the Pasch, he says, means the day on which *the lamb was slain*, for our Saviour himself said, “ With longing I have longed to eat this Pasch with you before I suffer.” Hence, the day of Passion in the Christian Festival can never begin before the 14th day of the moon ; then the day of burial will be the 15th of the moon, and therefore the day of the Resurrection can never be earlier than the 16th day of the moon ; and being always a Sunday, must be on some day between the 16th and 22nd day of the moon, inclusive. “ For if, he says, as you do, the Resurrection were celebrated on the 14th of the moon, then the day of burial will be the 13th, and the day of Passion the 12th, which is preposterous and opposed to the clear testimony of Scripture.”

Then he appeals to the authority of the Ecclesiastical Synods against the Irish usage. There was, he admits, in the beginning a diversity of practice even in the Apostolic churches founded by Peter the Key-bearer, and John the Eagle-pinioned, for the Apostles themselves, driven hither and thither by persecution, had no time to fix a uniform cycle for all the Churches. But afterwards “ I find it was ordered that all those were to be excommunicated who dared to act against the statutes of the four Apostolic Sees of Rome, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria.” The Nicene Synod, he adds, composed of three hundred and eighteen bishops, ordained that the same rule should be followed in all the Churches of the East and West. The Synod of Arles also, where six hundred bishops were present, insisted on uniformity throughout the whole world in the observance of the Pasch, lest, as St. Jerome observes, we should run the risk of eating the Pasch contrary to the law, *extra unam domum*, that is, outside the communion of the Universal Church. “ Consider you well, therefore, whether it is the Hebrews, Greeks, Latins, and Egyptians, united together, that are the *extra domum*, or a fragment of the Scots and Britains, living at the end of the world, that form a conventicle separated from the communion of the Church. You are the leaders of the people ; beware how you act, leading others into error by your obstinacy. Not so our Fathers, whom you pretend to follow, for they were blameless in their own days, seeing that they faithfully followed what they thought in their simplicity to be best ; but you can scarcely excuse yourselves for know-

ingly rejecting the observances of the Universal Church.” The writer then proceeds to insist at great length on this argument from the practice and authority of the Church ; and recites various passages from St. Augustine, St. Jerome, St. Cyprian, and St. Gregory, on the unity of the Church, and the guilt and danger of schismalical practices. “ Non alia Romanae urbis ecclesia, alia totius orbis aestimanda est,” he says, quoting St. Augustine : and then he adds from St. Jerome, “ Si quis Cathedrae S. Petri jungatur meus est ille,”— communion with Rome was in Cummian’s estimation, as in Jerome’s, the test of orthodoxy both in doctrine and discipline. “ Can anything,” he says, “ be more absurd than to say of our mother the Church—Rome errs, Jerusalem errs, Antioch errs, and the whole world errs, the Irish (Scoti) and Britons alone are in the right ?” In this part of his letter Cummian certainly displays not only great learning, but also great vigour and eloquence of style.

Lastly, he discusses the various cycles in use at different periods, and although he found much diversity with various nations, “ you,” he says, “ have one of your own quite different from them all. First, there is the Paschal cycle introduced by St. Patrick, [8] our spiritual Father (Papa nostra), according to which the Æquinox was assigned to the 21st of March, and Easter day ranged from the 14th to the 21st day of the moon.” He then refers to the cycles of Anatolius, Theophilus, Dionysius, Cyril, Morinus, Augustine, Victorius, and lastly he mentions the cycle of Pachomius to whom an angel revealed the proper way to calculate Easter—cycle meaning, it would seem, the special manner of calculating Easter peculiar to each. He then refers to the cycle of nineteen years adopted by the Nicene Fathers, calling it by its Greek name —ἐννεά-καθήμερις—which, he adds, might enable them to ascertain the date of Easter with sufficient accuracy. “It is, as I find, quite different from yours in its kalends, its bissextile, in its epact, in its fourteenth moon, in its first month, and in its equinox.” This is an important passage, because it shows that the Irish cycle was in every respect different from the cycle of nineteen years as adopted by the Church of Alexandria. He then refers to St. Cyril, and the cycle of Victorius, clearly showing that he was familiar with the entire subject, and probably had in his hands some works which we no longer possess.

After referring to the Synod of the Campus Lene, as explained above, and the appeal to Rome in accordance with the ancient statute (mandatum) of the Irish Church, he goes on to say that according to the synodical decree [9] all such “ causae majores ad caput urbium sunt referenda.” This refers to the decree of the Synod of Patrick, Auxilius, and Isernius, bidding the Irish prelates if any cause of disunion arose, to go to the place which the Lord hath chosen (to Rome, the ‘ caput urbium’) for the decision of these more important causes, “ so we sent there certain wise and humble men, whom we knew, as children to their mother.” And they returned in the third year, and told us what they had seen and heard, and how in the Church of St. Peter, the common hospice of all the faithful, Greeks and Hebrews, Scythians and Egyptians—“ all celebrated Easter on the same day, which differed an entire month from our own, and we saw with our own eyes many miracles wrought by the relics of the saints and martyrs which they had carried home with them from the holy city.” In conclusion, he adds that he had not written to attack them but to defend the truth ; he apologises for any wrong or harsh words that might have fallen from him, and in the last sentence implores on them all the strong blessing of the Holy Trinity to guard them from all evil.

This remarkable epistle affords a striking, proof, not only of Cummian’s own learning, but of the high efficiency of the schools of his native land, in which he studied. He gives the Hebrew, Greek and Egyptian names of the first lunar month. He refers to almost every cycle, and emendation of a cycle, of which we have any account, briefly, indeed, but sufficiently to show that he has acquainted with them, and with the decrees of synods, and with the passages of the Fathers that make reference to them. Above all things, he insists upon the unity of the Church, and incontestably establishes the Irish tradition in his own time, that the Irish Church was founded from Rome, that Rome is the Source of Unity, the final Court of Appeal, and the Mother of the Irish, as of all other Churches. The text is unfortunately somewhat cor-

rupt, and the style wants polish ; but, though in this respect Cummián is inferior to several Irish writers of the seventeenth century, his Latin is much superior to that of several ecclesiastical documents that we have seen in our own nineteenth century.

The *Liber de Mensura Poenitentiarum*, cannot with certainty be ascribed to Cummián Fada ; but it is highly probable that he was the author. It was preserved like so many other invaluable Irish MSS., in the Monastery of St. Gall, and has been published in the *Bibliotheca Patrum*, and, together with the Paschal Epistle, has been republished by Migne. [10]

We have seen that Cummián was regarded by the Abbot of Hy as a great moralist, and it may be that the same Segienus was the “ faithful friend,” whom the author addresses — *mi fidelissime*—in the prologue. The treatise consists of fourteen chapters, giving the canonical penances assigned to sins of various kinds. It treats of these sins in the most minute detail, but contains little original matter ; for the penances are, in most cases, taken from the works of the Fathers and the penitential canons of various early Councils. But it shows how carefully these matters were attended to in our early Irish Church, and is another striking monument of its ecclesiastical learning.

Cummián Fada has not unfrequently been confounded with Cummián Finn, the nephew of Segienus, Abbot of Hy. The latter wrote a life of St. Columba, to which Adamnan refers, and most of which he, Adamnan, inserted in the Third Book of his own Life of St. Columba. The Paschal Epistle has also been attributed to him, but without any grounds. The intrinsic evidence of the letter itself shows that it was written by a prelate of the southern half of Ireland ; he speaks of Ailbe, Brendan, and the rest as “ our fathers and predecessors ;” he had accepted the Roman usage which Hy and its family refused to accept for many years after ; and he uses in reference to St. Peter the very peculiar expression, “ *clavicularis*,” which is also used by the author of the poem in honour of the Apostles, which was undoubtedly the work of Cummián Fada, the Bishop of Clonfert.

The Four Masters say that “ St. Cummián Fada, son of Fiachna, Bishop of Cluainfearta Brennain, died on the 12th of November, 661,” which is his festival day. The entry of the death of his beloved tutor, St. Colman O’Cluasaigh, is marked a little later on as happening in the same year, and therefore towards its close. Colman, however, lived long enough after Cummián to compose an elegy on his death. The Four Masters have preserved a few lines, which may be thus translated : —

“ No bark o’er Luiumeach’s bosom bore,
From Munster to the Northern shore,
A prize so rich in battle won.
As Cuininian’s corpse, great Fiachna’s son.
Of Erin’s priests, it were not meet
That one should sit in Gregory’s Seat,
Except that Cummián crossed the sea,
For he Rome’s ruler well might be.
Ah ! woe is me, at Cummián’s bier
My eyelids drop the ceaseless tear ;
The pain, of hopeless anguish bred,
Will burst my heart since Cummián’s dead.”

The poet’s verse was true—Colman died within a month of his pupil to whom he was so deeply and tenderly attached. We may infer, too, from these verses that Cummián died at home in his native Kerry, but that his remains were carried up the Shannon in a boat to his own Cathedral of Clonfert, where he was interred. The Four Masters tell us that in A.D. 1162 the “ relics of Maeinenn and of Cummián Fada [11] were removed from the earth by the

clergy of Brenainn (that is, of Clonfert), and they were enclosed in a protecting shrine.” So far as we know there is no account to be had now of the existence of this shrine.

IV. — Subsequent History of Clonfert.

Frequent reference is subsequently made in our Annals to the monastery and See of Clonfert, but it is oftentimes a saddening record. Its buildings were four times plundered, and six times burnt. Nor was this the work of the Dane alone. The degenerate chieftains of Ireland too frequently followed their bad example, and provoked Divine vengeance by unspeakable acts of sacrilege, especially during the tenth and eleventh centuries.

In A.D. 838, Turgesius brought a great fleet to Lough Ree, which he stationed there for the express purpose of harrying the banks and islands of the Shannon. He plundered and burnt Clonfert, Clonmacnoise, and indeed all the monasteries and churches from Lanesborough to Limerick, which were within reach of his marauders ; and not once but frequently between the years A.D. 838 and 845. Yet strange to say it is stated in the old *Annals of Innisfallen*, that Feidhlimidh, son of Crimthaun, King of Munster, had a friendly conference with Niall, son of Hugh, King of Ulster, in the year A.D. 840, at Clonfert, and there received Niall’s homage as High King, and sat in the seat of the abbots of Clonfert.

Still the schools were not entirely destroyed, for in A.D. 868 is recorded the death of Cormac—Steward, Scribe, and Doctor of Clonfert-Brenainn. It was well that God then called him away, for next year, in A.D. 869, came Earl Tomrar with his warriors from Limerick to Clonfert. “ He was a fierce, cruel, rough man of the Lochlans ;” and hoped to obtain a great prey in the church and monastery. But he was disappointed, for the brethren heard of his approach, and fled expertly before him, as the Annals tell us, some in boats, and some into the surrounding morasses. Others took refuge in the church, but the disappointed freebooter killed them all, both those whom he found in the church and in the cemetery Tomrur however, died of madness three days afterwards, “ for Brendan wrought a miracle upon him for plundering his monastery and killing his monks.” In A.D. 949, Ceallachan, King of Cashel, plundered the monastery of Clonfert. But the men of Munster were not without rivals in their deeds of sacrilege. In A.D. 1031 Art O’Rorke, surnamed the ‘ Cock,’ plundered the monastery once more, but providentially when returning laden with his pillage, he fell in with Doncha, son of Brian, who defeated him. and his followers with great slaughter.

Some thirty years later in A.D. 1065, Aedh O’Rorke and Diarmaid O’Kelly plundered Clonfert and Clonmacnoise, and once more speedy vengeance overtook the robbers ; for Aedh O’Connor came against them and defeated them through the miracles of Ciaran and Brenainn, whose churches they had plundered. A bloody slaughter was made by Aedh, and, moreover, he captured or sunk their boats, and drove great numbers of the plunderers into the river. Yet the monastery and School of Clonfert still lived on down to the advent of the Anglo-Normans, for in the year A.D. 1170, is recorded the death of Cormac O’Lumluini, whom the Four Masters in pathetic language describe as the remnant of the Sages of Erin. The subsequent history of the School and See of Clonfert is foreign to our present purpose.

The old Cathedral of Clonfert still survives, and is one of the few of our ancient buildings now used for religious worship. It has passed, however, from Catholic hands, and will, doubtless, soon be abandoned by the Protestants too, for the few persons who attend divine worship in the old Cathedral of St. Brendan can hardly be called a congregation.

The church consisted of a nave with a western tower in the centre, and a chancel with two transepts branching nearly at the centre of the nave. The building is small, the nave being 54 feet by 27 in the clear, but very beautiful. The western doorway is described with great fulness of detail by Brash (p. 43), who declares that in point of design and execution, it is not excelled by any similar work that he has seen in these islands. There is not, he says, a square

inch of any portion of this beautiful doorway, with its six orders of shafts and arches, that is without the mark of the sculptor's tool, every bit of the work being finished with the greatest accuracy. Romanesque and Norman porches and doorways, he adds, exist of grander proportions, but none exhibiting the fertility of invention and beauty of design which this one does.

The altar window of the chancel is also greatly praised by the same competent authority. "The design of this window is exceedingly chaste and beautiful, the mouldings simple and effective, and the workmanship superior to anything I have seen either of ancient, or modern times. The mouldings are finely wrought, and the pointing of the stone work so close, that I cannot believe they were ever worked by tools." [12]

He says the work is, in his opinion, of the twelfth century, and he is inclined to attribute its building to the celebrated Peter O'Mordha, a Cistercian monk, who was first Abbot of Boyle, and afterwards became Bishop of Clonfert. He was unfortunately drowned in the Shannon two days after Christmas Day, in the year A.D. 1171. With him we may fitly close the history of the School of Clonfert.

[1] *Dr. Todd* To whom we are indebted for much information about Cumman.

[2] Note to Archdall, *sub voce*, "Clonfert."

[3] There is a characteristic story of Cumman, Guaire, and Caimin, told by the scholiast on the *Felire* of Ængus. The three half brothers were at one time in Caimin's Church of Inis Cealtra in Lough Derg. "What would you wish to have this Church filled with?" said Caimin to Guaire. "With silver and gold," he replied, "that I might give it for my soul's sake to saints and to churches, and to the poor." "And you, Cumman, what would you have it filled with?" "I would have it full of books to instruct studious men, to enable them to preach the Gospel, and save souls," said Cumman. Then they said, "But thou, Caimin, what would you wish to have in it?" "I would wish to have the full of it of diseases and sicknesses to afflict my body," replied Caimin. And all three got their wish, the earth to Guaire, wisdom to Cumman, and sickness and disease to Caimin; and they all went to heaven in the way they wished.

[4] *Primo loco de observatioue Paschae Domini, et uno die et uno tempore per omnem orbem a nobis observetur et juxta consuetudinem litteras ad omnes tu dirigas.*

[5] See Hefele. *Councils*, vol i., use 314. French Edition, 1869.

[6] Was this Breacan of Dairinis, near Waterford, half-brother to Cumman? He might have been then at Hy.

[7] Perhaps to Disert Chuimin, where he wrote: "Ut me ut nyeticoracen in domicilio latitantem defenderem." Epistola.

[8] Skene says this "is the oldest authentic notice of St. Patrick."—*Celtic Scot.*, vol. ii., p. 17.

[9] This is the synodical decree quoted in the *Book of Armagh*. Its citation by Cumman so early as A.D. 640 is a clear proof that the Synodical decrees are authentic.

[10] Tome 87. *Patr. Latina*.

[11] In some ancient MSS. Fada is written Fota, but it is the same word, meaning 'Tall.'

[12] *Ecclesiastical Architecture of Ireland*, page 44

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