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Current Topics

AT HOME AND ABROAD.

"Is Baithen mentioned in the topic in last issue ST BATHAN'S, the St Bathans after whom a town in Central CENTRAL OTAGO. Otago is named?" We cannot answer the question with certainty. Several Baithens are met with in Irish hagiology. Most likely the Baithen we mentioned in connection with Iona is the St Bathans referred to. St Baithen was the successor of St Columba. He was a near relative—according to some the cousin, according to others the nephew—of Columcille. Columba was engaged in his favourite occupation of transcribing the Sacred Scriptures when his fatal illness attacked him. Overcome by weakness he laid down the pen in the middle of the 33rd Psalm. "Let Baithen write the rest," said the master. His wish was law with his monks. They saw clear indication of the desire of the dying saint that Baithen, whom he was wont to liken to John, the Beloved Disciple, should succeed him at Iona. The kinship, far from being a bar to the succession, was a qualification in those days when the spirit of clan was strong in the monasteries. So Baithen became Abbot where for many years he had been Prior, and ruled Iona with gentle sway for three years. He died in the year 600, and to this day is revered as the patron saint of Taugh-boyne (Teach-Baithen), County Donegal.

THE lives of the Irish missionary saints are full of interest. The history of Baithen, of Iona, as SAINT BAITHEN OF IONA. student, monk, and abbot is no exception. He was a great saint and a great scholar. His angelic modesty and constant fervour, and ceaseless activity were constant sermons to the monks of Iona and Heth. He took a full share of work in the fields. His work was in itself a prayer, and was accompanied by prayer. He never lost a moment. Even as he walked to and from the monastery with eyes cast down his hands were clasped beneath his habit as he prayed. The old chronicler in the Salamanca MS., mentions many interesting details of his life. As an illustration of his spirit of prayer and mortification it is related that he was accustomed to recite a prayer between every two morsels of food. When he accompanied Columba from Derry he became overseer of works at Iona. His skill as a Scribe found him more occupation in the scriptorium or transcribing room than in the fields. It is said of Baithen that on one occasion he hurriedly copied the psalter. On revising the work it was found he had made but one mistake—he had omitted a dot over an i. These monks were wonderfully skilled in transcription. "I have seen," says O'Flaherty, "handwriting of St Columba, in Irish characters, as straight and as fair as any print of above 1000 years standing." To be a choice scribe was high recommendation for preferment. "Let Baithen write the rest." The "choice Scribe" of Iona spoke of the "choice Scribe" Baithen, who was then Abbot of the monastery founded by Columba at Magh-Lunga—the plain of the ships—in Heth. This monastery was twenty miles from Iona—a short distance for the hardy sailor monks of those northern seas. The writer of the life of St Baithen says that his days were spent in reading, prayer, and bodily labour. His scholarship was universally acknowledged. "Be assured," wrote an old writer, "that he had no equal on this side of the Alps in his knowledge of sacred Scripture, and in the profundity of his science. He was a wonder worker, and many miracles are recorded by the Annals'.

IN his admirable work, "Irish Schools and A STORY FOR YOUNG AND OLD. Scholars," the Most Rev Dr Healy, to whom we are indebted for information in the proceeding notes, tells a story of the early life of St Baithen which shows that "spare the rod" was not the motto of masters in the schools of Erin. It were well that colonial children were more generally dealt with in ancient fashion. The birch generously applied is good corrective medicine for incipient larrikinism.

Here is the story of Baithen's shortcoming, and how the young saint was cured of the usual boyish laziness:—"We are told in the life of St Colman Ela, of Lynally, in the King's County, that he once punished St Baithen, the nephew of Columcille, and his successor in the abbacy of Hy, for neglecting his studies. The boy, thereupon, fled from the church in which the school was, it seems, taught, to the woods to hide, and avoid both his lessons and the chastisement of his master. There he saw a man building one of the circular wicker-work houses then very common, and observed that, although he worked one rod at a time, the wicker-wall rose steadily to the roof. "Ab," said he, "if I only learned a little each day, I too should grow learned." Then he took shelter from a shower under the spreading branches of an oak tree. While standing beneath the boughs he observed a drop of water dripping from a leaf and falling on the ground. He made a hole with his heel on the spot where the drop was falling, and soon noticed that the hole was filled. Here he made a similar mental reflection, and vowing that never again would he neglect his daily task, he returned to his master and grew up to be a very learned and a very holy man (O'Curry, M. and O. vol ii, p 83).

ON the same page of Dr Healy's work, from which we take the foregoing quotation, we find some information about the food of lads at the ancient Irish monastic schools, which will interest our modern school boys, who like flesh meat three times a day. The law compelled the teachers to supply wholesome food according to the rank of the parents of their pupils. "What are their victuals?" asks the writer in the *Lenchois Mor*. "Strabout (lithe) is given to them all, but the flavouring is to be different." It was salt butter for the sons of inferior grades; fresh butter for the sons of chieftains; honey for the sons of kings. The sterabout of oat-meal might be made on water, or on butter-milk, or on new milk, and given to the different classes in like manner.

A COPY of a shadowgraph or photograph according MORE ABOUT THE SHADOWGRAPH. ing to Professor Hütgen's invention, has attracted a deal of attention in Dunedin, where it is exhibited in the shop of Mr E. Hyams, jeweller. It was taken in Hamburg, and represents a human hand. The hand of a living person was photographed, with the result that a skeleton hand with shadows where the flesh should be, appeared distinctly in the negative. The photograph was taken by the Professor himself. D. Speiss, of Vienna, at a recent lecture, exhibited, "among other photographs, a very interesting one, showing the hand of a servant belonging to the institution. This man, years ago, ran into his hand a piece of glass, which could not be extracted, and which always penetrated deeper. The photograph of the skeleton of the hand produced by Professor Poentgen's method showed this bit of glass quite distinctly."

A FEW years ago the conversion of a lineal DESCENDANT OF JOHN KNOX. descendant of Martin Luther was chronicled. It will interest our readers, especially of the lectures, "Catholicism and Presbyterianism," now published in our columns to learn that the only lineal descendant of John Knox is a member of the congregation of the Holy Cross. Brother Philip was a Methodist preacher in his early manhood, but for thirty years past he has been a teacher in various Catholic schools. He has in his possession a snuff-box which belonged to his ancestor.

A good man, the head of a Roman Catholic college, ODDS AND ENDS. was walking home in the falling light when he beheld in the middle of the road a dark object in the snow. Drawing near, he found a little cobbler from the neighbouring hamlet, lying unconsciously drunk. The Jesuit could not leave him to perish. So with great difficulty he raised him from the ground, and with great difficulty he managed to steer the helpless fellow-mortal to his house, half a mile off. Though unconscious at starting, he had partly regained his senses when he reached his own

COMPARE SIZE AND WEIGHT OF STICKS.

Smoke T. C. Williams' LINDO Smoke