

**A GRAMMAR OF THE MODERN
IRISH LANGUAGE, DESIGNED
FOR THE USE OF THE CLASSES
IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649354245

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Cover @ 2017

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BY

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VARIOUS READINGS, AND GRAMMAR AND CRITICAL NOTES," &c.;

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Second Edition—Revised and Enlarged.

WILLIAMS AND NORGATE,
14, HENRIETTA-STREET, COVENT GARDEN, LONDON;
AND
20, SOUTH FREDERICK-STREET, EDINBURGH.
DUBLIN: HODGES, SMITH, AND CO.

1860.

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PREFACE.

THE little work of which the second edition is now issued from the press is a short introduction to the study of the Irish language, and is intended mainly to assist the student desirous of obtaining an acquaintance with the language as it is spoken in many parts of our island; while to those who desire to enter more deeply into the study of Celtic, it may, perhaps, serve as a starting point at which to commence their investigations.

Similar elementary grammars of the Irish language, varying in value and interest, have been long before the public, the best of which are those of Dr. Neilson, and Mr. Connellan, the present Professor of Irish in Queen's College, Cork. These have been made use of in the drawing up of the present work. The former had been long in use as a class-book in the University of Dublin; but as it was confessedly very inaccurate and provincial in the character of the Irish which it exhibited, I was asked by my friend, Rev. D. Foley, D.D., Professor of Irish in the University of Dublin, to draw up a short grammar which would be free from errors of that kind. This work having received the kind revision of Dr. Foley, was published with a recommendatory preface by him in 1855, the Board of Trinity College, Dublin, having very liberally made a

grant sufficient to defray almost the entire expenses of its publication. Since its publication it has, at the instance of Professor Foley, been made a class-book in the Dublin university.

It is well known by philologists that the great standard grammar of Modern Irish is by Dr. O'Donovan, one of the foremost representatives of native Celtic learning. This much praised work was published in 1845, and it is on it that I have mainly relied both in my first, and now again in my second edition. Much progress, however, has been made since that time in Celtic studies, and great results may be looked for when the second edition of Dr. O'Donovan's grammar appears, as it is to be hoped that he will combine in it the results of Zeuss and his school, and of his own researches in the study of the Brehon Laws.

Since the first publication of this little work the greatest change has come over our Celtic philology. That change has been caused by the appearance of the *Grammatica Celtica* of Zeuss. That great work which marks a new era of Celtic philology was published in 1853. In it Zeuss solved the Celtic problem, viz.: the question, in what relationship the Irish, Welsh, and old Gaulish people stand both to each other and to the other nations. Numerous have been the works published on this question during the two last centuries. And yet we must say, with regret, that as to their value, it is almost none. In no department can more scientific errors be pointed out. The Continental scholars never mastered the Celtic languages; the native scholars lacked, almost without exception, common sense, and often common honesty. No Irish

scholar was conscientious enough to learn Welsh, no Welsh scholar to learn Irish; but all were ready enough to compare their languages with Phœnician, Persian, Etruscan, Egyptian, of which again they knew, in reality, next to nothing. Justice compels us to mention one remarkable exception, the great Welsh scholar, Edward Lhwyd, of whom it may be said that he lived 150 years before his time; but, unable to follow him, the native school had sunk into chaotic and childish etymological dreams. The Celtic problem appeared to be hopeless, and became distasteful to sober minds. Some twenty years ago, however, the influence of the new science of Comparative Philology began to be felt. Pritchard tried to apply it to Celtic with some success. The Continental linguists of Bopp's school, Bopp himself, Diefenbach, Pictet, and others, although tending in the right direction, failed to *prove* the truth. Zeuss at last succeeded by combining with an intellect of rare power a devotion to the subject which amounted, one may say, to a sacrifice of his life. And even this might not have been enough if he had not possessed what no one possessed before him, viz., the *really oldest* monument of both the Irish and the Welsh dialects. Those of the Irish he found in the MSS. of St. Gall, Milan, Würzburg, and Carlsruhe; the Welsh, in Oxford.

Dr. O'Donovan, in a paper on Zeuss in the *Ulster Journal of Archæology* for 1859, quotes the following remarks by Dr. Siegfried in explanation of this: "Zeuss, in the course of his historical researches, had become more familiar with the great libraries of Europe than most men; and he knew, what the scholars of Ireland and Britain were not aware of, that the *oldest* Irish

MSS. existing are not to be found either in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, or of the Royal Irish Academy, nor yet in Oxford or London ; but that they had been hidden for hundreds of years in the Ambrosian Library at Milan, in the old monastery of St. Gall, in Switzerland, and in some other Continental places. Most people know how this occurred. Ireland was at one period famous for its learning, and called by our ancestors the Island of Saints, and Irish missionaries were then the missionary teachers of the Continent. In the numerous monasteries founded by them, such as St. Gall and Bobbio, learned men found a refuge. The MSS. Zeuss found in the German and Italian libraries are the results of their pious labours. These, however, are not original works, they are mere copies of parts of the Scriptures, and of the classics. In transcribing these, the monks, for the assistance of their own memories, and for the benefit of younger scholars, used to write between the lines the *literal Irish translation* of difficult words and phrases. These are the famous *glosses* of St. Gall and of Milan. Zeuss saw their value, and spared no labour nor expense in copying them out with his own hand. Possessing them he soon learned more of the really oldest forms and grammar of the Irish language than any scholar had known before him. There are archaisms preserved in those *glosses* which were never found in the MSS. preserved in Great Britain or in Ireland."

Previous to the appearance of Zeuss' work, attempts could be made with impunity to connect Welsh and Irish with Hebrew and Phœnician, or with Etruscan, Egyptian, and Basque. At the same time Welsh scho-

lars on the one hand, and Irish scholars on the other, were able to deny the connexion of the two languages. An end has been now put to all such vain attempts and assertions. It is now proved (1) that on no grounds of rational or scientific etymology can the Celtic be compared with the Shemitic or other allophylan families, but that it is of a purely Japhetic, *i.e.*, Indo-European, origin; and (2) that the Irish and Welsh were originally the same language. On this general result of the researches of Zeuss we quote the following statement of Dr. O'Donovan, in the article already alluded to, which is of peculiar value as showing that the results of the German scholar are adopted by the highest native authority on Celtic matters. O'Donovan states that the *Grammatica Celtica* has proved:—

“1. That the Irish and Welsh languages are *one* in their origin; that their *divergence*, so far from being *primeval*, began only a few centuries before the Roman period; that the difference between them was very small when Cæsar landed in Britain—so small, that an old Hibernian, most likely, was still understood there; and that both nations, Irish and British, were identical with the Celts of the Continent—namely, those of Gaul, Spain, Lombardy, and the Alpine countries;—this is, in fact, asserting the internal unity of the Celtic family.

“2. That this Celtic tongue is, in the full and complete sense of the term, one of the great Indo-European branches of human speech. This, which it had been impossible for the great linguist Bopp to prove, is fully demonstrated by Zeuss.

“The consequence of these two facts is, that there

must now be an end to all attempts at comparing either Hebrew, Phœnician, Egyptian, Basque, or any other language which is not Indo-European, with any dialect of Celtic. The consequence further is, that as far as language gives evidence, we must consider the inhabitants of these islands strictly as brethren of those other five European families constituting that vast and ancient pastoral race who spread themselves in their nomadic migrations till, in the west, they occupied Gaul, and crossed over to Britain and to Ireland, the last boundary of the old world. It follows, likewise, that to the Celtic family we must allow the full Japhetic heir-loom, not only of the grandly organized original language, but of all that it attests of early culture in every respect, the first germs of a mythological Pantheon included.

“Of a heterogeneous mixture, Zeuss has found no trace either in the Welsh or the Irish; therefore, what mediæval tradition relates of such mixture is now a problem which must find solution from a different source.”

The Celtic family consists of two living branches, the British and the Irish; the first comprising the Welsh, Cornish, and the Armoric; the second comprising the Irish or Gaelic, the Scotch Gaelic, and the Manx.

The antique Celtic of Gaul is unhappily lost. Many proper names, and a few words reported by the old classic writers, were long all we possessed of it. Grimm pointed out some curious charms reported by Marcellus, the physician of Theodosius the Great. During the last few years about ten really ancient Gaulish inscriptions have been discovered in France. Unfortunately