

**HELPS FOR STUDENTS OF
HISTORY, NO. 18.
ECCLESIASTICAL
RECORDS: THREE LECTURES**

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Helps for students of history, No. 18. Ecclesiastical Records: Three Lectures by Claude Jenkins

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CLAUDE JENKINS

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HISTORY, NO. 18.
ECCLESIASTICAL
RECORDS: THREE LECTURES**

TO THE MEMORY OF
JOHN HUNTER SMITH
A GREAT SCHOOLMASTER
AND
A TRUE LOVER OF HISTORY

English
man
4-30-30
21742

ECCLESIASTICAL RECORDS

THE ECCLESIASTICAL SCRIBE

AN ecclesiastical scribe may be either an ecclesiastic who is a scribe or a scribe who writes documents of ecclesiastical concern or for ecclesiastical purposes; he may be either an original author or one who ministers to the originality of others; and even this does not exhaust the possible permutations and combinations. In every age, again, he will have his conventions and his idiosyncrasies; the materials with which he works may be found to shew a certain amount of variation; more important still, his writing itself will tend to reproduce certain general features of the school to which he belongs and the training that he has received, so that, arguing from MSS. of known *provenance* and date the palæographer, like the art critic, will often tell you with some confidence, if with less complete assurance of infallibility, not only when, but where, a particular work was produced, whether at Canterbury, shall we say, or at St. Albans or some other great centre. And the range of the subject, as will be seen, is vast, covering many lands and many centuries, each more than sufficient for a single lecture.

A Keeper of MSS. may be allowed to try to picture to himself some of these men and the tools and materials they used, and a Librarian to be not altogether unmindful of the circumstances in which their work was done. It would be tempting to depict that scene in the Far East where a man clothed in white linen, with a writer's inkhorn by his side, is marking the people, as the prophet saw him by the river Chebar. It is still more tempting to skip eight centuries and look inside a student's room which will be famous while scholarship endures. Seated there is a man with a history. Years ago, when his father died for the Faith he believed, he had been left, a lad of seventeen, the eldest of seven children, to support himself and his family. For a time a rich woman, a widow, helped the poor student, and then he parted with his only wealth, a few fine copies of ancient authors—we can judge what it must have meant—to a purchaser who allowed him 6d. a day for several years, sufficient for his personal needs. He teaches, and his fame as a teacher grows year by year, though not without doubts and jealousies. And now in the prime of life he sits here, still rigorously austere to himself, but wonderfully attractive to others, and at last with everything at hand that a scholar could desire. It is a pleasant room, looking out upon an inner courtyard, where a fountain, no doubt, and perhaps even trees, afford a refreshing contrast to the fierce glare of an Eastern sun. The scene is a busier one than the quiet peace of Dürer's imaginative picture

of St. Jerome in his study, with the Cardinal's hat hanging on a peg and the lion in the foreground which seems to be saying: "Deus, Deus, nobis haec otia fecit." For as the scholar takes from the stone ledge by his side one or other of those rolls of the New Testament scriptures which Sir Frederic Kenyon has so vividly described,¹ he begins to read, and as he reads to dictate a commentary on the sacred text. Hour after hour he goes on and one *notarius* or shorthand-writer succeeds another without a break, for there are seven or eight, at least, at hand to take their turn; and as many *antiquarii* or transcribers, probably in another room, relieve each other in writing out the notes in longhand as each *notarius* gives up his place. And not only these but girls also who have been trained in elegant calligraphy. Maecenas, we are sometimes told, invented shorthand; it is a Christian Maecenas who has made all this possible at his own charges, and who is here following his master's progress with untiring devotion and admiration all day long. "He left *no* leisure for meals or rest," says a fragment in Suidas. "Of the space from dawn to the ninth or tenth hour I say nothing. All students give *that* time to the investigation of the Divine oracles, and to reading."² And assuredly wherever the name of Origen of Alexandria and Caesarea is

¹ *Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 2nd edit. (Macmillan, 1912).

² Suidas, ed. Bernhardt (1858), II. 1280 (of Ambrosius); Hler., *Ep.* xliii. (of Origen).

known that of Ambrosius the rich deacon should not be forgotten.

Let us turn our thoughts Westward and put the clock three or four hundred years on. By the Seventh century the fame of the skill of the monks of Ireland in writing and illumination had spread far beyond their own land as their restless activities led them to travel: witness the library of Bobbio (now mostly in the Ambrosiana at Milan), or of St. Gall, both founded by Irish monks c. 618. If the ascription of 8,000 students to a single monastery be too great a tax on our credulity, it must still be remembered that, at any rate, there is ample evidence for the existence of a sufficient number of Irish scribes to account for the production of an enormous number of manuscripts; evidence, too, of a knowledge of Greek far exceeding that of most of the mediaeval bishops, who traced on the floor of churches a St. Andrew's cross composed of the Latin and what they supposed to be the Greek alphabet, as part of the ritual of consecration. And a search for traces of acquaintance with at least some Hebrew words will not be found unfruitful. But our immediate purpose is a quest for details of a more technical kind. Let us take three or four incidents connected with Adamnan or with St. Columba. The first shall be a scene in which Adamnan represents himself as acting as amanuensis; he is taking down the words that fell from Arculf's lips, and he is doing so with a stylus upon tablets covered with

wax, just as he might have done in Rome in pre-Christian days; and we recall that upon just the same *tabulae ceratae* the mediaeval precentor or succentor was wont to write the list of lections and other details for the services of the church, the wax being provided by the sacrist—probably a useful way of disposing of candle-ends and other waste. This method of writing furnished the Latin language with the inelegant transformation of the Greek *χαράσσειν*, “to scratch,” into “caraxare,” of course emended by critics into the more Ciceronian “exarare,” which has the same meaning. There are some critics whose appropriate occupation in purgatory would be an attempt to edit the *Hisperica Famina*. Let us remind ourselves then, in passing, that the primary duty of a student of a manuscript is not to determine what the scribe might have written or ought to have written, but what he wrote and what he meant to write; and if the student would see how valuable such painful work may be let him turn for encouragement to Dr. C. H. Turner’s magnificent edition of the Latin versions of the Canons or the edition of the Vulgate by Bishop John Wordsworth and Dr. H. J. White, which is one of the glories of English scholarship. The notes which Adamnan made were then transcribed, he tells us, *in membranis*, on skins. In many parts of the ancient world papyrus was never used because it was unobtainable; by the Fourth century A.D. it had been almost entirely supplanted for valuable MSS. by vellum. We shall have to wait nearly

1,000 years before "paper" in the modern sense acquired the vogue in England which it had possessed in China before the Christian era.

Our second illustration shall be the quaint traditional story of the *Cathach* of St. Columba, now in the Royal Irish Academy, and recently edited by Dr. Lawlor. St. Finnian of Moville had a MS. brought from Rome which Columba saw. To see was to covet, to covet was to copy, and alas! he did it by stealth, regardless of copyright. But he could not keep the knowledge of his treasure to himself; and Finnian, claiming the copy, appealed to the King. Diarmait, in strict accordance with the principles of the Berne Convention, decided that "to every book belongs its son-book, as to every cow her calf." The result was a battle in which Columba's supporters were worsted, and the saint himself soon retired to Iona. The book, so the story runs, a Latin Psalter enshrined in a silver case, became the battle trophy, the mascot, of the O'Donnells. True or false, its history may remind us of that Fulda codex deeply marked with swordcuts with which the founder, the Blessed Boniface, is said to have defended himself in the Eighth century against his murderers,¹ or of the *Scholastic History* of Peter Comestor captured with its owner, King John of France, by the Black Prince in the Battle of Poitiers, and now to be seen among the Royal MSS. in the British Museum.²

¹ *Vita auctore Othlono*, Lib. II. in Mabillon's *Acta SS. Benedict. III. ii.*, p. 85.

² Royal MSS. 19 D II