

**THE HOLY SCRIPTURES IN
IRELAND ONE THOUSAND
YEARS AGO: SELECTIONS FROM
THE WÜRTZBURG GLOSSES**

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Glosses by Thomas Olden

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THOMAS OLDEN

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PREFACE.

THE Commentary from which the following selections are taken is preserved in the University (formerly the Cathedral) library of Würzburg, in Germany, where it has been from time immemorial. Nothing is known of the person by whom, or the time at which, it was brought there; but as Würzburg was frequented by Irish ecclesiastics in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and its monastery was of Irish foundation, there is little doubt that the manuscript was brought from Ireland by one of the many pilgrims who passed over to the Continent: and he happily placed it in the safe depository where it still remains. It contains a Latin version of St. Paul's Epistles, with Irish glosses or comments written between the lines of the text and round the margin, as shown in the facsimile. They terminate at Hebrews vii. 5. The manuscript has no date, but the language of the glosses is pronounced by competent authority¹ to be of the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century. How early this is may be judged from a few historical facts. Charlemagne was probably reigning at Aix-la-Chapelle, or at least he could not have been long in his grave; Alfred of England had not yet ascended the throne; two centuries or more had to elapse before the consummation of the great schism between the Churches of the East and West, and more than three before the Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland.

¹ Zeuss, *Grammatica Celtica*, 2nd Ed. Berlin, MDCCCLXXI. Preface, p. xxiv. Referring to this and other MSS. of the same class, he says: "The language of all these manuscripts is the same, and they are to be assigned either to the eighth or the beginning of the ninth century."

The handwriting of three scribes is discernible in the glosses, though they are mainly the work of one. The names of all are unknown, and it can only be affirmed with certainty that the Commentary was written by Irishmen and for Irishmen, and is therefore a genuine relic of the ancient Church. It has a great advantage over many other ancient documents, in being free from the suspicion of interpolation or alteration; for when the Irish monasteries on the Continent lost their national character from the cessation of the stream of Irish pilgrims, there was no one who could read the language.

The existence of this precious manuscript was little known until the appearance of the great work of Zeuss on Celtic Grammar, in which it was largely quoted.

The whole of the glosses were afterwards published by Professor Zimmer,¹ and recently a new edition, with a literal translation, has been brought out by Mr. Whitley Stokes.²

Some time after the appearance of Zimmer's work, I made a translation of some parts of it; but not feeling satisfied with the result, I laid it aside.³ Subsequently Mr. Stokes having asked me to read the proofs of his translation, I took up the subject again, and having revised my work with the aid of his exact literal version, I decided on carrying out my original intention of publishing it. So far, therefore, as accuracy is concerned, it is largely indebted to the work of that distinguished scholar. In making these selections, my object is to give a fair representation of the whole work in a moderate compass, with such illustrations from other sources as circumstances enable me to add. I could have wished that these were more numerous; but living at a distance from libraries, I am obliged to be content with calling public attention to the Commentary

¹ *Glosse Hibernicæ*. Berlin. MDCCCLXXXI.

² *The Old Irish Glosses of Würzburg and Carlsruhe*, by Whitley Stokes, D.C.L. Printed for the Philological Societies of London and Cambridge. Austin. Hartford, 1887.

³ The difficulty of the language is very great, owing to its early date. In English, Chaucer cannot now be read without a glossary, and even then is difficult; but this is five centuries older than Chaucer.

by these selections, and must leave it to others who have leisure, and are within reach of books, to pursue the enquiry.

The following are the omissions which have been made :—

1. Most of the passages which are merely translations of the Latin text into Irish.

2. Repetitions of the same thought on parallel texts.

3. Places where the manuscript is partly illegible, or the sense has not been fully ascertained.

The glosses are so extremely concise, owing to the necessity of compression for want of space, that their full meaning is not always apparent at first sight, and it is possible that some passages of interest may have been omitted ; but if this is so, they cannot be many, and the reader may feel assured that the general character of the whole is represented by the present work. Those who may desire to examine the entire Commentary will have no difficulty in doing so in Mr. Whitley Stokes' book,¹ where they will find the original and a literal translation.

Some Latin passages are intermingled with the Irish in the glosses. These are generally from authors whose names are given. Most of them are from Pelagius, the rest from Jerome, Augustine, Origen, Gregory the Great, and Isidore of Seville. Here the orthodox divines of the early Church, Augustine and Jerome, are found in company with Pelagius and Origen, who incurred the condemnation of Councils for errors of doctrine. Pelagius in particular was the most noted heresiarch of early times, and was strenuously opposed by both Jerome and Augustine. But though the compilers of the glosses draw their materials from many sources, they do not follow any author implicitly, but deal with all in an impartial spirit, treating their views on their merits without respect of persons. The source of the Irish notes which constitute the Commentary is not indicated in the manuscript, but some of these also are from Pelagius, others from Hilary and Primasius.² The writers were not, how-

¹ They may be forewarned, however, that the work is intended for philologists, and is not of a popular character.

² See Appendix, pp. 122-124.

ever, indifferent to errors of doctrine, as appears from their reference to heretics on two or three occasions. Thus at Romans v. 14 the Pelagians are so described; at 1 Thessalonians iv. 14 those holding the opinions known as Docetic, by which the reality of our Lord's body was denied; at 2 Timothy ii. 17, 18, those who denied the Resurrection. There appear also to be allusions to errors, as at Hebrews i. 5, where the heresy of the Adoptionists is probably referred to. The names of the heretics are never given, though they are found in the text of the commentator from whom the gloss is taken. It would seem that the atmosphere of Ireland was so serene,¹ theologically at least, that it was unnecessary to trouble the student with the names of those whose opinions had never reached their shores. For the same reason, perhaps, glosses are sometimes admitted without hesitation which do not take account of controversies carried on elsewhere, and might be interpreted in an unfavourable sense if employed at the present day. References to extinct discussions also occur, as, for instance, that on trine immersion in baptism, which is alluded to at Ephesians iv. 5 and Colossians ii. 12. A special interest attaches to this Commentary, as illustrating the teaching of those Irish schools of which Bede and others speak so highly, but of which so little is really known. At that period when, as Dr. Johnson has observed, Ireland was "the school of the West, the quiet habitation of sanctity and literature," she sent forth many eminent men, natives and foreigners, to do battle with heathenism on the Continent and in England; and the reputation of her schools, especially for the teaching of

¹ One of the few instances of a theological discussion between Irish divines is that recorded in the case of Colchu Lector of Clonmacnois (*d.* 792). The community had a difference with some eminent divines on a question of doctrine, and Colchu was appointed their representative. He had made St. Paul's Epistles a special study, and accepted him as "his master and patron in the letter as well as in the spirit." In the controversy which ensued this knowledge was of such advantage to him that his arguments prevailed. In consequence of his successful vindication of St. Paul, the story went that when returning, laden with books, from the assembly, St. Paul appeared in person, relieved him of his burthen, and bore it for him to his destination. Colchu was a correspondent of Alcuin's, then at the court of Charlemagne. See my article on Colchu in the *Dictionary of National Biography*.

the Holy Scriptures, stood very high throughout Western Europe. Archbishop Ussher has collected many testimonies from foreign writers on this subject, one of which may be given here as a specimen. It relates to the great school at Lismore, in the County of Waterford, which is said to have been attended by large numbers of foreigners, and it may be thus translated :—

“ Now haste Sicambri¹ from the marshy Rhine ;
Bohemians now desert their cold north land ;
Auvergne and Holland, too, add to the tide,
Forth from Geneva's frowning cliffs they throng ;
Helvetia's youth by Rhone and by Saône
Are few : the Western isle is now their home.
All these from many lands, by many diverse paths,
Rivals in pious zeal, seek Lismore's famous seat.”²

The poet is eloquent and enthusiastic, but there must certainly have been some element of truth in this description of the students of Lismore.

The manner in which the Holy Scriptures were studied may be gathered from this Commentary. The students were not restricted to any special system of doctrine. On the contrary, they had opportunities of learning the views of the different schools of theology in the East as well as in the West. Thus on many passages two glosses are given representing different schools of interpretation, and sometimes as many as five are found, no suggestion being afforded as to which was to be preferred. The habit thus acquired of looking at a subject from different points of view, conduced to independence of thought, and helps to account for the difference which Mosheim and others notice between the Irish clergy abroad and their continental brethren in the ninth century. “ The Irish doctors alone, and among them John Scotus, ventured to explain the doctrines of Christianity in a philosophical manner. But they generally

¹ The Sicambri occupied the country between the lower course of the Meuse and the Rhine.

² Bonaventure Moronus, in Ussher (Works), VI., 300.

incurred strong disapprobation: for the Latin theologians in that age would allow no place for philosophy in matters of religion."¹ To the same purport are Mr. Haddan's words: "The difference between Ireland and other parts of the Church lay chiefly in her possessing a wider and more self-grown learning, and in the consequent boldness and independence of her speculations."²

The reader will not expect to find any new light thrown on the interpretation of Scripture, for the sources from which the glosses are drawn have long been known and used by scholars; but he cannot fail to be interested in finding so intelligent a Commentary produced in Ireland at this early period. It is the earliest³ Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles in the British Islands, and is, therefore, an original compilation. The authors were undoubtedly men of learning, and they had read as widely as circumstances permitted. They were also men of sincere piety, as one may judge from the ejaculations which occur now and then—the expressions of the author's feelings as he meditates on the great truths he is treating of. Thus at Romans viii. 17, when the words "joint-heirs with Christ" come before him, he exclaims, "Oh, the inheritance with Christ!" Again, at 2 Thessalonians i. 6, full of sympathy for the trials of that Church, he cries out, "O ye righteous ones!"

It has already been mentioned that the glosses are on the Latin translation of the Epistles. This sometimes agrees in sense with the Authorized English translation, at other times with the Revised or the Rhemish, and occasionally it differs from all three. As therefore no English translation exactly corresponded with it, it seemed most convenient to give the Authorized Version in the portion of the text which accompanies the glosses, placing the various readings, when necessary, at the foot of the page.

¹ Mosheim (Soames' Ed.), II., 225.

² Remains of Rev. A. W. Haddan, p. 293.

³ We have nothing of Bede's on St. Paul's Epistles, and Alcuin only wrote on Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews.