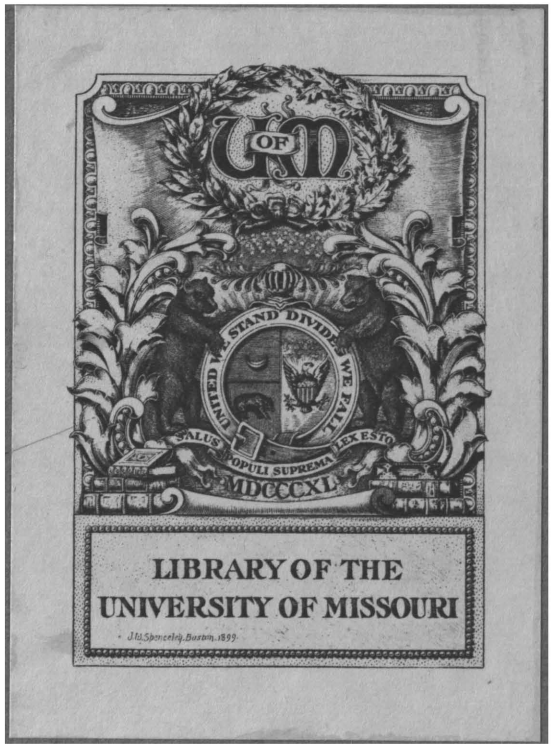

THE CELTIC CONTRIBUTION TO EUROPEAN CULTURE DURING THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

by

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THE CELTIC CONTRIBUTION TO EUROPEAN CULTURE DURING THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

CHAPTER I.

CULTURAL CONDITIONS IN IRELAND DURING THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

In dealing with the cultural conditions in Ireland during the early Middle Ages this discussion will concern itself with four main phases. In the first place an attempt will be made to show that the conditions under which mediaeval culture flourished were, in comparison to the conditions of Continental Europe, unique. An explanation for this unique development will be offered wherein it will be shown that the Irish, by temperament, by previous training and by their geographical position were the logical preservers of European culture during the 'Dark Ages'. In the second place St. Patrick and his associates will be assigned a definite place in the history of European culture. Special emphasis will also be laid upon their work as forerunners of the monastic schools and classical scholarship. Next a brief history of the early monastic schools will be given, with accompaning illustrations selected from typical saints and scholars of the period. The last part of the chapter will be devoted to a discussion of actual evidences of classical scholarship in Ireland during the early Middle Ages.

Ireland played no significant part in European history prior to to the introduction of Christianity. In pre-Christian times its relations with the outside world were few and entirely of a commercial nature.[1] There was some knowledge among the Romans of cultural conditions there, but this was so scant and of so questionable character as to furnish no satisfactory clue to actual conditions. It is certain that Ireland remained free from foreign control and very free from foreign influence. Its cultural development was distinct from that of the rest of Europe, having its origin in the ancient Celtic institutions and continuing its development in a Celtic environment. Under these conditions it developed social institutions, laws, a religion and a literature which were peculiar. It developed a national temperament which, despite some differences of racial stocks, became characteristic throughout Ireland. So deep rooted were these pre- Christian institutions that foreign elements, if brought in contact with them, failed to produce any essential change. In no country has the continuity of history been so well preserved. It is this element of continuity which first commands the attention of the student of Irish culture during the Middle Ages.

[1] Bury, Life of St. Patrick, 11.

In passing from ancient to mediaeval Ireland no such changes presented themselves as were to be seen in continental Europe. To continental Europe the Middle Ages meant a period of mental evolution and racial assimilation; to Ireland it meant a period of stimulated development.

The cultural status of the Roman Empire was reduced at the beginning of the Middle Ages to a level with the cultural capacities of its racial constituency. The age had passed when the Romans were to Latinize the Teutons and a new age had come when the Latin was to take from as well as give to the German. This interchange of intellectual, spiritual and physical traits, together with the all predominating influence of the Roman Catholic Church, constituted the foundation upon which mediaeval continental culture was to be erected.

This was not true of Ireland. There native culture remained unchanged by the introduction of foreign elements such as rendered the problem of continental Europe so complex during the Middle Ages. Christianity, it is true, was introduced from foreign lands, but it established itself so thoroughly coincident with Celtic ideals as to disturb but little the most venerated native customs and traditions. The same songs were sung, the same sagas related, the same laws obeyed under the Christian regime that were predominant in the most influential days of Druidism.[1]

[1] Lavisse, Études Sur l'Histoire D'Allemagne, Revue des Deux Mondes, Mar., 1886, 393.

The internal history of Ireland, then, during the greater part of the Middle Ages must be treated as distinct from European history as a whole. It is in the conditions which permitted this unique development that the explanation for the tremendous influence which Ireland exerted over all Europe from the fifth century to the beginning of the modern era is to be found. The first of these conditions lies in the special significance which the term Middle Ages possesses when applied to Irish history. The Middle Ages, considering the term as descriptive of certain characteristic tendencies rather than as a definite historical period, began in Ireland at least two centuries earlier than in continental Europe. The total absence of conflicting elements in the development of Irish culture: the harmonious manner in which change was wrought in the old order of things; the blending of the old institutions with the new establish a continuity of perspective which scarcely reveals a break through the ages of Ireland's cultural development. With the arrival of St. Patrick (A.D. 432) as a Christian missionary, a momentary shifting in the tendencies of Irish culture is obvious, but so soon is this lost sight of in the great creative epoch which follows that it becomes vastly more significant as a cultural stimulus than as a distinct innovation. A little more than a century after the arrival of Patrick, Christianity had completely triumphed over Druid-

ism and the dynamic forces attendant upon the new religion were steadily at work. The establishment of these new forces marks the beginning of the Middle Ages in Ireland.

The second of these conditions is to be found in the geographical position of Ireland. Isolation from the authority of the bishop of Rome gave rise to a tendency toward localization in the Irish church. This is particularly obvious in the very common practice among the early Christian missionaries of readapting local institutions and traditions to Christian usages. That such practices came about as the result of isolation cannot be questioned if it be recalled that these local tendencies continued without interruption from the Roman See until the latter half of the seventh century. The Roman Catholic authorities came in contact with them at that time not in Ireland, but in Britain whither they had gone as missionaries of the Christian faith. That opposition had not been met with prior to this time would obviously imply ignorance on the part of the papacy of actual conditions in Ireland.

The third of these conditions is due to the absence of conflicting racial characteristics, the presence of which so complicated cultural conditions in mediaeval continental Europe. The homogeneity of the Irish facilitated the adoption of new ideals and permitted of uniform alteration of the old.

The fourth of these conditions and the one of greatest significance in understanding the unique features of Irish culture is to be found in native Celtic traits. The Celtic temperament was such as to be deeply influenced by the teachings of Christianity and therefore adapted itself readily to the Christian religion. Imagination, emotion, pathos, mysticism, impressionableness , occasional morbidness--- all of which are characteristic Celtic traits, are such as to be highly receptive to Christianity. The new religion came to the Irish as a potent stimulus, instilling new zeal, effacing none of the ancient enthusiasm. The Celtic passion for music lived on in the converted bards, and the roving spirit found outlet in missionary labors.[1] No essential differences in social position existed between the Druids and the Christian priesthood. In many respects the duties of the latter were but logical continuations of the duties of the former. The priest performed the functions of seer, magician and teacher which prieviously had been carried on by the Druid. It was a comparatively simple matter for the Celtic temperament to give expression to its imagination in early Christian tales rather than in the sagas of pre-Christian times.

[1] Healy, Ireland's Ancient Schools and Scholars, 57.

For convenience of treatment the developmental history of Irish Christian culture may be divided into two general periods. The first of these was distinctly preparatory, beginning with the arrival of St. Patrick[1] and extending to the latter half of the fifth century when schools of a secular nature were first introduced. The second period began with the introduction of secular schools and extended to the great destructive invasion of the Danes in the twelfth century.

The contribution of St. Patrick to Irish culture was primarily that of a missionary, an organizer and a reformer. As this is true of Patrick so it is true of all the 'First Order of Saints'[2] Their efforts were little devoted to the spreading of learning or even to the establishments of schools: much more were they concerned with the establishment of the Christian religion. These men were pioneers of culture

[1] The beginning of this epoch is not placed with Palladius because his work can scarcely be considered of importance from a creative standpoint. Apparently there were Christian communities in Ireland even before the time of Palladius, but they were of an unorganized character and for the purposes of this discussion not worthy of consideration.

[2] "The first 'Order' was composed of Patrick and his associates, and is reckoned by the Irish to have lasted during four reigns. The next 'Order'.....to which Columcille belonged, ...also lasted for four reigns, or, roughly speaking, during the last three-quarters of the sixth century. .... After these came the third 'Order' who ..... are said.... to have lasted down to the time of the great plague in 664". (Gaskoin, Alcuin,3.

rather than its disseminators. Of this missionary labor of St. Patrick and his associates no more striking characteristic may be noted than its constructiveness. No native institution was molested if it could be readapted to fit the ideals of Christianity. The reform of the Brehon laws which took place under his guidance, is an excellent illustration of how he was able to reconstruct the old institutions in such way as to make them indispensable agents of reform without robbing them of their native prestige.[1] He removed only such parts of the laws as were contrary to the fundamental

[1] During the reign of King Loigaire (Laeghaire) a code of native laws was compiled. This compilation was known as the Senchus Mor. The codification was made from three main sources: (1) the decisions of the ancient judges (handed down by tradition); (2) the enactments of the Triennial Parliaments; (3) the customary laws (laws which grew up according to the customs of the patriarchial society).

In the year 438 A.D. a commission of nine men representing the various classes of Ireland was summoned for the purpose of reforming the Senchus Mor. This commission consisted of three kings, three bishops, and three men of science. Chief among the bishops was St. Patrick. Healy, Ireland's Ancient Schools and Scholars, 53--54.

The names of the members of this commission as well as an account of its purposes is preserved in the "Tripartite Life of St. Patrick":

"Nos (customary law), the knowledge of nine (nofis) to wit three kings and three bishops and three sages, namely a sage of poetry, and a sage of literature and a sage of the language of Feni. All these were composing the Senchus Mor. Thence it said:

Loigure, Corc, dour Daire,
Patrick, benen, just Cairnech,
Ross, Dubthach, Fergus with goodness,
Nine props, those of the Senchus Mor.

(W. Stokes' translation (Trip. 570.) (Bury, Life of St. Patrick, 355.

teachings of Christianity.[1] Druidism was no longer to be countenanced, but the Brehons and bards were still to be recognized and still to be granted the position of dignity which they had occupied in the past.

Of the bards most useful allies were made. They were permitted to retain their harps and to sing their wild songs, but gradually they were taught the hymns of the Christians and thus became most useful allies in the spreading of the faith.

More important than his treatment of the bards was Patrick's policy toward the Brehons.[2] It might naturally be expected that Patrick, being a citizen of the Roman Empire, would have sought to displace the Irish code by the Roman Civil Law. On the contrary he "retained 'all the judgments of a true nature, which the Holy Ghost had spoken through the mouths of the Brehons and the just poets of the men of Erin' thus winning over to his side that influential Order which might otherwise have been arrayed against the propagation of the Gospel."[3] an faith

1 Healy, [illegible], Ireland's Ancient Schools and Scholars, 52--56

2 The Brehons were the ancient judges and lawgivers of Ireland.

3 An interesting illustration of Patrick's attitude toward the Brehons is to be found in the fact that in the household which accompanied him in his travels that the judge was a Brehon. Hyde, A Literary History of Ireland, 135.

3 Healy, op. cit., 56--57.

The wisdom displayed by Patrick in his treatment of the bards and Brehons was also displayed in his treatment of the kings. He sought to guide, not to destroy their authority. With characteristic wisdom and foresight it was among the kings rather than among the people at large that he began his missionary labors.[1] His first significant labors were carried on in the kingdom of Meath at Tara, where he vainly sought the conversion of king Loigaire.[2] Although unsuccessful in his attempt to convert the king he succeeded in gaining the royal protection for himself and the Christian cause, a fact of infinite importance in the cultural history of Ireland in that it led eventually to the union of Christian bishop and native king which has ever been of so marked significance in the spreading of the Christian religion. Conclusive evidence of this cooperation is to be found in the assignment of kingly duties which Loigaire suffered to be made in the reformed code of the Senchus Mor. Throughout this code the idea of soverign justice was emphasized. The king was pledged to deal justly with all

[1] Bury, Life of St. Patrick, 93 seq.

[2] "Loigaire agreed to protect Patrick in his own kingdom, though he resented any attempts that were made to convert him." Bury, op. cit., 112.

who appealed to him, was urged to use every care that those whom he selected as counselers should be both just and wise. Widows, orphans, and strangers were under his personal protection and the giving of alms was made an imperative duty. Merit was made the basis for promotions in the offices of the court and wickedness among the officials was punishable by banishment. Christianity was made the state religion and kings were warned against giving heed to the counsel of Druids, pythonesses, and augurers.[1]

Another feature of cultural significance in the policy of Patrick was his aim to create a native ministry. Although assisted by a large band of coworkers from foreign lands[2], he realized that it was a matter of utmost importance that a native ministry be created. Toward this end he began early in his career to train many of the Irish youths to missionary labors. Boys who were to be given to this service were taken by Patrick and his associates upon their journeys, learning thus by a sort of apprenticeship the work that later was taught in the numerous schools of Ireland.[3]

1 Healy, op. cit., 61.

2 Hyde, Literary History of Ireland, 102.

3 Healy, op. cit., 58., Bury, Life of St Patrick, 173-174.

The training of this native ministry was not only important from a religious standpoint, but was also of great cultural significance. For Patrick and his associates were teachers of the Latin language as well as of saintly lore. Through them a knowledge of Latin was diffused in Ireland. The fact that Latin instead of Celtic was introduced into Ireland as the ecclesiastical language is largely responsible for the prevalence of classical learning there in the early Middle Ages. It may be said, also, that the numerous schools which flourished in Ireland within a half century after Patrick's death owed their origin in large part to the fact that the Irish people were brought in contact with Roman civilization through a wide spread acquaintance with the Latin language.[1]

[1] "It was Patrick with his auxiliaries who bore to their (the Irish) shores the vessel of Rome's influence, along with the sacred mysteries of Rome's faith. No wonder that his labours should have been almost unobserved in the days of ecumenical stress and struggle, when the Germans by land and by sea were engaging the world's attention, and the Huns were rearing their vast though transient empire. But he was labouring for the Roman idea no less than the great Aetius himself, though in another way and on a smaller scene. He brought a new land into the spiritual federation which was so closely bound up with Rome, nexuque pio longinqua reuinxit. Bury, op. cit., 224.

Like most of his contributions, however, the introduction of the Latin language was not of immediate cultural value, but served rather as a preparation for classical culture, which was to be introduced from a more fruitful source. The English invasion of Britain in 449 drove Christianity and learning into the mountain fastnesses of Wales and Scotland. The monasteries which at that time were being established in Ireland also offered shelter to many of the English scholars. In this manner classical learning came to be widely diffused throughout Ireland. During the seventh and eighth centuries these monasteries were so famous for their classical scholarship that one who knew Greek was assumed to be an Irishman or to have receive his training in in the Irish schools.[1]

There is , however, another important source from which Ireland derived its classical scholarship. The roving spirit of the Irish, stimulated as it was by the missionary ideal, gave rise to a practice among the clergy of visiting the neighboring countries. Thus it was that the monasteries of Britain, particularly those of Wales, came to be much frequented as resorts of learning by the Irish scholars.

[1] Norden, Die Antike Kunstprosa, II, 666.

This practice accounts in large measure for the rapid spread of classical culture throughout Ireland. More important still it accounts for the preservation of classical scholarship from destruction by the invading English. Ireland became at the same time the preserver and the foster parent of classical learning.

In the latter half of the fifth century Enda, son of the king of Oriel, crossed over into Britain where he became a student at the monastery of Rosnat under the great master Mancennus.[1] This visit was doubtless made between 470 and 480. It is probable that he remained there for some years, after which he seems to have traveled on the Continent, perhaps visiting Rome. However this may be, he returned to Ireland in 483 and settled on the island of Aran Mor where he established the monastic school of that name. It was there that almost all of the saints of the 'Second Order' spent their novitiate. Finnian of Clonard, Finnian of Moville, Columcille and Ciaran, all of whom were to play so important a part in the establishment of the monastic schools, received much of their training at the feet of Enda.[2]

[1] The location of the monastery of Rosnat is not definitely known. By some it is thought to have been in the valley of Rosna in Wales while others think it was the monastery known as Candida Casa, or Whithern, located on the peninsula of Galloway. Gaskoin, Alcuin, 3., Healy, op. cit., 166.

[2] Hyde, op. cit., 194 seq.

Of the scholars of Aran Mor, Finnian of Clonard did most to spread learning throughout his country. Prior to his visit to the school of Aran Mor, Finnian had spent several years in the monastic schools of Wales where he had had for his teachers the wisest and holiest of the Welsh scholars among whom were St. David, St. Gildas, and St. Cathmael.[1] Finnian's association with the Welsh saints and scholars and his intimate acquaintance with the practices of the Welsh monastic schools accounts in large part for the prevalence of similar schools in Ireland. In the early part of the sixth century, presumably about the year 520, Finnian founded the famous monastic school of Clonard.[2] The school of Clonard was to Irish scholarship what Aran Mor was to Irish holiness. Shortly after its establishment its fame spread far and wide and scholars old and young flocked there for instruction. Trustworthy evidence seems to indicate that there were at one time no less than three thousand scholars and saints at Clonard.[3]

In a similar manner numerous other schools were established

[1] Healy, op. cit., 105.

[2] Ib. 109 seq.

[3] Reversus in Clonardiam,
Ad cathedram lecturae,
Apponit diligentiam
Ad studium scripturae.
Trium virorum milium
Sorte fit doctor humilis:
Verbi his fudit fluvium,
Ut fons emanans rivulis:
Hymn from St. Finnian's Office, Hyde, Ib., 106-107.

during the sixth century. Among the most famous of these were the schools of Clonmacnois, Clonfert, Bangor, and Cork.

It would be a task unnecessary to this discussion to trace the development even of the most important of Ireland's monastic schools. It is more in keeping with the aim of this work to present a general survey of of the cultural conditions rather than a detailed history of the sources of that culture. Suffice it to say that the number of these schools was so great as to be hardly credible and their influence so far reaching as to make it comparable to that of the Humanists in the latter part of the Middle Ages.

The fundamental purpose of these monastic schools was theological, the training of a Christian ministry. It is a fact, however, of inestimable importance that theological training in Ireland developed hand in hand with secular culture.[1] Indeed secular culture occupied a position of so great importance as to lend some weight to the proverbial absurdity that "the Renaissance began in Ireland seven hundred years before it was known in Italy."[2]

1 "..... Enfin, tandis que la culture ancienne dépérissait en Gaule, les monastères d'Irlande étaient de grandes écoles où l'on étudiait avec la meme passion les lettres profanes et l' Ecriture." Lavisse, op. cit., 393.

2 "The classic tradition to all appearances dead in Europe, burst out into full flower in the Isle of Saints, and the Renaissance began in Ireland 700 years before it was known in Italy." Darmesteter, English Studies, 202., Hyde, op. cit., 216.,Gaskoin, Alcuin, 8.

Irish scholarship as represented by the numerous scholars who dwelt in the monastic schools was broad. There were but few fields that it did not traverse with at least some degree of thoroughness. Theology, natural science, geography, astronomy, arithmetic, logic, rhetoric, grammar, music, poetry, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew all played a significant part in the curricula of the Irish monastic schools.[1] The knowledge of many of these subjects was superficial and often inaccurate: but the fact that they were studied is sufficient to make them emminently worthy of consideration in the history of European culture.

Of these subjects none was studied with greater thoroughness[2] than the languages, particularly Latin and Greek. During an age in which classical learning on the Continent was almost entirely lost in the chaos attendant upon the reconciliation of barbaric ignorance with Christian orthodoxy, it is a fact both extraordinary and pleasing to find that the Greek and Latin classics were not only preserved in the monasteries of Ireland, but were read and taught with an appreciation which would not have been unworthy of the humanists of a much later period.

[1] Hyde, op. cit., 216: Lavisse, op. cit., 393: Norden, op. cit., 665.

[2] Norden, op. cit., 665 seq., Hyde, op. cit., 215 seq.

The Irish monks pursued their classical studies not only as a means to higher theological learning, but for their own sake, requiring "no prizes or scholarships to stimulate their energy, holding rather that learning was its own reward."[1]

In a study of Irish classical culture Latin scholarship would naturally be first to claim the attention since it was earliest introduced and because it was most widely studied both in the lay and the monastic schools. So widely was the study of Latin cultivated that by the twelfth century it came to be a second language among the Irish. It was widely used in the mercantile transaction of the Dublin merchants and was the polite language of the women of the upper classes.[2]

As early as the sixth century the study of the classics was seriously carried on in Ireland. The school of Bangor furnishes an exceptionally large number of examples of early classical scholarship. Of these Columbanus is noteworthy. In addition to his marked ascetic tendencies he was strongly influenced by a humanistic appreciation of the classics.[3] In a letter written in Adonic verse, the title of which is

[1] Stokes, Ireland and the Celtic Church, 229.

[2] Green, The Making of Ireland and its Undoing, 240.

[3] Ebert, Christlich - Lateinische Literatur, I. 620; Lavisse, op. cit., 393 seq.

'Epistula ad Fedolium, Columbanus has given expression to an aesthetic appreciation of the classics as well as a knowledge of the ancient poetic forms. In addition to writing the Adonic verse with marked success he gave evidence of a broad classical knowledge by many references to classical mythology and history, such for example, as the golden Fleece, the fall of Troy, the golden rain which corrupted Danäe and the golden collar for which Amphiaraus was sold by his wife.[1] He also quoted Juvenal and recommended the reading of the classical poets as well as the church fathers.[2] His Latin writings, superior as they are to those of the Gallo-Roman scholars of the time, clearly indicate that he was strongly influenced by the refined styles of the classical authors. It is noteworthy in this connection also that a companion of Columbanus, the monk Jonas, gave evidence in his writings of a knowledge of the classics. This influence is especially obvious in his Life of St. Columbanus in which he quotes Virgil and Livy.[3] His style also, quite unlike that of his contemporaries, shows every evidence of having been modeled on the classics.

[1] Ebert, op. cit., I. 621; Lavisse, op. cit., 366.

[2] Hauréau, op. cit., 12.

[3] Jonas, Life of St. Columbanus, Trans. and Reprints, II. 2.

Not only in the school of Bangor are evidences of classical scholarship to be found. Another striking example is furnished by Ailerian of the school of Clonard. A number of Latin writings are attributed to him, all of which indicate a high degree of Latin scholarship. An existing fragment of his writings, 'A short Moral Explanation of the Sacred Names', affords the most convincing proof of his classical knowledge. This work, in addition to the excellence of its Latin style, gives a number of citations from Jerome, Augustine, Origen and Philo. While there is no evidence that Ailerian was acquainted with the original Greek texts, it is sufficient evidence of his classical knowledge that he read them in the Latin translations.

The prevalence of such evidence as is furnished by the writings of Columbanus and Jonas, together with the numerous Latin verses, hymns, letters, and canons which have been preserved, would seem to be ample justification for a conjecture that Virgil and Ovid, and perhaps most of the Latin poets, were widely studied in the monastic schools of Ireland. Although most of the instruction was given in these schools

through the medium of the Irish language, the text books both in theology and the secular studies were written mainly in Latin.[1]

More convincing, however, of the cultural attainment of the Irish was their knowledge of Greek. This is all the more remarkable if it be remembered that knowledge of Greek was dead upon the Continent. Continental learning had been carried over into Ireland. Prior to the seventh century a collection of Greek proverbs was translated by an Irish scholar into Latin. This is preserved today in the "Proverbia Grecorum".[2] Greek manuscripts copied by the Irish scribes of the Dark Ages remain ~~today~~ in the various monasteries of Europe. Without this practice so diligently pursued by the Irish Monks and scribes much of the classical knowledge which is now available would have been entirely lost. It was the monasteries founded by Irish missionaries which, far more than the monasteries of Germanic origin, preserved for continental Europe the manuscripts of the classical writers.[3]

[1] Hyde, op, cit., 216.

[2] Green, The Making of Ireland and Its Undoing, 248.

[3] See page 37 seq.

Evidence of Greek scholarship in the ninth century is to be found in the Irish monasteries themselves. The Book of Armagh preserves an early ninth century copy of the Lord's Prayer which is written in the Latin language but in Greek characters.[1] In the same century Sedulius copied a Greek psalter and wrote several commentaries on the writings of the fathers, showing in each a knowledge of Greek which was perhaps equal to that of Scotus Erigena. Sedulius, also, was the author of numerous Latin verses and made extracts from Origen and Jerome.[2] These numerous poems of Sedulius, many of which have been preserved, bear convincing testimony of the state ~~of the state~~ of Irish classical culture in the ninth century. Most of them are written in the form of epistles and are modeled upon the style of the ancient elegies and odes. In grammatical construction, style, metre and diction they closely resemble the classics. Sedulius was greatly influenced by Virgil and frequently copied from Ovid and Fortunatus.[3]

[1] Sandys, A History of Classical Scholarship from the Sixth Century B.C. the End of the Middle Ages, 448.

[2] Ebert, op. cit., II. 192.

[3] Sandys, op. cit., 449.

Cummian of the school of Clonfert, who lived during the seventh century (d. 664) furnished excellent evidence by his writings of the extent of the knowledge of Latin and Greek in the Irish schools. In a letter written by him to Segiens, abbot of Iona, concerning the Paschal controversy. evidence is given not only of a knowledge of the writings of Augustine and Jerome, but also of an acquaintanee with the writings of Anatolius, Theophilus, Dionysius, Cyril, Origen, Morinus, Pachomius and Damascius.[1] The extent of Cummian's knowledge of the various cycles and the fact that he used the Greek names for them would seem to imply a considerable knowledge, if not entire familiarity with the Greek language.[2]

[1] Healy, op. cit., 239; Hyde, op. cit., 201 seq.

[2] "I call this letter a marvellous composition because of the vastness of its learning; it quotes besides the Scriptures and Latin authors, Greek writers like Origen and Cyril, Pachomius the head and reformer of Egyptian monasticism, and Damascius the last of the celebrated neo- Platonic philosophers of Athens, who lived about the year 500 and wrote all his work in Greek. Cummian discusses the calendars of the Macedonians Hebrews, and Copts, giving us the Hebrew, Greek, and Egyptian names of months and cycles, and tells us that he had been sent as one of a deputation of learned men a few years before to ascertain the practice of the Church of Rome. When they came to Rome they lodged in one hospital with a Greek and a Hebrew, an Egyptian, and a Scythian, who told them that the whole world celebrated the Roman and not the Irish Easter." G.T. Stokes, (in " Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy", May, 1892, 105.) Hyde, op. cit., 203.

The examples cited in proof of Irish classical scholarship during the early Middle Ages are by no means special cases, but are typical. There can be no question that, beginning with the sixth century, Ireland was for three hundred years the one spot in Europe where classical learning remained pure. It is certain too that the Irish alone of all Christian Europe studied the classics with enthusiasm and appreciation which came from a true poetic impulse. Altho the nursery of saints, Ireland never lost its appreciation for earthly things. "The very field of study of which the Latin was taught to say, 'This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish', was that to which the Scot turned with purest enthusiasm".[1]

It was not only the lighter classical productions that made an appeal to the Irish nature. They pursued their more scholarly labors with no less zeal and with no less success. High spirituality and lofty scholarly attainment as well as imagination were contributions of Ireland to Mediaeval Europe.

As to the manner in which teaching was carried on in Ireland the information is but scant. It is known that there existed both lay and monastic schools and that the

[1] Poole, Illustrations of the History of Mediaeval Thought, 12--13.

classics furnished in each the basis of study. Bede relates that British noblemen visited the schools of Ireland and that "some faithfully dedicated themselves to the monastic life" and that "others chose rather to pass in turn through the dells of the masters and give their labour to study: and the Scots most readily received them and provided them daily their food without charge and books also to read, and free instruction."[1]

It was not only as preservers of culture that the Irish scholars are important in the history of European culture. Far more important was their work as disseminators of that culture. The Celt was by nature a wanderer. Furthermore the conditions of poverty then so prevalent in Ireland offered no little incentive to emigration. Most of all the Celtic zeal for missionary labor, and the desire to emulate the example of the original Irish saints sent many of the young monks into the remote parts of continental Europe. Within less than a century after their conversion the Irish were numerously represented by their missionaries on every part of the Continent. Unaided by church or king, absolutely devoted to the cause which they represented, these missionaries poured forth upon the Continent at a time when no assurance was offered them of success or safety save their own boundless faith. ([illegible], 12.

[1] Bede, Hist. Eccl., III. 27.

In addition to their religious zeal the Irish brought to the continent their love for culture and wherever they paused to preach the Christian gospel or wherever they erected their monastic cells their influence was felt not only as religious teachers, but also as disseminators of culture. It is with this phase of Irish cultural history that the next chapter will deal.

CHAPTER II.

THE CELTIC CONTRIBUTION TO MEDIAEVAL CLASSICAL CULTURE

In tracing the history of the Celtic influence upon the cultural development of mediaeval Europe it is only natural that greatest emphasis should be placed upon Ireland as a source of that influence. It has been seen in the preceding chapter that western Europe is largely indebted to Ireland for the preservation of classical learning during the 'Dark Ages'. Even more important is the part which Ireland played in giving back this culture to the Continent after the barbarian incursions had largely ceased and all Europe had turned to the task of readjusting itself to its racial and institutional changes. Before entering into a detailed discussion of the work of Ireland's missionaries as disseminators of culture on the Continent it is essential that some attention be given to the labors of those missionaries who, prior to the arrival of the great body of the Irish, had begun to sow the seed of Christian Celtic influence upon the peninsula of Brittany. The scarcity of data

respecting the early missionaries there renders the task of estimating the extent of Celtic influence during the fifth and sixth centuries a difficult one. The fact, however, that Christianity gained a firm foothold in Armorica during these centuries through the influence of Celtic emigrants from Britain justifies the giving of some attention to that phase of the Celtic contribution. For it will be shown in the sequel that evidence is not entirely wanting to prove that certain phases of cultural influence other than the purely religious were disseminated in parts of Gaul through the efforts of British missionaries in Armorica.

Owing to the English invasions into Britain during the latter part of the fifth century, large numbers of emigrants sought refuge among their kinsmen in Armorica. It is quite probable that among these emigrants, especially in the numerous priestly body which accompanied them, that there were some Welsh and Irish.[1] It is quite certain that in their religious life, especially in their monastic organizations, they were strongly influenced by the Irish. In visiting the monastery of Landevenec in the ninth century Louis the Pious was very much surprised at finding the customs of the monks very different from those of his acquaintance.

[1] Montalembert, Monks of the West, 465.

They explained that the differences were due to the fact that they had received their monastic traditions from the Irish.[1] While this does not furnish conclusive proof that the Irish were among the earliest Christian settlers of Brittany, it does argue for their early influence even in that remote part of Gaul, for it is known that the monastery of Landevenec was founded in the early part of the sixth century.[2]

No sooner were these emigrants settled among their Armorican kinsmen than evidences of the spread of Christianity became abundant. They preached in a language which was common to them all and so complete was their success that to the present day no part of Europe remains more firm in the Christian faith.[3] By no means was the new religion introduced without opposition from the native bards and priests. This is strikingly illustrated in the memorable lines of one of the bardsoof the time: "A day comes when the men of Christ shall be pursued, when they shall be hunted like deer. They shall die by bands and batallions. Then the mill wheel shall grind small; the blood of the monks shall serve as water to turn it."[4]

[1] Haureau, Singularites Historiques et Litteraires, 9.

[2] See page 30.

[3] Montalambert, op. cit., I, 466.

[4] Hersart de La Villemarqué, Chants Populaires de la Bretagne, I, 218. (Montalambert, op. cit., I, 468.)

Without attempting, however, to follow in detail the religious labors of these Celtic missionaries we find that by the middle of the sixth century . monasteries had sprung up throughout the peninsula. Brittany had become one of the foremost centres of Celtic culture as well as of Christianity. Among the earliest of the monasteries to obtain prominence were those of Rhuys, Finisterre, Landevenec, and Dol. While it is difficult to obtain positive evidence that these monasteries exercised widespread influence upon the purely cultural development of Brittany, there seems to be ample justification for saying that they played no insignificant part in preserving the classical tradition.

The most ancient of these monasteries and by far the most famous for its literary work was that of Landevenec, founded in the early part of the sixth century by Guingalois, the son of an emigrant Celt. It long enjoyed the distinction of being foremost among the monasteries of Brittany as a cultural and ecclesiastical centre.[1] There are evidences of the pursuit of literary work there as early as the first half of the sixth century. The best known of these early writings is a life of St. Guingalois written not later than 530.[2] The writer seems to have given special study

[1] Montalembert, op. cit., I,

[2] Hist. Litt. de La France, III. 183.

to secular literature, showing some knowledge of the classics. He also gives evidence of exceptionally good training in the art of writing.[1] Both in style and Latinity the work is strikingly superior to most of the contemporary Latin writings. While possessing many faults, it serves at least to illustrate that the classical tradition was kept alive even in the remote parts of Brittany.

In the ninth century the monasteries of Brittany were among those which fostered literary pursuits. Gurdistan, who became abbot of Landevenec in the ninth century, wrote a second life of Guingalois and at the same time one of his disciples, at his solicitation, wrote a life of St. Paul, bishop of Leon. In the same century Clement, an inmate of Landevenec, wrote some verses which, although lacking in elegance, show some evidence of having a classical model.

While traces of the Celtic influence were in Brittany as early as the fifth century, it was not until the sixth century that such influence manifested itself generally on the Continent. It was then that the Irisn monks, deeply imbued

[1] Histoire Literaire de La France, III. 183.

with the missionary ideals of their own country, entered the Continent as teachers of Christianity. They carried with them a knowledge of classical culture which was destined in time to reawaken the interest of western Europe in the culture of antiquity. Before entering into a discussion of the Irish missionaries as teachers and disseminators of classical culture on the Continent it is essential that a brief sketch of the cultural conditions prior to their arrival be given.

Christianity had long been an important factor in the civilization of the Roman Empire. Since the third century it had flourished in parts of Gaul and Britain and some progress had been made in the conversion of the German tribes in the region of the Rhine and the Danube. Thus far Christianity had served not only as a unifying agent in the Empire, but had proven an effective means of fostering Roman culture in the distant provinces. Prior to the fifth century no force had appeared to obscure the cultural influence of Rome. It was not until the latter part of that century that Roman culture was blotted out by the Germanic invasions.

The Frankish kingdom which owed its development in large part to Christian influence had fallen in the latter part of the sixth century into a low state of morality and intellectuality. Only the vicious elements of Roman

culture remained among the people, the higher cultural ideals having fallen into complete oblivion. Even the clergy had suffered from the demoralizing influences. Many of th[1] them were unable to read or write. Never in the history of Europe has more complete moral and cultural depravity manifested itself and never has such political insecurity been known there.[2] Gregory of Tours, who may be taken as the best representative of the higher culture of his age, altho deploring the low state of culture which surrounded him, was entirely ignorant of Greek and was but little vereed in the classics. His writings are filled with descriptions of his country's depravity.[3]

The cultural conditions in the largerpart of Italy were little better. Political and commercial interests were largely dead and learning had declined hopelessly.

1 Mombert, Charles the Great, 55 seq., Zimmer, op. cit, 6 seq.

2 "The facts of these times are of little other importance than as they impress on the mind a thorough notion of the extreme wickedness of almost every person concerned in them, and consequently of the state to which society was reduced. But there is no advantage in crowding the memory with barbarian wars and assasinations." Hallam, Middle Ages, 6.

3 Greg. Tur. IV. 12., Ix. 6 etc., Zimmer, op. cit., 9. Dudden, Gregory the Great, 73.

Gregory the Great, who received the highest training offered by the schools of his time, was ignorant of Greek. While this does not argue for the illiteracy of Gregory it furnishes convincing evidence of the absence of cultural opportunities in the West.[1] His knowledge of Latin was much better, but little credit for this is due to the schools, for the stylistic ideals of his age were hopelessly low.[2]

It was into surroundings such as these that the Irish monks and scholars entered when in the sixth century they were carried to the Continent by their missionary zeal. With the arrival of the Irish scholars and teachers a new era in European cultural history opens. Credit must be given to them as being foremost in the ranks of those who sought to give back to western Europe the religion and the culture which it had lost through contact with the barbarian invaders.[3]

1 Zimmer, op. cit., 10.

2 Dudden, Gregory the Great, 73.

3 "Isolated in a remote island, the stream of classical learning had remained pure while the rest of Roman Europe had suffered it to be corrupted or dried up in the weary decay of the Empire that followed the German influx. In Ireland it was still fresh and buoyant; and from the Irish it passed back to the continent in greater and greater waves." Poole, Illustrations of the History of Mediaeval Thought, 11.

Foremost among these missionaries who visited Gaul was St. Columbanus, who, in the latter part of the sixth century (585--590), founded in the wooded solitudes of the Vosges the three monasteries Anegray, Luxeuil, and Fontaines. For more than ten years he and his companions labored, with but little opposition, laying the foundation for the Celtic monastic ideals which were destined to play so great a part in the cultural development of Gaul and Italy. It was during his residence at Luxeuil that he drew up his Rule wherein he prescribed the copying of manuscripts and teaching as a part of the daily task of the monks. It would indeed be a difficult matter to overestimate the religious influence of these monasteries, but aside from their religious importance they performed an inestimable service toward the preservation and assimilation of classical culture.

By the middle of the seventh century Luxeuil had become the ecclesiastical centre of Gaul. During the abbacy of Eustace, a Burgundian who succeeded Columbanus, hundreds of students gathered there and all countries under Frankish rule recognized it as the monastic capital.[1] The kingdoms of Burgundy and Austrasia looked to Luxeuil for their bishops, abbots, preachers and reformers. This extraordinary prosperity was due in large part to the school which flourished there and which had been established by Columbanus.

[1] Montalembert, op. cit., I. 590.

Students flocked there from Lyons, Autun, Langres and Strassburg. "Fathers came to study with their children."[1] Altho most of these students came with the idea of training for the ministry, many attended for the purpose of preparing for secular pursuits. The children of the Frankish and Burgundian nobility were sent there for their secular education.

The activity of the monks of Luxeuil extended far beyond the monastic community. From Lake Geneva to the North Sea monasteries sprang up which were founded by Irish missionaries or by monks who had received their training in the Irish monastic schools. The episcopal cities of Besancon, Laon, and Verdun obtained bishops who had received their training at Luxeuil. Colonies which had received their inspiration and guidance from Luxeuil were innumerable. The Irish monk Deicolius founded the monastery of Lure in Sequania or northern Burgundy; in 621 Donatus, assisted by his mother, founded Jussamoutier, a monastery for Nuns. Ramelen, later Duke of Burgundy, reestablished the ancient abbey of Romoin as a reverential tribute to the memory of Columbanus. It was peopled by a colony from Luxeuil. In a similar manner

[1] Montalembert, op. cit., 590.

the monasteries of Bèze, St. Ursanne, and numerous others were founded, many of them being peopled by colonies fro Luxeuil. Enough has been said to show the far reaching influence of the original monastic foundations of Columbanus and his companions; even more important were their later foundations.

The zeal with which Columbanus attacked the wickedness of the Burgundian court soon brought about his banishment, but the work which he had done was of a permanent nature and the numerous monasteries which were established according to his Rule continued their influence even beyond the Middle Ages. From Burgundy he went into the country of the Allemani where he continued his missionary work for three years under the patronage of Thudebert. In 612 he set out for Italy where a year later he founded the monastery of Bobbio. In 615 he died, but the last monastery which he founded became the centre of learning in Northern Italy. Without seeking for further evidence of the state of learning in Bobbio during the Middle Ages its manuscripts would be ample. A catalogue of these,made in the tenth century, included 668 manuscripts among which were writings of Terence, Lucretius, Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, Martial, Juvenal, Persius, Claudian, Cicero, Seneca, the elder Pliny, Demosthenes and Aristotle.[1]

[1] Zimmer, op. cit., 114 seq., Sandys, op. cit., 440 seq.

Forty of these were presented to the monastery by the Irish monk, Dungal, a number of which are now in the Ambrosian library at Milan and are dedicated in the handwriting of Dungal himself.

No less important as a cultural centre was the monastery of St. Gall, founded by a companion of Columbanus in 614. Like Bobbio it has preserved to the world a wealth of literature, both Irish and classical. By the close of the ninth century the library of St. Gall contained 533 manuscript volumes. Thirty five of these were added from the private library of abbot Grimald, a fact of some importance as evidence of the possession of private libraries by the most learned monks of the time.[2] The Florentine scholar, Poggio, who in 1416 visited the monastery for the purpose of seeking valuable manuscripts of Cicero, found copies of eight of the orations with commentaries by Asconius Pedianus, a grammarian of Padua (30--60 A.D.) Manuscripts of Flaccus, Vitruvius, Priscian, Quintilian, Lucretius, Statius, and Manlius were also found in the monastery of St. Gall.[3]

[1] Zimmer, op. cit., 114.

[2] Record is also made of 32 volumes given by the presbyter Theodore and four by brother Adelbert. Zimmer, 115.

[3] Sandys, op. cit., 442., Zimmer, op. cit., 117 seq.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the monastery lost many of its most valuable manuscripts through the carelessness of its monks.[1] Notwithstanding these losses, however, St. Gall still possesses large numbers of them, many of which were copied during the seventh century.[2]

It would be [illegible] to assert that the great number of these manuscripts collected at these two monasteries were entirely the products of Irish scholars. No such claim is necessary to show the importance of Irish influence upon the classical learning of the Middle Ages. It is enough that they were found in monasteries which owed their origin and development to Irish effort and to Irish rule. The manuscripts which were copied by Irish scribes present striking contrasts to those written by continental monks, owing to a peculiarity of Latin alphabet. The frequency with which this peculiarity appears in the manuscripts of Bobbio and St. Gall furnishes ample evidence of the predominance of Irish influence.[3]

[1] At the time of Poggio's visit to the monastery of St. Gall he was permitted to carry away two wagon loads of these MSS. Again when the monks of Italy attended the Council of Constance they were permitted to carry with them many of the manuscripts, many of which were never seen again. Zimmer, op. cit., 116 seq.

[2] Ib., 118.

[3] Ib., 119.

It is not alone, however, as preservers of manuscripts that these monasteries are noteworthy. Their services as centres of teaching were equally important. Secular science as well as theology was cultivated. Calligraphy, music, grammar, metrics, classical literary models, medicine, and astronomy were studied.[1] Not only was this true of the greater monasteries such as have been mentioned. The numerous offspring of these were but smaller agents in the performing of an invaluable cultural service, carrying into remote fields the work which was being fostered in the great centers.

A study of the monasteries, however, reveals only a small part of the cultural influence of the Irish on the Continent. The Carolingian Renaissance marks a new epoch in their labors. Even in the time of the Merovingians the superiority of the Irish schools was well known. Many Frankish ecclesiastics went to Ireland for their education[2] and Dagobert the Second received his training in the Irish monastic schools. By the time of Charlemagne this superiority was so widely recognized that Irish scholars were offered inducements to go into Gaul for the purpose of teaching. An account of the

[1] Zimmer, op. cit., 74 and 76.

[2] Ib., 45.

entrance of the Irish into the Frankish kingdom is given by a contemporaneous monk of St. Gall. The account is doubtless lacking in accuracy of detail, but it will at least serve to show that the Irish played an important part in the stimulating of learning.[1]

[1] "When the illustrious Charles had begun to reign alone in the western parts of the world and the study of letters was everywhere well-nigh forgotten, in such sort that the worship of the true God declined, it chanced that two Scots from Ireland lighted with the British merchants on the coast of Gaul, men learned without compare as well in secular as in sacred writings; who, since they showed nothing for sale, kept crying to the crowd that gathered to buy, If any man is desirous of wisdom, let him come to us and receive it; for we have it to sell. This therefore they declared they had for sale, sunce they saw the peoplet to traffic not in gifts but in saleable things, so that they thus might either urge them to purchase wisdom like other goods or, as the events following shew, turn them by such declaration to wonder and astonishment. At length their cry being long continued was brought by certain that wondered at them or deemed them mad, to the ears of Charles the king, always a lover and most desirous of wisdom: who, when he had called them with all haste into his presence, enquired if, as he understood by report, they had wisdom ve verily with them. Yea, said they, we have it and are ready to impart it to any that rightly seek it in the name of the Lord. When therefore he had enquired what they would have in return for it, they answered, Only proper places and noble souls, and such things as we cannot travel without, food and wherewith to clothe ourselves. Hearing this he was filled with great joy, and first for a short space entertained them both in his household: afterwards when he was constrained to warlike enterprises, he enjoinedthe one, by name Clement, to abide in Gaul: to whom he entrusted boys of the most noble, middle and lowest ranks, in goodly number, and ordained that victual should be provided them according as they had need, with fitting houses to dwell in. The other he despatched into Italy and appointed him the monastery of Saint Austin beside the Ticinian city, that there such as were willing to learn might gather together u unto him." St. Gall, Acts of Charles the Great.

Chronicle of

In addition to the monk Clement to whom the monk of St. Gall gives some notice in his 'Acts of Charles the Great', another monk, doubtless referred to in the same work, was Joseph (Scotus).[1] Very little is known of Joseph save that he was employed as a teacher. Much more is known of Clemens (Clement). Under the patronage of Charlemagne the latter conducted a schools for boys, both poor and rich. The monk of St. Gall who wrote so voluminously concerning his own age, related numerous stories concerning the lives of the students of Clement.[2] The success of his teaching, however, as well as the extensiveness of his scholarship is amply attested by the fact that he became the tutor of Charlemagne's son, Lothaire. He continued teaching in the palace school after the death of Charlemagne where he bore the title "magister palatinus". He was particularly famous as a grammarian, having been entrusted by the Abbot of Fulda with the training of a number of the best students from that monastery.[3]

1 Mombert, Chas. the Great, 259.

2 Ibid.

3 The 'Catalogue of the Abbots of Fulda' makes note of the fact that Ratgar, abbot from 802 to 817, sent the monk Modestus and others to study grammar under Clement the Scot. Pertz, Germaniae Historica Scriptt., XIII. 272.

Even more famous than Clement as a scholar at the court of Charlemagne was Dungal. It is possible that he reached the Frankish realm in the year of Clement's arrival, perhaps being a companion of the latter.[1] Many of the monks fled from Ireland on account of the Danish invasions. Dungal appears first in history as an astronomer. An eclipse, having excited the curiosity of Charlemagne, he wrote a letter to Dungal, at that time at the monastery of St. Denis, for an explanation.[2] The explanation which Dungal wrote shows not only a considerable knowledge of the astronomy of his day, but gives indication of a truly scholarly spirit by questioning some theories of the Ptolemaic system. He says in part: "Some affirm that these (the fixed stars) also have a proper motion, but on account of the immense time they take to accomplish their revolutions, and the shortness of human life, their movements cannot be discerned by observation." Dungal also warns Charlemagne that the works of the ancients respecting astronomy must be studied with caution. It is also interesting to note that he makes especial reference to the writings of Plato, Cicero, Virgil, and Pliny the younger, lamenting that the works of the latter were not available for reference.[3]

[1] Dict. of Nat. Biog., XVI, 197.

[2] Mombert, op. cit., 268,, Zimmer, op. cit., 52.

[3] Histoire Literaire De La France, IV. 495.

There is also ample evidence of Dungal's acquaintance with classical poetry. He makes frequent references to the classical poets in his numerous letters and his writings against Claudius of Turin.[1] A manuscript poem of S. Remi is thought by Mabillon to be the work of Dungal.[2] Altho it is impossible to find unquestionable evidence of Dungal's poetic authorship it may be said with certainty that he possessed no insignificant knowledge of the classical poets.

After remaining at the monastery of St. Denis for some years Dungal was sent by Charlemagne to the monastery of St. Augustine in Pavia where he superintended the instruction of certain ambitious young students.[3] In 823 he was appointed by the Emperor Lothair to a position in the academy at Pavia. A capitulary of the Emperor, written in 823, ordered that young men from Milan, Brescia, Lodi, Bergamo, Vercelli, Genoa, and Como should repair to the academy of Pavia and place themselves under the instruction of Dungal.[4]

1 Histoire Lit. de La France, IV. 497.

2 Ib. 497.

3 Mombert, op. cit., 267., Zimmer, op. cit., 53.

2 Dictionary of National Biog., XVI, 196.

While dwelling in Lombardy he became involved in a controversy with Claudius of Turin, against whom he was called upon to defend the worship of images. He shows familiarity in these controversial writings not only with the work of the older Christian poets, but also with Virgil and Priscian. He seems to have died in the monastery of Bobbio, whither he had retire to spend the last days of his life.

While not so important as an exponent of classical learning, Dicuil, another Irish emigrant at the court of Charlemagne, is worty of mention in illustrating the extent of Irish influence upon the Continent. That Dicuil was of Irish origin and that he received his training in the schools of Ireland is proven by references which he makes to his native land. In his 'Liber de Mensura Orbis Terrae' he uses the phrases "hermitae et nostra Scottia navigantes" and "circum nostram insulam Hiberniam".[1] In the same work he refers to the fact that he was a student of Suibneus[2], who, as Letronne has conjectured, may be identified with the Irishman, Suibhne. It would be hazardous to conjecture the extent of his classical knowledge. Apparently he drew much of his information from a 'cosmography' drawn up during the consulship of Caesar and Antony and a 'Chorografia'

[1] Archer, Dict. National Biography, XV, 49.

[2] Ibid.

of the time of Augustus.[1] He also borrowed from Virgil, Orosius, Servius, and others, but his knowledge of Herodotus, Homer, and other Greek writers seems to have been gleaned from secondary sources. He is best known for his extraordinary knowledge of astronomy and geography, but his work also indicates his ability as a grammarian and metrician.

Foremost among those who bear convincing testimony to the cultural influence of the Celts upon western Europe is John Scotus Erigena.[2] Unquestionably of Irish nativity, he made his appearance at the court of Charles the Bald sometime prior to 847 very much in the manner of Joseph (Scotus) and Clement. Soon after his arrival there he was placed at the head of the royal school in Paris where he became especially distinguished for his extraordinary knowledge of the classics and for his independence of religious thought. His original thinking and his striking Hellenistic ideals were in such contrast to contemporary thought that he has frequently been mentioned as a Neo- Platonist. However closely allied his thinking may have been to the Hellenistic philosophers it is certain that he possessed a marked predilection for the Greeks. His preference for the Greek theological writers was doubtless acquired in the monastic schools of Ireland, the early Greek writers being held in very high repute there. While teaching

[1] Dict. Nat. Biog., XV. 49.

[2] Poole, op. cit., 55.

in the royal school of Paris he was called upon by his patron, Charles the Bald, to translate into Latin certain Greek writings which were attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite. The fact that Erigena was selected to undertake this task and the apparent facility with which he accomplished it has gained for him, and not unjustly, the distinction of being superior to all others scholars of his time in knowledge of the Greek.[1] His position as 'scholasticus' or lay scholar permitted of a degree of original thinking which was far in advance of his age. In his principal work, 'de Divisione Naturae' , he presented philosophy as an independent science equal to, if not superior, in importance, to theology, but having for its basis reason rather than authority. In addition to his place of importance as an exponent of classical culture the career of Scotus Erigena bears witness also to the influence of the Celts as contributors to original thought during an age in which originality was in almost complete subjection to authority.

Mention has alredy been made in a previous chapter of the classical attainments of Sedulius. From 840 to 860 he was employed as a teacher at Liege. In addition to his marked ability as a Latin scholar and teacher Sedulius was also familiar with Greek.[2] He is also remarkable as

[1] Zimmer, op. cit., 58.

[2] Ib., 60 seq.

one of those few examples of the early Middle Ages who could descend to the human level by writing comic verses.[1]

It was not only the Frankish kingdom that received great cultural stimulus from the Irish. Many monasteries among the Alemannii and Alsatians owed their origin to the labors of Irish monks. Foremost among these scholars of the eastern kingdoms was Virgil, Abbot of St. Peter's at Salzburg. He is chiefly noteworthy here as illustrating the tendency among the Irish scholars to transcend the narrow cultural limits set by mediaeval orthodoxy. His thorough training in his native country placed him in the front ranks of Ireland's scholars. The first two years of his residence on the Continent were spent under the patronage of Pepin at Cressy. At the invitation of Duke Otillo of Bavaria he went to the latter country where he succeeded to the abbacy of St. Peter's at Salzburg.[2] It was while there that he became involved in a controversy with St. Boniface which led to a remarkable revelation of religious and secular learning on the part of Virgil.[3]

1 Zimmer, op. cit. 61.

2 Ib., 62.

3 Ib., 62.

the best evidence of the liberality of his thinking is to be found in his doctrine of the antipodes.[1]

Mention might also be made of Dubdachrich, an Irish scholar in Bavaria, who was distinguished for his knowledge of Greek, and of Findan who with seven companions set out to labor as missionaries among the Allemani.[2] That other Irish teachers were numerous in the German monasteries seems amply proven by the number of manuscripts written by Irish scribes which are to be found there. It can hardly be justly assumed that all such manuscripts were carried there from other monasteries, altho the presence of some of them may be accounted for in that way.[3]

With the eleventh century the significant influence of the Irish upon the thinking of the Continent ceased. While Irish monks continued to wander through various parts of Germany even as late as the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries , their influence gradually weakened, their originality being lost in the ascetic ideals of the Benedictine cloisters. The influence of their teaching,

[1] See page 57.

[2] Zimmer, op. cit., 63 seq.

[3] Ib., 69.

however, continued for a much longer time, becoming a potent factor in stimulating rationalistic and humanistic ideals in the late Middle Ages. The next chapter will set forth some typical illustrations of early Irish humanism and rationalism.

CHAPTER III.

HUMANISTIC AND RATIONALISTIC TENDENCIES OF CELTIC CULTURE DURING THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES.

The preceding chapters represent an attempt to trace in a more or less detailed way the history of the origin and diffusion of Celtic culture during the early Middle Ages. The first has concerned itself especially with the means whereby classical culture found refuge in Ireland during a period in which it was driven from its ancient seat on the Continent. It has also shown that certain unique conditions in Ireland made possible the preservation not only of the letter, but also the spirit of classicism when the remainder of Europe was hostile to such spirit.[1] The second chapter has shown

[1] ". . . . . la différence qui existe entre le goût littéraire des écoles irlandaises et des écoles romaines est bien plus notable. A Rome et dans les pays où domine l'esprit romain, les souvenirs de l'antiquité païenne sont exécrés: si l'on recherche les manuscrits anciens, c'est pour les détruire, ou pour en effacer les caractères et tracer sur le même vélin des prières, des légendes sacrées." Hauréau, Singularites Historique et Littéraires, 10-11.

Ireland as a missionary country attempting, through its numerous missionaries upon the continent, to revive the religious and cultural traditions of the Empire. The aim of the present chapter is to ascertain the extent of Celtic influence upon the development of humanistic and rationalistic ideals in the Middle Ages.

It is apparent already from the foregoing pages that the Celtic interpretation of Christian doctrine was essentially different from the interpretation of European peoples as a whole. While the views of Patrick may have been distinctly in agreement with those of the Church of Rome,[1] there can be little doubt that by the sixth century local ideals and traditions had shaped Christianity also in Ireland along distinctly local lines. From the beginning the Celts mingled their poetry and legend with their religion. In their schools, organized primarily for the promulgation of the Christian faith, they studied with equal zeal profane literature and theology. Such conditions, prevalent from the outset in the Irish monasteries, permitted extraordinary freedom in the development of Christianity. While it is not true that they lived apart from Roman Catholocism, it is certain that they were less submissive to Catholic authority.

[1] Bury, op. cit., 61.

This independenc is nowhere more obvious than in their attitude toward the classics and toward authority. It remains to be seen whether or not their study of the classics was based upon a truly humanistic appreciation and whether or not their opposition to authority was necessarily an expression of rationalistic thinking.

Information respecting the cultivation of classical literature in the Irish schools is scant. Most that can be said is necessarily of the nature of inference and conjecture. Judgment must be passed upon them through a study of the works of the students rather than through available knowledge of the schools themselves. Such investigation yields two results, first, that classical studies were extensively pursued, and second, that the study of the classics was prompted by a distinctly humanistic appreciation. To those who were in a position to enjoy the cultural training of the Irish monasteries a new field of literary study was opened, a field so fertile in imagery, passion, adventure and heroism as to make a peculiar appeal to the Celtic temperament which had already ~~given expression to~~ expressed itself so abundantly in the songs of the pre-Christian bards.

Assuming that the foregoing evidence has established beyond question that the Irish students were prompted by a humanistic impulse to the study of the classics, further in-

vestigation will naturally concern itself with determining whether or not this study ~~necessarily~~ developed the spirit of rationalism among the students. Conclusive proof of this is lacking among the earliest of the saints and scholars, but sufficient evidence is available to warrant an assumption favorable to such view. It is difficult to imagine a humanistic appreciation for classical antiquity unaccompanied by the spirit of rationalism. The humanism of Petrarch and his times furnishes striking evidence of the close relationship of rationalism and humanism. The entire Renaissance movement was characterised by a constant struggle for the triumph of reason over authority. The movement,moreover, had received its most potent stimulus from an appreciative study of antiquity. It is only logical, then, to assume that the same rationalistic tendencies were to some extent present among the Irish scholars of the early Middle Ages.

Much has been written in the preceding pages concerning the work of Columbanus both as a student of the classics and as a missionary on the Continent. In many respects Columbanus was most representative of the Irish teachers of the sixth century.[1] Certainly he was the best representative of the school of Bangor.

[1] Zimmer, 23note.

Altho of an ascetic nature he possessed many humanistic and rationalistic traits. Unquestionably he felt a deep appreciation for the classics and cultivated them for their own sake.[1]

While investigation has not revealed abundant evidence of the rationalistic tendencies of Columbanus, there is one bit of striking testimony which, altho it may not have been dictated by a purely rationalistic impulse, was certainly written by one who was not blinded by authority in matters of reasoning. This is to be found in the letter of Columbanus to Pope Gregory the Great concerning the Easter question. "How is it", he says, "that you with all your wisdom, you, the brilliant light of whose sanctified talents is shining abroad throughout the world are induced to support this dark Paschal system? I wonder, I confess, that the erroneous practice of Gaul has not been long since abolished by you.... ..... You are afraid, perhaps, of incurring the charge of a taste for novelty, and are content with the authority of your predecessors, and of Pope Leo in particular. But do not I beseech you, in a matter of such importance, give way to the dictates of humility or gravity only, as they are often mistaken. It may be that in this affair a living dog is better than a dead lion!" (Leo) The attitude of Columbanus was clearly not that of one who was stubbornly clinging to a

[1] See page 18 seq.

tradition, but of one who would have the Pope base his conclusion upon his own reasoning rather than upon the questionable authority of his predecessors. This attitude seems to have been characteristic of the Irish scholars of the sixth century. While an extreme ascetic ideal was fostered both at home and abroad. it was not an asceticism which transcended reason. Without presenting additional evidence illustrating the rationalistic tendencies of the Irish scholars of the sixth century, it seems just to assume that the attitude which permitted the Irish monk to accept classical learning without fearing to weaken his faith is sufficient proof of his superior rationalism.

By the eighth century numerous examples of rationalistic thinkers among the Irish scholars on the Continent were evident. The most noteworthy of these was the scholar, Virgil of Salzburg. Virgil was one of the few men of the early Middle Ages who cultivated the profane sciences. He may be said to have been foremost among those who first felt the real distinction between science and theology. Living in an age in which the Bible was deemed the one infallible source of all knowledge, both profane and sacred, he ventured to

assert his belief in the existence of the antipodes. The views of Virgil respecting the universe and man's relation to it were in large part the same views which led to the great scientific revolution of the Renaissance era.

Perhaps the science which did most to enlighten the people of the Middle Ages respecting their relation to the universe was astronomy.[1] The passing of the belief that the earth was the centre of the universe and the exaggerated conception of man's importance marks the beginning of scientific progress. The most flagrant superstitions of the Middle Ages had their origin in man's exaggerated conception of his own position in life. It is but natural that each phenomenon observed should be looked upon as a divine warning for him. The dispelling of this conception must be noted as a distinct step toward rationalistic thinking. It can hardly be deemed merely accidental that the Irish were foremost among the scholars of the Middle Ages to acknowledge the existence of profane science as distinct from sacred. Striking evidence of this is given by their knowledge of astronomy. In this respect the work of Virgil of Salzburg was not peculiar. He was

[1] Lecky, op. cit., 285.

in every way typical.

Astronomy was among the earliest subjects cultivated in the Irish monastic schools.[1] The superiority of the Irish knowledge of astronomy is amply illustrated by the work of the Irish scholars at the court of Charlemagne and his successors. Foremost among these was Dungal. Mention has been made in a previous chapter of his scholarly attainments.[2] The superiority of his astronomical knowledge is amply attested by the explanation which he made to Charlemagne of the extraordinary solar eclipses which had greatly interested the monarch. Throughout the letter gives evidence of astronomical knowledge vastly in advance of most of the contemporary writings on the subject. His views were very similar to those of Virgil of Salzburg, a fact which goes far to prove that the conception of the Irish scholars in general of astronomy was greatly in advance of western Europe as a whole. Further evidence of this superiority of astronomical knowledge was given by Dicuil, a contemporary and fellow countryman of Dungal. In the early part of the ninth century he produced a work on astronomy which, from the point of view of original and rationalistic thinking was entirely new.[3]

[1] Hyde, op. cit., 216.

[2] See page 43.

[3] Zimmer, op. cit., 55.

By far the most convincing illustration of the rationalistic tendencies of the Irish scholars of the Carolingian Renaissance was John scotus Erigena. The scope of his general knowledge was broad, but his philosophical works give to him a distinct place in the history of European rationalism. Very little is known of the details of the life of Scotus Erigena other than that he was a teacher in the court school of Charles the Bald and that his writings, greatly in advance of the mediaeval thought, were constantly attacked by his contemporaries. He was distinguished from his contemporaries by his thorough knowledge of the Greek, especially his knowledge of the writings of the church fathers, and by the additional fact that he was the only lay scholar of note in western Europe. The distinguishing characteristic of his philosophy is the superior place which it gives to reason. This is particularly obvious in his theory of the universe and in his treatment of the relation of reason to authority. He boldly asserted his belief in the eternal existence of the universe. Science to him was entirely independent of theology and in every way its equal. The one was based upon reason, the other upon authority: of the two, reason must be held as superior since it required no authority to support it. Altho an ardent student of the writings of the church fathers, the sacredness of their position did not hinder

his indulgence in original thinking. The Bible itself could not be interpreted literally, but must be studied through the agency of philosophy in order to render clear its substance. Authority was nothing if it could not stand the test of reason, for the two proceeded from a common source which was God. This reasoning is by no means to be considered as peculiar to Scotus Erigena. It was typical of the Irish scholars of his age and of the age preceding him. The same attitude was manifested again and again, altho with less assurance and with less scholarship, by Irishmen between the sixth and the ninth century.

It is to be seen from the foregoing illustrations that, as the Irish preserved classical culture during the Middle Ages, so also they preserved something of the rationalistic and humanistic attitude of antiquity. The same freedom which permitted the study of the classics for their own sake made the Celt less susceptible to the narrowing influences of rigid church authority. In accepting Christianity he did not lose sight of the things of the world, but, in keeping with his adventurous spirit, he turned to the study of the natural sciences, astronomy, geography and natural philosophy, with the same earnestness that he studied theology. He became thoroughly ascetic in habit, but it was a part of his ascetic life to seek for truth.

In Columbanus, Virgil of Salzburg and Scotus Erigena are to be found characteristic types of the Celtic temperament. Columbanus typifies the Celtic attitude toward religious authority; willing to acknowledge the authority of the papacy if it can substantiate itself by reason, but curious to subject it to every test. Virgil represents the Celtic attitude toward science, believing in the existence and the dignity of secular science apart from theology. Scotus Erigena represents the highest point of Celtic humanism and rationalism, affirming not only the separate existence of science and theology, but subjecting theology to the most thorough tests of reasoning.

It would be difficult to trace the Celtic contribution to humanism and rationalism beyond the age of Scotus Erigena, for in him is to be seen not only the typical Celtic attitude, but also the philosophical method which was destined to contribute so abundantly to modern philosophy. It was not until two centuries later, when a new intellectual leader came out of Brittany, in the person of Peter Abelard, that the European intellect received further stimulus equal to that given by Scotus Erigena. One cannot but suspect that Abelard also was strongly influenced by the Celtic strain. While it would be impossible to detect direct evidence of

of this Celtic strain throughout the later development of European thought, it is certainly not too much to claim that it helped to make possible the work of scholars such as Gerbert of Rheims (Pope Sylvester II), Abelard and John of Salisbury.

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