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Some Notes on Virgilius Maro Grammaticus

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Boedromia, to which the Greeks themselves assigned a choice of impossible historic origins. While the thing attacked and defended in such rites represents, not a national religious symbol invidious to foreigners, as the pseudo-historical myths alleged, but femininity itself.

The Russian Spring-fight is sometimes enacted by two parties of women, with their hair flying, like the Maenads; and, where the body of the Whitsun doll is made of straw, it is torn up, when victory declares itself, and scattered over the fields, in order to distribute the productive energy concentrated in the figure. The existence of such a custom among the Thracians would afford the most satisfying explanation for the frequency of the legend of a man being torn to pieces in connection with Dionysian rites, as Orpheus, Pentheus, and Dionysus himself.

Comparison with the Slavonians

affords also a possible explanation for the frequency of Greek legends of the capture of women by foreigners at Dionysian festivals, as in Lemnos and Naxos, and at Brauron in Attica. For the festival of Yarilo, the Slavonic Dionysus, seems to have been the regular occasion for the collusive capture of brides among the primitive Slavonians;¹ the occasion is still used for betrothals in the province of Tver; and if the songs at the Greek feasts had the same narrative character as those sung by the Slavonians at the capture-games in use at such festivals, they might easily have been interpreted as a record of historical events.

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¹ Nestor says: 'They had no regular marriage customs, but when they met for devil dances and songs, the men carried off wives for themselves, each as he had agreed with a woman.'

SOME NOTES ON VIRGILIUS MARO GRAMMATICUS.

THIS strange grammarian is now being taken seriously by scholars, and it is satisfactory to find that the authorities on Celtic literature are at present investigating his influence upon old Irish literature. The late Professor Zimmer, in the *Sitzungsberichte der K. Preussischen Ak. der Wissenschaften* 1910, proved that certain singular methods of contorting Latin, presumably for cryptic purposes, were found also in Old Irish: in some words letters were 'decapitated' at the commencement; to some words unmeaning letters were added; and again in some cases syllables were inserted into the body of the word, in other cases the letters composing the body of the word were transposed, as *germen* for *regnum*, *nodo* for *dono*, *gelo* for *lego*, etc. It appears that this method of disguising words came in process of time to affect the diction of Irish bards, who were taught as a part of their profession that some of their changes were permissible, and were in fact part of the technique of poetry, so that some of the Old Irish words changed their form, and others maintained two forms, of which

one was considered more appropriate for poetry. Thus *senchas* = *senex* became in poetry *fenchas*, and *anim* became *anuim*. This strange result may be set down to the Celtic fancy and great imitative faculty. The name of Virgil is not directly mentioned in Irish literature, but Zimmer assumes that the name of the author of an old Irish work called *Uraicept nan éces* (the poet's handbook), *Fercertne fili* is in fact no other than the Gaulish grammarian. He takes the first syllable *Fer* as an abbreviation of *Fergil*, the *-certne* as connected with *κέρδος* and *cerdo* and signifying 'the poet's craft,' and *fili* as the seer or poet. The data on which he arrives at this conclusion are too numerous to be set down here: it may suffice to state that they are accepted by Celtic scholars like Professor Kuno Meyer. It is significant that the oldest title of Virgil's work is *Virgilii Maronis ars = certne*. The MSS. of Virgil date from the ninth or tenth centuries A.D., and by that time the belief had grown up that *Fercertne* was the name of a person.

Now the question arises, What brought

the Gaulish grammarian to the shores of Ireland? and with this is connected the further question, What was the cause of the sudden outburst of learning which during the fifth and following centuries drew the attention of all Europe to Ireland as the heiress of classical literature? Professor Kuno Meyer, in an article in the *Irish Review* on 'Learning in Ancient Ireland,' following his predecessor Zimmer, has explained this phenomenon, which will henceforth have to be taken into account in the history of Irish literature. Zimmer proved clearly that Virgil lived in the fifth century, and was an elder contemporary of his countryman Ennodius (A.D. 473-521), who, it may be noted, was despoiled while yet a boy of all his patrimony by the Visigoths. This theologian wrote upon his brother presbyter Maro certain scathing epigrams, would tax him as a *fatuus homullus* and taunt him with his usurpation of the name of the great Mantuan.

Zimmer in the course of his reading came upon a document which, according to Professor Meyer, it is impossible to overrate. It is only one simple sentence, but a sentence so packed with information that it outweighs volumes. Though published so long ago as 1866 this document has escaped the notice of every writer on Irish history. The reason is probably that it is buried in a German periodical under the title of 'Sammelsurien,' which does not sound promising. Under that heading Lucian Müller, then professor at Leyden, published a number of late Latin texts. . . . In the course of his excerpts the scribe abruptly introduces a note on the barbarian invasions of Gaul in the early fifth century, as follows:

Huni, qui ex nephario concubitu progeneri sunt, scilicet demonum, postquam praeheunte cerva viam invenerunt per Meotides paludes, invaserunt Cothos, quos nimium terruerunt ex improvise mostro quod in illis erat. Et ab his depopulatio totius imperii exordium sumpsit, quae ab Unis et Guandelis, Gotis et Alanis peracta est, sub quorum vastatione omnes sapientes cismarini fugam ceperunt, et in transmarinis, videlicet in Hiberia et quocunque se rece-

perunt maximum profectum sapientiae incolis illarum regionum adhibuerunt.

Zimmer regards this entry as originally written in the sixth century in the west of Gaul. The remark on the fabulous origin of the Huns and the terror they struck into the Goths is taken from Jordanis, who wrote about 550. The tenor of the passage on the depopulation of the whole Empire makes it probable that it was not written long after that date. This very unimportant passage throws light upon the early development of Irish learning and civilisation. In brief, it shows that this learning and civilisation were due to an influx of learned scholars from Gaul during the fifth century. Why, then, did these learned Gauls leave their country in numbers during the fifth century A.D.? The answer to this question must be sought in the desperate condition into which Gaul was reduced during that century by the incursions of the barbarians. The Alemans penetrated the borders of Gaul to the south-east, Burgundians seized the highly civilised province of Lugdunum: Alans, Vandals and Silingae pushed towards Spain: the West Goths took possession of the south-west, and founded a kingdom there with its capital Toulouse, and extended their territory northward as far as the Loire. These Goths were fanatical Arians, and as such violently opposed to the Homoiousians or Orthodox Christians, and indeed more savagely inclined to their foes than any pagan people. Now Aquitania was a stronghold of orthodoxy: Hilary of Poitiers actually went into voluntary exile into Phrygia during the fourth century rather than yield to the Homoiousian proposals of the Emperor Constantine, and after his return he was the inflexible leader of the orthodox party in West Gaul as opposed to the Arian schismatics. We can therefore well appreciate the reasons which would urge Gaulish churchmen and Gaulish orthodox laymen alike to flee from the land of their persecution; to a land akin ethnically and linguistically with that of the Gauls, and a land which had been in commercial relationship with Gaul since Agricola's time.

We know from Virgilius's own words

that he was an Aquitanian of the district of Bigorre, and that he was an orthodox believer. We know that the Aquitanians belonged to the Iberian portion of Gaul, of which the modern Basques are the modern representatives. It follows that the Latin spoken and written by this *homullus fatuus* was not, strictly speaking, Gaulish Latin, but the Latin spoken by a grammarian whose native language was probably a dialect akin to modern Baskish, but who was likewise acquainted with Celtic Gaulish, and who had some slight knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, though it may be questioned whether this knowledge was very profound. For Latin scholars our grammarian offers some interesting problems. He employs a number of ordinary Latin words in a new sense, of which I have given a partial list in a previous number of the *Classical Review*. Such are *connumeratio*, account: *gustare*, to aim at: *internare*, to penetrate: *retroacta*, ancient. He employs many new and unclassical forms of Latin words, such as *telleus*, earthy: *decelsior*, lower: *fitur*, fit (*fieri*): *caraxare* and *atramentare*, to write: he uses unclassical syntax, as *scripturas* for *scripturae*, in this case approaching the Romance use: he employs a large number of strange foreign words, some of which seem to be Iberian, a few Celtic, a very few Teutonic; but most of these remain as yet unexplained and still await any light that may be thrown on them by linguistic experts. Of Baskish *bessu* is an example, which Virgil gives as the root of *bestia*: *bezu* is glossed in Baskish as 'disposition.' Some other words as *gabala* and *ceros* have been claimed by Mr. Dodgson as Baskish, and I hope that this scholar may be enabled on a careful perusal of Hümer's Edition of the grammarian to recognise still more of the words derived from this source. *Goela* seems to mean wanton, and to be connected with Modern German *geil*. *Criposcium* may be connected with Irish *cripóg*, a wrinkle, and *thors-rex* may be a Celtic word. But what are *assena*, *bax*, *belba*, *belsa*, *cers*, *clefare*, *falera*, *fambulo*, *hfascon*, *hpalanx*? What are the *praepositiones inusitatae* cited on p. 173

of Hümer, such as *salion*, *cyron*, *trasso*, etc.?

It is of interest to observe that Maro employs rhymed Latin, some of his verses evidently being taken from Church hymns.

It seems, however, to me that when he quotes what he calls *liniati versus*, and affirms that they consist of five 'metres,' by which he means feet, he is wrongly stating the scansion of the lines, which are bad rhyming hexameters, the ordinary rules of classical scansion being violated:

"Bella consurgunt poli praesentis sub fine
Precae temnuntur senum suetae doctrinae."

It would also be interesting to know whether the double forms which he cites of some words, alleging that they bear different meanings according to the form employed, ever existed save in his imagination, or were they local coinages? Such are *vido*, -as, -at, to discern with the mind's eye: *video*, with the bodily eye: *probo* -as, to try or test: *probo* -is, to examine as a medical man.

For the rest, Maro seems to have formed one of a circle of literary men who assumed the names of old classical authors whose works have perished. But there is no reason to doubt that these works really did exist, and that if they had come down to us they would have been of the greatest possible assistance to Romance scholars. My view of Maro's diction, which in some passages is unintelligible, is that of a grammarian who wrote Latin with difficulty, and who when he wrote it employed a bombastic and involved style, much as a learned Babu does when he writes English. He might hope thereby to impress the other members of his literary circle, who presumably employed much the same artifices to render their diction expressive, though our author must have eclipsed them all. But there is much that is as yet unexplained in Maro, and it is in the hope that some scholars may be induced to try and explain these difficulties that I ask the Editor to insert this article.

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