
The Cathach of St. Columba

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THE CATHACH OF ST. COLUMBA.*

IN the Library of the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin there is at present one of the most interesting relics which we possess of early Christian civilization in Ireland, the silver book-shrine which formerly contained the vellum manuscript known as the Cathach of St. Columba. The shrine is one of the kind technically styled *cumdach*, "cover," such as appear to have been not uncommon in older Ireland, being intended for the preservation of books, gospels or the like, which were highly prized either because of their intrinsic beauty or their connexion with some saint; they were the work of well-known artificers, who devoted no little skill and labour to their decoration, and in course of time they came to be as highly venerated as the manuscripts they contained, being frequently mentioned in the Annals. Six of these *cumdachs* (four of them dating from the eleventh century) are still extant, two of which—the *Domnach Airgid*, or shrine of St. Patrick's Gospels, and the shrine of St. Molaise's Gospels—are preserved in the National Museum in Dublin. But none have had a more chequered or romantic history than the one with which we are at present concerned. It is an oblong box or case, measuring roughly about $8\frac{1}{2} \times 7\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{3}$ inches, made partly of silver and partly of bronze, and elaborately decorated on lid and sides with figures and emblems, ornamental patterns and gems. Round the base runs an inscription in Irish which records that it was the work of the artificer Sitric, son of Mac Aedha, and was made by order of Cathbarr Ua Domnaill (or O'Donnell) and Domnall Mac Robartaigh, coarb of Kells. These persons have been identified: Cathbarr Ua Domnaill died in 1106, and Domnall Mac Robartaigh was

* *The Cathach of St. Columba*, by the Rev. H. J. Lawlor, D.D., Litt.D. With Appendices and Plates. Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy, vol. xxxiii., sect. C, no. 11.

coarb, or successor, of St. Columba at Kells between 1062 and his death in 1098; the shrine must, therefore, have been made between those dates.

At the time when the shrine was constructed the Cathach was in the possession of the O'Donnells of Tyrconnell, the clan to which St. Columba, or Columcille, himself belonged, and they were wont to carry it with them into battle that it might bring them victory over their foes. Hence the name *Cathach*—"the Battler." After the Treaty of Limerick in 1691, Daniel O'Donel, the head of the clan, left Ireland for France, taking the Cathach with him. In 1723 he caused the shrine to be repaired in Paris and an outer silver case to be constructed for it to protect it from further injury. This case bears a Latin inscription, in which the shrine is called "the hereditary heirloom of St. Columbanus"—*i.e.* Columba—"vulgarly known as the Caah" (*hoeraditarii Sti Columbani pignoris, vulgo Caah dicti*). In 1802 the Cathach was brought back to Ireland and restored to the O'Donnel family. In 1812 Sir Neal O'Donel entrusted it to Sir William Betham, assistant to the Ulster King of Arms, who was compiling a pedigree of the O'Donnells. At the time it was supposed that the shrine contained some personal relic of St. Columba, for, owing to a tradition handed down from ancient times, it was held sacrilegious to open it. Sir William Betham, however, took the liberty of doing so, and found it to contain a wooden box, much decayed, enclosing an imperfect copy of the Latin Psalter. Since 1842 the *cumdach* has been deposited in the Library of the Royal Irish Academy. Though the Psalter itself was briefly described by O'Curry in his *Manuscript Materials of Ancient Irish History* and a few other writings, it had never been submitted to careful scrutiny, and no attempt had been made to verify the tradition which connected it with St. Columcille (perhaps until the development of textual criticism supplied the necessary scientific criteria, it would have been impossible to do so) until Dr. Lawlor

took the task in hand. In the work before us we have not only the text of the Psalter but a minute account of the manuscript and its history and of the successive stages by which Dr. Lawlor has been led to the belief that tradition in this case is justified and that the Psalter was in very deed connected with St. Columcille—was in all probability the work of his own hand. The work is one of transcending interest for all who know or care anything for the ancient history and civilization of this country; for, if Dr. Lawlor's theory be correct, we have in the Cathach a book which produced momentous issues in the destiny of its writer and of the Ireland in which he lived.

Let us turn in the first place to the tradition which connects the Psalter with St. Columcille. Our chief source for this is the Life of the Saint compiled in the year 1532 by Manus O'Donnell, chief of Tyrconnell, a work which embodies the traditions current in the clan, and which, though containing many legendary accretions, has undoubtedly a basis of biographic fact. The story is in brief as follows: Once upon a time St. Columcille visited St. Findén, or Finnian, of Druim Finn, and got from him the loan of a book; and during his sojourn he used to stay in the church after office and mass, copying the book unknown to Finnian. In the night-time the fingers of his right hand shone like tapers, giving him the light needed for his task. On the last night, ere the book was yet wholly transcribed, Finnian sent a messenger to get it back. When the messenger reached the church and beheld a light within, he was afraid; and peeping through a crevice in the door, he saw St. Columcille at his work. The saint became aware that he was being watched and was angry; and turning to a pet crane which he had with him, said: "If God permits it, you have my leave to pluck out that youth's eyes, who came to observe me without my knowledge." Whereupon the crane thrust its beak through the crevice and plucked out the messenger's eye. He returned to

Finnian, who blessed the eye and restored it to its socket, so that it was whole as before. But Finnian was very wroth on finding that his book had been copied without his permission, and laid claim to the transcript. It was agreed to refer the matter to Diarmaid Mac Cerbaill, the high king of Ireland, and accordingly the two saints repaired to Tara. Finnian laid his case first before the king, saying: "Columcille transcribed my book without my knowledge, and I maintain that the son of my book belongs to me." After which Columcille made his defence, saying that Finnian's book had not lost in value by being copied, and that, moreover, Finnian had no right to extinguish the divine things it contained and withhold knowledge of them from others. Then Diarmaid pronounced judgement in the words: "To every cow her calf, and to every book its booklet" (*lebrán*, "little book"; or as Keating has it, "son-book"), and awarded the transcript to Finnian. "It is an unjust sentence," cried Columcille, "and you shall be punished for it."

It happened that at the time Curnan, son of Aedh king of Connacht, was at the court of Diarmaid as a hostage, and in a dispute which arose between him and the son of the steward of Tara during a hurling-match, he gave the steward's son a blow with his hurling-club which killed him. Curnan at once placed himself under the protection of Columcille, but by the king's orders he was dragged forth from Columcille's presence and put to death. Columcille forthwith left Tara, threatening vengeance on the king. He went to the north to his kinsmen, the kings of Tyrconnell and Tyrone, and laid his wrongs before them, and the result was that they joined forces with Aedh, king of Connacht, the father of the murdered youth, and fought the high king at Cúldremne, between Sligo and Drumcliffe. On the night before the battle the Archangel Michael appeared to Columcille and told him that in answer to his prayers victory would fall to his side, but that God was not pleased with him for having made such a worldly request, and that as a

penance he should leave Ireland in exile and never return to her shores or look upon the faces of her men and women again. During the battle next day Columcille was behind the hosts of the North and of Connacht, supporting them with his prayers, while Finnian in like manner supported the men of Tara; and the day ended in the total defeat of Diarmaid. After the battle Columcille declared to his kinsmen his intention of leaving Ireland and going into exile because of the numbers who had been slain on his account; moreover the saints of Ireland murmured against him, because through his counsel the battle had been brought about; and St. Molaise,¹ to whom Columcille made confession, ratified the sentence already passed by the Archangel. Thereupon, or soon after, Columcille left Ireland and went to Alba or Scotland, where he subsequently founded the famous settlement of Iona, of which he was abbot from 563 till his death in 597.

“The Cathach,” O'Donnell goes on to say, “is the name of the book on account of which the battle was fought. It is Columcille's chief relic in the land of Cinel Conaill Gulban.² It is encased in gilded silver, and it is not lawful to open it. And if it be taken thrice right-hand wise round the host of Cinel Conaill when about to engage in battle, they always return safe in triumph.”

It will be seen from the above account that the judgement passed by Diarmaid in the dispute between the two saints was the primary cause of the battle of Cúldremne, though the death of Curnan may have furnished the immediate and ostensible one; and O'Donnell is borne out by the historian Keating, who says expressly that one cause of the battle was “the unjust judgement Diarmaid gave against Columcille, when he secretly copied

¹ Of Damh Inis or Devenish Island, according to O'Donnell in this passage; but from other considerations it seems likely that Molaise of Inishmurray is the person meant.

² *i.e.* Tyrconnell, called from Conall Gulban, son of King Niall of the Nine Hostages, and great-grandfather of Columcille.

the Gospel from Fionntan's book," and gives as his authority for this statement the Black Book of Molaga, a manuscript now lost. Moreover, the tract *De Causa Peregrinationis S. Columbae*,³ which forms a passage in a life of the saint found in two Bodleian manuscripts, explicitly attributes the battle to Columba's wrath at the unjust judgement passed by Diarmaid in the matter of "a certain book"—what the book was or who the other party in the dispute, we are not told. Further, we have the testimony of an ancient stanza preserved by O'Donnell and attributed to Diarmaid, in which he is made to say that one of the things which deprived him of the kingship of Tara was "the judgement concerning the book of Columcille and of Findén, when with deceptive intent I said the saying: To every book its booklet" (*re gach lebar a lebhrán*).

It is true that the earliest Life of St. Columcille, that written towards the end of the seventh century by Adamnan, eighth Abbot of Iona in succession from Columcille and a kinsman of the saint's, tells nothing of the dispute with Finnian and assigns another reason for Columcille's exile, saying that in the second year after the battle of Cúldremne he set sail from Scotia (Ireland) to Britain, "wishing to make a pilgrimage for the sake of Christ" (*pro Christo peregrinari volens*). But readers of Adamnan will hardly be surprised at this. His book was not written as a biography, but rather as a panegyric of the saint, intended for the edification of the faithful; it deals in three parts severally with the prophecies of Columcille, his miracles and the angelic visions accorded to him, and is therefore merely a series of episodes unconnected with each other and not always in chronological order; moreover, as Adamnan derived most of his information (so he himself tells us) from the older monks of his community, it is devoted much more to the period of Columcille's life spent in Iona than that which went

³ Printed as an Appendix to Dr. Lawlor's work.

before. Besides, he would naturally have avoided anything which would tend to cast discredit on the saint; and though he tells us that Columcille was excommunicated at a synod held at Teltown "for certain venial and so far excusable matters," he gives no hint of what these matters were. Nor, to anyone acquainted with habits of thought in early Christian Ireland, will there appear any discrepancy between Adamnan's statement (or implication) that Columcille's pilgrimage was voluntarily undertaken from a religious motive, and the fact that it was a penance laid upon him. A penance may be at the same time prescribed by external authority and voluntarily undertaken in a deeply religious spirit. It was a common practice with Irish monks and ascetics to leave their country and fare abroad, not so much with the idea of spreading the Gospel (though that might be an outcome of their undertaking) as of offering a sacrifice acceptable to God. The Irish Life of Columcille in the Book of Lismore, written with much the same general aim as Adamnan's, likewise ascribes his pilgrimage to religious motives, and says nothing about the judgement of Diarmaid or the other events which led to the battle of Cúldremne. But that Columcille's exile, voluntary or otherwise, was conceived by him and his contemporaries and followers in the light of a painful sacrifice is attested by more than one poem among the many attributed to him, which refer in touching terms to his sorrow at quitting his native shores.

The battle of Cúldremne itself is an indisputable historic fact, which occurred, according to the Annals, in 561; and the Annals give 563 as the date of Columcille's departure for Scotland, therein agreeing with Adamnan. If, therefore, we allow for legendary embellishments, such as the miraculous light by which Columcille worked and the crane which plucked out the eye of Finnian's messenger—stories which have close parallels in other lives of saints, and which students of mediaeval hagiology will find little difficulty in accounting for—it seems as if there

were a basis of solid fact in O'Donnell's narrative about the copying of the book and the consequences to which it led.

The question naturally arises : Why should such dire consequences have followed from such a trivial matter ? Why should St. Finnian have attached such importance to the copying of a book ?

We know, of course, that in the sixth century books were a rare and greatly valued possession, and it is not surprising to find even saints, who had renounced all the other vanities of life, setting their hearts on this one earthly treasure. St. Columcille, we know from abundant testimony, was an ardent student and an indefatigable copier of manuscripts, and there is a story told in the notes to the old Irish martyrology known as the *Féilire Oengusa*, of his paying a visit to St. Longarad of Ossory, who had a library, and requesting permission to examine his books. But Longarad refused or—as the original puts it—“hid his books on him”; whereat St. Columcille “left a word”—to wit, a malediction—on the books, that they might be of no use to anyone after their owner's death. And that was fulfilled, for on Longarad's death his books were read by none.

Even so, it seems difficult to account for Finnian's wrath. Finnian of Druim Find, it seems pretty certain, was the same as Finnian⁴ of Magh Bili or Moville, with whom St. Columcille had formerly studied, and who seems to have had a deep respect for his old pupil, if we are to refer to him, and not to his namesake Finnian of Clonard, a story told by O'Donnell (p. 100) of how Columcille once paid him a visit, and Finnian, seeing him approach, said to those about him : “Do ye not see Columcille coming towards us and angels of God accom-

⁴ He is called Finnian. Findén and Findbarr in Irish religious writings, and by Keating Fionntan. Adamnan gives him the names Findbarrus and Vinnianus in one place (ii, 1), and in another (iii, 4)—where the same person seems to be meant—Finnio.

panying him?" Adamnan tells a similar story of a visit paid by Columcille to his old master just before his departure for Scotland. There is, of course, nothing improbable in the supposition that Finnian may have had a warm regard for Columcille which was not destroyed by their quarrel, and that during the two years which followed the battle of Cúldremne they may have been reconciled to each other. The most likely explanation of the whole dispute is that there was something about the book which Columcille borrowed which led Finnian to set special store on it and to be particularly jealous of the copyright.

Neither O'Donnell's Life nor the *De Causa Peregrinationis* tell us the name of the book, but O'Donnell makes it clear that it was a portion of the Scriptures; in Keating it is called a Gospel, *soiscél* ("good tidings," the Irish equivalent for *εὐαγγέλιον*). But in the accounts of the Irish saints the term *soiscél* seems to be used almost indiscriminately for any portion of the Bible. The Psalter, though we know that it was studied and copied in the monasteries hardly less than the Gospels, is rarely mentioned;⁵ no doubt because the word *saltair* (= *Psalterium*) early lost its primitive significance and came to be applied to an original metrical composition divided, like the Psalter, into "three fifties," *i.e.*, 150 poems, such as the famous *Saltair na Rann*.⁶

Now St. Finnian of Moville, as we learn from Colgan's life, had visited Rome and received from Pope Pelagius various gifts to bear back to his own country, among them "*evangelia, quae terra illa nondum plene susceperat.*" As the Scriptures were already well known in Ireland in Finnian's day, it is difficult to understand this statement unless we suppose that Finnian brought back a version differing in some respects from that already in

⁵ The terms generally used were the plural "psalms" or "the three fifties."

⁶ Keating (vol. i., p. 90) gives the word *saltair* as equivalent to *duanaire* = a collection of poems.

currency; and this version would naturally have been the translation by St. Jerome, which did not, as a matter of fact, reach Ireland till the sixth century. A gloss in the *Féilire Oengusa* states that Finnian of Moville first brought the Law of Moses and "the whole Gospels" to Ireland, and also "Colman's Gospel"; and in one MS. to the latter words is appended a later gloss: *correctum la Cirine*, "corrected by Jerome." Likewise the martyrology of Cashel: "Ipse est qui primo legem Moysaicam et totum evangelium in Hiberniam portavit."

If then St. Finnian brought back the Scriptures according to the text of Jerome, his manuscripts would have excited a lively curiosity among Irish clerics, hitherto acquainted only with the Old Latin versions, and permission to see or copy them would have been a privilege eagerly sought and perhaps not too readily granted.

It will be remembered that Jerome made three different versions of the Psalms. Two of these were produced after his call to Rome in 382 by Pope Damasus, the Roman Psalter and the Gallican, the former based on the Septuagint, the latter on the Hexaplar edition of Origen, in which the Hebrew, the Septuagint, and three other Greek texts were set forth in parallel columns. In the Gallican Psalter Jerome made use of special signs to distinguish various readings, enclosing words found in the Hebrew, but not in LXX, between an asterisk and a colon, and words found in LXX, but not in the Hebrew, between an obelus and a colon. Later, during his stay in Bethlehem, he translated the whole Old Testament directly from the Hebrew, this being the translation known as the Vulgate. But in the Clementine Vulgate—the Latin Bible officially recognized and in general use at the present day—the Psalter is not Jerome's version from the Hebrew, but his Gallican recension (though the text by no means represents Jerome's with complete accuracy).

Now, to turn to the Cathach itself, having dealt with the tradition concerning its origin and the hypothesis which may be offered to explain that tradition: how far

does Dr. Lawlor's investigation support both tradition and hypothesis?

The Cathach Psalter contains 58 consecutive leaves, all more or less mutilated, beginning with Ps. xxx, 10, and ending with Ps. cv, 13. The upper and lower margins are gone, but Dr. Lawlor's measurements make it appear likely that the leaves were originally of a size which would have been too large for the shrine, and that they had been curtailed before being placed in it. There is, indeed, every reason to conclude that it was imperfect when placed in the *cumdach* in the eleventh century. The earlier leaves have suffered more than the concluding portion, which is in fairly good condition; this points to the fact that the mutilation is not due to damp or other causes operating while it was enclosed in the *cumdach*, which would have affected both parts of the manuscript equally. It seems likely that it had never been completed and that the earlier leaves were already missing in the eleventh century.

Of the leaves remaining, the greater number were prepared for writing, the vellum being ruled, as was the custom, with a style or pointed instrument; but there are others on which only the ends of the lines were ticked off for ruling, while others again were wholly unprepared. Evidently the scribe was prevented by haste or some other cause from fully preparing his material.

The manuscript is throughout the work of one hand, and that a practised one. The script is good and regular, but of somewhat unusual character, being "a half-uncial reduced in size and made more flowing"—apparently because the scribe was pressed for time and had to write rapidly. That this was so is borne out further by numerous errors, such as the omission of one or more letters of a word, of which comparatively few have been corrected. It seems certain that the scribe did not compare his copy, when completed, with the exemplar. That his errors were due to haste and not to ignorance seems clear from the fact that there is a fairly large number

of errors which were certainly corrected by the scribe himself in the process of writing; this is especially the case with superfluous letters which he inserted and erased before passing on and finishing the sentence. The general conclusion reached by Dr. Lawlor is that the scribe was a penman of more than average excellence and with a full understanding of his text, who worked at high pressure and did not, according to the usual practice, compare his manuscript when finished with the original.

The script is itself discussed at length by Professor Lindsay of St. Andrews in an appendix to the work. Prof. Lindsay is one of the foremost Latin scholars of the age and the leading authority on Latin palaeography in these islands. He has devoted special research to the abbreviation symbols used in mediaeval Latin script, and has shown their value as criteria for fixing the date of manuscripts; and among his numerous works is a monograph on *Early Irish Minuscule Script* (published in 1910). His impression of the Cathach script agrees closely with that of Dr. Lawlor. The somewhat unique character of the writing makes it difficult to assign a definite date, but from the absence of abbreviations and other characteristics he is led to place it early, probably not later than the seventh century, and very possibly before it. Our knowledge of the difference between sixth and seventh century script in Ireland is too meagre, he says, to allow of a definite pronouncement; but there is no known reason why the script of the Cathach should not be as old as St. Columba's time.

Turning from the script to the text, we are on surer ground. It is fundamentally Hieronymian and appears to be based on Jerome's Gallican Psalter. A comparison of Ps. xc-xciii with a passage of corresponding length in the Book of Kells (which has a mixed text) shows that the variation of the latter from the Vulgate "is twice as great as that of the Cathach from the printed Gallican text, and that its old Latin mixture exceeds that of the Cathach in the proportion of more than two to one."

On the other hand, when compared in the same way with the Book of Durrow, the manuscript which of all early Irish Gospels most nearly approaches the Vulgate, the Cathach proves to be of a nearly identical standard both as regards variation from the Vulgate and the presence of Old Latin readings.

But the Hieronymian character of the text is still further asserted by the scribe's use of asterisks and obeli. These are by no means completely carried through, the number used barely amounting to a quarter of those in the corresponding part of the Gallican Psalter published by Vallarsi; nor do they always agree, where they occur, with Vallarsi's text. But in some cases it seems quite as likely that the Cathach represents Jerome's original reading as Vallarsi. Further, adopting the test of comparison with both LXX and Jerome's Latin text from the Hebrew in cases where these two give different and mutually exclusive readings, Dr. Lawlor finds that the Cathach may be considered quite as Hieronymian as the Clementine Vulgate; on the whole, he says, the Cathach text seems to be, if anything, nearer Jerome than the Vulgate.

And here it is interesting to notice a gloss found in the old Irish *Amra Coluim Cille*, the eulogy on Colum Cille composed by the contemporary poet Dallan Forgaill, which is extant in the *Lebar na hUidre* (c. 1100) and some later manuscripts, accompanied by an elaborate commentary. The line *glinnsius salmu*, "he secured the Psalms," is explained: "i.e., he separated them [the Psalms] under obelus and asterisk or under titles and arguments." In a fragment of an Irish treatise on the Psalter⁷ preserved in the Bodleian codex Rawlinson B 512 and another manuscript, the writer, speaking of Jerome's version, says: "It is a translation from the Hebrew into the Greek, into the Latin. Jerome corrected

⁷ Edited with translation by Prof. K. Meyer in *Hibernica Minora* (Oxford, 1894)

it under *obelus* and asterisk." Apparently the glossator of the *Amra Coluim Cille* was alluding to Columcille's share in introducing the Hieronymian text of the Psalter into Ireland as a well-established tradition.

The Cathach is provided with rubrics which were written by the same hand as the body of the work, but seem to have been added afterwards in spaces left for the purpose between the Psalms; this is shown by the circumstance that the rubrics are in some cases too long, in others too short for the spaces allotted to them. It seems therefore that they were copied from a different source from that of the text.

Complete rubrics of the type represented in the Cathach are not common in mediaeval Psalters; they consist of three parts: (a) the title, taken from the Septuagint, (b) the heading, a few words indicating the mystical interpretation of the psalm, and (c) the liturgical note, assigning its place in the liturgy.

From an exhaustive analysis⁸ of the rubrics in some twenty of the chief early mediaeval Psalters preserved in European libraries, Dr. Lawlor is able to show that the headings and liturgical notes of these fall into well-defined groups, each having a character of its own indicating a common source for the members which it comprises. On examining the 65 rubrics of the Cathach which are still legible, he at once recognized them as similar to those of the *Codex Amiatinus*, a Latin Bible written about 700 A.D. either at Wearmouth or Jarrow, whence it was sent as a present to the Pope, and now preserved in the Laurentian Library at Florence. The *Codex Amiatinus*, as far as its rubrics are concerned, belongs to a group of manuscripts some of which had their origin in the North of England. The chief of these are the *De Psalmorum Libro Exegesis* attributed to Bede, which in part at least was probably his work,

⁸ The data are given in App. IV of the work.

and, if so, written between 731 and 735; an Anglo-Saxon Psalter, now in Paris, which derived its rubrics from Bede's *Exegesis*, and therefore serves to supplement our knowledge of Bede's original text; and a Karlsruhe Psalter of the tenth century containing Jerome's version from the Hebrew.

It would be impossible in the scope of an article to do justice to the subtle methods of investigation and inference employed by Dr. Lawlor; all that can be attempted is to indicate the general conclusions he has arrived at. To readers, indeed, who are unfamiliar with the methods of modern scientific textual criticism there seems something almost uncanny in the way in which critics find in apparently trivial agreements or divergences in different manuscripts of the same work a clue to their origin and proceed not only to posit the existence, but even in some degree to determine the character, of the exemplars (no longer extant) from which they were copied, no less confidently than geologists, from a few fossil bones, construct the entire skeleton of a Pterodactylus or Ichthyosaurus.

A comparison of the *Codex Amiatinus* (A) and the Karlsruhe Psalter (R) shows that they had a common ancestor, which may be designated α ; further comparison with the rubrics of Bede (B) makes it likely that this hypothetical α was descended (probably through an intermediate stage) from another manuscript (β) which was also the parent of B. This relationship of A and B is to be expected when we remember that A was written either at Jarrow, Bede's own monastery, or the sister foundation of Wearmouth, when Bede was himself a young man; he must have known some exemplar of it. From a comparison of the elements common to the rubrics of A, B and the kindred Psalters, the text of β can be inferred with some degree of probability. When we turn to the Cathach (C), we find that of its 65 rubrics, 27 have headings and liturgical notes identical with those of α β , while 13 others agree with α (and several of

these probably with β also, though not with the existent text of B); an agreement of 40 out of 65, which makes it certain that c belongs to the same family as a and β . An examination of the remaining 25 rubrics shows that c probably represents an older text than either a or β . and in some cases apparently the text from which a and β were derived. It may therefore be concluded that c, a and β had a common archetype (γ), and that c stands closer to this archetype than either a or β , being most likely a direct transcript from it, any alterations or errors being due to the haste of the scribe.

Now it is beyond all doubt that c, both text and rubrics, was written in Ireland by an Irish scribe; we may therefore assume that γ (the source of the rubrics) was in Ireland when c was written, and that γ , or some copy of it, was carried to Northumbria and was the source of β , and, through it, of the rubrics in A and the greater number of those in B. Allowing a sufficient interval for the intermediate copies which probably intervened between β and A, which, as we know, was copied about 700, the date of β might be set down about 660 or even earlier, and it may be inferred that the original γ had reached Northumbria by the middle of the century. Now the period during which Irish influence was strong in Northumbria was between 635, when Aidan started his mission from Iona, and the Synod of Whitby in 664, and it is pretty certain that any Irish manuscripts which reached Northumbria arrived between those dates. Hence there is nothing far-fetched in the assumption that β was copied about 650 and that γ and its other copy c belong to an earlier period. So much is certain, that c was copied before 650 and had some connexion with Iona, and further, that there is no valid reason to prevent our believing that it was copied in the sixth century by St. Columcille himself and was the manuscript which led to the battle of Cúldremne; while on the other hand, as we have seen, not only ancient tradition but a large amount of evidence derived from the manuscript itself justify us in holding that belief.

There is, indeed, another claimant which might be put forward against the Cathach Psalter as having been the book which called forth the judgement of Diarmaid—a claimant no longer able to appear in court, since its existence can only be inferred from another source. The Book of Durrow, we know, contains a Hieronymian text of the Gospels. Now in the Book of Durrow there is a very remarkable colophon which runs as follows :

“Rogo beatitudinem tuam sancte presbyter Patrici ut quicumque hunc libellum manu tenuerit meminerit Columbae scriptoris. qui hoc scripsi (mi)hi[m]et evangelium. per xii dierum spatium. g[ra]tia D[omi]ni n[ost]ri s.s (=subscripti).”

This colophon, it will be seen, is addressed to St. Patrick and, apparently, by St. Columba, who was the founder of Durrow, and it asserts that he copied the Gospels in twelve days—a feat not indeed impossible, but which implies haste and strenuous toil.

Now it is plain that the colophon cannot refer to the Book of Durrow itself, a beautifully written and illuminated work which must have cost much time and labour and could in no sense of the word be termed a *libellus*, and which moreover for palaeographical reasons can hardly be assigned to St. Columba. Further, the colophon is in an unusual place. It stands early in the volume, and, as far as the original order of the leaves can be ascertained, it must have followed the *breves causae* of St. Luke and St. John and been followed by the *breves causae* of the other Gospels and the *argumenta* of all four. It seems likely that the scribe copied from an exemplar ending with the *breves causae* of St. Luke and St. John and the colophon, but lacking the remaining parts, which he supplied from another source; and the most natural explanation is that suggested by Dr. Abbott, that the Book of Durrow was copied in the first instance from a manuscript of the Gospels written by St. Columba rapidly in the course of twelve days and ending with the colophon in which he recorded the feat. The term

libellus would therefore apply, not to the Book of Durrow itself, but to the Columban exemplar.

If, then, stress were to be laid on the statement of Keating that the book borrowed from Finnian was a *soiscél* or Gospel, a plausible case might be made out for the *libellus* from which the scribe of Durrow copied. But, as we have seen, no argument can be founded on the use of the word *soiscél*, nor do we even know if Keating found it in his authority, as the Book of Molaga is no longer extant; while on the other hand, we have the tradition recorded by O'Donnell, no doubt the one handed down in the tribe and firmly established long before his day, that the book about which the saints quarrelled was no other than the Psalter of the Cathach.

Of course, all human reasoning is fallible, and we cannot be absolutely certain about the genesis of a manuscript which, at the latest computation, must go back to the seventh century; and we have lost in these days the power of evoking the shades of the past that they may give us information about their doings, as St. Columcille himself is said to have called up the shade of Fergus Mac Róich that he might learn from him the story of the *Táin Bó Cuailgne*. But I think that most readers of Dr. Lawlor's book who have followed his arguments with close attention will be ready to accept without qualms of conscience his theory that we have in the Cathach the work of St. Columcille himself, and, moreover, the book which called forth the judgement of Diarmaid. And if so, it is one of the books which have made history. For to it may be ascribed the initial hostility between Diarmaid and Columcille which led to the battle of Cúldremne and all that followed. But for the irritation caused by that judgement it is hardly likely that Curnan would have been slain while under the saint's protection or that his death would have led to such an irreconcilable difference. The Cathach Psalter was therefore the starting-point of a drama which, though played out in a remote island of Western Europe, was

destined to have far-reaching consequences. It was the immediate cause of much strife and bloodshed. Strife and bloodshed belong, alas, to all phases of the world's history, and when we turn from the stormy present to Europe of the sixth century it is only to meet with

“old unhappy far-off things,
And battles long ago.”

But, as so often happens, “out of the strong came forth sweetness,” and the Cathach involved issues far wider and deeper than the battle of Cúldremne. It brought about a crisis in the outer life of the saint and, we may well believe, in his inner life also; from the exile of Columcille sprang the foundation of Iona; from Iona the Gospel went forth to Northumbria, which became in its turn a centre of missionary enterprise; who can say when the final harvest of the seed sown by Columcille shall be gathered in?

M. JOYNT.