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THE COMMENTARY OF PELAGIUS ON THE EPISTLES OF ST. PAUL.

In the fourth century of our era, England, the Roman province of Britain, was divided into two well marked parts. The northern and western parts were occupied only by troops, but the eastern and southern lowlands contained nothing but purely civilian life.[1] The former districts were the scene of camps, the latter of towns and villas. The civilian part was thoroughly Romanized. The language of the people was Latin, and had been so for about two centuries, as the evidence provided by the excavations at Silchester shows. Latin was the official language; Latin was also the spoken language. As the greatest authority on this subject, Dr. Haverfield, puts it, "Latin was employed freely in the towns of Britain, not only on serious occasions, or by the upper classes, but by servants and workpeople for the most accidental purposes. It was also used, at least by the upper classes, in the country."[2] The same is true with regard to the civilization in general: all the evidence points to the fact that the earlier trades and arts succumbed to the conquering Roman influence.

The third and first half of the fourth centuries were periods of progressive prosperity, but about 350 the decline of Roman influence began, and in 406 or 407 Britain, much to its regret, was severed from Rome. Before this happened, however, the long process of Romanization had culminated, as it might have been expected to culminate, in the production of a great writer, and this great writer was, like all the really great writers of the third and succeeding centuries in the West, a Christian. The Church had followed

[1] Haverfield, *Romanization of Roman Britain* (Lond. [1906],) p. 8.
[2] *Op. cit.* p. 11.

the march of Roman civilization ever since the days of St. Paul; there had been settled Christian communities in Britain from the end of the third century at latest; and now one of the sons of the British Church was to raise a controversy by which the Christian thought of all succeeding ages has been affected.

It has been debated whether Pelagius was a citizen of the Roman Empire, belonging to the province of Britain, or an Irishman. The former view seems more probable, if we take all the circumstances into account; and the term 'Irishman' as applied to him was doubtless the offspring of the contempt and hatred of his enemies, the Irish being amongst the destroyers of Roman civilization in Britain. Another explanation of the term is to suppose that he was descended from Irish settlers in Somerset or Devonshire or Cornwall or the south-west coast of Wales; he could thus very well be called either *Brito* (a Briton) or *Scottus* (an Irishman).

But whether Briton or Irishman, he appears to have found his way to Rome in the closing years of the fourth century. We may suppose that he was animated by a thirst for learning, was possessed of considerable private means, and was naturally drawn to the centre of things. On arriving at Rome, he began to live the life of a monk. He lived simply and purely, and mainly occupied himself with the study of the Bible; and of the Bible his favourite portion appears to have been the Epistles of Paul. He conceived the idea of writing and publishing a commentary on these Epistles, and it is with the fortunes of this commentary rather than its character that I wish to deal in this paper.

There is a little difficulty in understanding why he should have chosen to write a commentary on this part of Scripture specially. There was in existence a commentary which had been published anonymously some twenty or thirty

years before, a commentary which still exists, and has earned the title of the best on these Epistles prior to the Reformation. One possible reason for the plan of Pelagius may have lain in the very fact that this commentary, now commonly called "Ambrosiaster," was anonymous. But whether this was a reason or not, there appear to have been two certain reasons for his action, apart from it. The first was that the "Ambrosiaster" commentary, brief as it is, is bulky in the mass: the second that it was based on a form of Latin Bible which was in ordinary use in Rome a generation before Pelagius' day, but had been to some extent superseded by that revision of the Latin New Testament text, which Jerome had undertaken at the request of Pope Damasus and issued in the years 383–384. This revision is what we now know as the "Vulgate." Pelagius chose, then, the Vulgate text, and wrote very brief comments on it, and after completing it, had it issued in Rome, the great book mart of the world, somewhat before the year 410. From there it circulated all over the Western Empire, and was hailed with pride by his fellow-countrymen.

At first it appears to have attracted little attention, but gradually it made its way by its merit. It fell under the eyes of the famed Augustine, bishop of Hippo in the North of Africa, who was greatly struck by a remark of the author, when dealing with Romans v. 12, "Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned," that children do not carry original sin. It seemed to him so self-evident from this passage that they did that he set himself to refute the statement of Pelagius, and the quiet monk awoke to find himself notorious. East and West took part in the discussion, which was led by some of the foremost minds of the age.

As Professor Bury well remarks[1]: "Pelagianism is not

[1] *Life of St. Patrick*, p. 43 ff.

one of those dull, lifeless heresies which have no more interest than the fact that they once possessed for a short space the minds of men a long while dead. . . . The assertion of the freedom of the will by Pelagius, and his denial of innate sin, represent a reaction of the moral consciousness against the dominance of the religious consciousness, and although he speaks within the Church, he is really asserting the man against the Christian." The view of Pelagius has a real interest for us in the present day, and most of us have moods in which we are tempted to think that he was right. However, the leaders of the Church in the fifth century mostly wrote and worked against it, and the author was eventually excommunicated.

The poet Horace has pithily said: *nescit vox missa reverti*, "a word once uttered cannot be unsaid." The author might be excommunicated, but copies of the book had been multiplied by scribes. It was valued in all quarters of the Latin Empire. How was the Church to retain and use the commentary without seeming to be in league with the author and his detested opinions? There were two, or rather three, ways out of this difficulty. One was to leave it anonymous, if it was so issued. Another was to erase the author's name from copies which bore it, and make it anonymous. A third was to put the name of an unimpeachable, an "orthodox," author upon it.

The number of anonymous copies still existing is a matter of considerable doubt as yet, and some anonymous commentaries on Paul's Epistles in European libraries, which I suspect may be Pelagius, have not hitherto been examined. About one only has practical certainty been reached, that it is a pure form of the original commentary.

There is, however, sufficient evidence of the employment of the other method of preserving commentaries written by heretics. Already in the fifth century the com-

mentary was circulating, by the strange irony of history, under the name of St. Jerome, one of the bitterest opponents of its author. Of this recension there exist at least eleven complete manuscripts, three or four as old as the ninth century, and a number of fragmentary manuscripts, two of which are as old as the ninth century. Little of the objectionable opinions of the author appears to have been eradicated from this form. This makes one suspect that the attribution to Jerome may have been made in good faith, because the commentary was on the Vulgate text, which Jerome made.

The history of this form in print is of some interest. The first printed edition appeared at Basle in 1516, under the editorship of Amorbach. In the preface he tells us that the one manuscript from which he printed it was in "Gothic" (by which he probably meant what we call Merovingian) characters, which through age had almost faded away. This manuscript I have been unable to trace. The results of its use are apparent to every reader of the printed text. It simply bristles with corruptions, such as *mansuetudo* (gentleness) where *consuetudo* (custom) is what the author really wrote.[1] Nor has any real advance been made in subsequent editions. The work was not Jerome; what was worse, it was the production of a heretic: it was hardly worth printing; but if it was to be printed, let it be relegated to an appendix, where nobody would read it; and take no trouble about making it readable by purifying it of textual error. Nothing was done to purify the text till the year 1901, when Professor Zimmer, of Berlin, a distinguished Celtic scholar, to whom these studies are much

[1] In 2 Cor. xi. 28. The reader should try what he can make of the comments on verses 9 and 10 of the same chapter (Migne, *Patrol. Lat.* xxx. 834 D, 835 A of the reprint).

indebted, published a collation of a St. Gall MS., from which hundreds of corrections were obtained.

So silly are some of the attributions of particular works to particular writers that we ought not to be greatly surprised that in the sixth century the name of Gelasius, an orthodox Pope, was sometimes affixed to it. Of this attribution, however, no trace now remains in MSS.

When and where the attribution to Primasius originated it is not possible to say with certainty; nor can we even say as yet what the original form of that recension is. It appears to exist in two manuscripts only, and these have yet to be examined. Primasius, bishop of Hadrumetum, in North Africa, in the sixth century, is a person of some note. He helped to keep the lamp of Christianity and Christian learning burning in that region in the period just before both were extinguished by the advancing hordes of barbarism. He was a leader of Christian opinion, whose advice was in considerable request, and he wrote a commentary on the Apocalypse, which is mainly a compilation from the works of his predecessors. It has attracted considerable attention in recent years, because an early African text of that book can be recovered from it. By common consent, however, Primasius is not regarded as really having had anything to do with the commentary on the Epistles of Paul, which Gagney edited in 1537, and which has since been several times reprinted. A critical examination of this commentary shows that it is based mainly on Pelagius, but that the passages which reflected that author's special opinions have been removed and in their places appear passages of his opponents Augustine and Jerome. It is of some interest to inquire where this mutilation and amplification occurred, and in doing so we shall have to make acquaintance with one of the most remarkable figures of the sixth century.

The preservation of early Christian books is due more to Cassiodorus than to any other man before the age of printing. One of the most distinguished statesmen of his day in Rome, he had a passion for education. After he had held the high position of Prime Minister to Theodoric, he retired to South Italy when sixty years of age, in or about the year 540. There he founded the monastery of Vivaria, as a seminary for the training of clergy. He has left us a description of the valuable library of the institution, which his knowledge, taste and high position enabled him to acquire. Amongst the treasures were many copies of Scripture and a complete set of all the Latin commentaries on the sacred text which up to that time had been written. Undoubtedly it is to him, ultimately, that we owe the best existing copy of the Vulgate Bible. It was copied in England at Wearmouth or Jarrow at the beginning of the eighth century directly or indirectly from a copy in this library of Cassiodorus, and has now found, after some curious wanderings, a resting place in the Laurentian Library at Florence.

Amongst the commentaries on Scripture in the library at Vivaria was that of Pelagius on the Epistles of Paul. Cassiodorus, as an inflexible Augustinian, could not allow the commentary to remain as it was. So he carefully worked through the part on Romans and purged it of its heresy, at the same time "stiffening" it with passages of contrary tendency from the great Latin authors. Having shown the way, he left the purification of the commentary on the other Epistles to his pupils.

This we learn from Cassiodorus himself, and Mr. C. H. Turner is possibly right in drawing the inference that the commentary which we possess under the name Primasius is actually that which Cassiodorus and his pupils prepared on the basis of the Pelagius commentary. The character of

the Primasius commentary corresponds exactly with what Cassiodorus tells us of the proceedings of himself and his pupils, and, as might be expected, the work of the pupils is much more perfunctory than that of the master. The very attribution to Primasius is a confirmation of Mr. Turner's view. Such attributions, as we have seen, are very often foolish, but there is one characteristic they have which is useful. Oftener than not they guess the wrong author, but they generally hit the right period, and this case is no exception to that rule. Cassiodorus and Primasius were contemporaries. The attributor recognized the work to be a sixth century production. He knew only one sixth century commentator, namely, Primasius; so he attributed it to him. Cassiodorus and his pupils had, of course, issued the commentary anonymously.

I have now brought the strange and eventful history of this commentary on the Continent down to the close of the sixth century, but if this were all that could be said, the story would lose half its interest. The Church had done its work of suppression so effectually on the Continent that not a single copy of the commentary is now left with the real author's name attached to it. But such copies did exist, and it was in Ireland and Ireland only that they were to be found. The discovery of the history of Pelagius' commentary in Irish circles is inseparably connected with the name of Heinrich Zimmer, of Berlin, who has unravelled it.

We have seen that on publication the commentary was despatched all over the Western world in the first decade of the fifth century. Amongst the countries which received copies was the Roman Province of Britain. Almost immediately after its reception by his gratified fellow-countrymen, the Roman troops were withdrawn from Britain, which was speedily overrun by the barbarians and closed to influences from the Continent. For a hundred and fifty

years or more the Church grew up in Ireland, (431 onwards) entirely independent of the Church on the Continent. It used the books it had got before the severance. It revered Pelagius as much as Augustine. It kept Easter at the old date, long after it had been given up by the Continental Church. In fact it developed a vigorous life of its own, independent of Christianity elsewhere, and based on the Christianity of the first four centuries. It was probably at first quite innocent of the storm which Pelagius had raised on the Continent, but it continued to follow his doctrines even after it had learned about it. It possessed, used and copied the commentary of that author, with his name attached to it.

I will now as briefly as I can detail the evidence for this knowledge and use of Pelagius' commentary in Ireland. The collection of Irish Canons, dating from the beginning of the eighth century, quotes from Pelagius exactly as it does from Jerome and Augustine: *Pelagius ait, Hieronymus ait, Augustinus ait.* The New Testament part of the book of Armagh, written in the year 807, contains prologues to the Epistles of Paul and a general prologue to all, all with the name of Pelagius. These are the same prologues as have been stolen without acknowledgement and attributed to Jerome in many Continental MSS. of the Vulgate. Again, a famous manuscript at Würzburg, in Bavaria, (*M. th.* f. 12), dating from the seventh or eighth century, and containing the Epistles of Paul in Latin in an Irish handwriting, contains, in addition to a number of glosses in the old Irish language, some nine hundred Latin glosses from Pelagius' commentary, with the symbol *Pil*, an Irish contraction for Pelagius, attached. In a manuscript formerly at Metz, and now at Berlin, in a handwriting of the eleventh century, are to be found glosses labelled in the same way. So in a manuscript of Ratisbon, now at Vienna, of the same date.

The Irish Church led a progressive existence until the beginning of the ruinous Danish invasions. The destruction of monasteries and libraries caused by these raiders drove the Irish in despair from their Ireland to seek homes on the Continent. They took their beloved books with them, and settled at numerous points from the North of France along the Rhine valley, right to Bavaria on the one hand, and North Italy on the other. The manuscripts I have just mentioned are all of Irish origin, as the places they come from or the script in which they are written show. The Irish missionaries gave back to Europe the learning which they had received from her centuries before. They were pioneers of Christianity, education and civilization. They circulated the commentary of their distinguished countryman under his own name, and all traces of it that can be recovered with the author's name can readily be connected with Irish transmission. There is further evidence of great interest.

There are some ages which are better employed in utilizing and making accessible the knowledge of previous ages than in producing original work. The ninth century is notable as an age of compilation. Zmaragdus, abbot of the Benedictine Monastery at St. Mihiel in the Vosges country, in the early years of the ninth century, conceived and executed the plan of a commentary on the passages of Scripture appointed to be read in Church on various Feast days and Sundays. He did not attempt to write a commentary of his own on these lessons of Scripture, but, being a man of learning, he extracted comments from the great writers of the Church, with or without abbreviating them. And this he did not without acknowledgement. He borrowed a system which was perhaps inaugurated, and certainly practised, by our own countryman Bede, and in the margin affixed to each extract the first letter or letters of the name of the author extracted.

In his preface he names as his authorities fifteen Latin writers, two Greek Fathers, and also, as requiring to be read with caution, Pelagius and Origen. Amongst those used Pelagius appears with great frequency, the extracts from him being labelled with the letter P in most cases. This exposition of the Lectionary was printed at Strassburg in 1536, and reprinted at Paris in 1851. The printed edition is far from satisfactory, but happily there are in existence a dozen or so manuscripts not far removed in date from Zmaragdus himself, which make it possible to restore the *ipsissima verba* of his compilation.

It ought, perhaps, to be mentioned that this great work of Zmaragdus has been unworthily neglected by scholars. The copies of the great Christian authors which he possessed must have been at least as old as the eighth century, and may have been much older. He is, therefore, a valuable witness to the text, not only of Pelagius, but of Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome and others. He appears even to have known a work of Origen on the Epistle to the Hebrews. A pressing need of patristic scholarship is a critical edition of Zmaragdus' Exposition, with all the extracts tracked to their original sources.

I have mentioned that he knew and used the commentary of Pelagius under its author's name. As Zmaragdus cannot be shown to have had any connexion with Ireland, this fact may seem to contradict my statement that Ireland alone preserved the commentary under its author's name. In reality it does not contradict it. An examination of the transcriptional errors in the quotations from Pelagius has shown me that his copy of Pelagius was written in Irish handwriting, and Zmaragdus thus falls into line with the Irish tradition.

Before going on to mention other compilations of the ninth century in which our commentary was used, I must

not forget a very important historical fact. The catalogues of three monastic libraries on the Continent, dating from the ninth and tenth centuries, show that these libraries each possessed in those centuries a copy of Pelagius under his own name. The libraries were at St. Riquier, near Abbeville, in Picardy, Lorsch on the Rhine, and St. Gall, near the Lake of Constance in Switzerland. All three places were on the direct line of Irish missionary travel on the Continent, and there can be no doubt that they owed their copies of Pelagius to the Irish. It is not certain that any of those three manuscripts still survives, though Zimmer believes that he has discovered the St. Gall one at St. Gall.

Apparently about the same time as Zmaragdus was working, another compiler made a commentary on all the Epistles of Paul by a similar method. It is uncertain who the compiler was. The commentary is sometimes attributed to Haymo (of Halberstadt), sometimes to Remigius (of Auxerre), and both attributions occur in ninth century MSS.; of which there are three, two crediting it to Haymo, one to Remigius. Whether the compiler possessed a pure text of Pelagius or the Pseudo-Primasius form only, is at present uncertain.

There is no such uncertainty about another compilation of the same century. Sedulius, a learned Irishman, whose sphere of activity was the Rhine valley, put together a commentary on the Epistles of Paul. He names Pelagius at least once, and extracts his commentary throughout. The date of his activity was about the middle of the ninth century. It appears to me that he sometimes used what Zmaragdus had collected before him, as well as the Pelagius and other ancient commentaries themselves.

The remaining evidence for the existence of the commentary under the name of its author can be very briefly related. A Munich MS. of the Epistles of Paul, contemporary

with the Berlin one already mentioned, i.e. belonging to the end of the eleventh century, contains glosses from Pelagius, who is named; as does also a thirteenth century MS. at Berne. In the same century a deacon of Verona, named John, mentions that he had seen a copy of the commentary with the author's name.

Later than this there appears no trace of it; and I must now briefly state how I think the commentary can be restored to its original form. The primary task is to collate such anonymous MSS. as may exist, then the Pseudo-Jerome MSS. and then those of Pseudo-Primasius. When this has been done, the editor has, in what is common to all, the commentary in a reasonably exact form. He must then collate MSS. of Zmaragdus, Haymo-Remigius and Sedulius, and note the form of the Pelagian extracts in these, as compared with those in his chief sources. Lastly, he must collect from the glossed manuscripts the clauses and sentences to be found there.

The task is long and difficult, but appears to be worth attempting. I hope that success will follow the attempt. The work of Zimmer already mentioned, and that of Hellmann, entitled *Sedulius Scottus* (Munich, 1906), have, in sifting the materials of Irish *provenance*, made a beginning which is very helpful to the investigator. The present writer is seeking to carry on the work, and expects to publish an edition of the Pelagius Commentary, with introductory essays, in the Cambridge *Texts and Studies relating to Biblical and Patristic Literature*, edited by the Dean of Westminster.

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