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THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND CHILD.
FROM THE BOOK OF KELLS.

*(Photo by A. Carrol, 16 Merrion Square North, Dublin).*

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# The Book of Kells.

By DANIEL NYHAN.

You ancient Book that still sublime
Resists the crumbling touch of Time ;
How strongly still your form displays
The piety of ancient days.
E'en now, as lost in thought profound,
I view your beauteous Page around
And pensive gaze with wistful eyes—
The Past returns—the Present flies —(*Burns.—Adapted*)

I RECENTLY visited Dublin, and went into Trinity College to see the Book of Kells—the *chef de oeuvre* of all the Celtic Manuscripts. I entered the main reading room and was informed that the Book was upstairs.

The room (Library room) is about 240 feet in length, lit by means of 100 windows. The show-cases are ranged in the middle of the apartment, and, at the further end, the Book of Kells may be seen, a magnifying glass reposing beside it for occasional use.

The show-cases contain old coins, old manuscripts, and curios of all descriptions. The signature of Mary Queen of Scots may be seen in an old volume, and an autograph letter of Dean Swiftes. Carved oak pedestals are ranged between the stalls. Near-by may be noticed a photograph of Ussher . . . I will deal now with the Book of Kells. . . .

It is an illuminated vellum manuscript of the Four Gospels. The language is Latin, but the characters are Gaelic. It contains at present 339 leaves 11 inches by 9. Five leaves are missing, including the last one, which might have contained the name of the scribe. It was written in St. Columba's Monastery at Kells in the eighth century. Besides the Four Gospels, it contains matters appertaining to the Prolegomena of Scripture, such as the Canons of Eusebius ; and on the reverse of the Illuminated pages there are some documents in Irish, referring to property left to the Church of Kells for pious purposes. Those are in a *different* hand.

It had a gold cover, studded with jewels, originally. Stolen from the Monastery in 1006—eight years before Clontarf—it was found by a workman under some sods near the outer walls, two months later. The cover, which was the thief's quest, had been torn off. During the troublous years following the dissolution of the Monasteries it passed into the hands of a man named Plunkett, who gave it to Ussher, who placed it in Trinity College years afterwards. The Kells volume was housed in Dublin Castle for a time with Bishop Ussher's collection, and here, it is said, a curio hunter tore off the five leaves which are missing. Another curious fact : It is said the Danes ravaged the Monastery at Kells three times and that somehow the Book escaped destruction. So it may be said of the old Manuscript that though " oft doomed to 'death,' it was fated not to 'die!'" In 1661 the transfer of the books from Dublin Castle to Trinity College took place.

At the commencement of the St. Matthew Gospel, nearly every sentence begins with a capital letter. The designs are of great variety—likenesses

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of various animals being interlaced in the finely traced designs with extraordinary beauty. Birds appear, and fishes twine in and out, and the figure of a man appears within the letters pointing to the various objects around him. The word "Et" often begins a sentence. Besides those "letter designs" there are illuminations occupying an entire page.

There are *seven* such in St. Matthew and two or three in each of the other Gospels. Four contain portraits of the Evangelists, one of St. John, one of St. Mark. There is one supposed to represent Our Lord in St. Matthew. St. John holds a book in one hand and a stylus for writing in the other. The Four living creatures of the Apocalypse are seen frequently in the volume.

The finest illumination in St. Matthew is undoubtedly at the 18th verse on the words :—"Christi autem generatio."

The letters "Chr" are very large. On the left side two angels hold each a book, at the top the Blessed Virgin is seen looking down, and in herma form is St. Joseph. There is a very homely illustration at the bottom of the page. Two cats are seated with their kittens playing about them. It at once attracts attention.

The first of the Portraits in St. Matthew is that of The Blessed Virgin seated in a chair with the Child in her arms. It is finely done.

In St. Luke the Temptation of Christ is narrated. It is very interesting. The Devil is a small figure—he cuts a sorry figure in the page. Sir Edward Sullivan says, speaking of this Page :—"The drawing here is of a strangely barbarous character, but the draughtsman for all that seems to have been well aware of what was expected of him. The small size of the devil is obviously intended to convey a suggestion of his powerlessness in the presence of the Saviour. It is noticable, too, that Satan here has wings, but no tail. The figures on the right of Christ are disciples, those above his head, angels. The execution of this page shows also very clearly that more than one artist was engaged in the illumination of the Book of Kells. The better of the two was an incomparable master of his art, the other possessed only very ordinary powers."

I must now refer to the pigments, which are laid on thickly, mixed with glue, gum, or gelatine. There is no staining of the vellum. The colours are black, a tint resembling burnt sienna, a bright red, yellow, a neutral green, an emerald green, a lilac and reddish purple. The yellow is a "filling up" colour—used for filling up finely traced designs. Mr. W. N. Hartley, F.R.S., read a paper in 1885 "On the colouring matters employed in the Illuminations in the Book of Kells." Perhaps I am permitted to quote :—"The lamp-black (black) is used, or possibly charred fishbones in a finely divided state. The reds, yellow, greens, and blue are obtained by grinding artificially coloured enamels or glasses or natural mineral substances. The reddish purple is finely ground glass, coloured with gold. It is sparingly used, and this is an evidence of its costly nature. The lilac tint of the Book of Kells was probably a lake prepared from lichens. The blue pigment is made by preparing a frit or glass from wood ashes or alkali sand and copper ore. A remarkable fact about this pigment—it is unaltered by exposure to sun or air."

"The red colour of the Book of Kells is a pigment composed of ore of arsenic called rialgur, this on exposure to the air turns yellow. The Book of Kells was originally coloured red—I mean the traceries—these on exposure to light turned yellow, thus becoming orpiment." This theory, I believe, has the support of Dr. Joly.

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Geraldus Cambrensis writes of the Book of Kells :—" If you look closely, and penetrate the secrets of the art, you will discover such delicate and subtile lines, so closely wrought, so twisted, and interwoven and adorned with colours, still fresh, that you will acknowledge all this is the work rather of angelic than of human skill." Cambrensis saw the Book in in Kildare. Professor Middleton has informed us that " with the aid of a microscope, Mr. Westwood counted in the space of one inch, no less than 158 interlacements of bands or ribands, each composed of a strip of white bordered on *both* sides with a black line."

The Book of Durrow—an ornamented copy of the Four Gospels (Vulgate version)—is second only in importance to the Book of Kells. It was kept in a silver casket by Flann, son of Malachy, in 916. It is supposed to possess curative powers. The " Book of Lindisfarne," third in importance, is in the British Museum.

Saint Patrick's Breastplate may be read in a old Volume near by the Book of Kells. Gaelic scholars are deeply interested in this.

The unknown artist of the Book of Kells has long since " gone to that bourne from whence no traveller returns." He " touched nothing that he did not *adorn*." But the Tide of Time has not effaced the imprint of his Footsteps on the sands.

[I thank Mr. J. Hanna, Assistant Librarian, Trinity College, for his kindness in helping me to secure the Print, the work of A. Carrol, 16 Merrion Square North, Dublin.]

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# Necrology.

## CHARLES AUSTIN BUNWORTH CAMPION, O.B.E.

Contributed by JAMES FRANKLIN WILLIAMSON.

Mr. C. A. B. Campion, an old and valued Member of the Society, died in London, on 22nd July, 1929.

Charles Austin Bunworth Campion was born at Leitrim House, Kilworth, County Cork, Ireland, on 30th September 1863. After the death of his father, in 1880, he left Ireland for Australia, and passed the succeeding twenty-seven years there, mainly in Queensland and New South Wales. All of this period was spent in banking in the service of the Australian Joint Stock Bank, Ltd.

In 1907, he was appointed to London to the management of the London office of his Bank, and was responsible for the conduct in England of the reconstruction arrangements of the Bank, when the name was changed to The Australian Bank of Commerce Limited.

In 1912, the Commonwealth Bank of Australia was founded by the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia, and he was given the appointment of Manager of the London office of this Bank, which position he held until his retirement in 1925. No inconsiderable part of the progress of The Commonwealth Bank has been due to the operations of the London office, which from the first had been under the charge of Mr. Campion, the Manager, and a *persona grata* in London financial circles. As the Commonwealth Bank acted as Bankers to the Federal Government, this was an office of much responsibility, and during the War, all Australia's War finance, and the transactions of the Australian Forces in Europe were virtually in his charge, and

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