

THE BOOK OF DURROW

(Codex Durmachensis)

This famous and beautiful manuscript is owned by the library of Trinity College, Dublin. It is a Latin text of the four Gospels, but as with many aspects of this volume, it is uncertain whether it was written in Northumbria, Iona or Ireland. It is older than the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels, and was probably done in the early part of the seventh century. The script is Irish, as are spelling and other characteristics. It is simpler in its use of colour, yet quite as magnificent in many of its pages as these other illustrious manuscripts.

The occasion of its production is unknown, but it is likely to have marked some epoch in the history of the Monastery at Durrow in Kings County, Ireland. This institution was founded about 546 A.D. by St. Columba, and for three centuries ranked as the premier Columban foundation in Ireland. In any case, the production or possession of a magnificent religious book was regarded as most meritorious, and in time such volumes became venerated as holy relics.

The light that is shed upon the past from the study of this Codex is impressive. Of the two large quarto volumes now held, one is devoted to the text, the other to a detailed analysis of every aspect of its history, art, text, script and origin-theories. The reproduction has been done in Switzerland by the Urs Graf Verlag in an edition of 650 copies. A good proportion of the plates are in colour, fairly faithfully printed, and the rest of the 270 pages in black and white.

This is an addition to much comparable material in the Library, and if one is to justify the considerable cost involved, it is enough to say that great books, like great works of art, tend to be expensive by the ordinary canons of value, and that it is of some library the duty to see that they are available to New Zealanders, students or otherwise.