

Bede as a Classical and a Patristic Scholar¹

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Along the many and complex problems with which the history of Europe in the Middle Ages—and especially the earlier period of the Middle Ages—teems is the character of the intellectual heritage transmitted to medieval men from classical and later Roman imperial times. The topic has engaged the attention of many scholars, amongst them men of the greatest eminence, so that much which fifty years ago was still dark and uncertain is now clear and beyond dispute. Yet the old notions and misconceptions die hard, especially in books approximating to the text book class. In a recently published volume on the Middle Ages intended for university freshmen there is much that is excellent and abreast of the most recent investigations; but the sections on early medieval education and scholarship seem to show that the author has never read anything on that subject later than Mullinger's *Schools of Charles the Great*. Even in larger works it is not uncommon to find the author merely repeating what the last man before him has said, without inquiring into controversial matters for himself. Years ago Ludwig Traube pointed the way to a correct estimate of Greek studies

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in Western Europe during the earlier Middle Ages, and subsequent research, while it has greatly added to the evidence collected by him, has only fortified his general conclusions. "Nevertheless one still finds Alcuin or Hrabanus Maurus listed amongst those who knew Greek, on the strength of a few words or phrases that, as a very little research shows, were taken over by them from Jerome. What is now needed is not striking generalisations, but a patient accumulation of data, not brilliant reinterpretations, but critical editions of the many texts that are still only available in antiquated and faulty publications. It is the purpose of this paper to examine the work of only a single author—to consider, without any claim, to have studied all his writings, the extent of the Venerable Bede's reading and method of work. Since his activity as an author extended over about forty years, it may also prove possible to gain here and there some little insight into the growth of his mind. In taking Bede as the subject of our inquiry we are, moreover, considering a man not only unique in himself, but the most important forerunner of the Carolingian Revival, indeed one of the outstanding figures of the whole medieval period. His example shows us what could be done to revive humane and theological studies; but we must not fall into the error of believing that there were many besides him who did it. In actual fact there were but few men who came within measurable distance of his achievement, and fewer still who accomplished more.

¹ The following abbreviations have been used throughout: *P.L.* = Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, references being to volume, column, and section. *C.S.E.L.* = *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, references being to volume, page, and line. *M.G.H.A.A.* = *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Auctores antiquissimi*, cited by volume and page.

When Bede was born neither of the two monastic houses with which his name is so closely linked was yet founded; only four or five years had passed since Theodore of Tarsus landed in England. On the other hand, much civilising work had been carried on for the past half-century in the northern parts of England by Paulinus, Wilfrith, and their associates, and by the Irish from Iona. These last laid the foundations of Northumbrian scholarship and gave to the English a script which they trans-

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lated into a national hand. The monastery of Wearmouth was founded in 674 by Benedict Biscop. To the care of its abbot and teachers the boy Bede was entrusted at the age of seven. When he was nine or ten, another religious house was established near-by at Jarrow. Wearmouth and Jarrow were indeed intended to form a single monastery. But political and ecclesiastical affairs often demanded Benedict Biscop's presence elsewhere, so that in practice each house had its own permanent head. Bede appears to have been transferred to Jarrow at, or soon after, its foundation; at all events, if the identification of him with the small choirboy, who aided abbot Ceolfrith to carry on the services of the Church during the awful visitation of the plague in 686, is correct, he was established by that year in the surroundings where he was to pass the remainder of his life. There is but little information about the schools at Wearmouth and Jarrow. The picture which modern writers have been apt to draw, by using in the main the evidence of the Carolingian schools, is likely to be more misleading than helpful. Two facts, however, stand out: Benedict Biscop had brought many books to the north and Abbot Ceolfrith added greatly to them.² In the second place, even the earliest works of Bede, though they may show little originality, make it abundantly clear that he had already then read widely, doubtless far more widely than any of his school-fellows. It is well to remind oneself, moreover, in order properly to appraise the magnitude of Bede's achievement, that Latin was a foreign language to the people of England. Bede's mastery over Latin idiom, like the German Einhard's a century later, is the more astounding.

Bede's earliest treatises—*De arte metrica*, *De schematibus et tropis*, *De orthographia*³—were intended for school

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use. They prove that he was brought up on, and, when he became himself a teacher, adapted and excerpted such writers as Donatus, Charisius, Audax, Caper, and other grammarians of the later Roman imperial age. Wide reading from the first in the Old and New Testament, doubtless accompanied by much memorisation, gave Bede an unrivalled knowledge of the Bible text. In all his works Biblical citations from every part of the Sacred Writings abound; but from no book does the former choirboy quote more frequently than from the Psalms.

The attitude of leading churchmen to pagan literature had varied from age to age, and continued to vary after Bede's time. Amongst the Fathers, Basil the Great and Jerome adopted the most liberal, Gregory I the most hostile, position.⁴ In England during the seventh century

² Bede, *Historia abbatum*, 4, 6, 9, 11, 13.

³ The *De arte metrica* and *De orthographia* should be consulted in volume 7 of Keil's *Grammatici Latini*: the *De schematibus et tropis* in Halm's *Rhetores Latini Minores*.

⁴ For a fuller discussion of this topic, cf. my *Thought and Letters in Western Europe*, pp. 26 ff., 80-1, 166 ff.

the two tendencies are well represented by Aldhelm and Bede. Aldhelm's poetry is steeped in Virgil, and in his prose writings he parades the tortuous and artificial conceits of the late imperial rhetorical schools. Bede, as the might expect from a profound admirer of Gregory I, in his early works makes very sparing use of illustrations from pagan authors. The *De schematibus et tropis* contains but one non-Biblical citation, and in the other two treatises also examples from the Bible and from Christian authors preponderate. Still, there is a fair array of quotations from classical sources which can easily lead the unwary astray. We must not be misled by the occurrence of single lines from Terence, Lucretius, Varro, Lucilius, the *ars poetica* of Horace, Martial, or Sallust; for, if we look a little further, we find the identical quotations in the grammarians used by Bede or else in the *Etymologies* of Isidore.⁵ Then, too, a tersely expressed sentiment, particularly if it were in verse and in conformity with Christian teaching, might become part

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of the teacher's stock-in-trade, and its original source be forgotten. The line of Juvenal,

Crescit amor nummi, quantum ipsa pecunia crescit⁶

was cited by Isidore; it is used by Bede, and it reappears in three places in Christian of Stavelot's commentary on Matthew.⁷ Neither Bede nor Christian seems to have known the author of the line. In fact, the one poet of the classical period whom Bede can be safely said to have known at first hand was Virgil. True, many of the Virgilian quotations are found in the grammarians, but there is a good sprinkling of those that do not appear to come from an intermediate source. Furthermore, Virgil was a favourite author of the Irish, and his works were certainly in England before Bede's time. Their extensive use by Aldhelm is sufficient proof of this. Bede refers in different ways to the poet. Sometimes it is directly by name. *Lege in Virgilio*, he writes in his commentary on Samuel,

Loricam consertam hamis auroque trilicem.⁸

Or again, in the commentary on the General Epistles *iuxta illud Maronis*,

Dat sine mente sonum.⁹

At other times the allusion is more vague. *Cui simillimum est illus etiam saecularium litterarum*:

Qui candore nives anteirent, cursibus auras.¹⁰

⁵ Line 763 from Terence's *Eunuchus*, cited in *De orthographia* (291, 22), doubtless comes from a grammarian, though it is not found elsewhere, in Keil.

⁶ *Juvenal*, 14, 139.

⁷ Bede, *P.L.*, 91, 1025A. For Christian, see my article in *Harvard Theological Review* 20 (1927), p. 137, note 30.

⁸ *Aen.*, 3, 467 in *P.L.*, 91, 611D.

⁹ *Aen.*, 10, 640 in *P.L.*, 93, 74A.

¹⁰ *Aen.*, 12, 84 in *P.L.*, 91, 721A.

*Unde Poeta dicit*¹¹ is yet another turn, while sometimes a citation is introduced without any preparation at all.¹² In

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one such case Bede's memory failed badly; for the line in the *Second Eclogue*,

Lao mihi non aestdte novum, non frigore defit,

appears thus:

Nec tibi lac aestate novum nec frigore desit.¹³

There are two quotations from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in the commentary on Genesis; but the former—three lines from Book I—is to be found in Isidore of Seville.¹⁴ The other—a single line from Book 4—I have not been able to trace in any intermediate source;¹⁵ yet it seems very doubtful whether Bede had read the poem, a doubt which applies to Aldhelm also.¹⁶ A few other Ovidian tags in Bede's early treatises are all to be found in the grammarians. The evidence for some acquaintance with Lucan is stronger, though not conclusive. Bede quotes six lines from the *exordium* of the *Pharsalia*, introducing them with the remark, "an ancient poet being about to describe the battles of Caesar and Pompey begins thus."¹⁷ In one of his scientific treatises Bede cites twelve lines of Ausonius, but it is questionable whether he knew the poet's name.¹⁸ The classical prose-writers, with one exception, have left little discoverable trace. In the *De orthographia* we light upon a few words from Cicero's *Pro Cluentio* not quoted by extant grammarians, and a sentence attributed to Cicero but still unidentified.¹⁹ In one of the Biblical commentaries Bede reproduces the famous sentence from Suetonius' *Life of Claudius*; *Claudius Iudaeos, impulsom Christo assiduo*

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*tumultuantes, Roma expulit.*²⁰ But although the citation does not appear in Rufinus' translation of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, a work constantly, used by Bede in this and other commentaries, its character is such that we can safely assume a Patristic author to have been the intermediate source. The one exception to which I have just referred is the *Natural History* of Pliny the Elder. The Second Book of this work was used extensively by Bede in his scientific treatises; he seems also to have known Books 4, 5, 5, 13, and 16, but there is nothing to show that he knew the later books of the *Natural History*.²¹ Of the Christian poets

¹¹ *P.L.*, 91, 743D, introducing *Aen.*, 3, 126-7.

¹² E.g., *P.L.*, 91, 400D and 1019C.

¹³ *Ecl.*, 2, 22 in *P.L.*, 91, 1019C.

¹⁴ *Ovid, Met.*, I, 84-6 in *Isid., Etym.*, II, 1, 5.

¹⁵ *Ovid, Met.*, 4, 58 in *P.L.*, 91, 126C.

¹⁶ The only evidence given by Ehwald in his edition of Aldhelm (*M.G.H.A.A.*, 15) is that two of the riddles exhibit similarities to two passages of the *Metamorphoses*.

¹⁷ Keil, *Gramm. Lat.*, 7, 245, 9 ff.

¹⁸ *De temporum ratione*, ch. 16. I owe this reference to the thesis of C. W. Jones named below, p. 76, note. 1.

¹⁹ Keil, *op. cit.*, 7.267, 18 and 269, 2-3. The second citation—*solis innocens acclammationibus punitus est*—is not in the *Thesaurus* (s.v. *acclamatio*). A possible allusion to Livy appears in Keil, *op. cit.*, 7, 292, 18.

²⁰ *Suet. Claud.*, 43 in *P.L.*, 92, 981B. All the Bede manuscripts that I have seen read *Christo*, not *Chresto*.

²¹ Cf. below, pp. 77 and 86. In *P.L.*, 92, 1023D-1024A Bede transcribes a sentence from Pliny, *N.H.*, 16, 9. Jones in his thesis (cf. below, p. 76) is justified in arguing that it is inconceivable that Bede knew Book 18, else he could not have failed to use it when writing the *De temporum ratione*. That there was in Bede's time a

there was evidently a large selection at Jarrow, and Bede studied and loved there. Not only did he use them for purposes of illustration in his early school-treatises in preference to classical poets, but he constantly quotes from them in his later works. Ambrose, Juvenius, Prudentius, Paulinus of Nola, Sedulius, Prosper, the *De Virginitate* and some other poems by Fortunatus, and Arator²² are all represented. Less known than any of these is Cyprianus Gallus, from whose epic on the Pentateuch Bede quotes fifteen lines. The epic is in hexameters, but there are several insertions in lyric metres. One of these serves Bede as an example of the Phalaecian.²³ It is an interesting fact that the same poet was known also to Bede's older contemporary, Aldhelm.

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If one views Bede's work as a whole, one must say that his attention to theology, and especially to exegesis, came first and never waned throughout his life. But his scientific attainments, particularly for the age in which he lived, were far from negligible. The practical application of mathematics to chronological problems was of absorbing attraction to him and bore fruit in the early work, *De temporibus*, and in the more elaborate composition of his mature years, the *De temporum ratione*, finished in 725. Between these two he composed the brief cosmological treatise, *De natura rerum*. For his special interest in chronology there was a general and a particular reason. A satisfactory chronological system applicable to world history—a chronological framework into which all historic events since the creation of the world could be fitted—seemed essential to one with as strong a historical sense as Bede. For it may be observed in passing that, apart from the *Ecclesiastical History*, which by universal consent is the supreme example of Bede's genius, the interest in historical occurrences and in chronology meets one at every turn in his numerous Biblical commentaries. A more special reason for the chronological treatises is the practical application of time-reckoning to the Easter question, which, as is well known, was a matter of hot dispute between the Roman and Celtic Churches before and during Bede's day. A most competent investigation by a young American scholar, Dr. Charles W. Jones, has demonstrated, amongst other things, that Bede's library on Easter calculation or the Paschal Question was by 725 astonishingly complete. It comprised not only the better known Patristic writings in which this question was discussed, but special treatises like those of Dionysius Exiguus, Victor of Capua, and Polemius Silvius.²⁴

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Bede's historical library was serviceable, though not specially remarkable, comprising Josephus, Jerome's translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle*, Rufinus' version of Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, Grosius, Eutropius, a good selection of chronicles, including that by

complete manuscript of the *Natural History* in England can, I think, be ruled out. Extant manuscripts of Pliny, it is true, number over 200, but those of the earlier group contain only small portions of the whole, while even in the later group very few manuscripts are approximately complete.

²² Bede used Arator especially when writing his commentary on Acts. One of the earliest manuscripts of the latter (Paris, Bibl. Nat., lat. 12284; saec. ix) also contains Arator's poem. At Manchester, MS. Rylands 107 contains Bede's commentary amplified by many citations from Arator, to illustrate passages in Acts, not elucidated by Bede.

²³ Keil, *Gramm. Lat.*, 7, 234, 16-30.

²⁴ Charles W. Jones, *Materials for an edition of Bede's De Temporibus ratione*, a thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in June, 1932. Two typewritten copies of the work are in the library of Cornell University.

Marcellinus Comes.²⁵ and, for literary history, Jerome's *De viris illustribus* with Genadius' continuation. To this list may be added the *Liber Pontificalis* and the chronological treatises referred to in connection with Bede's scientific books, and finally Gildas. However, since the sources for the *Ecclesiastical History* have been investigated by Plummer, we may turn at once to the commentaries. Bede's use of Rufinus, and of the historical information scattered through the many works of Jerome with which, as will be seen, he was familiar, needs no further discussion; but a word or two about two passages from Marcellinus and about Josephus will not be out of place. Bede's commentary on Mark contains a long story about the finding of John the Baptist's head and the chapter of accidents by which this precious relic came to be buried at Edessa.²⁶ The whole of this narrative is adapted from Marcellinus. Bede also referred to that author in his commentary on the Catholic Epistles, but apparently cited from memory with unfortunate results.

In commenting on the words, "for ever, kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed and hath been tamed of mankind,"²⁷ he gives two illustrations. One he attributes to Pliny, the other to Marcellinus; both attributions appear to be wrong. The tale, said to be from Pliny, of an Egyptian asp, which was tamed by the father of a family and came regularly every day from its lair to get its food-allowance (*annona!*), does not seem to be in the *Natural History*. The story from Marcellinus is to the effect that the emperor Anastasius

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received from India a present of a tame tiger. Actually Marcellinus relates that in A.D. 496 "India sent to the emperor Anastasius as a gift an elephant, which our poet Plautus calls *lucabus*, and two giraffes".²⁸ There is not a word concerning tigers; but, on the other hand, a tame tiger was, according to Pliny, one of the sights when the theatre of Marcellus was formally dedicated in 11 B.C.²⁹ While I hesitate to ascribe to Bede a confusion of Marcellus with Marcellinus, there is not any doubt that he confused his references. The source of the asp-story has so far eluded me.

Bede's acquaintance with the writings of Josephus is a matter of considerable complexity. If, for example, we take the commentary on Acts, we find that five out of six passages in which Josephus is mentioned by name come not directly from him, but from Rufinus' version of Eusebius. The sixth passage refers to an Old Testament episode in Josephus, but it is not clear whether Bede was using a Latin translation of the *Antiquities*, or an intermediate source, or the Greek original. The same is true in the case of a reference found in Bede's *Retractations*. But, indeed, appeals to the authority of Josephus are exceedingly numerous in our author, particularly in the commentaries devoted to the historical books of the Old Testament.³⁰ In his *Epistle to Plegwin*. Bede quotes verbatim a passage from the treatise against Apion; nevertheless comparison makes it evident that he did not use the Cassiodorean version.³¹ So much is certain: some of Bede's citations or adaptations from Josephus were made directly

²⁵ For the sources of Bede's *Chronicle*, cf. Mommsen's edition in *M.G.H. Chronica Minora*, 3.

²⁶ *P.L.*, 92, 192D-193A; Marcellinus in *M.G.H.A.A.*, 11, 84-5.

²⁷ James, 3, 7; *P.L.*, 93, 28A-E.

²⁸ *M.G.H.A.A.*, II, 72.

²⁹ Pliny, *N.H.*, 8, 65.

³⁰ E.g., *P.L.*, 91, 547C, 721C, 722A, 848A, 859B, 876D.

³¹ See Boysen's edition in *C.S.E.L.*, 37.

from that historian, while others were taken over from Rufinus or perhaps from Jerome. But whether Bede read Josephus in the original Greek must remain undecided still. It seems by no means impossible that he did. I cannot leave the subject of Bede's historical studies without pointing out that he quotes in one place

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some lines from his great predecessor in the art of historical composition, Gregory of Tours.³² It is also interesting to find that the oldest manuscripts of the *Retractations*—headed by one written in the first half of the ninth century³³—gives the name of the author cited as *Georgius*, not *Gregorius*. Georgius Florentius was the name of the historian of the Franks, who adopted that of Gregory in memory of his maternal great-grandfather.

It is, however, only when we investigate the Patristic authors known to Bede that we get a full insight into the breadth of his studies, and, incidentally, into the remarkable richness of the library or libraries to which he had access. I propose to speak in some detail of Bede's two commentaries on Acts, and then to supplement this by some reference to his other exegetical works. The *Commentary* and the *Retractations on Acts* are especially instructive for our purpose, because, while they seek to elucidate the same book of the New Testament, they were written by Bede at different times of his life. The one was composed some time between 709 and 716, the other not till after 731.³⁴ In 1896 the late Charles Plummer remarked in his edition of the *Ecclesiastical History*: "a really critical edition of Bede which should show exactly how much he borrowed and how much is original is a great desideratum; 'necdum illud merui videre.'"³⁵ In 1933 the stigma still attaches to England and to English scholarship that all but one of the works composed by one of the greatest of her scholars must be read in an edition

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which; even. for the time when it was published, was a disgrace, or else in the slightly emended reprint of Giles' text reproduced in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*. It is difficult to believe that, had Bede been a native of France or Germany, he would have suffered such long neglect in the country of his birth. It may here be further remarked that a proper understanding of Bede's methods as a commentator will help to illuminate the general practice of the medieval scholar, save that, at least in the earlier centuries, few approached within measurable distance of his standards.

The truth is that modern critics are still far too vague in their treatment of such questions. Medieval scholars commonly did not indicate at all the works from which they borrowed, or, if they did, usually thought it sufficient to give the author's name. If that author was a *vir*

³² *P.L.*, 92, 1032B; Greg. Turon, *H.F.*, 5, 26 (34), a description of a severe epidemic that visited Gaul in A.D. 580.

³³ Karlsruhe, *Augiensis LXXVII*. For a full description of this manuscript, which contains both the Acts commentaries, see A. Holder, *Die Reichenauer Handschriften*.

³⁴ The *Retractations* is not included in Bede's own list of his writings appended to the *Ecclesiastical History* (5, 34) and was therefore written after that work. The interesting reference in the *Retractations* (*P.L.*, 92, 1027D) to a living Pope must accordingly be to Gregory III, who became Pope in 731.

³⁵ *Hist. Eccles.*, I, p. xxiii, note 3.

unius libri, no great trouble ensues; but a general reference to Augustine or Jerome or Gregory the Great is a very different matter. To say, as has often been done, that this or that medieval writer knew or used Augustine, really tells one nothing in view of the African Father's enormous literary output. Bede himself seems to follow no consistent practice. Not infrequently he gives a writer's name and no more; occasionally—but considering how much he wrote, it is not often—he names the work as well.³⁶ Far more commonly, however, there is no indication in the text that a phrase, or a sentence, or even a paragraph has been taken over from a previous writer. To every one quotation attributed by name to Gregory the Great one can find ten or a dozen in Bede's works that are outwardly indistinguishable from Bede's own comments. Bede's own usage, it is true, was also to indicate in the margin the sources from which he borrowed, and he requested his copyists not to omit these signs. Until very recently it was universally assumed that all medieval

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scribes had ignored his request. But in 1926 Father Sutcliffe pointed out that two extant manuscripts of Bede's commentary on Mark preserve these source-indications for the borrowed material from the four Doctors of the Church. More recently the present writer has found similar source-marks, wholly or partially preserved, in sixteen other manuscripts of the same commentary, and, besides this, *marginalia* of a like character in nine manuscripts of the commentary on Luke.³⁷ Even so the modern editor is still far from his goal, if he only knows that such and such a quotation was taken by Bede from one of these Fathers. Moreover, if we would reach a proper estimate of what the English libraries in Bede's time contained, we must seek to ascertain not merely what authors, but what works by those authors, were then available in our island. For example, a copy of Augustine's *Retractations* in the Mayence library about the middle of the ninth century had all those works by Augustine marked which were then in that collection. While the list numbers forty-eight items, the *De doctrina Christiana* and other notable works are absent.³⁸ Even the cathedral library at Lyons, which in the time of Deacon Florus possessed a magnificent body of Augustinian writings, probably did not own all his works.³⁹ These examples of rich collections, however, belong to a time when, under the influence of the Carolingian Revival, *scriptoria* had greatly multiplied, and many of these kept working at full pressure for years. How much more restricted, then, must the resources of Wearmouth-Jarrow, of York, and even of Canterbury have been at the beginning of the eighth century, notwithstanding the scholarly zeal of Theodore and Hadrian in the south and of Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrith in the north of England.

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The following sources, so far, as I have been able to trace then, were consulted by Bede in writing his commentary on Acts:⁴⁰ of Gregory the Great the *Homilies on Ezekiel* and on the

³⁶ For instance, *Cyprianus in libro de habitu virginum* (P.L., 93, 46D) or Hieronymus in *historia beatae Paulae*, that is to say, Epistle 108 (P.L., 92, 958A).

³⁷ E. J. Sutcliffe, S.J., in *Biblica*, 7 (1926), pp. 428-39: M. L. W. Laistner in *Journal of Theological Studies* for October, 1933.

³⁸ M. Lindsay and P. Lehmann in *Palaeographia Latina*, 4 (1925), p. 37.

³⁹ On the Lyons *scriptorium*, see S. Tafel in *Palaeographia Latina*, 4 (1925), pp. 40ff.

⁴⁰ Full indications of Bede's sources will be given in my forthcoming edition of the *Commentary and Retractions on Acts*.

Gospels, the *Pastoral Rule*, and the *Moralia*. Ambrose is represented by the treatise, *De Spiritu Sancto*, Augustine by the *De consensu evangelistarum. Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, and the *De Genesi ad litteram*. Arator's poetic version of Acts is mentioned in general terms by Bede in his preface and is cited ten times in the commentary itself. But the author to whom Bede in this work is most constantly indebted is Jerome. Thus, he knew and used the commentaries of Jerome on Isaiah, Jonah, Ezekiel, Matthew, Galatians, and probably that on Amos. Further, he was familiar with Letters 53, 7; 108, and 112,⁴¹ with the treatise against Helvidius, and with that on Hebrew names and places; he also quotes several times from the *De viris illustribus*. Near the end of the commentary a lengthy quotation is rounded off with the statement: *haec de beati Didymi libris excerpta hunc in nostris opusculis teneant locum*. Actually Bede used Jerome's translation of Didymus' treatise, *De Spiritu Sancto*; he had already cited from it without acknowledgement in an earlier chapter of his commentary.⁴² But the most surprising discovery is that Bede knew and cited—again without any reference to the author—the short commentary of Jerome on the Psalms which, long believed to be lost, was only recovered and published in 1895 by that eminent Benedictine scholar, Dom Gustave Morin.⁴³

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There are fourteen places in the Acts commentary where Isidore's *Etymologies* have been consulted, and about a dozen in which Bede either quotes verbally or else adapts passages in Rufinus' *Ecclesiastical History*. He also refers his readers in one place to the *Shepherd of Hermas*, calling it *Liber Pastoris*, if then wished for further information concerning guardian angels. The passage that Bede presumably had in mind was Vision 5 in that work. The Greek original of the *Shepherd* was only recovered in the middle of last century, but the book was well known to the Middle Ages in translation. Two Latin versions survive, of which one, called the *versio vulgata*, is preserved in many manuscripts; it was undoubtedly this rendering to which Bede had access. In the second chapter he copies without acknowledgement a whole paragraph from Rufinus' translation of the oration on Pentecost by Gregory of Nazianzus. Years afterwards he referred to this quotation in the *Retractations*, because he had been criticised for the views expressed on the miracle of tongues. He silenced his detractors by an appeal to the authority of the "holy and in every way irreproachable master, Gregory of Nazianzus."⁴⁴ Lastly it would appear that Bede had seen the Latin translation, made by Evagrius, of Athanasius' *Life of St. Antony*. The words, "and after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux,"⁴⁵ stimulated Bede to explain to his readers who Castor and Pollux were. He adds a word concerning the sailor's superstition that, if one of Gemini is seen at the mast-head, the passage will be stormy; if both appear, the ship will enjoy a fair voyage. From the explanation of Castor and Pollux, which is based on Isidore,⁴⁶ Bede passes on to their mother, Leda, whom

⁴¹ As with Pliny's *Natural History*, so here it is unlikely that Bede had access to a complete collection of Jerome's correspondence. For, as Hilberg (*C.S.E.L.*, 54, p. v) points out: *inter codices qui alicuius pretii habendi sunt, ne unus quidem omnes epistulas complectitur*.

⁴² *P.L.*, 92, 994A-B quoting from *P.L.*, 23, 129A, 129B, 105C-106A. The earlier quotation will be found in *P.L.*, 92, 954D and comes from *P.L.*, 23, 151A and B.

⁴³ Published in *Anecdota Maredsolana*, III, part 1. Bede cites from these *Commentarioli* five times.

⁴⁴ *P.L.*, 92, 947B-D = *C.S.E.L.*, 46, 160, 17-161, 11. Reference to Gregory: *ibid.*, 999D.

⁴⁵ Acts xxviii., 11.

⁴⁶ Isid., *Etym.*, 15, 1, 40.

he calls the wife of Theseus, and to her gallant adventure with Jupiter disguised as a swan. From this union

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Helen was born. Hence, he adds, the saying: *iste modulatus ales Ledaeos petivit amplexus*. These words are taken from the *Life of St. Antony*.⁴⁷ Now this mentioned by Aldhelm in a general way, although there is nothing to show that he knew more than the name. The fact that Bede cited from this book shows that at least one copy of it existed in England. Had Aldhelm's latest editor, Ewald, known this evidence, he would perhaps have been more ready to believe that Aldhelm had read Evagrius' translation.⁴⁸

In the *Retractations on Acts*, which the oldest extant manuscript calls *liber secundus expositionis in actus apostolorum*, Bede's primary interest is in textual criticism, and particularly in comparing the Greek original with the Latin versions of the Bible text that were at his disposal. The sources that I have been able to trace are: Jerome's commentary on Ezekiel, the treatise on Hebrew names, and Letters 71, 108, and 112; Rufinus; two quotations from Hilary's *Tractate on the Second Psalm*, and one each from Cyprian's *Liber Testimoniorum* and Fulgentius' anti-Arian dissertation addressed to the Vandal king, Thrasamund. There are also single references by name to Eusebius' Chronicle, Josephus—a passage not taken from Rufinus—and Hippocrates in *Aphorismis*—that is, one of the medical treatises in Latin passing under Hippocrates' name in the Middle Ages. Augustine is represented by the *De consensu evangelistarum*; but there are some other Augustinian quotations that so far I have been unable to trace. To the passage from Gregory of Tours allusion has been made in another context. Lastly there are two works of a hagiographical character which, it may be suspected from the length of the citations and the interest they clearly aroused in Bede, had only recently come into his hands. The first

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was the *De transita Beatae Virginis*, falsely attributed to Melito, bishop of Sardes.⁴⁹ Bede was quite aware that it was a later forgery, and criticised it severely because its evidence conflicts with the testimony of St. Luke on a point of chronology. The second was Avitus of Bracara's Latin version of Lucian of Caphar Camala. This last-named writer in A.D. 415 had published an account of the miraculous discovery of St. Stephen's relics. From this curious narrative Bede copied a whole page into that part of his commentary which elucidated the martyrdom and subsequent burial of the saint.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Migne, *Patrologia Graeca*, 26, 75 (= *Acta Sanctarum*, 2, 97). These texts read *expelivit*.

⁴⁸ In *M.G.H.A.A.*, 15, :65, note 1, Ewald observes: *num Evagrii versionem noverit Aldhelmus, ex eis quae dicit, pzum constat*.

⁴⁹ Bede does not exactly give this title, but describes the author as, *librum exponens de obitu beatae genitricis Dei*. See *P.L.*, 92, 1014C.

⁵⁰ There is a clear allusion to the same narrative in the *Comm. on the Epist. of James* (*P.L.*, 93, 24D). 'Now, while we know from Bede himself (*P.L.*, 92, 940B) that his commentary on the Epistles of John was sent to Acca at the same time as that on Acts, it is inconceivable that, if Bede had at that time known Avitus' translation, he would not have used it for chapters 7 and 8 of Acts. Thus we must assume, what is inherently probable, that Bede's expositions of the Seven Catholic Epistles were composed at different times. When all had

One of the objects that Bede kept steadily in view when he composed the *Retractations* was to correct errors in his earlier commentary. References to two examples must suffice, both, as it happens, bearing on his acquaintance with pagan rather than Christian writers. In the *Commentary* he had explained the word *scapha*, a small boat, by a quotation from Isidore. In the *Retractations* he remarks that he had since perused the writings of others and had discovered that the true definition of *scapha* was not that given by Isidore, but a kind of canoe hollowed out of a single log. C. W. Jones has quite lately published the interesting discovery that by "other writers" is meant Vegetius' pamphlet on military tactics, from which Bede had already extracted information for his *De temporum ratione* and the *Ecclesiastical History*.⁵¹ My second instance shows how Bede, good scholar though he was, neverthe-

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less, like Homer, occasionally dozed. In Acts xx. 14 we read: "and when he suet with us at Assos we took him in and came to Mytilene." On this verse Bede remarks

"in my first book, following Plinius Secundus, I wrote that Mytilene is an island opposite Asia; but the same Pliny also writes in another place that Mytilene is a town in the island of Cyprus. We may believe both these statements to be true, but nevertheless that Paul and his companions on this occasion carne not to the island of Cyprus but to the Asiatic island. For it is attested that much later, and after he had travelled through many districts, he appeared off Cyprus but did not land there."⁵²

The last allusion is to Acts xxvii. 4, when Paul was on his way as a prisoner to Rome: "and when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary." The original information from Pliny may be found in the fifth Book of the *Natural History* (5, 139). where a list of Lesbian towns, including Mytilene, is given. But the supposed additional information—that there was also a Mytilene in Cyprus—is a myth; for Bede, I regret to say, misunderstood his authority. In the thirteenth Book (13, 10) Pliny discusses various drugs and says of one: *optimum hoc in Cypro, Mytilenis, ubi plurima sampsuchus*. Pliny has indulged his rather common habit of *asyndeton*, but Bede, not realising this, has construed *Mytilenis* in apposition to *Cypro*. Yet this, and perhaps some other trifling errors, must not blind us to the mature excellences of the *Retractations*. The book seems to me to be on a different plane to the other commentaries. Bede's judgement in his textual criticism is sound, his handling of quotations from the original Greek shows that his knowledge of that language near the end of his life was substantial, not superficial, and all through there appear to be much more of Bede's own thought and far greater independence of authorities than in his other exegetical works. In short, the *Retractations* is worthy to be

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set beside the *Ecclesiastical History* as an achievement of ripe scholarship.

been written, he added a general preface, and issued them as a single work, although privileged friends like Acca had already seen the separate parts as they first appeared.

⁵¹ See *Classical Review*, 46 (1932), pp. 248-9.

⁵² *P.L.*, 92, 1028B.

It is not possible to give more than a short survey, which makes no claim to being complete, of the source material from the Fathers found in Bede's other commentaries. Gregory the Great's works are constantly used, but it is often laborious to locate passages from them in Bede. The modern editor is helped to some extent by two collections of excerpts from Gregory's work made respectively by Paterius, a contemporary of that Pope, and by Alulfus, monk and librarian of St. Martin at Tournai in the first half of the twelfth century. Both collections are printed as an *addendum* to Gregory's works in Migne, and precise references to the place whence each extract is taken are added. Paterius' *Liber Testimoniorum* provides a briefer selection, but the extracts illustrate Gregory's exposition of both the Old and the New Testament. Alulfus takes only Gregory's exegesis of the New Testament into account, but, within these limits, gives a much fuller selection than his predecessor.⁵³ It may be said at once that Bede did not use Paterius. For one thing, there are many citations from Gregory in Bede that are not found in the *Liber Testimoniorum*. Besides this we have Bede's own expression of regret that he could not obtain Paterius. He had heard that this man, a disciple of Gregory, had made a collection in one volume of Gregory's utterances on the whole of Sacred Scripture. "If I had this work in my hands," he continues, "I could more easily and more completely carry out what I wish."⁵⁴ Two extracts from Cyprian's *De habitu virginum* and one from the same author's *De zelo et livore* find a place in the commentary on the Catholic Epistles.⁵⁵ Father Sutcliffe has shown that in the

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commentary on Mark the following works of Augustine were used by Bede: the *De consensu evangelistarum*, *Quaestiones in evangelium*, *Enarrationes in psalmos*, and some sermons. We have already seen that the first of these treatises was used in both the commentaries on Acts; more remarkable still is Bede's indebtedness to it in his long preface to the commentary on Luke, two-thirds of which is copied verbatim from Augustine.⁵⁶ Bede himself acknowledges in a general way his obligation to Augustine's *Tractates* on the First Epistle of John,⁵⁷ and he groups together, as aids to the interpretation of Genesis, the *De Genesi ad litteram* and *de Genesi contra Manichaeos*, the *Confessions*, and also "the admirable compositions written against the enemy of the Law and Prophets."⁵⁸ This last can only mean the treatise, *Contra Faustum*, the main purpose of which was to defend the Old Testament against the attacks of the Manichaean bishop. It is known, moreover, that Bede was familiar with it, since he cites from it in the *De temporum ratione*. Elsewhere he quotes from the *De sancta virginitate*⁵⁹ and refers his readers to a book which he calls *Liber de mendacii generibus octo*. As he does not appear to give extracts from it, it is not clear which of two Augustinian tracts, *De mendacio* or *Contra mendacium*, he means.⁶⁰ His *Letter to Plegwin* contains passages from Augustine's fifty-sixth letter, from the *Tractate on Psalm 6*, and from the fifteenth Book of the *City of*

⁵³ Both *florilegia* in *P.L.*, 79.

⁵⁴ *P.L.*, 91, 1223B.

⁵⁵ *P.L.*, 93, 46D = *C.S.E.L.*, 3, 192, 2-11; 55A = 193. 27-194, 4; 66C = 420, 1-18. There appears to be an allusion to Cyprian's *De lapsis* in *P.L.*, 91, 434D. The same work is quoted in Bede's *Martyrology* (for 22 May), but as Bede's share in this compilation is uncertain, this evidence must not be pressed.

⁵⁶ *P.L.*, 92, 305-6. = *C.S.E.L.*, 43, 4, 4-5 ; 6, 3-7, 3; 9, 3-10, 14.

⁵⁷ *P.L.*, 92, 940B.

⁵⁸ *P.L.*, 91, 9-10A.

⁵⁹ *P.L.*, 93, 173D-174A = *C.S.E.L.*, 41, 263, 7-264, 4; 264, 17-19.

⁶⁰ *P.L.*, 91, 650B. Both treatises of Augustine will be found in *C.S.E.L.*, 41.

God.⁶¹ However, Bede's debt to Augustine cannot be finally determined until all Bede's works have been critically edited; it is enough here to add one more to the list of Augustinian books known to our author. Bede, himself a great teacher, was familiar, one is glad to know, with

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that greatest of Christian educational treatises, the *De doctrina Christiana*. To his commentary on the Apocalypse he prefixed a long introduction in which he devoted much space to a summary of Tyconius' seven rules of Scriptural interpretation. This long disquisition, including some Biblical quotations, is transcribed *verbatim* from Augustine's fuller summary of the Donatist teacher, introduced at the end of Book 3 of the *De doctrina Christiana*.⁶² Here it may be observed that the degree of Bede's indebtedness to Tyconius' exposition of the Apocalypse still awaits investigation; indeed, it may be doubted whether a final estimate will ever be possible, because Tyconius' book has not survived and its contents are only recoverable from contemporary critics or subsequent commentators.⁶³

Of Ambrose, besides the short *De Spiritu Sancto*, Bede had certainly read the *Hexameron*, the briefer *De Noe et arca*, and the commentary on Luke.⁶⁴ To the list of Hieronymic writings already given above can be added the diatribe against Jovinian, the commentary on Daniel, and the Martyrology.⁶⁵ Other Bible commentaries utilised with

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or without out acknowledgement by Bede were Cassiodorus' book on the Psalms, itself largely culled from Augustine, and Primasius on the Apocalypse;⁶⁶ and in the *De temporum ratione* he borrows in two places from a commentary on Job by a Philippus. This writer is believed to be identical with a priest of the same name who was a pupil of Jerome. The commentary attributed to him exists in a shorter and a longer version, and it is from the latter that Bede quotes.⁶⁷

⁶¹ *P.L.*, 94, 672C-673A; 673C-D; 674C-D.

⁶² *P.L.*, 93, 129D-134A, abbreviated from *P.L.*, 34, 82-90.

⁶³ As Bede in his commentary on the Apocalypse names Tyconius no less than ten times, the quotations thus introduced may prove to be all that he borrowed. The care taken to indicate the source in the text, and not merely in the margin, was probably due to the fact that Tyconius was a heretical writer.

⁶⁴ Bede himself wrote commentaries on Genesis and on Luke, and he refers to his great predecessor by name in this connection. Cf. *P.L.*, 91, 10A. *De Noe et arca*, as Jones has shown, was also used for the *De temporum ratione*.

⁶⁵ There are two citations in the *Comm. on the Cath. Epist.* from the *adv. Iovinianum*, viz., *P.L.*, 93, 14B-C (cf. *P.L.*, 23, 286D-287A) and 79B-C (cf. *P.L.*, 23, 287C). The *Comm. on Daniel* is cited in Bede on the Apocalypse—*P.L.*, 93, 154C (cf. *P.L.*, 25, 579B). The *Martyrology* is described briefly in Bede's *Comm. on Mark* (*P.L.*, 92, 192D): in *Martyrologio quod Eusebii et Hieronymi vocabulis insignitum est*. In his later *Retractions* he writes as though anxious to correct erroneous notions about that work: *liber martyrologii qui beati Hieronymi nomine ac praefatione adtitulatur; quamvis idem Hieronymus libri illius non auctor sed interpres, Eusebius autem auctor exlitisse narretur*. A new edition of Jerome's *Martyrology*, with a most valuable introduction by Delehaye, was published in 1931 in *Acta Sanctorum*, November II, pars 2.

⁶⁶ On Bede and Cassiodorus cf. Lehmann, *Philologus*, 74 (1917), pp. 359-60 and my *Thought and Letters*, p. 73, note 2. For Primasius, cf. *ibid.*, p. 85, note 1.

⁶⁷ The identification of Philippus rests on Gennadius' authority, *De viris illustribus*, 62.

It would not be proper to conclude this survey of Bede's sources without some mention of the Greek Fathers. Only a few observations can be offered because the problem is a very intricate one and calls for separate investigation. If we except certain short, technical treatises consulted by our author on the Easter reckoning, the number of Greek theologians whom he names is not large. Origen is criticised several times as a heretical writer, or else a biographical detail about him is given. In the commentary on Genesis there is an appeal to his authority on the structure of Noah's ark. Origen's homilies on Genesis, as well as on some other books of the Bible, were, however, translated by Rufinus. It was probably from this version of the Second Homily that Bede took his information, but he does not cite it *verbatim*.⁶⁸ In his preface to the same commentary Bede makes a general acknowledgement to Basil the Great's *Hexameron*, adding the useful information that this book had been rendered into Latin by Eustathius. Later, in the commentary itself, Bede proceeds to quote at length from the Latin version.⁶⁹ Again, he mentions Clement of Alexandria eight times. One of these passages contains a biographical item. The remaining

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seven are citations, but four of them are taken word for word from Rufinus' *Ecclesiastical History*.⁷⁰ It is safe to assume that the other three were also borrowed by Bede from an intermediate source. A citation from Evagrius' translation of Athanasius' *Life of St. Antony* has already engaged our attention. In Bede's commentary on Nehemiah the redoubtable champion of orthodoxy in the Eastern Church is named in a general way together with Ambrose, Hilary, and Augustine.⁷¹ In the preface to the commentary on the Catholic Epistles Athanasius' authority is quoted for the belief that the First Epistle of John was addressed to the Parthians.⁷² I have been unable to find verification for this in Athanasius; on the other hand, it may be noted that an eminent Patristic scholar of our own time has stated that the words "to the Parthians" in the title of this Epistle first appear in Augustine.⁷³ The third mention in Bede of Athanasius introduces what is more probably a quotation than a paraphrase, but it is still unidentified.⁷⁴ Bede advised his readers to become acquainted with the "treatise of John Chrysostom on the theme that no one can be harmed by any one save himself."⁷⁵ In several other places he alludes to John of Constantinople. Plummer was uncertain how this designation was to be understood.⁷⁶ There is no doubt, however, that Chrysostom is meant; for in his commentary on Luke Bede reproduces and attributes to John of Constantinople certain chronological observations connected with the conception of St. Elizabeth and the dumbness of Zacharias, which are adapted from Chrysostom's homily on the Nativity.⁷⁷ The use by

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⁶⁸ *P.L.*, 91, 91A-C; cf. *Patrologia Graeca*, 12, 161-75.

⁶⁹ *P.L.*, 91, 16B-C = *Patrol. Graeca*, 30, 887B-C.

⁷⁰ *P.L.*, 92, 131D-132D reproduces Rufinus, *H.E.* (ed. Mommsen), 1, p. 141, 1-19. The other identified passages occur in the Acts commentary.

⁷¹ *P.L.*, 91, 912C.

⁷² *P.L.*, 93, 9B-10A.

⁷³ O. Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, 4, p. 486, note 1.

⁷⁴ *P.L.*, 93, 58B.

⁷⁵ *P.L.*, 93, 56D.

⁷⁶ *Hist. Eccles.*, 1, note on p. li.

⁷⁷ *P.L.*, 92, 314B-C; cf. *Patrologia Graeca*, 44, 357-8.

Bede of Rufinus' translation of Gregory of Nazianzus has been illustrated in an earlier part of this essay.

We thus reach two general conclusions: only some of the material from the Greek Fathers came to Bede from the works themselves, and, even when this was so, it was a Latin translation, not the Greek original that he consulted. I do not know a single passage on whose evidence one could say with certainty that Bede had read a particular homily or treatise in the Greek. On the other hand, the number of cases where he demonstrably employed a translation is substantial. This is highly significant.

The information presented in the preceding pages is not meant to be exhaustive; nevertheless it will have achieved its purpose if it has placed Bede's attainments as a scholar in a clearer light. Bede's own statement in the famous biographical notice appended to the *Ecclesiastical History*, is to the effect that he spent his whole life from the age of seven at Jarrow.⁷⁸ This must not be taken too literally, since it is clear from allusions elsewhere that he visited Lindisfarne and York.⁷⁹ One wonders whether he did not at some time visit Canterbury as well for we have seen that certain rare, or at least unusual, books were known to both Aldhelm and Bede. Alternatively we must suppose that the loaning of manuscripts by one library to another, for purposes of collation or copying *in toto*, was already as fully developed as in Alcuin's day. Certainly Bede's working library, whether composed entirely or only in part of manuscripts owned by Wearmouth-Jarrow, was astonishingly large and diversified for that age. And he made the best use of it, even though it did not very greatly stimulate his own originality; for to be a scholar meant in his day, and for many years to come, being a traditionalist. Bede's importance lies not in his original ideas, but in the selfless devotion with which he digested much of the learning and doctrine of the Fathers and passed it on in a simpler and more intelligible form

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lists of manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale, published in the *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes* from 1862 to the present time, will be found no less than forty codices of Bede. And this figure is for a single library and takes no account of Bede manuscripts bearing press-marks between 1 and 9,000. Evidence like this cannot be gainsaid. For seven centuries men turned to Bede the scholar for enlightenment and spiritual guidance. Can we doubt that not a few also were inspired by the single purpose and unswerving devotion to a noble cause of Bede the man? A great poet has drawn the moral of Bede's life for all time in moving words:⁸⁰

But what it One, through grave or flowery mead,
Indulging thus at will the creeping feet
Of a voluptuous indolence, should meet
Thy hovering shade, O venerable Bede!
The saint, the scholar, from a circle freed
Of toil stupendous, in a hallowed seat,
Of learning, where thou heard'st the billows beat

⁷⁸ *Hist. Eccles.*, 5, 24.

⁷⁹ See Plummer's edition, 1, p. xvi.

⁸⁰ Wordsworth, *Ecclesiastical Sonnets*, Part 1, no. 23.

M.L.W. Laistner, "Bede as a Classical and a Patristic Scholar," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 16 (1933): 69-93.

On a wild coast, rough monitors to feed
Perpetual industry. Sublime Recluse!
The recreant soul, that dares to shin the debt
Imposed on human kind, must first forget
Thy diligence, try unrelaxing use
Of a long life; and, in the hour of death,
The last dear service of thy passing breath!

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