

Reviews: *Kindheit in der Gründerzeit zwischen Alster und Elbe: Kuno Meyers Tagebücher, 1868–1874* (Maier); *Ein Junge aus Hamburg im viktorianischen Schottland: Kuno Meyers Briefe an die Familie, 1874–1876* (Maier); *Keltologe zwischen Kaiserreich und British Empire: Kuno Meyers Briefe an Korrespondenten in Deutschland und Österreich, 1874–1919* (Maier); *Kuno Meyer und Wales: Letters to John Glyn Davies, 1892–1919* (Maier)



Dáibhí Ó Cróinín

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Roinn na Nua-Ghaeilge, N.U.I. Maynooth

Kindheit in der Gründerzeit zwischen Alster und Elbe: Kuno Meyers Tagebücher, 1868–1874. Edited by Bernhard Maier. Bibliotheca Academica, Geschichte, Band 4. Ergon Verlag, Würzburg, 2016. 311 pp. €48.00. ISBN 978-3-95650-163-0.

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Kuno Meyer und Wales: Letters to John Glyn Davies, 1892–1919. Edited by Bernhard Maier. Bibliotheca Academica, Geschichte, Band 8. Ergon Verlag, Würzburg, 2017. 171 pp. €32.00. ISBN 978-3-95650-267-5.

No one did more than Kuno Meyer to make the study of early Irish literature ‘respectable’, and if Douglas Hyde’s *Love-Songs of Connacht* (1893) and his subsequent publications could be said to have set a light to the Irish literary revival of Yeats and Lady Gregory — at least insofar as they revealed for the first time to them and their like the riches of modern Irish literature in the vernacular — it was Meyer’s various translations from the earlier manuscripts that first revealed the treasures that lay buried in the older literature in Irish. The

full extent to which those two great pioneering scholars corresponded on these subjects was only recently revealed (see Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, 'Letters of Kuno Meyer to Douglas Hyde, 1896–1919', *Studia Hibernica* 42 [2016], 1–64); before that readers had Seán Ó Lúing's excellent biography (1991) to draw upon for the general picture of Meyer's mature years as an established scholar of Irish. Now, however, with the publication of these four marvellous volumes, Bernhard Maier of Tübingen has cast extraordinary new light on Meyer's youth and early formation and revealed, in over a thousand pages of annotated text, and in astonishing detail, the origins of his interest in Ireland and its literature and the enormous range of his contacts and influence.

Kuno Meyer was born on 20 December 1858. The fragmentary diaries that have survived for the years 1868, 1869, 1870 and 1871, the first of Maier's discoveries, reveal a happy and comfortable, if not lavish home life in Hamburg. Kuno reports regular outings and trips, with Papa, Mama, Edu [his older brother Eduard], Toni [his sister Antonie], and his younger brother Albrecht; the family appears to have been a very happy one. Kuno occasionally punctuated his daily diary entries with pencil drawings (his artistic skills improved with time, as did his handwriting); he was a talented artist and draughtsman. The phrases *nichts merkwürdiges* and *nichts Bedeutendes* appear with regularity, with equally regular lists of the presents that Kuno and his siblings received either for birthdays or for Christmas. It is not to be expected that a youngster of his age would comment on contemporary developments in the outside world, though the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–1 does intrude, with regular bulletins on the course of the hostilities. Closer to home, the occasional reference to school-mates who were struck down by fatal illnesses (including rheumatoid arthritis) presages the medical problems that Kuno himself was to labour under all his life and for which he sought periodic cures (mostly without success). It is somewhat surprising to discover that he was not particularly precocious in school, and required help from his father with Latin and Greek and from his brother Eduard with mathematics. Eduard, for his part, was to become one of the leading historians of the ancient world (ranked alongside the great Mommsen and Eduard Schwarz), and there is a sense in all of Kuno's surviving diaries and letters that he was throughout his life in awe of his older brother. Kuno's lists of books that he had read each year show him already well initiated into Greek and Latin, as well as English (compulsory even then). A less than distinguished school career, together with a restless spirit, might have seen Kuno head off into the world (as his brother Albrecht did, to the Yucatan, where he died tragically in 1881), but destiny intervened in 1874 when his parents noticed a small advertisement, forwarded by the director of his school, stating that *ein erblindeter deutscher Gelehrter, sein name ist Heinrich Weisse, ein Mann von 56 Jahren, auf 2 Jahre ein 15jährigen Knabe suche, der ihm als Vorleser u. Begleiter den Verlust seiner Augen ersetze* (full text p. 286 n. 258). The parents — to their eternal credit — leapt at the chance and on 14 April 1874 Kuno set sail for Edinburgh. The rest, as they say, is history.

The second of Bernhard Maier's discoveries in the Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz in Berlin, namely the letters that Kuno sent back to his

family during those two formative years that he spent in Scotland, offers an almost day-by-day insight into his life in Edinburgh and a detailed and fascinating account of what was happening around him in Victorian Scotland. The man to whom he came as *amanuensis*, Heinrich Weisse, had been educated to university level in Berlin before being struck by blindness, but his disability in no way halted his activities as a teacher of German. With Kuno as his eyes and ears, he gave regular private lessons to a range of interested students (mostly women), whose spoken grammar and pronunciation he corrected himself, but whose written exercises Kuno then read and corrected. Kuno also had the daily task of reading *The Scotsman* to Weisse every day — in its entirety; it usually took Kuno three hours to get through it from cover to cover! — together with a weekly Berlin newspaper that kept up Weisse's contact with happenings in the homeland, as well as a range of books on language and science and contemporary affairs. Kuno also had the use of his not inconsiderable library.

The holidays offered the promise of a trip to the island of Arran. When he eventually got there in July 1874 he marvelled at the fact that only Scots Gàidhlig was spoken there ('*Es sprechen dort alle Leute nur Gälisch und das Englische wird als fremde Sprache in den Schulen gelernt*', p. 81; and p. 90). The encounter was to provide the spark for his later devotion to the Irish language, and he even toyed with the idea of trying to learn it ('*vielleicht lerne ich ein bisschen, obgleich es sehr schwer sein soll*'). In a letter to his father in English (to show off his progress in the language) he quoted the Professor of Oriental Languages in Edinburgh to the effect that 'Without a considerable knowledge of Gaelic no person can make any proficiency whatever in philology' (p. 109), but bemoaned the want of good instruction material in the language. He also learned a couple of songs in Scots, and noted the distinctiveness of the language (p. 107; 130–2). He read David Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Ballads* (1776), but felt that Scottish ballads were 'all murder and mayhem' ('*Es ist alles Mord und Totschlag in den Dichtungen der Schotten u. selten begegnet man einem anmutigen, lustigen Liedchen*'; p. 202). As an alternative he recommends to his brother Albrecht *Gems of Moore's Irish Melodies*: '*Es ist alles das reinste Englisch*' (p. 200). '*Gleich das zweite Lied ist die bekannte "Letzte Rose", die er nun im Original lesen, lernen und singen kann*'.

In light of his later career, it is amusing to read that Kuno agreed with the view of John Blackie (Professor of Greek in Edinburgh University, one of Herr Weisse's acquaintances) that the study of 'Celtic' was important, but that the Celtic Muse was not to be compared to that of the Greeks and Romans ('*obgleich sich die Muse dieses Volkes der griechischen u. römischen wol nicht an die Seite stellen kann*', p. 198). All the while he was working away at Cicero and Herodotus, the *Poetae Lyrici Graeci*, Tacitus's *Germania* and some books on English and Gothic grammar, several of which he was able to borrow from Weisse's university friends. It was during those two years too that he acquired that mastery of English which was to be the hallmark of his translations from the Irish in later years, though for those who wonder what his accent was like, he recounts a story (p. 227) of how, after reciting Robbie Burns's *Tam o' Shanter* in company, a listener remarked: 'Indeed, you're speakin' like a real Scotchman!'

This daily routine at 1 Darnaway Street is described by Kuno in letters to his sister Toni, his brothers Albrecht and Eduard, and the parents, *‘ein Konvolut von 361 Blättern’* (as Bernhard Maier describes them) that remained in private hands until 1986, when they went to the Stabi in Berlin. Herr Weisse himself comes across as a very pleasant individual. Almost equally fascinating was ‘Madame Weisse’, his wife, who could play anything on the piano and who seems to have taken to Kuno; so much so that he remarked at one point that the Weisses offered, half in jest, to adopt him and to send their son, John, to Hamburg in exchange! The relationship was cemented by their regular attendance at concerts, though Kuno was not always enthused by what he heard: of some modern *Zukunftsmusik* that they heard he remarked *‘Ich möchte übrigens die Zukunft nicht erleben, wo solcher Unsinn Musik genannt wird!’* (p. 152). A later encounter with Scottish bagpipe music (p. 186) shows him trying to tune his classically trained ears to the different style of the native sound (*‘Zuerst kam es mir vor, daß es nichts als melodiöser Unsinn sei; ... lange dauerte es, ehe ich die Melodie heraushören konnte’*). The Christmas pantomime season was the occasion of his encounter with *‘ein kleiner Gesang’* that was *‘besonders hübsch’*: ‘For the fox and the bear, / And the hound and the hare, / And the birds in the greenwood tree, / And the pretty little rabbits / So engaging in their habits / Have all their mate but me.’ It survives to this day in the singing tradition of West Cork.

‘Madame W.’ was no shrinking violet: there is a hilarious account of how she thwarted a would-be mugger who made off with her purse; the perpetrator got a sentence of nine years for his trouble! In response to queries from home about possible romantic attachments to one or other of the young ladies who came to Herr Weisse for German lessons, there is a tantalising mention of a Mary Jane Todd from Dublin whom Kuno appears (p. 234) to have envisaged as a future wife (*‘eure künftige Schwiegertochter’*). But there is no more word of her. Kuno was even less fortunate in his later engagement to Mary, one of the two Weisse daughters, which he broke off.

His description of a Free Church of Scotland service that he attended with Weisse’s son John (p. 172) offers a rare glimpse of his interest in religion; he was not impressed. Weisse senior made his own distaste for Catholicism clear in debates with James Cowan, Lord Provost of Edinburgh (1816–96), who had an unseemly tolerance (*Neigung*) towards Catholic rites and beliefs (according to Weisse; p. 171) that derived from a period spent living in Bavaria; Kuno’s own view of Catholicism emerges only later, and then only fleetingly. In recounting his new acquaintance with a visiting Professor of English from Germany (p. 206), he describes his wife as ‘a Catholic from that nest of priests Regensburg’ (*‘eine Katholikin aus jenem Pfaffenneste Regensburg’*). Kuno’s then view of the Irish is reflected in a striking statement: *‘Die Irlander sind viel fleißiger und ordentlicher als die Schotten und ganz mit Unrecht so gescholten und verachtet’* (p. 194). His verdict on the English, by comparison, is amusing: *‘Alle Engländer sind nur große Kinder’* (p. 199), though he does admit that his fellow countrymen lag behind the English in many things, e.g., in the quality of their matches (*Streichhölzer*) (p. 198)!

Though Weisse's circle of acquaintances included several prominent political figures, there were only occasional intrusions of politics, foreign and domestic, into Kuno's routine; e.g., the Home Rule Bill of 1874, the defeat of the second Home Rule Bill of 1886 (p. 95 n. 124) and the outbreak of the second Boer War in October 1899 (p. 129 n. 210), while in March of that year he reported in great detail on the pomp and ceremony of a state funeral granted to Sir James Hope Grant (1808–75), who had served with distinction in China, India and the Crimea: *'Jedenfalls war es ein großartiger Anblick, und der Eindruck ein sehr mächtiger'* (p. 163).

Students of philology will be surprised to read Kuno's account (173) of the revelation that many of the statements in Dwight Whitney's *Lectures on Language* (1867) were lifted verbatim from Max Müller's publications. Müller was prompted to make the revelation following an attack on him by a son of Charles Darwin, who thought that some of Müller's statements ran counter to what his father had written. Kuno's verdict on the affair: *'Von dem Whitney nimmt kein Hund mehr ein Stück Brot'*.

Kuno's rhapsodic description (p. 206) of his first encounter with a real velum codex (the so-called 'Auchinleck MS.' in the Advocates' Library) gives a first inkling of what was to come, and we may well trace his later love of manuscript studies to that moment. By the end of 1875 he seems to have made up his mind (p. 266) that Celtic Studies, rather than Anglistik, were to be the subject of his future calling (*'bei der Wahl eines Lebensberufs entschließen'*). How that career worked out is marvellously revealed in the correspondence that Kuno conducted with colleagues in Germany and Austria during the years 1874–1919; it numbers 335 letters and postcards that have been tracked down by Bernhard Maier in various European archives and libraries. These run parallel in many respects to the letters and cards that he exchanged with Douglas Hyde (see above); together they present an intimate portrait of Kuno's early school years in Hamburg, his student years in Leipzig (in the footsteps of his brother Eduard), and his time as a private tutor to the Arnold family in Lowestoft in England, before his appointment to the Chair of German in Liverpool University in 1884 and his succession to Heinrich Zimmer as Professor of Celtic in Berlin in 1911. The nearly four years (1914–17) that he subsequently spent in the United States, promoting the cause of American-German relations (with a view to keeping the US out of the First World War) were seen by many of his English, Scottish and Welsh friends (and many Irish ones as well) as a tragic mistake on his part and the ill will generated by his activities resulted in the rescinding of the Freedom of the City that he had received in Dublin in July 1911 (it was restored posthumously) and of Edinburgh. E. C. Quiggin, for whom Kuno wrote several letters of recommendation to colleagues in Germany (p. 123), campaigned relentlessly for the rescinding of the honorary degree that Liverpool had bestowed on him, while the writer George Moore published a particularly vituperative condemnation in the English newspapers, calling him a traitor (p. 221).

Foremost amongst Kuno's German teachers (and later his colleagues) was Ernst Windisch in Leipzig, with whom he had already started learning Irish

just a week after his arrival there (p. 29). Theirs was to be a lifelong friendship. By 1881 Kuno was already editing Old Irish texts and was encountering that particular brand of *odium Celticum* that first appeared in Zimmer's *Keltische Studien* (1881), which spoke of Windisch in terms that shocked his colleagues (p. 45). He was himself to be at the receiving end of a similar diatribe from Standish Hayes O'Grady in 1886 ('*leider in ihrem Ton stark an Zimmer erinnernd*'; p. 93 and n. 119). In an unpublished letter to Windisch dated 21 August 1885 in the Leipzig University Archive (UAL NA Windisch 2, 187) O'Grady wrote of Meyer's book *Cath Finntrágha* that 'it is, from cover to cover, unmitigated rubbish. It conveys no one item of information and shews manifestly that he knows no Irish — except perhaps as a comparative philologist'! One wonders if Meyer's several failed attempts to meet O'Grady when in London had persuaded the Irish scholar that Kuno was trying to avoid him. At any rate he did not hold the attack against him, but was loud in his praise of O'Grady's famous *Silva Gadelica* (1892), even though he wondered, in a letter to Windisch of 1893 (p. 109) how O'Grady could be so wayward in his translations. He notes his passing in 1915, describing him as '*mein alter Widersacher*' (p. 280). The roll-call of scholars with whom Kuno corresponded subsequently is a veritable *Who's Who?* of Celtic Studies: Henri d'Arbois de Jubainville, Graziadio Ascoli, Robert Atkinson, Osborn Bergin, John Glyn Davies (whose correspondence Bernhard Maier has published separately; see below), Georges Dottin ('*Er ist ein sehr liebenswürdiger & munterer Gesellschafter*'), Henri Gaidoz, W. M. Hennessy, Joseph Loth, Carl Marstrander, Eoghan O'Growney, Julius Pokorny, Rudolf Thurneysen (who, it is revealed, worked on code-breaking during the war; p. 267), and many more, as well as scholars in other fields, such as Charles Plummer, Robert Priebsch and Eduard Sievers. And, of course, there were also the lifelong intimate friendships with Douglas Hyde and Whitley Stokes, whom Kuno visited regularly in London.

In 1884 Meyer was in Dublin, where he was pleasantly surprised to find that his reputation had preceded him ('*mein Name war überall bekannt*') and where the Royal Irish Academy made him a gift of its several facsimiles of Irish manuscripts (p. 61). He applied for the position of Todd Lecturer in the Academy, but was unsuccessful (he did receive the honour in 1904). He also reported (p. 102) how the Dublin archivist and historian, J. T. Gilbert (1829–98), had been advocating that more international scholars be recruited to publish editions of early Irish texts for the RIA, a plan that he said Stokes had declined to endorse, preferring rather that more facsimiles be published (while noting drily that Stokes could afford to buy photographs of any text he was interested in). It is quite astonishing to realise that, in between all these various activities and travels, Kuno was also instrumental in establishing the *Archiv für celtische Lexikographie* (published in three large volumes between 1898 and 1907), the *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* (still the premier journal of Celtic Studies), and the School of Irish Learning in Dublin (with the generous help of Alice Stopford Green).

All this time 'strange things were happening in Ireland' ('*In Irland gehen seltsame Dinge vor*'; p. 125). He wrote again in January 1899 to Windisch to

tell him about the notorious contributions of J. P. Mahaffy and Edward Gwynn to the Royal Commission hearings about the place of Irish in the national school curriculum; 'Irish literature, when not religious, is either silly or indecent', Mahaffy intoned, thereby setting in train the correspondence with Hyde and others that galvanised the Gaelic League into action and which resulted in the famously successful campaign to have Irish taught in the schools.

Perhaps the highlight of the entire correspondence is Kuno's letter to Windisch (pp. 132–3), dated 28 February 1900, in which he describes the occasion when a group of scholars and friends, gathered in Stokes's London home, ostensibly to celebrate his birthday, surprised the great scholar with the *Festschrift* that had been compiled in his honour. Stokes told him subsequently that he had taken the book to bed with him that night!

The letters from Kuno's years in the States, 1914–17 (pp. 201–308) make for painful reading, for the most part. He stated as his mission in going there baldly: '*Hier ist meine Hauptaufgabe, die Deutschen & Iren fester zusammen zu schließen*' (p. 221). Though it was to be expected that he would patriotically support the wartime efforts of his fellow-countrymen (his brother Eduard was even more active back in the homeland), the sinking of the *Lusitania* cast a shadow over everything, as Kuno well knew (p. 239); from that point on — and especially with the declaration of an unrestricted U-boat campaign in the Atlantic from 7 May 1915 — even the most pro-German elements in the USA (and the Irish-Americans as well) — found it more and more difficult to support the German side. His honorary freedoms of the cities of Dublin and Edinburgh were both rescinded (p. 236), and he knew of other moves against him back in Britain and in Ireland: '*Best & Bergin sind ebenfalls ganz antideutsch*' (p. 224), but he was grateful for their discretion in the matter. There are tantalising references to Big Jim Larkin (p. 261), a former student of Kuno's in his Liverpool days, as also was William Smith O'Brien, whom he encountered again in Chicago (p. 234), and to Roger Casement ('*der arme Sir R.*', p. 290), with whom Kuno had met several times, not just for conversation; he worried for him after the fiasco of his capture in 1916 and wrote that he thought he could have talked him out of his scheme to bring German arms to the Irish Volunteers ('*Ich glaube, wäre ich in Berlin gewesen, ich hätte es ihm ausreden können*', p. 289). Kuno mistakenly believed that Eoin MacNeill had fallen during the Easter Rising and adds, intriguingly, that MacNeill had travelled to Berlin (in 1910 presumably) to purchase Zimmer's library, and had visited Meyer in Liverpool on the way. Gradually, however, the activities of censors and the final outcome of the war reduced Kuno's correspondence to a trickle, and by Spring of 1917 he was back in Berlin.

Sadly, the entire war experience in America soured many of Kuno's personal relationships and his general outlook on life. There is a hint of the infamous 'stab in the back' accusation in a comment at the end of a brief letter of November 1918: '*Wir sind verraten und verkauft*' (p. 314), though he reports in 1919 that there are still some in England who were writing to him ('*Ich hatte wirklich schöne Briefe von einigen alten Freunden aus England, die trotz allem treu geblieben sind*', p. 321). He died of a heart attack on

11 October 1919 following a minor operation. His sister Antonie, in a letter to Edith Best in Dublin, wrote: 'He looked lovely, the painful expression had gone from his face and he appeared much younger. I put three red roses into his hands as his life had been given up to Dark Rosaleen' (p. 331).

Kuno Meyer's reputation as a scholar and activist rests principally on his activities in behalf of Ireland and her literature. However, the fourth part of Bernhard Maier's 'quartitych', an edition of almost all the 280 letters that he wrote to his Welsh friend of long standing, John Glyn Davies (1870–1953), reveals that his efforts were almost equally devoted to support for the Welsh language and its medieval and modern literatures. Davies was one of Meyer's earliest pupils in Liverpool and was for many years assistant lecturer in the university there, then director of the the Celtic Studies department from 1920 to 1936. Though none of his own letters to Kuno appear to have survived, what there is, both in Kuno's correspondence and in the detailed accounts of his activities that were reported in the Welsh national press, makes clear the extent of Kuno's interest in Welsh poetry and music, and cultural life in general, and his activism in support of the language (he learned Middle Welsh while still a student in Leipzig and some Modern Welsh from his pupils in Liverpool), as well as his untiring efforts to set up a library of Welsh books in the university. All these activities are reflected also in his regular bulletins to Ernst Windisch in Leipzig and others, and help to fill in the picture of his daily routine in Liverpool during his almost thirty years' teaching there, ending only with his departure for Berlin in the autumn of 1910, to take up the chair of Celtic left vacant by the tragic death of Heinrich Zimmer.

Bernhard Maier points out (p. 16) how the best efforts of Meyer to stir up interest in the Liverpool Welsh, in a speech in defence of Welsh at an Eisteddfod in 1874, fared no better than those of John Rhys (who had also been a student in Leipzig) in the very same year, when he gave a series of talks in Aberystwyth that subsequently appeared in print as *Lectures on Welsh Philology*, leading to his appointment to the first ever chair of Celtic in Oxford in 1877. Kuno received a rather backhanded compliment from a Welsh journalist, who described him as 'A German, who knows Welsh as well as any Welshman, and who has published a somewhat dull edition of the "Mabinogi of Peredur"' (p. 18)! It was not all plain sailing, either, in his relationships with native Welsh scholars. The palaeographer John Gwenogvryn Evans (1852–1930) actually sued Kuno for alleged breach of copyright on some material that he had used; the dispute even made it to the papers of the Welsh press, who gave a blow-by-blow account of Evans's bizarre courtroom testimony (pp. 56–7). Kuno coined a hapax legomenon to describe Evans: '*ein Arschgesicht*'!

Though the bulk of Kuno's letters to Davies are concerned with the daily *minutiae* of teaching and proselytising, as well as the usual academic tittle-tattle and idle gossip, they do provide an invaluable insight into his relationships with Davies and all the others, in Liverpool and beyond, with whom he came into contact; most impressive of all is his constant advice and encouragement to Davies himself to persist with his studies (in particular, to take himself either to Thurneysen in Freiburg or to Zimmer in Berlin, pp. 92–3) so that he could

eventually take up a university position in Scotland or Wales. Sadly, the correspondence peters out with the latter years of the war, but not before leaving a remarkable image of a remarkable man.

There are well over a thousand printed pages of text in these four books. Bernhard Maier would have earned our admiration for the task alone of transcribing and typesetting all the letters (I have found only half-a-dozen or so typos in the entire corpus), but the fact that he discovered these letters and published them, with expert annotation and invaluable introductions, makes the measure of his achievement even more remarkable. There are doubtless other Kuno Meyer letters out there somewhere, but with these volumes Professor Maier has succeeded handsomely in making Kuno Meyer the best known of all that generation of German scholars of Celtic who followed in the footsteps of the great Johann Caspar Zeuss.

DÁIBHÍ Ó CRÓINÍN

Gaillimh