Charles Thomson: Bible Translator
A public lecture in Maghera, Co Derry

Our story tonight starts in two places many miles apart and many years apart. One story begins not far from here, in Upperlands, in November 1729; the other begins in Egypt about 275 BCE.

The first part of the story begins with the birth of Charles Thomson in November 1729, the son of John Thomson who was a linen worker in Upperlands. By the time Charles was ten years old he had lost his mother, and so his father decided to make a home for the family in the new world. He sailed to America with his six young children, but died just before he reached Delaware. The children were separated, and Charles was taken into the home of a blacksmith at New Castle. When he overheard that he was to be apprenticed as a blacksmith he ran away. On the road he met a lady who asked about him, and when he said that he wanted to be a scholar, she took him to her own home and sent him to school. Nobody knows the name of the lady who changed the young Charles Thomson's life.

Thus he became a pupil of the Revd Dr Francis Alison, another Irish man, in his academy in New London, Pennsylvania. There were no fees to pay as the academy was supported by the local Presbyterian church. Charles was taught languages, philosophy and divinity, and he excelled at classical Greek. On one occasion he asked whence the writers of theology drew their ideas and was told: 'From the Holy Scriptures'. Charles replied: 'Well then, if they whom you so highly recommend as models drew their religious instruction from the Scriptures, I shall apply directly to the same source, instead of taking knowledge second hand.' Thus began his life-long study of the Bible.

Charles worked for while as a teacher and became concerned about the way the English were treating the native Americans. They were suffering many abuses at the hands of the British, who had cheated them and taken their lands. In 1759, when he was 30 years old, Charles published a book about the situation 'An Enquiry into the Causes of the Alienation of the Delaware and Shaweneses Indians from the British Interest.' A later writer observed: 'The friends of colonial honor cannot today read it with complacency, nor without a measure of sympathy for [the Indian chief] who was endeavouring to right the native wrongs.'

The following year Charles became a business man, importing dry good and hats from London. He became wealthy and influential in the province of Pennsylvania and so became involved with the protests against paying high taxes to Britain and the growing movement in the American colonies for independence. Less than a year after the Boston Tea Party on December 16th 1773, Charles Thomson was elected on Monday September 5th 1774 as the Secretary of the First Continental Congress. He had been married the previous Thursday, and so had to abandon his bride and go to take the minutes of Congress. The Journals of Congress, from September 1774 to March 1789 are almost all in Thomson's own handwriting.

On April 7th 1789, Charles Thomson was sent to Mount Vernon with a momentous message. He had to tell George Washington that he had been elected as the first President of the United States. Three months later, he decided to retire from public life at the age of 60. George Washington wrote to him:

> I cannot withhold any just testimonial in favour of so old, so faithful and so able a public officer, which might tend to sooth his mind in the shades of retirement. Accept then this serious declaration, that your services have been important as your patriotism has been distinguished; and enjoy that best of all rewards, the consciousness of having done your duty well.'

Thus began a whole new phase in his life; his work as the biblical scholar who made the first translation of the Greek Bible into English, and, as we shall now see, the first ever translation into English of the Old Testament that was used by the first Christians in Europe.

The second part of our story begins in Egypt almost 300 years before the birth of Jesus, and almost exactly 2,000 years before Charles Thomson began learning Greek in that academy in New London, Pennsylvania. The first Pharaoh of a new dynasty in Egypt began to collect books for a great library in Alexandria, the new city founded by Alexander the Great in 331 BCE. When Alexander died in 323 BCE, his empire was divided among his generals, and Ptolemy was given Egypt. He reigned as Ptolemy I, and decided that he needed a Greek translation of the Jewish Law for his Library. Aristobulus, the Egyptian Jew who wrote this, also says that some parts of the Law of Moses had already been translated and that Plato, who died about 25 years before Ptolemy became Pharaoh, knew them.

But it was Aristeas, a Jew from Alexandria, who described how the translation was done. He was writing 100 years after the event, in about 170 BCE, and he says it was done in the reign of Ptolemy II. He wrote to the high priest Eleazar in Jerusalem, asking him to send six scholars from each of the twelve tribes, men who were learned in the Law of Moses and able to translate it into Greek. He sent lavish gifts for the temple, and bought the freedom of a large number of Jewish slaves. The high priest chose 72 scholars and sent them to Alexandria with parchment scrolls written in gold. The Pharaoh received them with great ceremonies, and they began to work in a specially prepared scriptorium on a little island that was joined to the land by a mile-long bridge. Here it was cool and quiet.

The translators began each day by paying their respects to the Pharaoh at six o'clock in the morning. Then they said their prayers, washed their hands in the sea and began their work. They discussed each verse in turn, and then dictated their agreed translation to their scribe. They worked until three o'clock in the afternoon, and the work was completed in 72 days. This means that they translated the equivalent of 2½ pages of an English Bible a day, about 100 lines of Hebrew text, and so about 16 lines of Hebrew text per hour. For a committee of 72, that was considerable progress.

A large audience of Jews from the city assembled to hear the finished translation and they agreed it was miraculously accurate. The Pharaoh was delighted and gave each scholar three fine robes, two talents of gold, a gold cup and a set of dining room furniture. He also sent lavish gifts to Eleazar the high priest, including one hundred lengths of finest Egyptian linen.

Because the translation was done by 72 men working for 72 days it was called the work of 70, in Greek *Septuagint*, and that is now the name for the oldest Greek Old Testament. Over the years, the other books of the Hebrew Scriptures were translated into Greek, and more books were written in Greek and added to the collection. This became the Bible of the Greek-speaking Jews of the Mediterranean area in Egypt, in Asia Minor and even in Rome and southern Spain.

Since about 600 BCE, many Jews had left their homeland due to war and economic troubles. Many went to Egypt, and Jeremiah (chapter 44) tells us that they settled in several cities in the Delta: Migdol, Tahpanhes, Memphis. Archaeologists have also discovered evidence of a Jewish settlement in the far south of Egypt, not far from the present Aswan dam. The Jews had been living in Egypt for nearly 300 years when Alexandria was built, and they soon moved into the new city and became a significant presence there. They adopted the new Greek translation of their Scriptures, and this is what St Paul found in the synagogues of Asia Minor and Rome when he went on his missionary journeys. Many of the Old Testament quotations in the New Testament are from the Septuagint.

Meanwhile, there had been developments in the story of the Old Testament in Hebrew. Scribes were appointed to safeguard the Hebrew text, and they were authorised to correct anything they found in a scroll which they agreed was an error. There were strict rules for their work, but some of their corrections were made in order to make clear what they thought the text should say. Some suspect verses were left out. Thus over many generations, the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek translation of the older Hebrew text became slightly different.

In about 100 CE, some thirty years after the Romans had destroyed Jerusalem, the temple and many of the holy books, a group of rabbis met to consider how they could preserve their sacred writings. They chose one particular form of the Hebrew text which was different from the one used to make the Greek translation, and they also decided which of the individual scroll should be set apart as holy. This was the first time anyone had made a formal decision about what should be included in the Scriptures. This means that we do not know for certain what books Jesus and his first disciples thought of as Scripture, since the list was made some 70 years after the ministry of Jesus. The rabbis decided which books to keep, and also which version of those books to keep. Their list did not include all the books of the Greek Old Testament. Thus by 100 CE, there were two versions of the Old Testament.

There are several places in the New Testament where an Old Testament text is quoted that is not in our English Old Testament, which was translated from the Hebrew**.** This means that the text had been in the older Hebrew scriptures from which the Greek translation was made, and so was one of the parts removed or changed by the scribes. One early Christian writer, St Justin, who was martyred in Rome in 165 CE, accused the Jewish scribes of deliberately removing texts that the Christians interpreted as prophecies of Jesus. That is certainly one possible interpretation of the differences between the Hebrew and Greek versions of the Old Testament.

After 100 CE, the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek Old Testament were different. The Christians in the Greek speaking world around the Mediterranean adopted the Greek Old Testament as part of their Bible, and this prompted the Greek speaking Jews to make some new translations after 100 CE, using the Hebrew scriptures as the rabbis had defined them. They adopted some significantly different translations of key words. For example, the old Greek text of Isaiah translated Isaiah's prophecy as 'behold the Virgin shall conceive and bear a son' (Isaiah 7.14), but the new Jewish versions translated the same Hebrew text as 'behold the young woman shall conceive and bear a son...' The old Greek text became the basis for subsequent Christian translations into other languages: Slavonic, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian and Coptic. The eastern Orthodox church still uses the old Greek, and the very first translations into Latin were also made from the old Greek.

Everything changed with St Jerome. Pope Damasus said it would be a good thing if there was one Latin translation of the Bible to replace all the various local versions that had been made from the old Greek text. St Jerome travelled to Palestine and there, in 389 CE, he began to make a new Latin translation, but he did not use the old Greek text. Instead he used the Hebrew. He believed that this was the most authentic text, even though it had never been used for a Christian Bible. When St Augustine heard of his intention, he wrote to him from Hippo, a city on the coast of what is now Algeria. It would be interesting to know how news travelled so fast in those days! He warned St Jerome that using the Hebrew text was unwise, since it implied that there was something wrong with the Greek text that the Christians had always used (Jerome, Letter 144). St Jerome insisted that he would use not only the Hebrew text but also the Jewish list of holy books. He considered the extra books of the Greek Old Testament to be less important. His Latin translation eventually became the official version used in the Roman Catholic Church, although it took centuries before people completely gave up using their old Latin translations that had been made from the Greek text.

In the 16th century, William Tyndale pioneered the translation of the Bible into English. He began to translate the Hebrew Old Testament into English but did not live to complete the work. When Henry VIII ordered that an English Bible - 'the Great Bible' - be put in every parish church in 1538, the Old Testament was taken from Tyndale's work and from St Jerome's Latin, and was thus based on the Hebrew text. And when King James had yet another translation made in 1611, this too was taken from the Hebrew text.

The old Greek Septuagint was not much used in the Western Churches, but several ancient copies of the text did survive: two are now in the British Library in London, one is in Paris, and one is in the Vatican library. The text in the Vatican becomes the next part of our story. It was probably one of the 50 Bibles ordered by the emperor Constantine in 331 CE, to be placed in the churches of his new city, Constantinople. The text that survives in the Vatican library is not complete: most of Genesis is missing, as are Psalms 105-137. These parts were added in the 15th century to make a complete Bible. The Greek text of the Old Testament in the Vatican Codex was republished in 1665 by the University of Cambridge, and Charles Thomson had a copy of this Cambridge edition when he began work on his translation in 1789, 124 years after the Cambridge edition had been published.

He acquired his copy of the Cambridge edition by chance. He was in an auction house and he heard the auctioneer inviting bids for an 'unknown, outlandish book'. He made a small bid, and the book was his. It proved to be one part of the Cambridge edition of the Vatican Codex. Thomson was intrigued by his purchase and tried to find the rest of the work. He had no success until, two years after his first purchase, he visited the same auction house and found the rest of the work.

We now have to imagine Charles Thomson in his retirement, living on the farm where his wife had been born and brought up. He had a small stone house there and some 600 neglected acres. When he had been living there only a few months, a visitor came and observed: 'It will take him the rest of his life to bring it into complete order; but this, though attended with trouble, will be a constant source of pleasure.' Maybe he combined his scholarly work with work on his farm.

He began the translation early in 1789, at about the time when he took the historic message to George Washington that he had been elected the first President of the United States. Three months later he retired, and his enthusiasm for the translation may have been a factor in that decision. Among Thomson's papers was found a small but valuable fragment which tells why he wanted to translate the Greek Old Testament into English:

> As the quotations which the writers of the New Testament made from the Old... are taken chiefly from the Septuagint, and as, upon enquiry, I could not find that there was any translation of this into English...

That is all that remains, but we can guess the rest. Perhaps this was intended as part of a preface to the work, but this was never published. And in one of his notebooks he wrote about the work of a translator:

> To translate well is:
> 1,To give a just representation of the purpose of an author;
> 2,To convey into the translation the author's spirit and manner;
> 3.To give it the quality of an original by making it appear natural, a natural copy without applying words improperly, or a meaning not warranted by use, or combining them in a way which renders the sense obscure, and the construction ungrammatical or harsh.

It cannot have been easy to make a translation of the Septuagint as there were no existing English versions on which to model his work. He was the first person ever to make an English translation of the Old Testament of the first Christians in Europe. The work was eventually published in four volumes in Philadelphia in 1808, together with his translation of the New Testament, and it was known as Thomson's Bible. It was well received by reviewers, being commended for its accuracy, and it was consulted by the scholars who made the Revised Version of the Bible in 1881.

The next person to make a translation was the British clergyman Sir Lancelot Charles Lee Brenton, whose work was published in London in 1844. He knew of Thomson's work but does not seem to have used it, and Brenton's translation became far more widely known and used than Thomson's. Both scholars worked from a single ancient version of the Septuagint,

the one in the Vatican Codex, but Brenton also mentioned the slight differences found in the other ancient version known in his time, the Alexandria Codex which is now in the British Library.

Much more is now known about the Septuagint. Two major texts were discovered a few years after Thomson's death in 1824, and each of these has slight differences from the other texts. One was a fifth century version which is now in Paris, discovered in a book whose writing had been erased and used for another text. Fortunately the original writing could still be read, and it was identified as parts of an early Septuagint. The other was parts of the Septuagint identified in one of Constantine's great Bibles from the early fourth century that was found in the monastery at Mount Sinai. Both these discoveries were made in the 1840s by the same German scholar, Constantin von Tischendorf.

One of the great problems facing anyone who studies the Septuagint is the confusion brought into the text by the scribes who worked for Origen, the greatest early Christian biblical scholar who died in 253 CE. He compared all the versions of the Old Testament known in his time, both Hebrew and Greek, and tried to work out what the original must have been. He made some tentative reconstructions, which he marked in his original manuscript. Unfortunately, the scribes who made copies ignored his marks at times, and so some of Origen's tentative proposals were copied into the text. This accounts for some of the differences - the 'variants' - between the four earliest codices containing the Septuagint.

Septuagint study today is very different from anything Thomson knew, or perhaps could have imagined. The text I work from is a reconstruction based on a huge amount of ancient evidence. The pioneer in this field was a German scholar named Alfred Rahlfs, who worked in Gőttingen and drew his text from all the great ancient codices. His edition was published in 1935. A revised and expanded version of his work - the one I have – was published in 2006. In the latest reconstruction of the original Greek of Genesis, for example, a team of scholars has used 140 sources, some of which are only fragments of a text or quotations that survive in ancient authors. Nine of these are older than the text that Thomson used. The most recent English translation of the Septuagint was based on this edition and published in 2007.

But Charles Thomson worked in a very different world! He worked alone, and had around him none of the resources of a great library. What lexicon did he use? There was no Greek-English lexicon in his time; the first one of these appeared some years after he had published his translation of the Septuagint in 1808. He could have had a reprint of Stephanus' Greek-Latin lexicon published in Geneva in 1572; there were reprints of this, but the earliest seems to have been published in London in 1816 and so too late for Thomson's work.

This is an important question, since he made some interesting choices when he translated technical terms, and it would be fascinating to know why he did this. For example, there are several Greek words for linen in the Septuagint, used to translate various Hebrew words. It is not easy to work out the distinction between the various Hebrew words, and so the translators of the Septuagint have left important clues as to what the various Hebrew words meant. One

word, *pēshet*, means either linen fabric or flax: Jeremiah had a linen loin cloth (Jeremiah 13.1); Rahab hid the spies in Jericho under the flax that was drying on her roof (Joshua 2.6). The Septuagint says that the fabric of Jeremiah's loin cloth was *linon,* the King James Bible has linen, Brenton has linen, Thomson has linen. This probably meant simple or coarse linen. But the Septuagint says that Rahab hid the spies in the flax straw, *linokalamē*. and here the translations differ: the 2007 translation of the Septuagint has 'flax straw', the King James Bible has 'stalks of flax', Brenton has flax stalks, but Thomson has simply 'flax'.

Another example might be the Hebrew word *shēsh*, which also means both linen thread and linen fabric, but we assume a different type of thread or fabric. As thread it is *shēsh moshzār*, twisted linen, for which the King James Bible has 'fine twined linen' and the Septuagint has *byssos keklōsmenē* fine twisted linen. Brenton translated this as 'fine linen spun' and 'fine twined linen', but Thomson has 'cotton thread'. As a fabric, *shēsh* is fine linen. In the King James Bible, Pharaoh dressed Joseph in 'fine linen' (Genesis 41.42), and the prophet Ezekiel knew about fine linen from Egypt (Ezekiel 27.7). The word *shēsh* may itself have been borrowed by the Hebrews from the Egyptians, because they had another word for this fine fabric. The Septuagint says Joseph's robe was *bussinē,* made of fine linen, and that Ezekiel knew of *bussos* from Egypt. Brenton translated both these words as 'fine linen', but Thomson says that Pharaoh gave Joseph a cotton robe, and that Ezekiel knew of cotton from Egypt. Why did Thomson choose 'cotton' rather than linen?

This is why it would be interesting to know what lexicon he used. It would almost certainly have been a Greek to Latin lexicon, and in Latin the primary meaning of *byssus* is cotton. Some Greek writers of the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE also used the word *bussos* to mean the fabric spun from the fibres of the cotton tree. Pliny, the Latin writer who died in 79 CE, wrote a vast work on Natural History, in which he described this tree, *gossypinus,* which grew on the island we now call Bahrein: 'There are trees that bear wool... and the fabric made from this is finer than the linen of India.' (Pliny, *Natural History* 12.21-22). The Latin Bible, the Vulgate, translated the Hebrew *shēsh* as *byssus*, (e.g. Exodus 6, 8, 15).

The other Hebrew word for this fine linen was *bûts.* King David had a robe of *bûts* (1 Chronicles 15.27), which the King James Bible translated as 'fine linen'. The Septuagint has *bussinē,* which Brenton translated 'fine linen' and the Latin Vulgate as lineum, a garment of linen. Again, Thomson chose 'cotton.'

The great curtain in the tabernacle and later in the temple was woven with coloured wools - red, blue and purple – on a fine linen warp. The tabernacle curtain is described in Exodus as woven from coloured wools and *shēsh moshzār,* fine linen thread (Exodus 26.31). Here the King James Bible has 'fine twined linen'; the Septuagint has *bussos nenēsmenē*, 'fine spun linen', the Latin Vulgate has *byssus*; Brenton has 'fine linen spun'; and Thomson has cotton thread. The temple curtain is described in Chronicles as woven from coloured wools and *bûts* (2 Chronicles 3.14). Here the King James Bible has 'fine linen', the Septuagint has *bussos;* Brenton has 'fine linen'; and Thomson has 'cotton yarn'.

Josephus, a Jewish writer in the first century CE, came from a family of temple priests, but his description of the temple curtain offers no decisive evidence: he says that the *bussos* thread woven into the temple curtain symbolised the earth in which it grew (*Jewish War* 5.212). That could apply equally to the flax or the cotton tree. So was Thomson correct to choose cotton rather than linen to translate *bussos*?

Probably not. The description of the palace of the Persian king in the Book of Esther (Esther 1.6) shows that the Hebrew word *shēsh* also meant marble: like the fabric, it was white and shiny. This is likely to have been linen, after it had been beaten or trampled to make it soft and shiny. The other Hebrew word for fine linen, *bûts,* may even come from the Hebrew word for 'trample' which was *bûs.*

If, however, Thomson was working with a Greek to Latin lexicon, he would have seen that the Greek word *bussos* that he found in the Septuagint was the same as the Latin word *byssos* whose primary meaning was cotton. And that is why it would be very interesting to know what lexicon he was using.

Then there is the question of how Thomson translated the name of God, traditionally Jehovah but the English equivalent was probably Yahweh. The name was rarely pronounced since it was deemed too holy, and so when the Septuagint was translated, they used the word 'Lord', kurios. In the story of Moses at the burning bush, however, the Lord reveals his secret, personal name, which is only found here in the whole of the Old Testament (Exodus 3.14). The King James Bible translates this as I AM THAT I AM, and the Latin Vulgate has this too: EGO SUM QUI SUM. The Septuagint, however, translates it as ego eimi ho ōn, literally 'I am the one who is'. Brenton has 'I am THE BEING'; and Thomson has 'I am the I Am'. When the divine name occurs at the beginning of Jeremiah, however, Thomson does something very different (Jeremiah 1.6). The Hebrew text has Lord Yahweh, and this was translated literally by the Septuagint: despota kurie; and by the Latin Vulgate too, Domine Deus. Brenton translated this 'Supreme Lord', but Thomson chose to echo the secret name revealed to Moses and translated this as 'Self Existent Sovereign Lord'. Again, I wonder what made him translate in this way.

We must now look at some of the other choices he made. Even though he felt free to change the 'linen' of the King James Bible into 'cotton', in many other ways he stayed close to this traditional version.

He only translated those books that were also in the Hebrew Bible. There were more books in the Greek Bible than in the Hebrew. These now form the Apocrypha of a Protestant Bible but they are included in the Old Testament of a Catholic Bible.

He kept the books in the order of the King James Bible, even though the order in the Septuagint is different. He also kept the traditional names. For example, the Septuagint book Esdras B contains both Ezra and Nehemiah. The Hebrew Ezra is chapters 1-10 and the Hebrew Nehemiah is chapters 11-23. Thomson translated Esdras B but divided it and called it Ezra and Nehemiah. The Exodus description of the tabernacle is shorter in the Septuagint than in the Hebrew, and in some cases the text is in a different order. Here, Thomson kept

the verse number of the King James Bible, whilst translating only such lines as were in the Greek text. Thus his Exodus 40 lacks verses 7, 11 and 30-32, because these are not found in the Greek text.

He did the same with Jeremiah, where the Greek text is about one eighth shorter than the Hebrew, and some chapters are in a different order. Thomson kept the familiar Hebrew order for the chapters, but translated the shorter Greek text. Thus chapter 26 in the King James Bible is chapter 33 in the Greek, and chapter 29 in the King James Bible is chapter 36 in the Greek. This chapter, however, does not have anything corresponding to the Hebrew verses 16-20. Thomson gives the text with its Hebrew chapter number, 29, but leaves out the verses that are not in the Greek. The verses of his chapter 29 are numbered 14, 15 then 21, 22. Nor does he include the Greek sections of Jeremiah that are not in the Hebrew text: a letter written by Jeremiah to the exiles in Babylon and a letter written by his scribe Baruch. Both these are now in the Protestant Apocrypha, and in the Catholic Old Testament as the Book of Baruch.

On the other hand, he did include a psalm that is not in the King James Bible. He translated the Greek text of Psalm 151. The Hebrew text of this psalm was not known in Thomson's time, but was found among the Dead Sea Scrolls 150 years later.

Charles Thomson did not only *translate* the Septuagint; he was also thinking about the structure and origin of the texts. This would be the great concern of biblical scholars working in the late 19th century, but the pioneers were already at work during Thomson's lifetime. European scholars were analysing the first five books of the Old Testament - the Books of Moses - and wondering how such a complex work was written. The first detailed analysis, by a German scholar named Johann Eichhorn, was published in 1825, the year after Thomson died, but there are signs that Thomson was also thinking about the original context of the writings. How did the prophets give their teachings and prophecies? And where did they give them?

There are indications that Thomson imagined the writings of the prophets as the scripts of a Greek-style drama, in which there were only two [or perhaps three] characters on stage, and then a chorus of others – citizens perhaps, or slaves – who commented on the action or the debate they had just witnessed. Thomson would have known the great Greek dramas that were constructed in this way, and marks in his translation show that he was dividing up the writings of the prophets as though they were play scripts that had lost their character designations and stage directions. He marked up some parts of Isaiah, Amos and Micah, and large sections of Hosea and Jeremiah.

Take the early chapters of Jeremiah as an example. The prophet questions the Lord and the Lord answers. These are the two characters. The chorus is the people of Jerusalem, and sometimes the prophet speaks directly to them. Sometimes he himself reflects on the situation.

All too little is known about the great temple in Jerusalem, and some of the most interesting information comes from visitors who described what they saw. A Greek traveller in about 300 BCE, for example, looked down into the temple court from a neighbouring tower and

saw the high priest emerging from the temple in his glorious robes. He saw the people bowing in worship before the high priest because he brought them messages from the Lord. On his forehead he wore a gold ornament which bore the name Yahweh, and so he was, for his people, the angel [which means messenger] of the Lord (Hecataeus of Abdera, in Diodorus of Sicily Xl.3). Thomson could have been imagining the words of the prophets as a drama set in the temple: the prophet questioned the Lord, and the assembled people of the city were the chorus who commented on what they had seen and heard. Who knows?

Thomson's translation of the Bible, Old and New Testaments, was published in 1808. Then he embarked on a new venture. He combined the words of all four Gospels into one narrative, which he called a Synopsis. This was first done in the mid-2nd century CE, when a fourfold 'Harmony' of the gospels was made, first in Syriac and later in Latin. A copy of the Latin Harmony became one of the treasures of the monastery at Fulda in Germany. There were many popular versions of the gospel harmony in mediaeval north Europe, and in the early eighteenth century, the Moravian Church in East Saxony adopted the Gospel Harmony for their Bible readings during Holy Week. They still use this ancient form of the gospels [Gracehill, 1759]. Moravian missionaries from Germany arrived in Pennsylvania in 1741 and established their first settlement named Bethlehem. Charles Thomson had arrived as a ten year old in Pennsylvania only two years before the Moravians came, and one wonders if he learned from them about the tradition of Gospel Harmonies. Charles Thomson began to compile his *Synopsis of the Four Evangelists* when he was 80 years old, and it was published 1815, when he was eighty six. He lived for nine more years, and died in August 1824 at the age of ninety five.