

Thomas de Hibernia's Preface to the *Manipulus florum*,
translated by Chris L. Nighman from the edition of Mary A. Rouse and Richard H.
Rouse, *Preachers, Florilegia and Sermons: Studies on the Manipulus florum of Thomas
of Ireland*, Toronto: PIMS Studies and Texts 47 (1979), pp.236-8.
(with references provided for three citations incorrectly identified in the edition)

“She went out into the field and gathered ears of grain behind the reapers” (Ruth 2:3). Ruth, a poor woman without her own harvest to gather, went into another's field to glean after the harvesters. So too have I, a pauper without any books, gone into the field of Boaz, which may be interpreted as strength or virtue, namely the field of Robert [of Sorbonne] who was surely robust and in whom the strength of virtue surely flourished. And there, not without some effort, I collected the ears of grain of original sources, namely, various authoritative quotations by holy men, from various books. But realizing that they were not organized and so would not be of much use to anyone else after me, I have concisely gathered them here, as into a sheaf comprised of various ears, in alphabetical order in the manner of concordances so that they can thus be more easily found by myself and by other simple people. And so, just as when the other harvesters came joyously carrying their sheaves, let me (along with the poor widow) offer this, gathered behind the backs of the doctors, to the treasury of the Lord. For since the sea of original books is like a great and wide ocean that cannot be explored by just anyone, it seemed to me more useful to have a few sayings of the doctors at hand rather than too many; indeed a person could have sailed across it and come back empty handed, according to the advice of Seneca: “When you come across many [quotations], select one that you carefully consider on that day;”¹ “for you should linger and be nourished by certain geniuses, if you wish to derive something that will remain faithfully in your mind,”² for “the memory is fragile and inadequate for the confused mass of things.”³ “Therefore, we should imitate the bees which wander and graze on flowers to make honey, and then arrange whatever they have brought and distribute it throughout the honeycomb.” In this way, he says, “we should extract whatever we have gathered from reading various sources, for such extracts are better preserved. For the proper facility of the mind, we should then combine those various samples into one flavour so that, even if their origin should be known, yet they will appear to be different than the place from which they are taken.” Therefore, I have compiled here, in alphabetical order in the manner of concordances, certain better known and more common topics that very often appear in sermons or lectures and with which a person can improve himself in every way. Thus, the topics beginning with the letter ‘a’ are placed first in relation to the various letters that follow it in alphabetical order, next the topics beginning with the letter ‘b’, and so on for the rest of the letters of the alphabet. The same alphabetical order that is applied to the first letters of the topics is also applied to the letters that follow within the name of the topic; for example, ‘*conversatio*’ is placed before ‘*conversio*’, even though the first four or five letters are the same. Under each topic there are placed various authoritative quotations, which seem to speak very well on the subject, from saints and other learned men. And these authoritative quotations from various saints and learned

¹ Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 2.4.

² Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*, 2.2.

³ Seneca, *De beneficiis*, 7.28.

men are cited in the margin. But because a quotation that relates to one topic may also apply to several other topics, in order to avoid repeating quotations under different topics, I have placed letters of the alphabet in the margin next to each quotation that generally correspond to the number of quotations in that topic, and where the number of letters does not suffice, they are combined. Therefore, at the end of each topic there is a list of other topics with certain letters following which indicate that quotations relating to that topic are found in those topics under those letters. But if a topic in the list does not have any letters following it, it means that everything that can be found under that topic applies to the same subject. Thus, if any quotation is not situated in its proper place, it is restored to it, and these are very clearly shown to the user. However, I was not able to ascribe the quotations with certainty to the chapters of books because in different books they are arranged in different ways, and often the same quotation is ascribed to various authors; indeed, frequently one and the same quotation by the same person is found in different places. But every truth spoken by whomever is of the Holy Spirit. These are the authors whose sentences are very often cited here: Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory, Bernard, Origen, Cyprian, Fulgentius, Basel, Maximus, Raban, Caesarius, Leo, Bede, Prosper, Anselm, Richard, Hugh, John Cassian, Cassiodorus, Alan, Peter of Ravenna, Pliny, Solinus, Rabbi Moses, Valerius Maximus, Vegetius, Agellius, Sidonius, Tully, Boethius, and Seneca, whose sayings on each topic are placed at the end because, according to him, the part that should be saved for the end is the one that can even be desired by someone who is satiated. For “the last drink delights the person devoted to wine and people like to save the greatest delight until the end.” Moreover, I have listed at the end of this work the books of these authors, with their beginnings and endings, and their authors’ names and a number of partial books so that they can be known more easily and ascribed more accurately. Therefore, reader, pray for the compiler and make use of the things sought with another’s labour and be glad of the things found without your own labour. But do not despise the fertile original field on account of these paltry ears of grain, for he who strives to warm himself with sparks and neglects the fire is unwise, and so too is he who tries to quench his thirst with droplets and ignores the fountain.