

THE RACIAL AND LINGUISTIC ELEMENTS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

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The English tongue is a member of a great group or family, embracing many seemingly remote tongues. This family originally occupied a large portion of Asia and nearly the whole of Europe. The name given to it at the present time is the Indo-European or Aryan Family. The place where this language was first spoken is not definitely known, although its first home is supposed to have been in parts of southwestern Asia and eastern Europe.

Scientific study of the Indo-European family shows that all branches of it contain certain grammatical and root forms which bear a strong resemblance to one another. For this reason they are supposed to have sprung from a common source.

According to the similarity or nearness of relationship the Indo-European family has been divided into the following branches.

I. The Indian.

This branch includes the Gypsy, Hindi, Hindustani and Mahratti. Its greatest representative is Sanskrit. The earliest form of the Indian branch goes back to about two thousand years before the Christian era, and its latest except the Sanskrit to about three centuries before that epoch. The Sanskrit is spoken and written by a small priesthood in a limited section, to the present day. The Indian is the oldest known language belonging to the great Indo-European family and probably comes nearest to the primitive speech of all known languages.

II. The Iranian, including as its principal existing representative the Modern Persian and as its ancient branches the Parsi, and the Cuneiform Inscriptions containing records of the reign of Darius, Xerxes and other Persian kings from about 500 B.C.

III. The Hellenic, so named from the Hellenes, the inhabitants of Hellas. This embraces ancient Greek and the Atalic, the Doric, the Ionic and particularly the Attic dialects. The existing form is Modern Greek.

IV. The Slavonic or Slavo-Lettic.

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This branch is divided into two minor branches.

1. The Slavonian, including Polish, Russian, Czech, Croatian, Servian and Bulgarian.
2. The Lithuanian, embracing the Old Prussian, (now displaced by Platt, Deutch and literary High German) and the Lettish and Lithuanian.

The English language is not closely connected with any mentioned so far, although it has borrowed some from all, especially the Greek. With these remaining, however, it has a much closer relationship. With the first, the Keltic, its geographical connections are close, from the second, the Gadhelic, about half its literary connections have been taken, and of the third, the Teutonic, it is itself a member.

V. The Keltic.

This branch was once widely spread over western Europe, but is now confined to parts of the British Isles and to the peninsula of Brittany in northern France. It is now divided into:-

1. The Cymric. The dialects belonging to this sub-branch were once spread over the whole of England and southern Scotland, but is now almost restricted to Wales. There is one other living tongue belonging to the Cymric, the Breton, spoken in Brittany.

2. The Gadhelic or Goidelic. The most important member of this sub-group is the Erse or Irish. Two other dialects belong to it, the Gaelic, spoken in parts of the Scottish Highlands, and the Manx, spoken in the Isle of Man.

These dialects are dying out and others are taking their places. They have had no great linguistic influence on our language.

VI. Italic.

Of this branch, Latin is the great representative. The other ancient tongues of Italy are dead, but from Latin have sprung the Romance languages. These are not derived directly from the literary Latin of Cicero and Virgil, but from the

dialect of soldiers, colonists and traders, by whom the language was taken into the provinces. In this way the French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Provencal, Romansch and Wallachian languages have been developed.

These tongues are interesting to us as they have helped to form our English, especially so far as our vocabulary is concerned. This is especially true of classical Latin and French. Owing to certain circumstances the Romance elements make up about half our literary vocabulary.

VII. The Teutonic This is the most important as well as the strongest of all the branches that enter into our speech. The sub-branch to which English belongs is the Low German. The other tongues belonging to it are Platt-Deutsch, Frisian, Dutch and Flemish.

Another sub-branch is the Scandinavian including the Icelandic, Norwegian, Danish and Swedish.

The Gothic belongs also to the Teutonic branch, but its speech died out in the 9th Century.

The Old Saxon, which formed the foundation of our language, was spoken in the region between the Rhine and the Elbe. Its modern representative is the Platt-Deutsch or Low German. In the fifth and sixth centuries the Saxon was carried to Great Britain by the Saxons and Angles. There it has a history and developed a literature of its own. Its older form is designated as Anglo-Saxon or Old English.

English, then is accurately spoken of as belonging to the Indo-European family. Contrasted with its numerous related tongues, it is grouped as belonging to the Low Germanic group.

THE ROMAN CONQUEST.

The English language is now spoken in countries scattered all over the globe, but its history is almost wholly confined to the island of Great Britain.

The Kelts, the Romans, the Saxons, the Northmen and the French have all at some time been the predominating power on the island. English was not the original speech in that country, but has been developed through many centuries.

The first race to have possession of the island was the Keltic. The Kelts may be regarded as our first linguistic ancestors, in England. This race was divided into two tribes, the Kimmerian and the Kelt proper.

Very little is known concerning this people and their occupation of England. They are supposed to have been a brave and fearless people and are so portrayed by classical writers. When Julius Caesar invaded England in 55 B.C., he found the Kelts occupying the country. For nearly a hundred years after this invasion Great Britain was not molested by the Roman government. About A.D. 42 another attempt at conquest was made and was continued until the close of the first century. By that time the country as far as the Frith of Forth was under the control of the Romans. Colonies were established and military roads built. An attempt was made to introduce the Latin language, but these attempts were never very successful. With the departure of the Romans in the 5th century, the Latin disappeared, without having made, at that time, much impression on our language.

THE TEUTONIC CONQUEST.

Up to the time when the Teutonic tribes entered England, the English language was unknown upon the island. It is to these tribes that we are indebted for the introduction of our native tongue, and the displacement of the Keltic.

After the Romans abandoned the island, the inhabitants were left without protection, exposed to the invasions of the Picts and Scots, who had never been subdued. In their danger, the people called upon certain Teutonic tribes living in the northern part of Germany, to come to their assistance. It was by these tribes that the primitive English language was introduced into Great Britain. After a short time the allies turned upon the ones whom they had come to help. The Britons did not give up at once; rather they fought valiantly for their country for nearly three centuries, but at last the Kelts succumbed and the Saxons were masters of the land. At the beginning of the ninth century, the portion of the country under the

control of the British, was limited to the present country of Cornwall, the principality of Wales, and a strip along the northwestern coast of England and the southwestern coast of Scotland. By 940 the West Saxon house was given permanent ruling power over the entire island.

The Tribes Composing the Teutonic Invaders.

There were three tribes composing this branch. All were Low German: the Jutes, the Angles, and the Saxons.

According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle the first movement was made in 449, by Hengist and Horsa who are supposed to have come over with a body of Jutes, and to have founded the kingdom of Kent. Later, South Saxony and West Saxony were founded by the Saxons and the Angles. During the following years these tribes slowly merged into one, the "Englisc" or "English".

The Anglo-Saxon Language.

Before the accession of Egbert, the speech of the invaders was broken into a number of dialects. Two of these dialects were Anglian - the Mercian and the Northumbrian, and two others, which were spoken mainly south of the Thames, were the West Saxon and the Kentish. With the accession of Egbert, the West Saxon dialect became supreme and the few books written were published in that tongue.

The language of this people was called by them Saxon or English. Even down to the 11th century it was so called. The name English, however, seemed to be more prominent. By writers of today that early speech is designated as "Old English".

Of the changes of the language before the conversion of the Saxons to Christianity, little is known. The preaching of Christianity in England began about 597 A.D.

Of course, all through this period the Keltic language, which was that of the native British, had more or less influence upon the Anglo-Saxon tongue. This influence, however, was comparatively slight, as there was very little friendly intercourse between the two peoples. This fact was partly because the invaders were heathen. Indeed, Venerable Bede, who died in 735, states that his people has very

intercourse with the English, and did not respect their faith and religion any more than that of pagans.

The Latin on the other hand, had a marked influence at this time. Missionaries has been sent to England from Rome and by the end of the seventh century had succeeded in converting the people. Latin was the language used in the services of the church and in the writings of the priests, and soon came to be used considerably in common speech.

THE DANISH INVASION.

There was still another element to enter into the making of the language. In 787, during the reign of Bertric, King of Wessex, the Northmen invaded Britian. The Saxon Chronicle says:

"In these days there came for the first time three ships of the Northmen to the land of Herethi. The King's lieutenant rode thither, and would have made them come to the King's house, for he knew not who they were. But there he was slain. These were the first shipe of the Danes that came into England."

By the end of the ninth century much of the Saxon territory had been subdued by these fierce warriors and part of it had been permanently settled. Later, under the Peace of Wedmore, the country was divided between the two nations, the Danes adopting the Christian faith.

Although the Danes conquered the people, they did not conquer the language. On the other hand they gave up their own tongue and adopted the speech of those with whom they made their homes. It is difficult to determine just how much influence the Danish language has upon our tongue for the reason that both languages have a common source. They are both Teutonic. There is no doubt, however, that many Norse words were introduced at this time.

THE NORMAN CONQUEST.

From this time the language takes on a more complex and composite form. A new race enters the country, bringing with it new customs, new laws and above all, a new speech. The English absorbs new elements more rapidly than ever before and a new linguistic epoch, the Middle English Period, is developed.

The beginning of this period was marked by the advent into England of William of Normandy and his victorious hosts. This took place in 1066. The Normans were originally Teutons like the English, and were descendants of the Norse pirates, who, under Hrolf has conquered the land near the mouth of the Seine in the tenth century, and later developed the powerful duchy of Normandy in northern France.

The immediate cause for the invasion of England was the death of the English ruler, Edward the Confessor, early in 1066. William Duke of Normandy was a cousin of the deceased king, and, on the basis of the relationship, he promptly claimed the throne. To support this claim he invaded England with a large force. At the battle of Hastings, October 14, 1066, he defeated the native claimant for the throne and subsequently subjected the entire country.

After the Conquest, the French language was for centuries used exclusively in the courts and among the ruling classes. With a few exceptions it became the language of literature also, and therefore, the effect upon the language was very marked. There is only one English Chronicle of any great length after the Conquest and one came to an end exactly at 1066 as though the writer had no further interest in the work. Saxon poetry extends almost until 1066 and then ceases for many years.

The invaders despised English, as a barbarous speech of a conquered foe, but the great mass of the people still used it. For almost a hundred years after the Conquest the languages remained distinct, but gradually through business intercourse, intermarriage and social relations the foreigners learned the English speech, and by the loss of Normandy in 1204, the connections with France were broken

and English finally prevailed.

It was not, however, the old Saxon that prevailed. There were many reasons for this failure, the chief one being that the leading men, the ones who through literary, national and religious influence had maintained interest in keeping the language pure, were deposed. Consequently there was no one to keep up the supply of literature, nor listen to and encourage the native songsters.

The inflection system of the native tongue could not live in the troublesome times of this period. It was too cumbersome. The -an, the -um, the -era, the -êna, the -igenne and the -igendum were too unwieldy for the people who had invaded the country, and as the conquered people had lost their old national pride, these forms were laid aside.

There was also a great change made in the vocabulary. The Normans brought with them the French language and contributed much to our stock of words. Expressions of dignity, state and honor were mostly derived from the French:— soverign, scepter, throne, royalty, prince, duke, and many others of such nature were introduced at this time.

Though the words indicative of luxury, personal adornment and the like are Norman, the broad basis of our language does not belong to that tongue. The strong, plain, homely words which make up the life and vigor of our language, are Saxon. House, roof, home, hearth, all these and many others connected with the home life are of the native tongue.

The language resulting was neither Norman-French nor Anglo-Saxon, but Anglo-Norman, which finally became our English. By the usage of poets and authors it was made a settled speech, and became the basis of our modern English. The period including this epoch, designated as the Middle English Period, covers the time between the Conquest and the death of Chaucer,—1066 to 1400.

THE MIDDLE ENGLISH PERIOD.

Saxon had never ceased to be the speech of the common people. The Conquest merely destroyed the cultivated English, that which depended upon the literature for its propagation. Since this had been overthrown there was no central standard of speech and the language gradually fell back into three dialects, - the Northern, Midland and Southern English.

One of the first of the literary works of this period was Weyman's "Brut". This poem represents the dialect of the south and west. It was written near the beginning of the 13th century. The language is almost purely English, showing little effect of French influence. In the 32,000 lines only about fifty Norman-French words can be found. In the early part of the 13th century also Orm or Ormin wrote a religious poem, the "Ormulum". This represents the eastern type of English. An unusual number of consonants is a peculiar feature of the "Ormulum". This poem also is purely English. "The Ancreu Riote" or "Rules of the Anchoresses" which belongs to this same period shows however, a mixture of English and Norman words.

As we near the close of the 14th century we come to the end of what might be styled the "transition period". During this period there were strong efforts made to establish a national literature. But as yet there was no national language and authors were almost forced to write in French or Latin, in order to preserve their productions.

A poem "Genesis and Exodus" was written about A.D. 1250. At the end of the poem the author says:

"God shield his soul from hell-bale that made it thus an English tale".

Another poem written during this period is "The Owl and the Nightingale". A prominent characteristic of this production is the use of y for f; as yo for foe, vairer for fairer, vlize for flies. The sc of olden works becomes sch, as scharp, schule. The date of this poem is about A.D. 1280. Another very important

and original work is the rhyming Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester. He used the west county English or dialect.

Thus we see that there was no one standard of language, but that each author chose his own dialect. All this time the English speech was steadily gaining ground while French was losing. Under Edward III, about 1350, Latin ceased to be used for instruction in schools, and as early as 1362, French gave way to English in the courts of law. The English language was becoming not only the tongue of the common people, but the tongue of the wealthy, the refined, and the learned - in a word, the literary tongue.

During the latter part of the 14th century East Midland English became the most prominent dialect. It was the dialect spoken about London, and was the language of the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford, as well as the speech used in the court. Furthermore it was the language used in the more important literary productions. The poet, John Gower (1325 ? -1408) abandoned the French and Latin to write in this dialect. His first English poem was "Confessio Amantis" or the "Lover's Confession".

In 1380 John Wiclif translated the Bible into the Midland form. Another poem in the same dialect was Langland's "Visions of Piers Plowman". It stands as a good example of old alliterative English verse.

The East Midland dialect was not a pure dialect but was considerably mixed with French. Thus when the English tongue was finally adopted, it was not exclusively Anglo-Saxon, but was a mixed language. The grammar and forms of construction remained English but the vocabulary contained a very large number of foreign words. By this mixture the language became more flexible, richer and better suited for the expression of subtle, beautiful and poetic thoughts.

Although the various literary productions mentioned were very influential in the establishment of English as a literary language, yet the greater part was left for one man. This man was Geoffrey Chaucer. To him more than to any other one

man do we owe the recognition of our speech as a language of literature. As a courtier he was familiar with Norman-French, as one of the common people he was acquainted with the common speech in the vicinity of London. Thus he was peculiarly well fitted to combine the two great tongues into one. His influence was all the more powerful because his choice of the native tongue was not caused by ignorance of French and Latin. He chose English because he thought it the language in which an Englishman should write.

The English tongue however, was not yet settled as a literary language. For over a century after the time of Chaucer, many did not consider it a good enough language for their literary productions. Even in the 17th century, in the time of Bacon, works originally written in English were often translated into Latin in order that they might be preserved.

THE MODERN ENGLISH PERIOD.

This period includes everything from the middle of the 16th century to the present time. The period from 1550 to 1660 is remarkable for the expansion of our vocabulary. Many words came from the Greek, the French, the Spanish, and the Italian, although most of the additions were derived from the Latin. The cause for this remarkable development was the Renaissance, or the Revival of Learning, which had just reached England. As new thoughts were developed and new facts were discovered it was necessary to have new terms in which to express these facts and thoughts. Consequently many new words and phrases were coined. Not all of these of course ever entered into common usage.

By the time of the restoration of the Stuarts in 1660 the enthusiasm was beginning to wane. Indeed, the period between 1640 and 1783 added little to our vocabulary, except many French terms which were introduced by Charles II and his followers who had been in exile in France. During this time Samuel Johnson did much through his dictionary and other writings to unify the Teutonic and

Latin elements of the language. He favored, however, the Latin.

The period since 1783 has introduced many new terms, especially in science. Many of these are derived from the Greek and Latin and a few from almost every tongue spoken on earth, including Arabic, Chinese, Ethiopian, Russian, Turkish, Japanese, Hungarian, and American Indian. During this period the language has shown a tendency to go back to many of the older words and forms.

CONCLUSION.

During the modern period the English tongue has been carried to all parts of the world. It is, at the present time, spoken by more people than any of the other literary languages and its use is constantly increasing.

Our language cannot rest upon past greatness. Its growth in the future will depend upon the men who use it. The men who are to perpetuate it must have the power of intellect, the material strength and the moral development, not only to maintain their present place, but to win a yet higher place. There are strong indications that this marvelous tongue will grow and develop and maintain a vigorous life in the time to come as it has in the centuries past. The English speaking people of today are being more generally educated than ever before. Through their literature, their commerce, their missionaries, their political relations, their enterprises incident to modern civilization, they are constantly enriching their speech and are carrying it to the remotest corners of the earth. As a consequence it now seems probable that the time will come when the language of Chaucer and Shakspeare and Tennyson will be known by every nation, tribe and people in its whole world.

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