

Race Elements in the Formation of the English  
Language, and the Effects of these Elements upon English  
Literature.

Flora Edna Brenner.

Race Elements in the Formation of the English Language,  
and the Effects of these Elements upon English Literature.

English is not a language derived from any single source. Only in tracing its development, however, do we come to realize the vast number of elements that enter into its formation. Almost every written or spoken tongue on the face of the earth, has, in a greater or less degree, imparted some quality, in some particular manner, to the English.

Despite the fact of its borrowing from all these sources, English is primarily Indo-European or Aryan. The Aryans were a primitive race, of whom very little is known. Even their abode is disputed, some authorities ascribing it to Europe, and some to Asia. From these people, descendants have scattered to all parts of the earth and developed different tongues for themselves, but there still remains resemblances in certain words and grammatical forms.

It is my purpose in this paper, to give an account of only the most important of the racial elements, directly entering into, and influencing the formation, and development of our language, and literature.

The Keltic \*                      The British Isles, the cradle of the English Language,  
\*                                      \*  
Element. \* was, at the earliest record, inhabited by the Kelts, a race of  
\*                                      \*  
people possessing many interesting characteristics.

Their manners and customs were rude, and their homes were huts of timbers and reeds. They were divided, into tribes, each tribe, having its chief, who called his people together, to confer upon matters of general concern. War was their main occupation, and swords, spears, axes, and chariots, with scythes projecting, were their weapons. Their mode of summoning warriors, was by sending a messenger, who carried a stick burnt at the end, and dipped in blood. This, they called the "Cran tara". The religion of the Kelts was Druidism, and priests were arbiters of disputes, and judges of crime. They taught Eternal Transmigration of souls, and made appeals to their gods, by offering human sacrifice.

There were also Keltic Bards who went about singing the praises of heroes, using a musical instrument consisting of a wheel striking upon strings.

The disposition of the Kelts exhibited varied contrasts. They were passionate and emotional, varying from great vivacity, and hilarity, to melancholy and tenderness. They were lovers of gay colors, and of gorgeous displays in any form. They have shown these characteristics in their literature even sacrificing the best style to an elaborate manner of expression. They were remarkable for their genius, and the beauty of their writings, but lacked a balance of patience and stability, so essential to strong national government.

Few changes occurred in the language and literature, as a result of the Danish invasion. Their language was similar, in origin to the English, and as time passed, they gradually became assimilated into it, probably infusing some vigor. Such words as 'fellow', 'gait', 'hill', and names of places along the coast are attributed to the Danish element.

\* The first real beginning of English we find to be in the  
Tutonic \* Tutonic Element. The branch of the Tutons settling in England,  
\* Element. \* consisted principally of the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes.  
\* They immigrated to Britain, and after two hundred years of warfare, drove out the Kelts, or quietly absorbed them. They were known as the Anglo-Saxons, and named the land "Angla-land," which form later developed into England.

Anglo-Saxon characteristics were an abundant self reliance, a strong sense of honor, and a contempt for cowardice. They were severe in manners, grave, valorous, and liberty-loving. Their treatment of, and respect for woman, indicate a high and pure standard of morality. They fostered the spirit of home life, protecting women, and allowing them an equality with men before the law.

During the years of Anglo-Saxon independence, the nation made wonderful progress in almost every field of life. With the knowledge obtained from the Briton, and the Dane, as well as from the continent, united with their own practical good sense, together with their conversion to Christianity, they betook themselves to the tillage of the soil, to forms of manufacturing, and gradually constructed a manly and sympathetic constitution.

From the Anglo-Saxons we have obtained nearly half of our English words, and these of the tenderest and most effective type, as also our peculiarities of construction and idiom, the inflections of pronouns, terminations of possessive case, and plural number, as well as the second and third person, and singular verbs. The syllables 'er', 'est', the words 'more', and 'most', the suffix 'ly', such words as 'an', 'the', 'how', 'now', and 'then', are all derived from the Anglo-Saxon.

In a rude state of society, such as we find among the sturdy Anglo-Saxons, living in close contact with nature, it is but natural that the first literature should appear in the form of poetry. With such an environment, their ideas could not but have a beauty and simplicity affecting their writings. Among an illiterate people, historical facts are more easily preserved as poetry than as prose. The great subjects of their poems were "Man" and "Nature". Every manifestation of nature was attributed to some spiritual force, and all things beautiful and terrific, were personified. For example, the earth was spoken of as "Kind Mother", spring-time as "Gentle Maiden", and the sun, as "Gods candle".

Most authorities give the Kelt, little credit, as furnishing an element in the formation of the English language, for from them, not more than, one hundred words have been incorporated into our vocabulary, of three hundred thousand, and they exerted no influence upon the grammar.

The Keltic contributions to literature, were largely legends, and bardic songs, which were early translated into Latin, thus passing into all the literatures of Europe. They thus furnished much of the material for later writings.

The "Triads" of this people, were a collection of historical facts, maxims, mythological doctrines, and traditions, all expressed with extreme brevity, and regularly disposed in groups of three. Both in the "Triads" and bardic songs, allusions are made to King Arthur, the Knight and hero. The poems were very beautiful in tenderness, and pathos, as is shown by a little song, sung by a bard, who has seen his youngest son killed in battle.

"Let the war break noisily;  
Let it cover the shore, when the joined  
Lancers are in battle. O, Gwenn, woe to him who is too  
old since he has lost you!

Let the war break noisily;  
Let it cover the plain where the Lancers joine with a shock --  
Gwenn has been slain at the ford of Morlas.  
Here is the bier made for him by his fierce conquered enemy  
after he had been surrounded on all sides by the army of Lloe-  
grians; here is the tomb of the Gwenn, the son of old Llywarch.  
Sweetly a bird sang on an old pear tree, above the head of  
Gevenn before they covered him with turf; that broke the  
heart of old Llywarch."

The Danish \* \* \* \* \* During the later part of the eighth century, occurred  
Element. \* \* \* \* \* the invasions of the Danes. They were a roving piratical  
\* \* \* \* \* People, whose territory was the sea, and whose home was a  
ship. Their code of honor was: "A brave man should attack two, stand firm  
against three, give ground a little to four, and only retreat from five".  
They possessed an absolute contempt for death, so that with their strength  
and numbers, they proved a terror to Britain. Their victories were celebra-  
ted by the destruction of churches, monasteries, books, and the wholesale  
slaughter of men, women, and children. The English fought bravely, but  
lacked the national strength necessary to a universal defense.

The Danes succeeded in occupying the English throne from 1013 to 1042.  
When they embraced Christianity they lost much of their original ferocious  
nature. It is from these people that the English obtained their maritime  
enterprise.

The early authors possessed real genius, but labored under the disadvantage of limited ideas, unrefined diction, and a cramped system of versification. In the Anglo-Saxon poetry, there is no rhyme, nor are the syllables counted. Lines are written in three pairs, the three chief words of each line, usually beginning with the same letter.

The earliest known Saxon poem was "Beowulf", epic in its character, and pagan in its ideas, but later revised by a Christian writer. This poem serves as a most interesting relic, of that early period, giving a clear insight into the manners and customs of the people. It relates the heroic deeds of Beowulf, Prince of the Geatas, especially his strength with Grendel, a monster of the sea, as well as with Grendel's mother, and later with a dragon, the victory over which cost his life. The idea of fatalism, so prevalent among these people is shown where Beowulf cries, as he receives his death wound: "To us it must be, as our father betides, that fate which is every man's Lord".

Caedmon was the first Anglo-Saxon writer of religious poetry. His Subjects were taken from the Bible. He wrote of the "Creation", the "War in Heaven", and the "Fall of Satan". Similarities to Caedmon's writings are noticed in some of Milton's Works.

Cynewulf, another Anglo-Saxon poet, was supposed to have been Bishop of Lindisfarne. In his writings we find a gentleness, more akin to modern feelings. His most important poem was on the "Crist", of which the following lines are a sample :-

"Now tis most like as if we fare in ships  
On the ocean flood, o'er the water cold,  
Driving our vessels through the spacious seas,  
On which we toss here in this feeble world,  
O'er the deep paths. Ours was a sorry plight,  
Until at last we sailed unto the land,  
Over the troubled main. Help came to us  
That brought us to the haran of salvation  
God's Spirit son, and granted grace to us  
That we might know e'en from the vessels deck  
Where we must bind with anchorage secure  
Our ocean steeds, old stallions of the waves"

\* During the period from 1066 to 1366, occurred the Norman  
\* Conquest of England. This is known as the "Transition Peri-  
The Norman- \* od". The Normans were originally, of the same Tutonic race,  
French Element. \* as the Anglo-Saxons, but had settled in Northern France,  
\* where they adopted the French language and religion, forgetting their own.  
England was subdued in the battle of Hastings 1066, and William the Conquer,

became ruler of the conquered land.

The Normans had imbibed the French spirit in dress, and manners, and were superior to the Anglo-Saxon in military enterprise, and in intellect and culture. They were spirited and quick to act, and their regard for women was not so reverential. They admired woman only as their senses were appealed to. They possessed masterly qualities of courage and enterprise, and always made an effort to win the applause of their countrymen.

With such characteristics the Normans naturally looked upon the Anglo-Saxons, as rude and stupid, and began at once to reform English customs and institutions. French was made the fashionable speech, and was imposed upon tribunals, and legislatures. All ecclesiastical positions were filled by Norman bishops and abbots. Children at School were compelled to learn French and finally Latin. Taxes were levied, land appropriated, and the owner made slave to his own estate. But with all the changes, introduced by the Normans, the Anglo-Saxon, remained the language of the people. Norman Barons married Saxon wives, their children were taught Saxon, and thus they were compelled to learn to speak the language themselves.

Although the Anglo-Saxon prevailed as the language of the English people, it underwent many changes during this period. These were chiefly modifications of inflections, and additions to the vocabulary. Among the changes of inflection, were the weakening <sup>of the vowels, i, o, and u, into e,</sup> of the terminations. For example tellan to 'tellen' (to tell); stanas to 'stones'; stolas to 'stoles' (stools); carn to 'care'; and at length the dropping of the final n as tellen to 'to tell'. From the Normans it is estimated that at least five thousand words were added.

The literature of the Norman period was largely poetical romances, and so called verse histories, mostly written in French.

Latin has exerted a noticable influence upon English, but my title does not permit of any extensive discussion of this point, since no race element directly entered. I will mention however the first Roman invasion, 55 B.C., which added a few civil and military terms, the Christianization of Britain, 596 . . . , introducing Latin culture and literature. The majority of Latin entered through the Norman-French.

Thus we see that the English language, which is now spoken from ocean to ocean, is a composite language, each element imparting its especial characteristic, transforming the language, and moulding it into its present beauty and grace. The Kelt with his passion and sentiment, the Anglo-Saxon with his grave severity, the Dane with his courage and enterprise, and the Norman with his refinement and culture, all blend together in one harmonious whole. to form a language unrivalled by any,- a language which stands as the "Crowning glory of the works of man".