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THE CLAIMS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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THE CLAIMS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

PHI-DELTA AND THALIAN SOCIETIES

OF

OGLETHORPE UNIVERSITY, GEORGIA,

ON COMMENCEMENT DAY,

NOVEMBER 10, 1852.

BY B. M. PALMER, D. D.

OF COLUMBIA, S. C.

COLUMBIA, S. C.

PRINTED BY I. C. MORGAN.

1853.

CORRESPONDENCE.

PHI-DELTA HALL, Nov. 10, 1852.

Dear Sir,—The undersigned committee, in behalf of the *Phi-Delta Society*, would hereby express to you their deep sense of gratitude for the able and appropriate Address delivered before them on Commencement-day; and most respectfully solicit a copy of the same for publication. It is no cold compliment which we offer, nor a mere conventionality to which we conform. But we tender to you the *sincere thanks* of the Society, and for ourselves, sentiments of the highest esteem.

Yours most respectfully,

J. A. DANFORTH,
JAS. A. COUSAR, } Committee.
JAS. D. CLARK, }

To Rev. B. M. PALMER, D. D.

COLUMBIA, S. C., Nov. 15, 1852.

Gentlemen,—The Address, which I had the pleasure to deliver on the 10th inst., claims no merit of originality. The combination of old materials was all that was possible to one who has but recently turned his mind to the study of Saxon. Hoping that its publication may assist in drawing attention to the claims of our Mother-English, the Address is herewith submitted.

I am, gentlemen,

Very truly yours,

B. M. PALMER.

Messrs. J. A. DANFORTH, }
J. A. COUSAR, } Committee.
J. D. CLARK, }

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~~ANNEX A~~

ADDRESS.

Gentlemen of the Phi-Delta and Thalian Societies:

At your instance, I fill now an office not unlike that of the Chorus in the Ancient Drama; who, as you remember, were a medium of sympathy between the audience and the actors—giving vent in wild dithyrambiaks to emotions which the tragedy had inspired. So, at this season, when the graduate stands upon the verge of academic life, and greets the outside world in whose bustling throng he is soon to mingle, a beautiful custom requires that some one in the high noon of life should receive him upon the edge of the platform, and bid him a responsive welcome. To all who look at the hidden proprieties of these ceremonies, it will appear a delicate and graceful office, thus to put forth the hand of blessing upon those whom the world regards with prophetic hope. As a jet from the rock-bound but crystal spring, so gushes from its rough but earnest heart the world's blessing upon the young: hope flushing the dawn of their career with a glory like that the rising sun paints upon the morning sky. Sacred too, be the day which hushes for us the clatter of life, and throws us into conference with you under the shadow of these classic groves! when age, for a moment, slips away from care, and manhood remits his toil; to bow again at the shrines of Apollo and the Muse! Fragrant memories of the past are wafted upon every breath, and give a soul to every sound, as we mingle in these scenes: memories of

that secret joy when the adventurous hand first plucked fruit from the tree of knowledge, and our eyes were opened to the mysteries of Nature and of God: memories of those first ties which as separate threads have been woven into the web of life, the meshes of which time has drawn closer together and knit more firmly about us: memories too of budding hopes, which have either withered in disappointment, or else have expanded into the duties which fill life so much with care. Below the gay surface of this laughing scene, there flows in many breasts a deep current of undeveloped feeling—truant thoughts wander back to other days—and the heart becomes mellow in the associations of early life.

But this is not the occasion for idle sentiment, or dreamy reverie. Content with this quick exchange of greetings, I yield at once to the law of your entertainment by which

“Each guest brings his dish and the feast is united,”

and propose forthwith to spread before you *the claims of the English language upon the critical study of English and American scholars.*

I. Let the first argument be *the dictate of affection for our “birth tongue.”* Can it be necessary to plead for the language in which we first heard the accents of kindness from a mother’s lips?—the language, whose syllables trembled upon our own, when infancy exchanged its babbling dialect for connected speech?—the language, which like a vase of amber enshrines the teeming thoughts and fancies of a busy mind? whose tones awaken all the emotions of the past, as through her magic lantern memory causes its scenes again to flit before the mind?—The language which treasures the last farewell of dying friends, as faith utters the final note of trust in a covenant God? Our language, like our country and our kindred, is identified with all that we have ever thought and felt, wished and loved; and, by an easy sympathy, we soon spread over these the fondness we feel for ourselves. To plead with cold arguments for love to one or the other, infers a depravity, as unnatural as want of affection to the mother

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who bore us. Yet this instinctive affection often lies dormant till occasion draws it forth. The pilgrim, whose weary foot has trodden many a league of foreign soil, can almost kiss, in the fervor of devotion, the sod of his birth: and to the pious ear long vexed with the uncouth accents of a foreign tongue, the first sound of our native speech will open the heart to the rushing flood of tender memories. But if patriotic pride prompts us to expatiate upon the long statistics of our country's wealth, and to paint the landscape of her majestic scenery, should not our scholars dig up the vast wealth that lies hidden in her language, and sketch the broad outline and projecting features of her noble dialect?

Unnatural as this appeal may seem, it will not be judged needless by those familiar with the history of the European languages—how slowly scholars yielded to this natural affection, and how long they neglected the “orphan idioms of their father-lands.” The Latin, from being the language of the mightiest empire ever built by military prowess, had passed into a sacred dialect; preserving the doctrines and decrees of Papal, as before it recorded the victories of Pagan, Rome. Even before the rise of “the great Apostasy,” it enjoyed a traditional reverence, treasuring the works of many of the Fathers of the Primitive Church. It was the language in which were written the commentaries of the schoolmen, and the legends of monkish chroniclers; the language of diplomacy, in which treaties were framed; the language of legislation, in which laws were enacted; the language of jurisprudence, constantly echoing in halls of justice; the language of prayer in temples of religion; the language in which all solemn records were made, and all works destined for immortality were composed. The prevailing sentiment was

“Poets that lasting marble seek
Must carve in Latin, or in Greek.”

Scholars were attached to the Latin tongue by prejudices strong as fetters of brass. Their works were enshrined, so long as they were composed in this stately and religious language; to abandon which for the vulgar tongue was to rend a veil of sacredness, and unchastely to expose themselves to the rude affection of the mob. Men of let-

ters felt more concern to perpetuate intercourse between themselves by a common dialect, than to establish sympathy with the boorish multitude who spoke their own vernacular. The strength of this feeling may be measured by the fact that as late as the 17th century such a mind as Lord Bacon's, not content with writing his greatest works in this ancient language, expressed the wish that his English writings should be transfused into the same.* We cannot tell how long this exclusive aristocracy of learning might have continued, had not social convulsions broken up their charmed circle, and led men of genius to impregnate the inert mass of uneducated minds. It did not affect the result, whether this change was wrought by the expansive force of genius from within, bursting the trammels which confined it, and seeking a wider range; or whether some influence from without broke up the artificial crust of society, and mingled its elements more perfectly together. The classic tongue of modern Italy was perhaps occasioned in the former way, while those of Germany and of Britain were occasioned in the latter. Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, the creators of Italian literature, put forth their hands to find a harp fit for the song with which they were inspired, and which could not be breathed in the cold measures of Latin verse. They swept the chords in the hearts of their countrymen, and instantly from the discordant dialects around them arose in its perfection the Italian tongue. On the other hand, the English and German languages scarcely attracted the notice of native scholars, until at the period of the Reformation the leaven of true religion became diffused through the masses, and thus the educated and the illiterate were bound together in strongest sympathy. No historical fact is more certain than that Luther's version of the Bible gave stability to the German language; while that of the sixth Edward, and afterwards the more perfect version of King James, anchored the English which was before afloat. Dean Swift has said that if it were not for the Bible and Common Prayer-book, we should scarcely be able to understand any thing that was written two hun-

* D'Israeli's *Amenities of Literature*, vol. I, p. 120: which has suggested a considerable portion of this section.

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dred years*ago. Certainly, no language could long be preserved intelligible amidst the constant flux of words and idioms which marks a living tongue, except by the influence of some great and recognised classic giving its responses like the Delphic oracle :

"Oracle truer far than oak,
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These references are sufficient at least to show that adverse influences may long counteract an instinctive affection for our mother tongue, and suppress its cultivation. The spell is indeed broken which, two centuries since, forced genius within the iron embrace of a dead and inflexible language. English authors can now write for posterity, and yet write in the same tongue in which they think, as did the great masters of antiquity. Our language has been polished till it has become worthy of the proud literature it contains: and the hard necessity no longer exists of filtering our noble thoughts through the cold forms of a language which has lost all plastic power, and has passed away with the iron race which spoke it. But important as this reformation was, it needs to be followed by another; and English scholars have to recognise a broader claim of their mother tongue. It demands to be placed on an equal footing with the ancient languages in a course of liberal education. It claims to be studied with a superior devotion to these: to be critically known in its grammatical and logical structure, in the forms of its syntax, in the powers of its roots, in its historical changes, in the factors which compose it, in its apparently lawless idioms, in the composition of its words, and in the genealogy of their derived meanings. It is needless to say that in this thorough and comprehensive method, the English language is studied by none save by a few amateurs. In many schools, after learning the power of the English letters, and acquiring the art of combining them into words and sentences, a boy is first put to the study of grammar in the acquisition of Latin—as though the English was an offshoot from it, and had not a root of its own, giving rise to peculiarities which no explanation from that source can unravel. It seems either to be forgotten that the structure of English is organically different; or it is assumed that

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but that it shall unfold all the powers of the English tongue, and thus prepare the way for a perfect analysis of the great classics with which it is enriched. Nor will its claims be finally cancelled, until English scholarship shall take the precedence in our schools of learning; and the English Professor not be the least among his brethren of the gown.

II. But English deserves cultivation as *the language of the great Anglo-Saxon race, and the portraiture of their soul.* All history will confirm the observation which has been made, that at every period some one nation or race takes the lead so pre-eminently that its superior influence cannot be disputed. Perhaps, substantially for the same reason that it is the destiny of the million, in every department of science, of business and of art, to follow in the wake of some masterful intellect, blocking out for them the path of thought and action, and leaving every where the impress of its own energy. The ascendancy of this dominant race is usually destroyed by great political convulsions, like the awful changes which geologists tell us have once and again shattered the solid frame of the earth; and from the chaos springs a new dynasty, like the renovated earth which has been purged by flood or fire. The Grecian States, for example, were consolidated into an empire through the ambition of Philip, long after Greek genius had framed those polished models, which have shaped the literary castings of every age since theirs. The disciplined phalanx of Alexander was precipitated upon the feeble dynasties of Asia; and the Grecian empire, like a huge Colossus, bestrode the continent, one foot resting upon Macedon, and the other upon India. Under his four successors, this huge fabric was dissolved into petty monarchies, which floundered like wrecked vessels in an angry sea, till the fourth beast in Daniel's vision, "dreadful and terrible and strong exceedingly," made its appearance in the Roman commonwealth. For how many centuries this gigantick empire ruled the destinies of the world, pouring its armies, like streams of lava, over the inhabited earth, history has long since told us. Nor are we now to learn how the barbarians of the North, in their turn, swept over the effete and bloated empire of Rome, and for ten centuries chaos and night reigned upon the

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earth. A thousand years of strife, ignorance and barbarism, like a broad, dark belt, divide ancient from modern history. Then, from the womb of chaos, a new order of things arose: and the emergent race, which is now for centuries to wield the destinies of the human family, is that Anglo-Saxon, speaking the English which we boast as our mother tongue. No race is more widely diffused, and none marches with a more victorious tread. In the beautiful language of Mr. Webster, the British empire is "a power, which has dotted over the surface of the whole globe with her possessions and military posts; whose morning drum-beat, following the sun and keeping company with the hours, circles the earth with one continuous and unbroken strain of the martial airs of England."*

Where shall the limit be set upon the progress of this heroic people? The word of Canute was not more impotent to restrain the advancing tide, than any spell to fetter the diffusion of the English tongue. Already has it spread eastward and westward with Anglo-Saxon empire, planting itself with the conqueror's cannon upon the plains of India, overleaping the chafing ocean, and pushing aside the savage dialects which, with the war-whoop, re-echoed over this western continent. It is the language of that new empire which has sprung up by enchantment on the Pacific coast: amidst the confused Babel of dialects there spoken, the accents of the English hold an imperious sway. When commerce shall lay its iron track from the Atlantic to the Pacific coast, binding the continents which two oceans have hitherto divorced, English, from its diffusion, must become the paramount language of the world. England and America, sweeping the seas with their universal commerce, enriched by the proud discoveries made in every science, adorned with every art, ennobled by the freedom of their political institutions, and stimulated by the zeal which Christianity inspires, must long maintain themselves as leaders in our modern civilization.

As the portraiture of Anglo-Saxon character, the English language claims attention from the curious. It is no new truth that "the heart of a people is its mother tongue." The whole image of a race is reflected in its tones and

* Speech on the Presidential Protest. Works, vol. 4, p. 110.

words. Who can fail to discover the imaginative, acute and witty Greek in the flexible and polished dialect of Attica? or the hardy and haughty Roman in the buskin of his stately Latin? or the proud and courtly hidalgo in the dignified and sonorous Spanish? or the volatile and chatty Gaul in the curt and sprightly French? or the craven and voluptuous Italian in his

"Soft, bastard Latin,
Which melts like kisses from a female mouth?"

So the English, with its strong aspirate, its open vowels, its close consonants, its army of monosyllables, its straightforward idiom, represents a race bold, daring and abrupt, full of enterprise, driving on to its aim with an outbursting energy which no obstacles can bind. Like a crystal palace, reflecting its noble inmate from a thousand angles, the English language, from the face of every word and syllable, presents in varied attitude the great indwelling Saxon race: worthy of profoundest reverence, for picturing thus the noblest people that ever lived for noblest ends upon the earth.

III. We may next consider the value of the English tongue as *a monument of history, an avenue of philosophy, and a mine of poetry*. The antiquarian, standing amid the ruins of Karnac or of Luxor, traces with an envious eye the proud hieroglyphs which, under excruciating torture, refuse to yield their secrets. He feels that if the key to this cypher could be discovered, treasures of historic lore would be unlocked; and a flood of light be poured upon the races which have entombed their history in these curious and stubborn records. Yet, perhaps, he has never reflected that the language which is daily on his lips, the base vehicle of much common and sorry talk, is itself a prouder monument than all the obelisks of Egypt; that it is covered with inscriptions recording a succession of dynasties more important than any found in the royal rings in the famous tablet of Abydos. Probably, this is true of all languages alike: but in those which have ceased to be spoken, the clue may be forever lost, and the fragments of ancient history may be too far imbedded in the language to be uncovered. But in living languages, where the pedigree of words can easily be

traced, and the history of the people is so recent as to be known in detail, every great social revolution, like an inundation of the sea, leaves a deposite of new words upon the language. It is by no means difficult, for example, to trace the Moorish conquest over the Spanish peninsula, in the words from this stock grafted upon that language: so that if the history of this period were obscure, a disputed event, or perhaps a doubtful date, might be determined from the language alone. This is more particularly true of English; since the facts which make the frame of English history are attested by the existing state of the language. The earliest inhabitants of Britain known to history were of Celtic origin. It is notorious also that these were, at an ascertained period, supplanted by the Gothic hordes which, pouring down from the north of Germany, over-ran the southern provinces, and found their way over the water to the coast of Albion. Now, exactly corresponding with these facts, we find small trace of the Celtic tongue in the existing English. A few names of common objects, as basket, rail, button, crook, like the Indian words "squaw," and "wigwam," remain, the fossils of an extinct language: and a few geographical names, as Kent and Thames, like the Indian names of localities amongst us, are the only memorials of the aboriginal race, whose title to the country has been cancelled by their own extermination. The rest of the language was obliterated with the race, except the trace still to be found in the Welsh and Gaelic dialects; which are precisely the districts whither the Celts were driven, and in which they held the longest footing.

Again, as the Romans were the earliest conquerors of Britain, we should expect a large infusion of the Latin language. Indeed, chronology would lead us to expect the Latin would be the basis of the new tongue to arise upon the displacement of the Celtic. Yet, in fact, we discover the Latin element to be introduced at a much later day, and by an indirection, through the Norman French. This anomaly is soon explained, by remembering that the Romans held military occupation of the country merely; and at no period intermingled largely with the natives. Their dominion was vexed, through its entire period, by ceaseless conflicts with the aborigines; and finally, the

island was voluntarily abandoned, and their garrisons withdrawn. It is interesting, as showing the minuteness of the record which history chisels upon the face of a language, to observe, that the few words introduced at this period from the Latin, clearly point to the military tenure of the Romans: as street, from *strata*; cest, in Gloucester for example, from *castra*; and coln, as in Lincoln, from *colonia*.* On the other hand, history informs that the Teutonic races poured in such numbers upon the British isle, as finally to absorb the original population which remained after so many exterminating wars. Accordingly, we find the Saxon tongue of these invaders supplanting the original Celtic; and becoming not so much an element of the present English, as the substratum—the main stock, into which grafts from other languages are inserted.

Following the stream of chronology, we are brought, in 1066, to another revolution, permanently affecting the history and language of the English people. I allude, of course, to the Norman conquest. As two races were now introduced into the country, with two distinct languages, and the Norman ascendancy was sufficiently protracted, we might antecedently expect considerable modification of the old Saxon. Accordingly, we discover the Saxon gradually dropping its numerous inflections, and exchanging its awkward inversion of style for the simplicity and directness of the Norman. But of this change, we will have occasion to speak more minutely in another place. It is remarkable to what extent we can trace, in single words, the relative position of these two races. The Normans, as conquerors, would naturally occupy all places of trust and power, while the native Saxons would sink into the condition of serfs. As estates, benefices and civil dignities are transferred to the former, so all the terms of honor and pre-eminence, and all words that relate to war and chivalry, come to us from the Norman. The words duke, count, baron, villain, service, throne, realm, royalty, homage, sceptre, sovereign, palace, castle, chancellor, treasurer, and the like, will be taken as sufficient examples. Trench, from whom the above statement is drawn, with the minuteness of a finished and accurate scholar, remarks that the

* Latham's Hand-book of the English Language, p. 47.

word "king" is an exception to this list;* significant of the fact, that William came to the throne by a claim to the succession, and did not break the continuity of the nation or of the government. On the other hand, the names of common objects, the words that are used in practical life, the terms that are employed in business, are all of Saxon origin. The readers of *Ivanhoe* cannot fail to recall the philosophical illustration given by Wamba, the jester, of the relative posture of the two races. The names of animals are Saxon in the field; Norman, when brought into the market. Ox, steer, cow, are Saxon; beef, is Norman. Sheep, is Saxon; mutton, Norman. "He, is Saxon," says the jester, "when he requires tendance, and takes a Norman name when he becomes matter of enjoyment." Other illustrations, still more minute, might be afforded of history thus imbedded in a language. Few persons are aware that a historical explanation can be given of countess, the irregular feminine of earl. The irregularity is due to the circumstance that one word is Norman, and the other Saxon. Earl was the Danish-Saxon designation of a certain order of nobility; but was displaced by the Norman count, upon the ascendancy of the latter race. In the changes of fortune to which languages as well as men are subject, earl has recovered its place: but the conflict of races is marked in the retention of countess, as the name of its fellow. So the words shire, and county, are used interchangeably in common English: shire, from a Saxon word signifying to cut off, designating the territory put under the jurisdiction of a noble: but upon the Norman invasion, this jurisdiction passed into the hands of the Norman count; and the Saxon shire becomes the Norman county.† The substitution too, of Anglia, instead of Britain, as the name of the island, just about the period when Egbert united the Heptarchy under his single sceptre, is another minute coincidence of language with history.— But we must refrain from these particular illustrations of the manner in which the Philologist will disinter facts concealed, from careless observers, within the body of a language.‡ As the Geologist will describe the successive

* Trench on the Study of Words, p. 76. † Ib. pp. 203, 225.

‡ For example, the word cabal, formed from the initials of the names Clifford, Ashley, Buckingham, Arlington, and Lauderdale, who constituted the Ministry of the Second Charles.

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formations upon the earth's surface, so will the Antiquary describe the historical changes which have left their indelible marks upon the language of every people.

But the English is not only a monumental record of historical facts; it is also an avenue of philosophy. The study of all language is the study of the laws of the human mind. It has been well said that "the origin and formation of words, and the structure of sentences, as exhibited in etymology and syntax, taken as a whole, are but a counterpart of those mental phenomena which have been collected and classified by the masters of mental science. The laws of suggestion, of memory, of imagination, of abstraction, of generalization and reasoning, are distinctly exhibited, not merely in the higher specimens of eloquence and poetry, but also in the common forms of language; so that there is truth in the remark, 'that we might turn a treatise on the philosophy of mind, into one on the philosophy of language, by merely supposing that every thing said in the former of the thoughts as subjective, is said again in the latter of the words, as objective.' If language be "the incarnation of thought," as it has been beautifully described, then its verbal forms cannot be studied without opening treasures of philosophy. It is not our purpose, however, to plunge into the intricacies of universal grammar. However interesting it might be to trace the working of the human mind in forming the necessary parts of speech, and in the various modification of nouns and verbs by gender, number, case, tense and mood, such a digression would entirely defeat that particular advocacy of English, to which we are now committed. I will therefore confine your attention to those features of the English language which would naturally engage the attention of a philosophical student. And that which would first strike the eye of a classical scholar, is the comparative absence of all transposition in the construction of its sentences. The idiom of the Greek and Latin languages allows the words to be arranged according to the taste or caprice of the writer; while the idiom of the English follows the natural order of thought as developed from the mind. The subject is stated first, with all the qualities which belong to it; then comes the action, with all its relations; and last follows the object, upon which all the

preceding must terminate. This difference of structure draws after it a greater difference in the very character and genius of the language. Words cannot be widely transposed, without undergoing great changes by inflection. It is only by this artifice that endless confusion is avoided. If, for example, a dozen words intervene between the noun and its adjective, there must be some sign common to both, by which they may be collated and construed together. Hence arises the inflection of nouns by case and gender, which must also be extended to the adjectives by which they are qualified. The direct style of the English, on the other hand, avoids this whole difficulty, since it expresses the relations between words by means of connectives and auxiliaries. There can be little doubt that the latter idiom is far the more philosophical. As a test of this, take the beautiful statement by Kuhner, of the Greek cases. He says, "all the relations, which the language denotes by the inflection of the substantive object, were originally relations of *space*. In this manner the object of the verb appears in a threefold aspect; namely, first, as that out of which the action of the verb proceeds; secondly, as that to which the action of the verb tends; thirdly, as that by or in which the action of the verb takes place. In this way three cases originate: the genitive, denoting the direction whence; the accusative, whither; and the dative, the place where." He proceeds to show that the same principle may be extended to time and causality: the genitive, denoting the time whence; the accusative, the time whither; and the dative, the time in which. So again, the cause of an action is put in the genitive, as expressing its outgoing; the effect or consequence is put in the accusative, as to this the action tends; and the means, by or in which the action proceeds, in the dative. Now as a classification of facts, this is extremely just and striking: but can we penetrate its philosophy? Can we assign any reason why the genitive should be the *whence* case; the accusative, the *whither* case; and the dative, the *where* case? What is there in certain terminations of words to suggest, and therefore to signify, these relations? Perhaps, if we had known these languages when they were crystallizing into shape, we might be able to detect some natural association between the two. It

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might then appear that these terminations, by which the stem noun is modified in the different cases, are in reality but fragments of original words expressing these relations; and that by agglutination they have become so thoroughly incorporated into the main word, as to seem only a part of it. Thus the inflection of nouns by cases might have originated, like the inflection of nouns in the Shemitic languages by suffixes of the pronouns. However this may be, such connexion is now forever lost. We cannot trace the origin of these terminations of case, and therefore the arrangement seems to be purely arbitrary. In the English, however, these relations of time, space, cause and the like, are expressed by the aid of prepositions. The nouns themselves discharge the single office of designating the thing spoken about: and a whole army of connectives spring forward as servitors to wait upon the noun, and express its relations to other things. This is far more philosophical, since one set of words is assigned to a single function, and not to the double office of both designating and defining. If we adopt the view taken by Horne Tooke, which to me appears sufficiently substantiated, that these prepositions, conjunctions, etc., are fragments of original nouns and verbs, which have been washed up from the detritus of language, and made to serve as "wheels for the more easy and rapid conveyance of thought," the advantage is most clearly for English. According to this theory, every word, however humble its office, can show a patent of nobility. No word is so insignificant, but it has its independent meaning; and if that meaning conveys the ideas of time, and space, and causation, then is the connection not an arbitrary vinculum to bind words together, but is the natural nexus connecting a word with the circumstances from which it cannot be viewed apart. The advantage of expressing all relations by means of separate words devoted to that office, will signally appear from the fact that neither the Greek nor Latin language can inflect their nouns so as to dispense, altogether, with the aid of prepositions. To multiply cases so as to express every possible relation in which one word may stand to another, would be to render the language so unwieldy that it could never be employed. Hence, in these tongues, the relations which we express

by the prepositions before, behind, around, above, below, within, without, can only be conveyed by corresponding connectives:* a clear confession of the greater simplicity and completeness of the English method.

If we pass from the consideration of case to that of gender, we shall be more fully persuaded of the philosophy of the English language. In the Latin and the Greek, the distinction of gender extends to multitudes of nouns which are not susceptible of sex. What is still more anomalous, this distinction extends also to the adjective, which, as it denotes an abstract quality only, does not admit of gender. Yet this invasion upon sound philosophy is necessary, to remedy the inconvenience arising from the singular inversion of their style. If the adjective be dissociated from its proper noun by many intermediate words, the expedient is devised of putting it in the same gender; and by this sign the noun recognises its own qualifying and descriptive epithets. But in English there is no sign to indicate gender, except in a few cases, which are easily enumerated; and gender is applied only to those objects which naturally have sex. This is not only more philosophical and true, but it contributes not a little to vividness of style, by giving frequent occasion for personification. When the Greek, for example, puts sun in the masculine gender, and moon in the feminine, it is a mere trick of grammar, by which these words may know their places in a sentence; while in English, the application of the personal pronouns to them, in giving gender, is a beautiful figure of rhetoric.

It is, however, in the use of auxiliaries, by which the modifications of the verb are expressed, that the peculiar advantage of the English is perceived. The same remark will apply to the conjugation of verbs, previously made of the declension of nouns, that the various terminations employed do not philosophically denote the changes which they indicate; or at least the clue is lost by which the significance of these terminations might be ascertained. But in English, these modifications of the original verb, both in tense and mood, are denoted by auxiliaries, such as do, can, may, shall, will, have, be, was, and others; and these auxiliaries are themselves verbs, still retaining

* Kuhner's Greek Grammar, p. 410.

their primary significance. By means of them, every possible shade of meaning may be expressed. As too, it is impossible to multiply cases so as to express all the conceivable relations of the noun, so is it even more impracticable to multiply tenses which shall convey all possible modifications of the verb. Hence the immense advantage of English in the matter of precision. The shades of meaning which we convey by the auxiliaries might, could, would, and should, must in the Latin and Greek, be conjectured, from the context; since they are all embraced within one tense, and no sign is employed to discriminate between them.*

Thus it is seen that the main characteristics of the English language, distinguishing it from the ancient classic tongues, are directness in the structure of its sentences, as opposed to the great transposition of words; and, the employment of auxiliaries, prepositions, conjunctions, and other connectives, to express all the accidents and properties and changes to be noted, rather than the inflection of the noun and verb in declension and conjugation. That in these respects it is the more philosophical language, will appear from the ease with which it may be spoken, even by the illiterate. All that needs to be known are the names of those objects about which we speak, and the words which will convey what we desire to affirm, and nature herself will prompt the order of utterance. But in the classic languages of antiquity, a correct style of conversation required the same cultivation of taste, as a correct style of composition requires now; and he who could speak them with accuracy, received as much praise as a good author with us. For the same reason, the Latin language was almost unfit for the drama; and produced no literature of this species at all equal to the English.— Equally so, in regard to epistolary composition: it tasked the versatility of even Cicero's genius, and his profound mastery of his native tongue, to preserve himself from comparative failure in the Letters he has left us. It is no slight confirmation of this that the Greek, which is far more perfect than the Latin, is far less inverted, approach-

* See, on the topics of this Section, Art. Language, in the Encyclopædia Britannica.

es the excellence of the English in its abundant use of particles and connectives, and pre-eminently excels in the power of combining words. It is, perhaps, a higher proof still, of the superior excellence of the direct idiom, that with the example before them of the transpositive languages, the modern tongues of Europe, not excepting those formed on the basis of the Latin, pursue the more philosophical order: though in this respect, neither the French or Italian, or Spanish will compare with the English.

It is a curious circumstance in the history of the English language, that it has changed in its progress from the one idiom to the other. The old Saxon was strongly marked by the inflexion of its names and verbs, as well as by the inversion of its style. In passing into the present English, it presents the singular fact of dropping its inflexions, and substituting in place of them the connectives and auxiliaries which now abound. It might be interesting to inquire into the causes of this remarkable change, and Dr. Latham seems to challenge such investigation by laying it down as a universal law that "the earlier the stage of a given language, the greater the amount of its inflectional forms—as languages become modern, they substitute prepositions and auxiliaries for cases and tenses, while the reverse of this never takes place."* He evidently considers this the natural developement of language, and certainly admitting of philosophical explanation.—Outward influences may accelerate the change, but do not originate it. In the English language, this change has been usually ascribed to the influence of the Norman Conquest. The idiom of the Norman French being more direct, would naturally improve the Saxon by introducing a more natural order in the construction of its sentences. Dr. Latham suggests a doubt of this, from the fact that in Sweden, Norway and Denmark, a similar transition has taken place, without any such conquest, to which to ascribe it.† Sharon Turner ascribes to the Norman influence a greater attention to euphony, and greater directness of style; but attributes the general abandonment of inflections to their extreme irregularity, and the confusion of

* Hand-Book of the English Language, p. 65.

† Hand-Book of the English Language, p. 68.

thought thus occasioned. Only a few have been retained, sufficient to mark the genius of the original Saxon, which are now inwoven into the very frame of the language. These remarks will at least indicate the philosophical researches to which we may be introduced by the critical study of our mother tongue.

But the intrinsic worth of the English language is not fully appreciated, unless we consider the wealth of Poetry stored within the recesses of almost every word. Thoughtless men, for centuries, have trodden the ruins of Pompeii and Nineveh, ignorant of those exquisite specimens of ancient art and skill which antiquarian research has recently disinterred. In like manner, few have ever broken through the outer crust of words, and opened the hidden chambers of imagery, adorned with paintings fresher and brighter than any found in the temples and tombs of Egypt. The changes of meaning to be traced in words present a series of dissolving views, which melt into each other like the fading clouds of summer, as the setting sun illuminates the scenery of the sky. To every word belongs one radical and essential meaning. How it should acquire this, we may be unable perhaps to discover, except in that class of words known as onomatopœes: and there must be a starting point in language as in every thing else.* In the

* The following passage, taken from the Introduction to Nordheimer's Hebrew Grammar, will be of interest to the reader, as throwing some light upon this difficult point: "Since however, the external sound belongs entirely to the material, and the idea which it represents as exclusively, to the immaterial world, the two stand at a distance so remote from each other, that the connexion between them has hitherto been a complete *res occulta*; and such doubtless it will continue, so long as we shall remain ignorant of the nature of the union subsisting between the body and the soul. * * * * All that we can hope to accomplish in the vast majority of cases, is to find out the primitive idea or signification of a word, for the expression of which the organs, through the power of the soul, were first set in motion: and when once the word, with its individual meaning, has been thus established as an integral part of the language to which it belongs, the formation of derivatives may be shown to take place on principles, the determination of which is comparatively easy."—*Heb. Grammar*, vol. 1, p. 7.

Resuming this topic in the Introduction to his second volume, Nordheimer supposes four principles to co-operate in the formation of language. The first he terms the *imitative principle*, when there is an objective resemblance in words to the sounds which the words indicate, as in crash, buzz, slam, etc. The second he describes as the *symbolic principle*, where there is no direct imitation, but only an analogy between certain ideas and certain sounds, as in sloth, hurry, calm, and the like. The third principle, which he calls the *analogical*, prevails, when having arrived by one or other of these two processes

lapse of time many secondary significations will develop from the primary; some of them so remote that a scholar can pass from one extreme of the chain to the other only by closely observing the intervening links. Two causes exist for this: first, that as sense is the outlet of our ideas, we must draw from the objective world the bullion which the mind may stamp in its own mint, and circulate as its coin; the second is, that to frame a new word for every shade of thought, would swell language to such bulk that life would be consumed in its study, and the very design of it as a means of intercourse would be defeated. In drawing out these secondary meanings, the nicest philosophy is disclosed. We trace the operation of the mind itself, developing the thought which is embodied in the original word. But these transitions are often as beautiful as they are philosophical. In proportion, however, as the new meaning comes to be regarded as conventional, and its derivation is overlooked, the beautiful image is buried beneath the popular and unreflecting usage, like the fossil remains of some once living, but now extinct, animal. Trench, in his little work before mentioned,* remarks, "many a single word is a concentrated poem, having stores of poetical thought and imagery laid up in it. Examine it, and it will be found to rest on some deep analogy of things natural and spiritual. The image may have grown trite and ordinary now; perhaps, through the help of this very word; may have become so entirely the heritage of all, as to seem little better than a common-place: yet not the less he who first discovered the relation and devised the new word which should express it, or gave to an old never before but literally used this new and figurative sense, this man was, in his degree, a poet." From this source arises the exquisite pleasure experienced in the study of the sacred Hebrew, and its cognates. Every word being significant, we are opening treasures of philosophy and poetry at every step. Beautiful crystals of

at the representation of an idea, other analogous ideas are expressed by similar sounds. And the fourth, or *synthetical* principle, causes a compound idea to be represented by a combination of the words denoting the constituent simple ideas, or the most important elements of such words."—*Heb. Grammar*, vol. 2, pp. 7, 8.

* On the Study of Words, p. 14.

thought are seen shooting up, and the same poetic glow enlivens us which fired the heart of the first framer. Who, for instance, can trace the Syriac word for "truth" to its primary sense, which is the passage of an arrow through the air, without feeling the beauty of the imagery—truth speeding without deflection to its mark? And who can uncover the radical signification of the Hebrew word for "man," denoting weakness or frailty, without dropping a tear over this pathetic memorial of the fallen condition of the human race?

In the so called dead languages, considerable attention must be given to etymology, in order to their acquisition. In the effort to associate certain ideas with certain words, we are compelled to aid the memory by tracing the connexion in their significations. This, however, can be done to a partial extent only; in many instances the origin of words is lost beyond recovery: it is chiefly in compounded words that we are successful, and that simply in resolving them into their constituent parts. But in a living language, the process is daily going forward by which words change their meaning, and a clue is furnished to guide our investigations. We have a knowledge of the great factors of the language, so that no limit can be assigned to a successful analysis of its words. Yet a familiarity from infancy with our vernacular tongue, blunts the edge of inquiry. We know the conventional meaning which usage assigns, and thus are not driven back upon the pedigree of words to gain such an acquaintance as shall be available for practical ends. Thus, it has been well remarked, to a classical scholar, the dead languages of Greece and Rome may have more of life than that he was first taught to lisp at a mother's knee. Should English, however, be studied in the original power of its roots, and in the derivation of meanings from the same—should attention be given to the heraldry of its words, the language becomes instinct with life, and glows with the poetry with which it is inspired. One has but to open such a work as Richardson's Dictionary, to see words, which at first view are like marble statues standing silent in their niches, start forth into life, bright with intellect and warm of heart. We pick up the acorn at our feet with livelier interest, upon decomposing the word and recognizing it as the

oak-corn. We feel a new friendship for that little word "can," when we remember its first sense, to know, still preserved in the Scotch, to ken; and trace its kindred with its low relative, cunning; and we cannot put it away, without pausing upon that analogy which transfers the signification from knowledge to power. The "fog" which surrounds our dwelling on some autumnal morning, grows denser as we trace it to the Anglo-Saxon *feg-an*, to gather or collect; and new relations spring up before us, as from the same root we develop the words *fagot*, and *pettifogger*. The husband becomes a more august personage, when he stands revealed as *vinculum domus*, whose authority binds the house together as a unit: and the correlative, wife, is infinitely dearer, when in the Saxon, she is presented as the *woof-man*; engaged in domestic pursuits, of which weaving may be deemed the type. "Man" stands forth in greater dignity and robustness, as derived from the Saxon, *megan*, to be strong. "Virtue" has a more comprehensive sense when, from the Latin, *vir*, it includes all the traits which should adorn a man. "Woe" has a deeper significance, when traced to the Saxon, which sighs it forth: and "wrath" is more terrible, when it is identified with "writhe," and expresses the torture which is felt. Thus, like the immense coal formations of our native land, the English language is a perfect bed of what Emerson calls "fossil poetry." Whether, then, we view it in relation to this feature, or consider it as a monument of history, or a repository of philosophy, in each aspect its intrinsic worth as a language establishes a just claim to the critical study of scholars.

IV. It is another argument for the assiduous cultivation of English, that we employ it as *the instrument of guiding the minds, and controlling the opinions of men*. Probably, there is not a nation upon the globe so essentially a speech-making people as our own; with whom therefore this consideration should carry greater weight. Our form of government is one which draws the masses together, in their primary assemblies, to discuss political measures. A people as busy as ours, and yet as free and inquisitive, will depend much upon the ear for acquiring knowledge, and gather in lyceums and debating clubs, and rally at the call of lecturers, who go in shoals over the land. They

are also a religious, and therefore a reading people, holding large communion with unseen authors, whose living thoughts breathe upon the printed page. Besides this occasional use of language as the vehicle of thought, there are four distinct classes whose profession requires its habitual employment: the Jurist, engaged in the distribution of justice, and the enforcement of law,—the Divine, expounding the great rules of human duty, and tracing the mysteries of the future world,—the Statesman, shaping the political history and destiny of the commonwealth,—and the whole army of writers, from the paragraphist of the newspaper to the conductors of grave Reviews, and the authors of ponderous volumes. Surely, an instrument so much wielded for the instruction and pleasure of mankind, should be fully understood and appreciated. Even the sawyer and axeman will not go to their daily toil without a proper edge upon their tools; how much more stupid is the attempt to control the thoughts and passions of men without comprehending the instrument employed in so serious a task!

The English needs to be carefully studied with reference both to *power* and *precision* in its use: and this necessity will more distinctly appear, upon remembering that English is not strictly a homogeneous language, developed from a single stock. Disregarding the slight infusion of words from other sources, it is doubtless true that Latin and Saxon are the two great factors of which it is composed:* and skill in its use will turn greatly upon the proposition in which these elements are mingled. To make this apparent, I cannot do better than condense some statements found in an admirable article of the Edinburgh Review, for the year 1839. Of 38,000 words, then, which constitute the English vocabulary, about five eighths, or 23,000, are Anglo-Saxon; the remaining three eighths including words from all other sources, though chiefly from the Latin. This is the relative proportion, if

* A German Philologist, speaking of the English language, says, "Its altogether intellectual and singularly happy foundation and development, has arisen from a surprising alliance between the two noblest languages of antiquity—the German and the Romanesque—the relation of which to each other is well known to be such that the former supplies the material foundation, the latter the abstract notions."

we take the census of the whole language. If, however, with Sharon Turner and Sir James Mackintosh, we select passages from the best and purest writers, the proportion of Saxon words is far greater. An estimate has been made upon the basis of passages taken at random from the Bible, Shakspeare, Milton, Cowley, Thomson, Addison, Locke, Pope, Young, Swift, Robertson, Hume, Gibbon, and Johnson; and the general result gives the Saxon element, predominating in the ratio of four to one. In none of these passages was the number of foreign words greater than one third; in many, less than one tenth. If, then, the number of words be the only criterion of judgment, the Saxon is clearly the controlling element of the language.

But if we consider further the *classes* of words and their relative importance, the supremacy of the Saxon will no longer be questioned. Condensing still the admirable generalizations of the Edinburgh Reviewer, it appears that English Grammar is almost exclusively occupied with what is of Anglo-Saxon origin. What few inflections exist of noun and verb are Saxon—the articles and definitives of every sort—the pronouns—the auxiliary verbs, prepositions, conjunctions and adverbs, almost without exception—the terminations which express comparison—all these are of Saxon derivation. Again: the names of most objects in nature come from the same source, as sun, moon, and stars, earth, fire, water; the names of three of the seasons—spring, summer, winter; all the divisions of time—day, night, morning, evening, sun-rise, sun-set, noon, twi-light; the names of heat, cold, frost, hail, rain, snow, sleet, thunder, lightning; all the features of a diversified landscape—land, sea, hill, dale, wood, stream. The Saxon too furnishes that vivid class of words which express the cries and postures of animated existence, as to sit, stand, lie, run, walk, leap, slide, stagger, yawn, gape, fly, crawl, creep, swim, spring, spurn, etc: the very terms which form the staple of all impressive, poetic descriptions. To the same language we are indebted for the names of our nearest and dearest connections, as father, mother, husband, wife, brother, sister, son, daughter, child, home, kindred, friends; also, the names of hearth, roof, fire-side, with which our earliest and holiest remembrances are linked. From the same fountain we draw the language

of our strongest and tenderest emotions, as love, joy, grief, hope, fear, sorrow and shame; and the names too which we give to the outward signs of these emotions—tear, smile, blush, laugh, sigh, and groan. From the Saxon again we borrow the names of practical life, the language of business, the nomenclature of the street, the market, the workshop and the farm; the dialect, home-spun yet forcible, which utters our national proverbs, is original Saxon. The language too, of satire and invective, of pleasantry and humour, the colloquial terms of ordinary intercourse, are Saxon. While too, our general and abstract terms are derived chiefly from the Latin, those which denote special objects are Saxon. For example, colour is Latin; but the varieties of colour, white, brown, green, blue, red, yellow, and black, are all Saxon. Crime too, is Latin; but theft, murder, robbery, and the like, are Saxon. Animal is Latin; man, cow, sheep, are Saxon. Number is derived from the Latin, through the Norman French; while the Saxon gives all the cardinals and ordinals, from one to a million. From this condensed statement of facts, it is obvious that the Saxon element in our language must be studied, in order to appreciate its power: and that neither speakers nor writers are capable of wielding this great instrument, until they have mastered both constituents of the language, and can draw from either as the nature of their subjects, or the character of their hearers, may demand. If the speaker's object be to sway the judgment of the masses, he should draw chiefly upon the Saxon portion of the language; every word of which goes with a home influence to the bosoms of men. So too, if his aim is to excite vivid emotions, and call into play the passions of men, he must rely upon those special and poetic terms which the Saxon affords; if his object be denunciation or pleasantry, he must again from the Saxon armoury draw the bolts of satire or the shafts of ridicule. If, on the other hand, his discourse be upon subjects of science, the foreign languages will suggest the proper terms. If the effort be to soften what is harsh, or to vary what is trite, or to dignify what is low, the classic terms will afford the euphemisms that are needed. Disregard of these independent sources of the English tongue has been the cause of serious injury, defacing its beauty, and retrenching its power. To

this disregard we must refer these hybrid words, which, springing from a Saxon stock, put on a Greek form. A graver offence is the importation of foreign idioms, forcing the English into the strange, unnatural forms of a different dialect; as when Dr. Johnson introduced his cumbrous, periodic style, which was neither Latin nor English, but which Macaulay hits off as Johnsonese; and when Carlyle and his bombastic imitators strive to force a German idiom, and only succeed in turning the English, like a glove, wrong side out. These corruptions of our mother tongue would never have been perpetrated, if the native strength of the Saxon had been understood. A full conviction of this too, would restrain the fantastic desire of sewing what Horace satirizes as "purple patches" upon a plain style; peppering it over with grotesque citations from Greek, and Latin, and French authors;* which the Edinburg Reviewer tartly says resemble classical compositions, as much as the hortus siccus of a botanist resembles the parterre of a flower garden.

The study of synonyms also, is essential to those who undertake to write or speak English with precision. Even those languages which are developed from a single root will exhibit many words of similar import; and the scholar must learn to detect the slight variations of thought which they discover. But a language, like the English, which draws its life from two breasts, imposes a sterner vigilance, and a keener discrimination upon all who hope to master it. Two distinct languages, as the Latin and the Saxon, might be expected to have each its own word to express the same idea. When these two are fused into one language, as the Saxon and the Latin into English,

* Reminding one of Hudibras, who spoke

"A Babylonish dialect
Which learned pedants much affect;
It was a party-coloured dress
Of patched and piebald languages;
'T was English cut on Greek and Latin,
Like fustian heretofore on satin.
It had an odd promiscuous tone,
As if he talked three parts in one:
Which made some think, when he did gabble,
They heard three labourers of Babel;
Or Cerberus himself pronounce
A leash of languages at once."

what become of these rival terms? And when one shall gain the ascendancy, what modifications are put upon the other to extinguish this identity? It is astonishing how fast the supposed synonymes of the English disappear, upon close inspection; so that a careless use of them must introduce great confusion of thought. As in the Daguerreotype the slightest motion will blur the picture, so in language the least shifting of thought will obscure the synonyme. A close attention to, this distinction of words will tend greatly to correct redundancy. The effort to conjure up the word which will precisely express the thought, serves to exclude many which are inadequate; and after all, a redundant style is felt to be a grievance, not so much from the overloading of the idea, as from the confusion of mind produced by this mingling together distinct shades of thought. Illustrations of this could be produced without limit. How many writers, for example, would distinguish between bravery and courage—referring the former to what is constitutional, and the latter to what results from principle and by reflection? “Many words,” says Graham,* may be observed to differ from each other, as the *species* from the *genus*, as we may perceive between to *do* and to *make*; a very large class of words may be distinguished under the heads of *active* and *passive*, as between *ability* and *capacity*; the principle of *intensity* may be observed to operate in the difference between the words to *see* and to *look*; others have a *positive* and *negative* difference, as between to *shun* and to *avoid*; and many, which do not appear to depend on any uniformly acting principle, may be ranged under the head of *miscellaneous*.” This classification of words is like the classification made by Naturalists of the animal kingdom: and disregard of the essential differences of words will produce as great confusion in language, as a similar disregard of the differences of animals would produce in natural history. Hence the value of that advice suggested by Coleridge:† “accustom yourself to reflect on the words you use, hear or read—their birth, derivation and history. For if words are not *things*, they are *living powers*, by which the things of most importance to mankind are actuated,

* English Synonymes, p. 7. † Aids to Reflection.—Preface.

combined and humanized." Language, as the medium of thought, should be transparent as the purest crystal: it should neither refract nor discolour the truth which it transmits. The blending of images by the indiscriminate use of synonymes, like the distorted image reflected from the uneven surface of a mirror, shocks where it was intended to please; and misleads where it was desired to guide. If a writer on morals, for example, uses the word *obligation*, when he means *duty*, he insensibly shifts the ground upon which his injunction rests; and makes a voluntary contract or promise the basis of action, rather the natural relations of society from which there is no escape. So, if a metaphysician represents that as *evident* which is really *obvious*, he utters a half truth and weakens his argument by the feebleness of the term chosen: while he is thinking of truths that are *intuitive*, the reader recognises truths that are *demonstrable*. If, then, no higher appeal could be made to the hearts of our scholars in favour of this critical study of the English language, this cold, utilitarian argument should convince their understandings, and a motive of policy prevail where the promptings of affection prove ineffectual.

V. But as this address must be contracted within the patience of a wearied audience, I shall be content with suggesting only one consideration further: *the treasures of Literature laid up in the archives of the English language*. The enthusiastic admirers of ancient classic genius love to expatiate upon the philosophical and poetical remains of Grecian literature. But there is no language, living or dead, ancient or modern, which hoards so vast a store of intellectual wealth as the English. Perhaps, in one or two single departments, it may be surpassed. In fiction and romance,—possibly too, in the Natural sciences—larger contributions may be gathered from the French: yet it is hard to admit that Walter Scott and Bulwer can be surpassed in the first; or Brewster, and Davy, Lardner, and others, in the second. So too, in dry, verbal criticism, in the dray-horse plodding of mere learning, the Germans may bear away the palm; though, as to valuable results, one page of English criticism will outweigh ten pages of German. But the English sweeps with the broadest wing over the entire circle of human

knowledge. To recite the names of distinguished writers in the different departments, would be to count the stars in the firmament. Among the poets, there is Pope, with scarce a ripple curling the surface of his flowing verse; and Moore, whose lyrics breathe the voluptuous softness of the ancient Syren; and Byron, like the Phœnix enveloped in flame, consuming amid the fires of his own terrific passions; and superior to them all, the immortal Milton, like an eagle from its eyrie, "soaring to the key-stone of Heaven." Among the essayists which crowd the milky way of English literature, it is almost invidious to speak even of Addison, and Steele, and Swift, and Lamb, and Johnson, and Goldsmith, and Foster; and Mackintosh. Among historians, the names of Hume and Gibbon, and Robertson and Alison, and Macaulay, shine with splendor undimmed by the halo which surrounds the names of ancient Thucydides and Livy. In the class of orators, we follow the stately and sustained tread of Robert Hall; or revel in the elegant declamation of Burke, often from the highest pinnacle of philosophy "swooping like a falcon to his quarry," in the happy use of some colloquial phrase which awakens all the home-thoughts within a man. In the drama, it is enough to repeat great Shakspeare's name, whose creative genius presents a world in miniature, tossed with the same jealousies and passions which have always rent society with the terrors of an earthquake. But it is especially in the department of philosophy that the robust English mind leaves the impress of its greatness. Compared with the calm and healthful writings of Locke, Reid, and Stewart, Brown and Hamilton, all the transcendental rhapsodies of the French and German schools, are but as the exploding rocket, compared with the quiet, twinkling star; or as the lawless comet with the steady moon, reigning with queenly majesty amid the hosts of Heaven.

But I cannot pause even to group in proper clusters the great lights of English literature and science. It is enough to say that a people as vigorous as ours; as impatient of dictation, and enjoying the stimulus of free institutions, cannot lag in any career upon which they may start forth: and the closest scrutiny of facts will sustain this antecedent presumption. There is however one branch of

literature in which the English mind has utterly distanced competition. I refer to all that the English language contains upon civil liberty, and Protestant Christianity. All that the world enjoys of regulated liberty, it owes to the Anglo-Saxon race. The modern English Parliament may unquestionably be traced to the Saxon Witenagemot as its root: and though the people were not directly represented in that, but only the magistracy, yet, beyond doubt, it is the germ of all that exists among us of popular representation.* That great bulwark of liberty and justice, trial by jury, took its rise in the early period of English history, and was gradually moulded into its present form during the progress of civil freedom. And the great body of common law, now of force, both in this country and in England, has come down from Saxon times, enlarged and greatly modified during the Norman rule. But it is needless to go into detail, when the whole drift of English history is but the progress of regulated civil liberty. The great clue to its interpretation, from the granting of Magna Charta by the feeble John in 1215, to the overthrow of the treacherous House of Stuart in 1688, is simply the struggle between prerogative and privilege,—the conflict of the crown with the parliament. Even Hume declares the revolution that placed the Prince of Orange upon the throne of England to have decided forever this great issue: “the precedent of deposing one king, and establishing a new family, gave such an ascendant to popular principles,† as has put the nature of the English Constitution beyond all controversy: and it may be justly affirmed, without any danger of exaggeration, that we, in this island, have ever since enjoyed, if not the best system of government, at least the most entire system of liberty, that ever was known amongst mankind.”‡ If this could be safely written of the British isle one hundred years ago, the achievements of the Anglo-

* Pictorial History of England, vol. 1, pp. 239, 240.

† “When the English Revolution of 1688 took place, the English people did not content themselves with the example of Runnymede; they did not build their hopes upon royal charters. * * * Instead of petitioning for charters, they declared their rights; and while they offered to the Prince of Orange the crown with one hand, they held in the other an enumeration of those privileges which they did not profess to hold as favours, but which they demanded and insisted upon as their undoubted rights.”—*Webster's Speech on the Revolution in Greece: Works*, vol. 3, pp. 70, 71.

‡ Hume's History of England, vol. 6, p. 363: Harper's edition.

Saxon race since then, have not reduced the world's indebtedness for the development of social and civil freedom on this western continent. What language, then, but the language of this imperial race, contains the noble records in which Liberty reads both her struggles and her triumphs? It is the glory of the English tongue to be the vernacular dialect of civil freedom, in which are bequeathed to mankind the united blessings of liberty and law.

Intimately associated with this is the identification of our language with Protestantism. "It is a most significant circumstance," says Mr. Macaulay, "that no large society, of which the tongue is not Teutonic, has ever turned Protestant; and that wherever a language derived from ancient Rome is spoken, the religion of modern Rome to this day prevails."* It is irrelevant to my purpose to investigate the causes of this fact, which, in its broad generality, with some understood exceptions, is beyond the reach of contradiction. The fact is enough. The German and English languages, for the most part, comprise the History of the Reformation: but the latter excels the former in the vast body of religious literature which it contains. No dialect spoken on the globe preserves so vast and so valuable a store of theological learning, as that produced by English divines during the 17th century, and by English, Scotch and American divines of a later day. It is the crowning glory of the English language to be even more identified with the *spread*, than with the *literature*, of Protestant Christianity. While Germany, which once took the lead in the great battle with Anti-christ, can now scarcely recover herself from the depths of rationalism and infidelity, England, Scotland and America have formed a triple and a holy alliance to bear the banner of the cross to the bounds of the earth. Happy in a three-fold union, of blood, of language and of religion, they seem the selected instruments of evangelizing the globe: and the sacred pre-eminence is thus assigned to the English language of revealing Christ and his gospel to the race of man. In three of the greatest aspects in which a language may be viewed, English has already a paramount influence, and is predestined to increasing dignity and power: it is at

* History of England, p. 53: Boston edition.



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once, the language of commerce,—the language of civil freedom and popular rights, and the language of a universal religion, for the entire globe.

I must here snap the thread of discourse, though far from having filled out the plan which I originally drafted. It is perhaps necessary to a full discussion of this theme to trace the discipline by which this mastery of English can alone be attained. I had designed to insist upon a careful study of the Latin and old Saxon tongues, which, though now obsolete, are still the sources from which the present English is drawn. A thorough comprehension must also be had of the principles upon which the compounded and derived words are framed. I desired also to insist upon the importance of studying those periods of English history during which the language received its greatest modifications, as well as the character and genius of the men whose writings have chiefly moulded it: and last of all, I did wish to urge a more thorough course of instruction in English literature, upon those who have in charge the education of the country. It surely is time that the Professor of Belles Lettres in our colleges should teach something beyond the mere graces of Rhetoric—time that English, as a language, should be taught; and the genius of our great English writers should be analyzed. But all these points I must forbear, leaving the simple suggestion of them for your own private meditations. You will perceive that for a grave end, I have foreborne to offer you the foam and spray of mere declamation. It would have been easier to entertain you with the flashes of a sprightlier style; but I shall be well repaid for the self-denial of choosing a theme too severe for the exhibition of simple oratory, if but a single mind fires with the purpose to honour his native tongue with the devotion of an enthusiastic student; and thus a widening influence be created, which shall finally exalt English to the same pre-eminence among the languages, which those who speak it enjoy among the nations.

