

HANDBOOKS for Students and General Readers.

HISTORY
OF THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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PREFACE.

THE general plan of this volume is so fully stated in the conclusion of the introductory chapter, that little needs to be said in addition. One or two explanatory statements it may be advisable to make.

The history is a history of the language, and not at all of the literature. To any real comprehension of the former, however, some knowledge of the latter is essential; and inasmuch as, in the case of Anglo-Saxon and Early English, sources of information on this subject are not easily accessible to most readers, a slight sketch of the literature of those periods has been given.

The division of the history into two parts, each to a certain extent complete in itself, has involved in a few instances the necessity of going over the same ground. In no case, however, will this be found to

be mere repetition. And, while the second part has been more particularly prepared for the special student, it is hoped that there is nothing in it which will present any difficulty to any reader of ordinary intelligence who cares to investigate the subject.

EXPLANATORY.

THIS Series is intended to meet the requirement of brief text-books both for schools and for adult readers who wish to review or expand their knowledge.

The grade of the books is intermediate between the so-called “primers” and the larger works professing to present quite detailed views of the respective subjects.

Such a notion as a person beyond childhood requires of some subjects, it is difficult and perhaps impossible to convey in one such volume. Therefore, occasionally a volume is given to each of the main departments into which a subject naturally falls—for instance, a volume to the Zoölogy of the vertebrates, and one to that of the invertebrates. While this arrangement supplies a compendious treatment for those who wish, it will also sometimes enable the reader interested in only a portion of the field covered by a science, to study the part he is interested in, without getting a book covering the whole.

Care is taken to bring out whatever educational value may be extracted from each subject without im-

peding the exposition of it. In the books on the sciences, not only are acquired results stated, but as full explanation as possible is given of the methods of inquiry and reasoning by which these results have been obtained. Consequently, although the treatment of each subject is strictly elementary, the fundamental facts are stated and discussed with the fulness needed to place their scientific significance in a clear light, and to show the relation in which they stand to the general conclusions of science.

Care is also taken that each book admitted to the series shall either be the work of a recognized authority, or bear the unqualified approval of such. As far as practicable, authors are selected who combine knowledge of their subjects with experience in teaching them.

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

INTRODUCTORY CHAPTER.

LANGUAGES ALLIED TO THE ENGLISH.

THE most superficial student of speech is well acquainted with the fact that English is no isolated, independent tongue, but one of the members of a vast family, embracing tongues far removed from one another, both in time and in space. This family occupied, at an early period, large districts of Asia, and nearly the whole of Europe; and during the last four hundred years its domain has been extended still farther, over a great portion of the habitable globe. Various names have been employed to designate it as a whole; of which those most in use are Indo-Germanic, Indo-European, and Aryan, especially the last two. Every one of the Indo-European languages is more or less closely related to every other by the fact of descent from a common mother-tongue. Yet of this common mother-tongue not only

have no monuments been handed down, but also the time when and the place where it was spoken are unknown, and are likely to remain forever unknown. This only we can say, that, at some remote periods of the past, members of the race that spoke the primitive Indo-European speech or later descendants of it, parted company from one another, wandered in various directions, and finally formed permanent settlements far apart. Lapse of time, and separation in space, caused differences to spring up between these dispersed communities, — differences in customs, in beliefs, and, what most concerns us here, in language. The divergences that arose became, in the course of events, so much more important and conspicuous than the resemblances which had been preserved, that, when the scattered races and peoples that had sprung from this one primitive Indo-European tribe appear to us in recorded history, they are totally unaware of the tie of blood or of speech that subsists between them ; in fact, it was not discovered until within a hundred years. The scientific study which has been carried on in the present century of the languages of the Indo-European family shows that in all branches of it there is a certain number of the same grammatical forms and of the same words. These are not merely proofs of a common descent : their common existence makes it clear that these forms and words must have belonged to the speech of the primitive Indo-European community before its dispersion into separate ones ; and from it they must have been transmitted to all its descend-

ants. By a comparison of the forms and words thus preserved in the derived languages, it has been possible to construct a theoretical primitive language, which is the remote parent of every tongue included in this family.

Bound to each other, therefore, by the fact of common descent, all Indo-European tongues necessarily are ; but it likewise follows that some are much more closely related to one another than they are to others. According to the nearness of this relationship among themselves, the languages of the Indo-European stock have been divided into the following distinct branches : —

I. The Indian. — This embraces the languages of Northern Hindostan. Its great representative is the Sanskrit, which, as a spoken tongue, died out three centuries before Christ. It is the oldest of all the languages of the Indo-European family, and as a whole comes nearest to the primitive speech.

II. The Iranian. — This includes the languages of both Ancient and Modern Persia and of provinces and tribes adjoining or belonging to that country.

III. The Hellenic. — This includes the Ancient Greek, with its various dialects, and its existing representative, the Romaic or Modern Greek.

IV. The Slavonic, or Slavo-Lettic. — This includes the languages spoken over a large portion of Eastern Europe. Of this branch the Russian is much the most important.

With none of these has the English any intimate

relationship, though from the Ancient Greek it has borrowed a moderately large number of words. With the three remaining branches its connections are nearer, though varying in their nature. With the first it has come into close geographical contact; from the second it has taken full half of its literary vocabulary; of the third it is itself a member.

V. The Celtic. — This branch was once widely spread over Western Europe; but it is now confined to portions of the British Isles, and, in North-western France, to the Peninsula of Brittany, a part of the ancient Armorica. It is divided into the two following clearly-defined groups: 1st, The Cymric. To this belong the languages or dialects once used throughout the whole of England and Southern Scotland, but now limited to the principality of Wales, and represented in it by the tongue we call the Welsh. The Cornish, the language of the extreme south-west of Britain, which died out entirely in the last century, was also a member of this group, which includes one other living tongue besides the Welsh, — the Breton or Armorican, spoken in the Peninsula of Brittany, as already mentioned. 2d, The Gadhelic or Gaelic. Of this group the most important members are the Irish, the native language of Ireland, and the Erse, the language of the Scottish Highlands. The Manx, spoken by a portion of the population of the Isle of Man, is also included in it. The Celtic tongues are all gradually dying out; giving way in the British Isles to the encroachment of the English, and in France to that

of the French. Linguistically they are widely removed from our tongue, and, in spite of their geographical nearness, have had no influence worth speaking of on its vocabulary, and none at all on its grammar.

VI. The Italic. — Of the ancient languages included in this branch, the Latin is the great representative; and from that tongue have descended all the modern ones belonging to it. These are collectively called Romanic or Romance. The most important of the descendants of the Latin are the Italian, the Spanish, the Portuguese, the French, and the Provençal. French was at first the language of Northern France only; while Provençal, or the Languedoc, was the language of the south of that country. The latter, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries especially, flourished as a language of literature, and in it was then composed the poetry of the troubadours. But the political preponderance of Northern France carried with it the supremacy of the tongue spoken in it; and the Provençal sunk from the position of a cultivated language to that of a dialect. The influence of this branch upon the English has been very great so far as regards its vocabulary. The Latin and Romance elements in our tongue, owing to circumstances connected with its history, make up fully one-half of the number of words used in literature.

VII. The Teutonic. — Of this branch English is one of the most important members, and may, perhaps, be justly called the most important. As we have no remains of the primitive Indo-European, so

we have none of the primitive Teutonic speech, from which all the tongues belonging to this stock have descended. This whole branch is subdivided into four groups : —

1. *The Gothic, or Mæso-Gothic.* — This was the tongue spoken by the Goths who dwelt in Mœsia, on the Lower Danube. It is the eldest of the Teutonic tongues that have been preserved, and naturally much the most ancient in its forms ; standing, indeed, in the same relation to the other members of this branch that the Sanskrit does to all the members of the Indo-European family. Its principal literary monument is only partially preserved. This was a translation of the Bible made in the fourth century into the language of the Goths dwelling in the province of Mœsia on the Lower Danube, by Ulfilas, their bishop. The speech died out in the ninth century, and has left no descendants.

2. *The Norse, or Scandinavian.* — The oldest representative of this group is the Old Norse, or, as it is sometimes called, the Old Icelandic. To Iceland it was carried in the ninth century by settlers from Norway, and there gave birth to a brilliant literature. The modern Scandinavian tongues are the Icelandic, the Swedish, the Danish, and the Norwegian. The last is a popular dialect only.

3. *The High-Germanic.* — This is so called because originally spoken in Upper or Higher Germany. The history of the dialects belonging to it is divided into three periods. The first is that of the Old High Ger-

man, extending from the eighth to the twelfth century. The leading literary dialect of the Old High German was the Frankish, though others were employed. The second period was that of Middle High German, extending from the twelfth to the sixteenth century. This literature was very abundant in quantity, and rich in quality: the dialect in which it was written was the Swabian. The New High German begins with the writings of the reformer Luther, in the first half of the sixteenth century, especially with his translation of the Bible. It is the language of all modern German literature, and is by us usually termed simply the German.

4. *The Low Germanic.*—This was so called because originally spoken in Northern or Low Germany. This group consists of several tongues, of which some are now only popular dialects, having been reduced to this condition by the predominance of High German as the language of literature. The four ancient tongues of this group are the Friesic, the Netherlandish, the Old Saxon, and the Saxon or English. The Friesic was once spoken on the coasts of the North Sea and on the adjoining islands. Its oldest records consist of legal documents of about the thirteenth century, and it is now only an idiom of the common people. The Netherlandish and the Old Saxon were closely related. From them have descended the Dutch of Holland, the Flemish of portions of Belgium, and the Platt Deutsch, or Low German proper. This last is still a wide-spread popular idiom in Northern Germany, and