A DICTIONARY OF

FOREIGN WORDS

AND PHRASES

IN CURRENT ENGLISH

A. J. BLISS

ROUTLEDGE & KEGAN PAUL

World Publishing Corp

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For J.A.P.

'How charmingly and effectively these foreign tags
assist one in the great task of calling a spade by some
other name!'

Aldous Huxley, *Antic Hay*

PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As Henry Sweet wrote in the Preface to his *Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 'a dictionary which is good from a practical point of view—that is, which is finished within a reasonable time, and is kept within reasonable limits of space—must necessarily fall far short of ideal requirements'. Although I hope that my own dictionary may be found serviceable from a practical point of view, I am acutely conscious of its deficiencies, and well aware that several more years' work would have made it a much better book. I can only plead in extenuation that nothing of quite the same kind has been attempted before, so that the plan of the dictionary had to be worked out from first principles, and the material collected afresh; moreover, the need for such a work is so pressing that longer delay seemed ill-advised.

This dictionary would have fallen even further short of ideal requirements if it had not been for the generous help I have received from many sources, and it is both a duty and a pleasure to acknowledge my indebtedness. My thanks are due first to all those correspondents, many of them personally unknown to me, who wrote to suggest words and phrases for inclusion in the dictionary; the plan of the work did not allow me to accept all the suggestions made, but the fact that so many persons of varying tastes and interests co-operated in this way has moderated if not quite eliminated the bias which a purely personal choice must have introduced. Next I must thank the numerous friends and colleagues who have patiently answered my questions about the most diverse subjects; if, as I hope, there is no actual error of fact in the dictionary, the credit is largely due to them. My thanks are also due to my publishers for their forbearance in the matter of last-minute alterations and additions, and to the printers for the skill with which they have accomplished an exceedingly difficult task.

My chief indebtedness, however, is to Mr. J. A. Porter, who for several years has devoted much of his scanty leisure to assisting me in the preparation of the dictionary. He has not only suggested a large number of words and phrases for inclusion, but he has been indefatigable in hunting out quotations to illustrate the use of the expressions included, and information throwing light on their meaning, origin, and history. He has discussed the plan of the work with me, and has read the whole of it several times both in manuscript and in proof; I am ashamed to remember the number of errors and omissions that his vigilance has enabled me to avoid.

The obligation under which I have been placed by so many people would be poorly discharged if I did not point out that the responsibility for the dictionary, both in general and in detail, remains mine alone. I have frequently found myself unable to accept advice which might have made the work better than it is; if my judgment has been at fault, no one is to blame but myself.

A.J.B.

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INTRODUCTION

I. The Contents of the Dictionary

The number of foreign words and phrases used in current English, both written and spoken, is very large. To the ordinary cultivated man many of these will already be familiar, but there will be others of whose precise meaning he is ignorant or uncertain; and in these cases it is not always easy for him to discover the meaning unless he has access to a well-stocked reference library. The smaller English dictionaries, with their limited vocabulary, naturally tend to include relatively few foreign words, and list only those which have entered the language of everyday intercourse and occur with great frequency; most of these will already be known to the inquirer. The larger dictionaries, like the *New English Dictionary*[1] and the American *Webster*, aim at completeness, and include a great many terms used only by specialists in some art or science, who already know their meaning; not only are the foreign words as a whole lost among the much more numerous native words, but the more widely current foreign words are lost among a mass of highly technical terms rarely encountered in general reading. The *New English Dictionary* has the additional disadvantage (from this special point of view) that it is a historical dictionary, and therefore of set purpose includes a very large number of words which have long been obsolete. Moreover, these dictionaries include very few phrases. Naturally enough, an English dictionary will not list many English phrases, since the meaning of the vast majority of these can be deduced from the meanings of the words of which they consist, all of which will be entered separately. But foreign phrases used in English have a different status: they are indivisible units, corresponding in this respect to English words rather than to English phrases; the words of which they are composed are not normally used except in the one set context, and will not therefore be individually entered in any English dictionary.

Dictionaries of foreign languages are likely to be more helpful, if they are available in sufficient number—words and phrases from more than fifty different languages are in use in English—but even these may not always serve the purpose unless they are unusually comprehensive. It so happens that many of the foreign expressions

[1] For further details of this important work see p. 61.

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used in English are, though not limited in their use to specialists, more or less technical in their connotation, and many of the smaller foreign dictionaries are deficient in technical terms. (For these more technical expressions there are, of course, special technical dictionaries—Dictionaries of Law, Dictionaries of Music, Dictionaries of Geography and so on; but each of these deals with only a small proportion of the foreign words and phrases used in English). Foreign phrases are often highly idiomatic—this may well be one of the reasons for their adoption into English—so that their meaning cannot be readily deduced from the meanings of the words of which they are composed; and the smaller foreign dictionaries do not contain many such idiomatic phrases. But the strongest objection to the use of foreign dictionaries depends on the fact that the meaning, or at least the connotation, of many of the foreign expressions used in English differs substantially from the meaning or connotation they have in the language from which they come; in such cases the use of a foreign dictionary will be actively misleading. Some of the more extreme examples of such changes of meaning are discussed below, p. 13, but there are numerous other examples in which the change of meaning or connotation, though less striking, is none the less significant.

There are indeed dictionaries of foreign expressions used in English, but none of these is wholly satisfactory. Much the best is *The Stanford Dictionary of Anglicised Words and Phrases*[1], but even this has many disadvantages. It is now antiquated—it was published in 1892— and contains none of the very numerous expressions first introduced into English in the twentieth century; as the title implies, it includes a very large number of words which have been fully anglicized, and which are therefore not now 'foreign' in any ordinary sense of the term; and (like the *New English Dictionary*) it is historical in plan, so that its pages are overloaded with words and phrases which have long been obsolete. Other more recent dictionaries of foreign expressions are even less useful: all swell their bulk by the inclusion of numerous words and phrases which have either long been obsolete, or have only a very limited currency; some appear to aim at providing a kind of compact polyglot dictionary for those travelling abroad, since they include expressions which could not conceivably have any currency in an English context.

In this dictionary I have tried to supply the needs of the general reader in search of a single work of reference which will explain at least the majority of the foreign words and phrases likely to be

[1] For further details of this work see p. 61.

encountered in current English, both written and spoken. I have tried to restrict the volume to a manageable size by excluding expressions which are either obsolete or have only a limited technical currency. For this reason I have found it necessary to compile the list of words and phrases to be included without reference to earlier dictionaries—though I have, of course, consulted dictionaries and other works of reference in search of information about the expressions included in the list. With very few exceptions all the words and phrases in this dictionary have been culled from recent books and journals; the exceptions are expressions which I would use myself or have heard in conversation, but which I have not happened to find in print. No doubt this method must result in the omission of words and phrases which I have accidentally overlooked, though I hope the omissions will not be found to be very numerous; but the ransacking of dictionaries for additional entries could only have made this volume more bulky, more expensive, and less convenient to use.

The remainder of the first part of this Introduction is devoted to a discussion and appraisal from different points of view of the words and phrases actually listed in the dictionary. The second part deals with various difficulties arising in connection with the use of foreign expressions in English. The third part explains the arrangement of the dictionary.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

A visitor to Britain during the first half of the fifth century would have found two languages in common use: in the rural districts British (the language which eventually developed into Welsh, Cornish and Breton), in the Romanized cities Latin. About the middle of the century a new language, the language which ultimately developed into modern English, was brought to the country by invaders from across the Channel. According to the Venerable Bede the invading force was composed of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes; but archæological investigation has thrown some doubt on the validity of Bede's distinctions. The original homes of the invaders were in the districts which now constitute northern Germany and the Danish peninsula, but it is very probable that they had migrated first to the lowlands of Frisia and western Holland, and that the original tribal differences had been largely eliminated in the course of their residence there. At all events it is now generally agreed that the invaders spoke a single, more or less homogeneous language, and that the dialectal divergences observable at a later date developed in Britain, not on the Continent. The language spoken by the invaders is some-

times known as Anglo-Saxon, but it is better called Old English, since this latter name emphasizes the essential continuity of the English language from the fifth century to the present day.

Old English was a Germanic language, and contained few words alien to the original native stock. Like the other Germanic languages of this period, it contained a few words of Latin origin picked up on the Continent, long before the invaders came to Britain, through trade with the Romans; examples, in their modern English form, are *cheese* < *caseus, kitchen* < *coquina*, and *street* < *strata* (*via*). However, the Anglo-Saxons did not very readily accept foreign words into their speech, and there are very few words in English which can be attributed to borrowing from the British-speaking and Latin-speaking inhabitants whom the invaders found in possession of the country: *brock* 'badger', *combe* 'valley' and the adjective *dun* 'dark-coloured' are examples of words borrowed from British; *chest* <*cista, fork* <*furca*, and *pail* <*pagella* are examples of borrowings from Latin during this early period. The advent of Christianity about the year 600 introduced into the language a number of Latin ecclesiastical terms, such as *bishop* <*episcopus, devil* <*diabolus*, and *priest* <*presbyter*; all three Latin words are in turn derived from Greek. But even in this sphere the Anglo-Saxons preferred either to apply new Christian meanings to native words like *Easter, heaven, hell* and *sin*, or to form new compound words from native stems to express the new Christian concepts; thus, for the mystery which we now call by the Latin name *Trinity*, the Anglo-Saxons used the native compound *Threeness*. During the later Anglo-Saxon period, from the latter part of the ninth century onwards, the north-eastern part of England was occupied by Danish invaders, and a large number of Scandinavian words found their way into the local dialects of this area, many of which still survive in the modern dialects. Relatively few Scandinavian words, however, found their way into the English spoken in the Southern part of the country; examples are *fellow, outlaw, wrong*, and the verb *call*.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of the influence of the Norman Conquest on the English language. Before the Conquest the vocabulary of English was almost entirely native; by the end of the fourteenth century, when Chaucer was writing his *Canterbury Tales*, about half[1] the words used in English were of foreign origin, though the basic structure of the language remained (and still remains)

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[1] Half the words as listed in a dictionary or glossary, that is; in a passage of continuous writing not more than one fifth of the words would be of foreign origin, because the foreign words were used relatively much less frequently than the surviving native words.

Germanic. Within a short time after the Conquest all the important positions in the country, both secular and ecclesiastical, had been filled by Normans; for nearly two hundred years the 'upper crust' of English society spoke French amongst themselves. From the beginning there must have been influences at work against the use of French: many of the Norman nobles married English wives, and Norman mothers had their children suckled by English nurses, so that all the Norman children in England must have spoken some English, at least as a nursery-language; and every Norman landowner or cleric must have needed to speak some elementary English to his English subordinates and servants. Yet as long as the Norman nobility owned estates in Normandy as well as in England, and spent some part of the year on the other side of the Channel, French must have been the more convenient language for their general use. With the loss of Normandy by King John in 1204, circumstances changed; those nobles who chose to remain in England now spent the whole of their time there; residence in France no longer served to counteract the natural encroachment of English. Linguistic nationalism seems hardly to have existed in the Middle Ages, yet the fact that France became and remained the traditional enemy of England for many hundreds of years can hardly have failed to exert some influence against French in favour of English as the language of the upper classes in England.

From the thirteenth century onwards the upper classes in England made increasing use of English; but, because at first English came less naturally to them than French, they tended to interlard their speech with French words—partly because the native English vocabulary was somewhat defective in certain fields (notably in those concerned with abstract concepts and with the luxuries of life), partly from ignorance of the appropriate native term. The numerous French words adopted in this way were fully absorbed into the English language, so much so that many of them cannot easily be recognized as French except by professional students of language. The following words, for instance, would scarcely strike the ordinary user of English as being 'foreign': *assets, bargain, broker, chair, coat, dance, faith, fruit, fur, ink, joy, pen, pray, roast*. This extensive acceptance of French words into the vocabulary of English made it easier for words from other foreign languages to be accepted too, and from this time onwards foreign words entered English in abundance; words were taken not only from French, but from the Classical languages, from other European languages, and in due course, as more and more of the world became accessible to travellers, from remoter languages as well.

THE ANGLICIZATION OF FOREIGN WORDS

The French words absorbed into English during the Middle Ages were fully anglicized both in pronunciation and in form. There was less difference between the pronunciations of the two languages in the Middle Ages than there is today, but there were already a number of sounds in French that had no counterpart in English; these were all replaced by English sounds. There was also a marked difference in stress between the two languages, in so far as the stress in French tended (and tends) to fall towards the end of a word, and the stress in English tended (and tends) to fall towards the beginning of a word; the French stress was nearly always rejected in favour of the English stress. The substitution of the English for the French stress can be observed in such words as *beauty, memory, palace*, and *service*; and it will be noticed that these words contain no sounds which are not fully English. In a similar way French words were provided with English inflections. Nouns offered little difficulty, since the addition of a final *-s* was the most common way of forming the plural in both languages. Verbs, on the other hand, lost their French inflections and were conjugated according to the English pattern—usually one of the simpler English patterns; but such French verbs as *catch/caught* and *strive/strove/striven* show that even the more irregular of the English patterns could be brought into play.

In the same way words adopted at a later period, not only from modern languages but from the Classical languages, tended to be anglicized. Until recent times Greek and Latin were pronounced in each individual country with the sounds of the vernacular language of that country[1], so that the question of modifying the pronunciation of borrowed words did not arise. In form, however, these words underwent substantial changes: the original inflectional endings were dropped, and were replaced either by the appropriate English endings or by special endings, not fully English, but felt to be less alien from English than those of Greek or Latin. An example of the first process is to be found in the numerous verbs formed from the past participles of Latin verbs: such forms as *select, situate*, and *convict*, all three from Latin past participles, were originally borrowed in an adjectival function; the first is still often used as an adjective, the second only in the jargon of the law, the third never (though with a variant stress it is used as a noun); but all three are now in use as verbs, and are conjugated with the ordinary English verbal inflections. An example of the second process is to be found in the numerous adjectives of Latin

[1] The pronunciation of Latin and Greek in England is discussed at length below, pp. 37-40 and 42-44.

origin which in English end in -ous such as *obvious, tremendous, various*; in these the original ending *-us* of the Latin nominative singular masculine has been replaced by the French ending *-ous*[1] found in such words as *famous* and *generous*, an ending which historically corresponds not to Latin *-us* but to Latin *-osus*.

The anglicization of words adopted since about 1600 has been less systematic. French words adopted during the seventeenth century tend to show a curious combination of French stress with English sounds: such words as *campaign, festoon, gazette* and *grimace*, for instance, are pronounced with the stress on the last syllable as in French, though the sounds have been fully anglicized. More recent borrowings vary considerably in the treatment they receive; both the extent of the anglicization they undergo and the rapidity with which it takes place tend to depend on frequency of usage; in general the more frequently a word is used the more completely and the more rapidly it is anglicised. The word *picnic*, for instance, was first used in the eighteenth century (usually in the form *pique-nique*) to describe a function considered essentially foreign, to be encountered only abroad; not until after 1800 was it first applied to an *al fresco* meal in England. On the other hand the word *garage* was first used in English as recently as 1902, and for several years thereafter was still always printed either in italics or within quotation marks; yet owing to the rapid development of the internal combustion engine the word has become so familiar that, although more conservative speakers still prefer a quasi-French pronunciation of the final syllable, a fully anglicized pronunciation is now probably more common, and will certainly eventually prevail.

However, anglicization is not entirely a question of long standing in the language, or of frequency of usage; there are some words of foreign origin which have been used, even frequently used, for many hundreds of years and have still not been anglicized. More remarkable still, it sometimes happens that a foreign word becomes fully anglicized, and yet at a later date reappears in a 'foreign' form. The French word *bévue*, for instance, was introduced and anglicized in the eighteenth century as *bevew*; but this anglicized form is now obsolete, and the only form in current use is the original *bévue*, so spelt, and pronounced approximately as in French. Some of the reasons for the failure of anglicization, or for the re-appearance of a 'foreign' form, are discussed below, pp. 21–25. This dictionary is concerned only with those words which have not been anglicized, or which have re-appeared in a 'foreign' form; and, amongst these, only with those

[1] The ending *-ous* is a Norman dialect form corresponding to the *-eux* of standard French: *fameux, généreux*.

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which can be said to belong to current English.[1] Unfortunately, it is exceedingly difficult to define precisely what it is that characterizes a word as 'foreign', and nearly as difficult to define what is meant by 'current' English. These two concepts will therefore have to be discussed at some length.

THE MEANING OF 'FOREIGN'

There is no difficulty in distinguishing a 'foreign' phrase from an English phrase: one is composed of foreign words, the other of English words. However, to draw an equally sharp distinction in the case of single words is to oversimplify. In point of fact, words of foreign origin form a spectrum graduating imperceptibly from words like *faith* at one end, the foreign origin of which would be obvious only to the professional student of language, to words like *éclat*, which no one would consider anything but 'foreign', at the other; it would be possible to prepare a sequence of words, each slightly but perceptibly more 'foreign' than the preceding one, covering the whole range between these two extremes. Unfortunately, for the purpose of such a dictionary as this it is necessary to draw a hard-and-fast line somewhere across this spectrum, and to call all words on one side of it 'foreign', all words on the other side 'not foreign'; and the right point at which to draw the line is not easy to determine.

It would be very satisfactory if it were possible to draw up a list of objective criteria by means of which 'foreign' words can be distinguished from those which are 'not foreign', and up to a point it is indeed possible; at least the attempt is worth making. These criteria may be either positive or negative; that is to say, they may prescribe characteristics the presence of which implies that a word *is* 'foreign', or characteristics the presence of which implies that a word is *not* 'foreign'. As will appear, most of the possible criteria are open to obvious objections, and none is wholly free from difficulty; yet, taken together, they are of considerable help in distinguishing 'foreign' words.

SOME POSITIVE CRITERIA

The following is a list of some positive criteria, with the objections that might be urged against each.

(1) *The use of italics in printing*. At first sight this seems to be an admirable criterion, since one of the accepted uses of italic type is for

[1] The dictionary also, of course, deals with foreign phrases; but these are normally anglicized (if at all) by translation, and therefore present fewer problems; see below, pp. 22-23.