THE ELEMENTS OF ENGLISH GRAMMAR.

CHAPTER I.

HISTORICAL SURVEY.

1. Britons and Englishmen. The people who lived in our island fifteen hundred years ago were not Englishmen, nor did they speak the English language. When, in our flights of rhetoric or poetry, we declare that we glory in the name of Britons, or sing that Britons never shall be slaves, our intentions are patriotic, but our language is apt to be misleading. Britons we may indeed call ourselves, if in doing so we mean nothing more than this, that we are inhabitants of Britain. But when we speak of ourselves as Britons, or as a British race, let us bear in mind such facts as these:—that we are in the main of English origin; that our English forefathers conquered the Britons, deprived them of their lands, and made many of them slaves; that the English settled in the country belonging to the Britons, and that their descendants have remained here ever since. Firmly grasping these truths, we may, if we like, apply the name of Britons to our fellow-countrymen, just as we apply the name of Great Britain to our country. No danger of misconception lurks in the use of the word
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‘Britain’ as the geographical name of our island, for our island remains the same: it is the population which has changed.

2. **The Roman Conquest.** As the result of his invasions in B.C. 55 and the following year, Julius Caesar exacted from the British tribes the payment of an annual tribute to Rome. His advance into the country reached only as far as St Albans, and nearly a century passed before the Romans returned. In the year A.D. 43, the Roman legions were sent to Britain again, and in the course of the next forty years the country was reduced to subjection as far as the Tyne. Half a century later, the limit of Roman conquest was pushed further north to the Clyde. The Romans held the country as we hold India to-day. They did not intermarry with the Britons as they intermarried with the natives of Gaul or of Spain. Their occupation of Britain was a military occupation, and the Britons preserved their own language, though it was not until A.D. 410 that the Romans, after a tenure of nearly four hundred years, finally left the island.

3. **The Britons were a Keltic race,** and in some parts of our islands a Keltic language is still spoken. Welsh is a Keltic dialect; so is Manx; so is the native Irish, or Erse; so is the dialect of the Highlands of Scotland. If we wish to have a notion of the sort of language which an ancient Briton spoke, we must remember that it was like the Welsh of to-day and therefore very different from English. The people of South Britain called themselves *Cymry*, as the Welsh call themselves now. *Cambria* and *Cumbria* preserve for us this name ‘Cymry’ in a Latin form.

4. **The English Conquest.** In the year A.D. 449, a generation after the departure of the Romans, Hengist

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1 Lowland Scotch is an English dialect.
the Jute settled in Kent, and in the course of a century the conquest of the country was for a second time fairly complete. The account of the successive invasions,—first of Jutes, then of Saxons, and then of Angles, all closely allied tribes,—must be looked for in a history of the English people, not in a book on the English speech. But to these two questions an answer ought to be given here:

1. **Who were these settlers?**
2. **Where did they come from?**

1. They were **Teutonic tribes**. The people, whom we call Germans, call themselves **Deutsch**. The word is familiar to us in the form **Dutch**. The Romans, getting as near as they could to the name by which these German tribes called themselves, made the word **Teutoni** and gave it a Latin declension. From this we derive the convenient term **Teutonic**. If we pronounce the stems of **Teutoni** and of **Deut-scher** with their proper vowel sounds, the resemblance is close. We disguise this resemblance by giving to the vowel of the word **Teutonic** the sound of the **eu** in **feud**. We use the word **Teutonic** to signify 'belonging to the German race,' but if we said that English, or Dutch, or Flemish, was a 'German' language, the term might be misleading, as we commonly employ the word **German** in a narrower sense, to signify the language spoken to-day in Berlin and taught at school to English boys and girls who are said to be 'learning German.' This German which is spoken at the present day in Germany is itself one of the Teutonic dialects.

Thus the Jutes and Saxons and Angles were very different people from the Britons. The Jutes, Saxons, and Angles,—or to call them by a collective name, the **English**,—were Teutonic tribes. Their speech was akin to Dutch, and it was the parent of our own. The Britons were a Keltic race, and their language was as different from the
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language of their Saxon conquerors as the Welsh language of to-day is different from our modern English.

(2) To find the district from which these tribes came, we must turn to the map of North Germany and Denmark.

The Angles are believed to have come from the duchy of Schleswig.

Crossing its northern border we pass into Jutland, which is part of Denmark. The south of Jutland was probably the home of the Jutes.

If we move southwards again into Holstein, we find on the west coast two rivers forming respectively its northern and southern boundaries, the Eider and the Elbe. From this neighbourhood it is supposed that the Saxons came.

Neglecting these details, we may remember that the English people came from Schleswig-Holstein, or that the English people came from the country to the north of the mouth of the Elbe; that they came between the years A.D. 450 and 550; and that having come they stayed.

As the district from which these invaders came is a low-lying, flat part of the continent, we call them Low Germans, to distinguish them from their Teutonic kinsmen living in the interior of the country, where the ground is higher. What we call to-day the ‘German’ language is High German. Dutch, Flemish, spoken in parts of Belgium, and Frisian, still spoken in the districts from which our ancestors came, are Low German dialects. Thus the terms High and Low, as applied to German, have a geographical origin. No stigma of inferiority is attached to us when we are described as a ‘Low German’ race.

5. What became of the Keltic race, the Britons?

They were driven into the west and the north of the island,—into Devon and Cornwall, into Wales, into West-
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moreland and Cumberland. Those who remained in the parts which were under English rule were made slaves. Their Keltic language was spoken only amongst themselves. Henceforth the language of the country was English.

6. Anglo-Saxon. The term Anglo-Saxon has a twofold application, (1) to people, (2) to language.

(1) Whether the name ‘Anglo-Saxons’ meant originally Angles and Saxons or Saxons of England (as distinguished from Saxons of North Germany) is a point which we need not now discuss. At an early age the term was used to denote the Teutonic tribes generally in England and at the present day by ‘Anglo-Saxons’ we signify people of English race.

(2) Applied to language Anglo-Saxon is a misleading term, suggesting as it does that the English settlers all spoke one dialect. Now there were at least three dialects in use, viz. Anglian in Northumbria (north of the Humber), Frisian in Mercia (the Midlands), and Saxon in Wessex (south of the Thames). Most of the literature which has come down to us from that early period is written in the Wessex dialect and to this dialect scholars in the 17th century gave the name Anglo-Saxon. Our standard Modern English traces its descent from the Mercian dialect, not from the so-called ‘Anglo-Saxons’ of Wessex.

7. Roman missionaries. Our English forefathers were heathen. We preserve relics of their worship in the names of the days of the week. Roman missionaries were sent to this country in the year A.D. 597 to teach them Christianity. Latin became again one of the tongues of Britain, the language of its worship and of its literature. Trade brought in other words from a Latin source.

8. The Northmen. During two and a half centuries, from about A.D. 800 to 1050, England was exposed to frequent inroads of the Danes, or Northmen, inhabitants of Scandinavia and not merely of Denmark. These Northmen, from Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, were a Teutonic race, so they were akin to the English whom they harassed; but we place them in a group apart from High or Low Germans and call this group the Scandinavians.

9. The Norman Conquest. The Normans, who established themselves in our country in A.D. 1066, were originally, like the Danes, Northmen or Scandinavians.
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But they had been settled on French soil for about 150 years and had acquired a French dialect, the French of northern France, called the langue d’oil. The word oil, the same word as oui, signifies yes. The langue d’oil was the dialect in which people said oil for yes, as distinguished from the langue d’oc in which they said oc. This French language was in the main a form of Latin, containing, however, a certain amount of Keltic, for the Gauls were a Keltic race, though they adopted the speech of their Roman conquerors. So the French influence upon our English tongue is really a Latin influence in disguise.

10. The Revival of Learning. The sixteenth century is the time of the Revival of Classical Learning, or of the Renaissance as it is sometimes called. The capture of Constantinople by the Turks in A.D. 1453 had caused the flight of the cultured Greeks who lived there, and they sought refuge in the cities of Italy. To Florence flocked eager students out of many lands to acquire from these learned exiles a knowledge of ancient literature. Curiosity respecting Greek and Roman antiquities spread widely, and Greek and Latin writers were zealously read. The consequence was that an enormous number of new words, borrowed directly from the Latin, passed into our English vocabulary. Hundreds of words were introduced and dropped, as there was no need of them: hundreds more remained. Very different was the way in which words of Latin origin came in at this time from the way in which they came in under the influence of the Norman Conquest. At the Revival of Learning the words were borrowed by scholars from books. Under the Norman kings they were introduced by the daily speech of foreigners who had taken our England and made it their own.

11. Other incidents in our history deserve mention in an account of the influence of political events on the formation of our speech. Thus, in the reign of Mary, Spanish
influence was strong; in the reign of Elizabeth, English volunteers helped the Dutch against the Duke of Parma; in the reign of Charles II., French was the fashion at Court. But the Spanish and Dutch and French words which thus secured a footing in our language are few.

12. We will close this chapter with a short summary of the chief historical events which have affected the formation of our English speech as it exists to-day, and in the next chapter we shall say something about the character of the words which we owe to these events.

1. The original inhabitants of this country were Britons, a Keltic race, speaking a language like Welsh. They were subdued by the Romans, who remained here from A.D. 43 to 410. They were then subdued by the Jutes, Saxons, and Angles, tribes belonging to the Low German branch of the Teutonic stock. These English people came from the district north of the mouth of the Elbe at different times between A.D. 450 and 550, and their descendants have stayed in this country ever since.

2. A.D. 600 to 1000. The Christian missions introduced some words of Latin origin, and the growth of trade brought in others.

3. A.D. 800 to 1050. The Danes made frequent incursions, and from 1017 to 1042 Danish kings ruled in England. By 'Danes' are meant not only people of Denmark, but people of Norway and Sweden also. Like the English they were a Teutonic race, but we call theirs the Scandinavian branch.

4. A.D. 1066 to 1400. The Normans were also originally Scandinavians, but they had adopted the language of France during their occupation of that country for 150 years before they conquered England; and for 150 years after their conquest of England,—until the death of John and the final severance of England from Normandy,—great efforts
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were made to extend the use of the French language in this country. The blending of the Norman-French and English languages did not take place till long after the Conquest. The Normans in England continued to speak French; the English continued to speak English, and books were written in English. Nearly two centuries elapsed before there was a real amalgamation. About the year 1250 French words began to pass freely into the native vocabulary, and by the year 1400 French had ceased to be the speech of the nobility in England. The French language is in the main a form of Latin, though the Gauls were a Keltic race.

5. The Revival of Letters, or of Classical Learning, or the Renaissance, affected our language from the time of Henry VII. to the end of Charles I.'s reign, i.e. during the 16th and the first half of the 17th century.