THESIS

THE ELEMENTS OF ENGLISH.

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Language is something more than words. The introduction of one vocabulary into another is not simply the intermixture of two stocks of words. The blending of two languages means the close union of two peoples; it may be with different inherent traits, different thoughts, and widely separated dispositions.

In speaking of the various elements of language which have combined to form the English of today, it is not simply to these instruments of thought that I would call your attention, but what is equally important, the characteristic peculiarities which the people themselves possessed, the individuality which they gave to the language, and the particular influences which they had on the generations which came after.

As my title suggests, the main theme which I shall present in this paper, will be the historical
origin of the English language, and something of the time and circumstances which had to do with its formation.

The language belongs to the great family called Aryan. Where and when the Aryan language first existed is not easy to say, though various theories have been advanced. It is enough for my purpose to say that it is quite certain that such a language did exist, and that, very probably, its seat was in south-western Asia, though this fact is not to be taken as undisputed.

Five or six thousand years ago, then, probably in the country south and south-east of the Caspian sea, there lived a race of people, differing somewhat from those around them. They were Caucasians, and were an agricultural people, more hardy and intelligent than those tribes among whom they
lived. Gradually, from some cause, probably the pressure of other tribes behind them, by the great growth of population, or the love of adventure, they moved westward until we find them in Persia. At this point, the stream divided, one part moving in a south-westerly direction into Hindoostan, and the other going north- and west, through Turkey in Asia into Europe. Up to this time, it is thought the Aryan peoples spoke one language. But time and isolation wrought great changes in language, especially so in a barbaric one, and we find a division and redivision into languages and dialects from this time on.

Scarcely has it entered the continent when we find a division in the European branch, one part moving along near to the Mediterranean sea, the other going northward toward the Black and Baltic seas. From the former, we have the Greek, Latin,
and Celtic languages, with all the modifications and subtle influences of a southern climate, and from the latter, the Tertiary, with all the change which a climate diametrically opposite, and influences totally unlike can work.

The first people whose periodic migrations took them farther and farther along the coast of the Mediterranean sea were the Celts. Their advance was not constant, but we may suppose that for centuries they would remain settled in one place, drinking in the sunshine of their southern home, moulded by the beauty of the scenery with which they were surrounded, enlivened, quickened, invigorated, and refined by the life and loveliness which abounds everywhere, and having implanted in their natures the same love of sound, and light, and color; the same vivacity, and sprightliness, and versatility as to-day.
characterizes the Celtic mind. But trace forward by the same influx of people from behind as is seen later in the northern countries,—an influx which to me is one of the most interesting and mysterious that tradition affords, the history of whose countries millions must ever remain unwritten— they found their way into Germany, Italy, Spain, Gaul, and finally into Britain, being, so far as we know, the original inhabitants of that home of the English race. From here, they are able to go no farther; and, protected by their insular home, they are practically isolated from the world, and remain for a time undisturbed.

Early historians, in what must be composed more of mythology than of fact, look far back into the past and tell of Celtic Kings who reigned in David and Solomon's time, and King
Dear is spoken of long before the foundations of Rome were laid.

Livy, in his "Bust," traces the Britons back to Brutus, who, as an exile, had wandered away from his native city, Troy, to find a resting place in Albion. The story is undoubtedly legendary but it does contain germs of truth, and these we can take for what they are worth.

First, then, we have the Celtic element to consider. It has been asserted by many that the Celtic element is so infinitesimal, and of so little consequence, that it need not be considered at all. So far as words in our language go, this may be true, but to me, the great versatility which the average writer in English displays, the flashes of wit, the bright, racy descriptions of time and scenery, the clear delineations of form and color, the
bursts of passion and tender feeling, the lively imagination which delights to roam in fields never before explored—arc purely characteristic of the Celt, and are but the outcome of his influence upon the English race. The Celt was a most ardent lover of nature. He saw beauty everywhere; he had a most emotional and imaginative mind, and as a consequence was a creature of high ideals. Fickle, joyous, loving, happy—that was the Celt, and one has only to take up the writings of any standard moralist to see what an influence he has had upon the English language. True, as said before, this influence is denied by many able men, but equally good authorities assert it. Henry Morley, whose name carries great weight as an authority, says in his "Early English Writers" in speaking of the Celtic element in English: "But for the
early, frequent, and various contact with the race
which in its half barbarous days invented Cicero's
dialogues with St. Patrick, and that quickened
afterward the Norman's blood in France, Germanic
England must not have produced a Shakespeare."
Matthew Arnold says on the same subject: "If I
were asked what English poetry got these three
things, its turn for style, its turn for melancholy,
and its turn for natural magic — for catching and
rendering the charm of nature in a wonderfully
near and vivid way, I should answer with some
doubt that it got much of its turn of style from
a Celtic source; with less doubt, that it got much
of its melancholy from a Celtic source; with
no doubt at all, that from a Celtic source it
got most of its natural magic." So much for
the Celtic. Not in words left in the language,
but in the subtle influence of a personal contact and the infusion of Celtic blood into Saxon veins, it has had no mean part in making English what it is.

The first invasion of a foreign nation upon British territory was about 55 B.C., when Caesar, with his Roman legions succeeded in subduing the Celts. For four hundred years, the Romans ruled, though little of their language was left behind them. Words of a military character, as "camp" and "fort" are about all that we have to prove that Latin had the slightest influence upon the language then spoken. At first, it seems strange that such a long residence should have so little effect, but when we take into consideration the fact that the Roman legionaries did not come during those four hundred years to make Britain
their home, but simply to hold it as a possession of Rome, that no personal intercourse existed between them and the people, we can easily recognize the fact that they could learn very little impress upon the existing language. Later on, we find the Christian missionaries coming to bring their influence to bear upon the barbaric Celts, and with them we find another influx of Latin words—this time of a wholly different character from what had been previously introduced. At first, they were the words of a warlike race; now they are words which tell of God, and Christ, and His religion. The amount of these last was somewhat greater than the first, but we do not get the addition of Latin words which forms such a large part of our vocabulary, until the Norman conquest of which I shall have to speak later. About four hundred years after their first introduction to Britain, the Romans were
called away by the exigencies of their dying empire, and the Celts were left in peace. But not for long. Their fierce cousins in the North, the Scots and Picts, in a way which one would hardly expect from blood relations, began to harass them in a most unpleasant way, and, unable to cope with them single-handed, they were forced to call in to their assistance the nation which, from being their protectors, turned into their conquerors, and whose language, supplanting that which it found upon the island, became the framework—the very bone and sinew—of what was to be known as the English Language. This nation was the Anglo-Saxons.

We have spoken above of the split in the old Bryer stock after it came into Europe, one part going south and developing the languages of southern Europe, the other going north. It was from this latter...
that we have the Teutonic languages of which the
Anglo-Saxon is one. What the history of the Teutons was
before the fourth or fifth centuries, we do not know.
What great nations among them came into existence
and disappeared in pre-historic times we can only
surmise. All that we know is that they suddenly appear
in most appalling numbers, with vastly different char-
acteristics from their Celtic kinmen. But their
different environments could well make the difference
in character. The cold, sterile regions of the north, with
its dark, foggy, gloomy landscape, and none of the
features of beauty which are so numerous in southern
lands, was well calculated to develop a race of fierce,
warlike, and barbarous people as they were. Besides
these traits, however, they had the power of adapting
themselves to their surroundings, and of attracting
all that was desirable from the peoples with
whom they came in contact. This has been largely
the cause of their advancement. It was the language
of this people, which, with the landing of Hengist and
Horsa in 449 was established in Britain or, as
we ought henceforth to say, England.

The Anglo-Saxon, like all the Aryan group, was an
inflected language, and, even on the continent, had de-
veloped a literature to some extent. The influence which
the conquered people of England had upon the vocab-
ulary of the language, was slight at first, and
for some centuries it was spoken as an inflected
language, the tendency being, however, to gradually drop
the inflectional endings. The Anglo-Saxons were a
rude, undisciplined, matter-of-fact people and the
words they have left us are those which are most
largely used by the masses, and are adapted to the
expression of thought in a clear, concise manner.
is hardly necessary to say that of the language of everyday use, the Anglo-Saxon forms fully 95 per cent; not the highly inflected Anglo-Saxon of the sixth century, however, but a language with its inflections eroded and its involved grammatical constructions simplified from its fierce contact with the languages which came later.

About the eighth century, the Danes, another Teutonic tribe closely related to the Anglo-Saxons, succeeded in conquering Britain, and, ruling for a time, left their quota of words in the language. This element is rather small, and few traces of Danish words can be found in English. But all these incursions helped to wear off the corners of the language, and to simplify it to a still greater degree. The Danish rule was short, and soon the Saxons ruled again, with a speech but slightly modified by the invasion.
The next, and last element in English, and that which made the most radical change in Anglo-Saxon, was the Norman French, brought in by the Normans in 1066. How was this Norman French?

To answer this we must go back to a time previous to Cassar’s conquest of Gaul—about 55 B.C. Up to Cassar’s conquest, as far as we know, the inhabitants of France had been Celts—descendants of the same wandering tribes that crossed the English Channel and peopled Britain—wild, brave warriors as ever; irresistible in attack, boastful in speech, and variable in disposition. But they pursued a different course here from what they did in Britain. They made settlements, and the language of the country quickly became Latin, modified by the Celtic tongue. With the Roman—
The invasion of Europe by the Teutonic tribes in the fifth century, France did not escape, and the Franks assumed the control and government of that country, not retaining their own language, however, but adopting the already somewhat corrupted Latin which they found there, and, with it, the manners and customs of the Romans.

Four centuries later, Rollo the Dane, bringing with him a band of men called Northmen, conquered this part of France, afterwards called Normandy, and made it their home. These Northmen spoke a Teutonic language, which, along with their half-savage customs, quickly gave place to the language and civilization which they found among the people they had conquered. It was this Latin corrupted by the Teutonic tongue - a language of the Celt, the Frank, and the Northman - that the Norman conquerors...
in 1066, introduced into England, and which has received the name of Norman-French.

For some years—a century perhaps, after the Norman conquest, the two languages, Saxon and Norman, remained apart. The conqueror was forced to learn enough of the language of the conquered to be understood, but he spoke the little that he knew without regard to inflections or strict grammatical construction. In a like manner, the Norman speech was modified in the mouth of the Saxon, and gradually, by the breaking down of class relations, and the inter-marriage of the two nationalities, the two languages grew together, both being simplified and modified by those who cared nothing for correct inflection and construction so that the thought was conveyed. For a time it seemed that, as before, the Latin would take precedence; but, as great an sho-
vagaries of language, the Saxon soon secured its
power, and became the language which had the
prominent position. Perhaps not until Chaucer's
time was it so thoroughly cemented and amalgam-
mated as to form a perfect language.

There are additions being made constantly,
as it now stands. New words are being coined,
and almost every language under the sun is
furnishing additions to the vocabulary. But these
are taken and made to conform to the gram-
matical (or non-grammatical as you please to
call them) rules of English, and do not tend in
any way to influence the general formation of
the language.

The languages which I have mentioned are
the principal ones—Celtic, Danish, Latin, Saxon,
Norman—branches of the same great stem, children
of a common parent, starting from the same Aryan
homeland, though nurtured and fostered under
different skies and various transforming circum-
stances. And these are united after centuries
of separation and development in different schools,
to form our own matchless English. To me
the history of their division and separation, the
changes which took place in them, and the
fortunate train of circumstances which reunited
them in England is more fascinating than a novel.
To me English, writing as it does the characteristics
of the vivacious Celt, the polished Roman, the languid
Saxon, and the haughty Norman, is the most
wonderful language in the world. Potted
of its original elaborate inflectional ending, no
other language in the world is so simple in
its construction, or has so little inflectional change.
Brought from so many different sources,
from peoples of such widely differing characteristics as other language is capable of expressing such various shades of thought and feeling as the English. One has only to look at the vast range of English literature to be convinced of this.

In conclusion let me quote from so good an authority as Richard Grant White:

"The true fact is that the English language is the medium and vehicle of a literature unequalled by that produced in any other known tongue, and that it is becoming the common intermedium and most widely diffused speech in the world, show that it possesses in the highest degree the two essential elements of a great and complete language - adaptation to man's highest and his humblest needs in expression. There is no other known language
at the same time, perfectly adapted to the needs of the jurist, the politician, the man of business, and the mariner.