Handbook of the History of the English Language

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THE

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HANDBOOK OF THE HISTORY
OF THE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

FOR THE USE OF TEACHER AND STUDENT

BY

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"THE TRUE THEORY OF GERMAN DECLENSION AND CONJUGATION"
ETC.

"The ground of our own language appertaineth to this old Saxon"—CAMDEN

FOURTH EDITION, ENLARGED AND REVISED

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PREFACE
TO
THE PRESENT EDITION.

Since the first appearance of this work the field of English philology has been sedulously cultivated by many able writers both at home and abroad. It may be sufficient here to mention Koch's 'Historische Grammatik,' 1869; Mätzner's 'Englische Grammatik,' 1865; Marsh's 'English Language,' 1862; Helfenstein's 'Comparative Grammar of the Teutonic Languages,' 1870; Dr. Abbott's 'Shakspearian Grammar,' 1870; Dr. Morris's 'Historical Outlines,' 1873; A. J. Ellis's great work on 'Early English Pronunciation,' 1868-75; and the important Transactions of the Chaucer and Early English Text Societies. These and several other recent works have been consulted in the preparation of the present edition, which thus embodies much fresh matter in further illustration of the successive steps by which the English tongue has arrived at its present state.

Some may possibly affect surprise that no change has been made in the nomenclature, and that the terms Saxon and Anglo-Saxon are still retained. But after mature deliberation I am more than ever convinced that the outcry
raised by Mr. Freeman, Mr. Sweet, Dr. Morris, and a few others against these names, is unreasonable, and that their contentions cannot be upheld. It might be supposed that if there ever were Teuton tribes calling themselves Saxons, and not merely called so by others, it would be childish to quibble about the term Saxon as applied to the Teuton dialects spoken by them. But Mr. Freeman will hear of nothing but English, on the ground that 'as far as we can go back, that language has always had the same name, and that name has been English.' And in his 'Historical Outlines,' Dr. Morris* goes still further. 'These Teutonic invaders,' he says, 'were known to the Romans and Celts by the name of Saxons; and this term was afterwards applied by them to the Teutonic settlers of the fifth century; who, however, never appear to have called themselves Saxons, but always Anglice or English' (p. 28).

Than this it may be doubted whether any more reckless statement ever was made by an otherwise really accomplished scholar. Apart from the broad fact that it was the Saxons themselves, and not the Welsh or other foreigners, that mapped out the parts of the island settled by them into the various kingdoms or political divisions of the East Saxons, the West Saxons, the South Saxons, &c. (names still living in our Sussex, Essex, Middlesex), endless passages might be quoted from the very earliest writers, from charters, laws, and authentic documents of all sorts, showing that the word

* In later works, however, Dr. Morris gives up the point, and quietly returns to the use of the really indispensable terms Saxon and Anglo-Saxon. Thus, at p. 32 of the Preface to his Chaucer (1874), we have: 'In Anglo-Saxon fader, brother, daughter took no inflexion in the singular.' And again: 'This construction occurs in A.S. writers,' p. 36; 'verbs of Saxon origin,' p. 37, and elsewhere passim.
Saxon was freely used in Saxon times and by Saxon writers, as applicable both to the people and to their language. Thus in the 'Wid-sið,' one of the oldest, if not the very oldest, piece of Saxon poetry extant, the Scop or 'Widewanderer' tells us that amongst the many tribes and peoples visited by him were the Saxons: 'And mid Ænum and mid Seaxum ic wæs:' p. 322 of Thorpe's 'Codex Exoniensis.' In the same poem, and probably for the first time in an English text, Angle occurs under the forms Ongle and Engle four times: Offa weold Ongle; mid englum ic wæs, &c.

But as soon as both tribes could be spoken of as one people we find both terms from the very first used indifferently by English writers when speaking comprehensively of all the Teutonic tribes settled in Britain. Thus, our very earliest historian, Bede: 'Gens Anglorum sive Saxonum Britanniam tribus longis navibus advehitur.' Chronicon, A. 449, p. 163, in Stevenson's edition, 1841. And in his 'Hist. Eccl.' I. 22: 'Genti Saxonum sive Anglorum,'* here placing the Saxons before the Angles, though himself an Anglian. In his Life of Hwætberht he also preserves a letter addressed by that Abbot to the Pope, in which the whole of England is actually spoken of as Saxony: 'Hwætberchtus...Abbas Coenobii beatissimi Apostolorum principis Petri in SAXONIA.' Bedæ Opera Hist. II., p. 159. So also Gregory I. in a Brief ad An. 596: 'SAXONIA transmarina,'†

* So also Alfred translates the expression 'historiam gentis Anglorum,' at the opening of Bede's History: 'Angel þcðe and Seaxum,' supplying the word Saxon, as if he had not yet brought himself to look upon Angel as alone sufficient to include the whole people.

† With these passages compare also: 'Ego Leutherius gr. D. episcopus pontificatus SAXONIÆ gubernacula regens' (A. 675, in Cod. Diplomaticus, I. p. 14); Ego Ini monarchus SAXONIÆ, A. 699, ib.
though both he and Bede more generally use the words Anglia and Anglus—the Roman bishop because he seems to have first become acquainted with Anglians, and the historian because he was an Anglian. As, moreover, Anglian letters prevailed in the eighth century, the word became current even amongst Saxon or Southern writers, and is consequently usually employed by Alfred in speaking of the whole nation. So in a note to the passage 'and we secgad to sooan þæt se tima wesan gesælig and wynnum on Angel-cynne. þa þa Eadgar cyning þone cristen dom gefyrðrode,' occurring in the Gloucester fragment of St. Swiðhun, its editor, Mr. J. Earle, justly remarks: 'The Saxons called their nation Angel-cyn, and their speech Englisc. This shows what an influence the Anglian superiority of the seventh and eighth centuries had exercised over the island:' p. 17.

But that Saxony was equally used as applicable to the whole people is sufficiently proved by the above quoted passages. The following will further show that they spoke of their language also as Saxon as well as Angle: 'Etiam similiter et a pastu et refectione illorum hominum quos Saxonic nominamus walhsæred and heora festing and ealra Angelcynnes monna, &c.,' in a deed referred by Kemble to p. 53; Ego Ini rex Saxonum, A. 701; Saxonicæ gentis, p. 62; Angul-Saxonía (V. p. 169); Angul-Seaxná (II. p. 304); Ongol-Saxná-cyning, i.e., Æðelstan (V. 218). And in a rare old Lambeth MS. of the N. T. given by Macbride Mac Duman, bishop of Armagh, 885–927, to this same king Æthelstan, and by him to the Church of Canterbury for ever, there occurs the expression 'Athelstanus Anglo-Saexna Rex, 925,' where the Saxon gen. pl. na for the Latin num (Anglo-Saexna for Anglo-Saxonum) should be noted, as implying a very general use of this compound term at the time. Similar instances may be seen in a paper by Fr. A. March, entitled, 'Is there an Anglo-Saxon Language?' in the Transactions of the American Philological Association for 1872.
the year 855 (Cod. Dipl. Introd. 42). And in the same place occurs a still more pointed expression from a document of Ææelberht's bearing date 863: 'Hæc sunt pascua porcorum, que nostra lingua Saxonica denbera nominamus.' Have these passages escaped the industry of Mr. Freeman, or does he suppose that they can be explained away by his usual device of attributing the use of the term Saxon in this sense to the Welsh and other foreigners? A similar expression occurs in the Chronicle Æthelweard, speaking of the time of the first invaders: 'Porro Anglia vetus sita est inter Saxones et Giotos habens oppidum capitale quod Sermone Saxonico Slesuvic nuncupatur, secundum vero Danos Haithaby.' Here the distinction is very obvious which the writer draws on the one hand between the language of the Angles and the Saxons, which he calls 'the Saxon language,' and that of the Danes on the other. So also our first grammarian Ælfric: 'Hæresis, Kyre vel gedwelo-æfter-ægelund secund. Saxon. hæreticus,' at p. 55 of the Glossary attached to his Gram. Latino-Saxonica, Oxford, 1659. Bede also, and the Saxon Chronicle, which always has been called the Saxon, not the English, Chronicle, distinguish, whenever necessary, between the Saxon and the Anglian dialects, as in Hist. Eccl. II., 5: 'Cælin rex Occidentalium Saxonom qui lingua eorum Ceawlin vocabatur.' Nor should it be forgotten that this West-Saxon language, here spoken of, took precedence of the Northumbrian, or Anglian proper, in the ninth century, and that in it, rather than in Anglisc, are in fact composed nearly all the extant remains of our earliest literature, though the terms Anglian* and Anglisc,

* With regard to these terms themselves—Angle, Anglisc, Englisc, Angel-cyn, &c.—a good deal of misconception seems to exist, which it may be well to clear up. Thus the following passage from the Saxon
already consecrated, as it were, by the writings of Bede and of his translator Alfred, continued to prevail. But the Chronicle shows that even the compound Angel-cyn does not always and necessarily embrace all the tribes, Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Frisians, as is generally assumed: 'Her ongōn Ceowulf ricsian on West-Seaxum and symble he feah and won oððe wið Angel-cyn oððe wið Wealas,' A. 597. Others again propose to substitute the form Englisc for the Saxon period of the language, on the supposition that it differs in sound as well as in spelling from the modern English. But here a distinction is necessary. The combination se was certainly pronounced sk in the North, but very probably sh in the South, so that the term Englisc in Alfred's mouth sounded very much as it does to this day. That this sound sh is recent, I hold to be utterly untenable, notwithstanding the great weight of certain names to the contrary. It may also be noted that the first letter e is simply the Southern anlaut or modification of the Northern a: Englisc for Angliisc, like Ælfred, Ælfric, for Alfred, Alfric; whence also England for Angliand = Anglia-rand = the land of the Angles. Most foreign nations have accepted this change at our hands, calling us Englisch (German), Inglese (Ital.), Ingleses (Span.), &c. But our more immediate neighbours, the French, still adhere to the older or Northern forms, Anglais, Angleterre, probably translating directly from the Latin Anglius, Anglia. This form also has found its way into the East, where we are known to the natives of India as आंग्रेजी = Angrēzī for Anglesi, interchangeing with r, as in the French orme, apōtre, épōtre, and in this very word Ingresse, which is often heard amongst the lower classes for Inglese in many parts of Italy. English therefore is simply the Southern form of the Northern Angliisc or Angliisc, and is the proper name of the Angliian or Northern dialect, commonly, though not exclusively, applied also to the West-Saxon and other Southern dialects, finally to any form of Saxon or Early English, mainly through the influence of our first writers, Cadmon, Bede, probably also Cynewulf, who happened to be Angles, and not Saxons. But it must be now evident that it would be more correct, besides being vastly more convenient, to restrict Angliisc to the Northern dialect, and to designate the old Southern language that has come down to us in literature by its proper name of Saxon, as had been the uniform practice of all writers on the subject till Mr. Freeman started his hobby.