

ON THE SAXON ELEMENT
IN THE DICTION OF ENGLISH POETRY.

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The subject announced in the title of this paper, appears to me to present itself in two aspects, which are of equal interest. To the lover of literature, it is interesting, in its connexion with poetry; and to the philologist in its relation to language. One whose daily occupation it is to give a knowledge of the English language to those whose physical deprivation causes them to be utterly ignorant of all language, is naturally led to make himself acquainted, to some extent, with the sources and the materials of our mother tongue; and when, in the precious intervals of a busy life, he has been able to steal aside from the track of necessary duty, to snatch however transiently the joy which literature affords, it has only deepened the conviction which many will share with him, that there are no richer delights to be found anywhere, than in the ever "fresh fields and pastures new"* of English poetry.

I lay claim to no other qualifications for dealing with the present subject than such as these pursuits have afforded.

Now I believe that there passes current in the world a large quantity of respectable letter-press, under the name of poetry, which has not the smallest right to that honourable designation. We certainly have verse of every style, and upon every subject: as moralizing, it is most unexceptionable; as satire, it is most pungent; in its prosody, it is correct to a hair's breadth; its rhymes may be such as Pope himself might envy; and yet it is a complete misnomer to call it poetry at all.

If the theory which I shall enunciate is correct, it is a mistake to suppose that any work is necessarily a Poem, because it is written in rhyme, or in

* Milton. *Lycidas*.

blank verse ; or that poetry has any necessary connexion with the trick of putting a nominative a dozen lines from the verb it governs, and filling up the intervening chasm with high-sounding words, woven into dislocated verse ; or that there is any poetry in words, as such, apart from the idea which they appropriately embody, or the objects which they fitly describe.

The faults here indicated are perhaps not so current now as they were formerly. We have some lingering specimens of these vicious styles amongst us still, but they were carried to their greatest lengths by the writers of the Didactic School, who, aiming at a compromise between poetry and prose, succeeded in producing something which was neither the one nor the other. But, let us not deceive ourselves on this point. Though we may have fair ground for congratulation that this school of writers has almost become extinct amongst us, we must not, therefore, conclude that we are faultless. If it is the glory of some periods to have a title to greater eminence, and higher renown, than can be claimed for other times, it is not the less certain, that every age has its own characteristic failings. One observant critic will tell us, and with truth, that almost every grade, both of topic and of treatment, ranging between the familiar and the abstruse, is followed by our living writers ; and another will add—what can scarcely be denied—that not only is this so, but these extremes are run out to their furthest limits, until, in the excess of our passion for common things, we find men singing in the slang of outlaws, and others soaring so very far into the regions of transcendentalism, that minds of ordinary stamp can only “toil after them in vain,” and leave them at last, in sheer despair of following, to chant their unintelligible strain in their own way, to their own unalloyed, because unshared, gratification. So much for the affectations of fashion, and the mannerisms of the day. But poetry is independent of all these. Though sometimes “cribbed, cabined, and confined,” and held down in ignoble slavery to the caprices of the time, yet there is that within her which speaks thrillingly and lives immortally—and she is beautiful even in her chains. How much the more, then, when fitly habited and adorned.

.....a native grace
Sits fair proportioned on her polished limbs,
Veiled in a simple robe, their best attire
Beyond the pomp of dress : for loveliness
Needs not the foreign aid of ornament,
But is, when unadorned, adorned the most. *

* Thomson's Seasons.

Yet it is not in words that the magic of poetry lies. It is in the ideas which are associated with those words. Poetry resides not in the outward form or dress of any man's conception, but in the idea so conceived. John Clare, the peasant-poet of Northamptonshire, has borne testimony to this truth in one simple and beautiful couplet—

I found the poems in the fields ;
I only wrote them down.

If, therefore, the original idea, as it arises in the mind, is not, in itself, poetical, no powers of language, or supposed charms of diction, can ever make it so. As it is birth, and not dress or manner, which makes an Englishman, so it is the native thought, which is, or is not, poetical. No assumed dress or form can give to any mental conception a character which it does not naturally possess. Poetry is an essential, not an accidental, property. But it is absolutely requisite to the due development of poetic thought, and for investing it with full expressiveness and beauty, that it should be clothed in befitting language. The thought which would be striking for its impressiveness, or admirable for its beauty, may be made ineffective or ludicrous, either by the puerility or the pompous extravagance of its diction. What poetry seeks from language, is adequate and graceful expression. This being given, the feeling which burns in the heart of the poet will soon be responded to in the hearts of other men, and the kindling light of genius be felt and reflected in minds happily susceptible of those influences which make "the poet's pen" more potent than the wand of the magician.

The proposition which I shall endeavour to prove on this occasion is, that the proper dress of English poetry is that portion of the English tongue which is commonly distinguished and known as the Anglo-Saxon. If I were engaged in a strictly etymological enquiry, it would be my duty to analyse the composite character of our language more rigidly, and to define its lines of separation more closely, than is at present necessary. For though our vocabulary bears obvious marks of having gained its present flexibility and fulness by what it has drawn from *many* different sources, it is sufficiently accurate for our present purpose to take its main constituents to be two, and to assign the Norman conquest as the dividing point between them. The language which at that time began to be engrafted upon the original Anglo-Saxon, was adopted from the *Latin*, either immediately, and in tolerable purity, or through the Normans and French, with

the modifications of form which they had introduced. These two main tributaries of our language, I shall speak of as the Anglo-Saxon and the Classical, and shall endeavour to show that the older, or Anglo-Saxon element, is emphatically that of poetry, as best adapted to the work of addressing the fancy, and appealing to the feelings, while the other is found to be the most suitable in all which concerns the peculiar province of the intellect. And the reason is this :—like the feelings themselves, the language of feeling never alters. “One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,” and while the restless intellect of man is making new discoveries, achieving new conquests, and perpetuating them in the advances of science, and the progress of civilization, the human heart remains still and ever the same. Through every stage of social progress—in the midst of the constant changes and chances of this mortal life, that source of sympathy and fount of feeling remains unchanged ; and the language which is the exponent of those feelings partakes of the same unchanging character. But that language which describes events and circumstances—which records the discoveries of science, and conveys the lessons of philosophy, must be expected to change its form, and to enlarge its scope, as new events transpire, and circumstances alter, and science achieves new triumphs, and philosophy extends her researches, and gathers from each new field of observation new motives to duty, and fresh supplies of deep and solid wisdom. Poetry, again, has to do with details ; science with generalisations. For the former, simple words, expressive of simple ideas, are necessary, and such are most commonly of Anglo-Saxon derivation. For the latter, such words are needed as are capable of combination—as the Latin and Greek—by which complicated ideas may be united in a single word, at once significant and concise. For these two distinct purposes, the two main branches of our language seem signally fitted, and I hold very strongly the opinion, upon grounds to be shewn presently, that any heedless or ignorant admixture of the two, without reference to this principle, tends to lower the purity, and weaken the force of language, and to lessen the peculiar charms of its respective constituents.

No stronger proofs could be adduced than those which are to be found in the Sacred Writings. But these I forbear to press into a discussion upon a purely literary topic, though I cannot pass without naming Psalms civ. and cxxxix., Eccles. xii., Isaiah xl. ; the history of Joseph, the appeal of Ruth, and that night vision in the book of Job which Burke refers to, as a

passage of "amazing sublimity."* In the Lord's Prayer, too—as we learned it from beloved lips in infancy—there are not six words, which are not immediately and directly derivable from Anglo-Saxon. The Prayer Book of the Church of England bears also similar testimony. Those parts of it which have been added, on occasion, and to meet particular contingencies, may almost in every case be distinguished from its original contents, by the more extensive prevalence in them of a foreign classical diction. Theology requires such a diction, but Devotion does not. What, I would ask, has that noblest of all hymns—the *Te Deum*—or that most devout of all supplications—the *Litany*—lost of original significance and force in that Anglo-Saxon version with which we are so familiar?

But we will turn from these examples to the illustrious roll of English poets; and by the light of their undimmed and still unwaning lustre, examine the theory which I have to vindicate. Wordsworth remarks that "the affecting parts of Chaucer are almost always expressed in language pure and universally intelligible, even to this day."† The same cannot be said of his descriptions of persons and customs; and the reason why the language proper to feelings has remained unaltered, while that which is appropriate to other matters has changed, has already been given. Sir Philip Sidney said of the old ballad of Chevy Chase, "that he never heard it, that he found not his heart moved by it more than with a trumpet."‡

Campbell tells us, however,§ that "the prevailing fault of English diction, in the fifteenth century, is redundant ornament, and an affectation of Anglicising Latin words." Nor can we wonder at this, when we remember of how many co-operating causes it was the effect. The Crusades, and the extended commerce to which they led, had opened the civilisation of the East, to the semi-barbarism of the West. During the long period in which the Turks threatened Constantinople, there was a constant influx of the learned of that metropolis into Italy, where the love of ancient learning revived under their auspices; and when at last, A. D. 1453, the imperial capital of the East fell into the hands of the Mahomedan conquerors, the treasures of literature, which had so long been accumulated there, were dispersed throughout Christendom, and the invention of printing soon

* On the Sublime and Beautiful, Part II., Section iv.

+ Note to Preface, *Lyrical Ballads*.

‡ *Defence of Poetry*, quoted in *Percy's Reliques*, vol. i.

§ Essay on English Poetry, p. 93.

placed them within the reach of the studious in every country. Nine new colleges had been founded at Oxford, and an equal number at Cambridge, in the course of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries; the same period also witnessing the establishment of the foreign universities of Padua, Naples, Toulouse, Montpellier, Salamanca, Orleans, and some others of less note. In the two succeeding centuries, the movement not only continued, but was urged on by the circumstances just mentioned. And it was then, too, that our Grammar Schools sprang into existence. That of St. Paul's, London, was founded by Dean Colet, the friend of Erasmus, in 1510; that of Manchester, by a Lancashire worthy, Hugh Oldham, bishop of Exeter, in the same year;* and during the reigns of Henry VIII., Edward VI., and Elizabeth, 1509-1603, a very large proportion of those now in existence were established, some by the sovereign, others by private individuals. Among the former are the Westminster, Shrewsbury and Birmingham Schools, and Christ's Hospital; and among the latter, besides the foundations of Colet and Bishop Oldham, just mentioned, the noble schools of Harrow and Rugby, and that of Merchant Taylors' Company, in London, as well as others in the smaller towns throughout the kingdom, almost every one of which has, at some time or other, sent forth its pupil into the world, to play therein an honourable part, and to become thereafter one of the nation's illustrious ones. Bishops and priests, soldiers and statesmen, philosophers and poets; men whose names are watchwords, breathing

* The Boteler Grammar School, at Warrington, was one of the earliest of these Foundations, having been established in 1526. See the paper by J. F. Marsh, Esq., in the present volume. The total number of Grammar Schools in England and Wales, appears by the reports of the Charity Commissioners to be 705, and their total annual income £167,761. The following table taken from the "*Digest of Schools and Charities for Education*," which forms part of the Commissioners' Report, shews the number of Grammar Schools founded in successive reigns.—It is extracted from the *Educational Expositor* for November, 1855:—

Henry II 1	Elizabeth 112	Anne 29
(1154-1189)	(1558-1603)	(1702-1714)
Richard II 2	James I 70	George I 39
(1377-1399)	(1603-1625)	(1714-1727)
Henry VI 3	Charles I 54	George II 26
(1422-1461)	(1625-1649)	(1727-1760)
Henry VII 7	Commonwealth 33	George III 22
(1485-1509)	(1649-1660)	(1760-1820)
Henry VIII 36	Charles II 65	George IV 1
(1509-1547)	(1660-1685)	(1820-1830)
Edward VI 48	James II 15	Unknown 97
(1547-1553)	(1685-1689)	
Mary 22	William and Mary .. 23	Total 705
(1553-1558)	(1689-1702)	

courage into the breast of the hero, and inspiration into the spirit of the sage ; these were once the hard-working pupils of England's Grammar Schools. Not to wander from our present subject, just glance at the list of poets. From Westminster School have come Ben Jonson and Dryden, Cowley and Cowper, Churchill and Southey. Milton was educated at St. Paul's ; his witty contemporary, the author of *Hudibras*, at Worcester ;* Shakspeare at Stratford ; Sir Philip Sidney at Shrewsbury ; Addison, Dr. Johnson, and Garrick, at Lichfield ; Coleridge and Charles Lamb at Christ's Hospital ; and Wordsworth received a portion of his early training at the little village Grammar School of Hawkshead, in this county. And now, to connect this apparent digression with our present subject.

The object of these schools was to give a classical education : to make that general which Henry VIII. had already made fashionable, by his own attainments, and by having his children thoroughly instructed in the ancient languages. Sir John Cheke, Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge, had been Preceptor to King Edward, and Roger Ascham to Queen Elizabeth. If, therefore, the prevailing fault of the fifteenth century was, as Campbell states, the affectation of Anglicising Latin words, such a fault was not likely to be amended in the following century. That, on the contrary, it greatly increased, we know to be historically true. A well-known testimony is borne to this fact by the very competent authority of Sir Walter Scott, who, in his novel of the *Monastery*, avowedly satirizes, in the character of Sir Piercy Shafton, the current language of fashionable life in the time of Queen Elizabeth. Yet the reign of that sovereign stands pre-eminently illustrious in the annals of English poetry ; and the two greatest names in the splendid array of Elizabethan poets are those of men who may be said to have absolutely turned their backs upon the fountains of classic lore, and drawn only from the "well of English undefiled." That Shakspeare brought with him from the Grammar School at Stratford "little Latin and less Greek,"† is no unfortunate circumstance for the English language, and for English poetry ; and that Spenser, after once contemplating so great an innovation as the abolition of rhymes, and the introduction of hexameters into English verse, should finally not only adopt Anglo-Saxon as the vehicle of his thoughts, but should avowedly imitate the diction of times preceding his own, shews that he, too, turned away from the new wine which he had

* *Comus* was first acted, and *Hudibras* was written, at Ludlow Castle.

† Ben Jonson.

more than tasted, "saying the old is better." And what was thus effected for the diction of poetry, by the genius and example of these two great men, was yet more remarkably and successfully accomplished for the language itself by our noble English Bible. That which was solid and fixed in the character of our vernacular was thus taken from the lips of the people, and imperishably recorded; and much besides, which was in a state of transition, and might soon have become obsolete, was arrested, and thus saved from being swept away before the invasion of a new and pedantic phraseology. It was as if,—to borrow an illustration from that beautiful art, of recent discovery, which transfers and embodies into picture not only the bold, immutable outlines of the landscape, but seizes too its lighter graces, and catches the very shadows as they fly,—thus it was that Tyndale and Coverdale first of all, and the translators of our present version after them, not only employed and recorded in permanent shape that part of our language which was in daily use, but those more fleeting characteristics which are analogous to the passing shadows in the view, or the momentary play and expression of the features,—all these were seized in their passage, and written in light, as with a ray from heaven, and the result was that glorious picture, our peerless English Bible. If any man would see what poetry is, and what it is not, and would judge of the capability of our Anglo-Saxon tongue, let him turn from a passage in Dr. Johnson, Young, Akenside, or Thomson, or in the works of some who might be named among our living authors, to a chapter in Isaiah, or to one of the Psalms. There he will see how the sublimest truths which can address man's intellect, and the most touching incidents which can affect his heart, are set forth in the plainest and simplest language. They seek no embellishment from words; the stirring grandeur, or the moving pathos of the subject, appears all the more vividly for the pure simplicity of its vesture.

But now to turn to those illustrations which these observations have too long interrupted. We will first quote Spenser—that "prince of poets in his tyme"—and it should be sufficient to refer to his description of the "gentle Una with her milk white lamb," in the first Canto of his *Faery Queene*, and again to that passage in Canto III., where it is said—

Her angel's face
As the great eye of heaven shyned bright,
And made a sunshine in the shady place,
Did never mortal eye behold such heavenly grace.

Out of nearly thirty words in this passage, there are just four of foreign

derivation ; and not to dwell too long upon a single work, or a single author, I will just quote two of the stanzas in the same writer's exquisite *Hymn of Heavenly Love*.

Yet, O most blessed spirit ! pure lampe of light,
Eternall spring of grace and wisdom trew,
Vouchsafe to shed into my barren spright
Some little drop of thy celestial dew,
That may my rymes with sweet infuse imbrew,
And give me words equall unto my thought,
To tell the marveiles by thy mercie wrought.

O blessed Well of Love ! O Floure of Grace !
O glorious Morning Starre ! O Lampe of Light !
Most lively image of thy Father's face.
Eternal King of Glorie, Lord of Might,
Meeke Lambe of God, before all worlds behight,
How can we thee requite for all this good ?
Or what can prize that thy most precious blood ?

A close examination of these passages will shew how little the author owes to a classic diction ; how capable he proved the older English tongue to be, as an exponent of devotional and poetic thought. Turn now to Shakspeare, and see if it was necessary to the expression of his vivid thoughts, that he should escape from the poverty of his native language, and become a dependant upon the wealth of other tongues. Our examples, however, must be short and few. First glance at the night scene in the *Merchant of Venice* :—

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank—
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears : soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.

Again in *Henry VI.* :—

The gaudy, blabbing, and remorseful day
Is crept into the bosom of the sea.

And the description of the River, in the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* :—

The current, that with gentle murmur glides,
Thou knowest, being stopped, impatiently doth rage ;
But when his fair course is not hindered
He makes sweet music with the enamel'd stones,
Giving a gentle kiss to every sedge
He overtaketh in his pilgrimage ;
And so by many a winding nook he strays,
With willing sport to the wild ocean.

Besides these, which seem sufficient for the purpose, I had marked for quotation the apostrophe to Mercey, in the *Merchant of Venice*, Wolsey's Farewell to Power and Dignity, the passage in *Macbeth*, beginning—

“ To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,”

with some others. But time prevents my quoting them at length, or making comments as I proceed. A close observation of the passages read will shew that the diction is that which I have called Anglo-Saxon, to the almost entire exclusion of those words which are of classical derivation.

Milton, though so eminent a classic, and though *Paradise Lost* was formed upon the best ancient models, and his declared purpose was to make an innovation upon English practice, by setting an example,—“the first,” he says, “in English,—of ancient liberty recovered to Heroick Poem, from the troublesome and modern bondage of Rhyming,”* has yet clothed some of his finest thoughts in that native language, which was the theme of one of his earliest poems. The description of Evening in the Fourth Book of *Paradise Lost*—

“Now came still evening on,” &c.

and that exquisite speech of Eve’s which follows it—

“With thee conversing, I forget all time,” &c.

are strongly illustrative of the point we are arguing. So also is the opening speech in *Samson Agonistes*, on his blindness; in contrast to which might well be placed the opening of Book III., in *Paradise Lost*, beginning, “Hail, holy light,” which, with the exception of a few occasional lines, seems to be at once the least poetical and the least intelligible passage in the poem; and that simply from its faulty diction. The Song on May Morning, *Comus*, and the smaller poems, would furnish us with corroborative examples in abundance. Milton was the contemporary of the metaphysical poets; and early in his career seems to have been ambitious of a place amongst them. That despicable school was the product of the extension of classical learning which followed the Reformation, and of the access thereby given to the metaphysical disquisitions of the schoolmen of the middle ages. It would be hard to find, anywhere, more of the common-place and the nonsensical in the garb of verse, than in works of this class; yet some of those writers had a relish for true poetry, and have left behind them some evidences of their powers “not utterly unworthy to endure.” Here is a specimen from Francis Quarles, in simple native English:—

Can he be *fair*, that withers at a blast?
 Or he be *strong*, that airy breath can cast?
 Can he be *wise*, that knows not how to live?
 Or he be *rich*, that nothing hath to give?
 Can he be *young*, that’s feeble, weak and wan?
 So *fair*, *strong*, *wise*, so *rich*, so *young* is Man.

* Preface on “The Verse.”

So fair is Man, that Death (a parting blast)
 Blasts his fair flower, and makes him *Earth* at last;
 So strong is Man, that with a gasping breath,
 He totters and bequeaths his strength to Death;
 So wise is Man, that if with Death he strive,
 His wisdom cannot teach him how to live;
 So rich is Man, that (all his debts being paid)
 His wealth's the winding sheet wherein he's laid;
 So young is Man, that (broke with care and sorrow)
 He's old enough to-day, to die to-morrow;
 Why bragg'st thou then, thou worm of five feet long,
 Th' art neither fair, nor strong, nor wise, nor rich, nor young.

The seventeenth century produced a noble array of philosophers—but few poets. In the next generation, the attempt was made to unite the pursuits of both, and that School of Philosophical Pœtry sprang up, of which Pope was the founder, and the *Essay on Man* the chief result. This influence continued to operate, with slight modifications, until nearly the commencement of the present century. Wordsworth then set himself to conquer it, but for the time he was foiled. To him, however, and to his friends, Coleridge, Southey, and Scott, do we owe, in a great measure, the increased use which the simple and expressive language of our Anglo-Saxon forefathers has gained in current speech and writing. Take the very first poem in the works of the Poet-Sage of Rydal:—

My heart leaps up when I behold
 A rainbow in the sky;
 So was it when my life began;
 So is it now I am a man;
 So be it when I shall grow old,
 Or let me die!
 The Child is father of the Man,
 And I could wish my days to be
 Bound each to each by natural piety.

The two last words are derived from the Latin, but there is not another in the whole poem which is not Anglo-Saxon.

Then there is the affecting little story, "We are Seven," the Sonnet on "Milton," and that composed on Westminster Bridge:—

Earth has not anything to show more fair:
 Dull would he be of soul who could pass by
 A sight so touching in its majesty:
 The city now doth like a garment wear
 The beauty of the morning: silent, bare—
 Ships, towers, domes, theatres, and temples lie
 Open unto the fields, and to the sky,
 All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.
 Never did sun more beautifully steep
 In his first splendour, valley, rock, or hill;
 Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!
 The river glideth at his own sweet will;
 Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;
 And all that mighty heart is lying still.

It will be observed here that most of the natural objects have vernacular names, while those which are artificial have classical ones. I shall only add one more extract from Wordsworth—the description of the *White Doe of Rylstone* :—

White she is as lily of June,
And beauteous as the silver moon,
When out of sight the clouds are driven,
And she is left alone in heaven ;
Or like a ship some gentle day,
In sunshine sailing far away ;
A glittering ship that hath the plain
Of ocean for her own domain.

A similar passage from Dryden, from the opening of the *Hind and the Panther*, I will here cite, though out of chronological order. Dryden was the lineal predecessor of Pope : like him, he was the poet of artificial life rather than of nature, and his testimony is therefore the more valuable :—

A milk-white Hind, immortal and unchang'd,
Fed on the lawns, and in the forest rang'd ;
Without unspotted, innocent within,
She feared no danger, for she knew no sin.
Yet had she oft been chas'd with horns and hounds,
And Scythian shafts ; and many winged wounds
Aimed at her heart ; was often forc'd to fly,
And doomed to death, though fated not to die.

Though there are several words of Latin derivation in this quotation, they bear a very small proportion to the whole, and there is nothing in Dryden which breathes a finer strain of pure and simple poetry. If we had time to examine the works of other writers belonging to the same school—Gray, Collins, Goldsmith, Cowper—we should find ample evidence to the same purpose. But we must return to the contemporaries of Wordsworth. Coleridge somewhere defends himself against the supposition that he was a full believer in the poetical creed of his friend ; but along with other benefits which he wrought, he certainly helped, by his example, in a very eminent degree, to purify our poetry from the jargon of the philosophico-poetic school. I will first quote from the *Ancient Mariner* :—

To walk together to the kirk,
And all together pray,
While each to his great Father bends,
Old men, and babes, and loving friends,
And youths and maidens gay !

* * *

He prayeth best, who loveth best,
All things both great and small ;
For, the dear God that loveth us,
He made and loveth all.

* * *

He went like one that hath been stunned,
 And is of sense forlorn :
 A sadder and a wiser man,
 He rose the morrow morn.

For all the purposes of this passage, any other tongue than the Saxon might almost as well have never existed ; and so in *Christabel* :—

The night is chill ; the forest bare ;
 Is it the wind that moaneth bleak ?
 There is not wind enough in the air
 To move away the ringlet curl
 From the lovely lady's cheek ;
 There is not wind enough to twirl
 The one red leaf, the last of its clan,
 That dances as often as dance it can,
 Hanging so light, and hanging so high,
 On the topmost twig that looks up at the sky.

And the exquisite ballad of *Genevieve* gives further testimony of the same kind. But it may be thought that though our primitive language is adequate to the expression of simple ideas, and to the happy description of natural objects, it is wanting in force, and would fail to express strong emotions, or to develop nobler images. There are numerous passages in Coleridge which would prove the contrary ; but I prefer to take an example from a very different author, and one who, it might be thought, would rather militate against the theory I am advocating. If any man ever ignored the canons of the critic, and wrote because he had something to say, and must say it, it was Byron. Let him then be witness. With his wild passions boiling within him, all he cared to do was to give utterance to his strong feelings, in language as strong and vivid as themselves. And he succeeded. No man's works reflect more faithfully than his, their writer's true character, or express with greater power, the bitterness, the hatred, the scorn, which flamed up incessantly and inexhaustibly from the volcano of that impetuous heart. And what was the language which came ready to his pen, when he wielded it to defy the world ? Why, the simple Saxon phrase of our unconquered forefathers. When, before he closes *Childe Harold*, his voice "breaks forth" to "pile on human heads the mountain of his curse," what says he—and how?—"That curse shall be forgiveness," &c. (See *Childe Harold*, Canto iv., Stanzas cxxxv., cxxxvi.) So, too, the description of the night before Waterloo, at Brussels ; the Apostrophe to the Ocean, in the same poem ; the opening lines in the *Corsair* ; the Shipwreck, in *Don Juan*—"Then rose from sea to sky the wild farewell ;" and, last of all, that wonderful passage in the *Giaour*,

wherein the aspect of "Greece, but living Greece no more," is compared to the appearance of the dead upon the day of dissolution—

The first dark day of nothingness ;
 The last of danger and distress ;
 Before Decay's effacing fingers
 Have swept the lines where Beauty lingers.

Time fails to refer to Scott or Southey, to Shelley, or the poets of our own day. I will just, however, allude to one striking fact. The shorter poems, which are the most popular things of the kind in our language, and by which their authors have attained to the widest celebrity and most enduring fame, are those in which the old Saxon diction has been employed. Of this class are Gray's Elegy ; Wolfe's Ode on the Burial of Sir John Moore ; Campbell's Hohenlinden ; Hood's Song of the Shirt ; Tennyson's May Queen ; together with some of the more popular pieces in Longfellow, and in Moore's Irish Melodies, and those exquisite descriptions in Goldsmith's Deserted Village, which every schoolboy, in every subsequent generation, has known off by heart. Burns, too, wrote in a language which was oral : not a written language at all : a dialect of that Anglo-Saxon tongue which is common to ourselves, and to our fellow-countrymen in the vast colonial dependencies of the empire, as well as to that sister nation across the Atlantic, where, as I have been informed on good authority, next to the Bible, the most popular, and familiar, and best read book in the country, is the poetry of Robert Burns.

Having thus gone through the works of the greatest English poets, from the Elizabethan era downwards, I submit that I have proved my case—that the Saxon element in our language is the most fitting dress of poetic thought,* and that it has been so employed to embody the noblest concep-

* And this, after all, is but the local application of a general principle. Mr. J. T. Danson, one of the Vice-Presidents of the Society, who occupied the Chair when the present paper was read, threw out this, among other valuable suggestions and remarks, and pointed out, that what is here claimed for what I have called the Anglo-Saxon portion of our language, is probably "possessed, in an equal degree, by the most commonly used part of every other language, when used with ability in addressing those to whom it is native." It is evident that the argument in the paper derives great force from this fact; and that the subject acquires new interest when it is seen that a general principle is illustrated by what was intended to have only a local application. I will put the question thus:—
 1. The primitive oral language of every people, as it embraces the widest range of associations, is the language of that people's poetry. 2. The Anglo-Saxon is the primitive oral language of the English people; and therefore, 3. The Anglo-Saxon is the appropriate diction of English poetry. Nor have I, in that over-zealous advocacy, which some may think they recognise, claimed more for our primitive Saxon tongue than has been claimed for it by others, whose eminence as writers, and weight as literary authorities, will be recognised when I quote Mr. Macauley:—"The style of Bunyan," says that

tions, by those among our countrymen, whom all delight to honour. And the practical conclusion to be drawn from such an enquiry as the present is this—that whoever aims at poetic excellence, must study attentively the primitive language of this country, must learn to estimate its richness, to appreciate its beauty, and strive to make it the vehicle of communicating his thoughts to those whom he would address. It will more completely and clearly convey his own meaning; it will permit a fuller measure of justice to the nature of his conceptions, and obtain for them a readier comprehension and appreciation from the reader. Surely these are advantages not to be slighted. Those who have laboured to possess them, have been rewarded by the veneration of posterity; while those who have affected to despise, or neglected to cultivate, our simple but earnest Saxon phraseology, though they have, in some instances, achieved a “bubble reputation” in their lives, have been contemptuously doomed to the indifference of later times. Such has been their ultimate gain, after having chosen to adopt a gaudy and “inane phraseology,” which has passed current under the name of poetic diction. That spell, however, has been broken. Many of our best modern writers, following Wordsworth’s illustrious example, have aimed at, and apparently succeeded in, establishing the principle, that such words as the influence of classical studies have now naturalised into our language, may be legitimately employed, if used discreetly and appropriately, always subject to the laws of rhythm, and subordinate to the more copious use of those primitive words which form the great bulk of our vocabulary, and to which we mainly owe it that our noble English tongue is so rich, so flexible, so expressive, and so musical,

brilliant writer, “is delightful to every reader; and invaluable as a study to every person who wishes to obtain a wide command over the English language. The vocabulary is the vocabulary of the common people. There is not an expression, if we except a few technical terms of Theology, which would puzzle the rudest peasant. We have observed several pages which do not contain a single word of more than two syllables. Yet no writer has said more exactly what he meant to say. For magnificence, for pathos, for vehement exhortation, for subtle disquisition, for every purpose of the poet, the orator, and the divine, this homely dialect, the dialect of plain working men, was perfectly sufficient. There is no book in our literature, on which we would so readily stake the fame of our old unpolluted English language; no book that shews so well how rich that language is in its own proper wealth, and how little it has been improved by all that it has borrowed.” (*Essays*, vol. i.) And that which is here said of Bunyan, might be applied with almost equal force to Defoe. Indeed, it would be possible to carry the argument much further than I have done, and to maintain upon very strong grounds, that not only the most popular *poems*, but the most popular *books*, in our language, are those in which the primitive speech of the people has been used by a master hand.

as the authors now quoted have, in their undying works, demonstrated it to be. Any broad impassable line of separation between the two elements in our language which have now been dwelt upon, I fear too tediously, is as impracticable as it would be absurd. To interweave the one with the other; to give to poetic thought its best expression in the fittest words; scouting equally the affectation of a mawkish simplicity, or the assumption of a pompous volubility—this is the most worthy of the poet's honoured name, and of his noble vocation; as it is the most likely to make his calling honoured, and to establish his own fame upon a real and permanent foundation. But simplicity is a different thing from common-place; and doggrel is not poetry. The poet must treat of objects, not as they are (begging pardon of the Pre-Raphaelites), but as they seem to be. And poetic effect depends not exclusively upon the nature of his subject, but also upon a writer's treatment of it—at least to the same extent that artistic effect depends upon the painter. He finds the best point of view; depicts the scene before him with due regard to the finest effect of light and shade, and expressive grouping; and so he produces an admirable picture. Yet over the very same scenes the "ploughman plods his weary way" daily, but is as indifferent to their beauties as if they had no existence, or as if he were the inhabitant of another planet. And as with the artist's, so with the poet's eye. In the "primrose by the river's brim," and in "the meanest flower that blows," he sees something more than the outward shape, and visible colouring. While for these he has a more intense and loving admiration than another, his fancy invests them with new life and loveliness, "finds tongues" in their speechless beauty, surrounds them with touching images or kindling associations of magnificence and grace; and so by the matchless magic of the poet's pen, he wings their tender messages or thrilling appeals to every heart, which has kindred sympathies with his own.
