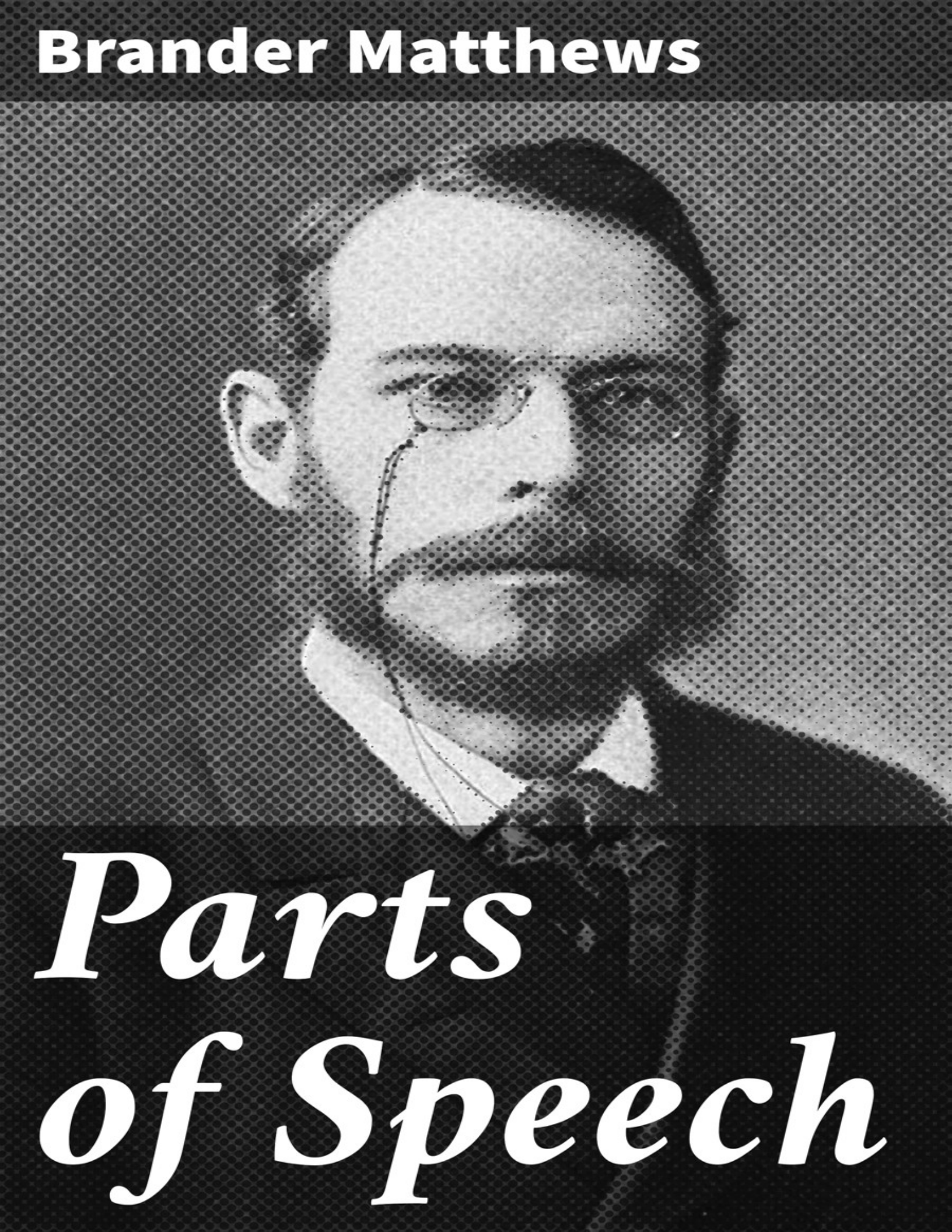
Brander Matthews



Parts of Speech

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Essays on English

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I
THE STOCK THAT SPEAKS THE LANGUAGE

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It is a thousand years since the death of the great Englishman, King Alfred, in whose humble translations we may see the beginnings of English literature. Until it has a literature, however unpretending and however artless, a language is not conscious of itself; and it is therefore in no condition to maintain its supremacy over the dialects that are its jealous rivals. And it is by its literature chiefly that a language forever binds together the peoples who speak it—by a literature in which the characteristics of these peoples are revealed and preserved, and in which their ideals are declared and passed down from generation to generation as the most precious heritage of the race.

The historian of the English people asserts that what made Alfred great, small as was his sphere of action, was “the moral grandeur of his life. He lived solely for the good of his people.” He laid the foundations for a uniform system of law, and he started schools, wishing that every free-born youth who had the means should “abide at his book till he can understand English writing.” He invited scholars from other lands to settle in England; but what most told on English culture was done not by them but by the king himself. He “resolved to throw open to his people in their own tongue the knowledge which till then had been limited to the clergy,” and he “took his books as he found them,”

the popular manuals of the day, Bede and Boethius and Orosius. These he translated with his own hand, editing freely, and expanding and contracting as he saw fit. “Do not blame me if any know Latin better than I,” he explained with modest dignity; “for every man must say what he says and must do what he does according to his ability.” And Green, from whom this quotation is borrowed, insists that, “simple as was his aim, Alfred created English literature”—the English literature which is still alive and sturdy after a thousand years, and which is to-day flourishing not only in Great Britain, where Alfred founded it, but here in the United States, in a larger land, the existence of which the good king had no reason ever to surmise.

This English literature is like the language in which it is written, and also like the stock that speaks the language, wherever the race may have planted or transplanted itself, whether by the banks of the little Thames or on the shores of the broad Hudson and the mighty Mississippi. Literature and language and people are practical, no doubt; but they are not what they are often called: they are not prosaic. On the contrary, they are poetic, essentially and indisputably poetic. The peoples that speak English are, and always have been, self-willed and adventurous. This they were long before King Alfred’s time, in the early days when they were Teutons merely, and had not yet won their way into Britain; and this they are to-day, when the most of them no longer dwell in old England, but in the newer England here in America. They have ever lacked the restraint and reserve which are the conditions of the best prose; and they have always exulted in the untiring energy and the daring

imagination which are the vital elements of poetry. “In his busiest days Alfred found time to learn the old songs of his race by heart,” so the historian tells us; “and he bade them be taught in the palace-school.”

Lyric is what English literature has always been at its best, lyric and dramatic; and the men who speak English have always been individual and independent, every man ready to fight for his own hand; and the English language has gone on its own way, keeping its strength in spite of the efforts of pedants and pedagogs to bind it and to stifle it, and ever insisting on renewing its freshness as best it could. Development there has been in language and in literature and in the stock itself, development and growth of many kinds; but no radical change can be detected in all these ten centuries. “No national art is good which is not plainly the nation’s own,” said Mr. Stopford Brooke in his consideration of the earliest English lyrics. “The poetry of England has owed much to the different races which mingled with the original English race; it has owed much to the different types of poetry it absorbed—Greek, Latin, Welsh, French, Italian, Spanish: but below all these admixtures the English nature wrought its steady will. It seized, it transmuted, it modified, it mastered these admixtures both of races and of song.”

The English nature wrought its steady will; but what is this English nature, thus set up as an entity and endowed with conscious purpose? Is there such a thing, of a certainty? Can there be such a thing, indeed? These questions are easier to ask than to answer. It is true that we have been accustomed to credit certain races not merely

with certain characteristics, but even with certain qualities, esteeming certain peoples to be specially gifted in one way or another. For example, we have held it as an article of faith that the Greeks, by their display of a surpassing sense of form, proved their possession of an artistic capacity finer and richer than that revealed by any other people since the dawn of civilization. And again, we have seen in the Roman skill in constructive administration, in the Latin success in law-making and in road-building—we have seen in this the evidence of a native faculty denied to their remote predecessors, the Egyptians. Now come the advocates of a later theory, who tell us that the characteristics of the Greeks and of the Romans are not the result of any inherent superiority of theirs, or of any native predisposition toward art or toward administration, but are caused rather by circumstances of climate, of geographical situation, and of historical position. We are assured now that the Romans, had they been in the place of the Greeks and under like circumstances, might have revealed themselves as great masters of form; while the Greeks, had their history been that of the Romans, would certainly have shown the same power of ruling themselves and others, and of compacting the most diverse nations into a single empire.

No doubt the theory of race-characteristics, of stocks variously gifted with specific faculties, has been too vigorously asserted and unduly insisted upon. It was so convenient and so useful that it could not help being overworked. But altho it is not so impregnable as it was supposed to be, it need not be surrendered at the first attack; and altho we are compelled to abandon the theory

as a whole, we can save what it contained of truth. And therefore it is well to bear in mind that even if the Greeks in the beginning had no sharper bent toward art than had the Phenicians,—from whom they borrowed so much of value to be made by them more valuable,—even if their esthetic superiority was the result of a happy chapter of chances, it was a fact nevertheless; and a time came at last when the Greeks were seen to be possessed of a fertility of invention and of a sense of form surpassing all their predecessors had ever exhibited. When this time came the Greeks were conscious of their unexampled achievements and properly proud of them; and they proved that they were able to transmit from sire to son this artistic aptitude—however the aptitude itself had been developed originally. So whether the Roman power to govern and to evolve the proper instruments of government was a native gift of the Latins, or whether it was developed in them by a fortuitous combination of geographical and historical circumstances, this question is somewhat academic, since we know that the Romans did display extraordinary administrative ability century after century. Whenever it was evolved, the artistic type in Greece and the administrative type in Italy was persistent; and it reappeared again and again in successive generations.

This indeed needs always to be remembered, that race-characteristics, whatever their origin, are strangely enduring when once they are established. The English nature whereof Mr. Stopford Brooke speaks, when once it was conscious of itself, worked its steady will, despite the changes of circumstance; and only very slowly is it modified by the

accidents of later history and geography. M. Fouillée has set side by side the description of the Germans by Tacitus and the account of the Gauls by Cæsar, drawing attention to the fact that the modern French are now very like the ancient Gauls, and that the descendants of the Germans of old, the various branches of the Teutonic race, have the characteristics of their remote ancestors whom the Roman historian chose to praise by way of warning for his fellow-citizens.

The Romans conquered Gaul and held it for centuries; the Franks took it in turn and gave it their name; but the Gallic type was so securely fixed that the Roman first and then the Frank succumbed to it and were absorbed into it. The Gallic type is not now absolutely unchanged, for, after all, the world does move; but it is readily recognizable to this day. Certain of Cæsar's criticisms read as tho they were written by a contemporary of Napoleon. As Cæsar saw them the Gauls were fickle in counsel and fond of revolutions. Believing in false rumors, they were led into deeds they regretted afterward. Deciding questions of importance without reflection, they were ready to war without reason; and they were weak and lacking in energy in time of disaster. They were cast down by a first defeat, as they were inflamed by a first victory. They were affable, light, inconstant, and vain; they were quick-witted and ready-tongued; they had a liking for tales and an insatiable curiosity for news. They cultivated eloquence, having an astonishing facility of speech, and of letting themselves be taken in by words. And having thus summed up Cæsar's

analysis of the Gaul, M. Fouillée asks how after this we can deny the persistence of national types.

What Tacitus has to say of the Germans comes home more closely to us who speak English, since the Teutonic tribes the Latin historian was considering are not more the ancestors of the modern Prussians than they are of the wide-spread Anglo-Saxon peoples. As those who speak English went from the mainland across the North Sea to an island and dwelt there for centuries, and were joined by earlier kin from elsewhere, the race-characteristics were obviously modified a little—just as they have been as obviously modified a little more when some of those who spoke English went out again from the island to a boundless continent across the Atlantic, and were joined here by many others, most of whom were also derived from one or another of the varied Teutonic stocks.

It is nearly two thousand years since Tacitus studied the Teutonic race-characteristics, and yet most of the peculiarities he noted then are evident now. Tacitus tells us that the Teutons were tall, fair-haired, and flegmatic. They were great eaters, not to say gross feeders; and they were given to strong drink. They were fond of games, and were ready to pay their losses with their persons, if need be. They were individual and independent. Their manners were rude, not to call them violent. They were possessed of the domestic virtues, the women being chaste and the husbands faithful. They loved war as they loved liberty. They had a passionate fidelity to their leaders. They decided important questions of policy in public assembly.

The several peoples of our own time who are descended from the Teutons thus described by Tacitus with so sympathetic an insight have been developing for twenty centuries, more or less, each in its own way, under influences wholly unlike, influences both geographical and historical; and it is small wonder that they have diverged as they have, and that no one of them nowadays completely represents the original stock. Some of the points Tacitus made are true to-day in Prussia and are not true in Great Britain; and some hit home here in the United States, altho they miss the mark in Germany. The modern Germans still retain a few of these Tacitean characteristics which the peoples that speak English have lost in their adventurous career overseas. And on the other hand, certain of the remarks of Tacitus might be made to-day in the United States; for example, the willingness to run risks for the fun of the game—is not this a present characteristic of the American as we know him? And here we have always been governed by town-meeting, as the old Teutons were, whereas the modern German is only now getting this back by borrowing it from the English precedent. In our private litigations we continue to abide by the customs of our remote Teutonic ancestors, while the German has accepted as a legal guide the Roman law, wrought out by the countrymen of Tacitus.

Second only to a community of language, no unifying force is more potent than a community of law. In the depths of their dark forests the Teutons had already evolved their own rudimentary code by which they did justice between man and man; and these customary sanctions were taken

over to Britain by the Angles and the Saxons and the Jutes; and they served as the foundation of the common law by means of which the peoples that speak English still administer justice in their courts. And here again we find the handiwork of the great King Alfred, from whom we may date the codification of an English law as we may also reckon the establishing of an English literature. With the opportunism of our race, he had no thought of a new legislation, but merely merged the best of the tribal customs into a law for the whole kingdom. The king sought to bring to light and to leave on record the righteous rulings of the wise men who had gone before. “Those things which I met with,” so the historian transmits his words, “either of the days of Ine, my kinsman, or of Offa, King of the Mercians, or of Æthelberht, who first among the English race received baptism, those which seemed to me rightest, those I have gathered, and rejected the rest.”

Law and language—these are the unrelaxing bands that hold a race firmly together. There are now two main divisions of the Teutonic stock, separated to-day by language and by law—the people who speak German and are ruled by Roman law, and the peoples who speak English and are governed by the common law; and the separation is as wide and as deep legally as it is linguistically. “By the forms of its language a nation expresses its very self,” said one of the acutest of British critics; and we have the proof of this at hand in the characteristic differences between the English language and the German. By the forms of its law a people expresses its political beliefs; and we have the evidence of this in the fact that we Americans regard our

rulers merely as agents of the town-meeting of the old Teutons, while the modern Germans are submitting to a series of trials for lese-majesty.

Laws have most weight when they are seen to be the expression of the common conscience; and they are most respected when they best reflect the ideals that are “the souls of the nations which cherish them,” as a historian of American literature has finely phrased it—“the living spirits which waken nationality into being, and which often preserve its memory long after its life has ebbed away.” The marked difference now obvious between the two great divisions of the Teutonic stock—that which speaks English and that which speaks German—is due in part to their not having each conserved exactly the same portion of the ideals inherited from their common ancestors, and in part to their having each acquired other ideals in the course of the many centuries of their separate existence. And the minor differences to be detected between the two great divisions of the stock that speaks English, that dwelling in Great Britain and that dwelling in the United States, are due to similar causes.

While the ancestors of the people who speak German were abiding at home, where Tacitus had seen them, the ancestors of the peoples who speak English went forth across the North Sea and possessed themselves of the better part of Great Britain and gave it a new name. They were not content to defeat the earlier inhabitants in fair fight, and then to leave them in peace, as the Romans did, ruling them and intermarrying with them; the English thrust the natives out violently and harried them away. As Green

puts it tersely, “The English conquest for a hundred and fifty years was a sheer dispossession and driving back of the people whom the English conquered.” No doubt this dispossession was ruthless; but was it complete? The newcomers took the land for their own, and they meant to kill out all the original owners; but was this possible? The country was rough and thickly wooded, and it abounded in nooks and corners where a family might hide itself. Moreover, what is more likely than that the invader should often spare a woman and take her to wife? For centuries the English kept spreading themselves and pushing back the Britons; but in the long war there were truces now and again, and what is more likely than an incessant intermingling of the blood all along the border as it was slowly driven forward?

Certain it is that one of the influences which have modified the modern English stock is a Celtic strain. If the peoples that speak English are now not quite like the people that speak German, plainly this is one reason: they have had a Celtic admixture, which has lightened them and contributed elements lacking in the original Teuton. To declare just what these elements are is not easy; but to deny their presence is impossible. The Celt has an impetuosity and a swiftness of perception which we do not find in the original Teuton, and which the man who speaks English is now more likely to possess than the man who speaks German. The Celt has a certain shy delicacy; he has a happy sensibility and a turn for charming sentiment; he has a delightful lyric note; and he has at times a sincere and puissant melancholy. These are all qualities which we find in

our English literature, and especially in its greatest figure. “The Celts do not form an utterly distinct part of our mixed population,” said Henry Morley in a striking passage. “But for early, frequent, and various contact with the race that in its half-barbarous days invented Ossian’s dialogues with St. Patrick, and that quickened afterward the Northmen’s blood in France, Germanic England would not have produced a Shakspere.”

Here we see Morley declaring that the Celt had “quickened the Northmen’s blood in France”; and perhaps by his choice of a word he meant to remind us that whereas the Northmen who sailed down the mouth of the Seine were Teutons, the Normans who were to sail up to Hastings had been materially modified during their sojourn in France, which had once been Celtic Gaul. Two series of occasions there were when the English received an accession of Celtic blood: first, when they conquered England; and second, when they in turn were conquered by the Normans, who ruled them for centuries, and were finally merged in them, just as earlier the Romans had been merged in the Gauls. And this recalls to us the fact that there was more in the Norman than the intermingling of the Teuton and the Celt; there was in the Norman also not a little of the Roman who had so long ruled Gaul, and who had so deeply marked it with certain of his own characteristics. Thus it was that the Norman brought into England a Latin tradition; he had acquired something of the Roman administrative skill, something of the Roman’s genius for affairs. After the Renascence, Latin influences were to affect the English language and English literature; but it was after the

conquest that the English people itself came first in contact with certain of the Roman ideals.

Matthew Arnold thought that we owed “to the Latin element in our language the most of that very rapidity and clear decisiveness by which it is contradistinguished from the modern German”; and he found in the Latinized Normans in England “the sense for fact, which the Celts had not, and the love of strenuousness, clearness, and rapidity, the high Latin spirit, which the Saxons had not.” Perhaps the English feeling for style, our command of the larger rhetoric, may be due to this blend of the Norman; and it cannot be denied that this gift has not been granted to the modern German. The fantastic brilliancy of De Quincey and the sonorous picturesqueness of Ruskin are alike inconceivable in the language of Klopstock; and altho there is a pregnant concision in the speeches of Bismarck at his best, there is no German orator who ever attained the unfailing dignity and the lofty affluence of Webster at his best.

Less than two centuries after the good King Alfred had declared English law and established English literature, the Normans came and saw and conquered. Less than three centuries after King William took the land there was born the first great English poet. If the language is to-day what it is, it is because of Chaucer, who chose the court dialect of London to write in, and who made it supple for his own use and the use of the poets that were to come after. The Norman conquest had brought a new and needed contribution to the English character; it had resulted in an immense enrichment of the English language; and it had related English literature again to the broad current of

European life. To the original Teutonic basis had been added Celtic and Norman and Latin strains; and still the English nature wrought its steady will, still it expressed itself most freely and most fully in poetry. And in no other poet are certain aspects of this English nature more boldly displayed than in Chaucer, in whom we find a fresh feeling for the visible world, a true tenderness of sentiment, a joyous breadth of humor, and a resolute yet delicate handling of human character.

Two centuries after Chaucer came Shakspere, in whom the English nature finds its fullest expression. The making of England was then complete; all the varied elements had been fused in the fire of a struggle for existence and welded by war with the most powerful of foes. The race-characteristics were then finally determined; and in Elizabethan literature they are splendidly exhibited. Something was contributed by the literature of the Spain that the Elizabethans had stoutly withstood, and something more by the literature of the Italy so many of them knew by travel; but all was absorbed, combined, and assimilated by the English nature, like the contributions that came from the classics of Rome and Greece. Bacon and Cecil, Drake and Ralegh, are not more typical of that sudden and glorious outpouring of English individuality than are Marlowe, Shakspere, and Jonson, Spenser, Chapman, and Massinger. In that greatest period of the race we do not know which is the greater, the daring energy, the enthusiastic impetuosity, the ability to govern, that the English then displayed, or the mighty sweep and range of the imagination as nobly revealed in their poetry. The works of the Elizabethan

writers are with us, like the memory of the deeds of the Elizabethan adventurers, as evidence, if any was needful, that the peoples that speak English are of a truth poetic, that they are not prosaic.

In the days of Elizabeth the English began to go abroad and to settle here and there. To those who came to America there were added in due season many vigorous folk from other Teutonic sources; and here in the centuries that have followed was to be seen a fusion of races and a welding into one nation such as had been seen in England itself several centuries earlier. To those who remained in England there came few accretions from the outside, altho when the edict of Nantes was revoked the English gained much that the French lost. The Huguenots were stanch men and sturdy, of great ability often, and of a high seriousness. Some crossed the Channel and some crossed the ocean; and no one of the strands which have been twisted to make the modern American is more worthy than this.

More important than this French contribution, perhaps, was another infusion of the Celtic influence. When the King of Scotland became King of England, his former subjects swarmed to London—preceding by a century the Irishmen who made themselves more welcome in the English capital, with their airy wit and their touch of Celtic sentiment. Far heavier than the Scotch raid into England, and the Irish invasion, was the influx of Scotch, of Irish, and of Scotch-Irish into America. At the very time when Lord Lyndhurst was expressing the opinion that the English held the Irish to be “aliens in blood, aliens in speech, aliens in religion,” the Irish were withdrawing in their thousands from the rule of a

people that felt thus toward them; and they were making homes for themselves where prejudice against them was not potent. Yet in England itself the Irish left their mark on literature, especially upon comedy, for which they have ever revealed a delightful aptitude; and in the eighteenth century alone the stage is lightened and brightened by the plays of Steele, of Sheridan, and of Goldsmith. About the end of the same century also the Scotch began to make their significant and stimulating contribution to English literature, which was refreshed again by Burns with his breath of sympathy, by Scott with his many-sided charm, and by Byron with his resonant note of revolt.

Just as the Angles and the Saxons and the Jutes had mingled in Great Britain to make the Englishman, and had been modified by Celtic and Norman and Latin influences, so here in the United States the Puritan and the Cavalier, the Dutchman and the Huguenot and the German, the Irish and the Scotch and the Scotch-Irish, have all blended to make the American. Not a few of the original Teutonic race-characteristics recorded by Tacitus are here now, as active as ever; and not a few of the English race-characteristics as revealed by the Elizabethan dramatists survive in America, keeping company with many a locution which has dropped out of use in England itself. There is to-day in the spoken speech of the United States a larger freedom than in the spoken speech of Great Britain, a figurative vigor that the Elizabethans would have relished and understood. It is not without significance that the game of cards best liked by the adventurers who worried the Armada should have been born again to delight the Argonauts of ’49. The characteristic

energy of the English stock, never more exuberantly displayed than under Elizabeth, suffered no diminution in crossing the Atlantic; rather has it been strengthened on this side, since every native American must be the descendant of some man more venturesome than his kin who thought best to stay at home. Nor is the energy less imaginative, altho it has not taken mainly a literary expression. “There was no chance for poetry among the Puritans,” so Lowell reminded us, “and yet if any people have a right to imagination, it should be the descendants of those very Puritans.” And he added tersely: “They had enough of it, or they could never have conceived the great epic they did, whose books are States, and which is written on this continent from Maine to California.”

More than half those who speak English now dwell in the United States, and less than a third dwell within the British Isles. To some it may seem merely fanciful, no doubt, but still the question may be put, whether the British or the American is to-day really closer to the Elizabethan? It has recently been remarked that the typical John Bull was invisible in England while Shakspere was alive, and that he has become possible in Great Britain only since the day when these United States declared their independence. Walter Bagehot, the shrewdest of critics of his fellow-countrymen, maintained that the saving virtue of the British people of the middle of the nineteenth century was a stolidity closely akin to stupidity. But surely the Elizabethans were not stolid; and the Americans (who have been accused of many things) have never been accused of stupidity. Mr. Bernard Bosanquet has just been insisting that the two

dominant notes of the British character at the beginning of the twentieth century are insularity and inarticulateness. The Elizabethan was braggart and self-pleased and arrogant, but he was not fairly open to the reproach of insularity, nor was he in the least inarticulate. Perhaps insularity and inarticulateness are inseparable; and it may be that it is the immense variety of the United States that has preserved the American from the one, as the practice of the town-meeting has preserved him from the other.

No longer do we believe that there is any special virtue in the purity of race, even if we could discover nowadays any people who had a just right to pride themselves on this. The French are descended from the Gauls, but to the Gauls have been added Romans and Franks; the English are descended from the Teutons, but they have received many accretions from other sources; and the Americans are descended from the British, but it is undeniable that they have differentiated themselves somehow. The admixture of varied stocks is held to be a source of freshness and of renewed vitality; and it may be that this is the cause of the American alertness and venturesomeness. And as yet these foreign elements have but little modified the essential type; for just as the English nature wrought its steady will through the centuries, so the American characteristics have been imposed on all the welter of nationalities that swirl together in the United States.

Throughout the land there is one language, a development of the language of King Alfred, and one law, a development of the law of King Alfred; and throughout the land there are schools such as the good king wished for.

American ideals are not quite the same as British ideals, but they differ only a little, and they have both flowered from the English root, as the earlier English ideals had flowered from a Teutonic root. The English stock has displayed in the United States the same marvelous assimilating faculty that it displayed centuries ago in Great Britain, the same extraordinary power of getting the sojourners within its borders to accept its ideals. The law of imitation is irresistible, as M. Tarde has shown; and as M. Fouillée asserts, a nation is really united and unified only when its whole population thrills at the same appeal and vibrates when the same chord is struck. Then there is a consciousness of nationality and of true national solidarity. Throughout the United States there is a unanimous acceptance of the old English ideals—a liking for energy, a respect for character, a belief in equality before the law, and an acceptance of individual responsibility. These are the ideals which will echo again and again in English literature on both shores of the Atlantic, as they have echoed so often since King Alfred died. “A thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night.”

(1901)

II
THE FUTURE OF THE LANGUAGE

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Two apparently contradictory tendencies are to-day visible. One of them is revealed by our increasing interest in the less important languages and in the more important dialects. The other is to be seen in the immense expansion of the several peoples using the three or four most widely spoken European tongues, an expansion rapidly giving them a supremacy which renders hopeless any attempt of the less important European languages ever to equal them. (It may be noted now once for all that in this paper only the Indo-European languages are taken into account, altho Arabic did succeed for a while in making itself the chief tongue of the Mediterranean basin, overrunning Sicily and even thrusting itself up into Spain, and altho Chinese may have a fateful expansion in the dark future.)

As an instance of the first of the two conflicting tendencies, we have in France the movement of the *félibres* to revive Provençal, and to make it again a fit vehicle for poetry. We have in Norway an effort to differentiate written Norwegian from the Danish, which has hitherto been accepted as the standard speech of all Scandinavian authors. We have in Belgium an increasing resistance to French, which is the official tongue, and an attempt arbitrarily to resuscitate the Flemish dialect. We have in Switzerland a desire to keep alive the primitive and moribund Romansh. We have in North Britain a demand for at least a professorship of broad Scots. We see also that,

among the languages of the smaller nations, neither Dutch nor Portuguese shows any symptoms of diminishing vitality, while Rumanian has been suddenly encouraged by the political independence of the people speaking it.

All this is curious and interesting; and yet at the very period when these developments are in progress, other influences are at work on behalf of the languages of the greater races. The developments noted above are largely the work of scholars and of students; they are the artificial products of provincial pride; and they are destined to defeat by forces as invincible as those of nature itself. In their different degrees Provençal and Flemish are struggling for existence against French; but French itself is not gaining in its old rivalry with English and with German.

At the end of the seventeenth century French was the language of diplomacy; it was the speech of the courts of Europe; it was the one modern tongue an educated man in England or in Germany, in Spain or in Italy, needed to acquire. As Latin had been the world-language in the days of the Empire, so French bade fair to be the world-language in the days when all the parts of the earth should be bound together by the bands of commerce and finance. In the eighteenth century the supremacy of French was still indisputable; but in the nineteenth century it disappeared. And, unless all calculations of probability fail us, somewhere in the twentieth century French will have fallen from the first place to the fifth, just below Spanish, just above Italian, and far, far beneath English and Russian and German.

It was the social instinct of the French which made their language so neat, so apt for epigram and compliment, so

admirable and so adequate for criticism; and it was the energy of the English-speaking peoples, their individuality, their independence, which made our language so sturdy, so vigorous, so powerful.

An excess of the social instinct it is which has kept the French at home, close to the borders of France, and which has thus restricted the expansion of their language, while it is also an excess of the energy of our stock that has scattered English all over the world, on every shore of all the seven seas. And now that the nineteenth century has drawn to an end, if we can guess at the future from our acquaintance with the past, we are justified in believing that the world-language at the end of the twentieth century—should any one tongue succeed in winning universal acceptance—will be English. If it is not English, then it will not be German or Spanish or French; it will be Russian.

This attempt to foretell the future is not a random venture or a reckless brag; it is based on a comparison of the number of people speaking the different European languages at different periods. At my request Mr. N. I. Stone, of the School of Political Science of Columbia University, made an examination of the statistics, in so far as they are obtainable. The figures are rarely absolutely trustworthy before the nineteenth century—indeed, they are sometimes little better than guesswork. Yet they are approximately accurate, and they will serve fairly well for purposes of comparison. They make plain the way in which one language has gained on another in the past; and they afford material for us to hazard a prediction as to the languages likely to gain most in the immediate future.