
Review: English Language

Reviewed Work(s): *The History of the English Language* by Oliver Farrar Emerson

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been accidentally omitted from the table of contents on p. xi.

The book, whose contents here are simply indicated, is a most painstaking and comprehensive piece of work that should serve as material in many directions. When the history of the Icelandic language shall be ultimately written, the present collection of verbal forms will furnish ready material for an important chapter.

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ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

The History of the English Language. By OLIVER FARRAR EMERSON, A.M., Ph. D., Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and English Philology in Cornell University. New York: Macmillan & Co., 1894.

THE growing interest in English philology has manifested itself in the production of three new works upon the history of the English language. Mr. Champneys, writing in England and yielding to the demands of the English student, has introduced into his *History of the English Language* a great deal that is local in character and usage. Chiefly in the closing chapters of the book have the dialectal forms been treated in such a manner that the reader, however studious he may be, loses himself in a tangle of historical data and colloquialisms. Nevertheless the informal presentation of the Protean nature of the English language in its old home is novel and attractive to anyone who is more or less familiar with the various dialects and the dialectal literature of England.

A second work more historical in its arrangement is the revised and enlarged edition of Professor Lounsbury's *English Language*. This work has been enlarged to the extent of one hundred and fifty pages and improved on almost every page. A few errors still remain, and the mode of presenting the subject has been unfortunately left unchanged. At a glance one may see that an historian of the English language has two paths open to him: one, following the order of time; the other, the order of some particular topic, as the noun or verb, through the whole history of the

language. It is true, however, that neither of these paths can be followed closely without danger. Most writers have preferred a compromise between the two. Professor Lounsbury has preferred this and has so successfully pursued it that we are charmed with it all, except the starting point. And here, why could we not have had an outline of the two great laws that have determined so many of the leading characteristics of the English language? We refer to the laws of Grimm and Verner. Though these laws are not strictly English, they are to the language in its course of development what the law of gravitation is to the construction of a house. Most students pass from the architecture of Latin and Greek forms into that of English. If they have the rule and plumbline of Grimm and Verner, they are better builders.

Such an equipment Dr. Emerson has provided. And this third book upon the history of the English language is the one concerning which I wish to speak at greater length. Dr. Emerson has written a practical text-book which presents an admirable arrangement of the growth of the language historically, together with an outline of the fundamental principles upon which this development has taken its course.

The first of the five parts into which this work has been divided is introductory in character and discusses the relationship of English to other languages. Just here the author has found it "necessary to an understanding of English as of any other Teutonic speech" to give place to an outline of one of the principal peculiarities of all Teutonic languages, namely, the shifting of consonants. This phenomenon was first examined by Rask, a Danish scholar, and was later arranged by the German scholar, Jacob Grimm, under the law now known as Grimm's Law. This law was further applied to other cases, seemingly inexplicable, by another Danish philologist, Karl Verner, whose name is now linked with that of Grimm. This consonantal shift is one of the features of English philology which never fail to awaken the interest of students, even though their study be limited to English.

The second part is entitled, "The Standard Language and the Dialects." Many will be

interested and some surprised, perhaps, because of the emphasis, not necessarily by the announcement, which the writer makes regarding the relation of the English to the Norman conquerors during the Middle English period.

"Mistaken conceptions as to the influence of the Norman conquest on the English language are largely due to erroneous ideas of the relations existing between the two peoples during the so-called Norman period. It has already been pointed out, that the affairs of England and Normandy were becoming mixed as early as the beginning of the eleventh century, when Emma of Normandy became the wife of Æthelred of England. When William the Norman came, it was to no ordinary subjugation of a hostile people."

... "Again, the actual number of the Normans coming in at the conquest has been greatly exaggerated in popular estimation." Our former conceptions regarding the breach in English life and institutions resulting from the conquest have already been corrected by later historians, but philologists have been slow to accept the evidence of the historians regarding the continuity of things English, partly because of lack of evidence, partly through a failure to keep pace with historical investigation. Dr. Emerson has called a timely halt here. It remains now for students of this period to give more weight to the evidence of such historians as Freeman and Stubbs. They must not confine themselves to literary documents. A recent critic of Chaucerian literature has made an error in the same direction. He speaks of the language of Chaucer as if the poet had invented every word and phrase, as if he had not employed the poetic vocabulary inherited from all his predecessors. Insufficient evidence is the charge against such a critic.

In the third section, after discussing the native and foreign elements in the English vocabulary, the author turns to two of the most important topics; namely, the history of English sounds, phonology, and the history of English inflection. More than one half of the book is devoted to these two divisions. Dr. Emerson has treated the phonology in the simplest manner, and wisely so. While fully appreciating that there is "no true etymology which does not base itself upon a

thorough understanding of sound-laws, and an accurate accounting for the changes in individual sounds," he has avoided the use of too complicated a system for the average college student, one might venture to write college teacher, for this branch of philology has been studiously shunned. Even recent historians of the English language have been afraid to enter this most arid, and therefore neglected, region of linguistic study. We say afraid, for we all confess our timidity, and know that Dr. Emerson has not over-estimated the value of phonology when he emphasizes the "importance of the spoken, that is the living, word as fundamental to all linguistic study." Such a chapter as this will do more to hasten that "inevitable day," when phonology will be recognized as a fundamental adjunct to the preparation for a historical course in English language, than other more elaborate systems designed for the same purpose. We have in mind the authoritative work of Mr. Sweet. The very elaborateness of the latter's work renders it useless to all students that have not had the double advantage of possessing phonetic skill and the author's personal instruction.

Teachers of English grammar who have never been philologically trained will find many of the most vexing problems of modern English grammar traced to their origin and briefly analyzed in the final section of the book. Here the historical usage of words and phrases is presented to explain the changes that they have undergone. Nor does the author oppose the historical form to the current form, he does not encourage antagonism to good form by making the historical appear more worthy of acceptance than the former. It is sometimes found that teachers encourage such expressions as, "It is me," because it is historical, after the genius of the language, they aver, and they thus oppose the work of the rhetorician. Undoubtedly the duty of the historian is solely to furnish us the data and to allow us to draw our own conclusions, but the historian is apt to know best what our conclusions should be, especially when the best language is the history of the best writers.

In addition to the skilful arrangement of the subject-matter, the book is supplied with a

good map, chart and diagrams illustrating the location and movements of the dialects. The index also is complete.

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MODERN LITERATURE.

Studi di Letterature Straniere, di B. ZUMBINI.

Firenze: Successori Le Monnier, 1893. 8vo, pp. vii, 264.

THIS book has received the highest praise, not only in Italy, but in the other countries whose literatures it discusses, and surely in learning, taste and charm of manner it ranks with the best criticism that our generation produces. The author has no rigid system. Works of literature are not classified like the stuffed animals and fossils of a museum, nor are they made to serve as premises for scientific generalizations; yet in his wide, almost universal reading, Zumbini has had a sharp eye for analogies and resemblances of every kind, but particularly for comparisons with the literature of his own Italy, so that his book is fruited with fresh ideas and suggestive views. Almost every essay contains hints for investigations which would be sure to yield interesting results.

Three of his subjects are taken from English literature, four from the German, and two from the French. The list is as follows: The Pilgrim's Progress, The Paradise Lost, Macbeth; The Messiah, the Goethe-Museum in Weimar, Goethe's Egmont and Manzoni's Conte di Carmagnola, Nathan der Weise; L'Abbaye de Thélème of Rabelais, and Hugo's L'Art d'être Grand Père. Worn as many of these topics are, they are here treated with such originality and such critical ability as to make every page interesting and instructive, for the author disdains to repeat universally known theories and will rather remain silent than merely echo the thoughts of others.

Zumbini's critical judgment is penetrating and sure. Macbeth's character is studied as a combination of action and imagination, of evil desire and avenging conscience; the *Messias* is ranked between the religious vision and the epic, Klopstock's inventions are more numerous than his creations; the continued

vitality of poetic ideals is illustrated by Hugo's poetry of infancy and childhood, which in turn is defined by a luminous comparison with Wordsworth. At every point neglected beauties are revealed, unsuspected relations made manifest.

The keynote of the volume is Italy. The episode of the *Abbaye de Thélème* is considered in connection with Ariosto's island of Alcina, with the new ideas of marriage, honor and religion, with Laurentius Valla, and, above all, with the spirit of the Renaissance. *Nathan der Weise* reveals its obligations to Cardano and to three of Boccaccio's tales. The *Pilgrim's Progress*, the *Paradise Lost* and the *Messias*, all suggest the *Divine Comedy*. The Goethe-Museum is filled with objects that make the Italian heart palpitate. Particularly significant among them are volumes of Manzoni and Foscolo in the library and many objects of art gathered during the *Italian Journey*, objects whose influence upon Goethe's development is set forth and traced back to the pictures in his father's house at Frankfort. A reverse obligation is considered in the essay on Goethe's *Egmont* and Manzoni's *Conte di Carmagnola*. Starting from a quotation from *Egmont* written on the fly leaf of the copy of his tragedy which Manzoni presented to Goethe, the author traces the resemblance between the two works in sentiment, in characters and in the lack of true dramatic quality.

Naturally, regarding the *Pilgrim's Progress* and the *Paradise Lost*, which are grouped together as "Two English poems of the Seventeenth Century," there could be little to say which would have absolute novelty; yet, in reading these studies, one finds the continual incitement of fresh interest. There are passages it is true, that are slightly disappointing. The typical in Puritanism is not sufficiently distinguished from what was individual; the study of Bunyan's mind is colorless after the imaginative psychology of Taine, and his materials are underrated; the remarks about the hisses with which the demons greet Satan appear a little strained. But the reviewer feels hesitation in speaking of such slight defects, in the presence of such extraordinary merits. Starting from the idea