

**A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH,
WITH A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF
RECENT BOOKS ON THE SUBJECT,
AND LISTS OF TEXTS AND
EDITIONS**

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A short history of English, with a bibliography of recent books on the subject, and lists of texts and editions by Henry Cecil Wyld

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HENRY CECIL WYLD

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By HENRY CECIL WYLD

AUTHOR OF 'THE HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE MOTHER TONGUE'
'LANCASHIRE PLACE NAMES,' ETC. ETC. ETC.

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PREFACE

IT may seem strange that in a work entitled a History of English, there should be no part dealing specifically with the Vocabulary. On the other hand, it has always seemed to me stranger still that in so many books published in this country, this is practically the only aspect dealt with. The present work was designed as a small book, and in a small book something has to be left out. After carefully thinking over the matter, I decided to leave out Vocabulary altogether, since this has been treated at great length, and very competently, in many other books—those of Dr. Henry Bradley, Professor Skeat, and Professor Jespersen, to mention no more.

This left me more room for a treatment of Sounds and Inflections. When I considered the text-books in use in England, it seemed that, excellent as many of these are, the phonology, or history of pronunciation, was in none of them dealt with as fully as this rather intricate subject demands. And it is just this aspect which is necessarily the backbone of all serious courses of study, whether in Universities, or among private students who wish to be more than amateurs. In no branch of philological research have such advances been made during the last forty years as in the investigation of the laws of sound change. On no side of the study does the untrained dabbler in Etymology show his incapacity so much, as on questions which demand an exact knowledge of the sound laws of the various dialects of Old and Middle English. But even those who have an elementary working knowledge of the sound changes of Old and Middle English, are often very much at sea when it comes to following the history of English sounds beyond the Middle English

period. Nor is this not altogether to be wondered at. Many English Universities, until recently at any rate, so framed their courses of study as though English had stopped changing upon the death of Chaucer. Yet the problems connected with the sound changes of the Modern period are, to put it mildly, no less perplexing than those of the earlier periods. During the last few years, in Germany, and in Scandinavia, a large literature has grown up around the history of English sounds from the fifteenth century onwards. Much of this is not easily accessible to the ordinary English student, and the text-books, as a rule, give no hint of its existence, and the young student and the amateur lack the energy or the training to ferret out the facts for themselves in the volumes of Ellis and of Sweet.

Closely associated with the history of sounds during the Modern period, are the problems connected with the rise of Literary English, and of Received Standard Spoken English. These are among the most living questions which are now occupying the attention of students of English, and some attempt is made in the following pages to introduce the reader to the principal questions at issue, and to the special work, nearly all by foreigners, which has recently been published upon these subjects. It is hoped that when the reader of these pages passes to a deeper study of problems which are but indicated here, he may at least feel that he can approach them with some understanding, and with some knowledge of recent results.

In the treatment here given of English inflexions, it will be seen that certain parts of speech are selected, and that they are dealt with at some length. Here again, it seemed better to give special treatment to points which are either omitted or slurred over in other books. It will be found, for instance, I believe, that many of the details here given with regard to the inflexions in the M.E. and Early Mod. periods are not brought together in any other single book. In examination papers for young persons, I have often noticed questions on such points as these, which could only be answered properly after a special investigation. Examiners, I note in passing, seem

to have all sorts of knowledge up their sleeve which neither they nor any one else has ever given to the world at large.

I hope this book may be useful to students of English in our Universities, though I trust it is far removed from being a cram-book. Perhaps the student may learn enough from these pages, on a great number of points, to realize that there is much more to learn concerning both them and other questions which are not dealt with here. The Bibliography and the references in the body of the book, while they make no pretence at completeness, will yet furnish him with information as to where a fuller treatment can be found, and in these special works he will find yet more complete reference to authorities. The idea of confining a young student to one, or for the matter of that, to a dozen text-books, is fatal to sound education after the school stage is passed. The young student ought to feel that in the higher reaches of learning nothing is finally settled once and for all, but that knowledge is for ever progressing. Hence it is essential that he should follow, if but to a slight extent, some of the scientific controversies which, at any given moment, engage the minds of those who are making real contributions to knowledge. He must get away from text-books as soon as possible, or use them but as servants and guides. If he reads some of the journals devoted to his special subject, and this from an early stage in his career, he is brought face to face with the clash of opinions, and feels that he is to some extent in real touch with the making of knowledge, often painfully beaten out, amid strife and dispute. The classified lists of books and monographs in the Bibliography will serve as a guide for the reader, at once to the special researches upon which our present knowledge is based, and to other text-books which deal with aspects of the subject omitted here.

No one will expect to find in each of the three chapters devoted respectively to Old, Middle, and Modern English Phonology the degree of minuteness which would belong, properly, to special grammars of these phases of our language. The student who is particularly interested in any of these will

naturally turn to the pages of Sievers and Bülbring, to Morsbach's *Mittlenglische Grammatik*, still unfortunately incomplete, to the works of Horn and Jespersen, all of which are first-hand and first-rate books.

In the pages of these masters he will find, still in condensed form, but exhaustively treated, fuller information than can be given in such a work as the present, and there too, as well as from the lectures of his own teacher, he will learn where to go for the minute discussion of each problem.

A few words are necessary as to my indebtedness to other writers. I have been helped more in the phonological chapters, and that which deals with the rise of Literary English, than in the rather long chapter on inflexions. Help on general and specific points has, I hope, generally been acknowledged in the text, but there are some names which I must record here with special gratitude. Of these, I am bound to put first that of my revered master Henry Sweet. Apart from his various editions of texts which are indispensable to every one, every student of English turns again and again to his *History of English Sounds*. This book is nearly thirty years old and an enormous amount of work has been done since then. Yet we still feel its wonderful freshness and suggestiveness, the soundness of its plan, the permanence of its contribution to knowledge. Coming to more recent works, I must express my special obligation to Sievers and Bülbring in Old English, to Morsbach, Kluge, ten Brink, and Frieshammer in Middle English, to Luick, Horn, Jespersen, Viëtor, and Zachrisson in the Modern period. I must pay a grateful tribute to the fine monograph of Price on the Ablaut in strong verbs in the period from Caxton to Shakespeare. I owe a great deal to the group of young scholars who during the last few years have supplemented Morsbach's work on the London Dialect, notably Frieshammer, already mentioned, Lekebusch, Dölle, and to the very instructive monograph of Dibelius on John Capgrave, which is really an important treatise on fifteenth-century English.

The republication of a considerable number of the early Grammarians in late years, has made possible a first-hand

reference to many authorities on English Pronunciation which before were chiefly accessible in the monumental work of Ellis.

The great *Historische Grammatik* of Luick, to which every student of English has been looking forward, has just shown in its first part, how brilliant and thorough a treatment we may expect. This part came into my hands when all of my book was written except the last chapter, that on Modern English Sounds, and part of that on Inflexions. It was a source of satisfaction to see that this eminent scholar takes the view which I have always taught, with regard to the fracture of West Germanic *ǣ* in O.E.

I ought to say perhaps, in justice to myself, and to those who may use this book, that it is not a mere piecing together of materials gathered from older text-books. It may seem ridiculous that such a statement should be necessary, but unfortunately, works on English are not wanting, whose authors have simply decocted the essence of a few of the chief books, including sometimes in a single paragraph of their extract three or four accounts of the same thing given by different writers, without seeing that some of the statements contradicted the others, so that the first half of the pemmican paragraph is at variance with the rest. It is unnecessary to say more than that unless an authority is specifically quoted, the statements in this book are really the result of a personal examination of sources.

Had I had access from the start to a full collection of special investigations on Middle and Early Modern English texts, I should have been spared much labour in hunting through these to discover whether this or that form did or did not occur, and no doubt my statements would in many cases have been more complete. Unfortunately I could not obtain some of the monographs which I required until the work was far advanced; others I have not been able to see at all.

The Bibliography is fullest in the sections devoted to Middle English and the Modern period, because it seemed that here guidance was most necessary. In the Old English sections, practically no special monographs are recorded, except those on the texts representing the various

Old English dialects. The reason for this is that the special problems connected with Old English are rather remote from a book of this kind, while full bibliographies are easily accessible to advanced students in the grammars of Sievers and Bülbring, though not, unfortunately, in any Old English grammar written in this country.

In giving select lists of Old and Middle English texts, it seemed desirable to indicate the editions, as it is not always easy for a young student to discover this information.

HENRY CECIL WYLD.

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