

**PROPOSAL FOR THE
PUBLICATION OF A NEW
ENGLISH DICTIONARY**

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Proposal for the Publication of a New English Dictionary by The Philological Society

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THE PHILOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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J. Moore

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BY THE

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PROPOSAL FOR THE PUBLICATION
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In the year 1857 the Philological Society determined to form a collection of words hitherto unregistered in the Dictionaries of Johnson and Richardson, with a view of publishing a supplementary volume, which might be used with either of those works. A committee was appointed, circulars were issued, and the public as well as members of the Society were invited to take part in the work. The success of the experiment was so encouraging, that some members of the Society, unwilling that the energies thus brought into play should be expended in the production of a work necessarily of a subordinate and imperfect character, strongly urged the propriety of extending the scheme to the compilation of a new and more Scientific Dictionary than any at present existing. This proposal was, after much deliberation, entertained and accepted, and the Philological Society, at its meeting of January 7, 1858, resolved that, instead of the Supplement to the standard English Dictionaries, then in course of preparation by the Society's Unregistered Words Committee, a New Dictionary of the English Language should be prepared under the authority of the Philological Society. The work has been placed by the Society in the hands of two Committees; the one Literary and Histo-

rical, consisting of the Very Rev. the Dean of Westminster, F. J. Furnivall, Esq., and H. Coleridge, Esq., Secretary; and the other Etymological, consisting of Hensleigh Wedgwood, Esq., and Professor Malden; and the former of these Committees will edit the Dictionary and direct the general working of the scheme. Arrangements for the publication of the work in 5s. Parts have been made with Messrs. Trübner and Co., of Paternoster Row.

The object of the present Prospectus is twofold: first, to lay before the public, as concisely as possible, the main outlines of the plan upon which the New Dictionary will be constructed, and to ask from that public such further help in the reading and noting of books as will enable the plan to be carried out satisfactorily; and, secondly, to furnish our contributors with such a system of rules as will direct them to the principal points to be attended to in perusing and analysing the books they may undertake, and also ensure general uniformity in the results arrived at. It will of course be understood that we cannot, within the limits of a mere circular like the present, do more than state the conclusions at which we have arrived, without attempting to enter into any arguments in their behalf, or any refutations by anticipation of possible objections. The whole subject will be most naturally and conveniently discussed in the preface to the work itself, and we must reserve our defence, if any be thought necessary, until that appears. Those who may wish for further satisfaction as to our lexicographical creed, than what can be gathered from this Prospectus, are referred to the Dean of Westminster's Essay "On some Deficiencies in our English Dictionaries," which leaves no important portion of the subject unnoticed.

I. We may begin then by stating that, according to our view, the first requirement of every lexicon is, that it should contain *every word occurring in the literature of the language it professes to illustrate*. We entirely repudiate the theory, which converts the lexicographer into an arbiter of style, and leaves it in his discretion to accept or reject words according to his private notions of their comparative elegance or incle-

gance. In the case of the dead languages, such as Greek, no lexicon of any pretensions would omit the ἀπαξ λεγόμενα of Lycophron, or the experimental coinages of Aristophanes and the other comedians; and as we are unable to perceive any difference between a dead and living language, so far as lexicographical treatment is concerned, it follows that we cannot refuse to admit words into the Dictionary which may not be sanctioned by the usage of more than one writer, or be conformable in their structure to our ideas of taste. However worthless they may be in themselves, they testify to a tendency of language, and on this account only, if on no other, have a distinct and appreciable value.

II. We admit as authorities all English books, except such as are devoted to purely scientific subjects, as treatises on electricity, mathematics, &c., and works written subsequently to the Reformation for the purpose of illustrating provincial dialects. As soon as a standard language has been formed, which in England was the case after the Reformation; the lexicographer is bound to deal with that alone; before that epoch, however, the English language was in reality another name for the sum of a number of local languages, all exhibiting an English type distinct from the Saxon, and therefore all equally entitled to notice as authorities in the formation of a Dictionary. At the same time we reserve to ourselves a discretion of deciding, in doubtful cases, what shall or shall not be deemed a Dictionary authority,—a discretion which from special causes may often be required and usefully exercised without at all infringing on the generality of the principles we have just laid down.

III. The limits of quotation in point of time are next to be fixed. We have decided to commence with the commencement of English, or, more strictly speaking, with that definite appearance of an English type of language, distinct from the preceding semi-Saxon, which took place about the end of the reign of Henry III. Of course this, like every other line of demarcation, is hard to draw, and occasions a few apparent incongruities, some of the books included in our thirteenth-century list retaining much more of their Saxon

matrix than others; but on the whole it would be difficult, if not impossible, to fix the limit lower down without excluding books which it would be most undesirable to lose.

IV. In the treatment of individual words the historical principle will be uniformly adopted;—that is to say, we shall endeavour to show more clearly and fully than has hitherto been done, or even attempted, the development of the sense or various senses of each word from its etymology and from each other, so as to bring into clear light the common thread which unites all together. The greatest care will also be taken to fix as accurately as possible, by means of appropriate quotations, the epoch of the appearance of each word in the language, and, in the case of archaisms and obsolete words, of their disappearance also; and the limits of the various phases of meaning exhibited by each individual will be defined, as far as possible, in like manner and by the same means.

V. Lastly, in the Etymological department of our work, where, as is well known, there is the most pressing need for improvement, we shall, in addition to the proximate origin of each word, exhibit several of its affinities with the related languages for the sake of comparison, always including that language which seems to present the radical element contained in the word in its oldest form. Examples illustrating our meaning will be found in the sequel, pp. 12–17.

The same principle of volunteer cooperation will apply to this portion of our work as to the other, and the labours of any contributors who may be willing to send in suggestions as to difficult etymologies, or emendations of those already in the Dictionaries, or lists of words illustrating any philological laws, such as those of letter-change, will receive every consideration.

And such contributions as the Etymological Committee shall deem worthy of insertion, in cases where there is room for a fair difference of opinion, although they may not themselves adopt the views therein propounded, will in all cases be distinguished by the initials of the contributors. It may be added here, that the following gentlemen have kindly con-

sented to aid the Etymological Committee by their advice and assistance in doubtful cases:—The Lord Bishop of St. David's, Sir F. Madden, Professor Key, Professor Goldstücker, Thos. Watts, Esq., Rev. J. Davies, Professor Siegfried, Dr. Halbertsma, M. de Haan Hetteema, &c.

We must now recur to the Literary and Historical portion of our work, in order to state the points on which we ask for help. The periods into which our language may, for philological purposes, be most conveniently divided, are three:—1. From its rise, cir. 1250, to the Reformation—of which the appearance of the first printed English translation of the New Testament in 1526 may be taken as the beginning. 2. From the Reformation to Milton (1526–1674, the date of Milton's death). 3. From Milton to our own day. As a general rule, we desire to give instances of the use of every word in each of these periods, or in as many of them as it occurs in, besides noting all changes of sense, &c.,—though, considering the unequal importance of different words, we reserve to ourselves the discretion of diminishing or increasing the number of quotations to be given under any word. In order, therefore, to carry out our desire, and recollecting that we have to catch every word on its first appearance in our literature, we have recently issued an alphabetical list of all A.D. 1250–1300 words*; and we ask our contributors to read among them all the printed books of the remainder of the first period, viz. 1300–1526, the fourteenth-century literature being taken first,—each contributor giving us extracts containing both the new and the obsolete words occurring in the particular books taken by him that fall within our rules hereinafter given.

For the period 1526–1674, we shall ask each contributor for a quotation for every word, phrase, idiom, &c., in his book that does not occur in the Concordances to the Bible and Shakspeare, or that to the Bible only, if the Shakspeare Concordance be unprocurable. It is true that this plan will fail

* Coleridge's *Glossarial Index of the Printed English Literature of the 13th Century*. London: Trübner and Co., 1859. 5s.