HANDBOOK OF THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE. FOR THE USE OF TEACHER AND STUDENT

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Handbook of the History of the English Language. For the Use of Teacher and Student by A. H. Keane

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BY

A. H. KEANE, B.A.

AUTHOR OF 'FRENCH ACCENT'
'THE TRUE THEORY OF GERMAN DECLENSION AND CONJUGATION'
ETC.

'The ground of our own language appertaineth to this old Saxon'—CAMDEN

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PREFACE

TO

THE PRESENT EDITION.

SINCE the first appearance of this work the field of English philology has been sedulously cultivated by many able writers both at home and abroad. It may be sufficient here to mention Koch's 'Historische Grammatik,' 1869; Mätzner's 'Englische Grammatik,' 1865; Marsh's 'English Language,' 1862; Helfenstein's 'Comparative Grammar of the Teutonic Languages,' 1870; Dr. Abbott's 'Shakspearian Grammar,' 1870; Dr. Morris's 'Historical Outlines,' 1873; A. J. Ellis's great work on 'Early English Pronunciation,' 1868–75; and the important Transactions of the Chaucer and Early English Text Societies. These and several other recent works have been consulted in the preparation of the present edition, which thus embodies much fresh matter in further illustration of the successive steps by which the English tongue has arrived at its present state.

Some may possibly affect surprise that no change has been made in the nomenclature, and that the terms *Saxon* and *Anglo-Saxon* are still retained. But after mature deliberation I am more than ever convinced that the outcry

raised by Mr. Freeman, Mr. Sweet, Dr. Morris, and a few others against these names, is unreasonable, and that their contentions cannot be upheld. It might be supposed that if there ever were Teuton tribes calling themselves Saxons, and not merely called so by others, it would be childish to quibble about the term Saxon as applied to the Teuton dialects spoken by them. But Mr. Freeman will hear of nothing but *English*, on the ground that 'as far as we can go back, that language has always had the same name, and that name has been English.' And in his 'Historical Outlines,' Dr. Morris* goes still further. 'These Teutonic invaders,' he says, 'were known to the Romans and Celts by the name of Saxons; and this term was afterwards applied by them to the Teutonic settlers of the fifth century; *who, however, never appear to have called themselves Saxons*, but always *Anglisc* or English' (p. 28).

Than this it may be doubted whether any more reckless statement ever was made by an otherwise really accomplished scholar. Apart from the broad fact that it was the Saxons themselves, and not the Welsh or other foreigners, that mapped out the parts of the island settled by them into the various kingdoms or political divisions of the East Saxons, the West Saxons, the South Saxons, &c. (names still living in our Sussex, Essex, Middlesex), endless passages might be quoted from the very earliest writers, from charters, laws, and authentic documents of all sorts, showing that the word

* In later works, however, Dr. Morris gives up the point, and quietly returns to the use of the really indispensable terms Saxon and Anglo-Saxon. Thus, at p. 32 of the Preface to his Chaucer (1874), we have: 'In Anglo-Saxon *fader*, *brother*, *doughter* took no inflexion in the singular.' And again: 'This construction occurs in A.S. writers,' p. 36; 'verbs of Saxon origin,' p. 37, and elsewhere *passim*.

Saxon was freely used in Saxon times and by Saxon writers, as applicable both to the people and to their language. Thus in the '*Wid-siþ*,' one of the oldest, if not the very oldest, piece of Saxon poetry extant, the *Scop* or 'Wide-wanderer' tells us that amongst the many tribes and peoples visited by him were the *Saxons*: 'And mid Ænum and mid Seaxum ic wæs:' p. 322 of Thorpe's 'Codex Exoniensis.' In the same poem, and probably for the first time in an English text, *Angle* occurs under the forms *Ongle* and *Engle* four times: Offa weold Ongle; mid englum ic wæs, &c.

But as soon as both tribes could be spoken of as one people we find *both terms from the very first used indifferently* by English writers when speaking comprehensively of all the Teutonic tribes settled in Britain. Thus, our very earliest historian, Bede: 'Gens Anglorum SIVE Saxonum Britanniam tribus longis navibus advehitur.' Chronicon, A. 449, p. 163, in Stevenson's edition, 1841. And in his 'Hist. Eccl.' I. 22: 'Genti Saxonum SIVE Anglorum,'* here placing the Saxons before the Angles, though himself an Anglian. In his Life of Hwætberht he also preserves a letter addressed by that Abbot to the Pope, in which the whole of England is actually spoken of as *Saxony*: 'Hwætberchtus...Abbas Cœnobii beatissimi Apostolorum principis Petri in SAXONIA.' Bedæ Opera Hist. II., p. 159. So also Gregory I. in a Brief ad An. 596: 'SAXONIA transmarina,'†

* So also Alfred translates the expression 'historiam gentis Anglorum,' at the opening of Bede's History: 'Angel þeóde and Seaxum,' supplying the word *Saxon*, as if he had not yet brought himself to look upon *Angel* as alone sufficient to include the whole people.

† With these passages compare also: 'Ego Leutherius gr. D. episcopus pontificatus SAXONIÆ gubernacula regens' (A. 675, in Cod. Diplomaticus, I. p. 14); Ego Ini monarchus SAXONIÆ, A. 699, *ib.*,