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Trübner's collection. A Simplified Grammar of the Swedish Language by E. C. Otté

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E. C. OTTÉ

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INTRODUCTION.

THE Swedish language belongs to a northern offshoot of the Old Germanic, which in course of time gave origin to two slightly differing forms of speech, known to Scandinavian grammarians as *Forn-Svenskan*, the Old Swedish, and *Forn-Norskan*, the Old Norse. The former of these was spoken by the Svear and Götar, or ancient Swedes and Goths; while the latter, as the name implies, was the language of the Norsemen, and probably identical with the *Norræna*, or *Dönsk Tunga*, of the Northmen who first made themselves known to the nations of Christian Europe.

We have evidence that these two main branches of the Old Northern never deviated sufficiently from each other to interfere with their comprehension by all the Scandinavian peoples, although each possessed certain inherent and persistent characters peculiar to itself, of which traces may still be found in the modern forms of cultivated speech, which we distinguish as Swedish, and Dano-Norwegian. These distinctive survivals of the original twin forms of the

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Old Northern have been best preserved in the provincial dialects of the northern kingdoms, and considerable light has been thrown on the history of the development of the Swedish language by a study of the various forms of the so-called "*bondespråk*," or peasant-speech, which still maintain their ground in different parts of Sweden.

The *Forn-Svenskan*, or Old Swedish, can scarcely be said to have lost its status as the spoken tongue of the people till the beginning of the sixteenth century, when, with the emancipation of Sweden from the dominion of Denmark, and its political and social regeneration under Gustaf Vasa, a new era began in the language, as well as in the political and national life of the people. Gustaf, partly from policy perhaps as much as from conviction, early gave his support to the Reformers, whose zealous endeavours to provide the laity with trustworthy vernacular translations of the Scriptures he warmly seconded, encouraging the most learned of the Swedish adherents of the Lutheran doctrines to take part in this praiseworthy labour. Amongst these, the most eminent was Olaus Petri, who, although of peasant birth, was an elegant scholar, alike well versed in the literature of his native land, and in the learning of the schools, which he had acquired while studying at the German universities under the immediate direction of Luther. His translation of the New Testament, which appeared in 1536, and is the earliest Swedish version of the

Scriptures, may therefore be fairly accepted as a true representative of the highest literary standpoint of the language in the earlier half of the sixteenth century. Indeed it may be said that Olaus Petri's work marks the turning point between the older and more rugged form of the language, and that later development from which has resulted the spoken Swedish of our own times. The latter has naturally undergone various modifications, but it has retained far more of the characteristic vigour of the Old Northern than its sister-speech of Norway and Denmark, where even the best preserved provincial dialects betray the Germanizing influences to which both the spoken and the written language of the people have been subjected. From this vitiation of their northern mother-tongue the Swedes have been saved through their early severance from their political union with Denmark, and still more, perhaps, through their geographical position, which, while it has aided them in maintaining, almost unassailed, the independence which the first of the Vasas secured for them, has not been without powerful influence on the preservation of the genuine northern character of their language.

In modern Swedish, great dialectic differences of inflection and pronunciation are still to be met with even among the educated classes, although it cannot be denied that the present generation is showing a constantly increasing inclination to level provincialisms towards a more general