

**THE BREECHES BIBLE,  
CONSIDERED AS THE BASIS FOR  
REMARKS, CRITICAL AND  
PHILOLOGICAL, ON THE ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE**

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The Breeches Bible, considered as the basis for remarks, critical and philological, on the English language by James Gurnhill

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**JAMES GURNHILL**

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# BREECHES BIBLE,

CONSIDERED AS THE BASIS FOR

Remarks, Critical and Philological,

ON

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

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UPWARDS of half a century has rolled away since INGRAM, in his Inaugural Lecture before the University of Oxford, pointed out with force and eloquence, the utility of Anglo Saxon Literature. The success which followed his endeavours to arrest the attention of his countrymen, not to speak of others, which have since also failed, affords but a poor precedent for any further attempts which may be made in the same direction. "That the Anglo Saxon language has a peculiar share of importance and interest; that it is capable of elucidating the principles of grammatical science, and of leading us to a philosophical theory of Language," are propositions, which, though none might care to question, but few are found ready to prove.

But this is not all. Though Anglo Saxon is a language pre-eminently qualified by the antiquity of its origin, and the purity of its descent, to instruct in the theory and first principles of human speech, it presents yet another aspect, which, as regarding not the philologist nor the philosopher, so much as the mass of Englishmen generally, has claims of a still more urgent character. It is the only language which can lead us to an intelligent conception of the English tongue. To state in round terms, the conclusion to which this assertion (if correct) must lead, that we are as a people ignorant of the very language we speak, might appear somewhat distasteful, nor is this the place to argue in defence of such an assertion.

Yet the Author feels bold to make the avowal, that only the settled conviction of widely prevalent misconception respecting the English Language, and also an earnest desire, to promote, what seem to him, truer and less contracted views, have induced him to publish this little volume.

If it should be urged, as perhaps with some justice it may, that the title selected is not so characteristic and descriptive as might have been wished, the Author would reply that there was really left him but little room for choice. The BREECHES BIBLE seemed likely, not only to afford an interesting and legitimate field of investigation, but also to possess peculiar advantages as a starting point, and basis of future operations. So that, though the object of the earlier chapters is specific,—namely, to institute a comparison between the English of the present and a past century,—and that of the latter generally—to advocate the claims of Anglo Saxon as a *national* study; yet the nature and mode of investigation pursued is throughout the same, even where the particular propositions sought to be established have differed.

It has ever appeared to the Author a matter for regret, that students of Anglo Saxon, who have hitherto written on the English Language, have striven rather to obviate and lessen the necessity of individual recourse to Anglo Saxon, by borrowing from it a few specious rules or illustrations, than to foster its study amongst Englishmen generally, by showing how it contains, not only the key to unlock the meaning and logic of words, but that it is itself moreover the soul which animates our language. And, though the labours of such men are by no means to be held in light esteem on this account, it seems pretty certain, that to their neglect in pointing to this conclusion, must be mainly attributed the disregard, which as a nation we still pay to the true and only mother of our Language. We have allowed others to read and interpret for us, where in reality a personal enquiry, and an experimental knowledge ought to have

enabled us to read and interpret for ourselves. Yet, slender as may at present be the grounds for entertaining such a hope, and few the indications which point to its realization, the Author feels assured, that the day cannot be very far distant, when the apathy and indifference now displayed to the study of Anglo Saxon, must give place to other and more intelligent views. With this conviction before him he has endeavoured to write, so far as his ability served him, not the page over which the advanced student in English or Anglo Saxon literature may pore with satisfied delight, but that rather on which the honest working bee may rest for an hour or so, and find something to carry away, and something to think about.

Nor is he unconscious of the responsibility which must of necessity attach itself to attempts of this kind—a responsibility, unfortunately, which his own imperfections and shortcomings tend rather to increase than to lessen. In one respect, however, he feels he has some claim to that indulgence which he both needs and asks for. His labours, or his recreations (for they seemed at times to be each,) were commenced, and in the main completed, in the quiet seclusion of a country life—amid the bleating of sheep and the lowing of oxen;—and, though he is proud to possess there many friends, of whose uniform kindness he entertains the most grateful and abiding remembrance, he had still to regret the absence for a long period on the continent of the only friend to whose judgment and revision he felt willing to submit his opinions and proof-sheets. For the assistance, however, which on his return, though late, that dear friend rendered him, the Author is only too glad to have this opportunity of expressing both his obligation and gratitude.





## TABLE OF CONTENTS.

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	PAGE.
INDEX OF WORDS. .. .. .	ix
CHAPTER I.	
INTRODUCTORY REMARKS. .. .. .	1
CHAPTER II.	
THE GENEVAN VERSION. .. .. .	13
CHAPTER III.	
EARLIER FORMS OF SPELLING SUGGESTIVE OF ETYMONS.	21
CHAPTER IV.	
WORDS ALTER THEIR MEANING. .. .. .	67
CHAPTER V.	
OBSOLETE AND OBSOLESCENT WORDS AND FORMS OF WORDS.	84
CHAPTER VI.	
OBSOLETE FORMS OF THE PAST TENSE AND PAST PARTICIPLE.	111
CHAPTER VII.	
LITERAL CONTRACTIONS—APOSTROPHICAL GENITIVE—REMARKS ON SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTIC FEATURES OF THE GENEVAN TRANSLATION AS COMPARED WITH OUR OWN. ..	119
CHAPTER VIII.	
ON THE MEANING AND CONSTRUCTION OF "THAN". ..	132

## CHAPTER IX.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE SPELLING IN THE BEECHES BIBLE:— TENDENCY OF ENGLISH AS ILLUSTRATED THEREBY. ..	147
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## CHAPTER X.

COMPARATIVE PHILOLOGY—INDO-GERMANIC FAMILY—LATIN AND GREEK; THEIR ORIGIN AND AFFINITY WITH THE GERMAN FAMILY—PEDIGREE OF ENGLISH—THE ROMANCE WALLON— ITS INFLUENCE—THE CLAIMS OF LATIN AND ANGLO SAXON COMPARED. .. .. .	167
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## CHAPTER XI.

THE VALUE OF ANGLO SAXON: FIRST, AS ILLUSTRATING THE FORMATION OF LANGUAGE GENERALLY, AND OF ENGLISH IN PARTICULAR; SECONDLY, AS DISCOVERING THE TRUE MEAN- ING OF ENGLISH WORDS—EXAMPLES—CONCLUSION. ..	189
APPENDICES, .. .. .	215