tion, so far at least as is essential to the scanning of the verse. This qualification is necessary, for we have few means of knowing how the individual vowels and consonants were sounded. We can, for example, generally appreciate the poetry of the Elizabethan and seventeenth century writers without strictly following even what we know to have been their own pronunciation. We must, indeed, occasionally read *Room* for Rome in Shakespeare, when he plays on the words—

> "Now it is Rome indeed and room enough."
> —*Julius Cæsar*, act i. sc. 2, line 156 (Globe).

and in this poem, lines 670–1, where "Rome" rimes with "to me," and must plainly be pronounced like "roomy;" or "*achies* in one's *jintes*," in Butler; but it is not necessary to read of "res*a*ving s*ar*vices of goold and y*a*llow *chiney*," or of "being obl*ee*ged to poonish a marchant," since these peculiarities do not affect the verse.

The signs I have employed are explained in the notice on the Versification. I may, however, take this opportunity of justifying an idea of my own with regard to Chaucer's verse, in which I fear all will not agree. Rime and metre were not indigenous among the Teutonic nations, but derived from the Romance languages, and I believe that before they were completely naturalized among us they were adopted with the peculiarities of French poetry, and that consequently when a line ended with a syllable containing a silent "e" that vowel was *always* sounded, though not so full or decidedly as others. I mean, to take a simple illustration, that though the word *pilgrimage* occurring in the middle of a line had but three syllables, yet when it ended a line it was read as of four; not so strongly pronounced as in the plural *pilgrimages*, but still it was pronounced. I had thought of using some special mark, as a single dot over the letter, but I have foregone this refinement, and written it, as I have other e's which I wish the reader to sound, thus, ĕ.

For the Life of Chaucer and the Grammar of the Language in his time I am greatly indebted to Dr. Morris' edition of the Prologue and Knightes Tale in the Clarendon Press Series, from which I have also borrowed freely in the notes; but I have had recourse to every historical and philological authority within my reach, in the hope of rendering this little work as perfect and useful as I could.

LONDON, *January*, 1881.

THE ARGUMENT AND CHARACTERS OF THE PROLOGUE.

The general plan of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* seems to have been suggested by the *Decameron* of Boccaccio, which had appeared some thirty years before. Each is a collection of stories more or less romantic, drawn from the French and Provençal literature of the Troubadours, and the older Italian writers; some again being traceable through these to Arabian, or, though oddly metamorphosed in transmission, to classic sources, the whole strung together by the simple artifice of being supposed to be told in turn by the members of a company who, having no present employment, agree thus to pass away their time.

But in the conception of their plots Boccaccio and Chaucer differ as strongly as did their individual characters or those of their respective societies. The Italian imagines five elegant *dilettanti* nobles with a like number of accomplished and youthful ladies retiring to the beautiful gardens of a villa in the country in order to escape the dangers and to avoid the horrors of the pestilence which in 1348 ravaged the city of Florence.

Gay, selfish, and callous to the sufferings of their poorer fellow-citizens, they spend their time in a round of feasting and revelry, or in walking amid the enchanting scenery of the Apennines, regardless of aught but their own enjoyment. Chaucer, on the contrary, was full of human sympathy, and though familiar with the languages, literature, and society of France and Italy, intensely English. Sprung from the middle class, but thrown by his varied avocations into contact with men and women of every rank, he had ample opportunities for cultivating a natural insight into character, he could appreciate whatever was good and true whether in "gentil Knight" or "poure Persoun" and his "Plowman brother," and had a no less keen perception of the vices, the faults, and the foibles of high and low. Yet his satire, though unsparing, is rather of the nature of kindly ridicule than stern invective; he aims rather at making its objects appear ludicrous, or at the worst contemptible, than as exciting hatred, indignation, or disgust; he laughs them down, and we, if not they themselves, enjoy the laugh.

Extremely happy is the little incident which brings together a motley crowd from every grade except the highest and the very lowest. A mere accident, but one which serves his purpose better than the most elaborate plot, and so probable and natural that one can scarcely believe it had no foundation in fact.

One fine evening in April, while he is staying at the Tabard, an old inn in Southwark, a company of pilgrims assemble, for the most part strangers to one another, with no other common purpose than that of mutual protection from the perils of the road, in their journey to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. At supper their host, a jolly and sociable fellow, offers to accompany them as their guide, having, he says, often conducted such parties in that capacity; and at the same time proposes that in order to enliven the tedium of the journey each shall tell a couple of tales on the way thither and the same number on their return. This advice is promptly agreed to, the order in which they shall speak determined by drawing lots, and the poet, anticipating much enjoyment from the study of characters so various and under circumstances so free from restraint, resolves on joining the party himself, and on writing an account of what he should see and hear.

The several personages are described with consummate skill. In a few lines we are made acquainted with their features and dress, their manners and characters; they stand out before us in strong individuality, not like portraits in a picture-gallery, but as men and women living, acting, talking with us. Though Chaucer never wrote a drama in the common acceptation of the word, he evinces in this Prologue the possession of dramatic powers of the highest order. He never aims at effect by contrast or exaggeration, the most trivial features are consistent with the rest; an under-current of fun pervades the whole, and the most telling hits often appear as by or after thoughts, adding greatly to their force.

First, we have the "verray perfight gentil Knight," a representative of the old chivalry, then fast passing away, a veteran warrior, but "of his port as meke as is a mayde;" in short, the ideal knight *sans peur et sans reproche.*

His son, a young "Squyer," as gay as he was brave, more accomplished than his father in the arts of peace, but having already proved his prowess in the last French war, was followed by a single attendant, an honest and trusty "yeman" from among his father's tenantry.

The number of clerical pilgrims is naturally large in proportion to the whole number, and among them we find representatives of both the ecclesiastical orders and the secular clergy. The ecclesiastical orders were in general recruited from the higher ranks of society, and from these Chaucer has drawn the Lady Prioresse, with her delicate table manners and her pretty affectations; the thrifty mendicant friar, who combines the trade of peddling with that of begging; the monk, proud of his horsemanship and his hounds, fond of rich attire and good living—a prototype of the fox-hunting country parson. The secular clergy, on the contrary, were drawn for the most part from the humbler classes and were often men of deep and earnest piety, and, thanks to the foundations at the universities, of far greater learning than the former. Connected by ties of blood and sympathy with the poor among whom they laboured, and than whom they were too often little richer, they used the influence which their spiritual character gave them in their behalf; and to their ministrations at the death-beds of the proud nobles we owe more than to anything else the gradual emancipation of the English peasantry from a state of absolute serfdom.

Chaucer has left us in the character of the "poure Persoun of a toun" a picture of simple, unselfish piety, such as has never been surpassed. Poor in this world's goods, "but riche of holy thought and werk," brother to a plowman, but "a lerned man, a clerk" (*i.e.*, a university man), "that Cristĕs gospel trewely woldĕ preche;" liberal to the poor, though poor himself; self-denying and contented with his lot, he did not seek preferment, but endeavoured by gentleness and sympathy, by well-judged remonstrance, and above all by his own good example, "to drawĕ folk to heven," his character is beautifully summed up in the last couplet,

> "But Cristĕs lore, and his apostles twelvĕ
> He taughte, but first he folwede it himselvĕ."

To the same class we must refer the "Clerk of Oxenford," though as yet he had not got a benefice. He lived apart from the world, spending his little money on books, a poor but earnest scholar, grave and thoughtful in speech.

After the clergy the other learned professions are represented by one member of each. The "Doctour of Phisik" is a capital sketch of the physician of the day. A learned ostentatious charlatan, deeply versed in astrology, magic, and all the useless lore of the dark ages, though

"His studie was but litel on the Bibel."

Gorgeously attired to command respect, temperate in his habits, and not wanting in worldly wisdom, for "ful redy hadde he his apotecaries," and "ech of hem made other for to wynnĕ;" a practice which is not quite extinct in our own time, though repudiated by every honourable practitioner.

The "Sergeant of Lawe" is a clever and favourable picture of the shrewd and successful pleader, with every statute and precedent by rote, and possessing that element of success, the art of appearing even busier and wiser than he really was. With him there was a wealthy Frankleyn or country gentleman, the prototype of the port-wine-loving squire of a bygone generation, at whose ample and hospitable board the lawyer had often sat when associated in the work of the sessions. He was a county magistrate, and had sat in parliament as knight of his shire.

Turning now to the middle classes we meet a "Marchaunt," acute in his dealings, and if not always prosperous, able to impress others with the belief that he is so. He can speak of little else than his business, but is cautious not to say too much. Four well-to-do Burgesses, whose dress bespeaks their wealth, and members of their respective guilds, at a time when the city companies were really haberdashers, weavers, &c., as indicated by their names. Like the traditional alderman, they are fond of good living, and bring with them a professed cook.

The gentle upright "Maunciple," ever mindful of his employer's interests; the not less able but utterly unscrupulous "Reeve" or Bailiff, an "unjust steward," overbearing to his inferiors but serving his master efficiently, though from motives purely selfish, and abusing the confidence which his ability earned him for the purpose of lining his own nest; the coarse, vulgar, and brutal "Mellere;" and the humble "Plowman," who in his narrower field exhibits the same simple Christian life and example of charity as his clerical brother; with the "Schipman" and the "Wyf of Bathe," complete the motley company.

"The Schipman" is a genuine sailor, brave, hardy, and master of his craft, more in his element in a storm in the Bay of Biscay than on a horse. Not troubled with an over-nice conscience, he was ready to combine the character of a freebooter with that of trader, not unlike the Raleighs and other privateer captains of a later age.

The "Wyf of Bathe" is, besides the "Lady Prioresse," and her attendant nun, of whom, however, we have no description—the only female personage in the company. It seems strange that Chaucer, who elsewhere shows his high estimation of womanly virtue, and especially of good wives, should not have given some other female characters, corresponding, for example, to the Manciple or the Frankleyn. If not a caricature, and there is no reason to suppose her to be such, she presents a dark picture of the morality of women of her class. A well-to-do cloth-worker from the west of England, trading on her own account, she belongs to the same grade of society as the group of city liverymen. Violent in temper, bold and wanton in dress and manners, loud, coarse, and loose in her language, and as loose in her morals, she is a living satire on the mere conventional observance of the externals of religion.

Such are the *dramatis personæ* of this matchless Prologue, which in less than nine hundred lines brings before our eyes nearly the whole of English society in the fourteenth century more vividly than the most laborious history.

The tales which follow reflect the minds of the narrators, but that part of the work Chaucer did not live to complete. The Prologue is, however, the most valuable as the most original portion, and from the light it throws on the manners and thoughts of our countrymen of that generation, deserves the most careful study.

LIFE OF CHAUCER.

THE father and grandfather of Geoffrey Chaucer were well-to-do citizens and vintners of the city of London. The guilds and city companies were at that time what their names imply, associations of men engaged in the same trade or industry, and, accordingly, we find John Chaucer, the father of the poet, keeping a wine-shop and hostelrie on the banks of the Thames, near the outfall of the Wall Brook, probably where the Cannon Street Station now stands, and here Geoffrey was born and spent his early years.

What education he gave his son, and whether he intended him for the professions of the law or the church, or for the less ambitious career of a citizen, we do not know.

The author of the "Court of Love" represents himself as "of Cambridge, clerk;" but even if this could be proved to mean that he was a student of that university, there are very strong grounds for believing that the poem has been wrongly attributed to Chaucer. There is, in fact, not a shadow of evidence that Chaucer studied at either Oxford or Cambridge, though Leland asserts that he had been at each.

Young men designed for secular callings frequently finished their education by attaching themselves to the households or retinue of some nobleman, with whom they enjoyed the advantages of introduction to good society, and sometimes of foreign travel on political or military enterprises.

John Chaucer attended Edward III. and his Queen Philippa in 1338 in their expedition to Flanders, but in what capacity we have no means of learning. In 1357 we find a Geoffrey Chaucer in the household of Elizabeth, wife of Lionel, third son of Edward, and if he were our poet he doubtless owed his appointment to his father's former connection with the court. In 1359 he served, still probably in attendance on Lionel, with the army of Edward in France, and was, as he himself informs us, taken prisoner, but ransomed in the following year at the ignominious peace of Bretigny.

In 1367 and the following years we find entries in the Issue Rolls of the Court of Exchequer and in the Tower Rolls of the payment to him of a pension of twenty marks for former and present services as one of the valets of the king's chamber. While in attendance on the members of the royal family he had formed an unreturned and hopeless attachment to some lady of far higher social rank, which inspired his first original poem, the "Compleynt to Pite;" and since, in his elegy on the death of Blanche, the young wife of John of Gaunt, entitled "The Dethe of Blaunche the Duchesse," he confesses that the "sickeness" that he "had suffred this eight yeere" is now past, there can be little doubt that she was the object of his affection.

From 1370 to 1380 he was engaged in not less than seven diplomatic missions to Italy, France, and Flanders, for which he received various sums of money, as well as a valuable appointment in the customs; in 1374 he obtained the lease of the house above the Aldgate from the corporation of London, and in this year the Duke of Lancaster granted him a pension of £10 for services rendered by himself and his wife Philippa. We hear of a Philippa Chaucer as one of the Ladies of the Bedchamber to the Queen Philippa as early as 1366; but since in the "Compleynte to Pite" in 1367 he expresses a hope that his high-born lady love may yet accept his love, it is probable that she was a namesake or cousin of Geoffrey, and that he did not marry her until the nuptials of the Lady Blanche with the duke had extinguished his hopes of ever making her his wife, perhaps, indeed, not until after her death.

In 1372–73 he remained in Italy for nearly a year on the king's business, where, if he did not make the acquaintance of Petrarch and Boccaccio, as is supposed by some, it is certain that the study of the Italian poetry and literature exerted a marked influence on his own writings, as seen in the works composed during this middle period of his literary career, the "Lyfe of Seynte Cecile," "Parlament of Foules," "Compleynt of Mars," "Anelide and Arcite," "Boece," "Former Age," "Troylus and Cresseide," and the "House of Fame."

At a later period he wrote his "Truth," "Legende of Good Women," his "Moder of God," and began the "Canterbury Tales."

In 1386 he was elected a knight of the shire for the county of Kent, and in this year we obtain the only authentic evidence of his age. In a deposition made by him at Westminster, where the parliament was met, in the famous trial between Richard, Lord Scrope, and Sir Robert Grosvenor, the council clerk entered him, doubtless on his own statement, as forty years old and upwards, and as having borne arms for twenty-seven years. We may therefore conclude that he was born in 1339, which would make him at that time forty-seven years old, and the twenty-seven years would count from his coming of age. He would thus have been eighteen when he became page to the Princess Elizabeth, and twenty in the French war.

His patron, John of Gaunt, was now abroad, and John's rival, the Duke of Gloucester, in power. The commission appointed by the parliament to inquire into the administration of the customs and subsidies, dismissed him from his two appointments in the customs, and soon after even his pensions were revoked. He was thus reduced from affluence to poverty, and his feelings are expressed in his beautiful "Balade of Truth;" to add to his troubles his wife died next year (1389), yet amid grief and penury he went on with his merry "Canterbury Tales."

With the reassumption of the government by Richard II. in 1389 and the return of the Lancastrian party to power, fortune smiled once more on the poor poet, but his income was at best small and uncertain, and his tenure of some petty offices short and precarious. He wrote about this time his translation of a "Treatise on the Astrolabe, for his son Lewis," his "Compleynt of Venus," "Envoy to Skogan," "Marriage," "Gentleness," "Lack of Steadfastness," "Fortune and his Compleynt to his Purse," besides carrying on his greatest work, the "Tales," which was left unfinished at his death. This event occurred in 1400 at a house in the garden of the Chapel of St. Mary, Westminster, the lease of which he had taken in the previous year.

He was probably in his sixty-first or sixty-second year when he died.

In the carefully executed portrait by Occleve, preserved among the Harl. MSS., and the words which he puts into the mouth of "mine host" of the Tabard, as well as from admissions no less than deliberate expressions of feeling scattered through his works, we can form a pretty complete notion of his personal appearance, habits, and character.

Stout in body but small and fair of face, shy and reserved with strangers, but fond—perhaps too fond—of "good felaweschip," of wine and song; passionately given to study, often after his day's labours at the customs sitting up half the night poring over old musty MSS., French, Latin, Italian, or English, till his head ached, and his eyes were dull and dazed. But his love of nature was as strong as his love of books. He is fond of dwelling on the beauties of the spring-time in the country.

> " Herkneth these blisful briddĕs how they synge,
> And seth the fresschĕ flourĕs how they springe!"

he bids us on a bright April morn. And more fully describes his own feelings in the "Legend of Good Women."

> " And as for me, though that I konne but lyte,
> On bokĕs for to rede I me delyte,
> And to hem give I feyth and ful credencĕ,
> And in myn hert*e* have hem in reverencĕ
> So hertĕly that there is gamĕ noon
> That fro my bokĕs maketh me to goon,
> But ẏt be seldom on the holy day,
> Save certeynly whan that the monethe of May
> Is com*e*n, and that I here the foulĕs synge,
> And that the flourĕs gynnen for to sprynge,
> Faire wel my boke, and my devocioun!"

He was thoroughly English, one of the educated middle class, the class to which England owes so much; he had by his connection with court acquired the refinement and culture of the best French and Italian society, without rising above or severing himself from the people to whom he belonged. He could appreciate genuine worth in squire or ploughman, purity and courtesy whether in knight or in the poor country parson. All were his fellowmen, and he sympathized with all. He had known every change of fortune, of wealth and want, and his poetry often reflects his state for the time being; but even in his old age, when poor, infirm, and alone, his irrepressible buoyancy of spirts did not desert him.

Freshness and simplicity of stylé, roguish humour, quaint fun, hearty praise of what is good and true, kindly ridicule of weakness and foibles, and earnest denunciation of injustice and oppression, are among his most marked characteristics.

ESSAY ON THE LANGUAGE OF CHAUCER.

The age of Chaucer marks an epoch in the history of our language, when what is called the New English arose from the complete fusion of the Norman French with the speech of the common people.

So long as our kings retained their continental possessions, and our nobles ruled England as a conquered country, looking to Normandy, Picardy, and Anjou as their fatherland, whence they continually recruited their numbers, the union of the races was impossible; but with the final loss of Normandy by King John in 1204 the relations of the two countries were changed, and in the reign of Edward I. and Edward III. the Norman barons were compelled by circumstances to consider this their home, and France a land to be reconquered by the arms of their English fellow-citizens and subjects. The change of sentiment required, however, time for its completion. For two or three generations the nobles felt themselves a superior race and clung to their own language, disdaining to adopt one which they had been accustomed to look on as fit only for "villans and burghers." Though they could not abstain from intercourse with the common people, the separation of language persisted, and served to mark the man of rank from the plebeian.

In the metrical chronicle of Robert of Gloucester, which from internal evidence must have been written later than A.D. 1280, and is referred by Mr. K. Oliphant to about A.D. 1300, it is plainly asserted, that to speak French was in his time considered a mark of good breeding:

> " Vor bote a man couthe French me tolth of hym wel lute,
> Ac lowe men holdeth to Engliss, and to her owe speche yute:
> Ich wene ther ne be man in world contreyes none
> That ne holdeth to her kunde speche bote Engelond one;
> Ac wel me wot vor to conne bothe wel yt ys,
> Vor the more that a man can the more worthe he is."

> [For unless a man know French one thinks but little of him,
> But low men hold to English, and to their own speech well;

I believe there are no men in the countries of the world
That do not hold to their native speech but England only;
But well I know that it is well to understand both,
For the more that a man knows the more worth (able) he is.]

The blending of the languages began with the fourteenth century. The ballads of Lawrence Minot, composed probably at intervals between 1330 and 1360, and the "Vision of Piers Plowman," which seems to have been written soon after 1365, contain an infusion of French words; but the effects of the complete coalescence of the two peoples, and the impulse it gave to the development of the common language, are to be seen in the poems of Gower and his friend Chaucer, which belong to the latter part of the fourteenth century. The translation of the Bible into English by Wycliffe at the same time served to raise the literary character and to fix the grammatical forms of the language, which had been passing through a period of rapid changes.

The old system of inflexions had been undergoing a process of disintegration, the several endings in *e*, *a*, *en*, and *an*, by which cases and numbers, moods and adverbs, had hitherto been distinguished, were fast being for the most part replaced by the single form of *e*, partly as a result of a law in every language that words become worn down by use, like pebbles in a water-course smoothed and rounded by friction,—a change which proceeds most rapidly in the absence of a written literature, and tends to convert synthetic or inflected into analytic or uninflected languages; and partly in obedience to a law less general, only because its conditions are not universal, viz. that when two races speaking different languages are merged into one, they, though freely using one another's words, being unable to agree as to their inflections, end by discarding such syllables altogether so far as can be done without loss of perspicuity.

To this law may be referred the triumph of the plural sign *s* or *es* over *en* or *an*, since French and English found themselves here at least at one, and the same may be said of the prefixes *un* and *in*, and the suffixes *able* and *ible*.

This detrition of inflexions, as we may call it, culminated in the Elizabethan era in the almost total loss of the final *e*, before the expedients for distinguishing infinitives from participles, adverbs from adjectives, &c., had been reduced to rule. Its loss becomes a stumbling-block to readers of Shakespeare and his contemporaries scarcely less grievous than its retention does to those of Chaucer, appearing in the guise of inexplicable anomalies, and of seeming violations of the most ordinary grammatical rules, which have been laboriously cleared up by Dr. Abbott in his admirable *Shakespearian Grammar*.

But though the new English had fairly established itself as a national and literary language it was still in a state of rapid growth and development, destined to undergo considerable changes in grammar, and even more in orthography, ere it settled down into the form which it has retained without any material alteration from the time of the Stuarts to the present day.

When Chaucer wrote printing was not yet invented; a number of scribes, whose attainments did not perhaps go beyond the mere mechanical art of writing, were accustomed to work together while one read aloud the book to be copied, and each spelling as he was in the habit of pronouncing, and probably not seldom misapprehending the meaning of the author, it was inevitable that countless variations should arise in the text, some representing the sound of the spoken word, others the changes which had taken place in the pronunciation between the dates of the original MS. and the particular copy, and others still such clerical blunders as are even now familiar to every one who has had to correct the proofs of any literary work.

After the sixteenth century, when our language had become stereotyped as it were in grammar and orthography, various attempts were made to modernize the spelling of so popular a poet as Chaucer so as to make him intelligible to ordinary readers, but with the most unhappy results; the men who undertook the task being almost entirely ignorant of the essential features of the language of the original work.

With a prose writer the consequences might not have been more serious than the loss to posterity of an invaluable philological landmark; but where metre and rime were involved, the result has been the entire destruction of all that constitutes the outward form of poetry; while by the subsequent attempts of editors to restore to the mangled verses something like metrical rhythm, the language itself has been wrested and corrupted to an extent which would have rendered hopeless all idea of its restoration, were it not that in the Harleian MS. 7334 we possess a copy executed by a competent hand very shortly after the author's death, and though not free from clerical errors, on the whole remarkably correct. The late learned antiquary Mr. Thomas Wright adopted it in his edition, with a few emendations; but since the publication by Mr. F. T. Furnivall of his six-text edition of Chaucer we have the means of collating it with the Ellesmere, Hengwrt, Corpus, Lansdowne, Petworth, and Cambridge MSS. Dr. Morris has availed himself of the first three in his edition of the "Prologue, the Knightes and the Nonnes Tales" (Clarendon Press Series); but though he has consulted the last three also in cases of difficulty, he has found them of little real use.

Chaucer himself seems to have had forebodings of the mutilations which were to befall his works, having already suffered from the negligence of his amanuensis. for in the closing stanzas of his "Troilus and Cressida," he says,

> "Go litel booke, go litel tragedie,
> And for ther is so grete diversitè
> In Englisch and in writing of our tong.
> So pray I God that non miswritĕ thee,
> Ne thee mismetre for defaut of tong.
> And rede wherso thou be or eles song
> That thou be understond."

And in language more forcible than elegant he imprecates a curse on this unlucky man—

> "Adam Scrivener, if evere it thee bifal
> Boece or Troilus for to writĕ new,
> Under thy long lokkes maist thou have the scall,
> But after my making thou write more trew.
> So ofte a day I mote thy werke renew,
> It to correct and eke to rubbe and scrape,
> And al is thorow thy negligence and rape."

HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TO THE TIME OF CHAUCER.

The term Anglo-Saxon, which is currently used to designate the language supposed to have been spoken by our forefathers before the Norman Conquest, is an invention of modern times, and has not even the advantage of convenience to recommend it.

It was not until the close of the thirteenth and beginning of the fourteenth century, when the fusion of races was followed by the rise of a truly national spirit and an outburst of literary activity, that a national language had any existence. The greater part of the thirteenth century was a period of dearth and degradation, a dark age to the student and lover of our glorious tongue. What little was written was in Latin or French, English being considered not only by the proud nobles, but unhappily also by a pedantic priesthood, as unworthy of cultivation, and consequently, being relegated to the ignorant peasantry, it suffered the loss of thousands of good old words. Hitherto the clergy had written in the language of the people to whom they belonged, and had produced many works of great literary merit. These, however, may be easily recognized as belonging to two great dialectic divisions—a north-eastern and south-western, besides minor subdivisions. The great sundering line may roughly be drawn from Shrewsbury through Northampton and Bedford to Colchester, and represents the original partition of the country between the Angles and the Saxons. On the former fell the full force of the Danish invasions, and as we go further north we find the proportion of Scandinavian words and forms to increase.

In the earliest times these languages were almost as distinct as High German and Low German (Platt Deutsch), and the so-called Anglo-Saxon dictionaries confound and mingle the two without distinction. The infusion of Danish or Norse into the Anglian led naturally to a clipping and paring down of inflections, a feature common to all mixed languages; whereas the speech of Wessex, the kingdom of Alfred, preserved much longer its rich inflectional character. Yet even these south-western people seem to have called themselves English rather than Saxons. At any rate King Alfred tells us that his people called their speech English, and Robert of Gloucester says of English, "The Saxones speche yt was, and thorw hem ycome yt ys." Bede, an Angle, calls them Saxons, but the word is of rare occurrence before the thirteenth century. Procopius in the sixth century calls them Frisians.

It is, however, from the East Midland chiefly that the new English arose, where the monks of Peterborough compiled the history of England in English, in chronicles which were copied and scattered throughout the land. Their dialect incorporating all that was good from the others laid the foundation of that literary language which, again taking up a large French element, was destined to become the speech of the nation at large.

Early in the fourteenth century Robert of Brunne, called also Robert Manning, living in Rutland, in the same linguistic province as the monks of Peterborough, wrote *The Handlyng Synne*, which marks an era in the history of our language and literature. In it