

commercial enterprise and military conquest, all tend to diffuse it over earth's surface. Other tongues and dialects are fast subsiding before it. And though other tongues, as the Greek for instance, have had almost world-wide dominion, and yet have yielded to that grey old conqueror, Time; we cannot think that such will be the lot of the English language. We believe that ages after this, Milton and Shakspeare, Macaulay and Scott, will be read with rapture on the banks of the St. Lawrence, the Hudson, and the Mississippi; yea, in southern latitudes, in far-off Australia and New Zealand, ours will, in all probability, be the language to which all others will succumb, and contribute their beauty and their strength. How truly prophetic are the words of our poet Daniel, who, almost three hundred years ago, sang thus of the English language:

“And who in time, knows whither we may vent
The treasures of our tongue? To what strange shores
This gain of our best glory shall be sent,
T' enrich unknowing nations with our stores;
What worlds in the yet unform'd occident,
May 'come refined with th' accents that are ours.”

The English language is derived from many and varied sources, and contains nearly one hundred thousand words. Its groundwork is the Anglo-Saxon, a language now dead, but formerly used by the Anglo-Saxons, one of the tribes of that Saxon confederacy which, about the beginning of the sixth century, invaded Britain, and drove the Celts, the ancient inhabitants, and rightful owners of the soil, to the wilds and fastnesses of Wales and Scotland. In colloquial intercourse, and also in many of our eminent prose writers and poets, the Saxon element is closely adhered to. Ingram observes, that, at the lowest estimate, fifteen out of twenty words used on ordinary occasions are of Saxon origin. It is also worthy of comment, that of the fifty-eight words of which the Lord's Prayer is composed, fifty-five are immediately or originally derived from the Saxon.

The invasions of the Danes do not seem to have made any considerable change in the language, the two nations being of closely allied origin—both of them belonging to the great Gothic family. Words of Danish origin are employed chiefly in the N. of England, and the S. W. of Scotland.

In the year 1066, William, Duke of Normandy, having succeeded in bringing England into subjection, surrounded himself with men of his own country, and thereby introduced the Norman language, a compound of French and Gothic. Shortly after the conquest, the Normans attempted to extirpate the English tongue, and substitute the Norman. This experiment was carried on for nearly three hundred years, but to no effect; the vernacular had too firm a footing—it was the every-day language of the body of the people. The law, therefore, was repealed; and since that period, English has been the official, as well as the common language of the nation.