

## ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

To trace the origin and analyze the construction of our admirable language, is an object of the first importance to all who wish to acquire an accurate knowledge of their mother tongue.

The English language was originally formed from the languages spoken by various tribes from the north of Germany, who settled in this country in the fifth and sixth centuries. The principal of these tribes were the Jutes, the Saxons, and the Angles. On invading this country they drove the greater number of the aboriginal inhabitants into the western and mountainous parts of Wales, where the descendants of these inhabitants are now located, and where the language of the ancient Britons, now called "The Welsh," is still spoken. Soon after these settlers arrived, the southern part of Britain was called *Angleland* (land of the Angles), or England; and the language which they spoke, formed from the amalgamation of their various dialects, was called the Anglo-Saxon language.

At the present time we find four great families of languages spoken in Europe, viz. the Celtic, the Latin, the Slavonic, and the Gothic. The Celtic languages are spoken by the Welsh, the Highlanders (or Gaels), the Irish, and the inhabitants of the Isle of Man; their respective dialects being called Welsh, Gaelic, Erse, and Manx. The Latin language, with various modifications, is spoken by the Italians, the Spaniards, the French, and the Portuguese. The Slavonic is spoken by the inhabitants of Russia, Poland, Croatia, and some parts of the Austrian empire. The other inhabitants of Europe speak the Gothic languages, which are also called Teutonic. The English is one of the Gothic family of languages, and as such resembles the German, the Dutch, the Flemish, the Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian.

More than half of the words in the English language are from the Anglo-Saxon, including the more common, homely, and familiar words—as, *come, go, can, will, good, see, hear, above, home, bad.* The others are mostly from the Latin, or the language of the ancient Romans. Some are from the French, Celtic, Greek, German, and Danish languages. Latin words were introduced by the clergy of the Romish church after Christianity was established, and by learned men, after the revival of the study of the ancient languages in the 15th and 16th centuries. French words were added by the Normans after the Conquest. About the beginning of the 17th century, in the reign of James I., our language had become almost the same as it is now, and was then generally called the *English* language.

When the *Bible* had been translated into English, and, by being printed, had been spread among the people; when the *Book of Common Prayer* had been compiled, and with the Bible, was read to the people in the churches; and when great writers, such as Spenser, Shakspeare, Ben Jonson, Bacon, and Milton, had published works which were universally read and admired—the language became fixed; and since those times it has not undergone any material change; although numerous Greek and Latin words have been introduced, chiefly during the present century, to supply new terms required by the rapid extension of the arts and sciences.