

lic. Mr. Larned does not give us any insight into the operation of the Free Libraries' Act, but we all know that it has come into force only in Toronto, Hamilton, Guelph, and a few other places. Yet, Massachusetts, with the same population as Ontario, has over 200 free libraries with an aggregate of over two millions and a half of books. But Ontario still holds its own as a premier Province, even in this respect, since the other Provinces have not adopted legislation of the same useful character. Many other compilations in this fine volume merit the study of the publicist, statesman and historian.

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J. G. BOURINOT.

### The New English Dictionary.\*

ALMOST every year brings to us a new dictionary of our language, very often with a great flourish of trumpets. But the one to which we refer is not yet complete, nor does it depend for its success upon the push of its publishers alone. The new dictionary, now in course of publication by the Clarendon Press, does, however, merit our attention and deserves our heartiest support.

The great French Dictionary of Littré is a credit to the genius of that famous lexicographer, and is the largest complete work of its kind. The great German dictionary, begun by the Grimm brothers, is being pushed steadily on by their successors, Prof. Heyne and others, but, although numbering some eight volumes, is not yet complete.

The thought of publishing an historical dictionary of the English language was first entertained by members of the Philological Society in the year 1857. Workers volunteered, and an immense amount of preliminary reading and "quotation gathering" was gradually done. In 1878 the delegates of the Clarendon Press agreed to undertake the publication, and in 1879 the work of printing was begun. Up to the present, vols. I and II, comprising the letters A. B. and C., and part of vol. III, the letter E., are completed. Altogether there have been some 1,300 workers engaged under the direction of Dr. J. A. H. Murray as editor. Latterly Henry Bradley has also become an editor. Over 5,000 works, from the various periods of our literature, have been read, and over 3½ millions of quotations have been made, alphabetically arranged, and all are stored up in the "Scriptorium" in Dr. Murray's garden. But the editors are still asking for more quotations and sending out lists of words in respect to which they are still in need of light.

The aim of the editors and many sub-editors is to give a history of the English vocabulary from the middle of the twelfth century down to the present time. The old English vocabulary before that time is not included because of the almost total disuse of inflections after the twelfth century, and because of the great number of Old English words which had become obsolete in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The treatment of the individual words is taken up under the following heads: (1) *Main* words which include single, radical or derivative words, and all compounds and phrases treated in separate articles; (2.) *Subordinate* words, or variant or obsolete forms of main words, words of bad formation, and those of doubtful existence or of alleged use; (3.) *Combinations* of main words, viz., compounds in which the first part is a main word, such as *burnfire* for *bonfire*.

Each individual word passes under a very strict examination, in which English scholars are assisted by the best authorities of other lands, such as, for instance, Prof. Sievers, of Leipzig; Prof. Kluge, of Freiburg; Prof. Noreen, of Upsala; Prof. Meyer, of Paris, and Prof. March, of Lafayette College. According to the result of this examination, the words are classified into (1) *Natural*s, which include all *native* words like *father*, and all *fully naturalized* words like *street*, *wine*, *church*; (2.) *Denizens*, or words *fully naturalized in use* but not in *form*, *inflection* or *pronunciation*, such as *aide-de-camp* or *locus*; (3.) *Aliens*, such as *shah*, *cicerone*, and (4) *Casuals* or foreign words in occasional use only. To this department of identification "also belongs pronunciation, grammatical designation, specification (music, botany and the like), spelling and status." This last is a very interesting feature in which this dictionary excels all other English lexicons.

In the historical sense we have no right to refuse to regard a word because it is not in some supposed or generally accepted classical author. Were we to listen to the purists of our day, our language would rapidly lose its robust life, pine away

and die as did the classic tongue which Cicero strove so hard to preserve from corruption. The English language in its entirety (and when followed back to its Indo-germanic parentage) might be likened to a wonderful mine from which may be taken innumerable specimens, each with a history as delightful as an eastern tale, and as instructive in thought, in religion, or in philosophy as any lecture ever given, or any book ever written. The Irish ditch-digger, by his pronunciation, carries us away back to the days of Henry II, and the newsboy's slang is a telescope through which we look into the far future of our language and are surprised to see the words we now scorn placed among the best and brightest jewels. We often talk of the *origins* of our mother tongue as if they were to be found in some remote past. Like the sailors, who were reported dying with thirst while the fresh waters of the Amazon were all about them, so we fail to recognize that we might find evidence of healthy life in our language all around us, were we not oftentimes wilfully blind. No language can show a more unbroken history than our own; no language is more replete with lessons on language growth, both in forms and in meaning. Words die out, become obsolete, and words are born or are not traceable to any of the ancient "roots" which have been the *bête noir* of so many students. Of the 60,549 words cited under A. B. and C., 10,497, or 24 per cent., of the main words have become obsolete. New words or former slang words and the like which have won their spurs are, under B alone, *bam*, *bamboozle*, *blabber*, *blurt*, *box* (a blow), *brunt* and a host of others.

After the words have been properly identified, their *morphology*, or form history, is touched upon under the heads of derivation, phonetic descent and miscellaneous facts of history.

Next in order is the tracing of the signification or meaning of the word, what new meanings have been taken on, what older meanings lost, in short, the evolution of the significance is fully treated, and in the logical, historical order. What could be more interesting or better reflect the life of a people than the evolution in meanings of *corn*, *craft*, *cross*, *critic*? Words to be treated in parts of the work yet unpublished, and which have interesting histories, are *dizzy*, *giddy* (in Old English *gid* means *song*) and *silly* (in Old English *selig*—*fortunate*, *lucky*). Quotations in all cases are full and well arranged.

It is needless to say that the letterpress is excellent. The Clarendon Press is a model in that respect.

The work is being pushed forward as rapidly as possible, consistent with thoroughness, under the combined editorship of Dr. Murray and Mr. Bradley, but of course no time can be set for completion. Safe it is to say that when completed, it will be an inexhaustible mine on the history of our language, and it is to be hoped that a copy will be found in every public library of whatever kind throughout the country. The day for a thorough study of the history of our mother tongue is rapidly approaching. Such a study is replete with information, is of the highest order as mental discipline and very fruitful in its results.

Such being the nature of the work, there is little possibility of comparisons being made between this work, and such as the Standard, the Century or the International. The purpose is entirely different. The latter have their place, of course, as popular works, but none of them can claim to be strictly historical.

\* \* \* L. E. HORNING.

### Correspondence.

#### ONTARIAN FAMILIES.

To the Editor of The Week:

Sir,—While thanking you for your complimentary notice of "Ontarian Families," I hope you will allow me an opportunity of correcting a false impression which seems to exist, and which you echo in your article. The list of families proposed to be included in the work cannot be regarded as by any means exhaustive of those who should be in it. It may easily be doubled or trebled, so far at least as the mere enumeration of names goes. The present work is being issued as Vol. I., and if sufficient encouragement is offered, it will, I hope, be followed by at least a second volume.

It is a surprise to me to find that any of the names in the list referred to can be regarded as "dubious," or in any way unworthy of being recorded in family history.

As for snobbishness, nothing of that sort will find encouragement at my hands. But what is snobbishness? People sometimes appear to others to be affected with that moral disease without being themselves conscious of it.

Toronto, 12th Nov., 1894.

E. M. CHADWICK.

\* A new English Dictionary on historical principles: founded mainly on the materials collected by the Philological Society; edited by James A. H. Murray and Henry Bradley. Oxford: at the Clarendon Press. New York: Macmillan & Co.