

spoken." The soil is not absolutely a virgin soil; the mine is not absolutely unworked; although the main body of the precious ore is yet to be extracted.

Meantime, one capital subject there is, and a domestic subject besides, on which, strange to say, neither nation has thought fit to raise any monument of learning and patriotism. Rich, at several eras, in all kinds of learning, neither England nor France has any great work to shew upon her own vernacular language. *Res est in integro*; no Hickes in England, no Malesherbes or Menage in France, has chosen to connect his own glory with the investigation and history of his native tongue. And yet each language has brilliant merits of a very different order; and we speak thoughtfully when we say that, confining ourselves to our own, the most learned work which the circumstances of any known or obvious case allow, the work which presupposes the amplest accomplishments of judgment and enormous erudition, would be a history of the English Language from its earliest rudiments, through all the periods of its growth to its stationary condition. Great rivers, as they advance and receive vast tributary influxes, change their direction, their character, their very name; and the pompous inland sea, bearing navies on its bosom, has had leisure through a thousand leagues of meandering utterly to forget and disown the rocky mountain bed and the violent rapids which made its infant state unfitted to bear even the light canoe. The analogy is striking between this case and that of the English language. In its elementary period it takes a different name—that of the Anglo-Saxon; and so rude was it and barren at one stage of this rudimental form, that in the *Saxon Chronicle* we find not more than a few hundred words—perhaps from six to eight hundred words—perpetually revolving, and most of which express some idea in close relation to the state of war. The narrow purposes of the *Chronicle* may, in part, it is true, have determined the narrow choice of words; but it is certain, on the other hand, that the scanty vocabulary which then existed, mainly determined the limited range of his purposes. It is remarkable, also, that the idiomatic forms and phrases are as scanty in this ancient *Chronicle*, as the ideas, the images, and the logical forms of connection or transition. Such is the shallow brook or rivulet of our language in its infant stage. Thence it devolves a stream continually enlarging, down to the Norman era; through five centuries (commencing with the century of Bede) used as the vernacular idiom for the intercourse of life by a nation expanding gradually under the ripening influence of a pure religion and a wise jurisprudence; benefiting besides, by the culture it received from a large succession of learned ecclesiastics, who too often adopted the Latin for the vehicle of their literary commerce with the Continent, but also

in cases past all numbering wrote (like the great patriot Alfred) for popular purposes in Saxon—even this rude dialect grew and widened its foundations, until it became adequate to general intellectual purposes. Still, even in this improved state it would have been found incommensurate to its great destiny. It could not have been an organ corresponding to the grandeur of those intellects which, in the fullness of time, were to communicate with mankind in oracles of truth or of power. It could not have afforded moulds ample enough for receiving that vast literature which, in less than another five hundred years, was beginning to well forth from the national genius.

Hence, at the very first entrance upon this interesting theme, we stumble upon what we may now understand to have been the blindest of human follies—the peculiar, and without exaggeration, we may say, the providential felicity of the English language has been made its capital reproach—that whilst yet ductile and capable of new impressions, it received a fresh and large infusion of alien wealth. It is, say the imbecile, a “bastard” language—a “hybrid” language—and so forth. And thus, for a metaphor, for a name, for a sound, they overlook, as far as depends on *their* will—they sign away—the main prerogative and dowry of their mother tongue. It is time to have done with these follies. Let us open our eyes to our own advantages. Let us recognize with thankfulness that fortunate inheritance of collateral wealth, which by inoculating our Anglo-Saxon stem with the mixed dialect of Neustria, laid open an avenue mediately through which the whole opulence of Roman, and ultimately of Grecian thought, plays freely through the pulses of our native English. Most fortunately the Saxon language was yet plastic and unfrozen at the era of the Norman invasion. The language was thrown again into the crucible, and new elements were intermingled with its own when brought into a state of fusion. And this final process it was, making the language at once rich in matter and malleable in form, which created that composite and multiform speech—fitted, like a mirror, to reflect the thoughts of the myriad-nuded Shakespeare, and yet at the same time with enough remaining of its old forest stamina for imparting a masculine depth to the sublimities of Milton, or the Hebrew prophets, and a patriarchal simplicity to the Historic Scriptures.

Such being the value, such the slow development of our noble language, through a period of more than twice six hundred years, how strange it must be thought, that not only we possess at this day no history, no circumstantial annals, of its growth and condition at different eras—a defect which even the German literature of our language has partially supplied; but that, with one solitary exception, no eminent scholar has applied himself even to a sin-