HISTORY OF
MODERN COLLOQUIAL ENGLISH
A HISTORY OF MODERN COLLOQUIAL ENGLISH

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'A SHORT HISTORY OF ENGLISH'
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PREFACE

The collection of the material upon which this book is based, the arrangement of this, and the writing of the book itself have occupied about five years, during which I have also had many other distractions and occupations. Whatever may be the shortcomings and defects of the present treatment, it is vain to attempt to extenuate or excuse them in a short preface. On the other hand, such merits and new information as the book may possess may be left for the discriminating reader to discover for himself.

I offer no apology for having omitted any specific treatment of the history of the English Vocabulary, and of English Syntax, during the centuries between Chaucer's day and our own. Nor do I conceive that those who have a first-hand acquaintance with the subject will make it a ground of reproach to the author, that having, after all, done something, he has not attempted to do everything. It seems reasonable that a writer should select for himself the aspects of a subject with which he will deal. As I have myself not been altogether idle, during the last twenty years or so, in attempting to add to knowledge in various domains of the history of our language, I think I am entitled to invite others to give the world systematic treatises, even if these should be no more exhaustive than the treatment of other aspects in the present volume, upon historical English Syntax, and upon English Semantics. I have observed that these are branches of English studies which many people consider important for somebody else to tackle.

With regard to the present work, the facts here stated are with very few exceptions derived direct from the sources, that is from the documents themselves. The conclusions drawn from these, both the larger generalizations and the more minute points, are independently arrived at, and represent my own interpretation of the facts. I have not looked up specially everything that has previously been written upon the innumerable questions here discussed, but have preferred to make my own inferences from my own material. In all cases where I have taken facts or conclusions from others, I hope and believe that I have made full acknowledgement.

In the slight sketch of Middle English dialectal features given in
Chapter II, I have made use to some extent of the well-known monographs of Morsbach, Lekebusch, Dölle, and Frieshammer, but most of the statements are based upon my own observations. As regards the Modern Period, the credit due to a pioneer belongs to Dr. R. E. Zachrisson, who in Chapter II of his important work on *The Pronunciation of English Vowels, from 1400 to 1700*, has emphasized the importance of what I have called *occasional spellings*, in the writings of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Dr. Zachrisson's collection of these spellings, and his method of dealing with them, have resulted in the need for a modification of the views previously held concerning the chronology of sound changes characteristic of the Modern period. My own treatment of the vowels in accented syllables is based primarily upon the spellings of the kind referred to, and I am personally convinced that further investigations, over a wider period of time, will vindicate more and more, in the main, the views first stated by Dr. Zachrisson. I believe I differ from some of his conclusions—I have not compared my results point by point with his—but it appears to me incontestable that we must put the 'vowel shift' much further back than we were formerly accustomed to do. Future research into the history of English pronunciation will, I think, concern itself rather with the testimony of the unconsciously phonetic spellings in the documents of the past, and with that of rhymes, than with the writings of the old grammarians. It is often said that great caution is needed in using rhymes to establish the existence of this or that pronunciation. This is perfectly true, and the same might be said of every other source of information concerning the speech of earlier generations. Great caution is necessary in all research, and so are courage and imagination.

I have utilized the phonetic spellings of the earlier documents in an attempt at the history of the pronunciation of vowels in unaccentuated syllables, see Chapter VII, and in dealing with the changes undergone by consonantal sounds, see Chapter VIII.

It is satisfactory to find that many features of pronunciation hinted at by the writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are often expressed by the occasional spellings much earlier. The writers on pronunciation not infrequently adopt, as a phonetic spelling to express their meaning, forms practically identical with those occasional spellings, into which writers of letters and other documents quoted below so often slip unconsciously. Thus it is rather striking to find for instance *Porchmoune* for 'Portsmouth' mentioned by Elphinston as a vulgarism in his day, to find the name spelt a hundred years earlier with *-ch*, in the Verney Memoirs, and again more than a hundred years earlier still by Admiral Sir Thomas Howard (cf. p. 292, below). In the face of this
evidence, it is hardly possible to doubt that the pronunciation referred to by Elphinston existed about two and a half centuries before his day.

The references to the old orthoepists and grammarians in this book are taken either from my own notes, made some years ago from the copies of these works in the Bodleian, from modern reprints, or, in a few cases, from copies of the originals in my possession. The quotations from Mulcaster's *Elementarie* are in all cases from a photographic reproduction of the Bodleian copy which my colleague Professor Campagnac kindly lent me.

Books and collections of documents written in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, from which forms are taken, are included in the short Bibliography at the beginning of the book. I have not thought it worth while to draw up a list of works belonging to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as it seemed most probable that all of these would be known and accessible to readers of this book.

My gratitude is due to various friends who have helped me in different ways. Dr. John Sampson read the first four chapters in manuscript and gave me the advantage of his advice on many important points. His kindly interest in the work, continually displayed, and his friendly encouragement, are not the least considerable benefits I have received from him.

Professor Elton was so kind as to read the proofs of Chapters IV and V, and to make many valuable criticisms and comments. I regret very much that I was unable, owing to the stage which the work had reached, to adopt many of his suggestions, or to develop further several interesting lines of investigation which he indicated. I can assure him that I am none the less grateful to him, and that his informing remarks will not be wasted.

To Professor R. H. Case I owe a peculiar debt. Not only have I consulted him constantly on all kinds of minor points, chronological, biographical, textual, and never in vain, but I have derived enduring pleasure and inspiration, and much valuable information, from our frequent discussions concerning all manner of literary questions, both of a general and special character. Mr. Case most generously placed not only his stores of knowledge and the benefit of his highly cultivated taste, but also his library at my disposal. To him I owe my acquaintance with several important sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works, notably *Laneham's Letter*, and the *Comparison of the Stages*; he also lent me copies of these and several other rare books and tracts.

I offer my best thanks to Professor Campagnac for lending me his photographs of Mulcaster, to Professor Foster Watson for bringing the *Correspondence of Dr. Basire* to my knowledge, and for the loan of
the volume, and to Professor C. H. Firth for calling my attention to, and lending me, vol. 1 of the *Verney Papers*, and for pointing out the importance of the *State Papers* of Henry VIII. I tackled the latter too late in the day to do more than skim a few forms from the surface of a single volume. The references to the passages from *Boswell’s Life of Johnson* on pp. 167 and 212 were most obligingly sent me by Mr. A. Okey Belfour of Belfast.

Miss Serjeantson of the University of Liverpool has helped me in many ways: in verifying and checking a large number of references, in copying out several rather long extracts from seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sources, and in some cases, by supplying me with actual forms—for instance a 3rd Pers. Sing. in -s in Bokenam which I had overlooked. For these not unimportant services, promptly and cheerfully rendered, my gratitude is now expressed.

In conclusion, I feel that if this book succeeds, on the one hand, in so interesting the general reader that he is impelled to study the subject for himself in the sources, and if, on the other, the special student of English should find in it such a collection of facts and inferences, and such a mapping-out of the ground as shall serve as the basis for further discussion and investigation, then the volume will have justified its existence.

HENRY CECIL WYLD.

THE UNIVERSITY OF LIVERPOOL.

December, 1919.
PREFATORY NOTE TO THE THIRD EDITION

The new matter included in this Edition will be found chiefly in the appropriate places in the footnotes, though some have been incorporated in the text. When the additional material, and the discussion which this involves extend beyond the limits of a footnote, recourse is had to an Appendix. The new forms, and the topics dealt with for the first time in this book, are all indexed separately from the original Indices, which are left as they were.

The List of Sources, which in the earlier editions presented a somewhat confused appearance, has been recast, printed more clearly, and made to include later sources of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

A brief list is added of some of the more important books which have appeared since this work was first published.

I am happy to think that the price of the present Edition may bring the book within the reach of many students of English who found the cost of the first two Editions prohibitive.

HENRY CECIL WYLD.

Alvscot.

March, 1936.
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ALPHABETICAL LIST OF SOURCES
Fifteenth to Eighteenth Centuries.


Aragon, see Catherine.

Ascham, Roger. Toxophilus, 1545; The Scholemaster, 1563.

Basire, Dr. and Mrs. Correspondence of (1634-75). Ed. Darnell, 1831.


Beaufort, Margaret. 1443-1509. Ellis' Orig. Letters, i. i. 46, &c.

Bekington, Bishop, see Margaret, Queen of Anjou.


Boleyn, Queen Anne. Letters, 1528, Ellis' Letters, i. 1; i. 2; ii. 2.


(printed from Author's MS.).


Celibacy, Vows of, 1459-527. In Lincoln Diocesan Documents, q.v.


Cox, Captain, his Ballads and Books, see Laneham.


Creation of a Knight of the Bath, see York, Henry, Duke of.


Edward VI's First Prayer Book, 1549; Second Prayer Book, 1552.


Gill, Alexander. Logonomia Anglica (2nd Ed.), 1627. Ed. Jiriczek, Q. and F. 90. Strassburg, 1903. (Important because Gill was Milton's headmaster at St. Paul's, and the poet adopted several of his spellings.)


Henry VIII, King. Letters, 1515 and 1544, in Ellis' Orig. Letters, i, vols. i and ii.


Hungerford, Lady, Letters of, c. 1560-88, in Society in the Elizabethan Age. Hubert Hall, 1887.

Instructions to Lord Montjoie, 1483, in Letters and Papers, vol. i.


Irish Documents, 1489-93, in Letters and Papers, vol. i.

Knight, Bishop of Bath and Wells. Letters, 1515, in Ellis, ii. 1, and iii. 1.


Latimer, Bishop Hugh. (1) Seven Sermons; (2) Sermon of the Plough, 1549. Arber's Reprints.


Ellis, ii. 2, p. 60, &c.


Margaret, Queen, of Anjou, and Bishop Bekinton. Letters, 1420-2. Camden Society.
Margaret, Queen of Scotland. Letters, 1503, Ellis, i. 1, p. 42.
Mary, Queen of Scots. Letters to Knollys, 1568, Ellis, i. 1. 253.
Mason, John. Letter, 1535, Ellis, ii. 2. 54. &c.
Monk of Evesham, Revelation of, 1482. Arber’s Reprints.
More, Sir Thomas. Letters, 1523-9, Ellis i. 1, and i. 2. Cit. p. See also Robynson, and Roper.
Pery, Thomas. Letter to Mr. Ralph Vane, 1539, Ellis, ii. 2. 140, &c.
Rede me and be not wroth, 1528. Arber’s Reprints.
Rouen, Siege of, in Short English Chronicle, c. 1420.
Sackville, Thos., see Buckhurst.
Shrewsbury, Countess of. Letters, 1581-2, Ellis, ii. 2. 63, and ii. 3. 60, &c.


Smith, Sir Thomas. (1) De Republica Anglorum (in English), 1565; (2) Letters, 1572–6, in Ellis, ii. 3; iii. 3.


Suffolk Wills (Bury Wills and Inventories), 1463–1569. Ed. Tymms, Camden Society, 1850.


Worcester, Ordinances of, 1467, in Toulnin Smith's English Gilds.


RECENT WORKS ON THE ENGLISH OF FIFTEENTH AND LATER CENTURIES.

Darbishire, Helen. Introduction and Notes to Morgan MS. of Book I of Paradise Lost. See Milton (ii) in List of Sources. (Contains elaborate study of Milton's spelling.)


Some Recent Works on M.E. Dialects.


REMARKS ON PHONETIC NOTATION

In a book like the present, which deals with a large number of questions connected with pronunciation and its changes, it is absolutely indispensable that we should be able to express rapidly, accurately, and unambiguously the precise sounds we are dealing with. This cannot be secured without the aid of Phonetic Notation.

The main essentials of a Phonetic Notation are: that there shall be a separate symbol for each separate sound; that no symbol should be written if there is no sound to be expressed—e.g., no r is required in part, to express the pronunciation of most educated Englishmen at the present day; we therefore write [pær]; that the same symbol should always express one and the same sound—thus [s] is always the initial sound in soap, [z] always the final sound in buzz, &c.

When it is remembered, for instance, that the official spelling takes no cognizance of the many sound changes discussed in Chapters VI, VII, VIII, it is evident that 'spelling' has nothing to do with the various problems involved, and that since we are dealing with sounds, we must have a simple and accurate means of expressing the phonetic facts we are considering. Thus the word flood, although often so spelt in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, may have, at a given time, three different pronunciations among different classes of speakers. In writing about these we can express the various sounds quite clearly by writing [fl, u, a], but not by speaking about the 'oo-sound'.

If the simple principles just enumerated be borne in mind, and if the reader does not associate the symbols in [ ] with the sounds which they express, often very inconsistently, in the traditional spelling, he will find very little difficulty in making out what sound is referred to. Even if he does experience some trouble at first in getting a clear idea of the sound intended, he may comfort himself by remembering, that if a phonetic notation were not used, he would be unable to gain any idea on the subject at all.

TABLE OF PHONETIC SYMBOLS USED IN THIS BOOK

Note that whenever phonetic symbols are used in the text they are enclosed in [ ].

VOWELS.

Symbol                Sound expressed.

[r] = English i as in bit.
[i] = English ee as in see; or French i in si. The vowel of the latter is short.)
[e] = English e in bet; when long [ê] the French è before r as in père.
[e] = French é in dé; when long [ê] = German e in lehnen.
[œ] = English ‘short a’ as in had; [œ] = the same sound long.
[ü] = English oo as in hoot.
[u] = English u in put.
[ô] = German o as in Bohne.
[ö] = English aw as in Law, or a in hall.
[φ] = French eu as in eux.
[œ] = French eu before r—peur.
[a] = German short a in hass; when long, [â] = English a in hart or in father.
[a] = English vowel in cut, &c.
[a] = unstressed vowel in water, &c. This is one of the commonest vowel sounds in English; it occurs only in unaccented syllables.
[ʌ] = the vowel in the English words, curd, term, heard, worm, bird.

The diphthongs [ai, oi, ei, au, ou, eo, iɔ] are simply combinations of certain of the sounds mentioned in the table; they are heard in bite, boy, cake, how, note, hare, here, &c., respectively.

Definitions. The following technical terms for different kinds of sounds are often used:—Back Vowel = a vowel made with the back of tongue as [â]; Front Vowel, one made in the front or middle of tongue as [i]; Rounded Vowel, one in which the lips play a part, as [ü, y], &c.; Tense Vowel, one made with the tongue, hard, braced, and muscally tense [i]; Slack Vowel, one made with the tongue soft, and muscally slack, as [ɪ]; High, Mid, Low Vowels: these terms refer to the different degrees of height of the tongue in articulation; [i, e, œ] are respectively High, Mid, and Low, Front, Slack vowels. Raising refers to the movement of the tongue in passing, e.g. from [ê] to [ɪ].

Consonant Symbols.

[χ] = sound of ch in Scotch loch.
[ʒ] = sound of g in German sagen.
[j] = sound of y in yacht, or j in German jagen, &c.
[j] = sound of ch in German -ich.
[w] = sound of u in English wall, &c.
[w] = sound of uh in Scotch or Irish while, &c.
[k] = sound of k as in king.
[g] = sound of g as in good.
[ŋ] = sound of ng as in sing.
[ʃ] = sound of sh as in shoot, &c.
[ʒ] = sound of ge in French rouge, or of j in jamais.
[t, d, b, p, n, m, l, r, s, v] express the same sounds as in ordinary spelling.
[p] = sound of English th in think.
[θ] = sound of English th in this.
[s] = sound of s in so, or of c in city.
[z] = sound of z in haze, or of s in is, was, easy.

Definitions. A Stop, or Stop Consonant, is one in the pronunciation of which the air-passage is completely closed, or stopped, for a moment—p, t, k. These are sometimes called explosives. An Open Consonant is one in the articulation of which the air-passage is only narrowed, so as to allow a continual stream of air to pass—[t, s, p, ʃ], &c. A Voiced Consonant is one during the articulation of which the vocal chords vibrate and produce a kind of ‘buzz’—[z, v, θ, ʒ], &c., which may be contrasted with the Voiceless, or Un-voiced, corresponding sounds [s, f, ɻ, ʃ], &c.
[h], the aspirate, or ‘rough breathing’—as in hat, &c.—is not included among the consonants because it is not consonantal in character.