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**THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION**

**Pamphlet No. 53**

**The Teaching of English in the  
Universities of England**

**By**

**R. W. Chambers, D.Litt.**

**With a Note in Comment on the Article by John Bailey**

**July, 1922**

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THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION

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The Teaching of English in the  
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THE KINGDOM ASSOCIATION



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# THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN THE UNIVERSITIES OF ENGLAND

## I. A SERMON AGAINST PESSIMISM

‘ Now, therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, thou and all this people, into the land which I do give to them . . .

Only be thou strong and very courageous.’

It may be reaction after the war that makes some of us pessimistically ready to tolerate wrong things which we know it is our duty to resist. Among much that is cheering and altogether excellent, one chapter in the *Report of the Departmental Committee on the Teaching of English in England* seems to accept what it admits to be evils ; evils which do not exist at present, and which need not come unless we deliberately go out of our way to choose them.

I am not overlooking the very great power of the *Report* for good. This appears on almost every page, and makes it seem ungrateful for a teacher of English to criticize details. Above all, its impartiality is praiseworthy. Any one who looks through the list of members of the Committee will see that it consisted of people whose interests are rather in English literature than in English language, and in literature rather modern than mediaeval. In spite of this, the justice with which the Committee have striven to hold the balance ought to be recognized. They show that sense of fair play which one always expects from a body of Englishmen and Englishwomen. The Committee emphasize the importance of mediaeval studies, and of the study of the English language. They insist that the normal English ‘School’ should be a ‘School’ of Language as well as Literature.

But protest must be made against the despondent view which the Committee take as to the qualifications to be expected from the candidate for English Honours.

It is because of this despondent view that, when we come to the chapter on the teaching of English in the Universities, we find the advance which the Committee have elsewhere made all along the line suddenly held up at this most critical point. Turned aside by fears assuredly not justified, the Committee almost remind one of the British in Saxo Grammaticus, stricken with panic in the moment of

their victory over Hamlet by corpses of the slain, which that practical and energetic young prince had propped up to resemble a new array of foes.

There is no difference as to our ideals : the only difference is that I am convinced that these ideals can be attained and are being attained, except in one direction. For we must, I fear, admit that few candidates for English Honours will come to the University with much knowledge of Greek. But the *Report* sadly admits more than this. After emphasizing the importance of 'some acquaintance with Greek or Latin literature, and if possible with both . . . in the interest of the ideally complete study of English', the *Report* continues :

'But the ideally complete in human knowledge is seldom attainable, even in Universities. It is certain that, though nearly all candidates for Honours in English will know some other language than their own, the majority will know very little Greek or Latin, and that, as things are at present, a great many will know none at all. So far, the ideal will not be attained.'<sup>1</sup>

No ideals will be attained, or maintained, unless we are prepared to strive for them.

When we consented, with regret, to the abolition of compulsory Greek for the London Degree, it was on the ground that there was not time in the schools for both Greek and Latin, and that it was better to learn one thing well than two badly. It is simply not true that a great many English Honours candidates know no Latin at all.

Leaving details for investigation later, it is enough to state that at Oxford Greek or Latin is compulsory for Responsions; at Cambridge Latin is compulsory for the 'Previous Examination'. At London Greek or Latin is compulsory in the Intermediate Arts, and students who take Latin in the Intermediate must have taken it previously in Matriculation. Similarly, Greek or Latin is compulsory at the Matriculation or the 'Intermediate Arts' stage, or at both, at Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Sheffield, Leeds, Bristol, and Durham (Newcastle). So, of all the English Universities (and we are only concerned with English Universities) there is not one in which it is possible, under the Regulations, 'as things are at present' for candidates for Honours in English to know 'no Greek or Latin at all'.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the compulsory minimum of Classics demanded is not

<sup>1</sup> § 199. The Committee are not using the word 'candidate' loosely, but are thinking of the student at the end of his course. This is clear from the context.

<sup>2</sup> Special arrangements for Oriental students (e. g. Sanskrit instead of Greek or Latin) do not, of course, concern us here.



great. But, if we assume that our English Honours students usually reach only the compulsory minimum, we shall be wronging them; they take English Honours because they like English, not because they are too feeble to take Honours in other subjects. The Committee themselves state that at Cambridge the present ordinary practice is to take a Classical or Modern Language Tripos before going on to English. Each University has its own methods; but they agree in encouraging the English Honours student to know more of Latin than the compulsory minimum. In the newer Universities Latin is very commonly taken as a 'Subsidiary' by English Honours students. To such students their Latin may be a subordinate consideration; but a knowledge of Latin which would seem poor enough to a Classical Honours man may be invaluable to the English Honours student. A fine swimmer may say of some puffing brother with a bad style 'He can't swim'; but in a boating accident the difference between being a poor swimmer and no swimmer at all may be a difference of life and death. The minimum of Latin upon which the Universities all insist, with the further knowledge which they encourage, makes the difference between live studies and dead studies. It is vital to maintain it, and fatal to ignore it.

But, further, the Departmental Committee were assured that candidates for English Honours will also be ill versed in Modern Languages. This also the Committee clearly believed to be true. For it is upon these two pessimistic and, as I shall try to show below, most inaccurate assumptions that they base their opinion that (notwithstanding the extremely strong evidence of University teachers to the contrary, which they quote) Old English and Early Middle English are not essentials for University Honours students of English Language and Literature.<sup>1</sup>

It should be emphasized, again, that the Committee were not led to this recommendation by any contempt for Old and Middle English, but simply by the belief that the candidate for Honours in English Language and Literature, coming to the University badly equipped, as they assume he will, will not have time, except in rare cases, to master both the Old English and the 'Mediterranean' sources. The Committee record, quite enthusiastically, how witness after witness put before them the arguments for the continuity of spirit in English literature, and the continuity of the language from the earliest times:

'Old English should be read, not as a dead thing, but as a living part of English literature. Nothing was more striking than the way the English people did not alter.' (Sir Walter Raleigh.)

<sup>1</sup> §§ 207-10.

‘Anglo-Saxon literature gave the English outlook on life, and this had at all times been the same.’ (Miss Wardale.)

‘There was really no break in English prose from the earliest Chronicle to the present time.’ (Professor de Sélincourt.)

‘For the study of the history of the language as language, or of the historical development of English prose, Anglo-Saxon was necessary.’ (Mr. Nichol Smith.)

‘He felt more and more a great sense of the continuity of the English language, and of the development of English prose from the very earliest stage to the present day.’ (Professor Wyld.)

The evidence of Professor Ker was given, as it has often been given before, in the same direction :

‘Historical grammar and the history of the language ought not to be regarded as a philological side of the study distinct from the history of literature.’

But it is unnecessary to multiply witnesses against those who would make a break between Old and Modern English, or between Language and Literature. The case for continuity in our literature is expressed by the Committee themselves in language which it would be difficult to rival :

‘For, if the sources of Chaucer’s matter are mainly Mediterranean, he is himself English of the English ; and if we look for earlier appearances of the most permanent, at least of the deepest and most serious characteristics of our race, it is not in any Mediterranean books that we shall find them, but in things written in this island, connected though they be with Chaucer by the slenderest of links, in *Beowulf*, and Alfred and Bede. Anglo-Saxon, then, and Early English, even if not the sources of the writings of Chaucer are, at least in a true sense, sources of Chaucer himself. And, of course, they are still more sources of the contemporary school of alliterative poetry of which *Piers Plowman* is the most famous example.’<sup>1</sup>

This is indisputable, though it has seldom been so fearlessly expressed. Equally indisputable is Professor Elton’s statement that ‘Latin and modern languages’ (French at any rate) ‘*must* be known if English literature is to be made intelligible’.

And further, the Committee ‘have no hesitation’ in coming to the conclusion that the normal English ‘School’ should be one comprising both Literature and Language.<sup>2</sup> Now, will any teacher of the English Language in any University tell us that our language can be studied, *as it should be studied in an Honours School of a University*, without at least some knowledge of Latin, French, Old and Middle English ?

<sup>1</sup> § 200.

<sup>2</sup> §§ 206, 207.

If there be such a man, I should like to take him by the hand, and introduce him to Professor Wyld. Obviously it is possible to deliver lectures, and to illustrate them by the sound laws of languages or stages of languages which the student does not know, but can reproduce in the examination-room with sufficient accuracy to procure a degree. This is the last kind of teaching the Committee would wish to see in a University. What we all wish is that the student should, equally with his teacher, be trying to find out things: taking in the post-graduate stage his actual share in research, but in the pre-graduate stage equally sharing in spirit. Such sharing is even more helpful to the teacher than to the student. But it cannot be, unless the student brings proper qualifications to his task. We must will the means, if we will the end.

And these qualifications are entirely within our own power. The experience of many years proves that if we insist on the candidate for English Honours coming to us with that knowledge of Latin and French which a well-educated boy or girl of eighteen should have, we can draw this kind of student to our 'School' in overwhelming numbers. On the other hand, in the teeth of this experience, we may assume henceforward that the English Honours candidate will often know no Latin and perhaps no French, or, if he does, that he will not have the ability to add that knowledge of Anglo-Saxon which has been demanded in the past. If we plan our Honours School on this assumption, then we shall get what we ask for. Candidates will flee to our City of Refuge to escape from the consequences of want of ability, or of failure to acquire a good secondary education, which may exclude them from other Honours Schools. And the mischief will not stop there. The first-rate English Honours student nearly always comes up from school first-rate in other subjects besides English. If English gets the reputation of being a 'soft option', such students will not take it. English, as the Committee most justly point out, is at the present moment anything but a 'soft option'. It must keep its ideals, if it is to continue to attract the best students: for these students generally leave school with quite sufficient knowledge to qualify them to read for Honours in other subjects, if English falls into disrepute.

We must accordingly insist in the future, as we have in the past insisted, that our students shall bring up from the schools a fair knowledge of Latin. Some French they all know. If they are to read for Honours in the English Language, they must enlarge their knowledge of these languages, and add, as in the past—it is indispensable—a knowledge of Old English. This is not, as the Committee

suppose, an ideal, possible only in rare cases. It is the consistent practice of the English 'Schools'. Why should we take up the cry of the faint-hearted spies sent to survey the land of promise: 'Surely it floweth with milk and honey, but we are not able to go up?' The penalty of faint-heartedness was forty years wandering in the wilderness.

## II. A CHOICE OF EVILS

'Here is a choice of two things, and neither of them is good.'—*Njals Saga*.

'If then we go behind Chaucer, as it is generally agreed to be part of the ideal that we should, where are we to go? To the languages or influences which are sometimes described in one word as "Mediterranean", that is to Old French and Italian or mediaeval Latin, or on the other hand to Old English and Anglo-Saxon?

'The answer is again, we think, "to both in the rare cases in which that will be possible; to either when both are unattainable".'

In these words the Committee outline their view of what an Honours Degree in English Language and Literature should entail, in the period before Chaucer.<sup>1</sup>

Now, an Honours Degree in English Language and Literature at present entails, in every University in England, some knowledge *both* of Latin or Greek at the outset, and of Old English later. This double demand is based upon two facts. (1) All western civilization goes back to Rome. (2) But equally, as the Committee so excellently put it, 'the earlier appearances of the deepest and most serious characteristics of our race' are to be found, not in any 'Mediterranean' books, but in books written in Anglo-Saxon times. Further, as witness after witness pointed out, the English language and English prose, from the earliest times to the present day, are continuous.

All this gives unity to our existing English Honours course. It is based upon facts and confirmed by experience.

Now let us examine the course which the Committee would substitute. Whilst every University in England regards some knowledge of Greek or Latin as essential, the Committee would allow a great many candidates for English Honours to know no Greek or Latin at all. Whilst every University in England further regards some knowledge of Old and Early Middle English as essential for a degree in English which includes Language, the Committee, though advocating a degree which includes Language, would excuse the candidate from

<sup>1</sup> § 200.

any pre-Chaucerian English, if he can offer instead Old French and Latin, particularly Mediaeval Latin.

Why *Mediaeval* Latin? Have not the Committee, in their desire to be fair, rather over-emphasized the mediaeval side? The Committee, as we shall see below, would permit the student to rely on translations for his study of the masterpieces of literatures which have influenced English. If so, is not the provision made for the textual study of Mediaeval Latin rather disproportionate? Is not Mediaeval Latin one of the few things that could be studied in translations? Bede or Asser, or Geoffrey of Monmouth, or Jocelyn of Brakelond owe their importance more to their matter than to any untranslatable beauties of style. Above all, this provision for Mediaeval Latin seems disproportionate when we remember that, according to the scheme put forward by the Committee, the people who are to make this special study of Mediaeval Latin are precisely those who are studying only Modern English Literature from Chaucer onwards.

Now, if a student of English, and especially Modern English, is to go back behind Chaucer in Old French and Mediaeval Latin, but not in pre-Chaucerian English, will not his course lack unity?

Within the lifetime of Chaucer's younger contemporaries, the reign of Mediaeval Latin and Mediaeval French in England was over. Standard English had arisen. If we study the records of town guilds and corporations, every ten years following Chaucer's death shows an amazing growth in the use of English. Mediaeval Latin becomes the butt of every scholar, till Colet could write in 1518,

‘ All barbarity, all corruption, all Latin adulterate, which ignorant blind fools brought into this world, and with the same hath distayned and poisoned the old Latin speech and the very Roman tongue which in the time of Tully and Sallust and Virgil and Terence was used . . . I say that filthiness and all such abusion which the later blind world brought in, which more rather may be called “ blotterature ” than literature, I utterly abanish and exclude out of this school.’

And, just as Latin ceases to be studied through a Mediaeval atmosphere, so equally *Mediaeval* French ceases to influence English literature, as new models arise.

The value of Old English to the student of English literature is precisely, as the Committee so excellently point out, that it stands for something permanent in our literature, ‘ the deepest and most serious characteristics of our race’. But Chaucer's Old French and Mediaeval Latin sources are not the most weighty things in Old French or Mediaeval Latin. Can the same permanent, deep and

serious interest be claimed for them? What bearing have they on modern English literature as a whole?

And, with regard to language, it is impossible to investigate how English has been influenced by Mediaeval Latin and Mediaeval French, if we exclude as unessential the study of pre-Chaucerian Middle English—that is, of English in the very period when, Englishmen being so largely bilingual, these influences were working most vigorously.

So, to give real cohesion, we must add on the one hand a study of pre-Chaucerian English; and on the other hand of Classical Latin and Modern French—the things which have really influenced Modern English literature. This is what has been done in the past. Why should the Committee fear that it will be possible ‘only in rare cases’ in the future?

Our student of Mediaeval Latin origins *must* study pre-Chaucerian English, if he is to understand how his Mediaeval Latin influences are working; equally our student of Old and Middle and Modern English *must* study Latin. Indeed, I am so far from accusing the Committee of any prejudice against Anglo-Saxon studies, that what most disturbs me is their willingness that students shall be turned out with an Honours Degree in English Language and Literature, knowing indeed Anglo-Saxon and Middle English, but knowing not a word of Latin.

Such students may subsequently have to teach the English Language in the schools to boys of sixteen who have already been learning Latin and French for from three to five years. Not one of these boys but must see that his teacher has not got the tools necessary for his craft.

But, it will be objected, on p. 211 the Committee do demand from the English Honours student a knowledge of ‘one or more foreign literatures’. True, but on turning over the leaf we find that our Honours student is to be allowed to derive his knowledge of his foreign literature from translations; provided only his motto is ‘not text-books, but translations’ or ‘not text-books till after translations have been read’. How far translations suffice to enable a man to understand how a foreign literature has influenced English literature may be left for discussion elsewhere: they cannot enable him to understand how another language has influenced the English language.

The normal Honours Degree in English, the Committee insist, should be a degree in both literature and language.<sup>1</sup> But, if so, the

<sup>1</sup> § 207.

man holding it should be able to teach the historical development of the English language. The man attempting this without any knowledge of Anglo-Saxon or Middle English will not expose himself in quite the same measure as the man attempting it without any knowledge of Latin, because his pupils are, in this latter case, as ignorant as he. But in neither case will the teachers be able to answer the questions which every intelligent schoolboy must put to them. Curiosity on linguistic subjects is one of the most deeply rooted of human instincts; such teaching stifles it.

In suggesting that problems of the language can be tackled without making pre-Chaucerian English compulsory, the Committee were evidently influenced by what the language teachers told them; but I fear they have not quite understood that evidence. It was urged by Professor Wyld that—

‘The problems of Old English were comparatively simple compared with some recent problems from the fifteenth century. The problems were more interesting, more vital, more living, more literary, more human, and really more difficult, after Chaucer than before.’<sup>1</sup>

Most of us, I think, would agree. In London, at any rate, the language teaching has, for the past dozen years, been increasingly concerned with the period after Chaucer.

But knowledge of Old English and of Middle English is an essential requisite for the solution of the problems of the period after Chaucer. If a teacher of Mathematics were to tell us that the deductions and riders arising out of the last twenty-four propositions of the First Book of Euclid were more interesting and more difficult than those arising out of the first twenty-four, this would not mean that students might begin their study of Euclid in the middle of the First Book. Neither does the statement that the most interesting problems lie in the period after Chaucer mean that in solving them we can dispense with a knowledge of the language before Chaucer. If any one doubts this, let him turn to such a book as Professor Wyld’s *History of Modern Colloquial English*. Of course the veriest dabbler might read such a book, and find it both interesting and instructive. But we are dealing with the serious study of the English language in our Universities. The student ought to undertake this study, not in the spirit of a Cook’s tourist, being conducted upon a journey regarding which he has no responsibility, but in the spirit of a young explorer accompanying a more skilled traveller in mapping out some unknown land. Unless the student is to read the book in the spirit of

<sup>1</sup> § 204.

unintelligent acquiescence in whatever his master may tell him, he must bring to it a knowledge of English before Chaucer.

The fact is that those who would insist upon the study of the English language as part of an English Honours Course, whilst leaving it optional whether the student knows any Old or Early Middle English, are, with the best of intentions, bringing about the very state of things which they most wish to avoid.

The Committee criticize with severity the teachers of English language in the Universities during the latter half of the nineteenth century. These teachers, the Committee assert, were dominated by German influences. From this followed several unfortunate consequences, one being that they approached their subject from the angle of comparative philology.<sup>1</sup>

As a matter of piety to our founders, I hope, in another place, to investigate this alleged German domination, and its 'unfortunate consequences'. Such retrospect is out of place here; but from the practical point of view it is vital to remember that, in the nineteenth century, candidates for English Honours knew some Greek. It was natural for students to approach the oldest stages of English from the angle of comparison with that Greek grammar and Greek vocabulary to which, at the moment, they were giving more attention than to almost anything else. In London, till 1902, Greek and Latin, and a third subject such as History, French, or Mathematics, were demanded from the English Honours student throughout the whole of his course. There was simply no time for the study of those problems of later English which, as the Committee quite justly record, are not only more interesting, *but also more difficult*, than the comparatively simple problems of the more primitive stage of the language. Yet it was desirable that an Honours student of language should have some insight into the working of those linguistic laws, the discovery of which was one of the great achievements of the nineteenth century. Assuming the student to know Greek, it is astonishing what light can be thrown, by a few simple laws, upon these primitive stages; elementary comparative philology may become a very live and helpful study. It may be carried too far, by an unwisely enthusiastic teacher who will take students into regions where they have not the knowledge to follow him. But that is a danger not limited to Germanic philology: a fact sometimes forgotten by those who attack that branch of learning.

But in 1903 the amount of Greek required in London was reduced to a minimum: after 1906 that minimum was no longer required.

<sup>1</sup> § 204.



Similar changes took place in other Universities. It became impossible any longer to teach our students much that it was quite reasonable to teach them when they were all studying Greek.

Yet the position was not hopeless: it merely called for readjustment. If the great majority of our students no longer had any Greek, they could translate with sufficient accuracy to satisfy an examiner, from and into Latin. Their knowledge of Anglo-Saxon was of a less thorough kind—they had read a good amount, though they had not that grammatical grip on the language which makes translation into it possible. Their knowledge of Gothic was again much less: they had read part of a Gospel in Gothic, and had some idea of the forms of nouns and verbs. They had read specimens of a good many Middle English dialects. Every student had to take a ‘subsidiary subject’ up to the graduate stage, and French was a most popular ‘subsidiary’: this involved the study of selected Old French texts. Students who did not take French as their ‘subsidiary’ had nearly all passed the Intermediate French—that is to say, they had satisfied the examiners that they could translate from any ordinary modern French texts unseen, could translate into French and write a French essay. To a student who knows so much French and some Latin, elementary Norman French offers few difficulties.

Now these languages provide exactly the equipment which is needed for the study of the history of modern standard English. The situation has accordingly been adjusted on these lines: and this is the meaning of the change, which the Committee observe and approve, by which the later stages of the English language are now increasingly studied, rather than comparative Germanic Philology.

But just as Germanic Philology, without Greek, is a study torn up from its roots, so also the history of the later stages of the English language, without any knowledge of the pre-Chaucerian stages, would be a study torn up from its roots. The Committee suggest that an Honours Degree in English should include a study of the English language, but they would allow the students either on the one hand to know no Anglo-Saxon or on the other no Latin; by this suggestion they are, in fact, cutting the ground from under our feet just as we are getting again on firm land. They are suggesting something which is exactly parallel to the study of Germanic Philology without Greek: advanced study without the necessary preparation.

Of course, popular lectures can be given even on abstruse subjects to a quite unprepared audience. But we are not now dealing with

popular 'Extension' lectures given to tired working people but with the lectures of a University Professor, in a University, delivered to men who have been exempted for some years from the care of earning their living, in order that they may co-operate with their teacher in intelligent learning.

The Committee indicate the lines upon which they think the English language will be most fruitfully studied in the pre-graduate stage. They quote, with just approval, the view of Professor Atkins that 'the study of place names, and of family names, should form part of a living linguistic course'. Certainly. But not of a pre-graduate course *in which the study of Old and Early Middle English is optional*. The curse of the study of place-names, which has made it the hunting ground of every quack and every faddist, is that people have insisted on guessing from the modern form of the name, when the only method is to trace the word to its most primitive form, and to explain it according to the sound laws which we know to have been in force, since the place was first named in the Saxon, or it may be the Danish, settlement of England. The study of place-names demands an elaborate knowledge of Old and Middle English sound laws. It will become a suitable study in our Universities *for people from whom a study of pre-Chaucerian English is not demanded* when the ruling of the Queen of Hearts 'Sentence first—verdict afterwards' comes into force in our Law Courts.

Again, the Committee indicate, as a fruitful study in the pre-graduate stage, the study of the meaning of words. They praise the work of the *New English Dictionary* 'which traces the life history of every English word from its infancy to the present day'. How is the student to pursue this study effectively if he is not to trace the word back to its infancy in Old English or Classical Latin?

The 'Schools' of English in the different Universities of England have by now many years of experience behind them. It is therefore not surprising that agreement has been reached, at any rate on these two points: (1) Some knowledge of Greek or Latin must be demanded before the student can begin his more specialized English work. (2) If the degree be an Honours Degree in English Language as well as English Literature, then a study of Old English must be demanded.

Now the Committee very justly say:

'It would be premature, and indeed impertinent, if we were to attempt to lay down in any detail the lines of a perfect "School" of English. That is a problem for time, experience, and the experiments of many Universities to solve.'

Yet they assume that many candidates for Honours in English will know no Greek or Latin at all. They raise the question whether Anglo-Saxon should be *compulsory* for University Honours students of English Language and Literature, and answer the question in the negative. In both cases their verdict is contrary to the unanimous practice and experience of every English University. There may be precedents in Indian Colleges, but these are not to the point, for the Report 'is intended to refer to England only'. Are the Committee quite acting in accordance with their own most excellent precept, when they rather scornfully wave aside the experience of every University with which they are concerned?

### III. THE EVIDENCE

And on what evidence do the Committee arrive at this conclusion that the study of Old and Early Middle English is not necessary for all Honours students of a 'School' of English Language and Literature? Against the great mass of evidence of those who have been giving their lives to teaching the subject, they quote four weighty witnesses. When discussing the study of language, and the place of Old English in such study, they tell us that Professor Chadwick thought it was 'a mistake to compel students of modern literature to read anything earlier than Chaucer'. Professor Chadwick's evidence, as any one will see who will read the first paragraph of § 208, relates to a school of literature alone. He is speaking of the claims of Anglo-Saxon 'purely from the literary point of view'. Whether we agree with him or no, his view that Anglo-Saxon is not necessary to 'students of modern literature' cannot fairly be quoted as evidence that it is not necessary to students of the English language.

The evidence of Mr. F. L. Attenborough is not quoted, but is said to have been on similar lines: if so, it too must stand down. Then we have the evidence of Professor Elton. But Professor Elton's 'School' at Liverpool is quoted by the Committee as an example of a 'School' of pure literature, separated from language. The Committee 'are glad that such an experiment should be made'; but they do not recommend it as a pattern for the normal English 'School'.<sup>1</sup> Yet, in the chapter on 'The study of *Language* in the Universities', dealing with the question of whether Anglo-Saxon should be compulsory for 'University students of English *Language* and Literature', they first quote, and then ground their con-

<sup>1</sup> § 206.

clusion upon, Professor Elton's statement regarding the study of *Literature*.

Finally there is the evidence of Sir Sidney Lee, who

'had great doubts as to whether the study of Old English was always an advantage. There were some students who found it very difficult to interest themselves in it intelligently, and were prone to resort to cram. There should be sufficient elasticity in the curriculum to permit such students to develop more on the literary side'.<sup>1</sup>

But again, it is one thing to say that some students find the study of the Anglo-Saxon language dull, and that these students should be allowed to develop more on the literary side. It is another thing to say that the problems of the English language can be properly studied in an Honours School while we leave Old and Early Middle English optional.

But we must return to the evidence of Professor Elton, which seems to have decided the Committee :

'The students usually arrive ill seen in Latin and modern languages. But these *must* be known if English literature is to be made intelligible. If they have not been learned before, they must be learned during University life. Accordingly the Honours men, though not examined in them for their degree, attend classes in these subjects. They are, I am convinced, "better value" than Old English, and there would be no time for both without cutting down the literary programme unduly.'

As I have said, even if the students were as ignorant as Professor Elton fears, I cannot see how his view that Old English is not essential for a School of Literature can be quoted by the Committee as evidence that it is not essential for a School of Language and Literature. But, *are* the students thus ignorant?

Firstly, as to Latin. The question is rather different from that which was dealt with above. We have seen that at some stage or other in every University in England the candidate for English Honours is bound to show a knowledge of Latin. It is therefore impossible that he should, as the Committee anticipate, often 'know no Latin at all'. Professor Elton's contention is different: it is that if Latin and modern languages 'have not been learned before', so much time must be spent during University life in learning them, that no time is left for Old English.

But either Latin or Greek is a *pre-requisite* to entering the University for an Arts course in nearly all English Universities:

<sup>1</sup> § 208.

at Oxford,<sup>1</sup> Cambridge,<sup>2</sup> London,<sup>3</sup> Liverpool,<sup>4</sup> Birmingham,<sup>5</sup> Leeds,<sup>6</sup> and Durham (Newcastle).<sup>7</sup> At Manchester, the student entering for English Honours must have matriculated in Greek or Latin, or must present a certificate of proficiency up to that standard. Failing either of these qualifications, seeing that the student *must* take Greek or Latin at the Intermediate stage, an extra year's work is demanded.<sup>8</sup> There is no rigid entrance qualification in Latin demanded at Sheffield or Bristol, but steps are taken at both Universities to ensure that the student arrives 'with sufficient knowledge of Latin to profit by the courses'<sup>9</sup> which he will have to pursue in his Intermediate year.

It is true that in London an Arts student *could* formerly matriculate without Latin, though he had of course to take Latin as one of the four subjects for his 'Intermediate Arts' at the end of his first session. The result was that occasionally (though very rarely) one of our students would enter without Latin, and try to cram it up 'during University life': the very evil of which Professor Elton complains. This was met by a regulation which came into force in 1917, insisting that the student must have passed Matriculation Latin, or its equivalent, at latest by the January preceding his Intermediate. The result is that the schools *have* to send people up properly prepared in Latin.

Surely London has taken the reasonable course; if it is found that students are entering for English Honours without proper equipment, we should stiffen up the qualifications necessary for entry, not cut down the qualifications we demand for graduation. Least of all should we cut down these demands to meet an abuse which was always exceptional, and, if we take the necessary steps, will become extinct. Students do *not* come up without some grounding in Latin, and the argument based on the assumption that they do falls to the ground.

I am not claiming that the standard of Intermediate Latin is

<sup>1</sup> *Exam. Stat.* 1921, pp. 25-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Cal.* 1921-2, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> *Int. Reg.* 1921-2, p. 77. A delay of three months is allowed in taking the examination. The regulation is not binding upon those who are already graduates of London in some other Faculty; but such cases very rarely occur.

<sup>4</sup> *Cal.* 1920-1, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> *Cal.* 1921-2, p. 76.

<sup>6</sup> *Cal.* 1921-2, p. 138.

<sup>7</sup> *Cal.* 1921-2, p. 183.

<sup>8</sup> *Cal.* 1921-2, pp. 275, 284.

<sup>9</sup> See Sheffield, *Cal.* 1921-2, pp. 65-6. At Bristol, intending students are recommended to take Latin in Matriculation or the School Certificate examination, as it will be compulsory for Intermediate. Unless they have done this they are 'liable to rejection' (*Prospectus*, 1921-2, p. 7).

a high one. Still, our experience at University College is that those who choose English Honours are certainly not the worst Latin scholars in the College. Last year, the two best students in 'Intermediate' Latin both chose to read English Honours for the Final: the year before, it was not so; but the year before that, again, the Prizeman in First Year Latin chose to read English. Nor do I think our experience is exceptional.

Now as to the alleged ignorance of Modern Languages. Some Universities demand, as a qualification for entrance, a second language (other than English) in addition to Latin (e. g. Oxford,<sup>1</sup> Cambridge<sup>2</sup>). If not at Matriculation, the second language is usually demanded at Intermediate (Manchester,<sup>3</sup> Sheffield,<sup>4</sup> Leeds,<sup>5</sup> Durham-Newcastle,<sup>6</sup> Bristol<sup>7</sup>). As Greek is now seldom offered, the second language is usually French. London is exceptional in not demanding a second language other than English, either at Matriculation or Intermediate. A student intending to take English Honours in London has, at Intermediate, fourteen options in addition to languages, any two of which he is, theoretically at least, free to take, together with his English and Latin.<sup>8</sup> Now this freedom is doubtless open to abuse, and if abused ought to be restricted. But what is noteworthy is that, though open to abuse, it is, in point of fact, very seldom, if at all, abused. Though not compelled by regulations, the overwhelming majority of students hoping to read for English Honours do, in point of fact, take French at the 'Intermediate'.<sup>9</sup> And they would not be doing this unless they had had a good French grounding at school. For the 'Intermediate' French involves the translation, unseen, of fairly difficult prose and verse (there are no set books), translation of a passage of prose into French, a French essay, some stiff grammatical questions, and a conversational test. If students were very weak in French they would be taking one of the other options.

Further, whilst reading for English Honours, every student at London (as commonly elsewhere) is bound to offer, concurrently, a 'Subsidiary Subject', which he has to carry on beyond the Intermediate Stage. In some Universities, including Manchester and Birmingham, this 'Subsidiary Subject' *must* be another language: in practice generally Latin or French. In London a wider range of

<sup>1</sup> *Exam. Stat.* 1921, p. 26.

<sup>3</sup> *Cal.* 1921-2, p. 284.

<sup>6</sup> *Cal.* 1921-2, p. 139.

<sup>7</sup> *Prospectus*, 1921-2, p. 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Cal.* 1921-2, p. 181.

<sup>4</sup> *Cal.* 1921-2, p. 86.

<sup>5</sup> *Cal.* 1921-2, p. 201.

<sup>8</sup> *Reg.* 1921-2, p. 78.

<sup>9</sup> Out of twenty-eight students who, on entrance this year at University College, London, had made up their minds to read for English Honours, twenty-five were taking French in 'Intermediate'.

choice is allowed in 'Subsidiaries': but in practice students generally do not avail themselves of the other options; they take either Latin or French.<sup>1</sup> They would not select these subjects so generally, if they came up from the schools peculiarly weak in them.

But, if these things are so, it is obviously wrong to base a scheme for an Honours Degree in English on the assumption that a great many candidates will know no Latin at all, or the argument that *if* they have not learned any Latin or Modern Languages before coming to the University, they will not have time to learn Old English there. They *have* learnt some Latin and French before coming to the University.

Indeed, it is frequently complained that Latin and French crowd out English in the preparatory and secondary schools. The Committee quote the Report of the Preparatory Schools Head Masters (1916), suggesting a time-table in which out of 32½ hours in the week, 9½ are allotted to Latin, 5 to French, and 3½ to English.<sup>2</sup> In the Secondary Schools the Committee say 'French is probably begun early, but a second language, usually Latin, is not as a rule taken till the age of 11 or 12'.<sup>3</sup> But if this be so, then the average Arts student coming up to the University will usually have been learning Latin for some six years and French for longer. Now I do not deny that, here and there, we find a man or woman, otherwise of Honours calibre, whose education has been so bungled that these six or eight years have been utterly lost, and that the secondary school education has practically to begin again in the University. But to assume that the normal student *reading for English Honours* will be in this state, and to base our normal scheme for English Honours upon that assumption, is, I venture to think, unduly to give way to despondency.

Anyway, our experience in London proves that students can quite well combine a knowledge of 'Mediterranean' languages with Anglo-Saxon; and our experience is in no way exceptional. Take the syllabus of the Honours Course in English Language and Literature at Armstrong College, Newcastle. I quote it as the latest I know: it has only recently been drawn up, and comes into force in 1923. It has experience behind it. Candidates must pass Matriculation, either Latin or Greek being compulsory.<sup>4</sup> Then comes Intermediate,

<sup>1</sup> At University College, out of sixty students now reading for English Honours, twenty-four are taking Subsidiary French (including, of course, Old French); nineteen Subsidiary Latin; three Subsidiary German.

<sup>2</sup> § 95.

<sup>3</sup> § 111.

<sup>4</sup> *Durham Calendar*, 1921-2, p. 183.

at which they must offer two of the following languages, one being an ancient language: Latin, Greek, French, German.<sup>1</sup> After this they must pursue an Honours Course for not less than three academic years; by the end of the first year they must present a certificate of proficiency in one ancient and one modern language,<sup>2</sup> failing which they are not allowed to continue their Honours course in English. This course includes Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, the History of the English Language and of English Literature to 1900; special subjects selected by the candidate, and a subsidiary subject which may be a foreign language (and, if so, will probably be a 'Mediterranean' language), or a philosophical or historical subject.

Now turn from the consideration of this quite admirable syllabus to the recommendation of the Departmental Committee, that

'weight should be given to knowledge both of Anglo-Saxon and pre-Chaucerian English Literature, and of the "Mediterranean" literatures to which Chaucer's debt is so much more immediately obvious; to knowledge of both if possible or, *as that will rarely be attainable at the undergraduate stage, to knowledge of either*.'<sup>3</sup>

The italics are mine.

#### IV. CLASSICAL PARALLELS

There is one other argument brought forward by the Committee, to show why Anglo-Saxon is not necessary in an Honours School of English Language and Literature.

'It has never been held necessary, even for a First Class in the Classical "Schools", that a candidate should know the Aeolic dialect, in which incomparably greater things were written than were ever written in Anglo-Saxon; and there seems to be no good ground for giving the language of *Beowulf* a place of privilege and compulsion not accorded to the language of Sappho.'<sup>4</sup>

Now we are dealing with a degree in English Language and Literature. As to Language: the English language has twelve centuries of recorded history. It is proposed that a student should be turned out with an Honours Degree, even though he is quite ignorant of the first six and a half centuries of this history, and though this ignorance must fatally handicap his researches in the history of the remaining five and a half centuries. Is a parallel really afforded by the argument that the classical scholar is not compelled to offer for his degree a special study of the Aeolic dialect? Doubtless Greek composition is composition in Attic Greek. Nevertheless, the Classical scholar

<sup>1</sup> p. 201.

<sup>2</sup> p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> § 200.

<sup>4</sup> § 209.



does not confine his study of Greek prose to Attic prose, he goes back to the earliest prose extant—to Herodotus; he does not confine his study of Greek verse to Attic verse, he goes back to the earliest verse extant—to Homer. A study of Homer or Herodotus is often compulsory even for schoolboys. The reason why a similar place of compulsion is not accorded to the language of Sappho is, surely, that the nine books of Sappho have been lost. Including all that Egyptian excavations have restored to us, there are, I think, only five fragments which exceed in length half a dozen complete lines, together with perhaps another fifteen of similar length, recovered on strips of papyrus or vellum torn right down, so that one half, more or less, of every line has to be supplied from conjecture. Then there are a few other odd passages, and many odd phrases or words preserved by the ancient grammarians to illustrate some point of metre or dialect. This does not form a satisfactory *corpus* to be prescribed for school or college reading: for the same reason some very fine Anglo-Saxon poems, like the *Ruin*, are excluded from an ordinary college curriculum. But Homer and Herodotus are there to prove that the Classical 'School' does not afford any precedent for allowing difficulties of dialect or archaism to interfere with the complete study of the language.

Now as to the question of literature. It can be argued that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is as worthy of attention as Herodotus, whether we are thinking of the growth of History or the growth of prose. On the other hand, no one would deny that *Beowulf* is not for one moment comparable to the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*. That is an excellent reason why the English student should be encouraged to read some Homer. It is not a convincing reason why he should read neither Homer nor *Beowulf*. Nor is it any reason why, having selected as the special subject of his study English Language and English Literature, he should not be master of his subject.

It is that mastery of the subject, be it Greek or English, which we ought to demand. For a student comes to College, not to finish a course of reading in any one subject, but rather to prepare himself for a life he has to live. Given a literature like Greek, or English, the student cannot be expected, during his College course, to be put through a curriculum which shall exhaust the whole of it. But he should, at the end of an Honours course in Greek, be master of the Greek language. He may, or may not, have read what is left of Sappho. But he knows ordinary Greek, and many of Sappho's most famous lines do not vary seriously from ordinary Greek. He will have read a good deal of Homer, and Homer swarms with Aeolisms.

Our Greek student, then, has had a training which enables him, whenever he wishes, at College or later, to master the extant lines of Sappho in a few evenings. He may not, *as yet*, have unlocked that particular door, but he has the key which will unlock that door and others.

Surely that is the test.

Now look at the position of the English Honours man who has no knowledge of Old or Middle English. The Departmental Committee admit that 'Anglo-Saxon is the chief key to our English life and ideas for a period of some five hundred years'. The English Honours man should be a student of English life and ideas, and he has not got this key. His degree is to be a degree in Language as well as Literature, and here, also, he has not the essential key. And how is he now to get the key? It needs several hours a week for, say, two years, to get a mastery of Anglo-Saxon, and the help of teachers is important. Latin and Anglo-Saxon are things which, if a student does not learn before he leaves College, he will find it difficult to learn later.

The fear is often expressed that an English student may 'sacrifice' the great things of English prose and verse to a study of early literatures. This again seems to me mere pessimism. What should prompt a man to take an Honours Degree in English, unless he has a real love of English literature? We wrong our students if we think otherwise. But, if so, their graduating is not the conclusion of a course of reading, but the beginning of a lifetime's study. The Committee comment upon the difficulty of many things in the English course, such as 'making oneself master of the political philosophy of Burke'. But, can a real understanding of the political philosophy of Burke be gained, except after watching, through many disappointing years, the course of political events? Can a young man or woman of twenty-one be fairly expected 'to be master of' the philosophy outlined by Burke between his fortieth and his sixty-seventh year? I do not mean that a young man cannot be taught, all too easily, to give, in examination papers, the kind of answer that his questioner wants. But how is he the better for being made to repeat prematurely what his elders really feel? There is much which only the years can bring to the student of English literature.

The education that is ever 'completed' was never worth beginning. I see little reason to fear that in insisting that English Honours students shall know some Latin and Anglo-Saxon and Middle English, we are 'sacrificing' Milton or Scott. There is more danger of sacrificing Latin and Anglo-Saxon to a headlong effort to make a student

devour all English literature before he is twenty-one. Does it really much matter whether or no a student reads *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* before graduation? But, if he graduates without learning Latin, he will probably *never* be able to read the *Epitaphium Damonis*. That does matter. The Committee say: 'only a good classical scholar understands and enjoys all that there is to understand and enjoy in Milton', and certainly the man who does not know any Latin must miss a great deal. Equally the student who does not take advantage of the opportunities a University offers him to study his Middle English, will never sympathize with Scott in the same way as the student who does. This last student may not have time to read, before he leaves College, as many of the Waverley Novels as the other. But I do not grant that he has 'sacrificed' Scott to Old and Middle English. If that magnanimous mind had been spared to the world another ten years, what a welcome would have awaited the guest who had arrived at Abbotsford, bearing Kemble's *Beowulf* in one hand and Frederick Madden's *Sir Gawayne* in the other. The man who despises these things will never really appreciate the man who edited and completed *Sir Tristrem*, and prefixed the account of the Auchinleck MS.

#### V. METHODS OF STUDY IN A UNIVERSITY

We are told that the claim that students of the history of the English Language should study Old English 'fails to take account of the equal claims of other sources'.

But does it?

It has been shown above that, for the normal degree in English Language and Literature in English Universities, the student is expected to bring up from the schools a knowledge of Latin, and, whether compelled or no, does also bring up a knowledge of French. During his first year at college, the 'place of compulsion' belongs rather to Latin (or Greek) than to Old English: French is also very generally taken. After Intermediate, Old English is compulsory in every 'school' of English Language and Literature; but in many Universities the student has to continue approved courses in one or more languages other than English, till he reaches a satisfactory standard: this is the case at Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Sheffield, and Newcastle.<sup>1</sup> In London, where the choice is left free, the 'Subsidiary' actually selected is generally either Latin or French.

<sup>1</sup> See above, pp. 18-21.

In spite of our demanding compulsory Old English and Gothic, I have hardly met a student who did not know much more of Latin *or* French than he knew of Old English—usually beyond comparison more of both Latin *and* French. The argument that Latin and French are, except in rare cases, incompatible with Old English is to me unintelligible.

It is true that we have not in the past made a special study of Mediaeval Latin—students have puzzled it out only occasionally when they needed it to illustrate some Old or Middle English text. The Mediaeval Latin literature ‘to which Chaucer’s debt’ is so ‘immediately obvious’ is a rather dull field. By all means let all fourteen members of the Committee spend laborious days studying *Albertani Brixiensis Liber Consolationis et Consilii*: but why should our students read it merely because Chaucer did?

How shal the world be served?  
Lat Austin have his swink to him reserved.

Hitherto our students have passed from an hour reading how one thegn after another fell fighting at Maldon round the body of his chief, to an hour, it may be, of subsidiary Latin with ‘Catullus whose dead songster never dies’. The lot has fallen to them in pleasant places. But what did Chaucer know of *Maldon*, Catullus, or Lucretius? Shall we substitute:

Of the wretched Engending of Mankinde  
As man may in pope Innocent y-finde.

Unless we are going to deny the title of ‘Mediterranean’ to Lucretius and his like, and confer it upon Pope Innocent and his like, I fail to see how it can be said that some knowledge of both Mediterranean and Old English sources ‘will rarely be attainable at the undergraduate stage’. It has always been attained in the past. Obviously, to *exhaust* both sources, a lifetime is needed. But that is not the question.

It is the Committee who would make the Mediterranean and Old English side, not complementary, as they are and must be, but alternative; who expect that a great many candidates for English Honours will know no Greek or Latin at all, and who contemplate students studying in translations even the special subsidiary literature which they select.

To run a race a man should have two legs. What should we say to the trainer who should tell us that this will only in rare cases be possible; and that, besides, it fails to take account of the equal claims of both legs; that one leg must be amputated; but in virtue of the

equal rights of both, the choice shall be left to the athlete which he will dispense with?

The student asked to study the History of the English Language with only Latin or Old English, not both; or asked to study the influence of French, or Italian, upon English only through translations—what is he but a cripple running a race?

It would be difficult to define exactly what constitutes a University; but two things are certainly necessary. People must be trying to find out things—seeking, researching; and men must be brought together who are doing this in many different departments of knowledge. And if we take the whole of English language and literature, with its necessary subsidiary studies, what better course could the student have? He combines the more scientific, philological side with the more literary and artistic one. And there is still so much for him to find out; and the fields of search are such pleasant ones. But there is no avoiding the necessary subsidiary studies.

There is no escape from the fact that, for the proper study of the English language, if the student is to get real pleasure out of it, some knowledge of Latin, French, and Anglo-Saxon is essential. Without these it must be unreal, unintelligent drudgery. But the student who knows Latin and Modern French will not find Old French difficult; the student who knows the West Saxon of about A. D. 900, and the speech of Chaucer, is well armed to make easy conquests in Middle English. The student so equipped can study intelligently the problems of any period of the English language after the Conquest.

And, for the study of literature, how glorious a field is open to him! Even though he has no Greek, he will have read some Roman poetry, 'the living heir of the genius of Greece'. Roman poetry is late: it cannot give him that insight into the feelings of the Heroic Age that he might get from Homer. But a good deal of the spirit of the Heroic Age may be learnt from Anglo-Saxon poetry: from *Maldon*, *The Fall of the Angels*, *Deor*, and the Lyrics. I know that this will be denied, especially by those who have not read these things. But, whatever may be said of Anglo-Saxon literature from the point of view of aesthetic criticism, it is an amazing fact in the development of European civilization. No other great European nation has preserved anything approaching it. If France or Germany could show such a vernacular literature from the eighth or ninth centuries they would be never weary of boasting of it. And it is all so astonishingly English.

We have King Alfred's prose describing the first recorded Arctic

exploration, or describing his educational policy, with compulsory English and optional Latin. (Why did the Departmental Committee omit to mention that the first person to insist on the proper place of English in an English education was King Alfred?) We have the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* with its description of the King's shipbuilding plans: how he laid down ships of unprecedented size and of his own design to meet the pirates from across the sea, and how they ran aground in the mud. We have a vernacular chronicle lasting for two centuries and a half, and counting at least four great writers among its annalists. Read the character sketch of William the Conqueror by the chronicler 'who had looked upon him, and sometime sojourned in his court'. When the *Chronicle* expired, in the middle of the twelfth century, English prose was at its lowest ebb. Yet within little more than fifty years an English prose masterpiece had been written, which was so popular, and deservedly popular, in the Middle Ages, that it had to be translated into Latin and French.

The study of these origins is not the less essential for the Honours student of English because there may be better things in Greek. The corresponding origins in Greek have been lost, with the rather depressing result that Greek literature begins with the best and tails off to the worst: from Homer to the Byzantine people. So Greek drama *begins* full grown with Aeschylus and Sophocles. But in English it is different. We have the thirteenth-century *Harrowing of Hell*; the Chester and Wakefield *Nativity Plays*; *Everyman*; Marlowe's *Faustus* and *Edward II*; history plays like *Sir Thomas More*: every one of them works of very great literary merit, and leading right up to Shakespeare.

One of the great advantages which English has as a 'School' is that it permits a study of origins such as Greek does not offer. I know that there are those who say that we need not demand a knowledge of these origins from the English student, because we cannot demand a similar knowledge from the Greek scholar; that we should not demand a study of Old English lyrics or of the *Harrowing of Hell* from the one, because we cannot demand a study of Sappho or of Thespis from the other. Even so the Fox who had lost his Tail persuaded his colleagues to discard so unessential and in fact inartistic an Appendix.

Old and Middle English are so important as *language* that they are worth studying for that alone. Personal or place names in Bede, legal documents of the fifteenth century, may be linguistically invaluable. But this should not blind us to the literary value of many

things in Old and Middle English. *Maldon* and the *Dream of the Rood*, the Old English Lyrics, or the Middle English Lyrics are all good things, *perfect* things, in that they do, in a way which cannot be bettered, what they set out to do. If they are worth studying for their own sake, and if they are important for the understanding of still greater things that come after, do not let us say that it is not obligatory upon the English students to study them, because some other thing in Greek, even greater, exists, like Homer; or, like Sappho, has been lost.

The *Battle of Maldon*, Professor Ker has stated, is the most heroic thing in English literature till we come to *Samson Agonistes*. I have not heard that anybody has disputed this; I doubt if any competent person would. Book XXIV of the *Iliad* is greater: the Greek heroic poet had a range infinitely beyond that of the Englishman; but each did *perfectly* that which he set out to do. It is important that the student of English literature should read, in the original, some perfect poetry of the Heroic Age. If he cannot read Greek, then all the more reason why he must read Anglo-Saxon. For neither Homer nor *Maldon* can be translated.

Only, let it be a serious study of the best things in Latin, in Anglo-Saxon, in French—not the study of ‘influences’ and ‘tendencies’, even with the motto, ‘not text-books, but translations’. The plays of Robert Garnier had in their day their translators and imitators in England; they influenced people, like Kyd, who influenced Shakespeare; but let us not set our students to read the tragedies of Garnier instead of the *Cid* or *Hernani*. They should study the best things, trying to get all that is possible out of them, remembering

‘that you might read all the books in the British Museum (if you could live long enough) and remain an utterly “illiterate”, uneducated person; but that if you read ten pages of a good book, letter by letter,—that is to say, with real accuracy,—you are for evermore, in some measure, an educated person.’

After all, more depends on the method than on the topic studied. It does not really matter whether we study the problems of the English language as it existed before or as it existed after Chaucer. But it is vital that the method should be right.

Years ago it was the custom at University College—a custom now abandoned—to begin the work of the session by a public lecture delivered by a professor and attended by students of all faculties alike: so that the first lecture that the students of my year heard was a lecture by the Professor of Zoology, Professor Weldon, whose

premature death was to rob English science of one of her giants. He explained to us the methods of zoological study; that the principles underlying the methods were the common property of all studies alike; that if we followed the right methods we should learn; if we followed the wrong 'not only will you learn nothing, but in the end you will render yourselves totally incapable of ever learning anything at all'.

R. W. CHAMBERS.

### A NOTE IN COMMENT ON DR. CHAMBERS' ARTICLE

The Publications Sub-Committee of the English Association invited Dr. Chambers some time ago to write a reply to the paper by Mr. McKerrow which they had recently issued (Pamphlet 49). In the present pamphlet, however, which is his response to that invitation, he has in fact scarcely touched on the views of Mr. McKerrow, but has devoted himself to a criticism of part of the Report issued in 1921 by the Departmental Committee on 'The Teaching of English in England'. The English Association is not in any way committed to approval of all the recommendations in that Report. But it has welcomed the Report as a whole and expressed a general agreement with its conclusions. Indeed the Report was very largely the work of members of the Association, the Chairman of the Committee being at the time also Chairman of the Association, and having among his colleagues several other persons who were active members of the Committee of the Association.

In these circumstances it may at first sight seem strange that the Association should, within a year of the publication of the Report, devote one of its few public meetings to a lecture which was in the main an attack upon an important section of the Report, and also issue as one of its publications for 1922 a further attack such as is contained in this pamphlet by Dr. Chambers. But the object of the Association is the promotion of English studies; and that object would certainly not be served by any attempt—which would be as futile as it would be ungrateful—to silence the views of men who have done so much for those studies as Professor Wyld and Dr. Chambers. The Committee therefore decided to accept and publish Dr. Chambers' paper. But they felt that their action might be misunderstood unless at the time of its publication an opportunity was given to a member of the Departmental Committee to make some comment on the strictures of Dr. Chambers. Circumstances into which it is unnecessary to go have induced the Association to



press this task upon me, the only Member of the Departmental Committee, I believe, who had no teaching experience whatever to guide him when listening to the evidence or considering the Report. It is only too obvious that, this being so, I am at a great disadvantage in replying to Dr. Chambers, who not only is—what I have no pretension to being—a distinguished scholar, but has a first-hand knowledge of the working of the University system, of which I know little or nothing.

However, I shall not follow him into technicalities which, in fact, occupy a very small place in the Report of the Departmental Committee. My object will be to deal as briefly as possible with his general criticisms and to explain the policy advocated in the Report, which I think he misunderstands. Of course, nothing that I write commits any one but myself. I believe that my argument may be said to represent, quite roughly, the general point of view of the Departmental Committee. But neither that Committee nor the Committee of the Association are to be held in any way responsible for any opinions which I may express.

What is the complaint of Dr. Chambers? It may, I think, be fairly summed up as this: that we advise a 'School' both of Language and Literature and then spoil the literature side of it by not making Latin compulsory and the language side of it by not making Old English and Anglo-Saxon compulsory (p. 7). Or perhaps it is the language side of which Dr. Chambers is thinking both when he demands compulsory Latin and when he demands compulsory Anglo-Saxon (p. 6). At any rate he makes both demands and is indignant that the Report makes neither. The reply which I should make can be summed up with equal brevity. It is that Dr. Chambers and we are not aiming at the same thing. We deliberately chose as large a measure of freedom as possible: he prefers the old system of park palings and compulsion. Although he appears to approve of our recommendation that the 'School' should include both literature and language, he really thinks throughout in terms of the old system which made an English 'School' something in which literature, especially modern literature, was of very little account, with the result that the students were, as Professor Chadwick told us, increasingly dissatisfied and 'demanded a course of more human interest'. This demand we desired to do what we could to meet; and we thought that any real attempt to meet it involved setting the student free from some of the bonds of compulsion which had hitherto shackled him.

With a great deal of what Dr. Chambers says I am personally in the strongest sympathy and I think he makes out his case against us

about our remark that 'as things are at present, a great many (candidates for Honours in English) will know no Greek or Latin at all' (p. 211). That appears to be simply untrue 'as things are at present'. I sincerely hope it never will be true. Indeed I fancy that I feel, on rather different grounds, even more strongly than Dr. Chambers about the value of Greek and Latin in the study of English. But I should like him to consider whether the Report of the Committee does not serve the cause of classical studies, or rather the policy of inducing English students to study the classical writers, better in the long run than he does. He talks as if we had thrown the classics to the wolves. What have we in fact recommended? First (Rec. 58), 'that a candidate for Honours in a Classical "School" should be given opportunities of illustrating his studies of the Classics by their English parallels or derivatives'. And, next (Rec. 59), that 'corresponding encouragement should be given to candidates for Honours in "Schools" of English to show a knowledge of the relation between English literature and the classical literatures'. We record the desire expressed by the large majority of the Professors of English in the Universities 'that students of English should, if possible, know some Greek and Latin', and we express our 'strong sympathy' with it (p. 210). We describe the Classics (p. 18) as 'sources, which can never be forgotten, of our own language, our own art, our own experience', and we express the opinion that 'no student of English will have completed his exploration, or gained all its advantages, until he has ascended the stream of literature, and discovered these perennial sources for himself'. Now which is the shadow and which the substance? Dr. Chambers clings to the compulsory modicum of Latin at present insisted upon at most Universities. We do not. But we ask that the Classical Schools should be strengthened, as they undoubtedly would, by being brought into closer connexion with English; and we ask that 'weight should be given in an English Honour School to such knowledge of the Greek and Latin classics as enables a candidate to illustrate and complete his English studies' (p. 210). Dr. Chambers advocates that everybody should have at least a smattering of Latin, and he would close his doors in the faces of those who have not. We are not careful about the universal smattering, but we urge that the greatest encouragement should be given to those candidates for English Honours who have a real knowledge of the classical authors, and that such knowledge should have weight in deciding their class (p. 210). The person whom we both want to produce is, I suppose, the man or woman who in reading Aeschylus sends his thoughts on

to Shelley and in reading Milton sends them back to Homer and Virgil. Which is the more likely to produce him?

I think my answer to Dr. Chambers would be substantially the same with reference to our dealings with Old English and Anglo-Saxon which provoke him to lay a still heavier hand upon us. Here again he wishes to retain compulsion. And here again he greatly exaggerates our delinquencies. He implies, as Professor Wyld actually asserted in his lecture, that we 'ostracize' Anglo-Saxon. We do nothing of the kind. We expressly declare (p. 228) that it is 'the chief key to our knowledge of English life and ideas for a period of some five hundred years'; and we look forward to its 'attracting an increasing number of students by its intrinsic interest and importance'. But we say that experience has in our judgement shown that a very large number of students, who make otherwise good candidates in an English School, have not only no aptitude but a positive distaste for philological studies. 'My own training was philological,' said Professor Chadwick, 'and when I began to teach I lectured on the subject exclusively for three or four years. But I was gradually driven to the conclusion that it was extremely distasteful to the great majority of the students.' He went on to say that while on the old system the 'School' at Cambridge 'never had much vitality and eventually became altogether moribund', the numbers taking Honours have multiplied by six since a freer system was introduced. He does not believe that a tenth of the students have any turn for philology, and thinks that the privileged position given to that subject injured the 'School' and injured literary studies without really serving the cause of linguistic studies; for when philology 'is imposed on large bodies of students, most of whom have no taste for it, it cannot fail to be of an elementary and dogmatic character', with the result of holding back the student who is really interested in the subject. And is not he the person whom we want to serve? And who serves him best, Dr. Chambers or the authors of the Report? Dr. Chambers would still drag him down by the weight of a number of reluctant companions, the slaves of philological compulsion. We set both him and them free, or as nearly free as we can. The policy we adopted, rightly or wrongly, was that expressed in the evidence of Sir Walter Raleigh: 'English literature could be the basis of a liberal education, but needed to be freed from slavery to philology and phonology' (p. 218). But we were far from discouraging, and of course farther still from 'ostracizing', the study of Old English and Anglo-Saxon. On the contrary, we set out their claims in a paragraph of which Dr. Chambers is kind enough to remark that what it says 'is indis-

putable though it has seldom been so fearlessly expressed'. All our sin lies in our refusing to recommend that no candidate should be allowed to obtain Honours in English without offering Anglo-Saxon (p. 227). We allow him an alternative. We require a 'knowledge of one of the two main streams which united to make our modern English Language and Literature' (p. 227): if the student does not take the Old English and Anglo-Saxon group of studies he must, under our scheme, take 'Middle French and Mediaeval Latin, including such ancient classics as directly influenced the writers of the Middle Ages' (p. 227). I am aware that this recommendation is open to certain criticisms, though some of the criticisms made upon it ignore the final reference to ancient classics. I am not myself sure that it might not have been better to require some first-hand knowledge of the great Greek and Latin classics, which directly and indirectly have so powerfully influenced our language and literature. Perhaps they might have proved a better alternative to Anglo-Saxon than any mediaeval authors. But I have not the knowledge of Mediaeval French and Latin necessary to enable me to discuss their claims. My point, as against Dr. Chambers, is simply that, whatever may be said against our recommendation, it cannot fairly be described as a discouragement of Old English studies. We try to make room for all. We say, 'Let those who choose be Anglo-Saxons and let those who choose be "Mediterraneans", and let those who have special tastes or gifts in either direction, or in that of the ancient classics, carry their studies as far as they like. The "School" must have room for the enthusiasm of specialists' (p. 229). But, as we immediately add, 'its ordinary students will not be specialists'.

That is in fact the issue. That is what they used to be, and what Dr. Chambers still wishes them to be, 'specialists', and specialists of one kind only, the philological. We believe that that system has been tried and has failed. Even those of us who were most keenly interested in the study of Old English could not help being influenced by what we were told of the history of the Cambridge Modern and Mediaeval Tripos. It seemed clear to us that the old system prevented English 'Schools' from being what they had it in them to be; and we have recommended one that seems to us freer and more liberal. Our scheme is no 'soft option' and should not be misrepresented as such. It includes both language and literature. Some candidates will specialize in one direction and some in the other. Those whose turn is language will naturally be expected to show knowledge of all the sources and influences that have shaped our language, and of the linguistic monuments that exhibit those influences at all the stages

of its growth. In them a comparative ignorance of such matters as the aesthetic significance of the English drama or lyric as compared with those of other nations will be easily pardoned. And so those whose turn is for literature will presumably be excused an ignorance of Gothic and even Anglo-Saxon in consideration of their real and intimate knowledge of the great classics of our poetry and prose; and all the more if they add a knowledge of the literature of Greece or Rome, Italy or France. It seems certain that if our recommendations were followed no candidate would obtain a First Class who had not reached a high level of knowledge in one direction or the other.

That is what I suppose we all aim at: real knowledge. Dr. Chambers says that there is no such knowledge of the English language without Anglo-Saxon. Neither is there any real knowledge of English literature without Milton. Yet it was never thought necessary, under the old system, and we do not think it necessary now, to make Milton compulsory. It was probably possible in English 'Schools', as they used to be, to obtain a First Class without having read either the *Paradise Lost* or the Odes of Keats. If that was a tolerable system, why should it be so wicked to make it possible, by exhibiting exceptional knowledge in other directions, to obtain a First Class in English without knowing Anglo-Saxon? Why, in fact, should Anglo-Saxon be given a place of privilege not given to Milton? To repeat the phrase in our Report which seems to have annoyed Dr. Chambers, 'there seems to be no good ground for giving the language of *Beowulf* a place of privilege and compulsion which has never been accorded to the language of Sappho' (p. 227). Dr. Chambers takes exception to this comparison on the ground of the little which remains of the poetry of Sappho. He appeals to Homer and Herodotus. They are not Attic Greek and we have always read them in Schools. But I do not think that Homer and Herodotus will help him. In the first place the differences between their Greek and Attic are comparatively slight and any one who knows Attic Greek can learn to read them with very little trouble. They afford therefore no parallel to compulsory Anglo-Saxon, which is divided from classical English by a gulf a hundred times as wide as that which separates Herodotus from Thucydides. What was worth while in the one case may easily not be worth while in the other. And there is another thing. The assertion is that English cannot be really understood without a philological knowledge of Anglo-Saxon. To this assertion the Homer-Herodotus precedent affords no support. The Greek scholars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who had often made no linguistic study of any Greek except the classical

Attic would have been very much and very justly surprised if you had told them that they did not really know Greek.

The truth is that philology has so long been accustomed to a position of privilege that it cannot easily accommodate itself to one of equality. Much of what Dr. Chambers urges would be perfectly applicable to a 'School' confined to English Language, but is quite inapplicable to one which includes Literature. It may be that the better plan is to have two separate 'Schools'. Then there would be room in the language 'School' for all the linguistic requirements set out by Dr. Chambers. But if the two are to be combined in one School, as we thought, and as Dr. Chambers seems to agree, then these things can only come in, not as requirements, but as possibilities. If Language and Literature are to keep company in one School they must do so on a footing of freedom and equality. The demands of compulsion on the one side will only provoke similar demands on the other. If too much of the philology which few demand is to be forced on the many, then too much of the literature which many demand will be forced on the few. If the grammar of Anglo-Saxon is to be compulsory for all, the spiritual purport of the Romantic Movement, or the relation of Milton to the ancient classics, will be made compulsory on all: and everybody will be forced to do something which he is incapable of doing well. Our ideal, right or wrong, wise or foolish, was the opposite of this. Unless I misinterpret my colleagues, what we thought was that a complete School of English, Language and Literature, should cover a vast field of which no single candidate would be able to pretend to know the whole. On the linguistic side, as the practice of such 'Schools' in the past has shown, this opens up fields of inquiry to travel over which will take the student much longer time than his University career allows him. On the other side, the side of literature, hitherto so much less explored, the ideal is nothing less than the study of the whole of English Literature, as the greatest of the Arts of England, and the truest expression both of the mind and of the character of the nation. And does anybody suppose that this is easily accomplished in a couple of years? Such a study involves, as we say in the Report (pp. 203-7), a considerable acquaintance with the social and political history of England; though it is a disastrous mistake to treat Literature, which is the finest of the fine arts, as a mere branch of History or Sociology. And besides this it involves, as we say on p. 211, a study of all the literatures, Greek and Roman, Italian, French, Spanish and German, which have at different times helped to make English Literature what it has been. Then again it involves a study of the

thought, religious, political, social, philosophic, which finds its expression in our literature. Here obviously is a programme far too crowded for the brief course of a student's University life even if the English 'School' left language alone and were confined to literature. Yet there is nothing extravagant in it; and indeed much of it is quite as important from the point of view of literature as Anglo-Saxon is from the point of view of language.

What is the conclusion of the whole matter? Surely that all interests can find room in so large a world and that they can all live happily together, provided only that they will all consent to live and let live. Let each be tolerant of the other. Let us not compel the born philologist to form unwilling and unimportant opinions on the sensuousness of Keats or the philosophy of Wordsworth, and on the other hand let us agree with Professor Chadwick whose own 'knowledge and experience', as he modestly told us, were 'confined to early and mediaeval studies' that 'it is a great mistake to force' those studies upon candidates 'who are not interested in them'. Let us bring within the scope of our English 'School' all that has made both our language and our literature what they are, well aware that no one can cover so vast a field: and let us encourage each candidate to seek his First Class, not by acquiring a smattering of knowledge in all parts of it, but by making himself master, so far as mastery can be expected in an undergraduate, of whatever particular branch of it his own tastes and capacities seem to invite him to enter with the best prospect of that penetration and intimacy which in these matters are the only kind of success worth having.

One other word, and one only; a word already partly said but one which it is well to repeat. It is obvious that Dr. Chambers is an expert in the matters which we have been discussing and equally obvious that I am not. Some of my colleagues on the Committee were, and any responsibility which I have for the Report is shared and protected by them. But for what I have said in this paper I alone am responsible: and whatever blunders or follies Dr. Chambers may find in it I hope he will attribute to me alone. And I hope he will do me another service. I should like him, if he reads what I have written, to make frequent insertion, as he reads, of such words as 'perhaps', 'it seems to me', and the like which it would have been tedious to print as often as they were in fact called for by my ignorance or inexperience. I have certainly no pretension whatever to lay down final or dogmatic decisions on these difficult problems. Nor have even my colleagues, in whom such an attitude would be

much less absurd. All we aimed at doing, I think, was to set out what seemed to us the general lines of an ideally complete English 'School' and leave the working out of its details, as we said, 'to time, and to the experiments of many Universities'. All that we asked was that the freedom of experiment should not be hampered by compulsory inclusions only too certain to be paid for by exclusions which, if not formally compulsory, are mathematically inevitable. For whatever we do there will still only be twenty-four hours in the day and only two or three years in a University career.

JOHN BAILEY.

[POSTSCRIPT.—I have just seen Mr. Bailey's very friendly and courteous *Comment*. But I do not think the difference between us is as serious as he supposes. Above all, I would assure him that neither I, nor those who agree with me, are thinking in terms of a 'School' in which literature, and especially modern literature, is of very little account.

The proposal of the Departmental Committee, which I am opposing, is that Mediaeval French and Mediaeval Latin might be allowed as alternatives to Old English, in an Honours 'School' of English Language and Literature. Mr. Bailey admits that this proposal is open to certain criticisms, and that it would perhaps have been better to have required Greek and Latin in combination with Modern English Literature. I cordially agree: I believe that an excellent course might be arranged on those lines—such a course making no pretence to be an Honours course in the English *Language*. But for the moment we have to consider the proposal of the Departmental Committee; and here my contention is that the study of the English Language must be based upon English, not upon Mediaeval French or Mediaeval Latin, which, however important in their right place, cannot take the place of Old English or Middle English for students of the English Language. To force Mediaeval French and Mediaeval Latin into this false position would be to make the Honours course in English Language not only fruitless, but also hopelessly complicated. It would leave the student insufficient time and energy for the course in English Literature which, according to the scheme of the Committee, is to accompany it, and which both Mr. Bailey and I wish to be pursued with enthusiasm. So, though I think Mediaeval English more relevant than Mediaeval Latin to the portion of the student's course which deals with the English Language, I am not necessarily thinking in terms of a system in which literature, especially modern literature, is of very little account.—R. W. C.]



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