The age of Elizabeth has been called the Golden Age of English Literature, and that of Queen Anne the Augustan Age. In the absence of other special characteristics to distinguish the present period in Great Britain, we may apply a less euphonious title and call it the Age of Dictionaries. We have had dictionary periods before, but the immediate present is prolific beyond all precedent. The new edition of The Imperial, enlarged by Annandale, was completed a little more than a year ago; the Encyclopaedic Dictionary, now in course of publication, is cast in a still larger mould; and Stormonth's Library Dictionary, also in course of publication, is another aspirant in the same field. And now the Philological Society of London, after twenty-seven years of encouragement and discouragement, of progress and delay, has given us the First Part of the New [English] Dictionary on Historical Principles, [hereafter abbreviated as New Dictionary] a work that in its plan and scope distances every other dictionary of the language hitherto attempted.

The scheme for a new dictionary by the Philological Society had its origin in a resolution of the Society passed in 1857, on the recommendation of Archbishop Trench, then Dean of Westminster. The plan at that time contemplated only a supplement to Johnson and Richardson, supplying their deficiencies. Dean Trench, Herbert Coleridge, and F. J. Furnivall were appointed a committee to prepare the work. Trench was mostly occupied with other matters, and Coleridge and Furnivall found the supplement plan a failure. It soon gave place to a plan for a new dictionary, with Coleridge as general editor. A large number of volunteers were secured, including several Americans, who undertook the search for illustrative quotations. In 1861 Coleridge died, and Furnivall succeeded him as general editor. Despairing of completing the full dictionary at which they had been aiming, he planned another and much smaller work, to be carried on in connection with the larger one, and secured sub-editors for both. But as time passed on, the work gradually slackened. Some of the workers were unable to continue their labors, and some died; and, underlying all, it lacked the pecuniary support which was necessary to carry it vigorously forward. For a time the enterprise seemed in danger of proving abortive. But the materials continued to accumulate till more than two millions of quotations had been brought together.

A brighter day at length dawned. The Clarendon Press, in the University of Oxford, came to the relief of the Society, and assumed the entire responsibility of printing and publishing the work. All honor to glorious old Oxford, renowned for literary achievements and ever-faithful guardian of the purity and progressive development of our dear mother-tongue. In 1879, Dr. J. A. H. Murray, President of the Philological Society, and author of the Dialect of the Southern Counties of Scotland and of the masterly article on the "English Language" in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, became its editor. The mass of literary matter bequeathed to him, printed and manuscript, amounted to over two tons in weight. It had accumulated in the house of Mr. Furnivall in boxes, and bales, and sacks, and parcels of various kinds, till it left very little room for himself and family. The home of Dr. Murray, a quaint, white-painted old residence at Mill Hill, was now subjected to similar inconvenience, and a large portion of the material in his hands was in a chaotic state. While Dr. Murray was studying how these collections could be assorted and arranged so as to be made available for future use, his good wife was studying how they could be got out of the house, and where they could find a suitable home. At her suggestion, a new building was erected in the garden adjoining their house, for the special use of the New Dictionary. It is an iron structure, furnished with over a thousand pigeon-holes for the arrangement of the quotations, and with other conveniences for dictionary work. The materials in hand were here distributed in systematic order, and became a quarry from which a million of stock settings for future use in the Dictionary were to be worked out.

But vast as these accumulations were, they were found to fall far short of completeness for the purpose of the work,
and a new appeal was made for volunteers to collect additional quotations. Since that time more than a million of new quotations have been furnished, making in all about three and a half millions, selected by about thirteen hundred readers from the works of more than five thousand authors of all periods. A very considerable portion of these quotations have been selected by American readers, under the direction of Prof. F. A. March, LL.D., of Lafayette College, Easton, Pa. One hundred and fifty American readers are now engaged in the work, of whom about forty are ladies, and about the same number professors or teachers of languages. Americans are to furnish all the quotations from American books for the whole work. Neither Prof. March nor any of his assistants receive any pecuniary compensation for their labor. It is worthy of special note, that while professors in our American colleges and universities have responded nobly to the appeal for assistance, very little help has been received from the colleges and universities of Great Britain.

The corrugated iron building in Dr. Murray's garden, which is itself sky-lighted but encroaches somewhat upon the small-paned windows of his house, has been called by various names—the "Dictionary Den," the "Lexicographical Laboratory," etc. Dr. Murray, who is now the great word-master of the language, has brought a word from the sacred precincts of monastic life, and calls it the "Scriptorium," and that it may have a sure footing in the language, he dates the preface of his work from "The Scriptorium." But Dr. Murray is a wise master builder, and the language is safe in his hands. He may call a useful word out from obscurity and give it fresh light, but he is in no danger of following the example of the early dictionarymakers, who coined new words freely in their dictionaries, but had no power to secure their recognition in the family of English words. Even the great Augustus, though a distinguished patron of learning and possessed of unlimited power, was compelled to acknowledge that he could not add a new word to the Latin tongue.

Those who are interested in the progress of the Dictionary will be interested in knowing something of the editor. Dr. Murray is the son of a Scotch schoolmaster. He was for a time employed as an assistant teacher, and afterwards as a clerk in the Bank of India. He is now a master in the Mill Hill Grammar School, London, where he still spends a portion of his time in teaching. His principal assistant at the Scriptorium is Mr. Alfred Erlebach, a former master of the school, and he has in addition one or two male assistants and one or two lady assistants. This is the working home force of the greatest literary undertaking of the century! O, for another D'Israeli to write for us "The Marvels of English Literature." The scanty financial support of Johnson and Webster, while engaged in writing their dictionaries, for which England and America owe them an undying debt of gratitude, has passed into history. Can it be possible that the nation which has given us a language that commands the admiration of the world, with all her intelligence and wealth, will allow the history of Johnson and Webster to be repeated in the preparation of the New Dictionary of the Philological Society? Where are her noblemen and others of boundless wealth, who accept dedications of scholarly works and consider it an honor to be ranked as patrons of literature and science? The Oxford press desires to bring out the work in ten years, and if Dr. Murray could devote all his time to it and have all the competent assistants he needs, it could be accomplished in less time than that; but if his Scriptorium is to be an adjunct of the Mill Hill school, and he is to be limited to two or three assistant home editors, it will require at least twenty years to complete the work with the same degree of thoroughness and care that are everywhere manifest in Part I.

The Dictionary gives an account of the meaning, origin, and history of all English words now in use, or known to have been in use at any time during the last seven hundred years, and illustrates these points by a series of quotations arranged in chronological order. These quotations, drawn directly from the best writers in the language during all this period, are the most valuable feature of the Dictionary, and present to the world a daguerreotype impression of the various changes that have taken place in the form and meaning of words since the date of their first appearance in the language. The value of these quotations is greatly enhanced by an exact reference in all cases to the author, work, and passage, so that the quotation may at any time be verified and the context examined.

Another excellent feature, in which this work excels all others, is the great use that is made of different kinds and styles of type, and a systematic arrangement of paragraphs, by which all the principal distinctions are made to speak plainly and eloquently to the eye. The size of the pages is exactly the same as that of the great French dictionary of Littré, and about one-sixth larger than that of the pages in Webster's Unabridged. The Part already published contains 352 pages, and the whole work when completed will fill six quarto volumes of about 1,400 pages.
each. It will contain nearly twice as many words as either of the great English and American dictionaries.

The definitions have been to a great extent framed anew upon a study of the quotations collected for the work. These quotations have furnished means never before possessed for learning the different meanings of words; and the new dictionary is entitled to the credit of introducing more valuable improvements in definitions than any other work that has appeared since the publication of Webster's American Dictionary, in 1828. It must, however, be said, that Dr. Murray, in his laudable effort to make the definitions as original as possible, has gone to an extreme which has, in some cases, led to the substitution of new definitions for better ones already in use. The best defining dictionary of the language is the "Imperial," but there are lexicographers who have written more good definitions than either Ogilvie or Annandale. It is the best because it is based upon the accumulated excellence of all definitions previously written, with many added improvements, including nearly all the new definitions of Webster, the peerless definer. Johnson and Webster and others have used freely the definitions of their predecessors, and if they had not done this the quality of definitions instead of improving would inevitably have deteriorated, since the best defining words and phrases would have been appropriated by the earlier gleaners. Nor is there anything dishonorable or discourteous in this practice. With the exception of definitions that are claimed to be covered by copyright, it is universal.

The editor has applied the historical principle quite extensively to the definitions that he has adopted from previous dictionaries, and given both authors and dates. It is interesting to know the original authors of happily framed definitions that have now become common property, and especially of those which were written one or two hundred years ago. Definitions have undergone so many changes in passing through the long line of English dictionaries that the attempt to exhibit even a small portion of them historically is a task of some difficulty, and it is not to be expected that these references will be free from errors in the first edition of the New Dictionary.

I have taken all the seventeenth century quotations that I find in the definitions of the first forty pages, and subjected them to the test of examination, with the dictionaries of that century before me, for the special purpose of finding and correcting as many errors as possible. The fruit of this search is here presented as a contribution to the next edition of these pages.

(1.) I find six instances, under the words *Abgregate, Ablacted, Ablecktick, Abliquire, Ablocate, Abrodietical,* in which the date of Cockeram's dictionary is given as 1612. The first edition of Cockeram was published in 1623.

(2.) *Abgregate.* --'To disperse, as it were to lead out of the flock.' --Cockeram, 1612. Phillips, 1678.

In two editions of Cockeram, I find this definition given, "To lead out of the flock," and not in the extended form as quoted. In Phillips it is given as quoted. Cockeram's name should not be attached to a definition that is included in marks of quotation, unless the definition is found in his dictionary as quoted.

(3.) Under the word *Abanderado,* a definition is quoted from 'Minsheu, 1623.' There is no such edition of Minsheu. The first edition was published in 1617, and the second in 1625-7; and no edition was issued between these dates. (See Wheatley, in Philological Society's Transactions, 1865, p. 230.)


This last name is Coles and not Cole; and it should not have been introduced at all, as the definition is distinguished by quotation marks, and should therefore be literal. I have turned to three editions of Coles, and in all of them this word is defined, "adorned for sale."

(5.) *Abrodietical.* --'A delicate person.' Cockeram, 1612. 'Feeding daintily, delicate, luxurious.' Minsheu, 1627.

This last definition is a wide departure from Minsheu's, and yet enclosed in marks of quotation. In Minsheu, 1627, it reads, "an Abrodieticall, a daintie feeder, or delicate person."

(6.) Under *Absorb* it is stated that this word is "in no Dict. bef. Blount, 1656." Minsheu, 1627, has "Absorbe, to sup up."
The question whether a general dictionary should combine a certain amount of encyclopaedic information with the definition of words has been on trial more than two and a half centuries, and is still as far as ever from being settled. The dictionaries that have recently appeared in Great Britain have embodied more encyclopaedic knowledge than any that preceded them, and it became a matter of some interest to know how this question would be treated in the dictionary of the Philological Society. It is safe to say that, with few exceptions, the lovers of good English will be gratified to find that the New Dictionary "explains words and deals with the description of things only so far as it is necessary in order to fix the exact signification and use of words." The dictionary proper should treat of language, leaving the encyclopaedia to do its own appropriate work.

Special attention is given to pronunciation, and every sound in a word, whether plain or obscure, is distinctly indicated by a system peculiar to this dictionary.

It is remarkable that in a work of such scope and magnitude, comprising such a variety of particulars, and the relations of so many different parts to one symmetrical whole, there should be found in the initial Part so few imperfections and so many excellences. It is an honor to the science of philology, and a boon to the English language of inestimable value.

But the New Dictionary, with all its merits, will not, even when complete, be found adapted to popular use, and it will be beyond the reach of a large portion of those who have frequent occasion to consult a dictionary. They require a very different kind of work, and in more convenient form, and it would lose its proud position in advance of all other dictionaries if it attempted to meet these wants.

The only work with which the New Dictionary can properly be compared is the great historical French Dictionary of Littré. The New Dictionary is in a great degree modelled after that of Littré, but the improvements upon Littré, in both plan and execution, are visible on every page. The historical quotations are fuller and more complete than his, and the work, when completed, will be about once and a half the size of Littré's.

The Dictionary of Littré was commenced in 1863 and completed in 1873, and cost the author more than twenty-five years of time. It is the fruit of personal labor that is without a parallel in any language. His quotations were nearly all from his own personal reading, and a large part of the manuscript was in his own hand. His wife and daughter did most of the copying. His work was accomplished largely in the night, when he was sure to be free from interruptions, usually continuing his labors till three in the morning, and often till a still later hour. His assistants left him at midnight.

The first number of the great historical German Dictionary of Grimm made its appearance in 1852, and the work is still in progress. It exerted an important influence in shaping the plan of Littré, and has been of essential service to the editors of the New Dictionary.

Special credit should also be given to Richardson, whose English Dictionary was commenced in the "Encyclopaedia Metropolitana" in 1818, and published complete as a separate work in 1837, in two volumes, quarto. Notwithstanding its many defects, the author is entitled to the credit of doing valuable pioneer service in introducing the historic method of treating words in a dictionary, which has been so ably carried forward and improved by Grimm, and Littré, and the Philological Society. His definitions are illustrated by copious quotations from a series of authors, commencing with the early stages of the language and continuing down to the present century. These quotations are arranged in chronological order, and exhibit, with some degree of fulness, the biography of the words in his dictionary.

In the long line of authors who have written English Dictionaries, there are many who have contributed valuable improvements, but few who have built up from the foundation. The first great name in English lexicography was Bailey; the second was Johnson; and the third was Webster. The appearance of the New Dictionary marks an important epoch in the history of the language, and the portion already executed gives assurance in advance that the name of Murray will occupy the fourth place in this list of distinguished names that the English-speaking world will ever delight to honor.
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