VIII.—THE PERMIAN PEOPLE OF NORTH DURHAM.

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In a geological map, the north-east corner of the County of Durham is occupied by the Permian formation, and is there represented by the familiar magnesian limestone. If we observe the colouring on the map we shall find that the line of the geologist coincides accurately at this locality with a peculiarity in the folk-speech. It might, in fact, be taken as the mark dividing the speech of two peoples. On the west of the line we have the undoubted Northumberland peculiarity of dialect, whilst on the Permian land, from Tynemouth southwards, we have a distinct manner of speech. It is chiefly a distinction in pronunciation; not in the glossary of the people. The words in use may be identical on either side of the line referred to, but in speech they are rendered so differently as to sound like another dialect.

The history of the district suggests to us that a common speech at one time prevailed over Northumberland and the north-east of Durham, and I propose to enquire if there are to be found any circumstances that will suggest a cause for the peculiarity now found in the folk-speech of Werewickshire.

The vulgar tongue may have historical value in places where the chronicles are silent and the records lost; and that there is a spoken history in our local dialects is evident, as we see the care with which words are preserved in their primitive forms or retained in common use long after they have disappeared from literary English; or, again, betray their later introduction and antecedents by their every-day

sound. With the Norman Conquest a handicraft was renamed; the *sewer* became the French *tailleur*, and hence the folks of Tyneside to this day talk of the *teyleur*. The original pronunciation is retained with almost faultless accuracy, whilst the modernized form of the word is unknown in the dialect. But I need hardly point out here those much older grammatical usages, which the dialect preserves for us; such, for instance, as the verb *to be*, with a present tense of *I is, thou is, he is*. Some find it impossible to resist a feeling of pity for one who dares to talk of such a thing as "a grammatical usage," so much has the schoolmaster become a drill-sergeant. But it is nevertheless good old English, and it has survived with us. "Aa's gaan to wark," "Thoo's deun," are every-day expressions.

"The only corrupters of dialects," observes one of the greatest philologists, "that I know of are the literary men, who 'improve nature,' by writing them, not as they *are*, but according to their notions of what they *ought* to be, *i.e.*, in accordance with rules of grammar derived from other languages with which they may be acquainted. As though grammar were anything but a systematic statement of usage."

Our courtly and literary English is itself but an emancipated dialect; and, with the *prestige* which it possesses as the vehicle of English thought, it is aided by the now rapid means of communication and the ubiquitous schoolmaster, in displacing the local dialects. But the folk-speech, though threatened by its powerful rival, is yet with us, maintaining not only the very words, but probably the actual tone and accent of our English or Danish fore-elders. It is because the manner, as well as "the parts of speech," are so little liable to change through long periods that the observation of our dialects must lend itself to our investigation of early times as an assistance by no means to be despised.

From Jarrow westward, and over a large area of North Durham, we find everywhere the peculiarity which is distinctive of the folk-speech of Northumberland. Here the sound of the letter "r"—the burr—or *r grasseyé*, is most emphatic. This remarkable guttural usage is especially noticeable, as its limits are defined more sharply than those of other dialectic forms. As soon, however, as we pass over into the Permian country on the east, the dialect changes altogether. The burr is lost. The *r* has become a mere breathing in

place of the deep guttural. Wear is "wy-ah," fear is "fi-ah," and in tone and accent the language has changed. Not that an absolute uniformity prevails over this north-eastern corner, for the speech of North Shields differs from that of South Shields, and both differ from Wearside. For instance, the South Shields man is jealous of his aspirate and never omits it, whilst his neighbour at Sunderland is reckless of the matter, and talks of Hartlepool as "Aht-le-powl." Yet these sub-dialects are so near akin, and in utterance have so much of a common sound, that they may be grouped together as one.

As our dialects are living things, their niceties of distinction can only be understood by *viva voce* example. The written form is most misleading, and few have mastered the phonotype in which it has been attempted to crystallize the spoken sound. The lip, and palate, and guttural sounds are readily caught. The burr may be imitated, for it is common to "French of Paris," and to German and Arab throats. Not so the vowels, which are the really distinctive sounds. So the broad, soft vocalization of Northumberland, as heard in "Aa," "waa," "smaa," "faal," "taal," etc. (I, wall, small, fall, tall), is difficult to anyone but a native. This, too, is so different as we pass into the Permian country that it suggests a race influence as having been impressed upon the Permian people at an early period of their history.

Not in speech only, but in temperament, these two peoples are in marked contrast, for the merchant adventurers and the mechanical engineers of Tyneside are a different people from the sea-going men of Shields and the vigorous shipbuilders of the Wear. A peculiar genius is characteristic of each locality, distinguishing it from the other; so that we travel from Newcastle to Sunderland to find ourselves surrounded not only by a folk-speech altogether different from that we have left behind, but by a people whose traditions and temperament are specially their own.

Whatever may be the genesis of the South Bernician people must be left largely to inference. Our historians, therefore, approach the matter with diffidence. There is the story that they came from over sea with Octha and Ebissa—son and nephew of Hengist—in forty ships, within a few years of A.D. 449. But Mr. Hodgson Hinde has no doubt that the territory occupied by these two adventurers was Lothian. Mr. Longstaffe derives the colonization of these parts from

Angles, not from Jutes, and says, "Perhaps a mixture of races was the consequence of large immigrations at various times." Mr. Freeman comes to a similar conclusion, yet lingers doubtfully over the tradition of the early settlement from over sea. "I began to doubt," he says, "whether it might not be owing to the coming of Octa and Ebussa, when I heard along the Roman Wall such names as Bellingham and Ovingham sounded with a soft 'g'; surely, I said in my heart, here are folk who are *Westsaxonibus ipsi Westsaxoniores*." From the succession of Ida (A.D. 547), through the two centuries following, the fusion of the peoples of Southern Bernicia must have proceeded till, from Tees to Tweed, the folk became a homogeneous community. In the year 731 the Venerable Bede could talk of "the peaceable disposition of the times being such that many of the Northumbrians, as well the upper as the lower ranks, laying aside their weapons are inclined to dedicate themselves and their children to the tonsure and monastic vows, rather than to the study of warlike arts." The rival states of Bernicia and Deira were wedded at last in the unity of the faith by the bond of peace. The priest could pass across from Mailross to Lindisfarne, or through the land from Lindisfarne to Ripon, amongst kindred and friends. "The people spreading abroad in innocency gave their labour in calm tranquility to cultivate the furrows of their neglected fields; and the burden-bearing oxen submitted to the yoke with pleasure." The descendants of the warlike English settlers had become men of peace. The fame of the Saints of Northumberland induced to a religious life, and monasteries rose, and art and letters advanced with the growing civilization of the community. The people of the Wear and the Tyne must have been, at this period, closely and constantly associated, for Mr. Longstaffe tells us:—"The establishments of Wearmouth and Jarrow were properly one monastery founded at two places. They acted in concert and often under one head. At Wearmouth, Bede, who was born on the monastic lands, entered on his sacred vocation; at Jarrow he wrote his great works and died." These "piping times of peace" must after all have been out of joint, for they seemed to have softened the hardihood of the nation. To the Dane the plunder of the church wealth was an irresistible temptation. The mere love of adventure was probably an equal temptation to the expeditions that now cruised round the English coasts; and, so much

had the settlers on these coasts degenerated, that Worsaae tells us, "One Dane would often put ten of them to flight." And it is thus the Vikings appeared.

In 793, "On the 6th of the ides of January the ravaging of heathen men lamentably destroyed God's church of Lindisfarne." In this church the sainted body of Cuthbert had been lying over a century, and the Venerable Bede, at Jarrow, had finished his task 58 years before this Danish trouble came. The heathen invaders were permitted to land without opposition, and the plunder of the churches exceeded their most sanguine expectations. Those monks who were fortunate enough to escape returned with their Bishop Higbald to find the body of their Saint left sacred. From which it is evident that the expedition had been a mere piratical foray.

Next year Danes entered the Tyne and sailed up to Jarrow, but were driven out with loss of their leader; and, being shipwrecked, they were despatched by the inhabitants. Mr. Hodgson Hinde assigns the locality of this expeditionary landing, on the authority of the Saxon Chronicle, as "King Ecgfrid's monastery at the mouth of the Don, in King Ecgfrid's port, that, is Jarrow." He adds, "The reference is to the little river Don, which discharges itself into the Tyne immediately contiguous to the site of the monastery, where it forms an estuary of no inconsiderable extent, and formerly of much greater depth than at present. On this subject," he continues, "the testimony of Leland is particularly valuable, who says, 'Portus Ecgfridi is a tideway (*sinus*) which penetrates inland from the Tyne to Jarrow, and did penetrate inland to Bilton, nearly three miles above Jarrow, to which vessels formerly penetrated. A little stream enters this tideway.'" Mr. Longstaffe identifies this Bilton with Boldon—not Hylton, as Mr. Hinde does.

The next Danish advance upon this part was after a different sort; for, in 867, from winter quarters in East Anglia, came an army of Danish foot and horse, more than 20,000 strong. "All Northumberland south of the Tyne," says Mr. Hinde, "was given up to the depredations of the invading host, who ravaged and plundered at pleasure. Beyond the Tyne they allowed an Anglo-Saxon to assume the crown, and to direct the executive machinery under the paramount authority of the conquerors." "The Durham monasteries fell in 867," says Mr. Longstaffe, "the marauders leaving nothing but roofless walls."

Seven years later the leader Halfdene or Halden began his campaign by the destruction of Tynemouth Priory, and, in the horrible progress of his arms, cruelty was practised as a fine art. "*Nec aetati nec sexui vel ordini deliberabant*," says Reginald. The account in the Rites of Durham reads:—"In the year 875 Eardulf was bishop, at which time certain Danes and pagans of sundry other nations invaded and destroyed the realm of England in divers places. And after a certain space, Halden, king of the Danes, with a great part of the navy and army of infidels arrived at Tinmouth haven, intending to sojourn there all the winter, and next spring he meant, with all his power, to invade, spoil, and destroy the county of Northumberland." The utter demoralization of the English in the face of the enemy is pitiful, and the hurried counsels taken speak never a word of defence. Flight is the only safety that recommends itself. Halfdene established his winter quarters on the Tyne at Tomemuth, which Mr. Longstaffe identifies with the mouth of the Team. "Probably on the strong post of the King's Meadows."

The terrible inroads of the Danes, which continued as the century closed, are vividly summarized by Worsaae. "The sea now suddenly teemed with the numberless barks of the Vikings, who constantly showed themselves in all the harbours and rivers." Those in most dread were the monks. For them "the holy cities had become a wilderness, their Jerusalem a desolation, their holy and beautiful house burned up with fire, and all their pleasant things laid waste." They fled to the mountains. And but little better were the folk who were alive and remained, spared, many of them, to be victims to the famine and plague that followed.

In 883 the victories of Alfred began to tell favourably for the northern Christians, and "the survivors," says the Anglo-Saxon chronicle, "descending from the mountains solicited the protection of the conquerors. By the Danes it was willingly granted."

But the end was not yet, for in 890, seven years after, we have Sigefrith, a pirate, "carried along the coast of Northumberland in his daring fleet, and ravaging the coast twice." And again Ragnal, the son of Godfrey the Dane, invaded the country with a large fleet at the beginning of the 10th century. "Ealdred of Bamburgh being driven forth, retired to Scotland and sought the aid of Constantine, whom he

conducted to Corbridge. In the battle which ensued the pagan king conquered, put Constantine to flight, routed the Scots, and slew Elfrid and all the English nobles except Ealdred, with his brother Uchtred" (Hist. S. Cuthbert, quoted by H. Hinde, p. 140). This was in 924. Ragnal must by this have achieved a footing for himself in the state, for the same year he tendered submission to Edward the Elder in company with his defeated adversary, Ealdred of Bamburgh, Constantine, king of Scotland, and the king of Strathclyde, "with all their people, Scots, Saxons, Danes, Norwegians, and Britons" (Hinde, p. 140). Mr. Hinde considers it probable that Ragnal was thus confirmed in the possession of the southern district of Northumberland.

Thirty years later (in 954), with the expulsion of Eric, "was extinguished the Danish authority in Northumberland; nor did anyone hereafter bear the title of King of that province, although some of the earls who succeeded enjoyed an amount of power almost as extensive."

The Danish invasions that followed during the next century were, in their nature and in their results, altogether different from the earlier piratical expeditions. Towards 900 A.D., Christianity was rapidly spreading itself in Scandinavia. The Norse peoples, divided by internal struggles, were unable for a time to reinforce their kinsmen in England, and when, in the latter part of the 10th century, the Danish and Norwegian Vikings again swarmed through England in yet larger expeditions, the conditions had changed, and the invaders sought to recover their former conquests.

In considering the hold which the Danes must have had in these parts, there are one or two points worthy of notice. Danes had come from time to time as settlers. There were here and there scattered over the country many who had mingled with their kinsmen, the English. The flow at first was intermittent. The absorption, therefore, was likely to be the more complete. "Fresh arriving Vikings," says Worsaae, "always found reception and assistance." "They married native women." "In Northumberland especially," he adds, "the Danes, and a considerable number of Norwegians had settled themselves securely under their own chiefs." Under such conditions, the fusion of considerable bodies of Scandinavians with the people of Northumberland would take place without disturbance of the English place-names or alteration of the spoken language.

If we return to the Permian country of North Durham we see how important a position it must have held in the early Danish descents. Here were the two great harbours; and not only were these entered by the Danes, but held by them as the basis of operations. Here they could winter—and hence sail forth at will. They must have seized upon the Permian land as commanding both the ports of Wear and Tyne. A glance at its physical contour will show its strategic importance. Tynemouth, with its fair haven, possessed the vantage of a natural fortress. The Tyne at that time entered the sea by two mouths. The northern channel, then as now, poured through the narrows, swept past the high bluffs of diluvial clay, then projecting far out into the tideway. The southern outlet passed by what is now the Mill Dam, flowed through the present Waterloo Vale, and thus to sea. Between these circling arms rose an island stronghold, crested by the ruins of the Roman city which flanked the eastern terminus of the Roman Wall. This was no mere delta, but a ridged height, worthy site of a great city, at full flood or at ebb standing out the key of the position. As the magnesian limestone passes southward, widening as it goes, it outcrops to the west in boldest escarpment. The Water Tower at Cleadon, the church and quarried cliffs at West Boldon, and the further eminence topped by the Durham Monument, mark at once the line of outcrop and the boldly distinctive features of this Werewickshire Permian country. This natural line of defence was on its westerly front still further strengthened by the great slake at Jarrow, into which fell the river Don, formerly navigable, as we have seen, by the tide for three miles inland to Boldon, and bordered on either bank by a vast and bottomless bog. This marsh (*Gyruu*, "Jarrow") must have been a formidable fosse; whilst the wilderness of marshes that covered the flat lands, where the coal-measures crop out below the limestone, would well divide the steep bluffs of the Permian country from the lands beyond. With the port of Jarrow in hand the Viking, accustomed to forage for himself, would find in marsh and flood an abundant stock of food. Beyond was Wearmouth —a harbour very different before the action of the sea had eroded its natural bay and reduced it to its present limits. Mr. Longstaffe speaks of it as "The tranquil harbour of rest, lauded by Malmesbury as receiving ships borne by propitious gales into its bosom, which

attracted Ptolemy's notice in preference to the Tyne." This harbour and the neighbouring Tyne were made the ports and places of refit by the Vikings. That the hold upon them must have been retained for over two centuries by the Danes seems probable, being in fact a necessity of their position. Remember that the Viking crews were not only skilful sailors and hard fighters; they must also have been cunning handicraftsmen. The outfit of a pirate fleet that must cross the German Ocean and land its crews in fighting trim, was not so simple an affair. Their ships were "nailed boats," as distinguished from the ruder craft of an earlier time. It would therefore be necessary for them to make for and secure commodious harbours; and that they steered for the ports of Tyne and Wear has been shown. The foreshores of these harbours would be used for beaching and refitting their vessels. The most convenient places for such purposes would be found at the low end of South Shields and on the south side of Wear harbour.

The river banks must then have resounded with the clink of the Viking's hammer, as he drove the trenail or recaulked the leaky seams of his "nailed boat." As he thus established himself on the south bank of the Wear, the bus-carle saw across the harbour the blackened ruins of the church of Benedict Biscop, where trembling monks had returned to crouch behind the bare, burnt walls, and build them huts for shelter. These monks would look over to the strange keels that were drawn up, and curiously watch the Danish settlement that had risen on the opposite shore; a settlement destined to perpetuate the the name of the Jutish home-land—the Sönderjylland of the Dane—in the Sunderland of the future.

Bearing in mind, then, the peculiarity of the Danish occupation here, we may conclude that they touched closely their kinsfolk, the English, of these parts—to be absorbed as time went on, losing thus their own language in their gradual intercourse with a more settled and civilized people, yet leaving a trace of the race fusion in an altered pronunciation and accent. This impress of the Dane would account for the existence of the marked sub-dialects peculiar to the coast from Cullercoats to Wearside. If this be not so, then we must otherwise explain the phenomenon of the Permian people of North Durham. They occupy a most important strategic position. They penetrate like

a wedge driven through the neighbouring people, whom they cut off from the sea ports. That this singular position must at one time have been acquired by a sea-faring and warlike people, is the natural—may I say—the inevitable conclusion.

In suggesting that an accurate observation of our folk-speech may prove of greater service to our historians than the obscurity and commonplace of the subject at first promises, I would add my persuasion, that, by the further study of our own homely dialects, we may add some broken light to those records of our early history,

> "Which, be they what they may,
> Are yet the fountain light of all our day,
> Are yet a master light of all our seeing."