

XV.—NOTES ON THE NORTHUMBERLAND *BURR*.

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[Read on the 25th July, 1888.]

REFERRING to Dr. Embleton's interesting paper 'On Certain Peculiarities in the Dialect of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Northumberland,'¹ it may be observed that, whatever may have been the origin of the peculiar pronunciation of the letter *r* in Northumberland, there are very strong reasons against the opinion that it is due to Danish influence.

That it could (according to Dr. Embleton's suggestion) originate from Danish influence in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries seems incredible, because there was no immigration of Danes at that time to account for any effect whatever on the speech of the people.

Dr. Embleton supplies good arguments that it did not originate from the Danes who invaded and settled in England in the eighth, ninth, and tenth centuries, because the guttural *r* in Danish is of later introduction; but, as it is sometimes assumed by other writers that the peculiarity comes from those Danish invaders and settlers, it may be worth while to show why such could not have been the case.

The Danish settlements in England were mainly in Yorkshire, Lincolnshire with the districts west of it, and Norfolk. They also extended, but less numerous, north and south of those limits into the county of Durham, and into Suffolk. South of Suffolk there were Danish piratical incursions, but settlements are rare, and the same north of the Tyne, till we come to the north of Scotland, where, as on the Western coasts, the settlements were rather Norwegian than Danish.

It will be observed that the districts in which Danish settlements occur are wholly in the kingdoms of Northumbria, Mercia, and East Anglia, which, as will also be noticed, are those which had been previously settled by the Anglian branch of the Anglo-Saxon people.

The dialect of the Angles was not the same as that of the Saxon branch which settled in the south of England.

If the origin of the Northern *burr* were Danish, we ought to find it the most strongly marked where the Danish settlements were the most numerous—in the North and East Ridings of Yorkshire, in Lincolnshire, and in East Norfolk—but being entirely absent in these localities, it seems plain that it has not been derived from the influence of the Danish settlers.

¹ *Archæologia Aeliana*, XIII. 72.

Concerning the present county of Northumberland, it has been shown² that, if place names are any guide, there were no Danish settlements on the east coast north of the Tyne.

North of the Tweed the Teutonic population was not entirely Anglian. An earlier settlement in Lothian appears to have been Frisian, and the mixture with the Ancient British tribes, whether Picts or Cymry (both probably the same race, though that is a question outside the present argument), was probably greater than between Tyne and Tweed. These facts may account for the absence of the Northumberland *r* north of the Tweed, supposing it to be of Anglian origin.

It would therefore appear that the territory in which the Angles were least mixed with other tribes was the present county of Northumberland. Here the Anglian dialect would, therefore, retain its purity with least change by influence from other quarters; and this being exactly the district where the *burr* occurs, we are led to the inference that if the *burr* is derived from some early mode of pronunciation, it is a survival of the pure Anglian dialect where it is least mixed with either Danish or other tongues.

The *burr* is indigenous to Newcastle, but not to Sunderland. There were Danish settlers at Sunderland, but not at Newcastle.³ If the *burr* had been from the Danes, it would have been a Sunderland and not a Newcastle peculiarity.

But it is necessary to remark that it cannot be maintained with certainty that the *burr* is a survival of Anglian speech. It looks likely; but we can only go so far as to say that *if* it is so early a form of speech, then it is Anglian, and in no case can it be Danish.

It is, however, not at all improbable that a later origin should be assigned to it. The county of Northumberland was much isolated from the rest of England in the olden times, and it would not be at all strange if, in the changes which are constantly going on in dialects as well as languages, and in pronunciation as well as etymology, the peculiarity referred to may have gradually arisen, and, though not from Danish influence, Dr. Embleton's supposition of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries might still not be far from the mark.

The only object of this short note is to endeavour to show, not when the *burr* originated, but that it is not Danish.

² *Archæologia Aeliama*, IX. 57.

³ See Mr. Heslop's paper, *Arch. Ael.*, X. 93, and see also X. 185.