PREFACE TO THE LETTER N.

This concluding portion of Volume VI, containing the words which begin with N, includes 3484 Main words, 440 Special Combinations explained under these, 2298 Subordinate entries, and 1579 Obvious Combinations; in all 7792 words. Of the Main words, 1079 are marked † as obsolete, and 147 are marked || as alien or not fully naturalized.*

N is one of the smaller letters in respect of the number of words beginning with it, and occupies only about half the space of L, and one-third that of M. Although including a considerable number of words in very common use, it does not comprise any which require very extensive treatment; the longer articles rarely exceed four or five columns, and a large number are comparatively short. In most cases the words have a very definite sense or senses, so that difficulties of arrangement or definition are few. On the etymological side, also, N is not a difficult letter; the great majority of the words being either native English, with clear cognates in the other Teutonic tongues, or Latin, adopted directly or through French. Those to which more or less obscurity attaches are chiefly short words of a colloquial type, as nag (horse), nap (to seize), nape, nasty, natty, nib, nibble, nick, nip, nipple, nob, noble, nod, noodle, noddy, nog, noggin, needle, nugget, etc. The origin of words of this class is very often obscure, and the absence of similar forms in the cognate languages makes it probable that they are mainly of native origin, though their history cannot be clearly traced.

The number of native words in N is considerably increased by the coalescence of the OE. negative ne with the following word. Hence the forms naught, neither, never (ne'er), no, none, nor, not, nothing, nought, and the dialect or obsolete na, nat, nather, nauther, nuther, nouter. (The distinction in form between naught and nought goes back to OE., and has not hitherto been clearly exhibited.) Formerly also this ne was prefixed to certain verbs, of which the only surviving representative is nill; illustrations of the others are given under nabbe, nad, nace; nam, nas, nis, nys; nist, note, etc.

Another addition to the words beginning with N is made by the cases in which the final letter of au or more rarely then (dative) has been transferred to the following word. In ME. this might occur with any word beginning with a vowel (see N 3), but the tendency towards the transference was more persistent in some cases than in others, as exemplified by nall, naul (awl), main, mean (own), naunt and nucle; in nickname and nonce the wrong division has become permanent.

Although no original prefix, either English or Latin, begins with N, the place of one has been taken by the Latin non, first introduced in a few Anglo-French words, and gradually extended in use until its application is practically unlimited. In this respect it resembles the real prefixes re- and ne-, the full illustration of which in any dictionary is impossible.

The material originally collected for the letter N was subedited by various hands, viz. Na- and Nicher—Niggo by the Rev. A. P. Fayers, Yeadon, Leeds; Ne- by Mr. A. Hailstone, Manchester; Ni- to Niched by Prof. F. E. Bumby, Nottingham; Nigh—Nizy by Mr. H. A. Nesbit, Hampstead; No—Nonyl by Mrs. G. H. Pope, Clifton (now Oxford); Noodle—Nozzle by Mr. E. L. Brandreth, London; and Nu- to the end of the letter by Mr. R. F. Green, Liverpool. Since this work was done, much fresh material had accumulated, often of great value in helping toward the real history of the various words.

Among those to whom acknowledgements are due for assistance in dealing with special words are Prof. I. Bywater of Oxford; Prof. W. W. Skeat of Cambridge; Mr. James Platt, Jr., who has supplied definite information regarding words from various American, African, and Asiatic languages; Dr. Alex. McKenzie, who specially revised the chemical terms connected with nitre; Dr. D. Hay Fleming, Edinburgh; and Mr. J. Maitland Anderson of the University Library, St. Andrews. Mr. E. L. Brandreth has helped by verification, in the British Museum Library, of references to books not accessible in Oxford.

* The following figures show how the present work compares with certain other Dictionaries:—

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<th>Words recorded</th>
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<th>'Century' Dict.</th>
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The number of quotations in this portion of Richardson's Dictionary is 1431.
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The proofs have been regularly read by Lord Aldenham, Mr. A. Caland, of Wageningen, Holland (who has done great service in verifying references and in other respects), Mr. H. Chichester Hart (who has supplied many quotations from Elizabethan literature), the Rev. J. A. Milne, of Lyne, Peebleshire, and latterly by the Rev. Canon Fowler, of Durham.

Those who have more immediately assisted in the preparation of N have been Mr. J. M. Ramsay, M.A. (in the earlier part), Mr. L. F. Powell, Miss E. R. Steane, Mr. R. F. Ray, Mr. J. H. Smithwhite, B.A., and (since the beginning of the present year) Mr. G. Watson. The article on NON-, and all the words beginning with this prefix, together with NONCE, were independently prepared by Mr. C. T. Onions, M.A.

W. A. CRAIGIE.

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