

## PREFACE

THIS reissue of A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles as The Oxford English Dictionary in twelve volumes is a reprint of the original ten-volume work. An additional volume comprises a Supplement of new words and meanings, the Additions and Emendations prefixed to the original volumes, corrected and amplified, a List of Spurious Words, and a List of Books quoted in the principal work. The importance of the Supplement arises from the fact that the publication of the Dictionary extended over forty-five years. For the early letters of the alphabet, therefore, the compilers of the Supplement have had to take account of the growth and change of the vocabulary over nearly half a century. The List of Books forms a bibliography of English literature such as does not exist elsewhere.

The history of this Dictionary, which is related in detail in the Introduction here following, goes back to November 1857, when Richard Chenevix Trench, then Dean of Westminster, by calling attention to the deficiencies of existing English dictionaries, encouraged the Philological Society to make plans for the compilation of a new English dictionary. These culminated after an experimental period of some twenty years in the great project which was eventually launched by an agreement made between the Society and the Delegates of the Clarendon Press. The connexion of the first editor with the work began in 1878 and the last page of it was passed for press in 1928, the issue of the 125 constituent fascicules extending from 1 February 1884 to 19 April 1928.

The aim of this Dictionary is to present in alphabetical series the words that have formed the English vocabulary from the time of the earliest records down to the present day, with all the relevant facts concerning their form, sense-history, pronunciation, and etymology. It embraces not only the standard language of literature and conversation, whether current at the moment, or obsolete, or archaic, but also the main technical vocabulary, and a large measure of dialectal usage and slang. Its basis is a collection of some five millions of excerpts from English literature of every period amassed by an army of voluntary readers and the editorial staff. Such a collection of evidence—it is represented by a selection of about 1,800,000 quotations actually printed—could form the only possible foundation for the historical treatment of every word and idiom which is the *raison d'être* of the work. It is a fact everywhere recognized that the consistent pursuit of this method has worked a revolution in the art of lexicography. In 1891 a great English philologist wrote of the 'debt' which 'English grammar will some day owe to the *New English Dictionary*'; and this debt has been mounting up ever since. There is no aspect of English linguistic history that the Dictionary has not illuminated; its findings have called for the revision of many philological statements and the reconsideration of many judgements on textual matters. So wide is its scope and so intensive its treatment that it has served for students, both native and foreign, as a lexicon of many languages, and, though it deals primarily with words, it is virtually an encyclopædic treasury of information about things. It has provided a ready quarry of material for many authors of treatises and dissertations. Abridgements and adaptations of it in several forms have been authorized and produced by the Clarendon Press: the two-volume Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, the Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English, the Pocket Oxford Dictionary (of which there is an American version), and the Little Oxford Dictionary; the Oxford Shakespeare Glossary is also directly based upon it.

In 1897 'this historical dictionary of the English language was by her gracious permission dutifully dedicated by the University of Oxford' to Queen Victoria. On its completion in 1928, it was presented, by His Majesty's gracious permission, to King George the Fifth; a copy was also officially presented to the President of the United States. Under the auspices of the British Academy, a gold medal was specially struck in honour of the first editor of the Dictionary and to commemorate its completion. The editors have been singled out for recognition and distinction in many ways. Two enjoyed civil list pensions from the early years of their editorship; two were Fellows of the British Academy; two have received the order of Knighthood; three have been elected to Fellowships in Oxford colleges, one of these to an Honorary Fellowship of his college; two have occupied positions as university teachers. Between them, the four editors have received degrees *honoris causa* from nearly a score of universities,



and one has been awarded the Sir Israel Gollancz Memorial Prize for distinguished services to English lexicography. The honorary degree of Master of Arts of Oxford has been conferred also upon some of the editorial assistants. It may be added that all the editors have produced works of authority apart from the Dictionary.

The conduct of the Dictionary has been singularly fortunate in that it has been possible to retain for many years the services of the four editors and of several members of the staff (some of whom have served for more than forty years). This has ensured a continuity of tradition over a period of half a century and more, the value of which cannot be overestimated. A corresponding tradition was maintained in the printing department, where, at the time of completion in 1928, a compositor was still working at the Dictionary who had been engaged on it at the outset.

With the exception of £5,000 generously contributed to the cost of volume VI by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths, the whole expense of production has been borne by the Delegates of the Clarendon Press, for whom, and for their official representatives, this Dictionary has been a constant object of interest and solicitude.

August, 1933.

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