

*LECTURES.
ENGLISH
LITERATURE*



THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ON THE BRITISH ISLES. BEOWULF

1. *The Ancient Britons and Their Language*
2. *The Celt's Culture*
3. *Mythology*
4. *Purpose of Myths*
5. *The Roman Conquest*
6. *The Invasion of Britain by Germanic Tribes*
7. *“Beowulf”*
8. *The Norman Conquest*
9. *The Danish Influence upon the Language of the Anglo-Saxons*

◉ ***1. The Ancient Britons and Their Language***

- ◉ Several significant historical events led to the appearance and development of the language which we now call English. The first mentioning of Britain dates back to the 4th century BC and the people who lived there were called Britons.
- ◉ They belonged to the Celtic race and the language they spoke was Celtic. The Britons were governed by a class of priests, called the druids, who had great power over them. Few traces of the Celtic language are to be found in the English today. For example:
 - ◉ *Stratford- on - Avon: Avon - river*
 - ◉ *Loch Ness: Loch - lake*

2. THE CELT'S CULTURE

- ◉ The Celts came to the British Isles from France about 3000 years ago.
- ◉ The language they spoke was Celtic, their culture, that is to say, their way of thinking and their understanding of nature were very primitive. The Celts were strong, tall fighters who learned to mine tin and to carry on trade with their neighbors. They absorbed the early Britons and became the ancestors of the Scotch, Irish and Welsh people.
- ◉ Celtic tribes called the Picts penetrated into the mountains in the North. Some Picts as well as the tribes of Scots settled in the North. The Scots came in such large numbers that in time the name of Scotland was given to the country. Powerful Celtic tribes, the Britons, held most of the country.

- ◉ Celts had no towns and lived in villages. They were acquainted with the use of copper, iron and tin, they kept large herds of cattle and sheep. They also cultivated crops. The Britons were more civilized than other tribes. Their clothing was made of wool, woven in many colors, while other tribes wore skins.
- ◉ Celts worshipped nature and believed in many gods. The Druids, a class of priests, who were skillful in teaching and administration, governed the Britons. They met in dark thick woods called Sacred Groves, wearing white robes. Little is known of their religion for sure, except the fact that the Druids had great power over the Britons. They led religious ceremonies, settled legal disputes, etc., in short, they were lawgivers.

- ◉ They sacrificed not only animals but also human beings to their gods. Victims were placed into baskets and burnt. Another ceremony was the cutting of the mistletoe that grew on oak trees, a custom that English people still remember at Christmas.
- ◉ Like all the ancient peoples the Celts made up many legends about their gods and heroes, they were called Sagas. The heroes of those Sagas and their adventures were imaginary. However, they give us an idea of the Celtic way of life, their occupations, tools, weapons, customs and religion. The greatest hero of such sagas was Cuchulainn ['ku:kulin]. According to the legends he lived in Ireland (Ulster). Cuchulainn was the greatest champion, like Achilles [e'kili:z], a Greek hero.

3. MYTHOLOGY

- ◉ **Mythology** is a collection of stories, telling people's beliefs and history. Some major issues are the origin of humanity and its traditions and the way in which the natural and human world functions. Most often the deities' daily activities are described in mythology, their love affairs, pleasures, jealousy, rages, ambitions and skills.
- ◉ In the times of the Celts different kinds of mythological narrations appeared.

Kinds of Mythological Narrations:

- ◉ **Legends.** Unlike many myths legends do not have religious or super natural context. Now we might still gain a philosophical and moral meaning from a legend. An example of a legend is the 'Tale of Atlantis'.
- ◉ **Folklore.** While legends and myths might be embraced as true stories, folk tales are known to be fictitious. They are often told only within limited geographical area. Sometimes rather small, such as a town, a mountain range but more often it's a country.
- ◉ **Fables.** The emphasis of a fable is always on a moral. It's a short story, which has animals as main characters.
- ◉ **Primitive myths.** They were, generally, stories about nature, usually told by primitive clergymen (priests), such as shamans.
- ◉ **Pagan myths.** These were like the Greek and the Roman tales of the interplay between deities and humans.

- ⦿ According to the themes raised in myths they can be divided into four main groups:
- ✓ Cosmic Myths: include narratives of the creation and end of the world;
- ✓ Theistic myths: portray the deities;
- ✓ Hero myths: give the accounts of individuals, such as Achilles and Guises;
- ✓ Place and object myths: describe certain places and objects (all the Myths of Camelot).

4. PURPOSE OF MYTHS

- ◉ 1. Myths grant continuity and stability to a culture. They foster a shared set of perspectives, values, history and so on. By means of these communal tales we are connected to one another.
- ◉ 2. Myths present guide lines for living. When myths tell the readers about the activities and attitudes of deities the moral tone implies society's expectations for our own behavior and standards. In myths we see typical situations and the options which can be selected in those situations.
- ◉ 3. Myths justify a culture's activities. Through their authoritativeness myths establish certain customs, rituals, laws, social structures in any culture.

- ◉ 4. Myths give meaning to life within all the difficulties: e.g. the pain becomes more bearable because people believe that all the trials have a certain meaning.
- ◉ 5. Myths explain the unexplained. They reveal people's faith in life after death, show the reasons for crises and miracles and other puzzles and yet they retain and even encourage the aura of mystery.
- ◉ 6. Myths offer role models. For example, children usually pattern themselves after heroes of comic books, cartoons and: so on, which depict lots of typical characters (the superman, for example).

5. THE ROMAN CONQUEST

- About the 1st century BC (Before Christ) Britain was conquered by the powerful state of Roman (Rome). The Roman period occupies the time beginning with the 1st century BC up to the 6th century AD. The Romans lived on the peninsula, which is now called Italy, and their language was Latin. This was a people of practical men. They were very clever at making hard roads & building bridges. Many things that the Romans taught the English were given Latin names. And the names of many English towns never dropped the Latin ending (For example, Manchester, Lancaster and many others).

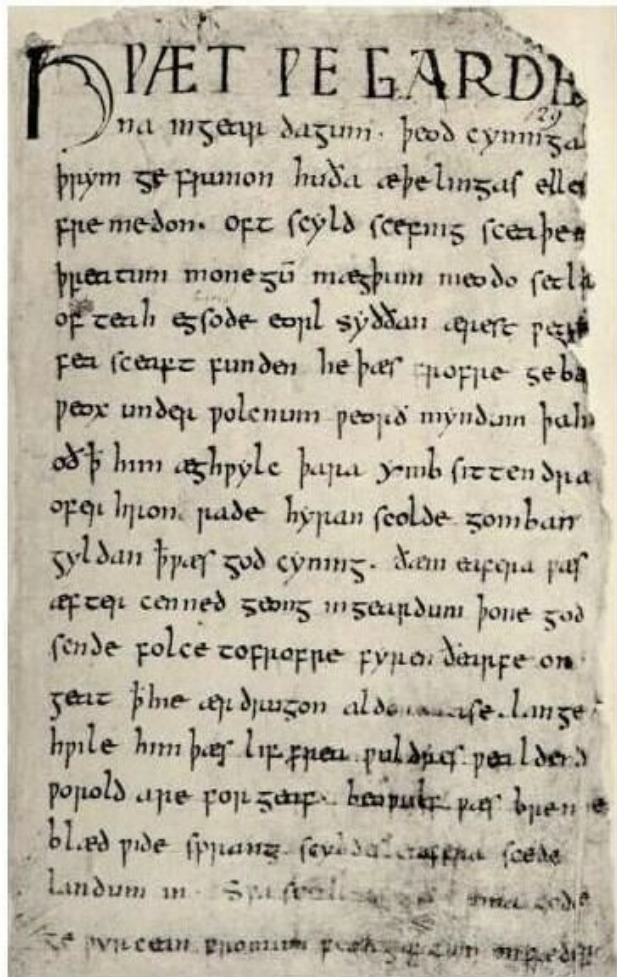
- ◉ The monasteries where art of reading & writing was taught became the scientific centres of the country. The monks wrote stories and verses. Though the poets were English, they were supposed to write in Latin. But notwithstanding this custom there were some poets who wrote in Anglo-Saxon. For example, Caedmon (7th century). He wrote the poem "The Paraphrase". It tells us of the Bible-story in verse. Many other monks took part in this work, but their names are unknown to us.
- ◉ The culture of the early Britons changed greatly under the influence of Christianity, which penetrated into British Isles in the 3d century. Christianity was brought to all countries belonging to the Roman Empire. The 1st British church was built in Canterbury in the 6th century and up to now it is the English religious centre.

6. THE INVASION OF BRITAIN BY GERMANIC TRIBES

- ◉ The next period is marked by the invasion of Britain by Germanic tribes. Among these invaders there were Germanic tribes called Angles ['æŋɡlz], Saxons ['sæksnz] and Jutes ['dʒu:ts] who lived in the northern and central parts of Europe. They kicked the country back in its educational and cultural development. As they were pagan (believed in many Gods), the names of their Gods are still preserved in the English language.
- ◉ It's well-known that Jusco, for example, was the God of the Darkness; Woden was the God of War; Thor was the God of Thunder; Truer was the God of Prosperity. When the people learned to divide months into weeks & every week into 7 days, they gave the names of their Gods. So, it's easy to guess that Sunday is the Day of the Sun, Monday - Moon, Tuesday - Day of God Jusco, Wednesday - Woden's Day, Thursday - Thunder's Day, Friday - Fries Day, Saturday - Saturn's Day.

- Soon after these invasions Britain split up into 7 kingdoms: Kent, Sussex, Essex, Wessex, Mercia, East Anglia and Northumbria. The Angles, Saxons and Jutes quarreled a lot with one another in their fight for supreme power. But nevertheless they became one nation in the course of a few centuries. They spoke different dialects of the West Germanic Language. But they had no written language yet. And the stories and poems they composed had to be memorized. The famous "Beowulf" ['beiwulf] belongs to them.

7. "BEOWULF"



Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagum,
 þeodcýninga, þrym gefrunon,
 hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.
 Oft Scyld Scefing sceapena þreatum,

monegum mægþum, meodosetla ofteah,
 egsode eorlas. Syððan ærest wearð
 feasceaf funden, he þæs frofre gebad,
 weox under wolcnum, weorðmyndum þah,
 oðþæt him æghwylc þara ymsittendra

ofer hronrade hyran scolde,
 gomban gyldan. þæt wæs god cýning!
 ðæm eafera wæs æfter cenned,
 geong in geardum, þone god sende
 folce to frofre; fyrendearfe ongeat

þe hie ær drugon aldorlease
 lange hwile. Him þæs liffrea,
 wuldres wealdend, woroldare forgeaf;
 Beowulf wæs breme (blæd wide sprang),
 Scyldes eafera Scedelandum in.

- ◉ The beautiful Saxon poem called "Beowulf" tells us of the times long before the Anglo-Saxons came to Britain. There is no mentioning of England. It has come down to us in a single manuscript, which was written at the end of the 10th century, at least two centuries after its composition. The poem was given the title "Beowulf" only in 1805 and it was not printed until 1850.
- ◉ The name of the author is unknown. The manuscript called the Nowell Codex is in the British Museum, in London. It is impossible for a non-specialist to read it in the original. Its social interest lies on the description of the life of this period. The scene is set among the Jutes, who lived on the Scandinavian Peninsula at that time, & the Danes, their neighbors across the strait.

- ◉ The people were divided into two classes: free peasants & warriors. The peasants planted the soil & served the fighting-men who defended them from hostile tribes. Their kings were often chosen by the people for they had to be wise men & skilled warriors.
- ◉ The poem shows the beginning of feudalism. The safety of the people depended on the warriors. There were several ranks of warriors; the folk-king, or liege-lord, was at the head of the community; he was helped by warriors who were his liegeman. If they were given lands for their services, they were called "earls", "knights".

- ◉ The Danes & the Jutes were great sailors. Their ships had broad painted sails & tall prows which were often made into the figure of a dragon or wolf or some other fierce animal. The poem shows us these warriors in battle & at peace, their feasts & amusements, their love for the sea & for adventure.
- ◉ Beowulf is the main character of the poem. He is a young knight of the Jutes, who lived on the southern coast of the Scandinavian Peninsula. His adventures with the sea-monster abroad, in the country of Danes, & later, with a fire-dragon at home, form two parts in this heroic epic. His unselfish way in protecting people makes him worthy to be folk-king. He would be slave to no man. Though fierce & cruel in war, he respected men & women. He is ready to sacrifice his life for them. Beowulf fights for the benefit of his people, not for his own glory, & he strives to be fair to the end in the battle.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE POEM

- ◉ The Anglo-Saxon verse had no rhyme. It had even no regular number of syllables for its lines. Yet it was necessary that the stressed syllables of one line should begin with the same consonant. This made their poetry very musical in sound & was called "alliteration". Note the different sounds in the following lines of alliterative verse.

[f]: **The folk-kings former fame we have heard of;**

[b]: **Bore it bitterly he bided in darkness;**

[t]: **Twelve-winters' time torture...;**

[s]: **Soul-crushing sorrow. Not seldom in private;**

[k]: **Sat the King in his council, conference held they;**

[g]: **Good among Geatmen, of Grendefs
achievements;**

[h]: **Heard in his home: of heroes then living.**

- Many nouns & names of people are accompanied by one or even two descriptive words. Based on a certain likeness between two subjects or two ideas, the descriptive words show the subject in a new light. They help the reader to catch the exact meaning the author had in mind. These descriptive words, whether verb, adjective or noun, are now called "metaphors". For example: salt-streams, sail-road, wave-goer, hot-burning hatred.

8. THE NORMAN CONQUEST

- ◉ The Norman Conquest took place in the 12th -13th centuries. In the 12th century the struggle between the Anglo-Saxon earls (гпаѢ) for supreme power began again. It caused a foreign conquest. The Norman Duke, (Earl) William the Conqueror, became complete master of the whole of England within 5 years (beginning with 1066 when the battle of Hastings took place). The lands of most of Anglo-Saxon aristocracy were given to the Norman barons and they introduced their feudal laws to compel the peasants to work for them. Thus, the English became the servile class. The Normans spoke Norman - French. During the following two hundred years that they kept coming over to England they couldn't suppress the English language.

Communication went on 3 languages:

- ✓ at the monasteries the scholars were taught in Latin;
- ✓ Norman - French was the language after ruling class, spoken in court and official institutions;
- ✓ common people held obstinately to their own expressive mother tongue.

English

Ox

Calf

Sheep

Pig

French

Beef

Veal

Mutton

Pork

- ◉ Each rang of the society had its own literature:
- ◉ 1) During the 12th and 13th centuries monks (монахи) wrote historical chronicles in Latin. The scholars at Oxford and Cambridge Universities described their experiments in Latin and even antireligious societies were also written there.
- ◉ 2) The aristocracy wrote their poetry in Norman – French.
- ◉ 3) The country folk made up their ballades and songs in Anglo - Saxon.

9. THE DANISH INFLUENCE UPON THE LANGUAGE OF THE ANGLO-SAXONS

- ◉ The Danes, who had occupied the North and East of England, spoke a language only slightly different from the Anglo-Saxons dialects. The roots of the words were the same while the endings were different. People made themselves understood without translators simply by using the roots of the words.

The endings, which show the relations between words, were substituted by dashes. This brought about changes, which developed the language in a new way. The droppings of case ending meant:

- ◉ The stress of the words was shifted. That's why the sound and rhythm of the language were all together different.
- ◉ New grammar forms developed to show the relations of words and prepositions and pronouns came to be used more than before.
- ◉ Since both languages were spoken by all classes of society they emerged with by another very rapidly. The Danes were in many ways far more civilized than the English (for example, they brought the game of chess to the English).