VIII.—ON THE DERIVATION OF THE WORD
BROKER. BY HENSLEIGH WEDGWOOD, Esq.

[Read March the 19th.]

The custom of employing a broker in the purchase of goods arises from the advantage of having a skilled intermediary, capable, from long practice, of forming a critical judgement of the goods in question, of pointing out their latent defects, and rejecting whatever falls below the degree of excellence called for by the circumstances of the case. To find fault is accordingly recognised in *Piers Plowman* as the specific duty of a broker :—

Among burgeises have I be
 Dwellyng at London,
 And gart Backbiting be a *brocour*
 To blame mens ware.

On this principle, the German designation of the office is *mäkeler* from *makel*, a blur, stain, fault ; *mäkeln*, to criticise, censure, find fault with ; [and thence] to follow the business of a broker, buy and sell by commission (*Küttner*).

Now in most of the Teutonic (especially the Low German) and Slavonic dialects we find the root *brak* or *wrak*, in the sense of rejection, refuse, vile, damaged, faulty, giving rise to a verb signifying to inspect, make selection, sort, try out, reject, cast out. To take the Slavonic languages first, although it may be thought that the word is probably borrowed by them from their German neighbours, we find :—Russ. *brak*, refuse ; *brakovat*, to pick and choose, to sort ; *brakovanie*, rejection, inspection ; Bohem. *brak*, rejection, refuse ; *brakovati*, to cast out as bad of its kind ; Pol. *brak*, refuse, want, lack ; *brakować*, to garble, to pick, to be wanting ; Lith. *brokas*, a fault, weak place, matter of blame ; *brokoti*, to criticise, to blame. In the Teutonic class :—Sua-bian *bracken*, to select, to try out ; *bracken waar*, refuse ; Du. *brack*, rejected, damaged ; *braeck goed*, goods damaged by sea-water, Kil. ; Pl.D. *braken* (primarily doubtless to cast out the refuse, but now generally), to garble, inspect, try ; *wraken*, *wroken*, to pronounce unsound, to reject ; *wrak*, anything

rejected as unsound; *wrak-good*, *wrak-hering*, *wrak-kese*, refuse goods, -herrings, -cheese. Dan. *vrage*, to reject, find fault with, to sort goods; Pl.D. *eecen wrack* drin smiten; Dan. *slaac vrag* paa, to throw blame upon, to find fault with: where it is seen how the capacity of signifying fault arises from the idea of rejection, which would seem the logical consequent; rejected because faulty. From the same radical notion (and not from the verb *break*, to which it is commonly referred) must be explained the O.E. *brack*, a blemish:—

You may find time out in eternity,
Deceit or violence in heavenly justice,—
Ere stain or *brack* in her sweet reputation.—B. & F.

The idea of rejection is developed in a somewhat different direction in the Romance dialects; Prov. *brac*, refuse, filth, mud, ordure, matter: and as an adjective, vile, dirty, abject; It. *braco*, *brago*, mud; Prov. *bragos*; O.Fr. *brageux*, defiled, dirty, noisome. ‘La ville où il y avait caues et sources moult *brageuses*,’ (Monstrelet). I have quoted the last expression for the illustration it affords of the E. *brackish*, of which the meaning is water rendered nauseous or spoiled for drinking by a mixture of salt water, the reference to salt as the special cause of nauseousness being purely accidental. Compare Du. *brack-goed*, merces salso corruptæ (Biglotton, Kilian).

The word *broker* seems to have come to us from the shores of the Baltic, the seat of the ‘Easterlings,’ with whom our early commerce was chiefly carried on, and the reason why the word is not found in the languages there spoken in precisely the same sense which it bears in English, may be that in those countries it has passed on to designate public inspectors appointed to classify goods according to their quality, and to reject the damaged and unsound. We are informed by Adclung that in the mercantile towns of Lower Germany public inspectors of goods exposed to sale are appointed under the name of *braker*, *bracker* or *wracker*; Dan. *vrag*er, an inspector of goods, usually of eatables. In Petersburg the price of tallow is quoted with or without *brack*, the term *brack* signifying the official inspection of sworn *brackers* or sorters.—Tooke’s ‘Catherine.’

If we advance another step in the inquiry, and seek the origin of the term *brack* in the sense of refuse, rejection, we find a satisfactory origin in an imitation of the sound of hawking or spitting, which has given birth to G. *brechen*, Du. *braeken*, to vomit; G. *brech-mittel*, an emetic; O.E. *parbreak*, vomit; Prov.E. *whreake*, tussis, screatio, Junius; *wreak*, a cough, Halliwell; Icel. *hraki*, spittle; A.S. *hraca*, a cough, spittle; Dan. *harke*, to spit; E. (with the *w* softened down into an *r*), to *hawk*, to cough up, to spit; Fr. *raquer*, *racher*, *cracher*, to spit. The act of spitting out affords the simplest image of rejection and the liveliest expression of disgust and contempt for the rejected object; G. *auswurf*, signifying outcast, refuse, is often used absolutely in the sense of spittle. Icel. *hraki* has given rise to a numerous class of derivatives expressive of contempt and rejection; *hrak*, any refuse matter; *hrakadr*, gravissimo contemptu receptus; *hrakinn*, propulsus, vexatus (to be compared with A.S. *wræcca*, an outcast, exile, whence E. *wretch*); *hrak-nytr*, vilissimus; *hrak-ordasamr*, convitiosus, foul-mouthed. From Fr. *raquer*, to spit, is formed *racaille*, refuse, and Prov. *raca*, an old worthless horse, analogous to Bohem. *brakyne*, an outcast or rejected sheep. The Languedoc *brumo*, phlegm, spittle, has exactly the force of the Teutonic *brack* in the expression ‘*brumos de boutigo*,’ *marchandises de rebut*, refuse wares; G. *brack-gut*. The same metaphor is employed in the Latin *respuere*, to cast out, expel, reject, refuse, condemn; *exspuere*, to cast out, banish, remove. The sea is said ‘*exspuere in littus purgamenta*,’ and so in E. the obsolete *wreak* is to cough or spit up;—*wrack* or *wreck*, the remains of weed or broken ships vomited up upon the beach. Another application of the same image, not commonly suspected, furnishes the expression of *wreaking* one’s vengeance, as illustrated by Lat. *evomere iram in aliquem*, to vomit a man’s wrongs upon him, to visit him with their consequences.