



Anglo-Saxon Primer

HENRY SWEET

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ANGLO-SAXON PRIMER

WITH

GRAMMAR, NOTES, AND GLOSSARY

BY

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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION.

The want of an introduction to the study of Old-English has long been felt. Vernon's *Anglo-Saxon Guide* was an admirable book for its time, but has long been completely antiquated. I was therefore obliged to make my *Anglo-Saxon Reader* a somewhat unsatisfactory compromise between an elementary primer and a manual for advanced students, but I always looked forward to producing a strictly elementary book like the present one, which would enable me to give the larger one a more scientific character, and would at the same time serve as an introduction to it. Meanwhile, however, Professor Earle has brought out his *Book for the beginner in Anglo-Saxon*. But this work is quite unsuited to serve as an introduction to my Reader, and will be found to differ so totally in plan and execution from the present one as to preclude all idea of rivalry on my part. We work on lines which instead of clashing can only diverge more and more.

My main principle has been to make the book the easiest possible introduction to the study of Old-English.

Poetry has been excluded, and a selection made from the easiest prose pieces I could find. Old-English original prose is unfortunately limited in extent, and the most suitable pieces (such as the voyages of Ohthere and Wulfstan) are already given in the Reader; these I could not give over again. But I hope the short extracts from the Chronicle and the Martyrdom of King Edmund will be found not wanting in interest. For the rest of the selections I have had to fall back on scriptural extracts, which have the great advantages of simplicity and familiarity of subject. The Gospel

extracts have been transferred here from the Reader, where they will be omitted in the next edition. The sentences which head the selections have been gathered mainly from the Gospels, Ælfric's Homilies, and the Chronicle. They are all of the simplest possible character, only those having been taken which would bear isolation from their context. They are intended to serve both as an introduction and as a supplement to the longer pieces. They are grouped roughly into paragraphs, according to the grammatical forms they illustrate. Thus the first paragraph consists mainly of examples of the nominative singular of nouns and adjectives, the second of accusative singulars, and so on.

The spelling has been made rigorously uniform throughout on an early West-Saxon basis. Injurious as normalizing is to the advanced student, it is an absolute necessity for the beginner, who wants to have the definite results of scholarship laid before him, not the confused and fluctuating spellings which he cannot yet interpret intelligently. Even for purely scientific purposes we require a standard of comparison and classification, as in the arrangement of words in a dictionary, where we have to decide, for instance, whether to put the original of *hear* under *ē*, *īe*, *ī* or *ȳ*. The spelling I here adopt is, in fact, the one I should recommend for dictionary purposes. From early West-Saxon it is an easy step both to late W. S. and to the Mercian forms from which Modern English is derived. That I give Ælfric in a spelling slightly earlier than his date is no more unreasonable than it is for a classical scholar to print Ausonius (who doubtless spoke Latin with an almost Italian pronunciation) in the same spelling as Virgil.

It is impossible to go into details, but in doubtful or optional cases I have preferred those forms which seemed most instructive to the

student. Thus I have preferred keeping up the distinction between the indic. *bundon* and the subj. *bunden*, although the latter is often levelled under the former even in early MS. In the accentuation I have for the present retained the conventional quantities, which are really 'prehistoric' quantities, as I have shown elsewhere (Phil. Soc. Proc. 1880, 1881). It is no use trying to disguise the fact that Old English philology (owing mainly to its neglect in its native land) is still in an unsettled state.

In the Grammar I have cut down the phonology to the narrowest limits, giving only what is necessary to enable the beginner to trace the connection of forms within the language itself. Derivation and syntax have been treated with the same fulness as the inflections. In my opinion, to give inflections without explaining their use is as absurd as it would be to teach the names of the different parts of a machine without explaining their use, and derivation is as much a fundamental element of a language as inflection. The grammar has been based throughout on the texts, from which all words and sentences given as examples have, as far as possible, been taken. This I consider absolutely essential in an elementary book. What is the use of a grammar which gives a number of forms and rules which the learner has no occasion to apply practically in his reading? Simply to cut down an ordinary grammar and prefix it to a selection of elementary texts, without any attempt to adapt them to one another, is a most unjustifiable proceeding. {viii}

In the Glossary cognate and root words are given only when they occur in the texts, or else are easily recognizable by the ordinary English reader.

All reference to cognate languages has been avoided. Of course, if the beginner knows German, the labour of learning Old English will

be lightened for him by one half, but he does not require to have the analogies pointed out to him. The same applies to the relation between Old and Modern English. To trace the history of the sounds would be quite out of place in this book, and postulates a knowledge of the intermediate stages which the beginner cannot have.

The Notes consist chiefly of references to the Grammar, and are intended mainly for those who study without a teacher. As a general rule, no such references are given where the passage itself is quoted in the Grammar.

On the whole I do not think the book could be made much easier without defeating its object. Thus, instead of simply referring the student from *stęnt* to *standan*, and thence to the Grammar, I might have saved him all this trouble by putting '*stęnt*, 3 sg. pres. of *standan*, stand,' but the result would be in many cases that he would not look at the Grammar at all—surely a most undesirable result.

Although I have given everything that I believe to be *necessary*, every teacher may, of course, at his own discretion add such further illustrations, linguistic, historical, antiquarian, or otherwise, as he thinks likely to instruct or interest his pupils.

My thanks are due to Professor Skeat, not only for constant advice and encouragement in planning and carrying out this work, but also for help in correcting the proofs.

In conclusion I may be allowed to express a hope that this little book may prove useful not only to young beginners, but also to some of our Professors of and Examiners in the English language, most of whom are now beginning to see the importance of a sound elementary knowledge of 'Anglo-Saxon'—a knowledge which I

believe this book to be capable of imparting, if studied diligently,
and not hurriedly cast aside for a more ambitious one.

HENRY SWEET.

HEATH STREET, HAMPSTEAD,

March 31, 1882.

PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION.

In the present edition I have put this book into what must be (for some time at least) its permanent form, making such additions and alterations as seemed necessary.

If I had any opportunity of teaching the language, I should no doubt have been able to introduce many other improvements; as it is, I have had to rely mainly on the suggestions and corrections kindly sent to me by various teachers and students who have used this book, among whom my especial thanks are due to the Rev. W. F. Moulton, of Cambridge, and Mr. C. Stoffel, of Amsterdam.

HENRY SWEET.

LONDON,

October 15, 1884.

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