

**XXXIX CONCESSIVE
CONSTRUCTIONS IN
OLD ENGLISH PROSE**

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XXXIX Concessive Constructions in Old English Prose by Josephine May Burnham

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XXXIX

CONCESSIVE CONSTRUCTIONS
IN
OLD ENGLISH PROSE

BY

JOSEPHINE MAY BURNHAM

A Thesis presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Yale
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PREFACE

This study was carried on under the direction of Professor Albert S. Cook, to whom in a special degree are due thanks for encouragement and for training in method. To Professor E. P. Morris I am indebted for helpful suggestions. I desire also to acknowledge courtesies extended to me, during the preparation of the thesis, by the Libraries of Yale and Harvard Universities, and to express my thanks to Miss Anna M. Monrad, of the Yale University Library, for assistance in proof-reading.

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J. M. B.

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CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

It is the purpose of this thesis to set forth the resources possessed by Old English for the expression of concessive relations, grouping the material in such a way as to show what are the main types of idiom employed, and their history so far as it can be traced. The search for origins, it is true, must in the case of many Old English idioms be disappointing, for however the language may have gained in firmness and compactness under the influence of Latin, the earliest prose we have shows most of the essential constructions of the language already present. What conclusions may be drawn have to do rather with the native character of a large number of concessive constructions, the influence of Latin upon others, and the antiquity of many locutions still in daily use. It is my hope also that part of the material included may illustrate some of the psychological processes involved in speech. My aim has not been, however, to enter the field of the psychologist, but to give an account as accurate as possible of facts which may prove to have psychological significance.

The concessive relation is usually understood as a specialized form of the conditional relation, or at least as most nearly akin to it. In each form of sentence the main proposition is thought of as *conditioned* by the subordinate. Typically, the conditional sentence contains a hypothesis and a conclusion contingent upon the truth of that hypothesis; the concessive sentence contains a hypothesis, or a fact, and a

conclusion *independent* thereof. The concessive sentence may be represented by the formula, linguistically though not mathematically true, $a-b=a$, in which b has a positive value. It is evident that this relation, like the conditional, has affinities with that of cause. The concession—the notion subtracted, as it were, from the main proposition—may often be looked upon as a blocked or inoperative cause or reason. The view, the reason, the circumstance is admitted, but the opposite of its natural consequence is asserted.

The close relation between the concessive and the conditional idea is shown by the frequency with which conditional particles are adapted to concessive use. The Greek *ei kai* and *eti kai*, the Latin *etsi*, *etiamsi*, the Gothic *þauhjabai*, and the German *obwohl*, *obechon* are familiar examples. In Modern English, *if* and *even if* are largely in use as concessive conjunctions. The likeness of causal and concessive ideas is especially seen in negative sentences. When a negative assertion or command is expressed, with a reason tending to an opposite conclusion, it is sometimes difficult to decide whether the minor clause is causal or concessive.

Old English, like other languages, reflects in its idioms the close relationship between the notions of concession, condition, and cause. Conditional particles, it is true, are less frequently employed to denote concession than in modern English. The kinship of the two ideas is shown rather by mixture of constructions. We find the concessive clause, for instance, slipping into what is logically a condition¹: ÆH. 1. 304. 6 *þeah hwa forlæte miccle æhta, and ne forlæt*

¹ For explanation of abbreviated titles see the list of texts at the end of this chapter.

ða gitsunge, ne forlæt he ealle ðing. Similarly the conditional clause may slip into the concessive, as in the 'inadvertent concessive conditions' to be cited in Chapter VI. The similarity of causal and concessive constructions is more marked in Old English. Exceptionally we find concessive clauses approaching causal meaning, as in this passage: *ÆH. 2. 216. 24* Gif hwam seo lar oflicige, ne yrsige he nateshwon wið us, *ðeah ðe we Godes bebodu mannum geopenian*. More frequently we find mingling of the constructions. The two may be used side by side with only a slight change of emphasis: *Bo. 69. 6 ff.* Hwæðer þu beo a þy fægerra for oðres mannes fægere? [cause] Bið men ful lytle þy bet *þeah he godne fæder hæbbe* [concession], gif he self to nauhte ne mæg. The same slight shift in emphasis may lead to an even closer combination, as in the following: *CP. 261. 22 ff.* Hwa sceal ðonne, ðara ðe hal & good andgiet hæbbe, Gode unðoncfull beon, *forðam, ðeah he hine for his synnum svinge . . . ?* (Latin original: *Aut quis sana intelligentia de percussione sua ingratus existat . . . ?*); *ÆH. 1. 252. 14 f.* *Getimige us tela on lichaman, getimige us untela*, symle we sceolon þæs Gode ðancian. It may be added that comparative adjective and adverbial phrases, such as those in the passage *Bo. 69. 6* just quoted, are in frequent use in Old English as correlatives of causal, conditional, and concessive clauses.

Analyzing the concessive relation more closely, we find that the three categories of assumed fact, hypothesis of possibility, and hypothesis contrary to fact, commonly applied to conditions, may be applied to concessions. The broader division between fact and hypothesis is, however, much more readily grasped and more fundamental.