A SHORT HISTORICAL ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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A short historical English grammar by Henry Sweet

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Clarendon Press Series

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SHORT HISTORICAL

ENGLISH GRAMMAR

BY

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PREFACE

For some years the want has been felt of a short historical English grammar up to date, especially as regards phonology, dialectology and chronology, the last implying careful discrimination between what is really in living use and what is obsolete. The present work is an attempt to supply this want. It is an abridgment of the historical portions of my *New English Grammar*. It does not include syntax, for the good reason that a grammar which attempted to deal—even if only superficially—with such a vast and difficult subject as historical English syntax could not possibly be designated as a 'short' grammar. But within the limits of phonology and accidence, including composition and derivation, it will, I hope, be found to contain all that is really essential to the beginner.

Some teachers will be disappointed at not finding here any exposition of that time-honoured generalization 'Grimm's Law,' and the still more popular 'Verner's Law.' I have for the present excluded them, because they do not belong to historical English grammar, but to comparative Arian philology; because, if studied adequately, they are too difficult for beginners; and because, without a detailed knowledge of

Sanskrit, &c., they are of little use for etymological purposes. But although most of those who have kept pace with the recent developments of Comparative Philology admit all this, some of them still plead for the retention of Grimm's Law on the ground of its being so interesting, and having such a stimulating effect on pupils. The answer to this is, By all means teach it then, but teach it as an extra, not as a part of English grammar, any more than you would include French, Latin, and Greek etymology in English grammar; although, of course, English grammar undoubtedly leads up to all these subjects, and is more or less directly connected with them, in the same way as it is connected with the political, social, and literary history of England.

The study of this grammar requires no preparation except a knowledge of the ordinary grammatical terms. It does not even postulate any practical knowledge of Old English, although I should advise every teacher of historical English grammar to let his pupils go through a preparatory course in Old English with the help of such a book as my *Anglo-Saxon Primer*.

Additional grammatical details and illustrations that may be required will easily be found in *The New English Grammar* and my *History of English Sounds*, in which latter will be found a concise statement not only of Grimm's and Verner's laws but also of all the other sound-laws by which English is connected with the older Arian languages.

HENRY SWEET.

SOUTH PARK, REIGATE,
7 *Sept.*, 1892.

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