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IN ANGLO-SAXON**

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HENRY SWEET

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ANGLO-SAXON

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YSAJSLI COWMATZ

PREFACE

IN my *Anglo-Saxon Primer* I tried to make things easy for the beginner by adopting a uniform normalized spelling, by giving only a few texts of the simplest character, and by basing the grammar and glossary exclusively on these texts, so that everything learnt in the grammar might be at once utilized in reading the texts, and the time and trouble of looking up words be reduced to a minimum.

But although the *Primer* is perfectly well suited for those students who have already had some linguistic training—especially those who know German—there are others for whom a rigorous grammar-and-glossary method is too abstract, and whose memories will not bear the strain of having to master a grammar of some length before proceeding to the texts.

Such learners require a less concise and abstract exposition, one in which the strain on the memory is reduced to a minimum, partly by careful gradation of difficulties, partly by greater fullness of exposition, and lastly by further simplification and omission of whatever is not absolutely necessary for the learner's first start. The present work shows that these changes do not entail any increase of bulk, the greater fullness of exposition being balanced by the omissions.

As the *Primer* is intended as an introduction to a scientific as well as a purely practical knowledge of Old English, it includes an exposition of some of the fundamental facts of historical grammar, such as the laws of mutation and gradation, which are certainly not necessary for the beginner, even if we admit that they have a practical value in helping to fix the forms in the memory. I have, accordingly, rigorously excluded all such details from the grammar in the present work, which is intended to be a purely practical introduction to the language.

But a practical mastery itself has different stages. The first requisite is to understand written texts, which involves only the power of recognizing grammatical forms, not of constructing them, as in the further stage of writing or speaking the language. Thus in beginning the second text in the present book (§ 14) a learner in the first stage is expected to find out for himself that *manna* is in the genitive plural, and that *craftum* is in the dative plural, and to infer from the ending *-ne* in *hwelne* that *craft* is masculine. He will then be able to infer with tolerable certainty from what he has learnt in the grammar that the plural of *craft* is *craftas*, but this inference belongs really to the second stage: a learner in the first stage is expected only to recognize the inflection of *craftas* when he meets it.

The first object, therefore, of a simplified grammar is to give what is necessary to enable the beginner to recognize the grammatical forms which occur in the texts he is about to read. This excludes not only mutation &c., but also part of the syntax; thus an exposition of the laws of Old English word-order would evidently be out of place in the present grammar.

The first thing is to explain the general structure of the

language—that in Old English, for instance, nouns have three genders, that the gender is partly grammatical, that nouns have four cases—and to state those general rules which admit of no exception, such as that Old English nouns in *-a* are masculine, and that compound nouns follow the gender of their last element.

Those irregular forms which are of very frequent occurrence—such as the inflections of the definite article—must, of course, be learnt by heart at once, the learner relying on their incessant repetition to fix them in his memory. Less frequent irregularities need not be included in the grammar at all, their explanation being relegated to a note. Thus in the present texts the dative *menn* does not occur till near the end (§ 230), where, accordingly, it is explained for the first time. So also with the passive *hätte* (§ 100).

In dealing with a group of irregular forms, we always have to ask ourselves the question, 'Which is the easier for the learner, to bring these forms under general rules, or simply to let them be learnt one by one as they occur?' Experience shows that at first it is better to err in the latter extreme. Accordingly, in dealing with the strong verbs, it will be seen that after giving a general account of their formation, and a few general rules—such as that in the preterite the second person singular always has the same vowel as the plural—I content myself with giving the typical forms of each verb in a note to the passage where it first occurs. When the learner passes on to the *Primer*, he will be able to combine these isolated inflections into a systematic scheme, with most of whose details he will be already familiar.

In some cases where there is more than one form, but without there being any great complexity and irregularity, I steer a middle course: I mention the various forms, but

without giving any rules for their use. Thus in § 16 I merely say that 'most strong neuters take *-u* in the plural, or else remain unchanged.' Here the reader will ask 'Why not give the simple rule that *-u* is used only when the preceding syllable is short?' But how about *rīcu*? And if we add a definition of 'short syllable,' and explain all the apparent or real exceptions, our brief rule—which gives all the information required for our purpose—will be considerably lengthened. And if the rest of the grammar is expanded in the same way, it will become simply a reprint of the greater part of the grammar in the *Primer*.

In the grammar I have been careful to group parallel forms together as much as possible. Thus under 'Cases' I give the inflections of nouns, the definite articles, and the personal pronouns all together, so that, for instance, the learner may make *them, her* stepping-stones to *jām, hira, jāre*, and afterwards to the corresponding strong adjective inflections.

The occasional paradigms are in most cases not intended to be learnt by heart, but serve only to sum up the scattered information already given.

All these principles are those which are carried out—consciously or unconsciously—by most linguists. An experienced linguist in attacking a new language begins with the shortest grammar he can find. He first takes a general bird's-eye view of the language, finds out what are its special difficulties, what is to be brought under general rules, what to learn detail by detail, what to put off till a later stage. The rash beginner who starts with a big grammar forgets two-thirds of it soon after he begins independent reading. Such a grammar as the one in the present work simply attempts to give him the really useful residue which, when once learnt, is not and cannot be forgotten.

Inflections may be recognized in two ways: by their form—as when we know that a noun is in the dative plural by its ending in *-um*; or by their function—as when we infer from a word expressing more than one person and standing in the indirect-object relation that it is a noun in the dative plural. Of these two methods of parsing—the formal and the syntactical—sometimes one is easier, sometimes the other. There is, therefore, every reason why elementary syntax should be learnt simultaneously with accidence. It seems irrational to force a beginner to recognize such a grammatical category as the subjunctive mood solely by irregular and perplexing inflections, when such a simple rule as that 'it is always used in indirect narration' may enable him to recognize a large number of subjunctives with mathematical certainty. In my grammar I have therefore blended the two together, which has the further advantage of giving the learner additional examples of the inflections in complete sentences.

The examples in the grammar have been carefully selected so as to prepare the learner for the texts. Those which are not sentences are generally groups of words, so as to do justice to the principle of association. It will be observed that the same principles are followed in the paradigms also. The examples under 'Pronunciation' have been utilized as a preparation for learning the inflections, especially the irregular ones, which offer no more difficulty than the regular ones to the learner who has not yet begun to analyze grammatically.

When an example is repeated, the learner is referred back to it. Thus when he comes to the numerals (§ 56) he finds that nearly all the inflections of *twā* are familiar to him from the examples there repeated.

In accordance with these principles of gradation and com-