

OLD ENGLISH RIDDLES

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Old English riddles by A. J. Wyatt

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A. J. WYATT

**OLD ENGLISH
RIDDLES**

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EDITED BY

A. J. WYATT, M. A.
UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND

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Preface

I AM almost ashamed to say that this little book represents the spare hours of the last eight years. It is ten years since I undertook it, at the request of the late Prof. E. M. Brown, of the University of Cincinnati. It has been a labour of love and pleasure, except for the waste involved in picking up the threads again each autumn after an interval of ten or eleven months. The text alone occupied weeks (including several visits to Exeter to consult the MS.); the punctuation, days. I have not cared about recovering an additional letter here and there in the numerous mutilated passages; but I have cared greatly to try and evolve a more intelligible text in the many whole passages that were yet obscure. The *Riddles* are the most difficult Old English text I know, because the editor needs to combine the qualifications of an editor, a riddler, and an antiquary in about equal proportions. To such qualifications I can lay no claim; my sole qualification is that I have endeavoured to let neither the riddler carry it with a high hand over the editor nor the editor over the riddler. The only safe road to riddle-guessing is the comparative method, combined with some antiquarian investigation into the exact form and construction of objects in early times.

Right or wrong, my own conclusions are in the main independent; that is to say, I have read everything that seemed worth reading and formed my own judgment. No rivalry, it seems to me, is possible between this edition and that of Prof. Tupper; but it is necessary to state quite clearly the relations in date between the two books. The text of this edition was completed in 1909; at the end of that year the Notes were finished, except for a few reserved matters; but the Introduction was still unwritten. Then the heavy duties

connected with the Examinership in English at London University compelled me to put this work altogether on one side for two years, until the autumn of 1911, when, and in the following Christmas vacation, it was completed. Meantime, early in 1910 Prof. Tupper sent me a copy of his edition; until I received it, I had no inkling that he was engaged upon, or even contemplating, such a book. My Introduction then alone remained to be written; and in the circumstances I deemed that I was not entitled to make any use of his researches, except to state with greater emphasis those points, if any, in which I differed from him. Before the appearance of his edition, however, I had made full use of his informing and stimulating articles, in *Modern Language Notes* (1903), on "The Comparative Study of Riddles."

One pleasant task remains: to thank those good friends who have so willingly helped me. The Rev. Chancellor Edmonds of Exeter gave me ready access to the MS., sometimes at very inconvenient hours and without any forewarning; Miss J. D. Montgomery of Exeter made the exact measurements given in the first foot-note to Riddle 91; and Mr. A. E. Morgan of University College, Exeter, though a complete stranger to me, most readily consulted the MS. more than once in order to verify my tracings and memoranda. The General Editor, Prof. F. M. Brown, took the kindest interest in the progress of the work; since his death I have greatly missed his knowledge and critical acumen. Two old pupils of mine, Max Drennan of Cambridge and Bernard Pitt of London, have done whatever I wanted whenever I wanted it. Last and greatest, my friend, G. Ainslie Hight, late of the Indian Forest Service, has been like the Centurion's servant; he relieved me entirely of the immense labour of making the glossary; without his ready sympathy and cheery help the work would never have come to completion. Much of the credit is his; the many faults and defects are mine.

CAMBRIDGE, APRIL, 1912.

ALFRED J. WYATT

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