

**FIRST MIDDLE ENGLISH PRIMER:
EXTRACTS FROM THE ANCREN
RIWLE AND ORMULUM WITH
GRAMMAR AND GLOSSARY**

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First Middle English Primer: Extracts from the Ancren Riwe and Ormulum with Grammar and Glossary by Henry Sweet

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HENRY SWEET

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HENRY FROWDE



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WITH GRAMMAR AND GLOSSARY

BY

HENRY SWEET, M.A.



Oxford

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1884

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P R E F A C E.

THE object of this work is not to afford a general survey of the Middle English dialects in their different periods, but rather to lay a firm foundation for such a survey by giving extracts from the two oldest texts which have been handed down in consistent, contemporary spellings representing pure and fixed dialects, one dialect being the direct descendant of the classical West Saxon of Alfred and Ælfric, the other the nearly direct ancestor of Modern English. The spellings of the MSS. have been preserved unchanged, or else given at the foot of the page, but diacritics have been added as guides to the quantity and quality of those sounds which are imperfectly distinguished in the MSS. The grammar and glossary are based entirely on the extracts, all comparison of the other M. E. dialects and periods being rigorously excluded, the two texts being also kept apart as much as possible.

Although I think it a great mistake to begin the study of M. E. without a previous elementary knowledge of Old E., such as may easily be acquired with the help of my *Anglo-Saxon Primer*, I have nevertheless adapted this work to the requirements of those who may take it up without any such preparation. These students will find it advisable to begin with the *Ormulum* instead of the *Ancren Riwe*.

The texts are based on the editions of Morton¹ and White², together with the collations of Kölbing in the *Englische Studien* (vol. i. p. 1 foll.) and the *Jahrbücher für romanische und englische sprache und litteratur* (xv. p. 180 foll.). I have followed Morton in basing my text on the MS. Cott. Nero A. 14, as being the only one in a pure Southern dialect, and am quite unable to agree with the objections raised to Morton's choice by Kölbing and others. The Cambridge Corpus MS. not only shows the influence of a Midland dialect, but gives (as far as I can judge at present) a much less accurate text than the Nero MS.

It must be understood that this first attempt consistently to mark the quality and quantity of the vowels in M. E. is only a tentative one, especially as regards the quantity. I am now inclined to mark the vowels in *-liche, wel, ȝet* (adv.), *lüt, lütel* as long, and to assume short vowels before certain consonant-combinations in the A. R., but have not been able to investigate the question fully as yet.

The extracts have been carefully chosen not only from a linguistic, but also from a literary and social-historical point of view. The student who has carefully worked through them will hardly need to be told that the A. R. is one of the most perfect models of simple, natural, eloquent prose in our language; without it indeed, the history of English prose from the close of the Old E. period down to the beginning of the seventeenth century would be little more than a dreary

¹ The *Ancren Riwe*, edited by James Morton. London: Camden Society, 1853.

² The *Ormulum*, with the notes and glossary of Dr. R. M. White, edited by Rev. R. Holt. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1878.

blank. As a picture of contemporary life, manners, and feeling it cannot be over-estimated. The passage (p. 36) in which Christ is described as a Norman knight in homeliest English phrase is alone enough to give a vivid idea of that fusion of English and French traditions and sentiments which—in spite of *Ivanhoe*—was almost completely carried out by the beginning of the thirteenth century. The conclusion (p. 39) of the allegory of Christ's wooing of the soul is, on the other hand, thoroughly Old English in its combined picturesqueness and grandeur (comp. especially l. 26 foll.). Thoroughly English, too, though in a totally different way, is the humorous description of the troubles of the nun with her cow (p. 41): how she curses when the cow is impounded, and yet has to pay the damages. Equally good is the description of the chattering nun (p. 19), and the comparison of her to a cackling hen. This, and many other passages, may be read with profit as well as amusement even at the present day.

Of the literary merits of the *Ormulum* little can be said, for it has none whatever. The author was, in fact, a spelling-reformer and philologist who mistook his vocation. The Old E. picturesqueness and power disappears entirely from his verse together with the traditional alliteration, and the only compensation is a dry, practical directness of style and metre which is anything but poetical. The only passage in our extracts that shows any trace of poetry is, perhaps, the description of the lamb (p. 68).

In conclusion, I have to express the wish that those who **make use** of this book either as teachers or students will **kindly favour me** with such corrections, additions, and