

**ESSAY ON THE HISTORY AND
MODERN USE OF THE VERBAL
FORMS IN -ING IN THE ENGLISH
LANGUAGE. PART I. OLD ANGLO-
SAXON PERIOD; MAY 30, 1871**

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Essay on the History and Modern Use of the Verbal Forms in -ing in the english language. Part I. Old Anglo-Saxon period; May 30, 1871 by Axel Erdmann

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AXEL ERDMANN

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THE HISTORY AND MODERN USE

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THE VERBAL FORMS IN -ING

IN

THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

BY

AXEL ERDMANN.

PH. C. HOLM.

PART I. OLD ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD.

WITH PERMISSION OF THE PHILOSOPHICAL FACULTY OF UPPSALA
TO BE PUBLICLY DISCUSSED AT THE GUSTAVIANUM MINUS

MAY 30, 1871, AT 10 O'CLOCK A. M.

STOCKHOLM, 1871.

PRINTED BY P. A. NYMAN.



Works referred to in this part of the essay^Δ

- Beowulf**, an epic poem, written in the beginning of the 8th century at latest; the substance of the poem is of earlier, heathen origin. Msc. of the 10th cent. The numbers refer to Grein, *Bibliothek der Angelsächs. Poesie. Text. I. II: Göttingen. 1857. 8.*
- Genesis**, a poetical paraphrase by the monk Cædmon + 680. Msc. of the 10th c. References to Grein.
- Crist and Satan**, a religious poem, probably of later date than the preceding. Ref. to Grein.
- Crist**, a religious poem by Cynewulf. Date uncertain. Msc. of the first part of the 11th c. Ref. to Grein.
- Enigmas in Anglo-Saxon verse**. In the same Msc. as the preceding poem. Ref. to Grein.
- Other poems incidentally mentioned: **Widsith**, **Exodus**, **Elene**, **Andreas**. Ref. to Grein.
- The Anglo-Saxon Laws of Æthelbirht** (king of Kent, baptized 597), **Hlóthhære** (k. of K. + 685), **Wihtræd** (k. of K. + 725): Msc. of the 12th cent. — of **Ælfred** (king of England 871—901), **Æthelred** (k. of E. 978—1016): Msc. of the 10th cent. Ref. to **Ancient Laws and Institutes of England**, etc. London. 1840. fol.
- Orosius**, translated from the Latin by king Ælfred. Msc. of the 10th cent. Ref. to **Bosworth**, **King Ælfred's Anglo-Saxon Version of the compendious History of the World by Orosius**. London. 1859. and to **Havercampus**, **Pauli Orosii adversus paganos Historiarum Libri septem**. Lugduni Batav. 1767. q:o.
- Boethius**, translated from the Latin by king Ælfred. Ref. to **Rawlinson**, **Boethi Consolationis Philosophiæ Libri V Anglo-Saxonice redditi ab Ælfredo**. Oxoniæ. 1698 (only a part examined here).

By Anglo-Saxon, in this part of the essay, is always meant Old Anglo-Saxon.

The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle to the year 1066. First part compiled about 891, then continued in several monasteries. Ref. to **Monumenta Historica Britannica**. Vol. I. London 1848. fol. The capital letters denote the different MMsc. A is the oldest (partly of the 9th cent.), F the latest (of the 12th c.). (The part of the Chron. later than 1066 is not examined here.)

The Homilies of Ælfric, archbishop of York 1023—1051. Msc. probably coeval with its author. Ref. to **Thorpe**, The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church. First Part. The Homilies of Ælfric. I. II. London 1844, 6. (only a part is examined).

The Anglo-Saxon Version of the Gospels, made from the Vulgate or some nearly similar Latin translation. The author and the precise date of the version are unknown. Ref. to **Thorpe**, The AS. Version of the Holy Gospels. London 1842. — **Bibliorum Sacrorum Vulgatæ Versionis Editio**. Parisiis 1785. — **Stamm**, Ulfila. Paderborn 1858.

March, A Comparative Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Language. London 1870.

Koch, Historische Grammatik der Englischen Sprache. Weimar, Cassel & Göttingen 1863—1869.

Mätzner, Englische Grammatik. Berlin 1860—1865.

Introduction.

There is no derivative-ending in the English language which is turned to such a number and variety of uses as the verbal ending -ing. The words formed by it belong to several different parts of speech and by their frequency and importance influence essentially the character of the language. A division of them into the classes of participles, nouns, adjectives, and prepositions, does not comprise all the cases of their extensive range. For besides these unmixed uses, there is one more, of a hybrid kind, which participates of the properties both of a noun and a verb, and by its pliant and easy nature has been widely spread in the language.

That this variety of signification, by which one and the same word may be sometimes a verb, sometimes a noun, sometimes half of each, must be traced to a variety of source, is a well established fact. Scientific grammarians have shown, conclusively, that the modern English verbal form in -ing originated in a gradual approach and final blending together of several old forms of different meaning which took place in that period during which Anglo-Saxon was transforming by degrees into modern English. But concerning the causes and manner of the change, their opinions vary considerably. Have the internal laws of the language effected independently the assimilation of the original forms or has foreign influence also cooperated promotingly? What was the relative attractive power of the forms and, consequently, the way in which they moved towards each other? At what dates did they pass through the successive stages of the

assimilating process? And even, what old forms have contributed to the result? These are all important questions differently answered. It cannot be regarded then as an unnecessary or useless task to attempt to elucidate and settle some points at least of what is obscure and uncertain in this department of English grammar.

Such is the purpose of this essay. The first part, now offered, should be considered chiefly as a preparatory work indicating the facts hitherto ascertained, although, on proceeding further in the examination of the language, these facts will probably be found, in some respects, incomplete and insufficient for the full explanation of the question. But this present want of completeness, if it exists, is a necessary consequence of the critical plan of the essay.

The period embraced in this part is the Old Anglo-Saxon. It shows the language in an essentially inflectional state, preserving, at least in its written literature, the system of its endings distinct and unimpaired. At the commencement of the following era, the New Anglo-Saxon or Semi-Saxon, a perceptible change took place in this respect and uncertainty and inconsistency, gradually increasing with the time, began to interfere with the regular working of the old grammatical system. In consequence of the general law of simplification controlling all languages, and probably also from other concurrent causes, the terminations of the words were weakened, shortened, or dropped, and thus many of them, previously well distinguished, were either amalgamated into a common new form or supplanted by one of those formerly in use. However, as the old forms which had before marked the syntactical relations, were thus passing away, the language supplied the loss of logical precision suffered from that cause, by a more liberal use of auxiliaries and particles and especially by fixing, in the construction of sentences, a more constant place for their different parts. In brief, the language became essentially positional.

The history of the forms which are to be discussed in this essay is closely allied with this general development of the language, and, if divided, must be so in accordance with the stages of this development. But it has been thought

proper to depart in this particular from the division generally made in the history of the English speech, that the termination line of the first period has been drawn here at the end of the Old Anglo-Saxon, separating thus the time of distinct and unmixed forms, on the one side, from that of assimilated and blended forms, on the other. This arrangement, with respect to our subject, has the advantage of being far more natural and clear than any other.

Of the Northern dialect of England no notice could be taken here, from a syntactical point of view, on account of an almost complete want of materials for studying it. Its etymological peculiarities have been pointed out, wherever supposed traces of them have been found in the works referred to. These works are written almost exclusively in the Southern dialect, or, strictly speaking, in that of the West-Saxons, which, by the political importance of the people and the successful literary exertions of king Ælfred, soon acquired a decided ascendancy in the Anglo-Saxon literature.

Lastly, it may be remarked here, with respect to the title of the essay, that the denomination of Anglo-Saxon was not used by the people themselves who are now so called, with regard to their language or nationality. It seems to belong to the Latin of that time. Thus king Ælfred's Latin signature was "Ælfred Rex Saxonum" and in the Latin history of his life, written by the Welshman Asser, the compound word is found, "Rex Angulsaxonum". In the contemporary native literature, on the contrary, the name applied to the people when considered as a whole, is Angelcyn or Englisce men, and their language is called Englisc. For inst. AS. Chron. 901. Ælfred was cyning ofer eall Angelcyn. Cf. *ibid.* 922. 976. 994. 1001. 1004 etc. Ælfr. Homil. II. Præfatio. Oros. I: 10: 2. Forðon hi mon hét on Creacisc Amazanás, þæt is on Englisc forténde. Cf. Boeth. Introd.; AS. Chron. Introd.; Ælfr. Homil. I. Præf.; *ibid.* 258. 264. II. Præf.; *ibid.* 282. Matth. XXVII: 46. Marc. XV: 34. But an alteration of the long used and commonly received names would, of course, lead to uncertainty and confusion. The attempt has been made by hypercritical reformers, but it has justly failed.