

**A DISSERTATION ON THE
HISTORY
AND DEVELOPMENT
OF THE ENGLISH VERB**

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A dissertation on the history and development of the English verb by Emil Schwerdtfeger

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BY
EMIL SCHWERDTFEGER,
Class '77, Cornell University.



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PREFACE.

THE present Dissertation on the English Verb was occasioned by the offer of prizes to my Anglo-Saxon students in The Cornell University, by the Early English Text Society of London, through their Secretary, F. J. Furnivall, Esq., to whom all students of the English language and literature must feel deeply indebted, for the untiring energy he has shown for years, in securing the literal reproduction in type of the best existing MSS. of Early English works.

The prizes consisted of certain valuable publications of the Society. But one subject was given to the classes—"The History and Development of the English Verb"—and the first prize was awarded, without a question as to its superior merit, to the author of this Dissertation; and it was on my testimony to its value as a contribution to the study of the English language, that his friend, Dr. J. C. Rodrigues, editor of "O Novo Mundo," in New-York City, to whom he is indebted for his education at The Cornell University, generously offered to print it at his own expense.

It may not be considered out of place to state, that Mr. Schwerdtfeger entered the University at the beginning of the winter term of 1873-74, he not being of the required age, sixteen years, to enter at the beginning of the year. His studies in English philology have all been pursued since his admission to the University. He learned, during the winter term, to read the Anglo-Saxon with perfect ease, and in addition to what was read in class, during the winter and spring terms,

namely, the Anglo-Saxon selections contained in my Handbook of Anglo-Saxon and Early English, he read all the Semi-Saxon and Early English selections given, from Layamon to Chaucer, and either read entire, or examined with care, the works cited on the last page.

This will be considered a pretty good *πάρρηγον*, along with all the other studies of the department of the University to which he is attached; but I make the statement as an evidence of the honest work that has been bestowed upon the Dissertation.

I would add that the author has received no help of any kind in its preparation, beyond the regular instruction of the class-room. The second-proofs were sent to me from New-York, and I was obliged, by reason of other engagements, to read them very hastily. The typographical and other errors will, however, be found to be but few, and those unimportant.

HIRAM CORSON.

THE CORNELL UNIVERSITY, 24 August, 1874.



THE ENGLISH VERB.

I.

THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD (TILL 1150 A.D.)

§ 1. THE Anglo-Saxon Verb has two voices, the Active and Passive; the latter, however, being found as a simple form only in the past participle, the other parts being compounds of the verbs *weorðan* and *wesan*, used as auxiliaries with the past participle. There may originally have been a special passive form, of which some traces are still perhaps to be found in the weak verbs in *-ian*, the *i* corresponding seemingly to the Old Norse terminations *ga*, *ja*, *ka*; which are allied to the Sanskrit *j*, that has the same functions and is besides used to form the passive; and it seems probable that they (*ga*, *ja*, *ka*) may have been used for the same purpose, before the origin of the modern passive of the Scandinavian languages, formed by adding to the active *-sk* (later *-st*) in O. Norse, and *-s* in Danish and Swedish, these terminations being weakened forms of the reflexive pronoun *sik*.* Of the *Medial* form nothing remains, excepting an

* Vide Holmboe's *Det Oldnorske Verbum*, pp. 2, 12. What he says there may apply also to the A.-S., for as Earle observes: "In fact, it would be hardly too much to say, that a description of the elder verbs of any of these languages (the Germanic) would, with very slight alterations, pass for a description of the elder verbs of any of the others" (*Philology of the English Tongue*, p. 226). "The endings *ga*, *ja*, *ka*," says Holmboe, "indicate partly the purely neutral state of existence (*det reent neutralt Tilstandsbegeed*), partly inchoatives and passives, partly causatives or factives;" and examples may easily be found among the verbs in *-ian*, corresponding to these significations, as: 1.) *steallian*, *wiclan*, to dwell, etc.; 2.) *dagian*, to dawn; *mistian*, to become misty, etc.; 3.) *blædegian*, to make bloody; *blæcian*, to bleach, etc. It

instance given by Koch, of *ic hätte* occurring in the sense of the Gothic *haitada*, I call myself. * But both of these forms must have disappeared at a very early period of the language, in accordance with the general tendency of all the Aryan dialects to discard them, which may be observed already in the Sanskrit in its somewhat irregular use of the Medial, and still more so in the later Indian dialects.†

§ 2. There are five *moods*, the indicative, subjunctive, imperative, infinitive, and participle; two simple *tenses*, the present and past; two *numbers*, singular and plural; the dual, still found in the Gothic, having disappeared from the verb, although still in use with the personal pronouns of the first and second pers.; and three *persons*, the first, second, and third.

§ 3. As in the other Germanic languages, there are two orders of verbs, the *strong* and the *weak*, the former of which form the past by a change of the root-vowel of the infinitive, the so-called *Ablaut* of German grammarians, while the pst. prt. ends in *-en*, either with or without accompanying *Ablaut*. The weak verbs form their past tenses by affixing *-de* or *-te*, either immediately to the *root* or with a connecting vowel (*o, a, e*), and the past prt. by

is also worthy of remark that most of the verbs in *-ian* are intransitive (Loth's *Angelsächsisch-Englische Grammatik*, p. 115); but it seems to be the general opinion that this *i* is merely a connecting vowel (Mätzner's *Englische Grammatik*, I. 320, Morris's *English Accidence*, p. 173, etc.), and I would therefore be extremely careful to advance this opinion, especially as it is at most only a conjecture.

* Koch's *Englische Grammatik*, I. pp. 243, 343.

† Holmboe's *Oldn. Verb.*, p. 12. "In the Prakrit occurs only the present and imperative of the passive, together with the participles; in Pali it shows strong symptoms of declining use; in Bengalee and Hindustanee it is always circumscribed; in Gothic it has only the indicative and subjunctive present. But few traces of the Medial occur in Prakrit and Gothic, while it has altogether disappeared from the Pali, Bengalee and Hindustanee. In the O. Norse the Medial, as a separate verbal form, is entirely unknown."

adding *-d* or *-t*, sometimes with and sometimes without a connecting vowel. One class of the weak order has moreover a change of the root-vowel in the *pst. tense* and *pst. prt.*

§ 4. The *strong verbs* may be divided into 21 classes,¹ according to the root-vowel of the *inf.* (corresponding to the root-vowel in the 1 p. *sg.* and *entire pl.* of the *prs. ind.*, the *prs. subj.*, the *imp.* and *prs. prt.*); of the 1 p. *sg.* of the *pst. indic.* (corresponding to the 3 p. *pst. sg.*); of the *pl. ind. pst.* (corresponding to the 2 p. *sg. pst. ind.* and the *entire pst. subj.*) and of the *pst. prt.* The first 11 of these classes have the same root-vowel in the *sg.* and *pl.* of the *pst. ind.* and *subj.*, while in the remaining 10 classes, the 1 and 3 p. *sg. ind.* have a vowel different from the other persons of the *pst. ind.* and the whole *pst. subj.* The root-vowels of the 21 classes are:

	Infinitive.	Past Sing.	Past Pl.	Past Part.
I.	ea	eô	eô	ea
II.	â	eô	eô	â
III.	eâ	eô	eô	eâ
IV.	ô	eô	eô	ô
V.	ê	eô	eô	ô
VI.	â	ê (eô)	ê (eô)	â
VII.	â	ê (eô)	ê (eô)	â
VIII.	a	ê (eô)	ê (eô)	a
IX.	a	ô	ô	a
X.	ea (a)	ô	ô	a (ea, æ, e)
XI.	e (a)	ô	ô	a
XII.	e	æ	â	e
XIII.	i	æ	â	e
XIV.	i (eo, e)	ea	eâ (â, â)	i (eo, e)
XV.	e	æ	â	o
XVI.	i	a	â	u
XVII.	e	æ	u	o

	Infinitive.	Past Sing.	Past Pl.	Past Part.
XVIII.	e (eo, i)	ea	u	o
XIX.	eô (ô)	eât	u	o
XX.	î	â	i	i
XXI.	i	a	u	u*

§ 5. The *present indicative* does not always contain the stem-vowel, and so we find that in the 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th classes, the original stem-vowel *a* has been weakened in the pres. to *i*; in the 15th and 16th classes the stem-vowel *a* (*æ*) to *i* (*e*); in the 12th, 13th and 14th the vowel *a* (*ea*, *e*) also to *i*, *e*; while in the 20th the stem-vowel *i* is strengthened in the pres. to *î*.† The connecting vowel, which comes between the stem and the personal ending, was in the strong verbs originally *a*, which is already weakened in the Gothic to *i* before *s* and *þ*, and this becomes *e* in the A.-S. A few strong verbs have *ia* (*ie*) as a connecting vowel instead of *a*, and *i* has been hardened to *g*, or been broadened to *ig*, and in some words has assimilated.‡ Although the personal ending has fallen off in the 1 p. sg. pres., the connecting vowel has still been retained (*heald-e stand-e*). This personal ending, originally like the others a pronominal stem, was in its full form *-ma*, which was weakened first to *-mi* and then to *-m*, preserved by the West Saxon in only two verbs, *com* and *beom*; while in the northern dialect it is still found (*ic geseam*, John 4. 19.; *ic gedôm*, Luke 12. 18., etc., *Northumbrian Gospels*, Koch), and also in the weakened form *-n* (*ic cweðon*, Matthew 6. 25., Koch). The personal ending of the 2 p. was originally *-tva*, which was weakened to *-fi* and then softened to *-si*. It is found in Gothic and Old Saxon as *-s*, which in A.-S. appears

* Loth's *Agst.-E. Grammatik*, p. 104. Corson's *Hand-Book of Anglo-Saxon and Early English*, p. 547.

† Koch's *Engl. Gr.* I. 256, 268, 272, 288.

‡ Ibid. I. 324-325.