

# **A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

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A brief history of the English language by Oliver Farrar Emerson

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**OLIVER FARRAR EMERSON**

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OF THE ENGLISH  
LANGUAGE**



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OF THE  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE

BY

OLIVER FARRAR EMERSON, A.M., PH.D.

PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AT WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY; AUTHOR OF  
"THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE," "AN OUTLINE  
HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE," "A  
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## PREFACE

WHEN the author's *History of the English Language* was passing through the press, a friend suggested the advisability of preparing a brief book on the same subject for schools not desiring the longer work. This suggestion, together with the success accorded to the larger book in this country and abroad, largely accounts for the present volume.

The aim has been to shorten and simplify the *History* by the omission of technical details, especially regarding the phonology of the language, without changing materially the scope of the former work. Each part has been rewritten or much altered, usually by omission, but sometimes also by addition and rearrangement. The greatest changes have been made in Parts IV and V. In Part IV the history of English sounds has been replaced by some chapters illustrating the most important and characteristic changes in the forms of words. It is hoped that these chapters, without being too technical, will emphasize the importance of phonetic change, analogy, and accent. They also make it possible to treat inflections on a phonetic, rather than an orthographic basis, thus simplifying classification and arrangement.

In Part V some advantageous changes in order have been made. The most noticeable of these is in treating the weak verbs before the strong. This order, while not adopted in the larger work, is quite in accord with the plan of both; namely, to give prominence to those elements of the language which have been most stable and most important. The weak verbs were not only more numerous than the strong in the oldest period, but have increased in number and influence at the expense of the latter. Besides, the present arrangement not only emphasizes the more regular weak class, but also brings together all the less regular classes, — an advantage in itself.

As in the larger work, much emphasis has been laid upon the spoken language. Yet the latter has been by no means exhaustively treated, and teachers are urged to stimulate observation of language as it exists about them in speech, in order both to explain its forms with relation to older usage, and to illustrate the influences that have shaped English in the past. Indeed, as the greatest recent advance in linguistic research has been made through a study of speech forms as used by common people day by day, too great stress cannot be placed upon the interest and advantage still to be gained from the same process.

Some selections representing Old, Modern, and Middle English will be found in the Appendix. To these, notes have been freely added, so as to facilitate their use in illustrating changes which English has undergone. Other specimens may be easily obtained from the Old English readers,

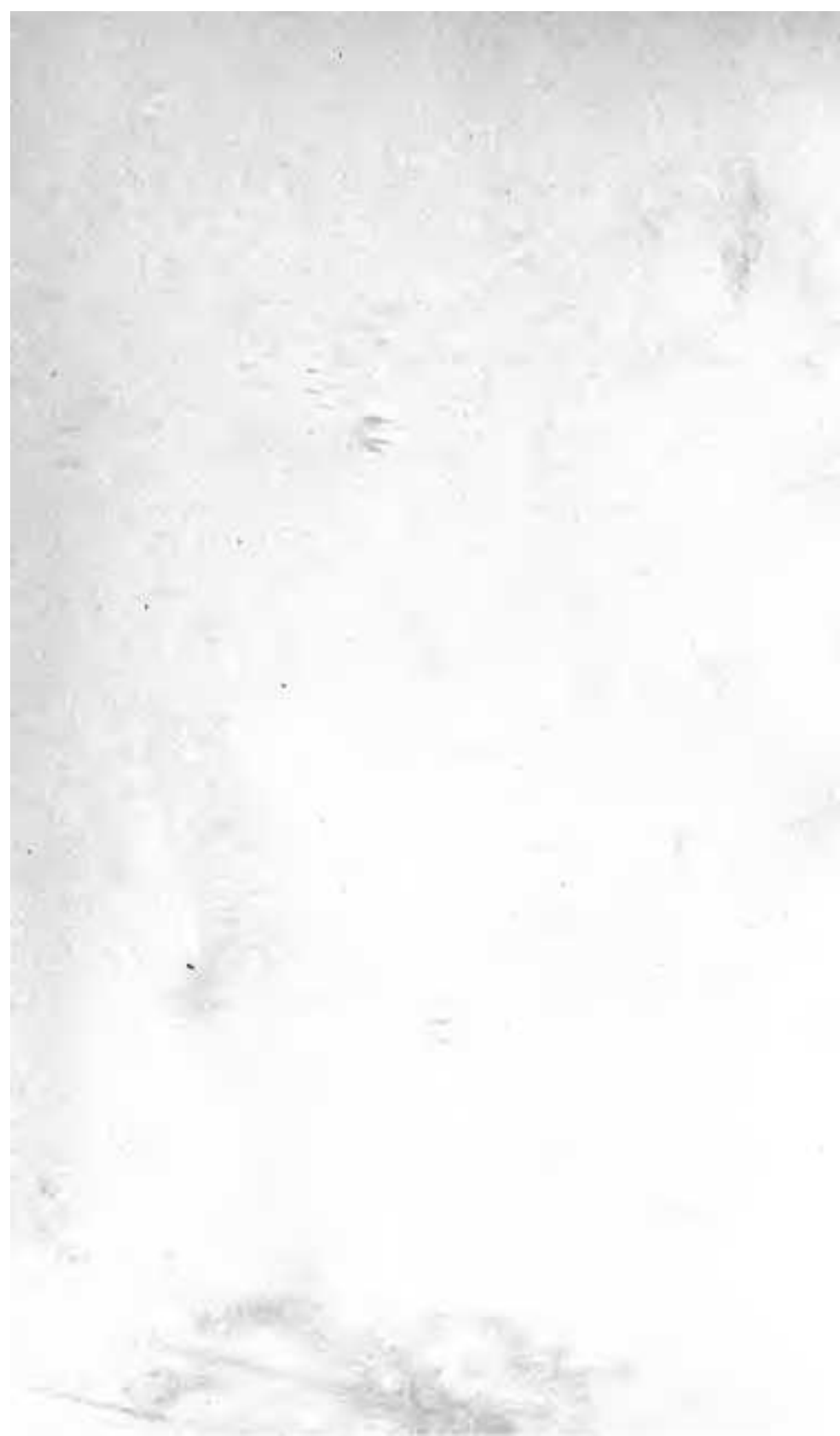


and from *Specimens of Early English*, by Morris and Skeat.

In the larger work reference was frequently made to authorities, — first as an acknowledgment of the author's indebtedness, second as a guide to the student in the choice of books for further study. It has not seemed necessary to repeat such references in this briefer book, as teachers and advanced students will naturally expect to use the larger *History* for reference.

O. F. E.

CLEVELAND, OHIO, July 1, 1896.



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