3
Old English

29. *The Languages in England before English.*

We are so accustomed to thinking of English as an inseparable adjunct to the English people that we are likely to forget that it has been the language of England for a comparatively short period in the world's history. Since its introduction into the island about the middle of the fifth century it has had a career extending through only 1,500 years. Yet this part of the world had been inhabited by humans for thousands of years: 50,000 according to more moderate estimates, 250,000 in the opinion of some. During this long stretch of time, most of it dimly visible through prehistoric mists, the presence of a number of cultures can be detected; and each of these cultures had a language. Nowhere does our knowledge of the history of humankind carry us back to a time when humans did not have a language. What can be said about the early languages of England? Unfortunately, little enough.

What we know of the earliest inhabitants of England is derived wholly from the material remains that have been uncovered by archaeological research. The classification of these inhabitants is consequently based upon the types of material culture that characterized them in their successive stages. Before the discovery of metals, human societies were dependent upon stone for the fabrication of such implements and weapons as they possessed. Generally speaking, the Stone Age is thought to have lasted in England until about 2000 B.C., although the English were still using some stone weapons in the battle of Hastings in 1066. Stone, however, gradually gave way to bronze, as bronze was eventually displaced by iron about 500 or 600 B.c.[1] Because the Stone Age was of long duration, it is customary to distinguish between an earlier and a later period, known as the Paleolithic (Old Stone) Age and the Neolithic (New Stone) Age.

Paleolithic humans, the earliest inhabitants of England, entered at a time when this part of the world formed a part of the continent of Europe, when there was no English Channel and when the North Sea was not much more than an enlarged river basin. The people of this period were short of stature, averaging about five feet, long-armed and short-legged, with low foreheads and poorly developed chins. They lived in the open, under rock shelters or, later, in caves. They were dependent for food upon the vegetation that grew wild and such animals as they could capture and kill. Fortunately, an abundance of fish and game materially lessened the problem of existence. Their weapons scarcely

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[1] The Iron Age begins in Southern Europe rather earlier. The metal was apparently just coming into use in the eastern Mediterranean in Homeric times. One of the prizes in the funeral games in the *Iliad,* by which Achilles commemorated the death of his friend Patroclus, was an ingot of iron.

extended beyond a primitive sledge or ax, to which they eventually learned to affix a handle. More than one distinct group is likely to be represented in this early stage of culture. The humans whose remains are found in the latest Paleolithic strata are distinguished by a high degree of artistic skill. But representations of boar and mastodon on pieces of bone or the walls of caves tell us nothing about the language of their designers. Their language disappeared with the disappearance of the race, or their absorption into the later population. We know nothing about the language, or languages, of Paleolithic culture.

"Neolithic" is likewise a convenient rather than scientific term to designate the peoples who, from about 5000 B.C., possess a superior kind of stone implement, often polished, and a higher culture generally. The predominant type in this new population appears to have come from the south and, from its widespread distribution in the lands bordering on the Mediterranean, is known as the Mediterranean race. It was a dark race of slightly larger stature than the Paleolithic population. The people of this technologically more advanced culture had domesticated the common domestic animals and developed elementary agriculture. They made crude pottery and did a little weaving, and some lived in crannogs, structures built on pilings driven into swamps and lakes. They buried their dead, covering the more important members of society with large mounds or barrows, oval in shape. But they did not have the artistic gifts of late Paleolithic peoples. Their language has not survived, and because our hope of learning anything about the language they spoke rests upon our finding somewhere a remnant of the race still speaking that language, that hope, so far as England is concerned, is dead. In a corner of the Pyrenees mountains of Spain, however, there survives a small community that is believed by some to represent this non-Indo-European culture. These people are the Basques, and their language shows no affiliation with any other language now known. Allowing for the changes it has doubtless undergone through the centuries, the Basque language may furnish us with a clue to the language of at least one group in the Neolithic cultures of Europe.

The first people in England about whose language we have definite knowledge are the Celts. It used to be assumed that the coming of the Celts to England coincided with the introduction of bronze into the island. But the use of bronze probably preceded the Celts by several centuries. We have already described the Celtic languages in England and called attention to the two divisions of them, the Gaelic or Goidelic branch and the Brythonic branch. Celtic was probably the first Indo-European tongue to be spoken in England. One other language, Latin, was spoken rather extensively for a period of about four centuries before the coming of English. Latin was introduced when Britain became a province of the Roman Empire. Because this was an event that has left a significant mark upon later history, it will be well to consider it separately.

30. *The Romans in Britain.*

In the summer of 55 B.C.Julius Caesar, having completed the conquest of Gaul, decided upon an invasion of England. What the object of his enterprise was is not known for certain. It is unlikely that he contemplated the conquest of the island; probably his chief purpose was to discourage the Celts of Britain from coming to the assistance of Celts in

Gaul, should the latter attempt to throw off the Roman yoke.[2] The expedition that year almost ended disastrously, and his return the following year was not a great success. In crossing the Channel some of his transports encountered a storm that deprived him of the support of his cavalry. The resistance of the Celts was unexpectedly spirited. It was with difficulty that he effected a landing, and he made little headway. Because the season was far advanced, he soon returned to Gaul. The expedition had resulted in no material gain and some loss of prestige. Accordingly the following summer he again invaded the island, after much more elaborate preparations. This time he succeeded in establishing himself in the southeast. But after a few encounters with the Celts, in which he was moderately successful, he exacted tribute from them (which was never paid) and again returned to Gaul. He had perhaps succeeded in his purpose, but he had by no means struck terror into the hearts of the Celts, and Britain was not again troubled by Roman legions for nearly a hundred years.

31. *The Roman Conquest.*

It was in A.D. 43 that the Emperor Claudius decided to undertake the actual conquest of the island. With the knowledge of Caesar's experience behind him, he did not underestimate the problems involved. Accordingly an army of 40,000 was sent to Britain and within three years had subjugated the peoples of the central and southeastern regions. Subsequent campaigns soon brought almost all of what is now England under Roman rule. The progress of Roman control was not uninterrupted. A serious uprising of the Celts occurred in A.D. 61 under Boudicca (Boadicea), the widow of one of the Celtic chiefs, and 70,000 Romans and Romanized Britons are said to have been massacred. Under the Roman Governor Agricola (A.D. 78–85) the northern frontier was advanced to the Solway and the Tyne, and the conquest may be said to have been completed. The Romans never penetrated far into the mountains of Wales and Scotland. Eventually they protected the northern boundary by a stone wall stretching across England at approximately the limits of Agricola's permanent conquest. The district south of this line was under Roman rule for more than 300 years.

32. *Romanization of the Island.*

It was inevitable that the military conquest of Britain should have been followed by the Romanization of the province. Where the Romans lived and ruled, there Roman ways were found. Four great highways soon spread fanlike from London to the north, the northwest, the west, and the southwest, while a fifth cut across the island from Lincoln to the Severn. Numerous lesser roads connected important military or civil centers or branched off as spurs from the main highways. A score of small cities and more than a

[2] In the opinion of R.G.Collingwood, Caesar's intention was to conquer the whole island. See R.G.Collingwood and J.N.L.Myres, *Roman Britain and the English Settlements* (2nd ed., Oxford, 1937), p. 34.

hundred towns, with their Roman houses and baths, temples, and occasional theaters, testify to the introduction of Roman habits of life. The houses were equipped with heating apparatus and water supply, their floors were paved in mosaic, and their walls were of painted stucco—all as in their Italian counterparts. Roman dress, Roman ornaments and utensils, and Roman pottery and glassware seem to have been in general use. By the third century Christianity had made some progress in the island, and in A.D. 314, bishops from London and York attended a church council in Gaul. Under the relatively peaceful conditions that existed everywhere except along the frontiers, where the hostile penetration of the unconquered population was always to be feared, there is every reason to think that Romanization had proceeded very much as it had in the other provinces of the empire. The difference is that in Britain the process was cut short in the fifth century.

33. *The Latin Language in Britain.*

Among the other evidences of Romanization must be included the use of the Latin language. A great number of inscriptions have been found, all of them in Latin. The majority of these proceed no doubt from the military and official class and, being in the nature of public records, were therefore in the official language. They do not in them-selves indicate a widespread use of Latin by the native population. Latin did not replace the Celtic language in Britain as it did in Gaul. Its use by native Britons was probably confined to members of the upper classes and some inhabitants of the cities and towns. Occasional graffiti scratched on a tile or a piece of pottery, apparently by the worker who made it, suggest that in some localities Latin was familiar to the artisan class. Outside the cities there were many fine country houses, some of which were probably occupied by the well-to-do. The occupants of these also probably spoke Latin. Tacitus tells us that in the time of Agricola the Britons, who had hitherto shown only hostility to the language of their conquerors, now became eager to speak it. At about the same time, a Greek teacher from Asia Minor was teaching in Britain, and by A.D. 96 the poet Martial was able to boast, possibly with some exaggeration, that his works were read even in this far-off island. On the whole, there were certainly many people in Roman Britain who habitually spoke Latin or upon occasion could use it. But its use was not sufficiently widespread to cause it to survive, as the Celtic language survived, the upheaval of the Germanic invasions. Its use probably began to decline after 410, the approximate date at which the last of the Roman legions were officially withdrawn from the island. The few traces that it has left in the language of the Germanic invaders and that can still be seen in the English language today will occupy us later.

34. *The Germanic Conquest.*

About the year 449 an event occurred that profoundly affected the course of history. In that year, as traditionally stated, began the invasion of Britain by certain Germanic tribes, the founders of the English nation. For more than a hundred years bands of conquerors

and settlers migrated from their continental homes in the region of Denmark and the Low Countries and established themselves in the south and east of the island, gradually extending the area they occupied until it included all but the highlands in the west and north. The events of these years are wrapped in much obscurity. Although we can form a general idea of their course, we are still in doubt about some of the tribes that took part in the movement, their exact location on the continent, and the dates of their respective migrations.

The traditional account of the Germanic invasions goes back to Bede and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. Bede in his *Ecdesiastical History of the English People,* completed in 731, tells us that the Germanic tribes that conquered England were the Jutes, Saxons, and Angles. From what he says and from other indications, it seems possible that the Jutes and the Angles had their home in the Danish peninsula, the Jutes in the northern half (hence the name
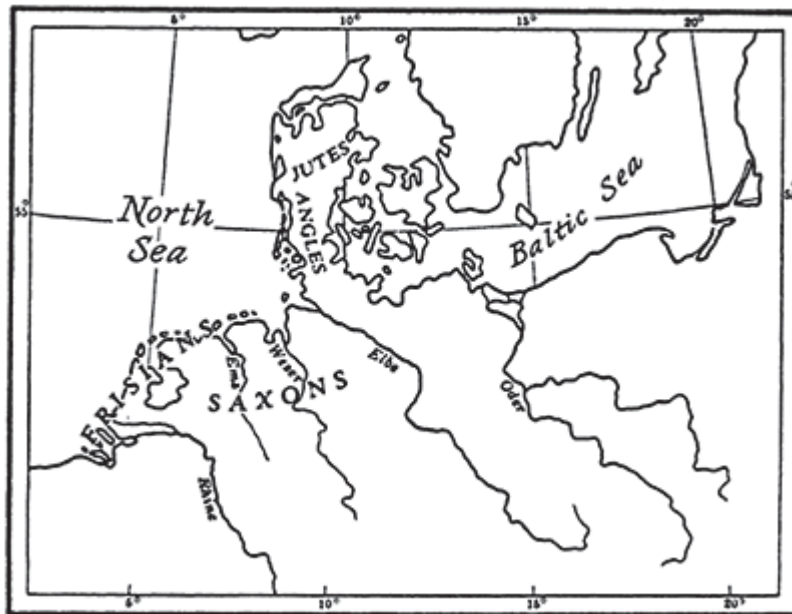
THE HOME OF THE ENGLISH

Note. The location of the Germanic tribes that invaded England is still a matter of dispute. The above map presents the traditional view, based upon the rather late testimony (eighth century) of Bede. An alternative opinion places the Angles on the middle Elbe and the Jutes near the Frisians.

Jutland) and the Angles in the south, in Schleswig-Holstein, and perhaps a small area at the base. The Saxons were settled to the south and west of the Angles, roughly between the Elbe and the Ems, possibly as far as the Rhine. A fourth tribe, the Frisians, some of

whom almost certainly came to England, occupied a narrow strip along the coast from the Weser to the Rhine, together with the islands opposite. But by the time of the invasions the Jutes had apparently moved down to the coastal area near the mouth of the Weser, and possibly also around the Zuyder Zee and the lower Rhine, thus being in contact with both the Frisians and Saxons.

Britain had been exposed to attacks by the Saxons from as early as the fourth century. Even while the island was under Roman rule these attacks had become sufficiently serious to necessitate the appointment of an officer known as the Count of the Saxon Shore, whose duty it was to police the southeastern coast. At the same time the unconquered Picts and Scots in the north were kept out only at the price of constant vigilance. Against both of these sources of attack the Roman organization seems to have proved adequate. But the Celts had come to depend on Roman arms for this protection. They had, moreover, under Roman influence settled down to a more peaceful mode of life, and their military traditions had lapsed. Consequently when the Romans withdrew in 410 the Celts found themselves at a disadvantage. They were no longer able to keep out the warlike Picts and Scots. Several times they called upon Rome for aid, but finally the Romans, fully occupied in defending their own territory at home, were forced to refuse assistance. It was on this occasion that Vortigern, one of the Celtic leaders, is reported to have entered into an agreement with the Jutes whereby they were to assist the Celts in driving out the Picts and Scots and to receive as their reward the isle of Thanet on the northeastern tip of Kent.

The Jutes, who had not been softened by contact with Roman civilization, were fully a match for the Picts and Scots. But Vortigern and the Celts soon found that they had in these temporary allies something more serious to reckon with than their northern enemies. The Jutes, having recognized the weakness of the Britons, decided to stay in the island and began making a forcible settlement in the southeast, in Kent.[3] The settlement of the Jutes was a very different thing from the conquest of the island by the Romans. The Romans had come to rule the Celtic population, not to dispossess it. The Jutes came in numbers and settled on the lands of the Celts. They met the resistance of the Celts by driving them out. Moreover the example of the Jutes was soon followed by the migration of other continental tribes. According to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle some of the Saxons came in 477, landed on the south coast, and established themselves in Sussex. In 495 further bands of Saxons settled a little to the west, in Wessex.[4] Finally in the middle of the next century the Angles occupied the east coast and in 547 established an Anglian kingdom north of the Humber. Too much credence, of course, cannot be put in these statements or dates. There were Saxons north of the Thames, as the names Essex and

[3] On the basis of archaeological evidence it has been maintained that the bulk of those who settled in Kent were Franks from the lower Rhine area, and it is suggested that with the Frisians they joined leaders who were Jutes, possibly from Jutland. See C.F.C.Hawkes, "The Jutes of Kent," in *Dark-Age Britain: Studies Presented to E.T.Leeds* (London, 1956), pp. 91–111. We must remember, however, that the possession of an ornament does not establish its maker or place of manufacture. See the remarks of T.C.Lethbridge in the same volume, p. 114.
[4] It will be recalled that the King Arthur of romance is thought by some to represent a military leader of the Celts, possibly a Roman or Romanized Celt, who led this people, at the beginning of the sixth century, in their resistance to the Germanic invaders, and who enjoyed an unusual, if temporary, success.

Middlesex (the districts of the East Saxons and Middle Saxons) indicate, and the Angles had already begun to settle in East Anglia by the end of the fifth century. But the entries in the Chronicle may be taken as indicating in a general way a succession of settlements extending over more than a century which completely changed the character of the island of Britain.

35. *Anglo-Saxon Civilization.*

It is difftcult to speak with surety about the relations of the newcomers and the native population. In some districts where the inhabitants were few, the Anglo-Saxons probably settled down beside the Celts in more or less peaceful contact. In others, as in the West Saxon territory, the invaders met with stubborn resistance and succeeded in establishing themselves only after much fighting. Many of the Celts undoubtedly were driven into the west and sought refuge in Wales and Cornwall, and some emigrated across the Channel to Brittany. In any case such civilization as had been attained under Roman influence was largely destroyed. The Roman towns were burnt and abandoned. Town life did not attract a population used to life in the open and finding its occupation in hunting and agriculture. The organization of society was by families and clans with a sharp distinction between *eorls,* a kind of hereditary aristocracy, and the *ceorls* or simple freemen. The business of the community was transacted in local assemblies or moots, and justice was administered through a series of fines—the *wergild*—which varied according to the nature of the crime and the rank of the injured party. Guilt was generally determined by ordeal or by compurgation. In time various tribes combined either for greater strength or, under the influence of a powerful leader, to produce small kingdoms. Seven of these are eventually recognized, Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Kent, Essex, Sussex, and Wessex, and are spoken of as the Anglo-Saxon Heptarchy. But the grouping was not very permanent, sometimes two or more being united under one king, at other times kingdoms being divided under separate rulers. In the early part of the seventh century Northumbria gained political supremacy over a number of the other kingdoms and held an undoubted leadership in literature and learning as well. In the eighth century this leadership passed to Mercia. Finally, in the ninth century, Wessex under the guidance of Egbert (802–839) began to extend its influence until in 830 all England, including the chieftains of Wales, acknowledged Egbert's overlordship. The result can hardly be called a united kingdom, but West Saxon kings were able to maintain their claim to be kings of all the English, and under Alfred (871–889) Wessex attained a high degree of prosperity and considerable enlightenment.

[5] The Anglo-Saxons, on the other hand, called the Celts *Wealas* (foreigners), from which the word *Welsh* is derived.

36. *The Names "England" and "English."*

The Celts called their Germanic conquerors *Saxons* indiscriminately, probably because they had had their first contact with the Germanic peoples through the Saxon raids on the coast.[5] Early Latin writers, following Celtic usage, generally call the Germanic inhabitants of England *Saxones* and the land *Saxonia*. But soon the terms *Angli* and *Anglia* occur beside *Saxones* and refer not to the Angles individually but to the West Germanic tribes generally. Æthelbert, king of Kent, is styled *rex Anglorum* by Pope Gregory in 601, and a century later Bede called his history the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. In time *Angli* and *Anglia* become the usual terms in Latin texts. From the beginning, however, writers in the vernacular never call their language anything but *Englisc (English)*. The word is derived from the name of the Angles (OE *Engle)* but is used without distinction for the language of all the invading tribes. In like manner the land and its people are early called *Angelcynn* (Angle-kin or race of the Angles), and this is the common name until after the Danish period. From about the year 1000 *Englaland* (land of the Angles) begins to take its place. The name *English* is thus older than the name *England*.[6] It is not easy to say why England should have taken its name from the Angles. Possibly a desire to avoid confusion with the Saxons who remained on the continent and the early supremacy of the Anglian kingdoms were the predominant factors in determining usage.[7]

37. *The Origin and Position of English.*

The English language of today is the language that has resulted from the history of the dialects spoken by the Germanic tribes who came to England in the manner described. It is impossible to say how much the speech of the Angles differed from that of the Saxons or that of the Jutes. The differences were certainly slight. Even after these dialects had been subjected to several centuries of geographical and political separation in England, the differences were not great. As we have seen above (§ 25) English belongs to the Low West Germanic branch of the Indo-European family. This means in the first place that it shares certain characteristics common to all the Germanic languages. For example, it shows the shifting of certain consonants described above (§ 16) under the head of Grimm's Law. It possesses a "weak" as well as a "strong" declension of the adjective and

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[6] The spelling *England* no longer represents the pronunciation of the word. Under the influence of the nasal *-ng* the *e* has undergone the regular change to *i* (cf. OE *streng>string;* ME *weng >wing*). The spelling *Ingland* occurs in Middle English, and the vowel is accurately represented in the Spanish *Inglaterra* and Italian *Inghilterra*.

[7] The term *Anglo-Saxon* is occasionally found in Old English times and is often employed today to designate the earliest period of English. It went out of use after the Norman Conquest until revived in the sixteenth century by the antiquarian William Camden. Although amply justified by usage, it is logically less defensible than the term *Old English,* which has the advantage of suggesting the unbroken continuity of English throughout its existence, but it is too convenient a synonym to be wholly discarded.

a distinctive type of conjugation of the verb—the so-called weak or regular verbs such as *fill, filled, filled,* which form their past tense and past participle by adding -*ed* or some analogous sound to the stem of the present. And it shows the adoption of a strong stress accent on the first or the root syllable of most words,[8] a feature of great importance in all the Germanic languages because it is chiefly responsible for the progressive decay of inflections in these languages. In the second place it means that English belongs with German and certain other languages because of features it has in common with them and that enable us to distinguish a West Germanic group as contrasted with the Scandinavian languages (North Germanic) and Gothic (East Germanic). These features have to do mostly with certain phonetic changes, especially the gemination or doubling of consonants under special conditions, matters that we do not need to enter upon here. And it means, finally, that English, along with the other languages of northern Germany and the Low Countries, did not participate in the further modification of certain consonants, known as the Second or High German Sound-Shift.[9] In other words it belongs with the dialects of the lowlands in the West Germanic area.

38. *The Periods in the History of English.*

The evolution of English in the 1,500 years of its existence in England has been an unbroken one. Within this development, however, it is possible to recognize three main periods. Like all divisions in history, the periods of the English language are matters of convenience and the dividing lines between them purely arbitrary. But within each of the periods it is possible to recognize certain broad characteristics and certain special developments that take place. The period from 450 to 1150 is known as Old English. It is sometimes described as the period of full inflections, because during most of this period the endings of the noun, the adjective, and the verb are preserved more or less unimpaired. From 1150 to 1500 the language is known as Middle English.[10] During this period the inflections, which had begun to break down toward the end of the Old English period, become greatly reduced, and it is consequently known as the period of leveled inflections. The language since 1500 is called Modern English. By the time we reach this stage in the development a large part of the original inflectional system has disappeared entirely, and we therefore speak of it as the period of lost inflections. The progressive decay of inflections is only one of the developments that mark the evolution of English in its various stages. We shall discuss in their proper place the other features that are characteristic of Old English, Middle English, and Modern English.

[8] This is obscured somewhat in Modern English by the large number of words borrowed from Latin.

[9] The effect of this shifting may be seen by comparing the English and the German words in the following pairs: English *open*—German *offen;* English *water*—German *wasser;* English *pound*—German *pfund;* English *tongue*—German *zunge*.

[10] Some of the developments which distinguish Middle English begin as early as the tenth century, but a consideration of the matter as a whole justifies the date 1150 as the general line of demarcation.

39. *The Dialects of Old English.*

Old English was not an entirely uniform language. Not only are there differences between the language of theearliest written records (about A.D. 700) and that of the later literary texts, but the language differed somewhat from one locality to another. We can distinguish four dialects in Old English times: Northumbrian, Mercian, West Saxon, and Kentish. Of these Northumbrian and Mercian are found in the region north of the Thames settled by the Angles. They possess certain features in common and are sometimes known collectively as Anglian. But Northum-brian, spoken north of the Humber, and Mercian, between the Humber and the Thames, each possess certain distinctive features as well. Unfortunately we know less about them than we should like since they are preserved mainly in charters, runic inscriptions, a few brief fragments of verse, and some interlinear translations of portions of the Bible. Kentish is known from still scantier remains and is the dialect of the Jutes in the southeast. The only dialect in which there is an extensive collection of texts is West Saxon, which was the dialect of the West Saxon kingdom in the southwest. Nearly all of Old English literature is preserved in manuscripts transcribed in this region. The dialects probably reflect differences already present in the continental homes of the invaders. There is evidence, however, that some features developed in England after the settlement. With the ascendancy of the West Saxon kingdom, the West Saxon dialect attained something of the position of a literary standard, and both for this reason and because of the abundance of the materials it is made the basis of the study of Old English. Such a start as it had made toward becoming the standard speech of England was cut short by the Norman Conquest, which, as we shall see, reduced all dialects to a common level of unimportance. And when in the late Middle English period a standard English once more began to arise, it was on the basis of a different dialect, that of the East Midlands.

40. *Some Characteristics of Old English.*

The English language has undergone such change in the course of time that one cannot read Old English without special study. In fact a page of Old English is likely at first to present a look of greater strangeness than a page of French or Italian because of the employment of certain characters that no longer form a part of our alphabet. In general the differences that one notices between Old and Modern English concern spelling and pronunciation, the lexicon, and the grammar.

   The pronunciation of Old English words commonly differs somewhat from that of their modern equivalents. The long vowels in particular have undergone considerable modification. Thus the Old English word *stān* is the same word as Modern English *stone,* but the vowel is different. A similar correspondence is apparent in *hālig—holy, gān—go, bān—bone, rāp—rope, hlāf—*

THE DIALECTS OF OLD ENGLISH

Note. Only the major dialect areas are indicated. That the
Saxon settlements north of the Thames (see § 34) had their
own dialect features is apparent in Middle English.

loaf, bāt—boat. Other vowels have likewise undergone changes in *fōt* (foot), *cēne* (keen),
metan (mete), *fȳr* (fire), *riht* (right), *hū* (how), and *hlūd* (loud), but the identity of these
words with their modern descendants is still readily apparent. Words like *hēafod* (head),

fæger (fair), or *sāwol* (soul) show forms that have been contracted in later English. All of these cases represent genuine differences of pronunciation. However, some of the first look of strangeness that Old English has to the modern reader is due simply to differences of spelling. Old English made use of two characters to represent the sound of *th:* þ and ð, *thorn* and *eth,* respectively, as in the word *wiþ* (with) or *ðā* (then), which we no longer employ. It also expressed the sound of *a* in *hat* by a digraph *æ (ash),* and since the sound is of very frequent occurrence, the character contributes not a little to the unfamiliar appearance of the page. Likewise Old English represented the sound of *sh* by *sc,* as in *scēap* (sheep) or *scēotan* (shoot), and the sound of *k* by *c,* as in *cynn* (kin) or *nacod* (naked); *c* was also used for the affricate now spelled *ch,* as in *sprǣc* (speech). Consequently a number of words that were in all probability pronounced by King Alfred almost as they are by us present a strange appearance in the written or printed text. Such words as *ecg* (edge), *scip* (ship), *bæc* (back), *benc* (bench), *þorn* (thorn), *þæt* (that) are examples. It should be noted that the differences of spelling and pronunciation that figure so prominently in one's first impression of Old English are really not very fundamental. Those of spelling are often apparent rather than real, as they represent no difference in the spoken language, and those of pronunciation obey certain laws as a result of which we soon learn to recognize the Old and Modern English equivalents.

A second feature of Old English that would quickly become apparent to a modern reader is the rarity of those words derived from Latin and the absence of those from French which form so large a part of our present vocabulary. Such words make up more than half of the words now in common use. They are so essential to the expression of our ideas, seem so familiar and natural to us, that we miss them in the earlier stage of the language. The vocabulary of Old English is almost purely Germanic. A large part of this vocabulary, moreover, has disappeared from the language. When the Norman Conquest brought French into England as the language of the higher classes, much of the Old English vocabulary appropriate to literature and learning died out and was replaced later by words borrowed from French and Latin. An examination of the words in an Old English dictionary shows that about 85 percent of them are no longer in use. Those that survive, to be sure, are basic elements of our vocabulary and by the frequency with which they recur make up a large part of any English sentence. Apart from pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, auxiliary verbs, and the like, they express fundamental concepts like *mann* (man), *wīf* (wife, woman), *cild* (child), *hūs* (house), *weall* (wall), *mete* (meat, food), *gærs* (grass), *lēaf* (leaf), *fugol* (fowl, bird), *gōd* (good), *hēah* (high), *strang* (strong), *etan* (eat), *drincan* (drink), *slǣpan* (sleep), *libban* (live), *feohtan* (fight). But the fact remains that a considerable part of the vocabulary of Old English is unfamiliar to the modern reader.

The third and most fundamental feature that distinguishes Old English from the language of today is its grammar.[11] Inflectional languages fall into two classes: synthetic

[11] The principal Old English grammars, in the order of their publication, are F.A.March, *A Comparative Grammar of the Anglo-Saxon Language* (New York, 1870), now only of historical interest; P.J.Cosijn, *Altwestsächsische Grammatik* (Haag, 1883–1886); E.Sievers, *An Old English Grammar,* trans. A.S.Cook (3rd ed., Boston, 1903); K.D.Bülbring, *Altenglisches Elementarbuch* (Heidelberg, 1902); Joseph and Elizabeth M.Wright, Old English Grammar (2nd ed., Oxford, 1914), and the same authors' *An Elementary Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1923); Karl Brunner,

and analytic. A *synthetic* language is one that indicates the relation of words in a sentence largely by means of inflections. In the case of the Indo-European languages these most commonly take the form of endings on the noun and pronoun, the adjective and the verb. Thus in Latin the nominative *murus* (wall) is distinguished from the genitive *muri* (of the wall), dative *muro* (to the wall), accusative *murum,* etc. A single verb form like *laudaverunt* (they have praised) conveys the idea of person, number, and tense along with the meaning of the root, a conception that we require three words for in English. The Latin sentence *Nero interfecit Agrippinam* means "Nero killed Agrippina." It would mean the same thing if the words were arranged in any other order, such as *Agrippinam interfecit Nero,* because *Nero* is the form of the nominative case and the ending *-am* of *Agrippinam* marks the noun as accusative no matter where it stands. In Modern English, however, the subject and the object do not have distinctive forms, nor do we have, except in the possessive case and in pronouns, inflectional endings to indicate the other relations marked by case endings in Latin. Instead, we make use of a fixed order of words. It makes a great deal of difference in English whether we say *Nero killed Agrippina* or *Agrippina killed Nero*. Languages that make extensive use of prepositions and auxiliary verbs and depend upon word order to show other relationships are known as *analytic* languages. Modern English is an analytic, Old English a synthetic language. In its grammar Old English resembles modern German. Theoretically the noun and adjective are inflected for four cases in the singular and four in the plural, although the forms are not always distinctive, and in addition the adjective has separate forms for each of the three genders. The inflection of the verb is less elaborate than that of the Latin verb, but there are distinctive endings for the different persons, numbers, tenses, and moods. We shall illustrate the nature of the Old English inflections in the following paragraphs.

41. *The Noun.*

The inflection of the Old English noun indicates distinctions of number (singular and plural) and case. The case system is somewhat simpler than that of Latin and some of the other Indo-European languages. There is no ablative, and generally no locative or instrumental case, these having been merged with the dative. In the same way the vocative of direct address is generally identical with the nominative form. Thus the Old English noun has only four cases. The endings of these cases vary with different nouns, but they fall into certain broad categories or declensions. There is a vowel declension and a consonant declension, also called the strong and weak declensions, according to whether the stem ended in Germanic in a vowel or a consonant, and within each of these types there are certain subdivisions. The stems of nouns belonging to the vowel declension ended in one of four vowels in Germanic (although these have disappeared in Old English): *a, ō, i,* or *u,* and the inflection varies accordingly. It is impossible here to

Altenglische Grammatik (3rd ed., Halle, Germany, 1965), based on Sievers; Randolph Quirk and C.L.Wrenn, *An Old English Grammar* (2nd ed., London, 1973); and Alistair Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford, 1959). The first volume, on phonology, has appeared in Richard M.Hogg's *A Grammar of Old English* (Oxford, 1992). Two classroom texts with grammars and readings are F.G.Cassidy and Richard N.Ringler, *Bright's Old English Grammar & Reader* (3rd ed., New York, 1971), and Bruce Mitchell and Fred C.Robinson, *A Guide to Old English* (5th ed., Oxford, 1992).

present the inflections of the Old English noun in detail. Their nature may be gathered from two examples of the strong declension and one of the weak: *stān* (stone), a masculine *a*-stem; *giefu* (gift), a feminine *ō*-and *hunta* (hunter), a masculine consonant-stem. Forms are given for the four cases, nominative, genitive, dative, and accusative:

Singular	N.	stān	gief-u	hunt-a
	G.	stān-es	gief-e	hunt-an
	D.	stān-e	gief-e	hunt-an
	A.	stān	gief-e	hunt-an
Plural	N.	stān-as	gief-a	hunt-an
	G.	stān-a	gief-a	hunt-ena
	D.	stān-um	gief-um	hunt-um
	A.	stān-as	gief-a	hunt-an

It is apparent from these examples that the inflection of the noun was much more elaborate in Old English than it is today. Even these few paradigms illustrate clearly the marked synthetic character of English in its earliest stage.

42. *Grammatical Gender.*

As in Indo-European languages generally, the gender of Old English nouns is not dependent upon considerations of sex. Although nouns designating males are often masculine and those indicating females feminine, those indicating neuter objects are not necessarily neuter. *Stān* (stone) is masculine, *mōna* (moon) is masculine, but *sunne* (sun) is feminine, as in German. In French the corresponding words have just the opposite genders: *pierre* (stone) and *lune* (moon) are feminine while *soleil* (sun) is masculine. Often the gender of Old English nouns is quite illogical. Words like *mægden* (girl), *wīf* (wife), *bearn* (child, son), and *cild* (child), which we should expect to be feminine or masculine, are in fact neuter, while *wīfmann* (woman) is masculine because the second element of the compound is masculine. The simplicity of Modern English gender has already been pointed out (§ 11) as one of the chief assets of the language. How so desirable a change was brought about will be shown later.

43. *The Adjective.*

An important feature of the Germanic languages is the development of a twofold declension of the adjective: one, the strong declension, used with nouns when not

[12] When the stem is short the adjective ends in *-u* in the nominative singular of the feminine and the nominative and accusative plural of the neuter.

accompanied by a definite article or similar word (such as a demonstrative or possessive pronoun), the other, the weak declension, used when the noun is preceded by such a word. Thus we have in Old English *gōd mann* (good man) but *sē gōda mann* (the good man). The forms are those of the nominative singular masculine in the strong and weak declensions respectively, as illustrated below.

		STRONG DECLESION			WEAK DECLENSION		
		Masc.	*Fem.*	*Neut.*	*Masc.*	*Fem.*	*Neut.*
Singular	N.	gōd	gōd[12]	gōd	gōd-a	gōd-e	gōd-e
	G.	gōd-es	gōd-re	gōd-es	gōd-an	gōd-an	gōd-an
	D.	gōd-um	gōd-re	gōd-um	gōd-an	gōd-an	gōd-an
	A.	gōd-ne	gōd-e	gōd	gōd-an	gōd-an	gōd-e
	I.	gōd-e		gōd-e			
Plural	N.	gōd-e	gōd-a	gōd		gōd-an	
	G.	gōd-ra	gōd-ra	gōd-ra		gōd-ena *or* gōd-ra	
	D.	gōd-um	gōd-um	gōd-um		gōd-um	
	A.	gōd-e	gōd-a	gōd		gōd-an	

This elaboration of inflection in the Old English adjective contrasts in the most striking way with the complete absence of inflection from the adjective in Modern English. Such complexity is quite unnecessary, as the English language demonstrates every day by getting along without it. Its elimination has resulted in a second great advantage that English possesses over some other languages.

44. *The Definite Article.*

Like German, its sister language of today, Old English possessed a fully inflected definite article. How complete the declension of this word was can be seen from the following forms:

	SINGULAR			PLURAL
	Masc.	*Fem.*	*Neut.*	*All Genders*
N.	sē	sēo	ðæt	ðā
G.	ðæs	ðǣre	ðæs	ðāra
D.	ðǣm	ðǣre	ðǣm	ðǣm
A.	ðone	ðā	ðæ	ðā
I.	ðȳ, ðon		ðȳ, ðon	

While the ordinary meaning of *sē, sēo, ðæt* is 'the', the word is really a demonstrative pronoun and survives in the Modern English demonstrative *that*. Its pronominal character appears also in its not infrequent use as a relative pronoun (=who, which, that) and as a personal pronoun (=he, she, it). The regular personal pronoun, however, is shown in the next paragraph.

45. *The Personal Pronoun.*

From the frequency of its use and the necessity for specific reference when used, the personal pronoun in all languages is likely to preserve a fairly complete system of inflections. Old English shows this tendency not only in having distinctive forms for practically all genders, persons, and cases but also in preserving in addition to the ordinary two numbers, singular and plural, a set of forms for two people or two things— the dual number. Indo-European had separate forms for the dual number in the verb as well, and these appear in Greek and to a certain extent in Gothic. They are not found, however, in Old English, and the distinction between the dual and the plural was disappearing even from the pronoun in Old English. The dual forms are shown, however, in the following table of the Old English personal pronoun:

Singular	N.	ic	ðū	hē *(he)*	hēo *(she)*	hit *(it)*
	G.	mīn	ðīn	his	hiere	his
	D.	mē	ðē	him	hiere	him
	A.	mē (mec)	ðē (ðec)	hine	hīe	hit
Dual	N.	wit *(we two)*	git *(ye two)*			
	G.	uncer	incer			
	D.	unc	inc			
	A.	unc	inc			
Plural	N.	wē	gē		hīe	
	G.	ūser (ūre)	ēower		hiera	
	D.	ūs	ēow		him	
	A.	ūs (ūsic)	ēow (ēowic)		hīe	

46. *The Verb.*

The inflection of the verb in the Germanic languages is much simpler than it was in Indo-European times. A comparison of the Old English verb with the verbal inflection of Greek or Latin will show how much has been lost. Old English distinguished only two simple tenses by inflection, a present and a past, and, except for one word, it had no inflectional forms for the passive as in Latin or Greek. It recognized the indicative, subjunctive, and imperative moods and had the usual two numbers and three persons.

A peculiar feature of the Germanic languages was the division of the verb into two great classes, the weak and the strong, often known in Modern English as regular and irregular verbs. These terms, which are so commonly employed in modern grammars, are rather unfortunate because they suggest an irregularity in the strong verbs that is more apparent than real. The strong verbs, like *sing, sang, sung,* which represent the basic Indo-European type, are so called because they have the power of indicating change of tense by a modification of their root vowel. In the weak verbs, such as *walk, walked, walked,* this change is effected by the addition of a "dental," sometimes of an extra syllable.

The apparent irregularity of the strong verbs is due to the fact that verbs of this type are much less numerous than weak verbs. In Old English, if we exclude compounds, there were only a few over 300 of them, and even this small number falls into several classes. Within these classes, however, a perfectly regular sequence can be observed in the vowel changes of the root. Nowadays these verbs, generally speaking, have different vowels in the present tense, the past tense, and the past participle. In some verbs the vowels of the past tense and past participle are identical, as in *break, broke, broken,* and in some all three forms have become alike in modern times *(bid, bid, bid).* In Old English the vowel of the past tense often differs in the singular and the plural; or, to be more accurate, the first and third person singular have one vowel while the second person singular and all persons of the plural have another. In the principal parts of Old English strong verbs, therefore, we have four forms: the infmitive, the preterite singular (first and third person), the preterite plural, and the past participle. In Old English the strong verbs can be grouped in seven general classes. While there are variations within each class, they may be illustrated by the following seven verbs:

I. drīfan	*(drive)*	drāf	drifon	(ge) drifen
II. cēosan	*(choose)*	cēas	curon[13]	coren
III. helpan	*(help)*	healp	hulpon	holpen
IV. beran	*(bear)*	bær	bǣron	boren
V. sprecan	*(speak)*	spræc	sprǣcon	sprecen
VI. faran	*(fare, go)*	fōr	fōron	faren
VII. feallan	*(fall)*	fēoll	fēollon	feallen[14]

[13] The change of *s* to *r* is due to the fact that the accent was originally on the final syllable in the preterite plural and the past participle. It is known as Grammatical Change or Verner's Law for the scholar who first explained it (cf. § 16). In Modern English the *s* has been restored in the past participle *(chosen)* by analogy with the other forms. The initial sound has been leveled in the same way.

[14] The personal endings may be illustrated by the conjugation of the first verb in the above list, *drīfan:*

The origin of the dental suffixes by which weak verbs form their past tense and past participle is strongly debated. It was formerly customary to explain these as part of the verb *do,* as though *I worked* was originally *I work—did* (i.e., *I did work*). More recently an attempt has been made to trace these forms to a type of verb that formed its stem by adding *-to-* to the root. The origin of so important a feature of the Germanic languages as the weak conjugation is naturally a question to which we should like very much to find the answer. Fortunately it is not of prime importance to our present purpose of describing the structure of Old English. Here it is sufficient to note that a large and important group of verbs in Old English form their past tense by adding *-ede, -ode,* or *-de* to the present stem, and their past participles by adding *-ed, -od,* or *-d*. Thus *fremman* (to perform) has a preterite *fremede* and a past participle *gefremed; lufian* (to love) has *lufode* and *gelufod; libban* (to live) has *lifde* and *gelifd*. The personal endings except in the preterite singular are similar to those of the strong verbs and need not be repeated. It is to be noted, however, that the weak conjugation has come to be the dominant one in our language. Many strong verbs have passed over to this conjugation, and practically all new verbs added to our language are inflected in accordance with it.

	INDICATIVE			SUBJUNCTIVE
	Present			*Present*
ic	drīf-e		ic	drīf-e
ðū	drīf-st (-est)		ðū	drīf-e
hē	drīf-ð(-eð)		hē	drīf-e
wē	drīf-að		wē	drīf-en
gē	drīf-að		gē	drīf-en
hīe	drīf-að		hīe	drīf-en
	Past			*Past*
ic	drāf		ic	drif-e
ðū	drif-e		ðū	drif-e
hē	drāf		hē	drif-e
wē	drif-on		wē	drīf-en
gē	drif-on		gē	drif-en
hīe	drif-on		hīe	drif-en

In addition to these forms the imperative was *drīf* (sing.) and *drīfað* (plur.), the present participle *drīfende, and the ge*rund (i.e., the infinitive used as a verbal noun) tō drīfenne.

47. *The Language Illustrated.*

We have spoken of the inflections of Old English in some detail primarily with the object of making more concrete what is meant when we call the language in this stage synthetic.

In the later chapters of this book we shall have occasion to trace the process by which English lost a great part of this inflectional system and became an analytic language, so that the paradigms which we have given here will also prove useful as a point of departure for that discussion. The use of these inflections as well as the other characteristics of the language so far pointed out may be seen in the following specimens. The first is the Lord's Prayer, the clauses of which can easily be followed through the modern form, which is familiar to us from the King James version of the Bible.

Fæder ūre,
þū þe eart on heofonum,
sī þīn nama gehālgod.
Tōbecume þīn rīce.
Gewurþe ðīn willa on eorðan swā swā on heofonum.
Ūrne gedæghwāmlīcan hlāf syle ūs tō dæg.
And forgyf ūs ūre gyltas, swā swā wē forgyfað ūrum gyltendum.
And ne gelǣd þū ūs on costnunge,
ac, ālȳs ūs of yfele. Sōþlīce.

The second specimen is from the Old English translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* and tells the story of the coming of the missionaries to England under St. Augustine in 597:

Ða wæs on þā tīd Æþelbeorht cyning hāten on Centrīce, and
Then (there)   was at that time   a king named Æthelberht in Kent,   and (a)

mihtig: hē hæfde rīce oð gemǣru Humbre strēames, sē tōscādeþ
mighty (one): he had dominion up to (the) confines of the Humber river,   which separates

sūðfolc Angelþēode and norðfolc. Þonne is on ēasteweardre Cent
the south folk of the English and the north folk.   Now   there is   in eastward   Kent

micel ēaland, Tenet, þæt is siex hund hīda micel æfter Angelcynnes
a large island,   Thanet,   that   is   six   hundred hides large   after the   reckoning of the

eahte.... On þyssum ēalande cōm ūp sē Godes þēow Augustinus
English....   On   this   island   came   up   the   servant of God,   Augustine,

and his gefēran; wæs hē fēowertiga sum. Nāmon hīe ēac swelce him
and   his companions;   he   was   one of forty.   Took   they   likewise with them

wealhstodas of Franclande mid, swā him Sanctus Gregorius bebēad.
interpreters from Frank-land,   as   them Saint   Gregory   bade.

And þā sende to Æþelbeorhte ǣrendwrecan and onbēad þæt hē
And   then (Augustine) sent to Æthelberht   a messenger   and   announced that   he

of Rōme cōme and þæt betste ǣrende lǣdde; and sē þe him hīersum
from Rome had come and the   best   message brought (led); and he   who   (if any) would

bēon wolde, būton twēon hē gehēt ēcne gefēan on heofonum and
be obedient to him, without doubt   he promised eternal happiness   in   heaven   and

tōweard rīce būton ende mid þone sōþan God and þone lifigendan.
a future kingdom without end   with the   true   God   and   the   living (God).

Ðā hē þā sē cyning þās word gehīerde, þa hēt hē hīe bīdan on þǣm
When   the king   heard these   words,   then bade he them to bide   on   the

ēalande þe hīe ūp cōmon; and him þider hiera þearfe forgēaf, oð þæt
island   that they had come up on; and   them thither their   need   provided,   until that

hē gesāwe hwæt hē him dōn wolde. Swelce ēac ǣr þǣm becōm hlīsa
he   saw   what   he would   do with them. Likewise   ere that   had come to him

tō him þǣre crīstenan ǣfæstnesse, forþon hē crīsten wīf hæfde,
the fame   of the   Christian   religion,   since   he   had a   Christian wife,

him gegiefen of Francena cyningcynne, Beorhte wæs hāten. Þæt wīf
given   him from   the royal family   of the Franks,   (who) was named Bertha.   That   wife

hē onfēng fram hiere ieldrum þǣre ārǣdnesse þæt hēo his lēafnesse
he   received   from her parents (elders)   on   the   condition   that she should have his

hæfde þæt hēo þone þēaw þæs crīstenan gelēafan and hiere ǣfæstnesse
permission that she   the   practice of the Christian   faith   and her   religion

ungewemmedne healdan mōste mid þȳ biscope, þone þe hīe hiere
unimpaired   might   hold   with   the bishop   whom   they to her

tō fultume þæs gelēafan sealdon, þæs nama wæs Lēodheard.
for the help of   the (her)   faith   had given,   whose name was   Leodheard.

   Ðā wæs æfter manigum dagum þæt sē cyning cōm tō þǣm ēalande,
Then it was after   many   days   that the king   came   to the   island

and hēt him ūte setl gewyrcean; and hēt Augustinum mid his
and commanded (them) in the open air a seat to make him;   and he bade Augustine   with   his

gefērum þider tō his sprǣce cuman. Warnode hē him þȳ lǣs hīe
companions   to come thither to a (his) consultation.   He guarded   himself   lest   they

on hwelc hūs tō him inēoden; brēac ealdre hēalsunga, gif hīe hwelcne
in the same house with him should enter: he employed an old precaution   in case they   any

drȳcræft hæfden þæt hīe hine oferswīðan and beswīcan sceolden. . . .
sorcery   had with which   they should overcome   and get the better   of him. . . .

Þā hēt sē cyning hīe sittan, and hīe swā dydon; and hīe sōna him
Then the king bade   them to sit,   and   they did   so;   and   they soon to him

līfes word ætgædere mid eallum his gefērum þe þǣr æt wǣron,
the word of life together   with   all   his   companions   that thereat   were,

bodedon and lǣrdon. Þā andswarode sē cyning and þus cwæð:
preached   and   taught.   Then answered   the king   and   thus   quoth:

"Fæger word þis sindon and gehāt þe gē brōhton and ūs secgað.
"Fair   words   these are   and   promises that ye   have brought and say to us.

Ac forðon hīe nīwe sindon and uncūðe, ne magon wē nū gēn þæt
But   since   they new   are   and   unknown,   we   may not yet consent to   this

þafian þæt wē forlǣten þā wīsan þe wē langre tīde mid ealle
      that   we   give up   the   ways   that we   longtime   with   all

Angelþēode hēoldon. Ac forðon þe gē hider feorran elþēodige
the English   have held.   But since   ye   hither   from afar as strangers

cōmon and, þæs þe mē geþūht is and gesewen, þā þing, ðā ðe [gē]
have come and,   as   it   seems to me   and   appears,   the things   that   ye

sōð and betst gelīefdon, þæt ēac swelce wilnodon ūs þā gemǣnsumian,
believed true and best   that likewise   (ye) wished to   impart them to us,

nellað wē forðon ēow hefige bēon. Ac wē willað ēow ēac fremsumlīce
we will not therefore   on   you   be heavy. But we   will   you   also   kindly

on giestlīðnesse onfōn and ēow andleofne sellan and ēowre þearfe
in   hospitality   receive   and   give   you food   and   your   needs

forgiefan. Ne wē ēow beweriað þæt gē ealle, ðā þe gē mægen, þurh
provide for.   Nor do we you   forbid   that   ye   all   those that ye   may   through

ēowre lāre tō ēowres gelēafan æfæstnesse geðīeden and gecierren."[15]
your   teaching to   of your faith   (the) religion   may join   and   convert."

48. *The Resourcefulness of the Old English Vocabulary.*

To one unfamiliar with Old English it might seem that a language which lacked the large number of words borrowed from Latin and French that now form so important a part of our vocabulary would be somewhat limited in resources. One might think that Old English, while possessing adequate means of expression for the affairs of simple everyday life, would be unable to make the fine distinctions that a literary language is called upon to express. In other words, an Anglo-Saxon might seem like someone today who is learning to speak a foreign language and who can manage in a limited way to convey the meaning without having a sufficient command of the vocabulary to express those subtler shades of thought and feeling, the nuances of meaning, that one is able to suggest in one's native language. This, however, is not so. When our means are limited we often develop unusual resourcefulness in utilizing those means to the full. Such resourcefulness is characteristic of Old English. The language in this stage shows great flexibility, a capacity for bending old words to new uses. By means of prefixes and suffixes a single root is made to yield a variety of derivatives, and the range of these is greatly extended by the ease with which compounds are formed. The method can be made clear by an illustration. The word *mōd,* which is our word *mood* (a mental state), meant in Old English 'heart', 'mind', 'spirit', and hence 'boldness' or 'courage', sometimes 'pride' or 'haughtiness'. From it, by the addition of a common adjective ending, was formed the adjective *mōdig* with a similar range of meanings (spirited, bold, high-minded, arrogant, stiff-necked), and by means of further endings the adjective *mōdiglic* 'magnanimous', the adverb *mōdiglīce* 'boldly',

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[15] The original is here somewhat normalized.

'proudly', and the noun *mōdignes* 'magnanimity', 'pride'. Another ending converted *mōdig* into a verb *mōdigian,* meaning 'to bear oneself proudly or exultantly', or sometimes, 'to be indignant', 'to rage'. Other forms conveyed meanings whose relation to the root is easily perceived: *gemōdod* 'disposed', 'minded', *mōdfull* 'haughty', *mōdlēas* 'spiritless'. By combining the root with other words meaning 'mind' or 'thought' the idea of the word is intensified, and we get *mōdsefa, mōdgeþanc, mōdgeþoht, mōdgehygd, mōdgemynd, mōdhord* (*hord*=treasure), all meaning 'mind', 'thought', 'understanding'. Some sharpening of the concept is obtained in *mōdcræft* 'intelligence', and *mōdcræftig* 'intelligent'. But the root lent itself naturally to combination with other words to indicate various mental states, such as *glædmōdnes* 'kindness', *mōdlufu* 'affection' (*lufu*=love), *unmōd* 'despondency', *mōdcaru* 'sorrow' (*caru*=care), *mōdlēast* 'want of courage', *mādmōd* 'folly', *ofermōd* and *ofermōdigung* 'pride', *ofermōdig* 'proud', *hēahmōd* 'proud', 'noble', *mōdhete* 'hate' (*hete*=hate). It will be seen that Old English did not lack synonyms for some of the ideas in this list. By a similar process of combination a number of adjectives were formed: *micelmōd* 'magnanimous', *swīþmōd* 'great of soul' (*swīþ*=strong), *stīþmōd* 'resolute', 'obstinate' (*stīþ*=stiff, strong), *gūþmōd* 'warlike' (*gūþ*=war, battle), *torhtmōd* 'glorious' (*torht*=bright), *mōdlēof* 'beloved' (*lēof*−dear). The examples given are sufficient to illustrate the point, but they far from tell the whole story. From the same root more than a hundred words were formed. If we had space to list them, they would clearly show the remarkable capacity of Old English for derivation and word formation, and what variety and flexibility of expression it possessed. It was more resourceful in utilizing its native material than Modern English, which has come to rely to a large extent on its facility in borrowing and assimilating elements from other languages.

49. *Self-explaining Compounds.*

In the list of words given in the preceding paragraph are a considerable number that we call self-explaining compounds. These are compounds of two or more native words whose meaning in combination is either self-evident or has been rendered clear by association and usage. In Modern English *greenhouse, railway, sewing machine, one-way street,* and *coffee-table book* are examples of such words. Words of this character are found in most languages, but the type is particularly prevalent in Old English, as it is in modern German. Where in English today we often have a borrowed word or a word made up of elements derived from Latin and Greek, German still prefers self-explaining compounds. Thus, for hydrogen German says *Wasserstoff* (water-stuff); for telephone *Fernsprecher* (far-speaker); and for fire insurance company *Feur|versicherungs|gesellschaft.* So in Old English many words are formed on this pattern. Thus we have *lēohtfæt* 'lamp' (*lēoht* light+*fæt* vessel), *medu-heall* 'mead-hall', *dægred* 'dawn' (day-red), *ealohūs* 'alehouse', *ealoscop* 'minstrel', *ēarhring* 'earring', *eorþcræft* 'geometry, *fiscdēag* 'purple' (*lit.* fish-dye), *fōtādl* 'gout' (foot-disease), *gimmwyrhta* 'jeweler' (gem-worker), *fiellesēocnes* 'epilepsy' (falling-sickness; cf. Shakespeare's use of this expression in *Julius Caesar), frumweorc* 'creation' (*fruma* beginning+work), and many more. The capacity of English nowadays to make similar

words, though a little less frequently employed than formerly, is an inheritance of the Old English tradition, when the method was well-nigh universal. As a result of this capacity Old English seems never to have been at a loss for a word to express the abstractions of science, theology, and metaphysics, even those it came to know through contact with the church and Latin culture.

50. *Prefixes and Suffixes.*

As previously mentioned, a part of the flexibility of the Old English vocabulary comes from the generous use made of prefixes and suffixes to form new words from old words or to modify or extend the root idea. In this respect it also resembles modern German. Among the words mentioned in the preceding paragraphs there are several that are formed with the suffixes *-ig, -full, -lēas, -līce, -nes,* and *-ung*. Others frequently employed include the adjective suffixes *-sum (wynsum)* and *-wīs (rihtwīs),* the noun suffixes *-dōm (cyningdōm, eorldōm), -end,* and *-ere* denoting the agent, *-hād (cildhād), -ing* in patronymics, *-ung (dagung* dawn), *-scipe (frēondscipe),* and many more. In like manner the use of prefixes was a fertile resource in word building. It is particularly a feature in the formation of verbs. There are about a dozen prefixes that occur with great frequency, such as *ā-, be-, for-, fore-, ge-, mis-, of-, ofer-, on-, tō-, un-, under-,* and *wiþ-*. Thus, with the help of these, Old English could make out of a simple verb like *settan* (to set) new verbs like *āsettan* 'place', *besettan* 'appoint', *forsettan* 'obstruct' *foresettan* 'place before', *gesettan* 'people', 'garrison', *ofsettan* 'afflict', *onsettan* 'oppress', *tōsettan* 'dispose', *unsettan* 'put down', and *wiþsettan* 'resist'. The prefix *wiþ*enters into more than fifty Old English verbs, where it has the force of *against* or *away*. Such, for example, are *wiþcēosan* 'reject' (*cēosan*=choose), *wiþcweþan* 'deny' (*cweþan*=say), *wiþdrīfan* 'repel', *wiþsprecan* 'contradict', and *wiþstandan*. Of these fifty verbs *withstand* is the only one still in use, although in Middle English two new verbs, *withdraw* and *withhold,* were formed on the same model. The prefix *ofer-* occurs in more than a hundred Old English verbs. By such means the resources of the English verb were increased almost tenfold, and enough such verbs survive to give us a realization of their employment in the Old English vocabulary.

In general one is surprised at the apparent ease with which Old English expressed difficult ideas adequately and often with variety. 'Companionship' is literally rendered by *gefērascipe;* 'hospitality' by *giestlīþnes (giest* stranger, *liþe* gracious); *gītsung* 'covetousness' (*gītsian*=to be greedy). *Godcundlic* 'divine', *indryhten* 'aristocratic' (*dryhten*=prince), *giefolnes* 'liberality' (*giefu*=gift), *gaderscipe* 'matrimony' (*gadrian*=to gather), *lǣcecræft* 'medicine' (*lǣce*=physician) illustrate, so to speak, the method of approach. Often several words to express the same idea result. An astronomer or astrologer may be a *tunglere* (*tungol*=star), *tungolcræftiga, tungolwītega,* a *tīdymbwlātend* (*tīd*=time, *ymb*=about, *wlātian*=to gaze), or a *tīdscēawere* (*scēawian*= see, scrutinize). In poetry the vocabulary attains a remarkable flexibility through the wealth of synonyms for words like *war, warrior, shield, sword, battle, sea, ship*—sometimes as many as thirty for one of these ideas—and through the bold use of metaphors. The king is the leader of hosts, the giver of rings, the protector of eorls, the victory-lord, the heroes' treasure-keeper. A sword is the product of files, the play of swords a battle, the battle-seat

a saddle, the shield-bearer a warrior. Warriors in their woven war-shirts, carrying battle-brand or war-shaft, form the iron-clad throng. A boat is the sea-wood, the wave-courser, the broad-bosomed, the curved-stem, or the foamy-necked ship, and it travels over the whale-road, the sea-surge, the rolling of waves, or simply the water's back. Synonyms never fail the Beowulf poet. Grendel is the grim spirit, the prowler on the wasteland, the lonely wanderer, the loathed one, the creature of evil, the fiend in Hell, the grim monster, the dark death-shadow, the worker of hate, the mad ravisher, the fell spoiler, and the incarnation of a dozen other attributes characteristic of his enmity toward humankind. No one can long remain in doubt about the rich and colorful character of the Old English vocabulary.

51. *Old English Syntax.*

One of the most obvious features of syntactic style in any language is the degree to which grammatical and semantic relationships are expressed by subordinate clauses. A high proportion of long sentences with subordination, as in the prose of Edward Gibbon or Henry James or the poetry of John Milton, is known as *hypotactic* style, whereas shorter sentences and a higher proportion of principal clauses, as in the prose of Ernest Hemingway, is *paratactic*. Parataxis may also be interpreted as immature and childish, as in examples given by S.O.Andrew:

> Then I asked him; then he replied…
> They came to a place on the road; there stood a temple.
> There lived in the convent a certain monk; he was called Martin:
> he said…[16]

[16] S.O.Andrew, *Syntax and Style in Old English* (Cambridge, UK, 1940), p. 87.

There are clear differences in our modern perceptions of Old English written in this paratactic style and Old English written with many embedded clauses. The problem is in determining whether a particular clause is independent or subordinate, because the words that do the subordinating are often ambiguous. Thus, Old English *þā* the beginning of a clause can be either an adverb translated 'then' and introducing an independent clause, or a subordinating conjunction translated 'when' and introducing a dependent clause. Similarly, *þǣr* can be translated as 'there' or 'where', *þonne* as 'then' or 'when', *swā* as 'so' or 'as', *ǣr,* as 'formerly' or 'ere', siððan as 'afterward' or 'since', *nū* as 'now' or 'now that', *þēah* as 'nevertheless' or 'though', and *forðām* as 'therefore' or 'because'. In each pair the first word is an adverb, and the style that results from choosing it is a choppier style with shorter sentences, whereas the choice of the second word, a conjunction, results in longer sentences with more embedded clauses. Current research in Old English syntax aims to understand the use of these ambiguous subordinators and adverbs. The conclusions that emerge will affect our modern perception of the

sophistication of Old English writing in verse and prose. Earlier editors tended to read a high degree of parataxis in Old English and to punctuate their editions accordingly. This reading fitted in with the idea that English subordinating conjunctions had their origins in adverbs. However, one can accept the adverbial origin of conjunctions and still argue, as Andrew did in 1940, that Old English style had attained a high degree of subordination (although Andrew's conclusions now seem extreme). Furthermore, it is important to bear in mind that parataxis and hypotaxis are stylistic options and not syntactic necessities, because Old English clearly had the means for a highly subordinated style. Syntactic investigators now find generally more hypotaxis than earlier editors did, but the efforts are directed toward discovering specific structural cues before making generalizations. The most obvious cues are in the word order of the clause as a whole, which includes familiar historical patterns of subject and verb such as S…V, VS, and SV. These patterns have been intensively analyzed for the principles operating in the placement of the finite verb, which typically occurs in second position in main clauses, and in final position in subordinate clauses.[17] In addition, there are more subtle cues in the patterning of auxiliaries, contractions, and other structures.[18] Finally, as Bruce

[17] See Robert P.Stockwell and Donka Minkova, "Subordination and Word Order Change in the History of English," in *Historical English Syntax,* ed. Dieter Kastovksy (Berlin, 1991), pp. 367–409. See also two essays in *Parameters of Morphosyntactic Change,* ed. Ans van Kemenade and Nigel Vincent (Cambridge, UK, 1997): Anthony Kroch and Ann Taylor, "Verb Movement in Old and Middle English: Dialect Variation and Language Contact," pp. 297–325; and Ans van Kemenade, "V2 and Embedded Topicalization in Old and Middle English," pp. 326–52.
[18] See, for example, Daniel Donoghue, *Style in Old English Poetry: The Test of the Auxiliary* (New Haven, CT, 1987), and Mary Blockley, "Uncontracted Negation as a Cue to Sentence Structure in Old English Verse," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology,* 89 (1990), 475–90.

Mitchell reminds us, it may be anachronistic to impose modern categories that result from our translations into words such as 'then' and 'when', "implying that the choice was simply between a subordinate clause and an independent clause in the modern sense of the words."[19] We should be especially cautious about imposing modern notions that equate hypotaxis with sophistication and parataxis with primitiveness until we know more about the full range of syntactic possibilities in Old English. Ongoing research in this subject promises to revise our ideas of the grammatical, semantic, and rhythmic relationships in Old English verse and prose.

52. *Old English Literature.*

The language of a past time is known by the quality of its literature. Charters and records yield their secrets to the philologist and contribute their quota of words and inflections to our dictionaries and grammars. But it is in literature that a language displays its full power, its ability to convey in vivid and memorable form the thoughts and emotions of a

[19] *Old English Syntax,* 2 vols. (Oxford, 1985), I, § 1879.

people. The literature of the Anglo-Saxons is fortunately one of the richest and most significant of any preserved among the early Germanic peoples. Because it is the language mobilized, the language in action, we must say a word about it.

Generally speaking, this literature is of two sorts. Some of it was undoubtedly brought to England by the Germanic conquerors from their continental homes and preserved for a time in oral tradition. All of it owes its preservation, however, and not a little its inspiration to the reintroduction of Christianity into the southern part of the island at the end of the sixth century, an event whose significance for the English language will be discussed in the next chapter. Two streams thus mingle in Old English literature, the pagan and the Christian, and they are never quite distinct. The poetry of pagan origin is constantly overlaid with Christian sentiment, while even those poems that treat of purely Christian themes contain every now and again traces of an earlier philosophy not wholly forgotten. We can indicate only in the briefest way the scope and content of this literature, and we shall begin with that which embodies the native traditions of the people.

The greatest single work of Old English literature is *Beowulf*. It is a poem of some 3,000 lines belonging to the type known as the folk epic, that is to say, a poem which, whatever it may owe to the individual poet who gave it final form, embodies material long current among the people. It is a narrative of heroic adventure relating how a young warrior, Beowulf, fought the monster Grendel, which was ravaging the land of King Hrothgar, slew it and its mother, and years later met his death while ridding his own country of an equally destructive foe, a fire-breathing dragon. The theme seems somewhat fanciful to a modern reader, but the character of the hero, the social conditions pictured, and the portrayal of the motives and ideals that animated people in early Germanic times make the poem one of the most vivid records we have of life in the heroic age. It is not an easy life. It is a life that calls for physical endurance, unflinching courage, and a fine sense of duty, loyalty, and honor. A stirring expression of the heroic ideal is in the words that Beowulf addresses to Hrothgar before going to his dangerous encounter with Grendel's mother: "Sorrow not…. Better is it for every man that he avenge his friend than that he mourn greatly. Each of us must abide the end of this world's life; let him who may, work mighty deeds ere he die, for afterwards, when he lies lifeless, that is best for the warrior."

Outside of *Beowulf* Old English poetry of the native tradition is represented by a number of shorter pieces. Anglo-Saxon poets sang of the things that entered most deeply into their experience—of war and of exile, of the sea with its hardships and its fascination, of ruined cities, and of minstrel life. One of the earliest products of Germanic tradition is a short poem called *Widsith* in which a scop or minstrel pretends to give an account of his wanderings and of the many famous kings and princes before whom he has exercised his craft. *Deor,* another poem about a minstrel, is the lament of a scop who for years has been in the service of his lord and now finds himself thrust out by a younger man. But he is no whiner. Life is like that. Age will be displaced by youth. *He* has his day. Peace, my heart! *Deor* is one of the most human of Old English poems. The *Wanderer* is a tragedy in the medieval sense, the story of a man who once enjoyed a high place and has fallen upon evil times. His lord is dead and he has become a wanderer in strange courts, without friends. Where are the snows of yesteryear? The *Seafarer* is a monologue in which the speaker alternately describes the perils and hardships of the sea

and the eager desire to dare again its dangers. In *The Ruin* the poet reflects on a ruined city, once prosperous and imposing with its towers and halls, its stone courts and baths, now but the tragic shadow of what it once was. Two great war poems, the *Battle of Brunanburh* and the *Battle of Maldon,* celebrate with patriotic fervor stirring encounters of the English, equally heroic in victory and defeat. In its shorter poems, no less than in *Beowulf,* Old English literature reveals at wide intervals of time the outlook and temper of the Germanic mind.

More than half of Anglo-Saxon poetry is concerned with Christian subjects. Translations and paraphrases of books of the Old and New Testament, legends of saints, and devotional and didactic pieces constitute the bulk of this verse. The most important of this poetry had its origin in Northumbria and Mercia in the seventh and eighth centuries. The earliest English poet whose name we know was Cædmon, a lay brother in the monastery at Whitby. The story of how the gift of song came to him in a dream and how he subsequently turned various parts of the Scriptures into beautiful English verse comes to us in the pages of Bede. Although we do not have his poems on Genesis, Exodus, Daniel, and the like, the poems on these subjects that we do have were most likely inspired by his example. About 800 an Anglian poet named Cynewulf wrote at least four poems on religious subjects, into which he ingeniously wove his name by means of runes. Two of these, *Juliana* and *Elene,* tell well-known legends of saints. A third, *Christ,* deals with Advent, the Ascension, and the Last Judgment. The fourth, *The Fates ofthe Apostles,* touches briefly on where and how the various apostles died. There are other religious poems besides those mentioned, such as the *Andreas,* two poems on the life of St. Guthlac, a portion of a fine poem on the story of *Judith* in the Apocrypha; *The Phoenix,* in which the bird is taken as a symbol of the Christian life; and *Christ and Satan,* which treats the expulsion of Satan from Paradise together with the Harrowing of Hell and Satan's tempting of Christ. All of these poems have their counterparts in other literatures of the Middle Ages. They show England in its cultural contact with Rome and being drawn into the general current of ideas on the continent, no longer simply Germanic, but cosmopolitan.

In the development of literature, prose generally comes late. Verse is more effective for oral delivery and more easily retained in the memory. It is there-fore a rather remarkable fact, and one well worthy of note, that English possessed a considerable body of prose literature in the ninth century, at a time when most other modern languages in Europe had scarcely developed a literature in verse. This unusual accomplishment was due to the inspiration of one man, the Anglo-Saxon king who is justly called Alfred the Great (871–899). Alfred's greatness rests not only on his capacity as a military leader and statesman but on his realization that greatness in a nation is no merely physical thing. When he came to the throne he found that the learning which in the eighth century, in the days of Bede and Alcuin, had placed England in the forefront of Europe, had greatly decayed. In an effort to restore England to something like its former state he undertook to provide for his people certain books in English, books that he deemed most essential to their welfare. With this object in view he undertook in mature life to learn Latin and either translated these books himself or caused others to translate them for him. First as a guide for the clergy he translated the *Pastoral Care* of Pope Gregory, and then, in order that the people might know something of their own past, inspired and may well have arranged for a translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. A

history of the rest of the world also seemed desirable and was not so easily to be had. But in the fifth century when so many calamities were befalling the Roman Empire and those misfortunes were being attributed to the abandonment of the pagan deities in favor of Christianity, a Spanish priest named Orosius had undertaken to refute this idea. His method was to trace the rise of other empires to positions of great power and their subsequent collapse, a collapse in which obviously Christianity had had no part. The result was a book which, when its polemical aim had ceased to have any significance, was still widely read as a compendium of historical knowledge. This Alfred translated with omissions and some additions of his own. A fourth book that he turned into English was *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius, one of the most famous books of the Middle Ages. Alfred also caused a record to be compiled of the important events of English history, past and present, and this, as continued for more than two centuries after his death, is the well-known Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. King Alfred was the founder of English prose, but there were others who carried on the tradition. Among these is Ælfric, the author of two books of homilies and numerous other works, and Wulfstan, whose *Sermon to the English* is an impassioned plea for moral and political reform.

So large and varied a body of literature, in verse and prose, gives ample testimony to the universal competence, at times to the power and beauty, of the Old English language.

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