INTRODUCTION.

Laws of King Eadgar.

We lærath that ælc cristen man his bearn to cristendome *geornlice* wæmige and him pater noster and credon tæce.	We order or instruct *that* each *christian man earnestly* accustom *[weana]* *his* children *to* christianity *[Christendom]* *and teach him the* Pater Noster *and* Creed.
We lærath that preost nc beo huntа nc hafecere nc tæflere ; ac plegge on his bocum swa his hade gebirath.	We direct *that* a *priest* be not a *hunter*, nor *hawker*, nor a gamester : but that he *apply* to *his books*, as it becomes *his* order.

We observe by these extracts that rather more than half the Saxon words have been lost, and now form no part of our language.

This language, with some words introduced by the Danes, continued to be used by the English, till the Norman conquest. After that event, great numbers of Saxon words went into disuse, not suddenly, but gradually, and French and Latin words, were continually added to the language, till it began to assume its present form, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Yet the writings of Gower and Chaucer cannot now be fully understood without a glossary.

But it was not in the loss of native Saxon words and the accession of French and Latin words alone that the change of our language consisted. Most important alterations were made in the sounds of the vowels. It is probable, if not certain, that our first vowel *a* had usually or always the broad sound, as we now pronounce it in *full*, or in some words perhaps the Italian sound, as it is now called, and as we pronounce it in *ask*. The sound of *e* was probably nearly the same as it is in French and Italian, and in the northern languages on the continent of Europe ; which is nearly that of *a* in *favor*. The Saxon sound of *i* was probably the same as it is still on the continent, the sound of *ee* or long *e*. The sound of *u* was that of our present *oo*, French *ou*, the sound it still has in Italian, and in most countries on the European continent. It is probable that the change of the sound of *u* happened in consequence of the prevalence of the French pronunciation after the conquest; for the present sound of *u* may be considered as intermediate, between the full sound of *oo*, or French *ou*, and the French sound of *u*.

These changes, and the various sounds given to the same character, now serve to perplex foreigners, when learning English ; and tend, in no small degree, to retard or limit the extension of our language. This is an unfortunate circumstance, not only in obstructing the progress of science, but of christianity.

The principal changes in the articulations are the *use* of *k* for *c*, as in *look* for *locian ;* the loss of *h* before *l*, as in *loaf* from *hlaf, lot* for *hlot, lean* for *hlinian ;* and the entire loss of the prefix *ge* or *ga*, as in *deal* for *ge-dælan, deem* for *ge-deman ;* and of *to* as a prefix, as in *to-helpan*, to help ; *to-dælan*, to deal. In no instance do we feel more sensibly the change of sounds in the vowels, than in that of *i*, which in French, Spanish and Italian, is *e* long ; for in consequence of this, persons, who are not acquainted with these foreign languages, mispronounce such words as *marino, Messina, Lima*, giving to *i* its English sound, when in fact the words are to be pronounced *mareeno, Messeena, Leema.*

In grammatical structure, the language has suffered considerable alterations. In our mother tongue, nouns were varied to form cases, somewhat as in Latin. This declension of nouns has entirely ceased, except in the possessive or genitive case, in which an apostrophe before *s* has been substituted for the regular Saxon termination *es*. Some of our pronouns retain their declensions, somewhat varied. The plural termination in *en* has been dropped, in a number of words, and the regular plural termination been substituted, as *houses* for *housen*.

In most cases, the Saxon termination of the infinitive mode of verbs, has been dropped, and for *gifan*, we now write, *to give*. The variations of the verb, in the several persons, have been materially changed. Thus for the Saxon—

Ic lufige,	We lufiath,
Thu lufast,	Ge lufiath,
He lufath.	Hi lufiath.

we now write—

I love,	We love,
Thou lovest,	Ye love,
He loveth or loves.	They love.

In the Saxon plural however we see the origin of the vulgar practice, still retained in some parts of England and of this country. *We loves, they loves*, which are contractions of *lufiath*.

In the substantive verb, our common people universally, and most persons of better education, unless they have rejected their traditionary language, retain the Gothic dialect, in the past tense.

I was,	We was,
Thou wast,	Ye was,
He was.	They was.

However people may be ridiculed for this language, it is of genuine origin, as old as the Saxon word *were*. In Gothic, the past tense runs thus—

Ik was,	Weis wesum,
Thu wast,	Yus wesuth,
Is was.	Eis wesun.*

In the present tense of the substantive verb, our common people use *a'nt* as in this phrase : "he *a'nt* present." This is evidently a contraction of the Swedish and Danish, *är, er*, present, indicative, singular, of the substantive verb, *vara* or *verer*, to be, which we retain in *are* and *were*.

In Swedish, han *är*, and in Danish, han *er*, he is. Hence he *er not* or *av not*, contracted into he *a'nt* or *e'nt*.

These facts serve to show how far the Gothic dialect has been infused into the English language.

It would be tedious and to most readers uninteresting, to recite all the changes in the forms of words or the structure of sentences which have taken place, since the Norman conquest. Since the invention of printing, changes in the language have been less rapid, than before ; but no art nor effort can completely arrest alterations in a living language. The distinguished writers in the age of Queen Elizabeth, improved the language, but could not give it stability. Many words then in common use are now obsolete or have suffered a change of signification. In the period between Queen Elizabeth, and the beginning of the eighteenth century, the language was improved in grammar, orthography, and style. The writers in the reign of Queen Ann and of George I, brought the language nearly to perfection ; and if any improvement has since been made, it is in the style or diction, by a better selection of words, and the use of terms in science and philosophy with more precision.

In regard to grammatical construction, the language, for half a century past, has, in my apprehension, been suffering deterioration, at least as far as regards its written form. This change may be attributed chiefly to the influence of the learned Bishop Lowth, whose grammar made its appearance nearly sixty years ago. I refer particularly to his form of the verb, which was adjusted to the practice of writers in the age of Queen Elizabeth, instead of the practice of authors in the age of William and Mary, Queen Ann, and George I. Hence he gives for the form of the verb in the subjunctive mode, after the words which express a condition, *if, though*, &c., *I love, thou love, he love*, observing in a note, that in the subjunctive mode, the present tense is the form of under a condition or supposition, or in the form of a wish, and therefore doubtful and contingent, the verb itself in the present, and the auxiliary both of the present and past imperfect times, often carry with them somewhat of a future sense ; as "if he come to-morrow, I may speak to him"—"If he should come, I should speak to him." This is true ; but for that very reason, this form of the verb belongs to the future tense, or should be arranged as such in Grammars. *If he come*, would be in Latin *si venerit*, in the subjunctive future.

But the learned author has entirely overlooked the important distinction between an event or fact, of uncertain existence in the *present* time, and which is mentioned under the condition of *present* existence, and a *future* contingent event. "If the mail that has arrived *contains* a letter for me, I shall soon receive it," is a phrase that refers to the present time, and expresses an uncertainty in my mind, respecting the fact. "If the mail *contain* a letter for me," refers to a future time, that is, "if the mail of to-morrow *contain* [shall or should contain] a letter for me." The first event, conditional or hypothetical, should be expressed by the indicative mode, and the latter by the subjunctive future. The Saxon form of the verb, *if he slay, if he go*, is evidently a contingent future, and is so used in the laws.

This distinction, one of the most important in the language, has been so totally overlooked, that no provision has been made for it in British Grammars ; nor is the distinction expressed by the form of the verb, as used by a great part of the best writers. On the other hand, they continually use one form of the verb to express both senses. The fact is the same in the common version of the scriptures. *If he go, if he speak*, sometimes express a present conditional tense, and sometimes a contingent future. In general this subjunctive form of the verb in scripture, expresses future time. "If he thus *say*, I have no delight in thee," expresses a future contingent event. 2 Sam. xv. 26. "If iniquity *be* in thine hand, put it far away," expresses a fact, under a condition, in the present time. Job xi. 14.

In many instances, the translators have deviated from the original, in using the subjunctive form of the English verb to express what in Greek, is expressed in the indicative. Thus Matthew iv. 6. Ει υιος ει του Θεου, if thou *be* [art] the son of God.

Ch. v. 29 and 30. Ει δι ο οφθαλμος σου ο δεξιος σκανδαλιζει σε ; if thy right eye *offend*, [offendeth] thee ; ει η δεξια σου χειρ σκανδαλιζει σε, if thy right hand *offend*, [offendeth] thee.

So also in Chapter xviii. 8 and 9.

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* This is probably the Latin *esse*. The Latins dropped the first articulation *v*, which answers to our *w*.

The present tense indicative mode of the Latin verb, with the *v* restored, would be written thus.

Ego vesum,	nos vesumus. [was,]
tu ves,	vos vestis, [was,]
ille vest.	illi vesunt, [was.]