STONG VERBS IN ENGLISH

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STRONG VERBS IN ENGLISH

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
North Texas State College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Sharon M. Pearson, B. A.

Denton, Texas

August, 1955
PREFACE

The English language, like the other Germanic languages, has two broad classes of verbs, weak and strong. The weak verbs form their preterits by means of a dental suffix (learn, learned; walk, walked; spend, spent), and the strong verbs form the preterit tense and past participle by ablaut, a change of the radical vowel (sing, sang, sung). ¹ Jacob Grimm, a German linguist, originated the term "weak" for the first group and "strong" for the second group of verbs, for no apparent reason, and these terms have stuck. Today, because most verbs belong to the weak conjugation, the term "regular," which suggests the simple and normal pattern, is often applied to this group and "irregular" to the strong verbs. The terms "strong" and "weak," however, are more generally accepted because the "regular" and "irregular" classification is misleading; all irregular verbs do not have ablaut. For example, even though the verbs leave, left and buy, bought have a change of the radical vowel, they are classed as weak verbs because of the dental suffix in the past participle. ²


The Germanic languages inherited ablaut or gradation from the hypothetical Indo-European language, the change probably being due to differences in accent or stress.\(^3\) The stress did not invariably fall on the root in all forms of the verb, and when it moved to the prefix or suffix, the root vowel, robbed of its stress, weakened into a different vowel. Ablaut was the characteristic means of distinguishing tense.\(^4\)

The weak preterit developed at some later period, and little is known of its origin or the manner in which it came into use. It seems certain only that the dental preterit originated from a similar Indo-European suffix and has become thus specialized in the Germanic languages.\(^5\)

Of the two classes, the strong class was the smaller in Old English, and it has since received no additions to its number except in a few cases by analogy. In fact, the number of strong verbs has been constantly decreasing by outright losses, some verbs having become obsolete, or by the influence of the weak verbs, some of the strong having assumed


the endings of the weak group through analogy. On the other hand, the weak class has been constantly increasing since new verbs have usually been formed on the model of the weak class, and those borrowed from foreign languages have almost without exception taken the same form after coming into English.\(^6\)

Of the approximately three hundred strong verbs in Old English, only about two hundred exist in Modern English, and more than half of those that remain have become weak.\(^7\) Those which have survived as strong verbs are for the most part common, monosyllabic words, for these resist analogy better than unusual words. In many respects they are the most characteristic verbs of the language, and as Arthur Kennedy has said, "These surviving strong verbs... are a high peak in the English language which has stubbornly resisted the erosion of the ages and from which one can look back over the history of our language."\(^9\)

Because of the historical significance of strong verbs in providing a key to the development of the English language from the period of Old English to that of Modern English and because of their unique role in present-day English grammar,

\(^{6}\text{Ibid.}, \text{p. 344.}\)

\(^{7}\text{Charles C. Fries, American English Grammar (New York, 1940), pp. 60-61.}\)

\(^{8}\text{Roberts, op. cit., p. 143.}\)

\(^{9}\text{Arthur Kennedy, Current English (Boston, 1935), p. 458.}\)
it is felt that more attention should be given to these forms than is customarily done by authors of English grammars. The purpose of this study is to give a brief history of the strong verbs in Old English and to trace their development in Middle English and in Modern English, concentrating on the last period. In Modern English two lines of development are of particular interest and importance: the confusion of children and illiterates in using strong verb forms and the treatment of strong verbs in recent grammars. It is hoped that this study will show the pertinence of these verbs and that from this study recommendations can be made as to the simplest procedure for teaching them.
CHAPTER I

STRONG VERBS IN OLD ENGLISH

Before examining strong verbs as they were in Old English, it is necessary to review briefly the ancestry of these forms and the stages of their development from their earliest existence to the Old English Period. 1 English, along with most of the languages now spoken in Europe, is recognized as descending from one hypothetical speech ancestor—Indo-European, often called Indo-Germanic or Aryan. No actual records of it remain, and what is known had to be reconstructed from the features preserved in its offspring. 2 As far as can be determined, the primitive Indo-European language was simple in character. In its earliest stages roots, or basic forms, were used which had no endings to indicate person or tense, and these roots, consequently, were used as verbs or verbal stems, either present or preterit. The language possessed no other means of expressing the various relations of an action but by reduplication, the repetition of the root. In order to form

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2 Ibid., pp. 15-18.
the preterit of the root *vid*, to see, the root was reduplicated into *vid vid*. Personal pronouns were added to this preterit stem, and the first person singular became *vid vid ma*. Later the three roots were agglutinated into one word; hence the first person singular became *vidvidma*. At this point variations of accent and stress caused changes and modifications, one of which was the development of the strong or ablaut verb.  

The ablaut verb, the subject of this paper, developed as a result of shifting of stress and variations of intonation in the Indo-European verb. In the preterit plural and past participle of Indo-European the radical vowel was without stress; for example, Old English *writen*, *curen*, and *-bogen* are weakenings of the diphthongs and long vowels in *writan*, *ceosan*, and *-bigan*, where the vowels have full stress. At first the ablaut had nothing to do with the original difference in the function of the verb; the ablaut differentiation was even superfluous since reduplication distinguished the preterit from the present. For example, the ọ-form of ablaut which

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appears in the root syllable of the preterit forms, such as Indo-European *de-dork-e and *le-loig-e as distinguished from *derk-, *leig- and *drk-, *lic- in other forms of the verbal system, originally had no connection with the meaning of the preterit. But strong forms with the arbitrary phonetic differences produced by ablaut in the various groups of forms often acquired in time a special meaning; the particular phases of ablaut became closely attached to the particular idea conveyed by the whole word. The use of ablaut is seen more clearly when such formative elements as had served to distinguish the meaning of a particular form from that of other members of the same group were lost, thus leaving only the ablaut to indicate the meaning. From Indo-European present stem *bhendho and preterit stem *bhabhndh, which illustrates reduplication, developed Middle High German first person plural present binden, "we bind," preterit bunden, "we bound," and Gothic bindam, bündum, examples of the dependence on ablaut to distinguish tense. As the primary root tended more emphatically to become the bearer of the meaning or sense of the word, the secondary roots gradually

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wore off and were no longer sufficient indicators of the differences of tense.

Corresponding to the development of ablaut as an indicator of tense was the emergence of a vowel pattern or ablaut series in which a certain vowel regularly indicated a certain tense. The vowels of primitive Indo-European were a, i, and u. The number was increased when a entered into combination, first with itself, and then with the two other vowels. The following table shows the gradation of the vowels:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primitive Radical</th>
<th>I Gradation</th>
<th>II Gradation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>a / a = aa</td>
<td>a / aa = åa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>a / i = ai</td>
<td>a / ai = åi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u</td>
<td>a / u = au</td>
<td>a / au = åu</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This gradation always took place in the preterit stems with the exception of a few verbs. Thus the root vid, "to see,"

---

7 The secondary roots were curtailed in various ways. The reduplication root commonly lost the final consonant, except when the primary root consisted of but one consonant and one vowel. The reduplicated preterit of the root vid became vivâid, of ruk, rurâuk, but of dá, dadâ, of sta, staštâ. These forms indicate vowel gradation which will be discussed later in the body of this paper. Helfenstein, p. 393.

8 Otto Jespersen, Growth and Structure of the English Language (New York, 1923), p. 29.

9 Helfenstein, p. 22.
appears in the preterit as yâld; kru, "to hear," as krâu; ruk, "to shine," as râuk; da, "to give," as dâ; stâ, "to stand," as stâ.

By the time of the Old English Period the strong verbs had increased the number of their classes or series of gradation to six, and the three original vowel series had been modified. Each class had four vowels corresponding to the four principal parts of the verb, which were the infinitive (the radical vowel of which was also that of the present tense), the preterit singular for the first and third persons, the preterit plural, and the past participle. The endings were -an, ----, -on, and -en. Thus, the four principal parts of writan, "to write," were writan, wrat, writon, written. A table showing all six classes of gradation is given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Preterit Singular</th>
<th>Preterit Plural</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class I</td>
<td>ð i</td>
<td>ð a</td>
<td>ð a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class II</td>
<td>ð o (u)</td>
<td>ð ea</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class III</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class IV</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ae</td>
<td>ae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class V</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>ae</td>
<td>ae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class VI</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>ð o</td>
<td>ð o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10Ibid., p. 393.
12Robertson and Cassidy, p. 138.
In discussing Old English strong verbs and the sound changes which affected them, it is necessary to classify the verbs according to these six ablaut patterns and then to analyze representative members of each class.

About fifty verbs belonged to Class I in Old English. The principal parts of representative verbs of this class are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I</th>
<th>ā</th>
<th>ī</th>
<th>ī</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bīcan, await</td>
<td>bād</td>
<td>bidon</td>
<td>bidōn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bītan, bite</td>
<td>bāt</td>
<td>bīton</td>
<td>bīton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rīdan, ride</td>
<td>rād</td>
<td>rīdon</td>
<td>rīdon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rīsan, rise</td>
<td>rās</td>
<td>rīson</td>
<td>rīsan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>snīban, cut</td>
<td>snāb</td>
<td>snīdon</td>
<td>snīdon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wītan, write</td>
<td>wītā</td>
<td>wīton</td>
<td>wīton</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bēon, thrive</td>
<td>bēh</td>
<td>bīgon</td>
<td>bīgon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lēon, lend</td>
<td>lēh</td>
<td>līgon</td>
<td>līgon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Snīban is an example of a small group of verbs in Class I which has an interchange between ā in the present and preterit singular and ĩ in the preterit plural and past participle. This change of ā to ĩ, together with that of b to g and ā to ī, is known as Grammatical Change according to Verner's Law. It was


14 Moore and Knott, p. 49.
due originally in Primitive Germanic to a shift of accent in the last two principal parts. Verner stated that the change of consonants took place when the preceding vowel in the original word was unaccented. The last two principal parts in the Indo-European system were accented on the last syllable. Grammatical change, it should be noted, did not always occur, as risan illustrates.

leon and leon are examples of verbs in Class I which have contracted infinitives—the result of the loss of an original h—and are often called Contract Verbs. The intervocalic h was lost about the beginning of the historical period of Old English and after the period of ï̆umlaut. The two vowels, or diphthong and vowel, thus brought together contracted into a single long vowel or long diphthong. In prehistoric Old English the infinitive leon was *lihan; breaking of the ï before h resulted in *liohan; the loss of the h and the absorption of the unaccented vowel by the accented one gave lión, which

15 Anderson and Williams, op. cit., p. 82.

16 Cf. Moore and Knott, p. 43: "At an early period of Prehistoric Old English the front vowels æ, æ, and æ, when followed by certain consonants or consonant combinations, underwent a sound change called breaking which converted them into diphthongs. Before æ plus a consonant (except æ), ï plus a consonant, or h, ææ became ææ; æ became ææ; and ï became æœ."
in later form was written *leon. A similar change may be traced
in the other infinitives of this group with the exception of
*leon. The original form of *leon was *benhanan before it became
*binan. Benhanan was originally a Class III verb, the past
participle of which, gapungan, "excellent," existed as an
adjective. Because of the resemblance in the infinitive be-
tween the contract verbs of Class I and those of Class II,
Class I verbs frequently may be found with forms of Class II.
For example, *leon may have these principal parts: *leah,
bugon, and begea.

The verbs of Class II are subdivided into two groups:
one group, the larger, has *o in the infinitive, and the
second group has *u in the infinitive. The principal parts of
representative verbs are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>*o (*u)</th>
<th>*a</th>
<th>u</th>
<th>o</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) beoden, command</td>
<td>bead</td>
<td>budon</td>
<td>boden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cleofan, cleft</td>
<td>cleaf</td>
<td>clufon</td>
<td>clofen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fleogan, fly</td>
<td>fleag</td>
<td>flugon</td>
<td>flogen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*ceosan, choose</td>
<td>ceas</td>
<td>curon</td>
<td>coren</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17
Cf. Moore and Knott, p. 124: "In EWS /Early West
Saxon/, *o and *a were frequently confused, *a being spelled
*o, and *ees frequently, *o being spelled *a. In LWS /Late
West Saxon/, *o is practically universal for both sounds."

18
Anderson and Williams, p. 82.
freosan, freeze freas fruron frozen
fleon, flee flesh flugon floren
-teon, draw -teah tugon togen

(2) brucan, enjoy breac brucon brocen

The verbs ceosan and freosan are examples of a few verbs in Class II which show grammatical change, in most cases the change being from a to r. Fleon and -teon are contract verbs coming from the prehistoric Old English infinitives *fleohan and *teohan, and they, too, have undergone grammatical change of h to g.

The verbs of Class III are characterized by having a short root vowel following by two consonants, the first of which is usually a nasal (m or n) or a liquid (l or r). The verbs may be subdivided into four groups: (1) verbs with stems ending in a nasal plus a consonant, (2) verbs with stems ending in l plus a consonant, (3) verbs with stems ending in r or h plus a consonant, (4) and verbs with stems ending in two consonants, of which neither is a liquid or nasal. In Primitive Germanic all of these verbs had originally the same ablaut: a, a, å, and u. The regularity of this ablaut was subsequently broken up, however, by sound changes, some of which took place in Germanic itself and some in Old

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19 Moore and Knott, p. 50.

20 Anderson and Williams, pp. 83-84.
21

English. In the following list of Class III verbs some of these sound changes may be seen:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>a</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>u</th>
<th>u</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>bindan, bind</td>
<td>band (bond)</td>
<td>bundan</td>
<td>buden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>drincan, drink</td>
<td>dranc (drone)</td>
<td>druncon</td>
<td>druncen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>helpan, help</td>
<td>healp</td>
<td>hulpon</td>
<td>holpen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gieldan, yield</td>
<td>geald</td>
<td>guldon</td>
<td>golen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>giellan, yell</td>
<td>geall</td>
<td>gullon</td>
<td>gollen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>weorpan, throw</td>
<td>wearp</td>
<td>wurpon</td>
<td>worpen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>weorben, become</td>
<td>wearp</td>
<td>wurdon</td>
<td>worden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>feotan, fight</td>
<td>feahht</td>
<td>fuhton</td>
<td>tohten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>bregdan, brandish</td>
<td>braegd</td>
<td>brugdon</td>
<td>broden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*bindan* and *drincan* of the first section were Primitive Germanic *bendana* and *dranca*, but Primitive Germanic *e* followed by a nasal plus another consonant or by a double nasal became *i*. In *band* and *dranc* the original *a* became *o* before the nasal *n*, giving Early West Saxon *bond*, *drone*, Late West Saxon *band*, *dranc*. In the second section of the Class III verbs, *gieldan* and *giellan* were Prehistoric Old English *zeldan* and *zellan*, but *e* was diphthongized to *ie* in Prehistoric Old English because it was preceded by the initial palatal *g*.

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21 Moore and Knott, p. 52.

22 Ibid.

23 In Prehistoric Old English the vowels *æ*, *æ*, and *e*, when preceded by the initial palatals *g*, *k*, or *ge*, underwent a sound change which converted them into diphthongs; *æ* became *ea*; *æ* became *ea*; and *e* became *ie*. Moore and Knott, p. 46.
The preterit singulars in this section, *healp, *mealt, *seald, and *seall were Prehistoric Old English *hap, *mael, *æald, and *æall. The æ became ae, which was then broken to ea.

The past participles, holpen, molten, golden, and gollen were Primitive Germanic *hulpanaz, *multanaz, *gudanaz, and *gullanaz. When the following syllable contained the vowel æ, Primitive Germanic u always changed to e, unless the u was followed by a nasal plus a consonant.

The verbs weorpan, weorban, and fechtan of the third section were Prehistoric Old English *werpan, *werban, and *fæhtan, but æ followed by r plus a consonant or by h was broken to eo. The past participles of these verbs, like those of the second section, changed from æ to ae, and the ae broke to ea. The past participles also underwent changes similar to those undergone by the past participles in section two. The verb weorban evinces grammatical change of h to d. In the final section, the preterit singular braéd of the infinitive bregað was Prehistoric Old English *braegd; the æ became ae and then remained, no cause of breaking being present. Bregdan was *brugdanaz in Prehistoric Old English, the u changed to o because of the æ in the succeeding syllable.

---

24 A remained æ only when it was followed by w or a nasal, or when it occurred before a single consonant followed by æ, o, or u. Elsewhere æ became ae. A always became ae before single h, even if the h was followed by æ, o, or u. Moore and Knott, p. 39.

25 Moore and Knott, p. 46.

26 Ibid.
Class IV verbs have a short root vowel followed by one consonant, usually a liquid or a nasal. This is the smallest class of strong verbs, numbering only about a dozen. Principal parts of some of the representative verbs are given below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>e</th>
<th>ae</th>
<th>åe</th>
<th>o</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beran, bear</td>
<td>baer</td>
<td>baeron</td>
<td>boren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cwan, die</td>
<td>cwael</td>
<td>cwælon</td>
<td>cwolen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>helan, conceal</td>
<td>hael</td>
<td>hælon</td>
<td>holen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stelan, steal</td>
<td>stael</td>
<td>stælon</td>
<td>stolen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The verb scieran, "shear," with its principal parts, scear, scearon, and scoren belongs to Class IV, but the e of the infinitive, the ae of the preterit singular, and the åe of the preterit plural have been diphthongized to ie, ea, and åa by the initial palatal sc. Another verb brecan, "break," is sometimes listed with Class IV verbs because of its ablaut pattern although its single consonant would place it in Class V.

In addition to the slightly irregular scieran and brecan, Class IV has two more irregular verbs, niman, "take," and cuman, "come." Their principal parts are given in the following table.

---

27 Anderson and Williams, p. 88.
28 Ibid., p. 89.
29 Ibid.
niman, take nom nomon numen
nam namon

cuman, come com comon cuman
cwom cwomon

The i in niman represents the change from Primitive Germanic e to i before a nasal. The o in nomon and comon is the result of the change of Germanic æ to a (Old English ð) before a nasal. The ð in the preterit singular is by analogy with the plural; nam is more regular. The Germanic form of cuman had the w, which was lost after a consonant and preceding u or o.

Strong verbs of Class V have a short vowel in the root syllable followed by one consonant which is neither a liquid nor a nasal. The ablaut of e, ae, æ,a is the same as that of Class IV except in the past participle. Representative verbs are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>e</th>
<th>ae</th>
<th>æ</th>
<th>e</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>cnedan, knead</td>
<td>cnæd</td>
<td>cnædon</td>
<td>cnæden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>metan, measure</td>
<td>maet</td>
<td>maeton</td>
<td>meten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>etan, eat</td>
<td>æet</td>
<td>æeton</td>
<td>eten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fretan, devour</td>
<td>fraet</td>
<td>fraeton</td>
<td>freten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cweban, speak</td>
<td>cwaeb</td>
<td>cwaedon</td>
<td>cwedon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giefan, give</td>
<td>keaf</td>
<td>keafon</td>
<td>giefen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sietan, get</td>
<td>keat</td>
<td>keaton</td>
<td>sietan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seon, see</td>
<td>seah</td>
<td>sawon, saegon</td>
<td>seven, segen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ibid.
biddan, ask or bid  baed  baeldon  beden
sittan, sit  saet  saeton  seten

The two verbs *sitan* and *fretan* have long instead of short ae in the preterit singular, probably through analogy with the preterit plural. *Cweban* demonstrates grammatical change of h to d. The verbs *giefan* and *gietan* look irregular because their vowels have been diphthongized by the initial palatal g. Contraction resulting from the loss of an original medial h occurs in some verbs of this class, such as *seon*. This verb has breaking of ae to ea before the final h in the preterit singular and grammatical change in the preterit plural and past participle. Sometimes it lost its h and sometimes its w, with the resultant double forms in the last two principal parts. The w forms are found more often. The last two verbs listed in this class are known as -ian presents because originally their infinitives ended in -ian, the i causing mutation of the root.

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31 Anderson and Williams, pp. 90-91.

32 Mutation or umlaut is a change produced in a vowel sound by some other sound which followed it; i-umlaut was a change produced in a vowel or diphthong by an i, I, or j in the following syllable. The changes which took place in Old English as a result of i-umlaut are shown in the following table:

- a (o) before nasals became e
- e became ee
- ae became ie
- o became e
- u became y
- u became ye
- ea became ie
- ea became ie
- io became ie
- io became ie

Moore and Knott, p. 63.
vowel and gemination of the final consonant, the gemination of a being æg.

Class VI had over thirty verbs in Old English. The following verbs are representative of this class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a</th>
<th>ð</th>
<th>ð</th>
<th>a</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>faran, go</td>
<td>for</td>
<td>foron</td>
<td>faren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gnagen, gnaw</td>
<td>snog</td>
<td>snogon</td>
<td>snagen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cecan, shake</td>
<td>scooc</td>
<td>scocon</td>
<td>scacan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flæan, flay</td>
<td>flog</td>
<td>flagon</td>
<td>flagen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>slæan, slay</td>
<td>sloh, slog</td>
<td>slogoon</td>
<td>slagen, slaegen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>habban, raise</td>
<td>hof</td>
<td>hofon</td>
<td>hafan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steppan, step</td>
<td>stop</td>
<td>stopon</td>
<td>stapen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swerian, swear</td>
<td>swor</td>
<td>sworon</td>
<td>sworen</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The verb scacan given above sometimes appears in a diphthongized form which is the result of the initial palatal æc: sceacan, sceoc, sceocon, sceacan. Flean and slean have contracted infinitives resulting from the loss of medial h; they also show grammatical change. The changes taking place in these infinitives may be exemplified by slean. The original *slaehan became *slaehan, Germanic a becoming ae before h; ae in turn

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33 Cf. Moore and Knott, p. 62: "Gemination is the doubling of a single consonant (except f) when preceded by a short vowel and followed by a i."

34 Anderson and Williams, pp. 91-92.

broke to **ea**, *sleahan*, and then was contracted to *slean*, the vowel being lengthened when the *h* was lost. The last three verbs given in the above list, *hebban*, *steapan*, *swerian*, are members of a group of **-ian** presents, similar to that group in Class V verbs. They have a mutated root vowel and gemination in the infinitive. It is to be remembered that the gemination of **f** is **bb** and that the letter **r** never geminates, the **i** in words containing an **r** remaining as an **i**. For example, the original form of *hebban* was *shefian*; the **i** caused the **f** to geminate to **bb** and the **ae** to mutate to **e**, and then it dropped out leaving the form *hebban*.  

When the Old English strong verbs are broken down according to the six classes of ablaut, as they have been in this discussion, there are a few verbs which do not fit into any of these classes. These verbs, often grouped into a seventh class, are called reduplicating verbs because it is supposed that originally they formed their preterits by prefixing to the root syllable a syllable composed of the initial consonant of the verb plus the sound of **e**, **as**, for example, the preterit of **hætan**, *he-hæt*, which became **heht** and then **hêt**. This process of reduplication, discussed earlier in this paper, exists in Gothic, but it has almost

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completely disappeared in other Germanic languages. A few verbs in Old English show evidences of it by preserving two preterits, the reduplicating preterit appearing chiefly in poetry. In the table given below the first preterit is the reduplicating form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>first preterit</th>
<th>redupl. preterit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>heban</em></td>
<td>heht, het</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>lacan</em></td>
<td>leoric, leoc</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>lastan</em></td>
<td>leort, let</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>raedan</em></td>
<td>reord, red</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The infinitive and past participle of these verbs have as their stem vowel a (or o) followed by a nasal, ā, āe, ē, ea, ēa, or ē. The singular and plural of the preterit have the same vowel, either ē or ēo, and on the basis of this preterit vowel the verbs are divided into two main sections. The vowel of the past participle, it should be noted, is that of the infinitive.

(1) Preterit with ē

(a) blandan, blend   bland   blendid  blendon  blenden
(b) *heban*, be called heht, het   ēton   ēten

37 In Latin, however, through a process of contraction, forms arose such as căpi from *ca-caπi, fecī from *fa-faci, and frēgi from *fra-fagi. A similar inclination to combine the reduplicational and the radical syllable came upon the Germanic languages, and a like effect was produced in the contraction of the vowels; hence Old High German hialt and Old Saxon hōld for the Gothic hai-hold. Helfenstein, p. 409.

38 Anderson and Williams, p. 95.
lēcan, leap  leolc, lēc lecon lācen
(c) lēatn, let  leort, let lēton lātēn
sleēpan, sleep  sleēn  sleēpon sleēpen
(d) fēn, seize  fēng  fēgon fāgan
(2) Preterits with ēo
(a) bannan, summon  beonn  beonnon  bannan
  spannan, attach  speonn  speonnon  spannen
(b) cnawan, know  cneow  cneownon  cnawan
  swæpan, sweep  sweop  swepon  swæpan
(c) hweasan, wheeze  hweos  hweoson  hweosen
  wæpan, weep  weop  weapon  wopen
(d) fæellan, fall  fæll  fællon  fællen
  hældan, hold  hæold  hæoldon  hælden
(e) bætan, beat  bœt  bœton  bæten
  hlaēpan, leap  hleōn  hleōpon  hleēpan
(f) flowan, flow  fleōn  fleōpon  flowen
  grawan, grow  greow  greamon  groven

Fon and hon, the two verbs listed in the (d) section of preterits with ē, are contract verbs. Fon, which will exemplify both verbs, developed out of Primitive Germanic *fanhanan; the n which was lost in the radical syllable of the infinitive and present is preserved in the preterit and past participle. These two forms show grammatical change of n to ē, too. In Prehistoric Old English the infinitive became *fohan, which,

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39 Ibid., pp. 95-98.
after loss of intervocalic $h$, contracted into $f$on. $\overline{\textit{hwesan}}$ and $\overline{\textit{wesan}}$, verbs of (c) section of preterits with $\overline{eo}$, are $-\text{ian}$ presents; their original infinitives were $\overline{*\textit{hwasian}}$ and $\overline{*\textit{wosian}}$.

In this examination of strong verbs in Old English it has been pointed out that ablaut originally developed in the Indo-European reduplicating verb as a result of shifting accent and stress and that although it had nothing to do with the original difference in the function of the verb, it gradually came to distinguish tense. It has also been shown that ablaut developed into six definite patterns by the Old English period and that verbs were classified according to their particular ablaut. Sound changes, such as gemination, breaking, mutation, and loss of intervocalic $h$, which affected the strong verbs and often confused the original ablaut, have been discussed.

Of the more than three hundred uncompounded strong verbs existing in Old English, more than half were lost, replaced, or modified in the Middle English period. The reasons for losses and the development of those strong verbs that remained will be discussed in the next chapter.

40 Moore and Knott, pp. 103-106.

41 Anderson and Williams, p. 98.

42 Fries, p. 60.
CHAPTER II

STRONG VERBS IN MIDDLE ENGLISH

The Middle English period was marked by changes in the English language, changes more extensive and fundamental than those that have taken place at any time before or since. Some of the changes were the indirect result of the Norman Conquest and the conditions which followed. Others were a continuation of tendencies that had begun to appear in Old English. These changes would have gone without the Conquest, but they took place more rapidly because the Norman invasion, by relegating English to the speech mainly of the uneducated people, made it easier for grammatical changes to go forward unchecked.

One of the major changes occurring in Middle English was the reduction of the number of strong verbs. Nearly a third of the strong verbs in Old English seem to have become obsolete early in the Middle English period, and of those that survived many changed over in the course of time to the weak conjugation.

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1 The Middle English period extended from 1100 to 1500. At the first date, the language showed such considerable differences from Old English as to warrant a new name. By the last date, all essential elements of Modern English had come into existence. O.F. Emerson, A Middle English Reader (New York, 1948), p. xiii.

At least ninety of the Old English strong verbs left no traces in written records after 1150. Some of them may have been current for a time in the spoken language, but except where an occasional verb survives in modern dialect they are not recorded. A number of other verbs which were lost in Middle English were rare in Old English or were in competition with weak verbs of similar derivation and meaning which superseded them. After the Norman Conquest the loss of native words further depleted the ranks of strong verbs; many of the French words that came into use bore meanings already expressed by a native word. In such cases either one of the two words was eventually lost, or, if both survived, they were differentiated in meaning. In some cases the French word disappeared, but

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3 The following strong and weak verbs derived from the same root existed simultaneously in Old English. The weak verbs, some of which have the same infinitive as the strong, are enclosed in parentheses. Class I: clifian (clifian, clæofian), ripan (ripan), sliplan (sliplan), spiwian (spæowian); Class II: bigan (bygan), dwogan (dwægian), dreowan (dryponian, drywian), dwinian (dyfan), hræowan (hrouwian), hwéowan (hwæowan), recean (recan), reofan (reafian), scutan (scotian), súcan, súgan (socian), smæcean (smocian), sreotan (spryt itlan); Class III: beorcian (bercian), boernan (bernan), deorcian (dierfan), hwæorfan (hwærfan), irnan (earnan), melcan (milcan, meolcan), mælan (mielten, mylten), twængan (twængan), weorcian (worcian); Class IV: helian (helian); Class V: pleon (plihtan), scæpan (scæpian), wæcan (wæcian); Class VII: blodan (blérdan), sácan (sáccan, lásccan, lícian), gónzan (gonzian), hón (hæncian), wæalcian (wælician), wælstan (wælstan), wælstan (wælstan, wylstan). The preceding list is cited by John E. McKendrick, "Some Aspects of the Metamorphosis of Strong Verbs into Weak Verbs in English," unpublished master's thesis, Department of English, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1949, pp. 106-7.
in a great many cases it was the Old English word. For example, the following Old English verbs were replaced by French equivalents: *andettan*, "confess," *beorgan*, "preserve," *dihtan*, "compose," and *herian*, "praise."⁴

One of the most important factors, however, in the reduction of the number of strong verbs in Middle English was the principle of analogy.⁶ By analogy with the weak verbs, many strong verbs developed weak preterits or weak past participles.⁷ At a time such as the Middle English period, when English was the language chiefly of the lower classes and largely removed from the restraining influences of education and a literary standard, it was understandable that many speakers should wrongly apply the pattern of weak verbs to

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⁴ Quotation marks indicate the French verb that replaced the native verb.

⁵ Baugh, p. 221.

⁶ Analogy is that tendency in language through which the exception tends to conform to the rule. When once a particular declension or conjugation is established as the normal or typical one—usually through the greater frequency of its forms—the rival types of inflection tend to yield to its influence, giving up their forms in favor of the "regular" ones. Robertson and Cassidy, p. 115.

⁷ Strong verbs also transferred from one class to another by analogy (*speak*, Class V, assumed the forms of Class IV by analogy with *break*), and a few weak verbs became strong by the same principle (Old English weak verb *meare* became strong by analogy with *tare*). Mary McDonald Long, *The English Strong Verb from Caxton to Chaucer* (Menasha, Wisconsin, 1944), pp. 266-7.
some which should have been strong. For example, the preterit and past participle of Middle English *cleven*, a strong verb, had variant forms *clēvede, clēved*, or with shortening *clēfte, cleft*. In the thirteenth century such verbs as *burn, brew, bow, climb, flee, flow, help, mourn, row, step, walk,* and *weep* were undergoing such changes. By the fourteenth century the influence of analogy was at its height. No less than thirty-two verbs in addition to those already mentioned were showing weak forms. After this century there were fewer changes. A. C. Baugh thinks that the impulse may have been checked by the steady rise of English in the social scale and later by the stabilizing effect of printing. In any case the fifteenth century shows only about a dozen new weak formations. 8

None of the many verbs which thus became weak changed from a strong conjugation suddenly. Strong verbs continued to be used while use of the weak ones grew, and in many cases they continued in use long after the weak inflection had become well established. Thus *oke* as the preterit of *ache* was still written throughout the fifteenth century although the weak form *ached* had been current for a hundred years. In the same manner *stone* existed beside *stepped, rowe* beside *rowed,* and *claw* beside *clawed.* 9

The strong verbs remaining in Middle English contained few changes in their ablaut patterns which were not in

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8 Baugh, p. 200. 9 Ibid.
accordance with the regular phonetic changes of the Middle English period. Normally, there were no irregularities in the first and third classes. In the second, fourth, fifth, and sixth classes, the vowels lengthened where they were short (except in the preterit singular), following the normal action of lengthening of vowels in open, accented syllables. In the second class, the vowel of the past participle was levelled into the preterit plural and was lengthened. In the fourth, fifth, and sixth classes, the vowel of the preterit plural remained, but the vowel of the infinitive in each class was lengthened, as was the vowel of the past participle. The following table shows the Old English ablaut series and the changes which occurred in each series in Middle English.

OE indicates Old English and ME Middle English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class</th>
<th>OE</th>
<th>ME</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>I</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>a</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drifan</td>
<td>draf</td>
<td>drifon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>driven</td>
<td>draf</td>
<td>driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clofan</td>
<td>cleaf</td>
<td>clofon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clefen</td>
<td>clef</td>
<td>cloven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meltan</td>
<td>melt</td>
<td>mulon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bindan</td>
<td>band</td>
<td>bundon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Verbs with original reduplication, often called Class VII, developed ē in the preterit, from Old English ē, ēo, or developed ðw from Old English ðow. The vowels of the present and past participle differed considerably owing to various phonetic changes of the Old English originals. ¹¹

The most marked change affecting all of these classes of strong verbs in the Middle English period was the loss of one of the preterit forms, reducing the four principal parts to three. For example, the principal parts of the Old English


¹¹ Emerson, *A Middle English Reader*, p. cxii.
verb *writan* were *writan, wrat, writon, written*; in Middle English the principal parts were reduced to *written, wrat, written*. This levelling took place for the most part in late Middle English, although sometimes both preterit stems are preserved in Modern English. Of the two preterit stems in Old English the singular preterit usually outlasted the plural. In two large classes of Old English strong verbs, Classes I and III, the vowel of the plural preterit was like that of the past participle (Class III *bindan, band, bundon, bunden*). Consequently, although normally the singular preterit survived as the Modern English preterit, verbs of Old English Class I or III frequently took the vowel of the plural preterit and past participle. Thus, *cling, sting, and spin* should have had a past tense *clang, stang, and span* (like *sing, sang*), but these forms were replaced by *clung, stung, and spun* from the Old English plural preterit and past participle. The preterit of *slide* normally would have been *slode*, but the Old English plural preterit and past participle had *slide,* which caused *slide, slid, slid.*

In addition to reducing their four principal parts to three, the Middle English strong verbs dropped the final *n* in the infinitive, preterit plural, and past participle.

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13 Baugh, p. 203.
The dropping took place at different times in the various dialects that existed in Middle English. In the infinitive the weakening of the -an to -an became universal not long after the Norman Conquest. As to the retention or abandonment of the letter -n itself, usage was exceedingly variable and remained so for several centuries. In the fourteenth century, however, the disposition to drop this letter became very pronounced; in the fifteenth, it became general; and in the sixteenth, the -n was used only for poetic effect. the loss of inflectional -n in the preterit plural in the Northern dialects began shortly before 950 and reached completion before 1340. In the Southern and Midland dialects the loss of -n in this category first occurred about 1050; in the Southern dialects it appears to have been retarded so that in late texts from the South the preterit tense frequently showed great retention of -n. The loss, however, was complete in all the dialects by 1525. There was no significant loss of -n in the strong past

14 Cf. Emerson, A Middle English Reader, p. xiv: "Middle English embraces the great dialect divisions, Southern, Midland, and Northern. Northern extended to the Lowlands of Scotland on the north, to the north half of Lancashire on the west, and probably to parts of Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire on the south. Southern included Kent and the region south and west of the Thames, with Gloucestershire and parts of Hereford and Worcestershire. Midland embraces the region from Northern and Southern from Wales to the North Sea."

15 Lounsbury, pp. 442-3.
participle in the Northern dialect at any time during the Middle English period. In the Southern dialects the loss of -n began about 1100 and was completed by 1400. In the Midland dialect the loss of -n in the strong past participle began about 1300 and by 1500 had reached a state of mixed usage which formed the basis of the n forms and n-less forms in the Modern English strong past participle.

Some of the main reasons for the loss of many strong verbs in Middle English have been discussed, and changes affecting those that remained have been pointed out. It is now time to take the classes of strong verbs, classes formulated from the Old English ablaut patterns, and see how extensive the changes were in each particular class.

The Old English ablaut pattern for Class I (i; ą; ū; ā) was reduced to i; ā, ū; ā by the fifteenth century. The infinitive retained the long i of Old English in Middle English with the exception of a few verbs (riff, strif, wrīt[te]) which arose apparently by analogy with the past participle. The Old English stem vowel ā of the preterit singular was preserved generally in the Northern dialects, but in the Southern dialects the stem vowel ū regularly developed from Old English ā. The Old English stem vowel ā of the preterit plural was preserved in about one third of the known forms. After 1400 the preterit

16 David W. Reed, The History of Inflectional n in English Verbs Before 1500 (Berkeley, California, 1950), pp. 262-4.
singular stem vowels œ, æ tended to intrude into the preterit plural: abade, rade (rood(e), rase (rose, roose), raffe, smote, strafe. In the past participle the stem vowel i (y) frequently lengthened in the open syllable, a syllable terminated by a vowel, of disyllabic words. Contrary to the usual habit of borrowed verbs, three new verbs, rive, thrive, and strive, joined this call in Middle English. Rive and thrive were adopted from Old Norse rífa and bryka, and strive, from Old French estriver. Also the Old English weak verb oxidan, "chide," assumed the strong forms of Class I by analogy with hide, glide, and ride. On the other hand, the Old English verb țižgan, "sty," changed to Class II by analogy with fly. Other verbs of this class frequently developed preterits with a, on the analogy of Classes IV and V. Drive, ride, strike, and write developed such forms; drave was the only one to survive Middle English. On the whole, however, strong verbs of Class I kept together in Middle English and underwent comparatively little modification.

In Class II, Old English ęo (u); ēe; u; o was modified to ę, ŏ; o, e, æ; o in the fifteenth century. The stem vowel ę (ee), from Old English ęo, predominated in the infinitive:

17 Long, pp. 1-3.

be(e)de, che(e)se, cre(e)pe, flee, fre(e)se, se(e)the. A change of stress by which the Old English falling diaphthong æo became the rising diaphthong Æo, with the subsequent loss of the first element, caused the Middle English stem vowel Æ to develop in some infinitives. In the preterit singular, Æ was the prevalent vowel. The Æ stem vowel in forbade may be explained by the confusion with Old English biddan, baed of Class V, and cæave by confusion with cæfan, cæf of Class I. The Old English u vowel of the preterit plural was completely supplanted by Æ, which developed by analogy with the past participle. The Old English stem vowel Æ of the past participle was lengthened in Middle English. Bid from Old English bæadan was confused in Middle English with Old English bidden of Class V. Numerous weak forms occurred chiefly in the verbs cæave (cæft), lose (lost), shoot (shot(te), flee (fled(de) by analogy with the Old English weak verbs cæofian, losian 19 and scotian, and the Old Norse weak verb fljia. Grammatical change disappeared to a large extent in Middle English, although past participles sometimes preserved the original consonant when they were used mainly as adjectives.

The verbs of Class III originally had the Old English ablaut pattern æ; ɐ; ʊ; ʊ, which was broken down into Old

19 Long, pp. 33-35.

20 Emerson, A Middle English Reader, p. cviii.
English Class III A i; a, o; u; u for verbs whose stems ended in a nasal plus a consonant and Class III B a; ea, å; u; o for verbs whose stems ended in a liquid plus a consonant. In Middle English the ablaut of Group A became i; a, o, ou; o, ou in the fifteenth century. The stem vowel i of the infinitive was long before -nd and -mh and short before mm, nn, nk, and nn. The stem vowel o in the infinitives drenke and swenke, which appeared occasionally, was due to analogy with the Old English causative verbs drenkan and swenken. In the preterit singular the stem vowel a was predominant. The intrusion of the past participle ou, however, gave rise to the preterit singular forms bounde, founde, and rounce, which appeared occasionally. The Old English preterit plural stem vowel u was represented in Middle English by o before n. The intrusion of the preterit singular stem vowel a into the preterit plural appeared frequently in the forms began, dranke(n), ranc, sank, sang, sprang, and span. As in the preterit plural, the Old English stem vowel u of the past participle was represented in Middle English by o before n. The diphthong ou used before ad produced the past participles bounde, found, ground, and wound(en). In Group B the Old English ablaut pattern was reduced to a; a, o; o in the fifteenth century. The stem vowel e of the infinitive appeared in such verbs as delvyn, helpen, melten, sterve, and swell. In the preterit singular the stem vowel a predominated,
particularly in the forms *halne*, *starf*, and *swal*. The ə in the preterit was the result of the intrusion of the past participle stem vowel ə into the preterit singular. The Old English stem vowel ə of the preterit plural was not retained. The forms *holpen* and *stornen* show the penetration of the past participle stem vowel into the preterit plural. Two new verbs, *flying* and *ring*, were added to this class at the beginning of the Middle English period. *Flying* came from Old Norse and was never conjugated in English except as a strong verb. *Ring*, originally Old English weak verb *hringan*, assumed the strong inflection after the analogy of *sine*, *spring*, and similar verbs. All of the verbs of this class had a distinct characteristic: in ordinary usage the original ending -en of the past participle was dropped. In poetry and in certain special phrases *bounden*, *drunken*, *sunken*, *foughten*, and *shrunken* occasionally have appeared, but these, when found, have almost invariably lost the participial sense and are simply adjectives. This is the only class of strong verbs which is characterized throughout by this peculiarity.

To represent Class IV, a very small class, Old English had an ablaut pattern ə; æ; æ; ə, which was reduced to ō; a, ō, ə; ō in the fifteenth century. The Old English stem

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21 Long, pp. 33-35.

22 Lounsbury, pp. 326-330.
vowel a, lengthened in the open syllable of a dissyllabic word in the thirteenth century, was seen in the Middle English infinitive. The intrusion of the preterit singular stem vowel a, from Old English æ, lengthened by analogy with the other principal parts, into the plural resulted in the levelled preterit forms bare, brake, shave, tate, tare, and ware, predominant in the Northern dialects; preterit singular forms with a short stem vowel a appeared less frequently. The stem vowel ð of the participle intruded into the preterit singular forms bore, brake, and tore and into the preterit plural forms boren forbore, and broke(n). The stem vowel ð prevailed in the past participle with the exception of occasional forms (bare(n), broken, brake, ybrake). 23 The past participles of verbs in this class generally retained the final -n (borne, broken, shorn, stolen, torn). Some differed from the other verbs of this class. The preterit com(e) was preserved in the South but was early replaced by came(e) in the North. 24 During this period the Old English weak verb werian, "wear," took on the strong preterit and past participle of this class through analogy with bear. 25

23 Long, pp. 112-113.

24 Lounsbury, p. 333.

Class V, also a small class, had the Old English ablaut pattern ǣ; æ; æ; ǣ; ē, which was modified to e, i; a, e, o; e, i, ǭ in Middle English by analogy with Class IV. The stem vowel ǣ of the Old English infinitives biddan, līcan, and sītan was retained in Middle English through the influence of the double consonant of the stem. The infinitive stik(k)e from Old English stecan arose by confusion with the Old English weak verb stician. Lye, "lie," developed normally from the ungeminated forms of Old English liecg(e)an by the vocalization and diphthongization of ie > ie, raised to long ī in the fifteenth century. The Old English stem vowel ē of the infinitive lengthened in the thirteenth century. The Northern dialect had a tendency to double the final consonant of a stem ending in ǣ, which caused fretē, retē, and forgetēe. A preterit singular stem vowel a from Old English ae occurred in some verbs (badde, sat, forkaft, spak, atak, and sat), but it was usually lengthened by analogy with the other principal parts of this class. The stem vowel ē in ēta developed normally from Old English ēat; such forms as gehte, forgete, and spe(e)ke frequently showed the intrusion of the preterit plural vowel into the preterit singular. The stem vowel ǭ was especially noticeable in the preterit plural forms spokyn and quothēn. The stem vowel e, lengthened in the open syllable of a dissyllabic word, prevailed in the past participle; the ī forms in the past participle resulted by analogy with the
infinitive. This class was made smaller during Middle English
by the tendency of the verbs to assume forms of Class IV. Verbs
which made this change were wréken, "avenge," spóken, "speak,"
weven, "weave," dréken, "kill," and gétén, "get." A few verbs
of this class show weak forms occasionally (weave, wreak).

Class VI had the ablaut pattern a; 3; ɔ; a, which became
ä; ɔ, ü; a by the end of the Middle English period. The Old
English stem vowel a lengthened in the open syllable of a
dissyllabic word and produced such infinitives as báken, for-
sáken, tóken and wáken. The Old English stem vowel ɔ(oo)
was predominant in the preterit singular and plural. The
frequent loss of the -n of the plural resulted in a common
levelled form. The raising of ɔ to ü was found in the
preterits forsuke and betuka in the Northern dialects. The
lengthened stem vowel á naturally was predominant in the past
participle. The intrusion of the preterit into the past partic-
iple produced the past participles forsook, shook, took, stood,
and woke. Stood later replaced the old past participle
standen, and woke existed beside the weak form waked. Also
the verb swear of this class developed the preterit swore
along with the regular swore. This variant form was probably

26 Long, pp. 133-5.

27 Emerson, A Middle English Reader, pp. cx-cxi.

the result of the influence of the preterits bare and tare of
the fourth class. A large majority of the verbs of this
class went over entirely or partially to the weak conjuga-
tion (ache, bake, laugh, shave, shape, wash, wax). Some of
these verbs which became weak, however, retained their
strong past participle forms (shapen, shaven). Some verbs
formed preterits on the analogy of reduplicating verbs (draw,
sway, heave, slay).

The reduplicating verbs, often listed as Class VII,
were very irregular in Old English and could be grouped only
by their preterit vowels. All of the verbs either had ę,ę
or ęą,ęą in the preterit singular and plural. In Middle
English, Group VII A contained verbs that had the stem vowel
ą in the Old English preterit. The Old English ablaut pat-
ttern for verbs of this group was ąę,ą; ą; ġ; ġ; ġę,ą,ą,
which was modified in Middle English to ę; ę; ą with the ex-
ception of the contract verbs and the special development of
Old English hāten. The Old English contract verbs för and
hon formed new infinitives fang(e) and hang(e)(n) by analogy
with the other principal parts and through the influence of
Old Norse fanga and the Old English weak verb hangian. In
the Northern dialects, the infinitive hyngre from Old Norse
hengja gave rise to a new series hyng(e), hang(hong), hunge

30 Lounsbury, pp. 343-4. 31 Price, p. 142.
by analogy with the ablaut pattern of Class III. The Old English verb *hæten* also formed a new verb pattern with *hete* and *hæht* from the Old English preterit *hæt, heht*. In the strong past participles, the stem vowel ā appeared occasionally as in *lætyn* and *ræde*, but long ė was the prevalent form. Weak forms, such as *dred(de)*, *(d)rad/de*; *red(de)*, *(rad/te)*; *s(c)hed(de)*, *(shad/da)*; *slæpt*; *(slepyd)*, were also numerous. The -n of the past participle completely disappeared from the reduplicating verbs whose stems ended in -d. Many weak forms appeared in the verbs of this group; for example, in *hæng* and *let* by confusion with the Old English weak verbs *hængian* and *lettan*, in *dread*, *read*, and *shed* by analogy with *lead*. The reduplicating verbs whose Old English stems ended in *aw*, *ow*, or *eaw* are classified as Group VII B because of their similar development in Middle English. The Old English ablaut series ā; ē; ēa; ēo; ēo; ē, ē, ēa by diphthongization of the vocalized a with the preceding vowel formed a new ablaut pattern in Middle English au, oe, ēu; eu; au, ēu, eu. Infinitives whose stems ended in ēu survived in the Northern dialects as *blæw*, *knæw(e)*, and *sæw*, but the ēu stems prevailed, as *blow(e)(n)*, crowe, *flowe(n)*, crowe, *know(e)(n)*, *sow(e)*, and *throw(e)* in all dialects. All forms of *hew* showed the falling together of Old English ēa of the infinitive and past participle with ēo of the preterit with the vocalized w in

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the diphthong eu(eu) in Middle English. Group VII C contained the remaining reduplicating verbs that had the eo preterits in Old English, the Old English ablaut pattern ea, e; eo; eo; ea, Ò having been modified to e, Ò, Ò; Ò; Ò, Ò. The prevalent stem vowel of the infinitives was Ò, derived from Old English ea, and the Ò of the preterit developed from Old English eo. An occasional -n ending distinguished the plural from the singular preterit forms. In general the past participles showed the same development as the infinitives. Many of the reduplicating verbs became weak. The following verbs all exhibited weak forms at the beginning of the Middle English period, though the strong forms of many of them were still in existence, especially the form of the past participle: ban, claw, dread, flow, fold, flow, hew, hight, lean, let, low, mow, root, row, shed, sleep, sow, span, swoon, walk, weep, and wheeze.

In this survey it has been pointed out that nearly a third of the Old English strong verbs disappeared early in the Middle English period. Some that were lost were rare in Old English, some were in competition with weak verbs of

33 Ibid. 34 Ibid., p. 219.

35 Hew, mow, and saw have the strong past participles hewn, mown, and sown as well as hewed, mowed, and sowed. Lounsbury, p. 347.

36 Lounsbury, pp. 344-348.
similar derivation and meaning which superseded them, and others were replaced after the Norman Conquest by French equivalents. Of those that remained in Middle English, many adopted weak forms by analogy with the weak verbs, and those that remained strong underwent such changes as the lengthening of the short vowels, the levelling of the singular preterit and plural preterit into a single form, and the dropping of the final *n* in the infinitive, plural preterit, and past participle. Although the strong verbs were never again to undergo such extensive and fundamental changes as they did in Middle English, they were to proceed further toward regularization in Modern English.
CHAPTER III

STRONG VERBS IN MODERN ENGLISH

The Modern English language, which developed from the East Midland dialect, came into general use by about 1500, and the various other Middle English dialects largely disappeared. The changes in the Modern English period are few compared to the major changes which occurred in Middle English. The inflectional forms have undergone numerous changes but no great reduction or modification, and some analogical changes have taken place but are less numerous and less important than those which took place in the preceding period. As George Krapp has said,

From the end of the Middle English time to the present day the language has been watched with increasing care and vigilance. It has been systematized, regulated, and purified; in short, it has tended to become more and more an established and settled literary and conventional language. The changes, consequently, which have taken place in the Modern English period have been comparatively slow and comparatively few in number. The difference between the English of the year 1900 and the year 1500 is much less than that between the English of the year 1250 and the year 1000.

1 Robertson and Cassidy, p. 49.

2 Samuel Moore, Historical Outlines of English Sounds and Inflections, revised by Albert H. Marckwardt (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1951), p. 141
The Modern English has been a regulating, refining, systematizing period, rather than a revolutionizing, reconstructing period. 3

Although a few strong verbs have disappeared in the Modern English period, the two main tendencies exhibited by these verbs in this period are either to adopt the endings of the weak conjugation or to combine the preterit and past participle into a common form (cling, clung). Thus C. C. Fries in his American English Grammar points out that of the 195 Old English strong verbs which still exist in Modern English, 129 or about 65 per cent have gone over to the weak conjugation. Of the remaining 66 strong verbs, only 42 maintain a difference of form between the preterit and the past participle. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there was a strong tendency to eliminate the distinction of form between the preterit and past participle in all of these verbs, and every one of the 42 verbs has appeared from time to time in acceptable literary writing with a common form for the preterit and past participle. 4

Linguists disagree upon the exact number of Modern English strong verbs which show a change of vowel within the stem. Fries lists sixty-six, 5 but George Curme lists ninety-two, 6

4C. C. Fries, pp. 60-62. 5Ibid., p. 61.
6George Curme, Principles and Practice of English Grammar (New York, 1947), pp. 73-77. The verbs which appear only on his list are arise, awake, beset, behold, bespeak, do, forbear, forbid, forget, go, hide, strive, and wind, "to blow."
O. F. Emerson, eighty-seven, and T. R. Lounsbury, seventy-eight. Eleven verbs not on Fries' list are given by two of the linguists, but only three verbs not listed by Fries are included by the other three men. It must be noted that some of the verbs appearing on the lists of Cure, Emerson, and Lounsbury are not original Old English strong verbs but are verbs which have changed over from the weak conjugation or which have come from a foreign language. Other verbs on their lists have adopted weak forms in general use and maintain strong forms only rarely or archaically and dialectally. Still others are compounds derived from Old English verbs. Fries' list, therefore, is considered the most suitable for a general survey of the Modern English strong verbs, but other English verbs which retain strong forms will be discussed later under their separate class divisions.

7 O. F. Emerson, The History of the English Language, pp. 360-2. The verbs which appear only on his list are burst, let, reeve, rive, stave, and thrive.

8 T. R. Lounsbury, pp. 313-345. The verbs which appear only on his list are cleft, "to adhere," climb, help, crow, and blow, "to bloom."

9 The eleven verbs are chide, dig, fling, heave, ring, seethe, shear, shrive, stick, string, wear.

10 The three verbs are wake, beet, and shoot.
The following alphabetical list contains the sixty-six strong verbs listed by Fries and their principal parts as given in the *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*.  

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*Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield, Massachusetts, 1951).
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This alphabetical list gives a general survey of the strong verbs in Modern English, but a clearer and more accurate picture of their development and the changes which they have undergone can be seen if they are divided into their original Old English classes. Therefore, the sixty-six strong verbs listed by Fries and other Modern English verbs which exhibit strong forms are given below in their respective classes. Variant forms of the principal parts are listed and their usage is discussed.

### Class I

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
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</table>

When the verb *abide* has the meaning "dwell," the more common parts are *abide, abode, abode*, but in other meanings the parts *abided, abided* are found more frequently. ("He *abode* in that region seven years," but "All the other thinkers *abided* by his decision.") As early as the sixteenth century *abidden* was shortened to *abid* or was assimilated to the preterit

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as aboden, the g eventually dropping. Abidden, however, was occasionally used by nineteenth-century writers.  

The verb bite was originally inflected like write, but since the sixteenth century the regular preterit bote has been superseded in standard English by the form bit. Although it has the original vowel of the plural, bit is not a continuation of the Old English preterit plural but is formed either from the past participle, or by analogy with some other verbs in Class I.  

Because it comes from the Old English weak verb eidan, chide could be properly included among the irregular weak verbs which shorten the vowel of the present to form the preterit (chide, chid). About the sixteenth century, however, it created a strong past participle by adding -en to the preterit (chidden). In addition to forming a new past participle, chide also formed the preterit chode by analogy with ride and stride. The weak preterit chided is a development of the present century. A verb whose development has been similar to that of chide is hide, which came from the Old English weak verb hydan.

13 A New English Dictionary, edited by James A. H. Murray, (Oxford, 1888), Vol. I, part 1, p. 18. (Hereafter the initials NED will be used in place of the full title of this dictionary.)


15 Lounsbury, p. 317.
Although it has several different forms, *cleeve*, "to adhere," is now more generally inflected according to the weak conjugation. Throughout its history its forms have been constantly confused with those of the verb *cleeve*, "to split," of Class II. The preterit for *cleeve*, "to adhere," is *clove* in early Modern English, but a more common form is *clave*, which has been kept alive by its frequent occurrence in the English Bible of 1611. 16

The usual forms of *drive* are *drive*, *drove*, *driven*, but *drove* appeared frequently in the past participle of the verb during the last of the seventeenth and the whole of the eighteenth century, and *drive* appeared occasionally as the preterit. 17

The preterit and past participle of *ride* are now generally *rode* and *ridden*, but *rode* appeared frequently in the past participle, and *rid* appeared in both the preterit and past participle during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. 18

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18  Royalty, pp. 59-61.
The verb rise has had similar variant forms; rise was frequent in the preterit until the last quarter of the eighteenth century, and rose was used as the past participle occasionally in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

As early as the sixteenth century, shine developed the weak preterit and past participle shined, which continued in common use until about 1800. Shone, which first appeared as a past participle in the second half of the sixteenth century, has supplanted shined. When the verb is transitive, however, it always assumes the weak conjugation. Thus, "The boots were shined."

In the sixteenth century, shrive assumed the inflections of the weak conjugation. From that time, shrived has been fully as common as shrove and shriven, perhaps more common. A New English Dictionary, however, does not give the weak forms.

The variant forms of slide and smite are regular developments. Another verb which is similar to these two is stride.

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19 Ibid., pp. 61-63.

20 George O. Curme, Principles and Practice, p. 73.


22 Lounsbury, p. 316.

A New English Dictionary notes that recent examples of it show much uncertainty with regard to conjugation. Most people, it is believed, would give strode, stridden in answer to a grammatical question, but in actual speech and writing there is often hesitation as to the correct form. The past participle rarely occurs. In the preterit strode is the usual form, but where the reference is to a single act and not to a manner of progression there seems to be a tendency to say strided ("I strided over the ditch.")

The verb strike should be regularly inflected in Modern English as strake and striken, and it has had these forms, among others, during its history. In the sixteenth century, perhaps under the influence of verbs of Class III, its preterit became struck. This form also made its way into the past participle and there further developed the form stricken, occasionally used. The original Old English verb strican did not have its present sense but meant "to go or to advance." This signification is still found in the phrase "stricken in years," in which the original past participle continues to be used. The past participle stricken is also used in a figurative sense; for example, "The community was stricken with pestilence," but "The dog was struck with a stick." In pure adjective function

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stricken is still used, especially in the position before
the noun ("the terror-stricken city").

The two verbs strive and thrive, borrowed from Old
French and Old Norse, developed strong forms and later,
weak ones. Strove and strived can be found side by side,
as can be the past participles striven and strived. Essen-
tially the same is true of thrive. The strong conjugation
of thrive, however, has always been the more frequent al-
though many examples of the weak forms occur in writers of
every period from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century.

In the verb write, the preterit form writ appeared very
frequently until the last quarter of the eighteenth century,
and wrote and writ were frequent in the past participle to
the early nineteenth century.

Although it is not a strong verb in Modern English, the
verb rive has a strong form. It came into the language from
Old Norse and exhibited the inflections: rive(n), rof, riven,
riven. Before the beginning of the Modern English period, the
verb had gone over to the weak conjugation, leaving behind,
however, the strong past participle riven.

27 Curme, Parts of Speech and Accidence, p. 317.

28 Lounsbury, p. 317.

29 NED, Vol. IX, part 1, p. 1148.

30 Royalty, pp. 63-66.

31 Lounsbury, p. 318.
Class II

choose  chose  chosen

cleave, "to split"  cleft  cleft  cleaved  cleaved
cleaved  cleave  cloven

fly  flew  flown

freeze  froze  frozen

Throughout its history the verb choose has had occasional variant forms; chose and choose appeared in the past participle before 1700 and became very frequent during the eighteenth century. Neither these forms nor the weak preterits, ched, chos, choosed, and chused, are now recognized in standard English.

The verb cleave often takes the preterit and past participle cleft, but these are historically inaccurate since they belong to the verb cleave "to adhere." The fact has been pointed out already that the two verbs become confused and their preterits are interchanged. For instance, cleave, "to adhere," has the preterit clave in Ruth 1:14, and cleave, "to split," has cleft for its preterit in Micah 1:4.

The forms of flecan, "to fly," were very early confused with those of fleohan, "to flee;" this confusion may be one of the reasons why the principal parts of the verb have an exceptional development.

32 Royalty, pp. 66-68.

33 Emerson, The History of the English Language, p. 349.

34 Lounsbury, p. 321.
The verb **freeze** has had no unusual or significant developments in its principal parts; like the verb **choose**, it has the vowel of the past participle in the preterit by analogy.

In addition to these verbs which belong in Class II, two weak verbs which exhibit strong past participles are often associated with this class. **Dufan**, an Old English strong verb of Class II, did not perpetuate itself, but the weak collateral verb **dyfan** survives in the word **dive**. Since the nineteenth century this verb has developed **dive** in the preterit by analogy with **drive** and **weave**. **Dove** is considered a dialectal form, but it is gradually becoming accepted in the United States. Sterling Leonard's study of current grammatical usage reveals that in the sentence "He **dove** off the pier," there was more disagreement among the judges than about most of the expressions. The general trend seems to be toward its acceptance, though it is not yet fully admitted to the category of accepted written usage.

The other verb often associated with this class is **seethe**, which now has the weak inflection **seethe**, **seethed**, **seethed**, but once was **seethe**, **sod**, **sodden**. **Sod** occurs in the English Bible of 1611, in "Jacob **sod** pottage," meaning "Jacob boiled

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36 Lounsbury, p. 323.  
porridge." The past participle exists in the phrase "a sodden mass." The strong forms sod and sodden are interesting because among English strong verbs they alone preserve the change of the consonant th to d, Verner's law. 39

### Class III

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Preterit</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>begin</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>sing</td>
<td>sang</td>
<td>sung</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


sink  sank  sunk  sunk
sling  slung  slung
slink  slunk  slunk
spin   spun   spun
spring sprang sprung
sting  stung  stung
stink  stank  stunk
stick  stuck  stuck
string strung strung
swim   swam   swum
swing  swung  swung
win    won    won
wind   wound  wound
wring wrung wrung

The tendency to combine the preterit and past participle into a single common form is very evident among the verbs of this class. By the Modern English period there were only two forms for the following verbs: *bind, find, grind, fight, cling, fling, sling, slink, spin, sting, win, and wring*. 40

The verb *begun* has exhibited a tendency to combine the preterit and past participle into a common form, *begun*. The preterit *begun* appeared frequently in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and the first half of the nineteenth. 41

40 Loubsbury, pp. 326-328. 41 Royalty, pp. 71-73.
That the form is not acceptable at the present time is seen by the results of the Leonard study. In the sentence "He begun to make excuses," only five per cent of the judges approved this form even for colloquial English; it was condemned as illiterate by the remainder of the group. 42

Of uncertain origin, dig does not seem to have appeared before the fourteenth century. It had then, and for several centuries following, the weak preterit and past participle digged. The strong form, dug, did not become common until the eighteenth century. It cannot be found in the English Bible of 1611, in Shakespeare, or in Milton. In all of these the preterit is digged, which is now archaic. 43

Another verb similar to begin is drink, which has at times adopted the past participle for the preterit. Drunk appeared in the preterit throughout the first quarter of the nineteenth century. 44 Drank, however, is a variant form of the past participle in the eighteenth century--perhaps to avoid the inebriate association of drunk. The full form drunken has been used mostly as an adjective since the seventeenth century. 45 Leonard lists two sentences containing forms of drink: "He drunk too much ice water," and "I have drank all my milk." In the first sentence, linguists and

42 Leonard, pp. 115-6.  
43 Lounsbury, p. 327.  
44 Royalty, p. 73.  
members of the Modern Language Association, probably because of their awareness of the historical justification for this form, placed this usage higher than did the other groups of judges, although even they labeled it illiterate. The last sentence was condemned as illiterate by a large majority.\textsuperscript{46}

The verb \textit{ring}, once weak, became strong by analogy with \textit{sing} and \textit{spring}. \textit{Rung}, a variant form of the preterit, was usual throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and very common during the nineteenth. It is listed as a form of the preterit by \textit{A New English Dictionary} and by the author of a very recent English grammar.\textsuperscript{48}

The preterit \textit{run} was frequently seen in the last quarter of the seventeenth century and the whole of the eighteenth. Today, however, it is only in use among the uneducated.\textsuperscript{50} In the sentence "Somebody \textit{run} past just as I opened the door," Leonard reports that the condemnation of this form was nearly unanimous.\textsuperscript{51}

Four verbs which apparently have consolidated the preterit and past participle are \textit{shrink}, \textit{sink}, \textit{spring}, and \textit{stink},

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{46} Leonard, pp. 116-118.
\item \textsuperscript{47} Royalty, pp. 78-79.
\item \textsuperscript{48} \textit{NED}, Vol. VIII, part 1, p. 692.
\item \textsuperscript{49} L. M. Myers, \textit{American English, A Twentieth Century Grammar} (New York, 1952), p. 71.
\item \textsuperscript{50} Lounsbury, p. 329.
\item \textsuperscript{51} Leonard, p. 116.
\end{itemize}
although in each case the old preterits shrink, sank, sprang,
and stank are equally popular.  

The verb sing cannot be grouped with the verbs in the
above paragraph even though sung was a usual form of the
preterit in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Recent
usage favors sang as the preterit form.  

In the Leonard study the sentence "She sung very well" was marked "dis-
putable." With the exception of the judges who were English
teachers, who ranked this expression as nearly established,
the judges placed this usage rather low on the list. One
judge remarked, "Once correct, it seems to be going out of
fashion in favor of sang."  

The verb stick is derived directly from the weak Old
English verb stician, "to adhere." The form stiked for the
preterit and past participle was common in the literary
language of the fourteenth century, but in the sixteenth
century stuck replaced the regular form and is the only form
in general use now.

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52 The past participle is listed as a regular form for
the preterit in these verbs by A New English Dictionary,

53 NED, Vol. IX, part 1, p. 76.


55 Lounsbury, p. 327.
Apparentlv formed from the noun string (Old English stren), the verb string was originally weak but adopted strong forms by analogy with sling. A slight differentiation can be made between the strong forms and the weak ones: "The bow is stringed (provided with a string) and stringed (bent to the string). Usually, however, stringed is used in both meanings. On the other hand, as a pure adjective, stringed is the usual form: stringed instrument, a gut-stringed racket.

The verb swim has no prominent variant forms or unusual changes.

Swang is seen occasionally in the preterit of swing, but it is considered an illiterate form. In the sentence "They swang their partners in the reel," Leonard reports that the form was rated illiterate by a practically unanimous vote.

The Old English strong verb windan, "to move in a winding course," has been transmitted in this sense to Modern English wind. But there is another verb wind, "to sound by blowing," derived from the noun wind. This latter verb should be inflected strictly according to the weak conjugation, and in certain senses it is. But the forms of the two verbs have

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56 Ibid., p. 328.

57 Curme, Parts of Speech and Accentence, p. 317.

to some extent acted upon each other. Consequently, the first
has occasionally been inflected according to the weak conjuga-
tion, but more often the second has been inflected according to
the strong. Thus, such a usage as "The way winded over the
hill" is seen frequently, while the corresponding usage, "He
wound his horn," is common.

The verb burst, formerly a member of Class III, became
weak about the end of the sixteenth century and continues to
maintain the weak forms burst, burst, burst. In addition
to these regular weak forms, burst has had numerous dialectal
forms: in the infinitive bersten, brust, brast; in the
preterit braest, brast, brast, busted; in the past participle
horsten, brost, brust, brusten, brast, bursten, busted.
Busted is more common in the United States than it is in Eng-
land. Leonard's study shows that in the sentence "The stock
market collapse left me busted," some support for this ex-
pression as colloquial English was found among linguists; the
English teachers on the committee, however, were almost
unanimous in condemnation.

Another Class III verb which has become weak is swell.
It still frequently shows a strong past participle swollen,
but in general that form is used as an adjective.

60 Lounsbury, pp. 329-30.
63 Leonard, p. 128. 64 Lounsbury, p. 331.
Class IV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Preterit</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bear</td>
<td>bore</td>
<td>borne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>broke</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>come</td>
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<td>come</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steal</td>
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<td>stolen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tear</td>
<td>tore</td>
<td>torn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The preterit of *bear* was *bare* until after 1600 when it was replaced by *bore*. The Shakespeare folio of 1623 has *bore* and *bare*, but the English Bible of 1611 has only *bare*. The various forms of the past participle formerly had no distinction of meaning. In the earlier part of the seventeenth century the forms were *borne* (usual), *born*, and *bore* (rare). About 1600 *borne* was generally abandoned, and *born*, analogous to *torn* and *worn*, was retained in all meanings, with *bore* as a frequent variant. But by 1775 a different usage was established: *bore* was abandoned, *borne* was reinstated and used as the ordinary form, and *born* was restricted to a specific sense. Thus, *borne* is now the only past participle, active or passive, for all the meanings of *bear*. *Born* is used in the sense of "to bring forth," "to give birth to," and there only in the passive, when not followed by *by* and the mother. ("She had *borne* several children," "the children *borne* to him..."
by this woman," "born of the Virgin Mary," "born in a stable," "a flower born to blush unseen.")

The Middle English preterit of break was brake, which is retained in the English Bible of 1611 and which is still familiar as an archaic form. But early in the sixteenth century, brake began to be displaced by the modern broke, formed from the past participle broken. Occasionally the past participle form broken is shortened to broke; this form was exceedingly common in prose and speech during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It is still used in colloquial language in the meaning "out of money" ("I'm broke").

The verb come has withstood the tendency to combine its preterit and past participle into one form. The judges in the Leonard study labeled the preterit form come illiterate by a practically unanimous vote.

In the fourteenth century the regular preterit form stal of the verb steal began to be superseded by stole, by analogy with the past participle, and this latter form has been the accepted form since the seventeenth century. The English Bible of 1611 has stale in two places and stole in four places.

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67 Curme, Parts of Speech and Accidence, p. 309.

68 Leonard, p. 117.
The weak forms *stealed*, *stealed* and the mixed forms *stolled* and *stoold* appeared in the sixteenth century and in modern dialects but have never been in general use.

The verb *tare*, similar to the verbs *bear* and *break*, had a in the preterit (tare) until the seventeenth century, when it adopted the o of the past participle, *tore*. From time to time, weak preterits have appeared but have never been in general use.

The Old English weak verb *wear* adopted the strong conjugation in the latter part of the Middle English period by analogy with *bear* and *tare*. It also has changed the a of the preterit to o (*tore*).

A former Class IV verb, *shear*, still maintains strong forms. *Sheared* is more common in the preterit than *shore*, but *shorn* is more common in the past participle than *sheared*.

Class V

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
<th>Preterit</th>
<th>Past Participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bid</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>get</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>give</td>
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<td>given</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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69 Royalty, pp. 38-89.  
71 Lounsbury, p. 334.  
72 Ibid., p. 333.
lie       lay       lain
see       saw       seen
sit        sat        sat
speak      spoke      spoken
tread      trod      trodden
trodden
weave      wove       woven
weaved     weaved

The principal parts of the verb bid, "to request or command," are bid, bade, bidden, or the shortened past participle bid. The weak forms, bid, bid, bid, by analogy with rid, rid, rid, carry the meaning "to make an offer" or "to invite to membership." ("Someone bid five dollars," "He has often bid for public favor," "She was bid into the largest sorority on the campus.")

The preterit eat was the usual form of the Modern English verb eat until the late nineteenth century, according to Paul Royalty's study, but the pronunciation of this form is uncertain. Ate became the accepted preterit in America in the late nineteenth century, but the preterit eat/et is still used in England. Thus the form in the Leonard study, "They eat/et dinner at twelve o'clock," is entirely correct in England and incorrect in the United States.

73 Curme, Parts of Speech and Accidence, p. 308.
74 Royalty, pp. 95-97.
75 Leonard, p. 117.
In the verb *set*, the past participle *got* is more frequent than *gotten* after the seventeenth century, but usage varies in the United States and England. The judges in the Leonard study marked the form *gotten* as "disputable"; the linguists of the group, however, testified that this form is acceptable in the United States, although it is nearly obsolete in England. 77 Jespersen believes that people in Scotland and in America generally make a slight distinction between *got* and *gotten*; "I have *gotten*" means "I have acquired," but "I have got" means "I possess or have." 78 In the compound verb *forget*, the past participle *forgotten* is preferred to *forgot*. 79

There are no recognized variants for the principal parts of *give*.

Confusion with the transitive verb *lay* accounts for the weak past participle *laid* in the strong intransitive verb *lie*. Similar confusion existing between the verbs *sit* and *set* has caused the weak past participle *set* occasionally in the strong verb *sit*.

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79 Lounsbury, pp. 334-5.


The tendency toward a common form for the preterit and past participle of see has never developed into general use, although seen does appear in the preterit form in the language of illiterates. The same statement is true for speak; spoke was fairly common in the past participle from about 1600 to 1775, but now its usage in that form has almost disappeared.

In the fourteenth century either under Norse influence or by assimilation to verbs of Class IV, the verb tread began to substitute the past participle trodden for the original trodden. The latter in its shortened form tread survived to the seventeenth century and is still in dialectal use. Weak inflections are often used for the verb in the sense of keeping oneself upright in water ("The boy treaded water until help came.") Weave has had a similar development to that of tread; weak inflections are used in the sense of moving in and out of a crowd or traffic.

Class VI

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Infinitive</th>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>forsake</td>
<td>forsaken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>heave</td>
<td>heaved</td>
<td>heaved hove</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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83 Royalty, pp. 106-108.
84 Ibid., pp. 111-113.
86 McKendrick, p. 93.
87 Ibid.
The verbs **draw**, **forsake**, **shake**, **slay** and **take** have resisted the tendency to combine the preterit and past participle. It is interesting to note that **forsake** is the single example in the English language of the preservation of a compound in which the simple verb has perished completely.

The verb **heave** has the weak inflection as well as the strong; the weak forms appeared in Old English and have been in use ever since. The preterit **hove** is more common than the past participle **hove**; both are used mainly in the nautical sense of the word.

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88 Three separate forms are given for each of these verbs in *A New English Dictionary* and *Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary*.

89 Lounsbury, p. 342.


In the verb *stand*, *standen* was the regular form of the past participle until the sixteenth century when its place is taken by *stood*, from the preterit form. A few examples of a weak form, *stanced*, occur in the writings of the sixteenth century and in compounds, *understank* and *withstanded*, which survived into the seventeenth century.

The conjugation of the verb *swear* has been influenced from early times by that of *bear*. The regular preterit *swore* has never ceased to be extensively current, but from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries *swore*, formed on the analogy of *bore*, was widespread. In fact, *swore* is the only form found in the English Bible of 1611, and it is still in existence, though confined usually to poetry.

The Modern English verb *wake* comes from both a strong and a weak verb, and it has had both strong and weak forms during the whole period of its history. The weak forms have until recently been generally preferred. In fact, the strong form *woke* almost disappeared for several centuries from the language of literature; it was not even recognized in dictionaries until lately. It has now, however, become fully as common as the weak form *waked*.

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94 Lounsbury, p. 342.

Class VII

<table>
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<th>Infinitive</th>
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<tr>
<td>throw</td>
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</table>

Five of the verbs of this class, blow, fall, grow, known, and thrown, retain three distinct principal parts, and according to A New English Dictionary and Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary they have no variant forms in general use.

The verb hang comes from the Old English strong verb hōn and the weak verb hängian. The past participle of the strong verb, hongge(n), originally hængen, made its way into the preterit, and during the Middle English period hung became the established form for both the preterit and past participle. The preterit and past participle of the weak verb continue in use, however, but only in the special sense of "to put to death."

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96 Lounsbury, p. 346.

97 Margaret M. Bryant, A Functional English Grammar (Boston, 1945), p. 57.
The verb hold had the past participle holden until the sixteenth century when it was displaced by held, from the preterit. Holden is now used rarely and usually as a legal term. 98

Once a Class VII strong verb, beat has become weak, retaining only a strong past participle beaten. 99 Another verb formerly of this class, crow, retains a strong preterit crow in the sense "to utter the loud cry of a cock." 100

The history of strong verbs in Modern English, as this study has illustrated, has been one of simplification and regularization, occasionally checked by the efforts of grammarians. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, for example, there was a strong tendency to eliminate the distinction of form between the preterit and past participle. Samuel Johnson and other eighteenth century grammarians seem to have been the chief factors in retarding this development. In his Grammar, published in 1755, Johnson made the following statement:

Concerning these double participles it is difficult to give any rule; but he shall seldom err who remembers that when a verb has a participle distinct from its preterit, as write, wrote, written, that distinct participle is more elegant, as "The book is written" is


99 Curme, Parts of Speech and Accidence, p. 307.

better than "The book is wrote" though wrote may be used in poetry. 101

The adoption of weak forms, the other main tendency of strong verbs of this period, has been a slow but definite process, a process subject to the disapproval and restraint of grammarians. The conflict between simplification and established tradition has been summed up by Lounsbury.

Against such changes are arrayed all the authority of past usage, and all the prejudice in favor of what actually is existing, and has been found to do, though perhaps clumsily, the work demanded of it. In fact, it may be said that these changes never succeed in making themselves adopted, until the necessity for them is imperious enough to override the protests of professional purists, and the feeling of dislike of innovation which becomes almost a second nature in the cultivated users of speech. 102

Today because of its tendency toward simplification and its surrender to the pull of analogy, the modern English strong verb presents a confusing problem to children, uneducated adults, and foreigners learning English. Some examples illustrating their confusion will be given in the next chapter.


102 Lounsbury, pp. 162-3.
CHAPTER IV

EXAMPLES OF THE CONFUSION OF STRONG AND WEAK VERBS IN THE SPEECH AND WRITING OF CHILDREN AND ILLITERATES

Because Modern English verbs have two major conjugations, the weak and the strong, they often become a perplexing problem in the speech of children and illiterates and even of people who are supposedly literate. Using the two forces of analogy and simplification, these people make errors, such as attaching weak endings to strong verb forms and interchanging preterit and past participial forms of strong verbs. Their errors are amusing to some people and irritating to others, but above all, they are important because it is through their frequent and widespread use that the language acquires new forms and continues to grow. These forms may work their way into colloquial English and in some

1 There are two minor conjugations, the anomalous and the preterit-present verbs. The former includes be, do, go, and will; their paradigms are made up from parts of different verbs. The latter group contains ought, can, dare, shall, may, and must. The present tense of each of them is a former strong preterit which early lost its preterit sense and acquired a present sense. The vacancy in the preterit was filled by a new, weak preterit. Robertson and Cassidy, pp. 139-140.
cases eventually be accepted into standard English. Whether they are accepted in standard English or not, the verb forms in the speech and writing of children and illiterates are good illustrations of the confusion existing between the two conjugations and the influences at work to simplify the two into one general conjugation.

One of the most frequent tendencies of children and illiterates, particularly children, is to treat all verbs as if they were weak. For example, in forming the preterit of strong verb, they often attach a dental suffix to the infinitive. Having heard -ed added to the infinitive of a verb such as walk in order to form the preterit walked, children quite naturally add -ed to a strong verb such as throw to form the preterit throwed. Alexander F. Chamberlain, in a report on the verb forms in the speech of his five year-old daughter, notes the following regularized preterits: beat ("After you beat the rug"), hit, blow ("It blowed on there"), buved, creped ("I guess it creped in"), doed, drinkt, sated, feel, find ("I guess he must have finded away"), full, settled, siv'd, good ("When I good out"), hid ("We hided up in the curtains") ("I hided 'em in the deep grass"), hold, lied ("If you just lied 'em in, it would fit

"Her word for lay was lie here, made, rode, runned ("while I was here, her nose runned quite a bit"), seed, sold ("This is all sold") ("I sold those all out"), shaked, shutted ("I shutted the damper"), slid ("I didn't feel it when I slid down"), speechoed ("I want to go and get speechoed") — The verb "to speech" is her own, spread ("I spread it all out"), stood ("When you stood up"), stinged ("When you get stinged by a bumble bee"), swept ("Mrs. H. swept it all away"), swam, swung, teached ("I teached it to myself"), weared ("We weared two of glasses"), and winded. In a survey of verb forms in the speech of fourth graders, ninety-six children were asked to tell stories from pictures flashed on a screen before them. The following sentences illustrate their tendency to add weak endings to all verbs to form the preterite.

And he looked up there and see'd some little birds.  
And the dog went out and holded the truck back.  
She throwed it in the trash basket.  
I think she striked the last match.  
The man jumped out of a parachute and the German plane caught on fire.

Three verb forms found in the surveys above, caught, see'd, and throwed, and two new ones, drawed and knowed, appear in the short stories of Ring Lardner, who makes frequent use of  

Following this same tendency of regularization, children many times form the past participle of a strong verb by adding a dental suffix to the infinitive. The fourth graders of the Carlton study used such forms as "And so she had striked a match," "The real tall buildings haven't blowed up yet," and "The little boy is almost runned over." \(^5\) Ring Lardner uses threwed as a past participle, and John Weaver, another short story writer, uses heared in the same manner. \(^6\)

Not realizing that strong preterits need no dental suffixes, children create double preterits when they add dental suffixes to forms which are already preterit. Chamberlain reports that his daughter used the forms blewed, helped, tookt, and rewed. \(^7\) This last form is a double preterit created by an incorrect change of the internal vowel; the dental suffix is correct. This incorrect change of the vowel may be by analogy with throw, threw. Another double preterit is noted by Fries: "He was borned May 30, 1910" and "Unless I was where he was borned...." \(^8\)

Double past participles, formed like double preterits, appear frequently in the speech and writing of illiterates and

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\(^5\) Carlton, p. 34.  \(^6\) Menner, p. 235.

\(^7\) Chamberlain, pp. 42-44.

\(^8\) C. C. Fries, p. 69. Fries used files of informal correspondence in the possession of the United States Government. All verb forms noted by Fries that are cited in this chapter are from Vulgar English.
occasionally in that of educated people. The only example of this error in the studies of children’s speech is reported by Carlton: “And this little girl is still bounded up on her horse.” Numerous examples of this error, however, have been found in writing. The following sentence appeared in a newspaper article in a Philadelphia paper, September 10, 1949: "Hull, unshavened and rumpled, sat weeping throughout the hearing." Another double past participle was used by a platform speaker in the sentence "He was found lying by the road soddened with drink." Louise Pound notes the following examples which were taken from newspapers. The first three sentences came from the Nebraska State Journal, and the fourth is from editorial matter in the Lawrence, Massachusetts Telegram of August 13, 1927.

Later the gentleman found that he had been mistaken in his information.

The awe-stricken crowd turned homeward.

The Lusitania was said to be laden with munitions for the Allies.

Disease gets into the system through the stomach just as one is poisoned unto death by taking arsenic into the stomach from eating of germ-laden putrid meats and vegetables. 12

9 Carlton, p. 44.
A variation of the double past participle *laden* is *laden*, which was heard in the sentence "A truck passes *laden* with machinery." The form also appears in a short story by O. H. Prince: "Please to observe, gentlemen, that at the word 'fire!' you must fire; that is, if any of your guns are *laden*...." 13

A few examples of the addition of a second dental suffix to a preterit which already has a dental suffix have been reported. The form *shut*ed appeared in the speech of Chamberlain's daughter: "I *shut*ed the damper," and Carlton reports the form *drown*ed in the sentence "The cat nearly *drown*ed." 15 A similar formation appeared in one of the letters examined by Fries: "We had the officers here from ... and they *agreed*ed with all I rote you before." 16 Pound also reports having heard the form *attack*ed. 17

The error of adding the strong past participle ending *en* (*n*) to infinitives or to strong preterits is frequent in children's speech. Examples of the former construction are "I want to be *fa*eden," "I want my hands *let*ten go of," and

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14 Chamberlain, p. 43. 15 Carlton, p. 43.

16 Fries, p. 69. 17 Pound, p. 163.
"I want the brush wetten." The following sentences contain examples of the addition of *n* or *en* to strong preterits.

I guess it must have *blown* out the window.
You haven't *aten* it all up.
I want to sit up till I get my plum *aten*.
I've got 'em all *gaven* to him.
Have you *sawn* it?
I wonder what else they have that we haven't *sawn*.
It was *tooken* away from its mother.
I didn't want to be *tooken* up.
I want some more stories *tolden* to my dolls.
What do you want to be *tolden*?
Have you *writen* down trazazo?
I want my Christmas tree *litten*.

The use of a present tense form for a preterit and the interchange between preterit and past participial forms are characteristic of the writings of people whom R. J. Menner puts in three groups, B, C, and D. Those people in Group B are trained in a profession (usually with college degrees) but have little general culture and little literary background. Group C is the average product of American high schools, and Group D is composed of people with little education and no background. The following present tense forms appear as preterits in the speech of the people in these various groups:

begin in Groups B, C, and D
*come in Groups B, C, and D
*eat in Group D
*give in Groups B, C, and D
*see in Groups B and D
*sit in Groups C and D

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18 Chamberlain, pp. 42-44.  
19 Ibid.  
20 Menner, pp. 234-236.
Carlton reports the use of present tense verbs as preterits in these sentences: "He got his gun and start shooting," "The truck skid on its brakes," and "And the fireman he took her little girl and hand her to her mother." 21 Fries notes the construction in these sentences: "The firm he work for wants him back," "Mr.... ask me to sign," and "For I just pick this boy up." 22

The two examples of the substitution of strong past participles for strong preterits which Carlton gives are "He went and seen the smoke coming out of the house" and "He done a good deed that day." 23 Fries reports the use of done and written as preterits in these two examples: "for he done nothing wrong" and "I written in and had the Red Cross to write Captain...." 24 Menner finds the preterit begun in Group D, done in Groups B, C, and D, seen in Group D, and run in Groups C and D. These four verb forms are also used by Ring Lardner, and done and run appear in the short stories of John Weaver. 25

The preterit form is used more frequently as a past participle than the past participle is used as a preterit. The interchange is recurrent in the speech and writing of both children and adults. Chamberlain gives the following examples:

21 Carlton, p. 44. 22 Fries, p. 70.

23 Carlton, p. 43. 24 Fries, p. 69.

25 Menner, pp. 234-236.
When you want it blew out, I blow it.
the ice cream man hasn't came since yet.
Have you ate 'em all? 26
he must have did like this.

Carlton gives numerous examples of the interchange:

The horse is hid behind the tree.
And the railroad track is still broke.
The little boy's fell down.
Now the man's got it tore up.
And the cat's just went in the water.
He had came.
Now the bird's flew out.
He's just save this man a badge. 27

Fries reports the following examples:

the ones that have gave it
My folks may have wrote you
I hope I haint done any thing rong or rote anything rong
I have broke my health to have a home to live in
He was the best boy I had and has gave me most help
He liyed his self in the army and was took without letting
me know anything about it
I wish you would see what has became of my son. 28

This substitution of the preterit for the past participle is
also very frequent in Menner's Group D. The people of this
group use the following preterits as past participles: ate,
began, did, drew, fell, gave, knew, ran, saw, took, went, and
wrote. Groups C and D used rode and threw as preterits;
Groups B and D use came as a preterit; and Groups B, C, and
D use broke and drank in this capacity. All of these verb
forms except threw, began, and fell appear in Ring Lardner's
writing. 29

26 Chamberlain, pp. 42-44. 27 Carlton, p. 43.
28 Fries, pp. 69-70. 29 Menner, pp. 234-236.
Walter S. Avis has studied the field records of the Linguistic Atlas of the United States and Canada and reports that in the North Atlantic and North Central states drank is quite as acceptable as drunk as a past participle in the speech of cultured people. The two forms, however, are not interchangeable; there is no evidence that cultured speakers say "he was drank" for "he was drunk." There seems to be every indication that either form is acceptable, however, when used as the verbal in a so-called periphrastic verb construction ("He has drank many a glass of water" or "he has drunk.")

The illiterate people who make these various errors in verb forms usually remain anonymous, the statistics in a linguist's survey, but occasionally one gains the attention of the general public. Such a figure is Dizzy Dean, the famous baseball player and radio sports announcer. His grammar so offended the Kansas City English Teachers' Association that they petitioned, unsuccessfully, the Federal Communications Commission to have him fired. Some of his most famous verb forms are swanged, swung, slug, and


31 Norman Cousins, "We're on Dizzy's Side," Saturday Review of Literature, XXIX (August 3, 1946), 16-17.

thrown. Describing a baseball game to radio fans, he is apt to say "The runner just slid into third safely, but he was apparently thrown out." Once when questioned about the verb slid, he asked, "What's the matter with slid anyway? How would you say it--slid? That aint right. The feller slid. I seen him do it with my own eyes."

In an interview reported by J. Roy Stockton, Dean used the following forms:

heart gonna bust
I give 'em each a scoop
I guess it
I'd give you one hundred bucks
I've won twenty-six games
So the next time he come to bat
He picked hisself up and give me a dirty look

In the short story "Who Flang That Ball?" W. F. Miksch satirizes the grammar of baseball players. The main character, Infield Ingersoll, one-time shortstop for the Wescoville Wombats and now a radio sports announcer, explains his unusual verb forms in this manner: "What I'm trying to do is easily the languish. I make all regular verbs irregular. Once they're all irregular, then it's just the same like they're all regular. That way I don't gotta stop and think." Some examples of his peculiar regularization are given below.

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33 Cousins, p. 17.
34 "Slid vs. Slud," Senior Scholastic, LVI (April 19, 1950), 3-4.
it was the day us Wombats play the Pink Sox
    /play, slew; play, plea/
the sun blinded me
    /wind, wound; blind, blinded/
the ball just nuck the tip of my glove
    /stick, stuck; nick, nuck/
I caught it just as it skam the top of my shoe
    /swim, swim; skim, skam/
I never luck that umpire anyway
    /strike, struck; like, luck/
The umpire whose
    /froze, froze; wheeze, whose/

Although there is very little chance that all the weak verbs will be made strong, as Infield Ingersoll advocates, the tendencies of children and illiterates to simplify and level verbs will have a definite influence on the future of strong verbs. For example, the preterits of come, run, and sing may become come, run, and sung, and the past participle of give, break, and drink may become give, broke, and drank. The acceptance of these forms seems probable in view of the fact that of the ten general types of errors in verb forms pointed out in this study, the most frequent error is the levelling of the preterit and past participle into one form. Meanwhile, the difficulty of teaching the distinction between strong and weak verbs remains. The treatment of this problem in recent grammars will be discussed in the following chapter.

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CHAPTER V

A SURVEY OF THE TREATMENT OF IRREGULAR VERB FORMS IN RECENT GRAMMARS FOR COLLEGE FRESHMEN

Examples of errors in verb forms in the speech and writing of children and illiterates were given in the preceding chapter, but it must not be supposed that these people are the only ones who confuse the principal parts of the strong and weak verbs. That such errors constitute a large percentage of all the grammatical errors made by public school students has been pointed out by Paul Royalty. In a study attempting to establish a sound basis for teaching the correct forms of the preterits and past participles of Modern English verbs, he makes the following statements:

There are, of course, different error percentages at the different grade levels, though improvement would seem to be disappointingly low; yet the same types of errors have the highest percentage of frequency in all the studies. Reviewing six of the main studies of oral English (Kansas City, Bonham, Columbia, Detroit, Hibbing, and Pittsburg), R. L. Lyman says: "From 49 per cent to 62 per cent of the errors were in verb forms...; from 9 per cent to 21 per cent in syntactical redundancy; from 10 per cent to 14 per cent in pronouns; from 8 per cent to 14 per cent in double negatives; from 1 per cent to 6 per cent in confusion of adjectives and adverbs; from 0 per cent to 1 per cent in confusion of preposition and conjunction; and from 0 per cent to 1 per cent in misplaced modifiers."
Verb errors constituted more than 50 per cent of all errors, and confusion of the preterit and past participle constituted an average of 16 per cent. As one might expect, therefore, verbs make up a considerable portion of the material of text books, exercises, and tests based on these findings. An examination of thirty-six such works reveals that verbs constitute almost exactly 50 per cent of their matter and that exercises in distinguishing between the preterits and past participles constitute about half of this or 25 per cent of the whole. 1

In spite of the emphasis placed on teaching the principal parts of verbs in public schools, authors of college grammars feel that it is still necessary to devote space, although not as much as that devoted by the authors of high school texts, to explaining the complexities of Modern English verb forms. An examination of fifty recently published grammars for college freshmen shows, however, that there is apparently no consistent or established policy followed in presenting the principal parts of verbs. In nine of the 3 books examined there is no discussion of the principal

2 All of the books were published after 1940.
3 Curtis Bradford and Hazel Moritz, The Communication of Ideas (Boston, 1951).
Howard Dunbar, Mildred E. Marcet, and Frank H. McCloskey, Writing Good English (Boston, 1951).
Joseph M. Thomas and others, Composition for College Students (New York, 1948).
Edwin C. Woolley and Franklin W. Scott, College Handbook of Composition, fourth edition (Boston, 1944).
parts of verbs or the confusion existing between the two conjugations. In seven books the reasons for the difficulty in using correct verb forms are discussed, but no suggestions for learning them are made. Twenty-eight of the grammars contain alphabetical lists of the principal parts of troublesome verbs—strong and irregular weak verbs mixed together--; in nine the lists contain no variant forms, but the remaining nineteen give accepted colloquial

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Albert L. Walker, Minimum Essentials For Good Writing (Boston, 1952), pp. 244-5.
forms. In only two of the books are the principal parts
of strong verbs given according to their seven Old English

John Wilson Bowyer and others, Better College English
Margaret M. Bryant, A Functional English Grammar
(Boston, 1945), pp. 56-58.
George O. Curme, Principles and Practice of English Grammar, pp. 75-77.

classes: in four, however, an attempt is made to classify irregular verbs either according to their Modern English vowels or their consonants.

The general attitude expressed in the grammars which do not contain discussions of the two conjugations or lists of principal parts seems to be that college students know the principal parts of most verbs and need to check only a few very irregular forms. An American Rhetoric and A Manual for College English have reference glossaries in which the principal parts of such verbs as lie and sit are given. Another book in this group, College Handbook of Composition, contains the complete conjugation of the strong verb take; it does not mention, however, that take is a strong verb or even that it is irregular. The suggestion is made in Writing Good English that if a student is in doubt about a verb form, he should consult a dictionary.


9 Wyatt, p. 163.
10 Summey and Abbott, p. 97.
11 Woolley and Scott, p. 105.
12 Dunbar, Marcett, and McCloskey, p. 167.
Most of the authors of the second group, those who discuss the difficulties in using correct verb forms, give definitions of the two types of conjugations and suggest that students should check any doubtful form in a dictionary. A few also mention that strong verbs were more numerous in Old English than they are in Modern English and that this reduction has been caused by levelling and analogy. Henry H. Adams in *Techniques of Revision* points out that by analogy many strong verbs became weak in Middle English and that many are gradually becoming weak today.\(^{13}\) The *Modern Rhetoric and Usage for College Composition and Communication* makes the statement that "a college graduate is expected to know the principal parts of troublesome verbs (strong) which form their preterit and past participle irregularly, usually by changing the internal vowel, and to follow the conventional forms given by the dictionary." The book also mentions two pitfalls to avoid: the use of the preterit and the past participle interchangeably and the confusion of weak and strong verbs.\(^{14}\) The seriousness of errors in verb forms is stressed by Robert H. Moore in *Effective Writing*:

The most glaring error in the use of verbs (one which is mercifully rare among college students, or at least in their writing) comes with the use of the past tense forms with auxiliaries for other than simple past tenses. The problem occurs only with

\(^{13}\) Adams, pp. 143-5.

\(^{14}\) Kallsen, p. 488.
irregular "strong" verbs, since regular verbs have identical past tense forms and combining forms. The misuse of the past tense form with auxiliaries is the most obvious indication of uneducated speech and writing. 15

In defining strong verbs, Leo Kirschbaum writes that in addition to having internal vowel change, these verbs frequently have past participles ending in -en, -n, or -ne. He gives the principal parts of sing, rise, grow, fall, bear, bite, 16 and come as illustrations. He also defines the weak verb and gives examples of regular weak and irregular weak verbs. 17

Verbs are classified either as "regular" or "irregular" in The Macmillan Handbook of English. In order to familiarize students with the use of a dictionary to check the principal parts of verbs, excerpts defining a regular and an irregular verb are taken from the Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary and the American College Dictionary. The point is made that if no principal parts are given for irregular verbs only and that principal parts are given for irregular verbs only and that if no principal parts are given, the verb has a regular -ed 18 ending in the preterit and past participle. Another author who also uses the terms "regular" and "irregular" is Raymond W. Pence. In A Grammar of Present-Day English, he says, "Since it is difficult to classify verbs in Modern English as 'strong' or 'weak' without a knowledge of their earlier

17 Ibid., p. 371. 18 Kierzek, p. 318.
forms, it seems best to discard these terms and to classify all the verbs as 'regular' or 'irregular.' The longest discussion of the two conjugations is given by Hugh Sykes Davies. His remarks seem to suggest that he has an intolerant viewpoint and a disregard for historical facts.

Perhaps the most important variation of tense is that between the present and the past. In Anglo-Saxon /Old English/ this was shown in two different ways. Some verbs (called by the grammarians 'strong') formed a past tense by altering their root. We still have all too many relics of this procedure, such as give-gave, get-got. The exact form of the internal change in 'strong' verbs, however, was something that had to be memorized in each particular case; for they followed no clearly defined rules and could only be classified into categories so complex that the human memory could never hope to retain them for long. The 'lowly' men who had the making of Modern English grasped this difference instinctively, but clearly, and they turned a large number of 'strong' verbs into 'weak' ones, to the gain of the language. They did not, however, push the process to its logical conclusion. Many strong verbs were allowed to survive, and they survive still. Most of them are of common occurrence in ordinary speech, and because the Englishman gets plenty of practice in using them, he is rarely conscious of their complication. Children, however, often take some time to master them, and they are a great trial to foreigners who learn English.

In the nine grammars which give alphabetical lists of troublesome or irregular verbs, including both strong and irregular weak ones, no indication is given that any of the principal parts have acceptable variants. A typical example of the type of discussion which precedes the lists is that given in Proper Words in Proper Places:

19 Pence, p. 238. 20 Davies, p. 81.
Between two and three hundred verbs are irregular; that is, they form the past and the past participle by means other than adding -ed or -ed. The few irregular verbs, however, are important out of proportion to their number, for they include the most commonly used words in the language. One cannot carry on an everyday conversation without using several of them. Study the verbs that you have trouble with; for example, if *sink* bothers you, repeat "I *sink*, I *sank* yesterday, and I *have sunk*." 21

A unique discussion, one of questionable value, is given in *The Way to Write*. The authors call the irregular verbs "trouble makers" and have the following comments to make:

The present and past tense are entirely different in form and sound. They present the same difficulties in the present perfect as they do the past. There is one thing to do about these irregular verbs, and only one thing. Memorize the tenses. That's all there is to it—nothing more. There's no rule to help you here as with the regular verbs. That's what makes these irregular verbs a trifle difficult. They're not "regular." Each one is a "special case." So the best thing to do is to take them one at a time or maybe two or three at a time, and get them down pat. Once you've learned them, they'll stick with you—you'll have no verb trouble. 22

This examination of college grammars revealed that the most popular method of presenting the principal parts of irregular verbs is to list the principal parts for troublesome verbs—both strong and irregular weak—and to recognize their variant forms. The strong verbs included on such lists are, of course, only those which are common in everyday speech and which are frequently misused. It is interesting to note

21  Flesch and Lass, p. 234.

22  Bailey, pp. 159-160.
that the nineteen grammars in this group show varying degrees of liberalism toward the use of certain strong past participles as variant forms of the preterit. For example, nine books give their approval to sung as the preterit of sing, and three more books list sung as an acceptable preterit, although less desirable than sang. Eight of the grammars list shrunk as a variant preterit of shrink, and two others recognize it although they prefer shrunk in formal writing. Six grammars give rung as a preterit for ring, and two others label it colloquial. The preterit sprung is given the same number of times as rung, and the same two authors

23 Birk and Birk; Bowyer, Greer, Jones and Jones; Henkin; Hodges; Leggett, Mead, and Charvat; Marckwardt; Perrin; and Woods.

24 Hook and Ekstrom; Taft, McDermott, and Jensen; and Warnock.

25 Bryant, A Functional English Grammar; Curme, Principles and Practice of English Grammar; Greer, Jones, and Jones; Henkin; Hodges; Perrin; Schutt; and Warnock.

26 Hook and Ekstrom; Taft, McDermott, and Jensen.

27 Bowyer; Bryant, A Fundamental English Grammar; Davidson; Greer, Jones, and Jones; Leggett, Mead, and Charvat; and Perrin.

28 Hank and Ekstrom; Taft, McDermott, Jensen.

29 Bryant, A Functional English Grammar; Greer, Jones, and Jones; Henkin; Hodges; Perrin; and Warnock.

30 Hood and Ekstrom; Taft, McDermott, and Jensen.
who label rung colloquial give that title to sprung. The variant preterit sunk of the verb sink is listed in five grammars, and two others give it as acceptable but not as desirable as sank. Other variants given occasionally are stunk for the preterit of stink, spun for the preterit of spin, and swum for the preterit of swim. In addition to giving the lists of principal parts of irregular verbs, some of the grammars in this group attempt to explain briefly the presence of the variant forms and their use. For example, in Using Good English Robert Warnock points out that

Some of these verbs have alternate forms which are commonly used. You may say with equal correctness "The dress shrank" or "The dress shrunk," "The boat sprang (or sprang) a leak." But you must not say "The dress had shrank" or "The boat had sprang a leak" since there is no commonly used alternate form, sprang or shrank to express this degree of past time.

31 Bryant, A Functional English Grammar; Curme, Principles and Practice; Jones; Leggett, Mead, and Charvat; Manchester.

32 Hook and Ekstrom; Taft, McDermott, and Jensen.

33 Bryant, A Functional English Grammar; Curme, Principles and Practice; and Perrin.

34 Curme, Principles and Practice.

35 Perrin, op. cit., p. 731.

36 Warnock, pp. 249-50.
Albert H. Marckwardt also notes that "though verbs which do make internal changes are few in number, it is important to recognize that in some cases, there are alternate forms for one or more of the principal parts."\(^{37}\) The tendency toward regularization which accounts for most of the variants is briefly discussed by Porter G. Perrin:

A number of verbs, most of them descended from Old English strong verbs (compare the strong verbs in modern German), make these past parts by a change in vowel (strike, struck, struck). Some of these are becoming regular (shined, weaved), and many are made regular in colloquial and vulgar usage (blowed, groved).\(^{38}\)

Only two of the fifty grammars examined group the strong verbs according to their Old English classes, and one of these, Modern English and Its Heritage, just gives one representative verb for each class. The American College English, however, classifies sixty-four verbs according to their Old English classes and gives this further explanation:

In the following table the strong verbs most commonly used are grouped according to the seven classes of Old English verbs from which they derive. While these classes are not so distinct in Modern English as in Old English (some have adopted forms from other classes) each group as a whole does display common traits.\(^{40}\)


\(^{38}\) Perrin, p. 701.

\(^{39}\) Bryant, Modern English and Its Heritage, p. 39 and Warfel, Mathews, and Bushman.

\(^{40}\) Warfel, Mathews, and Bushman, p. 103.
The most original treatment or presentation of the principal parts of these irregular verbs is that given in the four grammars which have adopted new systems of classification. Perhaps the simplest of these classifications is that given in Learning Our Language. According to the authors of this book, there are some seventy-five strong verbs which may be divided into two classes; one class containing forty-seven verbs has three distinct principal parts, and the other class containing twenty-eight verbs has only two principal parts.

The principal parts of the verbs in both of these classes are listed; no variant forms are given, and even verbs which have recognized variant preterits, such as sprung, rung, sung, and sunk, are listed in the first class, the verbs which have three principal parts. The classification used in New Practice Handbook in English is based on the similarity of the vowel pattern and upon the past participial endings. Troublesome verbs are grouped in seven classes:

I.

begin  began  begun
run   ran    run
ring  rang  rung
sing  sang  sung
swim  swam  swum
drink drank  drunk
shrink shrunk  shrunk
sink  sank  sunk

II.

break  broke  broken
speak  spoke  spoken

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Dunn, Ranous, and Allen, pp. 248-9.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>choose</th>
<th>chose</th>
<th>choseN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>freeze</td>
<td>froze</td>
<td>frozeN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>steal</td>
<td>stole</td>
<td>stoleN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>swear</td>
<td>swore</td>
<td>sworn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tear</td>
<td>tore</td>
<td>torn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>blow</th>
<th>blew</th>
<th>blown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>grow</td>
<td>grew</td>
<td>grown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>know</td>
<td>knew</td>
<td>known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>throw</td>
<td>threw</td>
<td>thrown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fly</td>
<td>flew</td>
<td>flown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>draw</td>
<td>drew</td>
<td>drawn</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>rise</th>
<th>rose</th>
<th>risen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>drive</td>
<td>drove</td>
<td>driven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ride</td>
<td>rode</td>
<td>ridden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write</td>
<td>wrote</td>
<td>written</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

V.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>come</th>
<th>came</th>
<th>come</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>do</td>
<td>did</td>
<td>done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>get</td>
<td>ate</td>
<td>eaten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>give</td>
<td>gave</td>
<td>given</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>go</td>
<td>want</td>
<td>gone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>see</td>
<td>saw</td>
<td>seen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shake</td>
<td>shook</td>
<td>shaken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>take</td>
<td>took</td>
<td>taken</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VI.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>lie</th>
<th>lay</th>
<th>has lain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>sit</td>
<td>sat</td>
<td>has sat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VII. 42

Irregular weak verbs, such as bring, brought, brought.

It should be noted that the first five of these classes contain only verbs which have three principal parts. Alternate forms, however, are recognized for the preterits rang, sank, 43

shrank, and sink.

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42 Limited space prevents the listing of all the irregular weak verbs.

43 Jones, Wallace, and Jones, pp. 114-5.
Louis M. Myers, believing that "a single alphabetical list looks completely chaotic," has devised his own system of classification. He places more emphasis on the irregular weak verbs than is done in *New Practice Handbook in English*.

I. Incomplete Verbs—The following verbs do not have -s forms, participles, or infinitives; they are used only alone or as the first part of verb phrases (can go).

- can
- may
- must
- ought
- shall
- will

II. Three-Form Verbs—These verbs have no separate form for the past tense.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beat</th>
<th>Hit</th>
<th>Shed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bet</td>
<td>Hurt</td>
<td>Slit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bid</td>
<td>Let</td>
<td>Split</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burst</td>
<td>Put</td>
<td>Spread</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cast</td>
<td>Quit</td>
<td>Thrust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>Rid</td>
<td>Wed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cut</td>
<td>Set</td>
<td>Wet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

III. Verbs that add ed irregularly to form the past tenses

- Flee
- Have
- Hear
- Lay

- Make
- Pay
- Say
- Sell

- Shoe
- Tell

IV. Verbs that change ed to et to form their past tenses

- Bend
- Build

- Lend
- Rend

- Send
- Spend

V. Verbs that add et and make some other changes to form their past tenses

- Bring
- Buy
- Catch
- Creep

- Feel
- Keep
- Kneel
- Leave

- Seek
- Sleep
- Sweep
- Teach
VI. Vowel-Change Verbs with no separate past participle

bind  hand  sit
bleed hold  slide
breed lead  spit
dig  light  stand
feed  meet  stick
fight  read  strike
find  shine  win
grind  shoot  wind

VII. Verbs having a in the past participle (These verbs have, unfortunately, preserved a separate past participle; and confusion between that form and the past tense causes much difficulty.)

bear  freeze  slay
bite  get  smite
blow  give  speak
break  go  steal
choose  grow  stride
do  hide  swear
draw  know  take
drive  lie  tear
eat  ride  throw
fall  rise  tread
fly  see  wear
forsake  shake  weave

Concerning Class VII, Myers says: "It is interesting to notice that the five of these verbs that end in w show a strong tendency to become regular in popular usage—I threwed, I have throwned, etc. Most of the others are quite regularly reversed in some dialects—I done, I have did, I taken, I have took. Some of these unorthodox forms were once in good literary usage. There is nothing shameful about any of them, and it is ridiculous to say that they don't make sense!" Nevertheless, the feeling that they are marks of illiteracy is probably stronger than any other prejudice about our grammar, so that it is worth a good deal of effort to master the standard usage." Myers, p. 143.

cling  slink  string
fling  spin  swing
slang  sting  wring
begin  drink  swim
ring  sing  spring
shrink  sink  stink

IX. Come and Run--These two verbs are exceptional in that their infinitives rather than their preterits are used as past participles. 46

Paul Roberts' classification shows some similarity to Myers'. Roberts classifies the preterits of all verbs into six classes: (1) verbs which add a dental suffix (−d, −t, or −ed) with no other change, (2) verbs which add d or t and also change the vowel sound: creep, crept, (3) verbs which form the preterit by changing d to t: bend, bent, (4) verbs which have a past tense identical in form with the present tense: put, put, (5) verbs which omit a final consonant before adding d or t: teach, taught; bring, brought, (6) verbs which form the past tense by a change in vowel sound, without

Myers makes the following comments about the verbs of Class VIII: "This group of verbs is even more confusing than the last [Class VII], since the typical a of the past participle has disappeared, and there is no perceptible reason why some should have two past forms and some only one. It should be noticed that none of these verbs has the a in the past participle. Three (begin, drink, and swim) must have the a in the past tense. Six others may have either the a or the u in the past tense, with the a on the whole in greater favor." Myers, p. 143.

Myers, pp. 140-44.
any addition of d or t: speak, spoke. The past participles of Class VI verbs are broken down into six groups: (1) verbs with a different root vowel in each of the principal parts, the past participle adding -n: arise, arose, arisen, (2) verbs with a like vowel in the preterit and past participle, the past participle adding -n: tear, tore, torn, (3) verbs with a like vowel in the infinitive and past participle, the past participle adding -n: eat, ate, eaten; give, gave, given, (4) verbs with a different root vowel (i-a-u) in each of the principal parts, no -n added to the past participle: drink, drank, drunk, (5) verbs with identical preterits and past participles: grind, ground; cling, clung, (6) verbs with identical infinitive and past participle: come, came, come.

Thus, to summarize briefly, the fifty college grammars examined for this study vary widely in their treatment of irregular verb forms. On one extreme is the small group (18 per cent) which feels that college students know the principal parts of verbs and that a discussion or list of irregular ones is unnecessary. On the other extreme is the even smaller group (8 per cent) which tries to formulate a systematic classification for irregular verbs. More than half of the grammars examined (56 per cent) give alphabetical lists

47 Roberts, pp. 141-143.

48 Ibid., pp. 191-194.
of the principal parts of irregular or troublesome verbs, and the majority of these lists (63 per cent) give and occasionally discuss variant forms. The inclusion of such variant forms as rung, sung, swung, sunk for the preterits of ring, sing, swing, and sink shows a definite trend toward liberalism. These grammars recognize and frequently show approval of the fact that usage is a constantly changing process, and they understand that to be of real value to a college student a grammar must show at least an awareness of such current language tendencies as the regularization and simplification of verb forms. The fact that only two grammars group Modern English strong verbs according to their Old English classes seems to indicate a pronounced disregard for the historical background of these verbs. This disregard is illustrated further by the development of new classifications for irregular verbs in which strong and weak verbs are often put under the same heading. The value of these new classifications is, at present, hard to estimate since they are not in widespread use.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purposes of this study have been to give the history and development of strong verbs in Old English, Middle English, and Modern English and to show the present status of these verbs. In order to illustrate the persistent tendency of the uneducated to level weak and strong verbs into one conjugation, examples have been taken from the speech and writing of children and illiterates. Also, a survey of recent grammars for college freshmen has been made in order to determine the current treatment of strong verbs and the general procedure followed in teaching these verbs.

To summarize the information pointed out in this study, the ablaut or gradation of the internal vowel which characterizes strong verbs was inherited by all the Germanic languages from the hypothetical Indo-European language. By the time of the Old English period the ablaut had developed into six definite patterns by which the approximately three hundred strong verbs could be classified. Toward the end of the period, however, certain sound changes, such as gemination, breaking, and mutation, began to disturb the strict uniformity of these patterns.

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The Middle English period was marked by more extensive and fundamental changes than those that have taken place at any time before or since. Nearly a third of the Old English strong verbs disappeared early in this period. Some which disappeared had been rare in Old English, some were in competition with weak verbs of similar derivation and meaning, and others were replaced after the Norman Conquest by French equivalents. Those that remained underwent striking changes, the most important one being the levelling of the singular preterit and plural preterit into a single form.

In Modern English the strong verbs, numbering about seventy, have continued to change, although the changes have been few compared to the major changes which occurred in Middle English. The two main tendencies exhibited by Modern English verbs are either to adopt the endings of the weak conjugation or to combine the preterit and past participle into a common form.

Children and illiterates, following these two main tendencies of analogy and simplification, make errors such as attaching weak endings to strong preterits and past participles, interchanging the preterit and past participles of strong verbs, and occasionally changing the internal vowel of weak verbs. Errors in verb form, although frequent in speech and writing of these two classes, are not confined exclusively to them. The authors of high school and college grammars are aware of the frequency and seriousness of such
errors and are conscious of the difficulty that students have in learning them.

A survey of fifty recent grammars for college freshmen has shown, however, that there is no generally accepted method of teaching these irregular forms. Some of the grammars ignore the problem, and others work out their own classifications. More than half of the grammars examined give alphabetical lists of the principal parts of strong verbs and of irregular weak verbs, and a majority of the lists also give widely-used variant forms. Only two of the grammars list the strong verbs according to their original Old English classes; the others seem to feel that the historical background of these verbs, though interesting to linguists, is of no significance to the average college student.

Thus, from this study, one can conclude that the history of strong verbs has been one of continuous losses and changes, the losses and changes being greatest in the Middle English period. Since the language has been and still is governed to a large degree by the forces of analogy and simplification, one can predict that at some distant time in the future all the strong verbs may disappear or become completely regularized. Their immediate future, however, is not seriously threatened, although it is probable that some strong verbs may be simplified through the levelling of the vowel of the principal parts. For example, the preterits of sing, ring, shrink, and sink may become sung, rung, shrunk,
and sunk exclusively, these preterits already having won partial recognition. In spite of such possible internal leveling, however, the verbs would presumably remain strong. Verbs having both strong and weak forms may become entirely weak. For example, the preterit and past participle of wake may be limited to waked, and the past tense forms of cleave may be restricted to cleaved. With its strong forms already restricted to nautical senses, the verb heave may adjust completely to the weak conjugation. Regardless of whether their preterit and past participle forms are combined or whether they become completely weak, the present strong verbs are not likely to disappear from the language. For with the exception of a few verbs, such as abide, cleave, and slay, whose usage seems to be decreasing, the existing strong verbs are basic and vital words in everyday speech and writing and cannot be easily replaced by weak verb synonyms.

Another conclusion which can be drawn from this study concerns the present and future methods of teaching strong verbs. A survey of fifty recent grammars has shown that although they follow no uniform procedure in dealing with strong verbs, the majority of the grammars give an alphabetical list of the principal parts of strong and irregular weak verbs and urge students to memorize this list. A few grammars, however, attempt to simplify the problem of learning these verbs by classifying them according to their internal vowels, their consonantal endings, their past
participles, or the number of principal parts they have. These classifications, depending on such mnemonic devices, are so intricate and complicated that it is simpler and quicker to memorize an alphabetical list. Thus, students must continue to memorize the principal parts of verbs which do not form their past tenses regularly until a classification less complicated than those now in existence is worked out.

One of the most obvious and important recommendations that can be made from this study is that those who teach grammar should have a thorough knowledge of the history and development of the English language. A teacher with this training can explain to a class why some verbs form their preterit by adding ed, t, or d to the infinitive while others change the internal vowel, why some verbs have two equally correct preterits, and why there are two principal parts for some verbs and three for others. Moreover, a teacher who is familiar with the changes that have already taken place in English will have a tolerant view toward students' use of new and variant forms, realizing that the forms indicate that English is still a growing and changing language.

A second recommendation is that students should be taught that language usage cannot always be separated into two classes of right or wrong and that in order to formulate their own standard of usage they must observe the speech and
writing of all levels. They should pay particular attention to the language used by literate or cultivated people in polite conversation, familiar letters, and in everyday discussions. If a majority of literate, cultivated people use variant forms, such as rung and sung for the preterits of ring and sing, such forms will become acceptable, and although teachers are not expected to emphasize these variant forms, they must recognize them.
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