

study Old English texts for philological purposes. It was not very long ago the general opinion—and unfortunately this view is still too prevalent—that the provincial dialects of English are corrupted forms of the classical language. A wiser philology has taught us that what we call classical “English” is but one of a number of local dialects, many of which survive only as spoken *patois*, while not a few can boast each of an extensive literature. One of these dialects, which probably had its “local habitation” in the midland district of England, became by the chapter of accidents the predominant language, and the writings of Chaucer, Wyclif, and others, made its predominance permanent. The analogue of this process is to be found in that which made the Attic the predominant dialect of Greece, in that which developed one of many spoken dialects into classical Latin, in that which performed a similar service for modern classical French, and in that which made one of the high German dialects the language of Luther and of Goethe. The student of Old English may not be able to appreciate, in all its beauty and force, this law of natural selection and the survival of the fittest in language; but he will be able to catch at least a glimpse of one of the great scientific truths, and will have his intellectual horizon expanded by its apprehension. Not till he learns that our own beautiful and flexible language has passed through extensive changes of form, that it was formerly one of many local dialects which had equal chances of literary development, and that many of these dialects still survive in a less altered form, is the student in a position to understand clearly the wider relations of English as a member of the great Teutonic family of languages, and of the still larger Indo-Germanic group with their common Aryan element.

But I may be told that he can learn all this more easily from philological compendiums like Latham's or Earle's, which give in brief compass the digested conclusions drawn from the researches of many eminent scholars, than he can learn it from his own reading of Old English texts. This brings me face to