

follow. Many of the vowel changes that have been already discussed, such as syncope, apocope, aphæresis, etc., are characteristic of unstressed syllables. Above all, we must remember that the thoroughgoing abandonment of inflections in English is the result of deficient stress. The sound of these endings became more and more obscure, until they were insufficient to mark grammatical distinctions, and relational words had to be substituted.

Vowel Shortening.
(a) In the Accented
Syllable.

A curious law of sound change in the accented syllable may be observed by comparing words like *heath* and *heather*, *throat* and *throttle*, etc. In the derivatives the place of accent remains the same, and yet the stem vowel is markedly shortened. This is more especially the case when the original long vowel is followed in the derivative by a group of two or more consonants.

EXAMPLES.—*Broad* and *breadth*, *wide* and *width*.

This is the reason for the vowel shortening in the past tenses of weak verbs, such as *feed*—*fed*, *read*—*read*. *Fed* was in Middle English *fedde*, and *read* was *redde*.

In compound words a similar vowel shortening occurs, generally due to the presence of two consonants after the accented vowel.

EXAMPLES.—*Gosling* (from *goose*), *bonfire* (from *bonfire*), *breakfast*, *husband* (from *house-bond*), *Whitby* (*white-town*), *Whit-church*.

In the following examples the shortening seems due only to the stress: *forehead*, *knowledge*, *two pence* (pronounced *tuppence*), *holiday* (for *holy day*), etc.

(b) In the Unaccented
Syllable.

Such are the vowel changes common in the stressed syllable of a compound word. The unstressed syllable likewise undergoes shortening, and is frequently much corrupted in sound.

EXAMPLES.—*Boatswain*, *coxswain* (pronounced familiarly *bos'n*, *cox'n*), *housewife* (corrupted to *hussif* or *hussy*), *sheriff* (for *shire-reeve*), *Hamton* (for *Ham-town*), *Sutton*, *Weston*, *Buckingham* (*ham* means *home*).

Finally, a syllable, owing to lack of stress, may entirely disappear.

EXAMPLES.—(a) In inflectional syllables—*man's* for *mannes*.

(b) In the body of a word—*lark* for O. E. *laverce*, *Gloucester*