

the rival tongue. Commoner words—the names of familiar, beloved and revered objects, pronouns, particles, the most important verbs—the illiterate people, in their subjugation and serfdom, had treasured up beyond the possibility of loss.

That, however, which completely distinguishes *Middle* from *Old* English, refers not to the *vocabulary*, but to the *grammar* of the language. Prior to any extensive influx of French terms, when, as the language of the peasantry, English was altogether devoid of literary aims and character, it had begun to lose that elaborate system of grammatical inflections which we have seen marked its earlier stages. In this, English simply shared in a tendency common to all the Low German tongues.* But the process of grammatical simplification in English was greatly accelerated by causes which did not operate on the continent. The first of these was the impossibility of preserving nice terminational changes and distinctions when the language, having lost all written standards, was spoken wholly by uneducated people. Philologists have called attention to a tendency observable in the uncultivated classes of all nations to blend widely differing terminational sounds in an indistinctly neutral one. The second cause, though operating most powerfully at a somewhat later period than that just mentioned is thus lucidly explained by Grimm:—

“When the English language was inundated by a vast influx of French words, few, if any, French *forms* were received into the grammar; but the Saxon forms soon dropt away, because they did not suit the new sorts; and the genius of the language, from having to deal with the newly imported words

* “Had there been no Norman invasion, English would have arrived at the same simplification of its grammar as nearly every other nation of the Low German stock has done.”—Morris, *Historical Outlines of English Accidence*.