

“AN HUNGRED” AND SOME KINDRED SYNTACTIC ARCHAISMS

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I

The following quotations from the Authorized Version of the English Bible, 1611,¹ illustrate one of the archaisms, both morphologic and syntactic, that seem strange and unfamiliar to modern students of English.

(1) For I was *an hungred*, and yee gaue me no meat: I was thirstie, and ye gaue me no drinke:... —*Matt.* xxv. 42.

(2) Lord, when saw we thee *an hungred*, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sicke, or in prison, and did not minister vnto thee? —*Matt.* xxv. 44.

It would be easy for any English or American reader who has not been specially disciplined in English philology to understand that *an hungred* in these quotations means ‘hungry’. *Hungred* might also be judged to be an old variant of modern *hungered*, though the use of this past participle in the sense of ‘hungry’ is now archaic, as labelled by the C. O. D. and some other dictionaries. The difficulty, however, lies in the problem as to how we should interpret *an* placed before the adjectival *hungred*. No one would take this *an* to be an indefinite article. The very fundamental sense of English grammar makes him deny any such interpretation. It is an extraordinary fact that *an* in *an hungred* is an archaic prefix though it has been written as a separate word. It is now for the writer to trace this biblical archaism to the origin and find out what nature it should be attributed to.

The Authorized Version contains seven instances of *an hungred*, besides the two quoted above. They are *Matt.* iv. 2, *Matt.* xii. 1, *Matt.* xii. 3, *Matt.* xxv. 35, *Matt.* xxv. 37, *Mark* ii. 25, and *Luke* vi. 3. Of the nine instances in all, *an hungred* is used as complement of the finite form of *be* in seven, including *Matt.* xxv. 42, quoted above as example 1. In the two others, *Matt.* xxv. 37 and *Matt.* xxv. 44, which has been quoted as example 2, *an hungred* functions as object predicative. Some of those which have *an hungred* used after the verb *be* will be given below.

(3) ...hee was afterward *an hungred*. —*Matt.* iv. 2.

(4) ...his Disciples were *an hungred*,.... —*Matt.* xii. 1.

(5) Haue yee not read what Daudid did when hee was *an hungred*, ...? —*Matt.* xii. 3.

In all these instances, it is out of question that *an hungred* is, syntactically as well as semantically, equivalent to the single adjective *hungry*.

It is now worth to observe whether the archaic expression has been handed down to any

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¹ Abbreviated A. V. The edition adopted here is *The Authorised Version of the English Bible, 1611*, edited by W. A. Wright; 5 volumes; Cambridge, 1909.

of the later versions of the English Bible and how it has been superseded by the new form there. The earliest version of the English Bible where the expression *an hungred* was used is Tyndale's published in 1526. After that it kept on appearing in the Great Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1557), the Authorized Version (1611), and the Revised Version (1881).² In the Revised Version, it must be added, it was partially preserved; for in one of the nine sentences above referred to *hungred* was substituted for *was an hungred*, as in: "he afterward *hungred*."³—*Matt.* iv. 2. But in all the other sentences the older form was preserved, as for example in: "for I was *an hungred*, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:..."—*Matt.* xxv. 42. It would be needless to say that this linguistic heritage has been replaced by the modern form in the later versions. So we find in the Revised Standard Version (1946)⁴: "for I was *hungry* and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,..."—*Ibid.*

In Tyndale's version,⁵ the earliest that the expression has ever been found in,⁶ it is spelt in two ways: (1) *anhungred* (*Matt.* xxv. 44 and *Luke* vi. 3), *anhongred* (*Matt.* xii. 1, *Matt.* xxv. 35, *Matt.* xxv. 37, and *Mark* ii. 25), or *anhungered* (*Matt.* xii. 3), and (2) *an hungred* (*Matt.* iv. 2 and *Matt.* xxv. 42). Of these two types we shall below give the representative instances:

(6) For I was *an hungred*, and ye gave me no meate; I thursted, and ye gave me no drynke;... —Tyndale, *Matt.* xxv. 42.

(7) Master, when sawe we the *anhungred*, or a thurst, or herbroulesse, or naked, or sicke, or in preson, and have not ministered vnto the? —*Id.*, *Matt.* xxv. 44.

Example 6 has *an hungred*, the same spelling as in the Authorized Version and the Revised Version; while in example 7 the solid form *anhungred* is to be noticed. It positively indicates the original nature of the expression concerned. *An* in *an hungred* as seen in the Authorized Version and the Revised Version, is originally a prefix, not a preposition, still less an indefinite article. The problem is what primary function the prefix *an-*, placed before a past participle, performed and how it came to be written in the form of a self-contained word, as if it were a preposition.

We may safely conjecture, with OED (s. v. ANHUNGERED), that this prefix *an-* has been extended from *a-*, specially before a vowel or an *h*-sound. *A-*, which is seen in *a-hungered* in Middle English, goes back to the Old English prefix *of-*, which means 'off, away, from.'

² Cf. T. F. Mustanoja: *A Middle English Syntax* I (Helsinki, 1960), p. 582.

³ For the quotations from the Revised Version (abbreviated R. V.) I have depended *The Interlinear Bible: The Authorised Version and the Revised Version* (Cambridge, 1898).

⁴ Abbreviated R. S. V. The edition adopted here is *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version* (Nelson, N. Y.; 1959).

⁵ For the quotations from Tyndale's version (dated 1526), I have depended on *The Gothic and Anglo-Saxon Gospels with the Versions of Wycliffe and Tyndale*, edited by J. Bosworth and G. Waring (3rd edition; Reeves & Turner, London; 1888).

⁶ For other verses than those which are concerned here, we can quote instances of this expression from an earlier version of the English Bible, as in: "3if pyn enemy be *an-hungred*, fede hym." (=If your enemy is hungry, feed him.)—Selected Parts of the New Testament (a fourteenth century version edited by A. C. Paues): *Rom.* xii. 20 [c. 1400] (q. MED).

⁷ Cf. OED, s. v. *A- pref.* 3; MED, s. v. *A- pref.* (1) 1 (c).

The transition can be proved by the existence of the Middle English form *afingered* (contracted from *af-hingered* <OE *of-hyngred*), as well as the original Old English *of-hyngrod*, *of-hyngred* (past participle of **of-hyngrian*, **of-hynggran* 'to suffer hunger, be very hungry').

It should be observed that the prefix *of-*, from which ME *a-* is derived, has some force of the perfective or resultative aspect associated with its original meaning, and is naturally suited to be put before the past participle of an intransitive verb which does not imply any idea of passivity but denotes a condition as a result of the physical or physiological process meant by the verb and so may be called a participial adjective. In the case of *of-hyngrod*, the prefix *of-* displays such force as to add to the condition of hunger an idea of complete exhaustion, intensifying the idea of the whole process from cause to effect. This *of-* was kept on till the fourteenth century. Below we shall cite some instances of such past participles from Old English and Middle English texts.

(8) ...se apostol...wæs eac *ofhyngrod*. —Ælfric, *Lives of Saints* x. 80-2.⁸ (=The apostle was also very hungry.)

(9) 3ef þu art *ofhungret* efter þet swete, þu most earst witerliche biten o þe bittre. —*Ancrene Wisse*, f. 102a. 4-6.⁹ (=If you are hungry after the sweet, you must first surely eat of the bitter.)

(10) He wearðe þa swiðe *ofþyrst* for ðam wundorlican slege... —Ælfric, *Judges* xv. 18.¹⁰ (=He became very thirsty after the terrible slaughter.)

(11) ...þenne hie beð *ofþurst* cumeð to sum welle. —*Trinity Homilies* xxxi (p. 199).¹¹ (=When she is thirsty, she comes to a well.)

(12) Petrus stod *ofcalen* on ðam cauertune. —Ælfric, *Homilies*¹² II. 248 (q. OED). (=Peter stood chilled in the courtyard.)

In these words, *ofhyngrod*, *ofþyrst* (<*ofþyrsted*, p.p. of **ofþyrstan* 'to suffer thirst, be very thirsty'), and *ofcalen* (p.p. <*calan* 'to be cold'), the idea of exhaustion with hunger, thirst, or coldness, is naturally associated with the intensity of the resultant physical condition. It is therefore in the course of nature that when in Middle English *of-* in words of this sort was reduced, probably through the intermediate *af-*, to *a-*, as in *a-hungered*, *a-thirst*, and *a-cale*, the new prefix was felt as intensive and thus attributed to that Old English *a-* which had been derived from OHG *ar-*, *ir-*, *ur-* (hence NHG *er-*, as in *erhungert* 'hungered').¹³ Whatever origin it might be ascribed to, the new prefix *a-* for the complex past participles began to appear in the fourteenth century. It is now instructive to observe the following instances from *Piers Plowman*, where the variant readings traceable to the different texts and manuscripts are suggestive enough to reveal the historical transition in which the prefix is involved.

(13) Ac the careful may crye and carpen atte 3ate,

⁸ Quoted from *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* I, edited by W. W. Skeat; E. E. T. S., No. 76, 1881. The MS. was composed in 1025-50.

⁹ Quoted from *Ancrene Wisse*, edited by J. R. R. Tolkien; E. E. T. S., No. 249, 1962. The MS. is assigned to c. 1225.

¹⁰ Quoted from *The Old English Version of The Heptateuch*, edited by S. J. Crawford; E. E. T. S., No. 160, 1922. MS. L, which contains *Judges*, is dated c. 1075.

¹¹ Quoted from *Old English Homilies of the Twelfth Century*, from MS. B. 14. 52 in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge (assigned to c. 1200), edited by R. Morris; E. E. T. S., No. 52, 1873.

¹² B. Thorpe, ed.: *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 2 volumes (London, 1844, '46). The MS. was composed c. 1000-25.

¹³ Cf. OED, s. v. *A-* *pref.* 1.

Bothe *afyngred* and *a-thurst* and for chele quake;

—*P. Pl.*¹⁴ B x. 58-9.

(=But the wretched man may cry at the gate, shivering with hunger and thirst and chill.)

OED (s.v. A-HUNGERED and ANHUNGERED) gives for *afyngred* here the variant readings: *a-hungred* and *an-hungred* (the latter noted "Oriel MS."), and for *a-thurst*: *a-thrust*, *a-thrist*, and *a-furst*. From this we can learn that the newer form *an-hungred* was going to appear by the side of *a-hungred*. What is more significant is that there can also be found the older forms, *afyngred* and *a-furst*; for these are respectively worn down, through phonetical assimilation, from *afhyngred* (<OE *ofhyngred*) and *afpyrst* (<OE *ofpyrst*). In fact, the C-text of *Piers Plowman* shows them in a more distinct form:

(14) Ac the carful mai crie and quaken atte zate,
Bothe *a-fyngred* and *a-furst* and for defaute spille,¹⁵

—*P. Pl.* C XII. 42-3.

Skeat (*op. cit.* II. p. 148) recommends as the best spellings *a-fyngred* and *a-furst*, as seen in the C-text, since they, along with *defaute*, constitute a line of treble alliteration with *f* recurring three times. For *a-fyngred* and *a-furst* here is also a variant reading: *of-hongret* and *of-perst* (Museum MS.).¹⁶ The latter is indeed more original and so serves to corroborate the morphological transition from *of-* to *a-* in the words concerned. With examples 13 and 14 the following should be compared:

(15) For blod may seo blood bothe *a-thurst* and *a-cale*,
Ac blod may nat seo blod blede, bote hym rewe.

—*P. Pl.* C XXI. 439-40.

(=For a man may bear to see his relatives both thirsty and chilly, but he cannot see them bleed without feeling pity.)

Apart from *afyngred* and *acale*, let us now consider the peculiar features of *athirst*. Besides examples 14 and 15, example 1, quoted from the Authorized Version, and example 7, quoted from Tyndale, have contained this complex word, the latter in the form of *a thirst*. This form may induce us to suppose that *thirst* [*thurst*] is a noun, the Old English noun *purst* and verb *pyrstan* having come to be formally identified and turned into the common form *thirst*, and that *a* is the reduction from the Old English preposition *an* [*on*] which means 'in, engaged in, in a condition of,' just as in these words: *abed*, *asleep*, *alive*, etc.¹⁷ So *a thirst* may be interpreted as 'in the state of thirst.'¹⁸

If we turn to the passage in the A-text of *Piers Plowman* that corresponds to either of the ones quoted above as examples 10 and 11, we shall be enlightened in this respect.

(16) Ac þe carful may criȝen and carpe at þe zate,

¹⁴ For the quotations from the A-text (dated c. 1362) of *Piers Plowman* (abbreviated *P. Pl.*) I have chiefly depended on G. Kane's edition (University of London, 1960), which is founded on the Trinity MS. (MS. T). When necessary, however, I have adopted W. W. Skeat's edition (2 volumes, Oxford U. P., 1954), where the A-text is edited from the Vernon MS. (MS. V). Skeat's edition has also been adopted when quotations have been taken from the B-text (dated c. 1377) and the C-text (dated c. 1393).

¹⁵ Here "for defaute spille" means 'die for need.'

¹⁶ Cf. OED, s. v. OFHUNGERED, OFTHIRST.

¹⁷ It is of the kind that OED treats as A-*pref.* 2.

¹⁸ This is the interpretation of *athirst* or *an hungred* by M. E. Elliot, *The Language of the King James Bible* (Doubleday, N. Y.; 1967), s. v. A 2b, AN 2, ATHIRST, HUNGRED.

Bope *for hungir* and *for þrest* and for chele quake;

—*P. Pl.* A XI. 45-6.

According to the footnote (p. 401) by Kane, the Douce and Vernon MSS. have "*of* hungir and *of* þurst" instead of "*for* hungir and *for* þrest" shown above. No matter which of the words may be used here, it is evident that *hungir* (=hunger) and *þrest* [*þurst*] (=thirst) are nouns in this context, exactly as *chele* (=chill) is, and that the preceding word, whether *for* or *of*, is a preposition that governs the noun following. This shows that the linguistic sense about this expression was greatly fluctuating in the minds of those who wrote the manuscripts of *Piers Plowman*. There seems to have been some association between *a-* in *a-fyngred* and *a-furst* on one hand and *of* in *of hungir* and *of þurst* on the other.¹⁹ As has been observed above, *a-* in the former is a phonetic corruption from OE *of*. This prefix originally implies the sense 'off, away.' While it is functionally adverbial toward the meaning of the verbal from to which it is prefixed, it is semantically suggestive of the primary affinity with the preposition, as symbolized by the etymological relation between the adverb *off* and the preposition *of*. In the fourteenth century, furthermore, prefixes such as *of*, *for*, *a-*, and so on, were generally falling into decay, and with the original function of each of them much weakened, were being confused with one another. Consequently, most of those prefixes that were turning inorganic were liable to be replaced by prepositions that were more expressive. It is not only that the prepositions were etymologically related to the prefixes, but that the replacement was accelerated by the general syntactic tendency from synthesis to analysis.

It is apparent that *for* [*of*] *thrust* was felt more distinct and expressive than *a-thurst*. At the same time, whenever a word which had originally been a past participle had assumed the same form as the noun it was related to or somehow was interchangeable with the noun, the former came to be replaced by the latter; or otherwise the past participle became invested with some nominal nature, or in other words, partially nominalized, so that it became qualified to stand after a preposition and function as its regimen, as if it were a genuine noun.

We have mentioned that *þirst* [*þurst*] in Middle English was formally identical whether it was a past participle or a noun. With *hunger*, the case is considerably analogical. We might here be reminded that the Old English verb *hyngran* [*hyngrian*] was superseded in Middle English by *hungeren*, through assimilation of the noun *hunger* (<OE *hungor*, *hungur*). It is inferable, furthermore, that when the preceding prefix was regarded as a preposition, the past participle *hungred* (<*hynghred*) in Middle English was felt as equivalent to the noun *hunger*, even though the former was seldom really replaced by the latter.

We are now in a position to conclude that the biblical phrase *an hungred* has grown from OE *ofhynghred* through a roundabout process. Composed of the prefix *of*, which meant 'off, away' and functioned as intensive, explicitly denoting the perfective or resultative aspect, and the past participle of the intransitive verb *hyngran*, OE *ofhynghred* was turned in Middle English to *afhingred*, *afingred*, *a-hungred*, and finally *an-hungred*. Further, the complex word has come to be written in a phrasal form *an hungred*. The arrival of the last stage

¹⁹ Also compare the following instances, where the prepositional phrases are composed of *on* (=in) and the noun *hunger* or *þerst*: "...ic ham ðes forzeltes Adames anlicnesse, þurh hwam ic am on muchele aruednesses, on *hungre* and on *ðurstes*, ..."—*Vices and Virtues* 95. 23-5 [c. 1200]. (=I am like the guilty Adam, through whom I am in great difficulties, in hunger and in thirst, ...)!" "When I was on *þerst* hongyng on þe rode..."—*Eleven Pains of Hell* 281 [c. 1275] (q. F. Th. Visser). (=When I was thirsty hanging on the cross...)

has greatly been influenced by the intuitive interpretation on the part of general speakers and writers. *An* is now felt as a preposition (<OE *an* 'on, in') that may govern as its regimen the semi-nominalized participial adjective. The preservation of *an hungred* even down to the Revised Version is ascribable to that stylistic value—dignified, conservative, and archaic—which has traditionally characterized the successive Versions of the English Bible.

II

In order to confirm that the transition as exemplified by OE *ofhyngred* > early ModE *an hungred* is rather general, not merely limited to some particular expressions, we should like to add here a description of some parallel phenomena.

In late Middle English *for* is occasionally found in juxtaposition with a participial or genuine adjective. Below we shall quote some instances that contain this combination.

- (1) I was wery *forwardred* and went me to reste
—*P. Pl.* B Prol. 7

(=I was wearied with wandering and went to sleep.)

- (2) The Millere, that *for dronken* was al pale,
—Chaucer, *C.T.*,²⁰ A, "The Miller's Prologue," 3120.

(=The miller, who was quite pale with drinking, ...)

- (3) And with that thought, *for pure ashamed*, she
Gan in hire hed to pulle, ...
—*Id.*, *Troilus and Criseyde* II. 656-7 [c. 1385].

(=And thinking so, she was purely ashamed and drew back her head.)

- (4) The kings dowhter, which this syh,
For pure abaisht drowh hire adryh
And hield hire clos under the bowh,
And let hem passen stille ynowh;

—Gower, *Confessio Amantis* IV. 1329-32.²¹

(=The king's daughter, who saw this, drew aside purely abashed, and keeping close under the bough, let them pass still enough.)

For in such expressions was originally a prefix. In Old English *for-* [fær-] was found, though not so commonly as *of-*, as a prefix. Its primary notion was that of 'forward, forth.' Usually prefixed to the past participle of an intransitive verb, it came to denote the notion of weariness or exhaustion caused by the action the verb meant.²² For example, OE *for-druncken*, from which comes *for-dronken*, as seen in example 2, meant 'overcome with drink,' *for-* thus displaying some intensive force. In the examples above, however, the original nature of *for* as prefix has been much weakened. In examples 2, 3, and 4 *for* is written as a separate word and appears like a preposition. What is more noteworthy, examples 3 and

²⁰ Abbreviated from *The Canterbury Tales*, the MSS. of which were composed between 1389 and 1400. For the quotations from Chaucer I have depended on F. N. Robinson, ed.: *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2nd edition (Oxford U. P., London; 1957).

²¹ Quoted from *The English Works of John Gower*, edited by G. C. Macaulay; E. E. T. S., E. S. No. 81, 1900 (reprinted 1957). The MS. was composed c. 1393.

²² Cf. OED, s. v. *FOR-* *pref.*¹ 6.

4 have the adjective *pure* inserted between *for* and the participial adjective, so that it can be regarded as modifying the subsequent word. The latter may then be interpreted as partially nominalized. This syntactical environment reinforces the sense of *for* as preposition. Moreover, *for* in each of these examples expresses more or less causal meaning toward the predicate verb or the predicative adjective in the sentence where it is used, and thus it apparently performs a semantic function of a preposition. In this respect, the line in A-text or in C-text that corresponds to the line in B-text of *Piers Plowman* quoted above as example 1 is specially worth observing.

- (5) I was weori *of wandringe* and wente me to reste
 —P. Pl. A (MS. V) Prol. 7.
- (6) Me byfel for to slepe for weyrynesse *of wandryng*;
 —P. Pl. C 1. 7.

(=It so happened that I slept for weariness of wandering.)

In example 5, *of wandringe* is used to function as an adverbial phrase that denotes a cause or source for the predicative *weori* (=weary),²³ meaning 'because I had been wandering.' Here *wandringe* is a gerund or verbal noun and is evidently used as regimen of the preposition *of*. The noticeable fact is that MSS. D and E read "for wand(e)ryng" for "of wandringe."²⁴ We may infer, accordingly, that *for-* in *forwandred* (B-text) is philologically connected to *for* in *for wanderyng* (A-text, MS. E). In other words, the nature as adverbial preposition inherent in the former, the prefix *for-*, has been embodied in the latter, the preposition *for*. Here is again a fluctuation in the different versions and manuscripts of *Piers Plowman* as to how to express the meanings that are delicately associated with each other. It represents an aspect of the unstable condition in the language of the fourteenth century. In the case concerned, it shows the tendency of the original prefix *of-* or *for-* in a complex word to be felt as a member of an analytical phrase, that is, *of* or *for* as preposition.

As mentioned in I above, these prefixes were already in a state of decay in early Middle English, and they had their individual functions a good deal weakened in the fourteenth century. *Of-* before a consonant had frequently been reduced to *a-* and so identified in form with some other prefixes of different origins. It is true that *for-* retained its vitality somewhat longer than most of the other prefixes²⁵ and supplanted *of-* in a number of complex words, as for example in the case of *for-wandred* < *of-wandred*; but even it soon fell into general disuse as a living prefix. Some of the complex words have come to be fossilized in Modern English, but *for-* in many others, where it had its original semantic value more or

²³ OE *wērig* (>weary), by the way, was mostly construed with a genitive case or sometimes with a prepositional phrase introduced by *for*, when it was required to express the cause or source of weariness, as in: "hwæpere ic fara feng feore gedigde *sipes werig*."—*Beowulf* 578-9. (=Yet I escaped the grip of the monsters with my life, weary with my enterprise.)/"Sunu min, ne agiemelease ðu Godes suingan, ne ðu ne beo *werig for his ðreounge*, ..."—Alfred, *Pastoral Care* XXXVI (253. 2-3). (=My son, don't neglect God's castigation, nor be weary of his rebuking.) Later in early Middle English an *of*-phrase, apparently an analytical expression in place of the OE genitive, began to be used with *weary*, as in: "sothli Jhesu maad *wery of the iurney*, sat thus on the welle."—Wycliffe [1389], *John* iv. 6. (=Truly Jesus, wearied with the journey, sat thus on the well.) (Cf. OE Version: se Hælend sæt æt ðam wylle, ða he wæs *werig gegan*," *gegān* being a past participle.) The use of *of* is now limited when *weary* means 'sick and tired,' while *for* in this construction has been superseded by *with* in Modern English.

²⁴ Cf. Kane, ed.: *op. cit.* p. 175 ft.

²⁵ Cf. Mustanoja, *op. cit.* p. 381 f.

less felt, was turning into a preposition and being written as the separate word *for*. It is this transitional, though in a way intrinsic, stage of linguistic development that has enabled such free syntactic combinations as in examples 2-4, where the adjective or participial adjective functions as regiment of the preposition, to be used in the fourteenth century.

III

Another early English phenomenon worthy to be noticed concerning the construction "prepositional prefix+verbal form" is the one whose origin may be exemplified by the following Old English instance.

(1) Wære þu todæg *on huntnope*? Ic næs, forþam sunnandæg ys, ac grstandæg ic wæs *on huntunge*. (L: Fuisti hodie *in uenatione*? Non fui quia dominicus est, sed hieri fui *in uenatione*.)—Ælfric, *Colloquy* 67-9.²⁶ (=Were you on hunting today? I wasn't, because it is Sunday; but yesterday I was on hunting.)

Here *on* is no doubt a preposition, meaning 'in a state or action of, engaged in,' and the following *huntnop* [*huntop*, *huntap*] and *huntung* are what may quite well be termed verbal nouns. Of these the form in *-ung*, later *-ing*, survived in Middle and Modern English; while the form in *-op*, later *-ep*, came to be regarded as archaic in early Middle English, and in the fourteenth century the ending *-ep* was sometimes confused with *-ed*, the ending of a past participle, and written so. We can thus quote from *Piers Plowman* such an instance as follows:

(2) ac hye Treuthe wolde
That no faiterye were founde in folk that *gon a-begged*
—*P. Pl.* C IX. 138.

(=But noble Truth wishes that no deceit would be found in people who go begging.)

For *gon a-begged* in the sentence above there is an older variant reading in the Ilchester MS.: *gon abeggeþ*.²⁷ It can be safely inferred, therefore, that *a-beggeþ* has been corrupted into *a-begged*. At the same time, it may as well be alleged that *a-* in *a-begged* in example 2, though it appears like a prefix before a past participle, just as *an-* in *an-hungred*, is really a reduction from the Old English preposition *on* [*an*]. Here can be traced a transition from preposition to prefix that seems exactly opposite to the one as perceived in the case of *an hungred*, that is, the transition from prefix to preposition. Whichever direction it may have taken, there ought to be a close affinity between a preposition or adverbial preposition and a prefix, and the resultant prefix *a-* as in *a-beggeþ*, *a-begged*, or *a-begging* is destined to decay sooner or later, till the complex verbal form comes to be the simple verbal, such as *begging*. In other words, whatever origin these complex verbals may be traced to, they have reached the same result: the reduced prefix *a-* has fallen into disuse and been lost. It would be worth to notice that we can quote from Chaucer the following set of instances where the expressions in question are synonymous with one another.

(3) For sikerly my dette shal be quyrt
Towardes yow, howevere that I fare

²⁶ Quoted from G. N. Garmonsway, ed.: *Ælfric's Colloquy* (Methuen, London; 1947). The work probably dates from the first half of the eleventh century.

²⁷ Cf. Skeat, ed.: *op. cit.* II, p. 111; *MED*, s. v. *ABEGGEþ*, *-ED*; *OED*, s. v. *BEGGED*, *-ETH*.

To goon *a-begged* in my kirtle bare.

—*C. T.*, "The Franklin's Tale," F 1578-80.

(=For surely my debt shall be repaid you, whatever may happen to me, even though I may go begging barely clothed in a kirtle.)

- (4) If a man be so bestial
That he of no craft hath science,
And nought desireth ignorence,
Thanne may he go *a-begging* yerne,
Til he som maner craft kan lerne,

—*The Romaunt of the Rose* 6716-20 [c. 1360].

(=If a man is so stupid as to know nothing about any craft and does not desire igno-
rance, then he may go begging eagerly, till he can learn some kind of craft.)

- (5) Or if his wynnynge be so lite
That his labour wole not acquyte
Sufficiently al his lyvyng,
Yit may he go his breed *begging*; —*Ibid.* 6741-4.

(=Or even if his winning is so scanty that his labour will not be sufficient to requite all
his living, he may still go begging his bread.)

Here we would just mention the peculiarity of the prefix *a-*. As above described, it was also following the same process of decay as the other prefixes of a similar kind in the course of Middle English; and yet on the other hand it succeeded in becoming popular especially at the lively colloquial level of speech. It seems that it had come to be felt as suited in phonetic and stylistic value to crisp and lively colloquialism. The noteworthy phenomenon is that *a-* was especially appropriated to prefixing a verbal form ending in *-ing*, even when the latter might be traced to a present participle, not to a verbal noun or gerund. This form of complex expression was kept on till the period of Modern English, and was found most frequently at the middle of the seventeenth century.²⁸ Even after that it has been preserved as dialectal.

Now Tyndale seems to have comparatively favoured this type of expression in his biblical translation. From his Version of the Gospels, dated 1526, we can quote nine instances of its use. They may be classified into three groups. In group A the *ing*-form is assuredly traceable to the Old English verbal noun or gerund which is semantically equivalent to the form ending in *-op*. In group B the *ing*-form seems to have retained the force of a gerund, and combined with "be+a-," naturally comes to imply the passive notion. Group C has that kind of *ing*-form which is manifestly active in meaning. If it were directly, without the intermediate *a-*, combined with a finite form of *be*, it would, as an ordinary present participle, readily constitute a progressive form. *A-* in this group, therefore, may in every respect be called expletive or redundant. To each of these instances we shall append the corresponding expressions in the later Versions, that is, A.V., R.V., and R.S.V., so as to see, in comparing them, how this linguistic heritage has been handed down and at last been superseded.

A. (6) I goo *afysshynge*.—Tyndale, *John* xxi. 3. (Cf. A.-S. Gosp.²⁹: Ic wylle gan

²⁸ Cf. F. Mossé: *Histoire de la forme périphrastique être+participe présent en germanique* (Klincksieck, Paris; 1938) II. iv.

²⁹ Abbreviated from *The Anglo-Saxon Gospels* (dated 995). The text adopted here is the one edited by Bosworth and Waring, which I mentioned in footnote 5 above.

on *fixop*./A.V. & R.V.: I goe [go] a *fishng*./R.S.V.: I am going *fishng*.)

B. (7) And all the multitude of people were with out, in their prayers whill the odoures were *abrennyng*.—Id., *Luke* i. 10. (Cf. A.V.: ...at the time of incense./R.V. & R.S.V.: ...at the hour of incense.)

(8) Master, thys woman was taken in advoutry, even as the dede was a *doynng*.—Id., *John* viii. 4. (Cf. A.V. & R.V.: ...in adultery, in the very act./R.S.V.: ...in the act of adultery.)

C. (9) Ffor he had but a doughter only of twelve yere of age, and she laye a *dyng*.—Id., *Luke* viii. 42.³⁰ (Cf. A.V. & R.V.: ...she lay a *dyng*./R.S.V.: ...she was *dyng*.)

(10) As he yett was a *commynge*, the fende rent hym, and tare hym.—Id., *Luke* ix. 42.³¹ (Cf. A.V. & R.V.: ...as he was yet a *coming*, .../R.S.V.: While he was *coming*, ...)

(11) And he was a *castynge* out a devyll, ... —Id., *Luke* xi. 14. (Cf. A.V. & R.V.: And he was *casting* out a deuill [devil], .../R.S.V.: Now he was *casting* out a demon...)

(12) Which of you havynge a servaunte a *plowynge* or *fydyng*e catell, wolde saye vnto hym, ...? (Cf. A.V.: ...hauing a seruaut *plowing*, or *feeding* cattell, .../R.V.: having a servant *plowing* or *keeping* sheep, .../R.S.V.: ...who has a servant *plowing* or *keeping* sheep, ...)

(13) Two shalbe also a *gryndynge* to gedder, the one shalbe receaved, and the other forsaken; ... —*Luke* xvii. 35. (Cf. A.V.: Two women shall bee *grinding* together, .../R.V. & R.S.V.: There shall [will] be two women *grinding* together; ...)

(14) And as they were *allosynge* the coolte, the owners sayde vnto them, Why loose ye the coolte?—Id., *Luke* xix. 33. (Cf. A.V. & R.V.: ...as they were *loosing* the colt, .../R.S.V.: ...as they were *untying* the colt, ...)

It cannot be denied that the so-called progressive form is historically connected to the kind of construction exemplified by group B, or more closely, to the one exemplified by 10, 11 and 14 of group C.³² From this, however, it is not necessarily possible to conclude that the verbal in *-ing* as a component of the English progressive form has originated in a gerund. As has already been discussed by a number of English philologists, the present participle and the gerund have been delicately united, both in form and in function, so as to turn the *ing* form into an essential component of the progressive form in Modern English. We have above observed that in *a-* also the prepositional and the prefixal element have been delicately united. Accordingly, the components of a *commynge*, as in example 10, might as well be considered “prefix+participle” as “preposition+gerund.” Whatever the state of things may be, it is certain that there was a sort of potentiality for such a syntactic variant as typified by “was a *coming*” to appear from the fifteenth century onward and contribute in a way to the establishment of the progressive form in late Modern English.

³⁰ Compare, however: “In them laye a greate multitude off sicke folke, off blynde, halt, and wyddered, *waytynge* for the movynge off the wather.” —Id., *John* v. 3. The construction is naturally followed by A. V., as: “In these lay a great multitude ...*waiting* for the mouing of the water.”

³¹ Compare: “Martha as sone as she herde, that Jesus was *commynge*, went and met hym; ...” —Id., *John* xi. 20. The construction is followed by A.V., as: “...Jesus was *comming*, ...”

³² In example 13, the construction may be less directly connected to the progressive form. As observable in the versions of R. V. and R. S. V., the corresponding part is expressed in the construction: “*There* shall [will] be two women *grinding* together,” which does not contain any progressive form, though certainly associated, both syntactically and semantically, with the progressive construction: “Two women shall [will] be *grinding* together.”