

6

The Reestablishment of English, 1200–1500

93. Changing Conditions after 1200.

How long the linguistic situation just described would have continued if the conditions under which it arose had remained undisturbed is impossible to say. As long as England held its continental territory and the nobility of England were united to the continent by ties of property and kindred, a real reason existed for the continued use of French among the governing class in the island. If the English had permanently retained control over the two-thirds of France that they once held, French might have remained permanently in use in England. But shortly after 1200 conditions changed. England lost an important part of its possessions abroad. The nobility gradually relinquished their continental estates. A feeling of rivalry developed between the two countries, accompanied by an antiforeign movement in England and culminating in the Hundred Years' War. During the century and a half following the Norman Conquest, French had been not only natural but more or less necessary to the English upper class; in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries its maintenance became increasingly artificial. For a time certain new factors helped it to hold its ground, socially and officially. Meanwhile, however, social and economic changes affecting the English-speaking part of the population were taking place, and in the end numbers told. In the fourteenth century English won its way back into universal use, and in the fifteenth century French all but disappeared. We must now examine in detail the steps by which this situation came about.

94. The Loss of Normandy.

The first link in the chain binding England to the continent was broken in 1204 when King John lost Normandy. John, seeing the beautiful Isabel of Angouleme, fell violently in love with her and, no doubt having certain political advantages in mind, married her in great haste (1200), notwithstanding the fact that she was at the time formally betrothed to Hugh of Lusignan, the head of a powerful and ambitious family. To make matters worse, John, anticipating hostility from the Lusignans, took the initiative and wantonly attacked them. They appealed for redress to their common overlord, the king of France. Philip saw in the situation an opportunity to embarrass his most irritating vassal. He summoned John (1202) to appear before his court at Paris, answer the charges against him, and submit to the judgment of his peers. John maintained that as king of England he was not subject to the jurisdiction of the French court; Philip replied that as duke of Normandy he was. John demanded a safe conduct, which Philip offered to grant only on conditions that John could not accept. Consequently, on the day of the trial the English king did not appear, and the court declared his territory confiscated according to feudal law. Philip proceeded

at once to carry out the decision of the court and invaded Normandy. A succession of victories soon put the greater part of the duchy in his control. One after another of John's supporters deserted him. His unpopularity was increased by the news of the death of the young prince Arthur, John's nephew and captive, who was married to Philip's daughter and who, it was firmly believed, had been murdered. In 1204 Rouen surrendered, and Normandy was lost to the English crown.

So far as it affected the English language, as in other respects as well, the loss of Normandy was wholly advantageous. King and nobles were now forced to look upon England as their first concern. Although England still retained large continental possessions, they were in the south of France and had never been so intimately connected by ties of language, blood, and property interests as had Normandy. It gradually became apparent that the island kingdom had its own political and economic ends and that these were not the same as those of France. England was on the way to becoming not merely a geographical term but once more a nation.

95. Separation of the French and English Nobility.

One of the important consequences of the event just described was that it brought to a head the question of whether many of the nobility owed their allegiance to England or to France. After the Norman Conquest a large number held lands in both countries. A kind of interlocking aristocracy existed, so that it might be difficult for some of the English nobility to say whether they belonged more to England or to the continent. Some steps toward a separation of their interests had been taken from time to time. The example of the Conqueror, who left Normandy to his son Robert and England to William Rufus, was occasionally followed by his companions. The Norman and English estates of William Fitz Osbern were divided in this way at his death in 1071, and of Roger de Montgomery in 1094, though the latter were afterwards reunited.¹ On several occasions Henry I confiscated the English estates of unruly Norman barons. But in 1204 the process of separation was greatly accelerated, for by a decree of 1204–1205 the king of France announced that he had confiscated the lands of several great barons, including the earls of Warenne, Arundel, Leicester, and Clare, and of all those knights who had their abode in England.² For the most part the families that had estates on both sides of the Channel were compelled to give up one or the other. Sometimes they divided into branches and made separate terms; in other cases great nobles preferred their larger holdings in England and gave up their Norman lands.³ John's efforts at retaliation came to the same

¹ For other instances see F.M.Powicke, *The Loss of Normandy* (Manchester, 1913), p. 482.

² Powicke, pp. 403, 415.

³ Stubbs, *Constitutional History of England*, I, 557; J.R.Strayer, *The Administration of Normandy under Saint Louis* (Cambridge, MA, 1932), p. 7.

effect. It is true that the separation was by no means complete. In one way or another some nobles succeeded in retaining their positions in both countries. But double allegiance was generally felt to be awkward,⁴ and the voluntary division of estates went on. The action of Simon de Montfort in 1229 must have had many parallels. "My brother Amaury," he says, "released to me our brother's whole inheritance in England, provided that I could secure it; in return I released to him what I had in France."⁵ The course of the separation may be said to culminate in an incident of 1244, which may best be told in the words of a contemporary chronicler:

In the course of those days, the king of France having convoked, at Paris, all the people across the water who had possessions in England thus addressed them: "As it is impossible that any man living in my kingdom, and having possessions in England, can competently serve two masters, he must either inseparably attach himself to me or to the king of England." Wherefore those who had possessions and revenues in England were to relinquish them and keep those which they had in France, and *vice versa*. Which, when it came to the knowledge of the king of England, he ordered that all people of the French nation, and especially Normans, who had possessions in England, should be disseized of them. Whence it appeared to the king of France that the king of England had broken the treaties concluded between them, because he had not, as the king of France had done, given the option to those who were to lose their lands in one or other of the two kingdoms, so that they might themselves choose which kingdom they would remain in. But as he was much weakened in body since his return from Poitou, he did not wish to renew the war, and preferred to keep silence; he even sought to repress the impetuous complaints of the Normans, as well as the furious and greedy desire that they manifested to rise against the king of England.⁶

The action of Louis was no doubt a consequence of the assistance Henry III attempted to give to the Count de la Marche and other rebellious French nobles in 1243, and although Matthew Paris is our only authority for it, there is no reason to doubt its authenticity. We may perhaps doubt whether these decrees were any more rigidly enforced than previous orders of a similar sort had been, but the cumulative effect of the various causes

⁴ Confiscations continued, as in 1217 and 1224. Cf. Kate Norgate, *The Minority of Henry III* (London, 1912), pp. 77, 220–21.

⁵ Charles Bémont, *Simon de Montfort* (Oxford, 1930), p. 4.

⁶ Matthew Paris, *Chronica Majora*, trans. J.A.Giles, I, 481–82. Although Matthew Paris puts this action of Louis IX and Henry III under the year 1244, it is possible that it belongs to the previous year. As early as July 1243, Henry ordered inquiry to be made to determine what magnates of England had stood with the king of France in the last war (*Cal. Close Rolls, 1242–47*, p. 69), and on January 24, 1244, he granted to his son Edward "a moiety of all the lands which the king has ordered to be taken into his hands and which belonged to men of the fealty of the king of France, and those holding of him" (*Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1232–47*, p. 418).

described was to make the problem of double allegiance henceforth negligible. We may be sure that after 1250 there was no reason for the nobility of England to consider itself anything but English. The most valid reason for its use of French was gone.

96. French Reinforcements.

At the very time when the Norman nobility was losing its continental connections and had been led to identify itself wholly with England, the country experienced a fresh invasion of foreigners, this time mostly from the south of France. The invasion began in the reign of King John, whose wife, mentioned above, was from the neighborhood of Poitou. A Poitevin clerk, Peter des Roches, was made bishop of Winchester, and rose to be chancellor and later justiciar of England. He is only the most important among a considerable number of foreign adventurers who attracted John's attention and won his favor. But what began as a mere infiltration in the time of John became a flood in that of his son. Henry III, in spite of his devotion to English saints, was wholly French in his tastes and connections. Not only was he French on his mother's side, but he was related through his wife to the French king, St. Louis. How intimate were the relations between the royal families of France and England at this time may be seen from the fact that Henry III, his brother Richard of Cornwall, Louis IX, and Louis' brother Charles of Anjou were married to the four daughters of the count of Provence. As a result of Henry's French connections three great inundations of foreigners poured into England during his reign. The first occurred in the year 1233, during the rule of Peter des Roches, a vivid picture of which is given by a contemporary: "The seventeenth year of King Henry's reign he held his court at Christmas at Worcester, where, by the advice of Peter bishop of Winchester, as was said, he dismissed all the native officers of his court from their offices, and appointed foreigners from Poitou in their places.... All his former counsellors, bishops and earls, barons and other nobles, he dismissed abruptly, and put confidence in no one except the aforesaid bishop of Winchester and his son Peter de Rivaulx; after which he ejected all the castellans throughout all England, and placed the castles under the charge of the said Peter.... The king also invited men from Poitou and Brittany, who were poor and covetous after wealth, and about two thousand knights and soldiers came to him equipped with horses and arms, whom he engaged in his service, placing them in charge of the castles in the various parts of the kingdom; these men used their utmost endeavors to oppress the natural English subjects and nobles, calling them traitors, and accusing them of treachery to the king; and he, simple man that he was, believed their lies, and gave them the charge of all the counties and baronies."⁷ The king, the same chronicler adds, "invited such legions of people from Poitou that they entirely filled England, and wherever the king went he was surrounded by crowds of these foreigners; and nothing was done in England except what the bishop of Winchester and his host of foreigners determined on."⁸

⁷ Roger of Wendover, trans. J.A.Giles, II, 565–66.

⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 567–68.

In 1236 Henry's marriage to Eleanor of Provence brought a second stream of foreigners to England. The new queen inherited among other blessings eight maternal uncles and a generous number of more distant relatives. Many of them came to England and were richly provided for. Matthew Paris writes, under the following year, "Our English king...has fattened all the kindred and relatives of his wife with lands, possessions, and money, and has contracted such a marriage that he cannot be more enriched, but rather impoverished."⁹ One of the queen's uncles, Peter of Savoy, was given the earldom of Richmond; another, Boniface, was made archbishop of Canterbury. Peter was further empowered by letters-patent to enlist in Henry's services as many foreigners as he saw fit.¹⁰ The Provençals who thus came to England as a consequence of Henry's marriage were followed ten years later, upon the death of his mother, by a third foreign influx, this one, like the first, from Poitou. Upon the death of King John, Henry's mother had married her first love and borne him five sons. Henry now enriched his Poitevin half-brothers and their followers and married their daughters to English nobles. To one he gave the castle of Hertford and a rich wife. Another he made bishop of Winchester, "notwithstanding his youth, his ignorance of learning, and his utter incapacity for such a high station."¹¹ Of a third the same chronicler says that when he left England "the king filled his saddle bags with such a weight of money that he was obliged to increase the number of his horses."¹² Meanwhile marriages with the strangers were promoted by both the king and the queen,¹³ Henry's own brother, Richard, earl of Cornwall, for example, being married to the queen's sister. Everywhere ecclesiastical dignities were given to strangers, sometimes to reward favorites, sometimes to please the pope. The great bishop Grosseteste, who lived at this time, made an estimate of all the revenues of foreigners in England and found that the income of foreign ecclesiastics alone was three times that of the king. In short, in the course of Henry III's long reign (1216–1272), the country was eaten up by strangers. Even London, says Matthew Paris, whom we have so often quoted, "was full to overflowing, not only of Poitevins, Romans,

⁹ *Chronica Majora*, trans. Giles, I, 122.

¹⁰ O.H. Richardson, *The National Movement in the Reign of Henry III* (New York, 1897), p.75.

¹¹ Matthew Paris, II, 433.

¹² *Ibid.*, II, 247. For the extent to which these foreigners were enriched, see Harold S. Snellgrove, *The Lusignans in England, 1247–1258* (Albuquerque, 1950; Univ. of New Mexico Pub. in History, No. 2).

¹³ Nothing can equal the impression that would be gained of this period by reading a hundred pages of Matthew Paris. Perhaps a few quotations will help to complete the picture: "My dear earl, I will no longer conceal from you the secret desire of my heart, which is, to raise and enrich you, and to advance your interests, by marrying your eldest legitimate son to the daughter of Guy, count of Angouleme, my uterine brother" (III, 15). "At the instigation of the queen, Baldwin de Rivers married a foreign lady, a Savoyard, and a relation of the queen's. The county of Devon belonged to this Baldwin, and thus the noble possessions and heritages of the English daily devolved to foreigners" (III, 219). "At the beginning of the month of May [1247],...two ladies of Provence were, by the forethought and arrangement of Peter of Savoy, married to two noble youths, namely, Edmund earl of Lincoln, and Richard de Bourg, whom the king had for some years brought up in his palace. At this marriage the sounds of great discontent and anger were wafted through the kingdom, because, as they said, these females, although unknown, were united to the nobles against their wills" (II, 230). "In the same year, on the 13th of August, by the wish and proposal of the king, Johanna, the daughter of Warin de Munchesnil, was married to William de Valence, the king's uterine brother; for, the eldest son and heir of the said Warin being dead, a very rich inheritance awaited this daughter Johanna, who was the only daughter left" (II, 230).

and Provengals, but also of Spaniards, who did great injury to the English.”¹⁴

97. The Reaction against Foreigners and the Growth of National Feeling.

The excesses of Henry III in his reckless bestowal of favor upon foreigners were not so completely unfavorable to the English language as might be supposed. A reaction was bound to follow. Even the milder tendencies of John toward the favoring of aliens led the patriotic chancellor, Hubert de Burgh, during the minority of John's son, to adopt a vigorous policy of “England for the English.” When Henry came of age and under the rule of Peter des Roches the first great inpouring of Poitevins occurred, the antagonism aroused was immediate. At a council held at Winchester in 1234 a number of the bishops told the king: “Lord king,...the counsel which you now receive and act upon, namely, that of Peter bishop of Winchester, and Peter de Rivaulx, is not wise or safe, but...cruel and dangerous to yourselves and to the whole kingdom. In the first place, they hate the English people...; they estrange your affections from your people, and those of your people from you...; they hold your castles and the strength of your dominions in their own hands, as though you could not place confidence in your own people;...they have your treasury, and all the chief trusts and escheats under their own control;... [and] by the same counsel all the natural subjects of your kingdom have been dismissed from your court.”¹⁵ Upon the threat of excommunication the king yielded and dismissed the foreigners from office. But they were soon back, and popular feeling grew steadily more bitter. As Matthew Paris wrote, “At this time (1251), the king day by day lost the affections of his natural subjects.” The following year the great reforming bishop, Grosseteste, expressed the feeling of native churchmen when he said: “The church is being worn out by constant oppressions; the pious purposes of its early benefactors are being brought to naught by the confiscation of its ample patrimony to the uses of aliens, while the native English suffer. These aliens are not merely foreigners; they are the worst enemies of England. They strive to tear the fleece and do not even know the faces of the sheep; they do not understand the English tongue, neglect the cure of souls, and impoverish the kingdom.”¹⁶ Opposition to the foreigner became the principal ground for such national feeling as existed and drove the barons and the middle class together in a common cause. It is significant that the leader of this coalition, Simon de Montfort, was Norman-born, though he claimed his inheritance in England by right of his grandmother. The practical outcome of the opposition was the Provisions of Oxford (1258) and their aftermath, the Barons' War (1258–1265). Twice during these years the foreigners were driven from England, and when peace was finally restored and a little later Edward I (1272–1307) came to the throne we enter upon a period in which England becomes conscious of its unity, when

¹⁴ III, 151.

¹⁵ Roger of Wendover, II, 583–84.

¹⁶ Quoted by Richardson, *National Movement* (New York, 1897), pp. 32–33.

the governmental officials are for the most part English, and when the king, in a summons to Parliament (1295), can attempt to stir up the feelings of his subjects against the king of France by claiming that it was "his detestable purpose, which God forbid, to wipe out the English tongue."

The effect of the foreign incursions in the thirteenth century was undoubtedly to delay somewhat the natural spread of the use of English by the upper classes that had begun. But it was also to arouse such widespread hostility to foreigners as greatly to stimulate the consciousness of the difference between those who for a generation or several generations had so participated in English affairs as to consider themselves Englishmen, and to cause them to unite against the newcomers who had flocked to England to bask in the sun of Henry's favor. One of the reproaches frequently leveled at the latter is that they did not know English. It would be natural if some knowledge of English should come to be regarded as a proper mark of an Englishman.

98. French Cultural Ascendancy in Europe.

The stimulus given to the use of French in England by foreign additions to the upper class coincides smoothly with another circumstance tending in the same direction. This was the wide popularity that the French language enjoyed all over civilized Europe in the thirteenth century. At this time France was commonly regarded as representing chivalrous society in its most polished form, and the French language was an object of cultivation at most of the other courts of Europe, just as it was in the eighteenth century. Adenet le Roi tells us in one of his romances that all the great lords in Germany had French teachers for their children.¹⁷ Brunetto Latini, the master of Dante, in explaining why he wrote his great encyclopedia, *Li Tresor* (c. 1265), in French, says: "And if anyone should ask why this book is written in Romance, according to the language of the French, seeing that I am Italian, I should say that it is for two reasons: one, because I am now in France, and the other because that speech is the most delectable and the most common to all people." At about the same time another Italian, Martino da Canale, translated "the ancient history of the Venetians from Latin into French" "because the French language is current throughout the world and is the most delightful to read and to hear." Similar testimony

(*Berte aus Grans Piés*, 148 ff.)

¹⁷ Avoit une coustume ens el tiois pays
Que tout li grant seignor, li conte et li marchis
Avoient entour aus gent françoise tousdis
Pour aprendre françoise lor filles et lor fis;
Li rois et la roïne et Berte o le cler vis
Sorent près d'aussi bien la françois de Paris
Com se il fussent né au bourc à Saint Denis.

comes from Norway and Spain, even Jerusalem and the East¹⁸ The prestige of French civilization, a heritage to some extent from the glorious tradition of Charlemagne, carried abroad by the greatest of medieval literatures, by the fame of the University of Paris, and perhaps to some extent by the enterprise of the Normans themselves, would have constituted in itself a strong reason for the continued use of French among polite circles in England.

99. English and French in the Thirteenth Century.

The thirteenth century must be viewed as a period of shifting emphasis upon the two languages spoken in England. The upper classes continued for the most part to speak French, as they had done in the previous century, but the reasons for doing so were not the same. Instead of being a mother tongue inherited from Norman ancestors, French became, as the century wore on, a cultivated tongue supported by social custom and by business and administrative convention. Meanwhile English made steady advances. A number of considerations make it clear that by the middle of the century, when the separation of the English nobles from their interests in France had been about completed, English was becoming a matter of general use among the upper classes. It is at this time, as we shall see, that the adoption of French words into the English language assumes large proportions. The transference of words occurs when those who know French and have been accustomed to use it try to express themselves in English. It is at this time also that the literature intended for polite circles begins to be made over from French into English (see § 110). There is evidence that by the close of the century some children of the nobility spoke English as their mother tongue and had to be taught French through the medium of manuals equipped with English glosses.

There is no need to heap up evidence of the continued use of French by the upper class in this century. Even at the close of the century it was used in Parliament¹⁹ in the law courts, in public negotiations generally.²⁰ Treatises on

¹⁸ Cf. Nyrop, *Grammaire historique de la langue française*, I, 30; Brunot, *Histoire de la langue française*, I, 358–a99. Writers still speak of the wide popularity of French at a much later date. Christine de Pisan at the beginning of the fifteenth century calls it “la plus commune par l’universel monde” (*Le Livre des Trois Vertus*, quoted in R. Thomassy, *Essai sur les écrits politiques de Christine de Pisan* (Paris, 1838), pp. lxxxi–lxxxii) and cf. the anonymous author of *La Manière de langage* (1396), ed. P. Meyer, *Rev. Critique*, 10 (1870), 373–408.

¹⁹ In the reign of Edward I the archbishop of Canterbury presented to the king and the leaders of the army a Latin letter from the pope and explained its contents in French (Matthew of West-minster, trans. C.D.Young, II, 546). The petitions to Parliament at this time are mostly in French, and sometimes the statutes themselves, though these were commonly drawn up in Latin (*Statutes of the Realm*, I, xl, and R.L.Atkinson, “Interim Report on Ancient Petitions,” typed transcript bound in the copy of *Lists and Indexes*, no. 1, in the Literary Search Room of the Public Record Office).

²⁰ As when Edward I was called in (1291) to settle the dispute concerning the Scottish succession (Rymer, *Foedera*, II, 553).

husbandry that have come down to us from this time are all in French. All of them²¹ seem intended for the owners of estates, except possibly *Seneschaucie*, which is on the duties of the seneschal. French was read by the educated, including those who could not read Latin.²² That the ability was on the decline is suggested by the action of a chronicler at the end of the century who, after citing a petition to Parliament “written in the French language in conformity with the usual custom,” translates it into Latin in order that it “may be more easily understood by those of posterity who may not be so well versed in the above language.”²³

That the knowledge of French, even of those who attempted to use it in this period, was sometimes imperfect is quite clear. One author of a French poem says he hardly knows how to write the language because he was never in Paris or at the abbey of St. Denis.²⁴ The most interesting evidence, however, is to be found in the bills or petitions presented to the justices in eyre at the close of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth centuries by those seeking redress at the law. Custom required these bills to be in French. They are obviously not written by lawyers or by the complainants themselves, but by professional scribes or possibly the parish priest. As the editor of a volume of such petitions²⁵ says, “The text of the bills makes it plain that the draftsmen were struggling with the forms of a language that was far from being a living tongue with them,” and he offers good reason for believing “that they neither spoke French nor were accustomed to hear it spoken in their own neighborhood.” Furthermore, declension and conjugation are often incorrect or peculiar, and the writers make the most obvious mistakes in gender, such as using *la* before a man’s name and *le* before a woman’s (“*le* avant dit Aliz”). Yet,

²¹ Four are edited by E. Lamond, *Walter of Henley’s Husbandry* (London, 1890). One was supposedly written by Bishop Grosseteste in 1240–1241 for the countess of Lincoln. Walter of Henley’s treatise exists in an English version that is attributed in the manuscripts to Grosseteste. If we could trust the attribution, it would constitute evidence that some of the landowners at this time preferred to read English. But the translation belongs probably to a later date.

²² A French poem on the calendar is addressed to “*simpli gent lettre*,” that is, those who could read, while Grosseteste’s *Château d’Amour* was “*por ceus ki ne se vent mie ne lettrure ne clergie*,” that is, those who could neither read at all nor understand Latin, but could understand French when it was read to them.

²³ Continuation of Pseudo-Ingulph, *Ingulph’s Chronicle*, trans. H. T. Riley, p. 330.

²⁴ *Je ne sai guers romanz faire...*

Car jeo ne fu unques a Parye

Ne al abbaye de saint Denys.

(*Antikrist*, latter part of the thirteenth century, cited by Vising, *Franska Språket i England*, III, 9.)

²⁵ W. C. Bolland, *Select Bills in Eyre, A.D. 1292–1333* (London, 1914), pp. xix–xx, xxx–xxxi (Selden Soc.).

singularly enough, the handwriting of some of the worst is excellent and seems clearly to point to an educated person.²⁶

The spread of English among the upper classes was making steady progress. References to a knowledge of the language on the part of members of this class are now seldom found, especially in the latter part of the century, probably because it had become general. We do not know whether Henry III understood English, though he probably did. His brother, Richard, earl of Cornwall, who was elected emperor of Germany in 1257, certainly did, for Matthew Paris tells us that he was chosen partly "on account of his speaking the English language, which is similar in sound to the German."²⁷ Henry's son, Edward I, notwithstanding his Provencal mother, spoke English readily, perhaps even habitually.²⁸ While the references to the language are not numerous, they are suggestive. Here a bishop preaches in it;²⁹ there a judge quotes it,³⁰ monks joke in it;³¹ friars use it to explain to the people of Worcester a legal victory.³² A royal proclamation is issued in it.³³

The clearest indication of the extent to which the English language had risen in the social scale by the middle of the thirteenth century is furnished by a little treatise written by Walter of Bibbesworth to teach children French—how to speak and how to reply, "Which every gentleman ought to know." French is treated as a foreign language, and the child is taken on a very practical course through life, learning the names of the parts of the body, the articles of its

²⁶ William Rothwell summarizes the situation well: "The true role of French in thirteenth-century England was not at all that of a vernacular, except possibly in the case of the king's immediate entourage." Also, "French as a vernacular was declining steadily before the twelfth century gave way to the thirteenth, but as a language of culture and administration it prospered all through the thirteenth century and even beyond," in "The Role of French in Thirteenth-Century England," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 58 (1975-76), 455, 462.

²⁷ *Chronica Majora*, trans. Riley, III, 209.

²⁸ Cf. an incident in Walter of Hemingburgh, I, 337 (Eng. Hist. Soc.); Freeman, V, 533.

²⁹ Grosseteste (cf. Stevenson, *Robert Grosseteste*, p. 32).

³⁰ W.C. Bolland, *The Year Books* (Cambridge, 1921), p. 76.

³¹ Giraldus Cambrensis, *Opera*, IV, 209 (Rolls Series).

³² Annals of Worcester, *Annales Monastici*, IV, 504 (Rolls Series).

³³ The agreement reached by the barons and the king in 1258 and known as the Provisions of Oxford was made public by a proclamation that bound everyone in England to the acceptance of it. The proclamation, issued by the king October 18, 1258, was in French and English and was directed "To alle hise holde ilaerde and ileawede" (to all his faithful subjects, learned and lay) in every county. It is the first proclamation to be issued in English since the Norman Conquest, and, although the only one for a good while, is very likely the result of Simon de Montfort's desire to reach the people of the middle class, the lesser barons, and the inhabitants of the towns. For the text of the proclamation, as entered on the Patent Roll, see A.J. Ellis, "On the Only English Proclamation of Henry III," *Trans. Philol. Soc.* (1868), pp. 1-135. The actual copy sent to the sheriff of Oxford was later found and published by W.W. Skeat, "The Oxford MS. of the Only English Proclamation of Henry III," *ibid.* (1880-1881), Appendix VI. A facsimile of this copy is given in Octavus Ogle, *Royal Letters Addressed to Oxford* (Oxford, 1892).

clothing, food, household utensils and operations, meals, and the like, together with terms of falconry and the chase and other polite accomplishments. The important words are provided with an interlinear English gloss. The person for whom the little manual was prepared was Dionysia, the daughter of William de Munchensy. The latter was among the leaders of the barons in the battle of Lewes and was related, through his sister's marriage, to the half-brother of King Henry III. Dionysia herself was later married to one of the sons of the earl of Oxford. She thus belonged to the upper circle of the nobility, and it is therefore highly significant that the language she knew, and through which she acquired French, was English. Since the treatise was certainly written in the thirteenth century (not later than 1250) and the number of manuscripts that have come down to us shows that it had much wider circulation than in just the family for which it was originally written, we may feel quite sure that the mother tongue of the children of the nobility in the year 1300 was, in many cases, English.³⁴

Finally, it is interesting to note the appearance at this time of an attitude that becomes more noticeable later, the attitude that the proper language for Englishmen to know and use is English. In the *Cursor Mundi*, an encyclopedic poem on biblical subjects, written shortly before or shortly after the year 1300, we may detect a mild but nonetheless clear protest against the use of French and a patriotic espousal of English:

Pis ilk bok es translate
 Into Inglis tong to rede
 For the love of Inglis lede,³⁵
 Inglis lede of England,
 For the commun at³⁶ understand.
 Frankis rimes here I redd
 Comunlik in ilka sted;³⁷
 Mast³⁸ es it wroght for Frankis man,
 Quat³⁹ is for him na Frankis can?
 In Inghland the nacion,
 Es Inglis man þar in commun;
 Pe speche þat man wit mast may spede;
 Mast þarwit to speke war nede.

³⁴ The treatise has been edited by William Rothwell, *Walter de Bibbesworth: Le Tretiz* (London, 1990). On the date see Baugh, "The Date of Walter of Bibbesworth's *Traité*," *Festschrift für Walther Fischer* (Heidelberg, 1959), pp. 21–33.

³⁵ people

³⁶ to

³⁷ each place

³⁸ most

³⁹ what

Selden was for ani chance
 Praised Inglis tong in France;
 Give we ilkan⁴⁰ þare langage,
 Me think we do þam non outrage.
 To laud⁴¹ and Inglis man I spell
 Pat understandes þat I tell...

(*Cursor Mundi*, Prologue, II. 232–50)

The Provisions of Oxford, mentioned above, were in Latin, French, and English. Latin was naturally the language of record. It is certain that the document was sent in English to the sheriffs of every county to be publicized. Whether it was also sent in French is not known but seems likely. At all events, fourteen years before (1244), the *Annals of Burton* record a letter from the dean of Lincoln asking the bishop of Lichfield to proclaim a directive from the pope excommunicating those who broke the provisions of Magna Carta, the pronouncement to be *in lingua Anglicana et Gallicana*.⁴² In 1295 a document was read before the county court at Chelmsford, Essex, and explained *in gallico et anglico*,⁴³ but this may represent no more than the survival of a custom of making important announcements in both languages. We may sum up the situation by saying that in the latter part of the thirteenth century English was widely known among all classes of people, though not necessarily by everyone.

100. Attempts to Arrest the Decline of French.

At the close of the thirteenth century and especially in the course of the next we see clear indications that the French language was losing its hold on England in the measures adopted to keep it in use. The tendency to speak English was becoming constantly stronger even in those two most conservative institutions, the church and the universities. Already in the last decades of the thirteenth century the great Benedictine monasteries of Canterbury and Westminster adopted regulations forbidding the novices to use English in school or cloister and requiring all conversation to be in French.⁴⁴ Similar regulations were found necessary at the universities. A fourteenth-century statute of Oxford required the students to construe and translate in both English and French "lest the French language be entirely disused."⁴⁵ Supplementary ordinances drawn up for Exeter College

⁴⁰ each one

⁴¹ ignorant, lay

⁴² *Annales Monastici*, I, 322 (Rolls Series).

⁴³ W.A.Morris, *The Early English County Court* (Berkeley, 1926), p. 173.

⁴⁴ *Customary of the Benedictine Monasteries of Saint Augustine, Canterbury, and Saint Peter, Westminster*, ed. E.H.Thompson, Henry Bradshaw Soc., XXIII, 210; XXVIII, 164.

⁴⁵ *Munimenta Academica*, II, 438 (Rolls Series).

by Bishop Stapleton in 1322 and 1325, and the foundation statutes of Oriel (1326) and Queen's (1340), required that the conversation of the students be in Latin or in French. As early as 1284 at Merton, Archbishop Peckham found that Latin was not spoken, as the rules required. Some time later conditions at this fine old college were clearly in a bad way; the Fellows talked English at table and wore "dishonest shoes."⁴⁶ Among the Cambridge colleges Peterhouse had a similar rule. Students were expected to speak Latin except that they might use French "for a just or reasonable cause...but very rarely English."⁴⁷ The primary purpose of these regulations was of course to insure an easy command of the Latin language, but it is evident that without them the language that would have been spoken, if not Latin, would have been English. According to Froissart, a further effort to keep the French language from going out of use was made by parliament in 1332, which decreed "that all lords, barons, knights, and honest men of good towns should exercise care and diligence to teach their children the French language in order that they might be more able and better equipped in their wards."⁴⁸ Such efforts as these indicate how artificial was the use of French in England by the fourteenth century.

If further evidence were needed it would be found in the appearance of numerous manuals for learning French. As early as 1250 we find a short Latin treatise on the French verb. Walter of Bibbesworth's *Traité* of about the same date has already been mentioned. In succeeding years there are several adaptations of it, fuller in treatment and with more attention to pronunciation. They form an unbroken series from that time down to our own textbooks of the present day, and in them all French is treated frankly as a foreign language.⁴⁹ These works have traditionally been understood as books for children, but it is possible that they functioned more as manuals for adults, both for the adults' own use and for instructing children. If so, the need for help in French extended at least a generation further back.⁵⁰

101. Provincial Character of French in England.

One factor against the continued use of French in England was the circumstance that Anglo-French was not "good" French. In the Middle Ages there were four principal dialects of French spoken in France: Norman, Picard (in the northeast), Burgundian (in the east), and the Central French of Paris (the Ile-de-France). At the date of the Norman Conquest and for some time after, each enjoyed a certain local prestige,⁵¹

⁴⁶ C.E.Mallet, *A History of the University of Oxford* (3 vols., London, 1924–1927), I, 118.

⁴⁷ *Documents Relating to the University and Colleges of Cambridge* (1852), II, 31.

⁴⁸ *Œuvres de Froissart*, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, II, 419.

⁴⁹ A full account of these books is given in K.Lambley, *The Teaching and Cultivation of the French Language in England* (Manchester, 1920), and G.T.Clapton and W.Stewart, *Les Études françaises dans l'enseignement en Grande-Bretagne* (Paris, 1929).

⁵⁰ See William Rothwell, "The Teaching of French in Medieval England," *Mod. Lang. Rev.*, 63 (1968), 37–46.

⁵¹ Roger Bacon notes the four dialects and says: "A fitting and intelligible expression in the dialect of the Picards is out of place among the Burgundians, nay, among their nearer Gallic neighbors." *The Opus Majus of Roger Bacon*, trans. R.B.Burke (Philadelphia, 1928), I, 75.

but with the rapid rise of the Capetian power in the thirteenth century the linguistic supremacy of Paris followed upon its political ascendancy. The French introduced into England was possibly a mixture of various northern dialectal features, but with Norman predominating, and under the influence of English linguistic tendencies, it gradually developed into something quite different from any of the continental dialects. The difference was noticed quite early,⁵² and before long the French of England drew a smile from continental speakers. It was the subject of humorous treatment in literature,⁵³ and English writers became apologetic. One poet says, "A false French of England I know, for I have not been elsewhere to acquire it; but you who have learned it elsewhere, amend it where there is need."⁵⁴ The more ambitious sent their children to France to have the "barbarity" taken off their speech.⁵⁵ But the situation did not mend. Everybody is familiar with the gentle fun that Chaucer makes of the Prioress:

And Frensh she spak ful faire and fetisly,
After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,
For Frensh of Paris was to hir unknowe.

One might well feel some hesitancy about speaking a language of which one had to be slightly ashamed.

102. The Hundred Years' War.

In the course of the centuries following the Norman Conquest the connection of England with the continent, as we have seen, had been broken. It was succeeded by a conflict of interests and a growing feeling of antagonism that culminated in a long period of open hostility with France (1337–1453). The causes of this struggle are too complex to be entered into here, but the active interference of France in England's efforts to control Scotland led Edward III finally to put forth a claim to the French throne and to invade France. The great victories of the English at Crécy (1346) and Poitiers (1356) fanned English patriotism to a white heat, though this auspicious beginning of the struggle was followed by a depressing period of reverses and though the contest was interrupted by long periods of truce. In the reign of Henry V England again enjoyed a brief period of success, notably in the victory against great odds at Agincourt (1415). But the success did not

⁵² Walter Map says that "if one is faulty in his use of this tongue, we say that he speaketh French of Marlborough." *De Nugis Curialium*, V, vi (trans. Tupper and Ogle).

⁵³ H. Albert, *Mittelalterlicher Englisch-französischer Jargon* (Halle, Germany, 1922).

⁵⁴ A life of Edward the Confessor in Anglo-French verse of the latter part of the thirteenth century; cf. A.T.Baker in *Mod. Lang. Rev.*, 3 (1907–1908), 374–75. William of Wadington makes a similar excuse: "No one ought to blame me for the French or the verse, for I was born in England and nourished and brought up there." So too does Gower (Vising, *Franska Språket i England*, III, 9).

⁵⁵ Gervase of Tilbury, *Otia Imperialia* (1212), chap. 20, ed. G.G.Leibnitz, *Scriptores Rerum Brunsvicensium* (Hanover, Germany, 1707), I, 945.

continue after the young king's death, and the exploits of Joan of Arc (1429) marked the beginning of the end. Although this protracted war again turned people's attention to the continent, and the various expeditions might have tended to keep the French language in use, it seems to have had no such effect, but rather the opposite. Probably the intervals between the periods of actual fighting were too long and the hindrances to trade and other intercourse too discouraging. The feeling that remained uppermost in the minds of most people was one of animosity, coupled with a sense of the inevitability of renewed hostilities. During all this time it was impossible to forget that French was the language of an enemy country, and the Hundred Years' War is probably to be reckoned as one of the causes contributing to the disuse of French.

103. The Rise of the Middle Class.

A feature of some importance in helping English to recover its former prestige is the improvement in the condition of the mass of the people and the rise of a substantial middle class. As we have seen, the importance of a language is largely determined by the importance of the people who speak it. During the latter part of the Middle English period the condition of the laboring classes was rapidly improving. Among the rural population villeinage was dying out. Fixed money payments were gradually substituted for the days' work due the lord of the manor, and the status of the villein more nearly resembled that of the free tenants. The latter class was itself increasing; there was more incentive to individual effort and more opportunity for a person to reap the rewards of enterprise. The process by which these changes were being brought about was greatly accelerated by an event that occurred in the year 1349.

In the summer of 1348 there appeared in the southwest of England the first cases of a disease that in its contagiousness and fatality exceeded anything previously known. It spread rapidly over the rest of the country, reaching its height in 1349 but continuing in the north into the early months of 1350. The illness, once contracted, ran a very rapid course. In two or three days the victims either died or showed signs of recovery. Generally they died. Immunity was slight, and in the absence of any system of quarantine the disease spread unimpeded through a community. The mortality was unbelievably high, though it has often been exaggerated. We can no more believe the statement that scarcely one-tenth of the people were left alive than we can the assertion of the same chronicler that all those born after the pestilence had two "cheek-teeth in their head less than they had afore." Careful modern studies based on the data contained in episcopal registers show that 40 percent of the parish clergy died of the plague, and while this is apparently higher than for the population at large, the death rate during the plague approximated 30 percent. It is quite sufficient to justify the name "The Black Death."

The effects of so great a calamity were naturally serious, and in one direction at least are fully demonstrable. As in most epidemics, the rich suffered less than the poor. The poor could not shut themselves up in their castles or retreat to a secluded manor. The mortality was accordingly greatest among the lower social orders, and the result was a serious shortage of labor. This is evident in the immediate rise in wages, a rise which the Statute of Laborers was insufficient to control or prevent. Nor was this result merely temporary if we may judge from the thirteen reenactments of the statute in the course of

the next hundred years. Villeins frequently made their escape, and many cotters left the land in search of the high wages commanded by independent workers. Those who were left behind felt more acutely the burden of their condition, and a general spirit of discontent arose, which culminated in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. By and large, the effect of the Black Death was to increase the economic importance of the laboring class and with it the importance of the English language which they spoke.⁵⁶

We may also note at this time the rise of another important group—the craftsmen and the merchant class. By 1250 there had grown up in England about two hundred towns with populations of from 1,000 to 5,000; some, like London or York, were larger. These towns became free, self-governing communities, electing their own officers, assessing taxes in their own way, collecting them and paying them to the king in a lump sum, trying their own cases, and regulating their commercial affairs as they saw fit. The townsfolk were engaged for the most part in trade or in the manufacturing crafts and banded together into commercial fraternities or guilds for their mutual protection and advantage. In such an environment there arose in each town an independent, sometimes a wealthy and powerful class, standing halfway between the rural peasant and the hereditary aristocracy.

Such changes in the social and economic life benefited particularly the English-speaking part of the population, and enable us better to understand the final triumph of English in the century in which these changes largely occur.

104. General Adoption of English in the Fourteenth Century.

At the beginning of the fourteenth century English was once more known by everyone. The most conclusive evidence of this is the direct testimony of contemporaries. So much of the polite literature of England until a generation or two

⁵⁶ As a result of the plague English must also have made its way more rapidly in the monasteries, as we know it did in the schools, and probably elsewhere. Forty-seven monks and the abbot died at St. Albans in 1349. Their places were filled by men who often knew no other language than English. We may judge of the situation from the words of the chronicler Knighton: "But, within a short time, a very great multitude of men whose wives had died of the pestilence flocked to Holy Orders, of whom many were illiterate and almost sheer lay folk, except in so far as they could read, though not understand."

before had been in French that writers seemed to feel called upon to justify their use of English. Accordingly they frequently begin with a prologue explaining their intention in the work that follows and incidentally make interesting observations on the linguistic situation. From a number of such statements we may select three quotations. The first is from a collection of metrical homilies written in the north of England about the year 1300:

Forthi wil I of my povert
Schau sum thing that Ik haf in hert,
On Ingelis tong that alle mav

Understand quat I wil say;
 For laued men havis mar mister
 Godes word for to her
 Than klerkes that thair mirour lokes,
 And sees hou thai sal lif on bokes.
 And bathe klerk and laued man
 Englis understand kan,
 That was born in Ingeland,
 And lang haves ben thar in wonand,
 Bot al men can noht, I-wis,
 Understand Latin and Frankis.
 Forthi me think almous it isse
 To wirke sum god thing on Inglisse,
 That mai ken lered and laued bathe.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ North English Homily Cycle, ed. John Small, *English Metrical Homilies from Manuscripts of the Fourteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1862), pp. 3–4:

Therefore will I of my poverty
 Show something that I have in heart
 In English tongue that all may
 Understand what I will say;
 For laymen have more need
 God's word for to hear
 Than clerks that look in their *Mirror*
 And see in books how they shall live.
 And both clerk and layman
 Can understand English,
 Who were born in England
 And long have been dwelling therein,
 But all men certainly cannot
 Understand Latin and French.
 Therefore methinks it is alms (an act of charity)
 To work some good thing in English
 That both learned and lay may know.

The allusion to clerks that have their *Mirror* is probably a reference to the *Miroir*, or *Les Evangiles des Domees*, an Anglo-French poem by Robert of Gretham.

Here we are told that both learned and unlearned understand English. A still more circumstantial statement, serving to confirm the above testimony, is found in William of Nassyngton's *Speculum Vitae* or *Mirror of Life* (c. 1325):

In English tonge I schal **3ow** telle,
3if 3e wyth me so longe wil dwelle.
 No Latyn wil I speke no waste,
 But English, þat men vse mast,⁵⁸
Pat can eche man vnderstande,
Pat is born in Ingelande;
 For þat langage is most chewyd,⁵⁹
 Os wel among lered⁶⁰ os lewyd.⁶¹
 Latyn, as I trowe, can nane
 But þo, þat haueth it in scole tane,⁶²
 And somme can Frensche and no Latyn,
Pat vsed han⁶³ cowrt and dwellen þerein,
 And somme can of Latyn a party,
Pat can of Frensche but febly;
 And somme vnderstonde wel Englysch,
Pat can noþer Latyn nor Frankys.
 Boþe lered and lewed, olde and **3onge**,
 Alle vnderstonden english tonge.⁶⁴ (11, 61–78)

Here the writer acknowledges that some people who have lived at court know French, but he is quite specific in his statement that old and young, learned and unlearned, all understand the English tongue. Our third quotation, although the briefest, is perhaps the most interesting of all. It is from the opening lines of a romance called *Arthur and Merlin*, written not later than the year 1325 and probably in the opening years of the century:

⁵⁸ most

⁵⁹ showed, in evidence

⁶⁰ learned

⁶¹ unlearned, lay

⁶² taken, learned

⁶³ have

⁶⁴ *Englische Studien*, 7 (1884), 469.

⁶⁵ English people

Riȝt is, þat Inglische⁶⁵ Inglische⁶⁶ vnderstond,
 Þat was born in Inglond;
 Freynsche vse þis gentilman,

Ac euerich⁶⁷ Inglische can.⁶⁸
 Mani noble ich haue yseize⁶⁹
 Þat no Freynsche couþe⁷⁰ seye.⁷¹

The special feature of this passage is not the author's statement that everybody knows English, which we have come to expect, but his additional assertion that at a time when gentlemen still "used" French he had seen many a noble who could not speak that language.

Although, as these quotations show, English was now understood by everyone, it does not follow that French was unknown or had entirely gone out of use. It still had some currency at the court although English had largely taken its place; we may be sure that the court that Chaucer knew spoke English even if its members commonly wrote and often read French. A dozen books owned by Richard II in 1385, most of them romances, seem from their titles to have been all French, though he spoke English fluently and Gower wrote the *Confessio Amantis* for him in English. Robert of Brunne, who wrote his *Chronicle* in 1338, implies that French is chiefly the language of two groups, the educated classes and the French.⁷² That in England French was the accomplishment mainly of the educated in the fourteenth century is implied by the words of Avarice in *Piers Plowman* (B-text, V, 239): "I lerned nevere rede on boke, And I can no Frenche in feith but of the ferthest ende of Norfolke." Among the learned we must include the legal profession and the church. French was the language of lawyers and of the law courts down to 1362. We may likewise believe that ecclesiastics could still commonly speak French. We are told that Hugh of Eversdone, the cellarer, who was elected abbot of St. Albans in 1308, knew English and French very well, though he was not so competent in Latin;⁷³ and an amusing story of the bishop of Durham who was consecrated in 1318

⁶⁶ English language

⁶⁷ everybody

⁶⁸ knows

⁶⁹ seen

⁷⁰ could

⁷¹ *Arthur and Merlin*, ed. E.Kölbing (Leipzig, 1890).

⁷² Frankis spech is cald Romance, So sais clerkes & men of France (Prol. to part II).

⁷³ Walsingham, *Gesta Abbatum*, II, 113–14 (Rolls Series).

attests his knowledge of French while revealing an even greater ignorance of the language of the service.⁷⁴ We have already seen that French was kept up as the language of conversation in the monasteries of St. Augustine at Canterbury and St. Peter at Westminster. It was so also at St. Mary's Abbey, York, as appears from the *Ordinal* drawn up in 1390, and was probably the case generally. Chaucer's prioress spoke French, though she told her tale to the Canterbury pilgrims in English, and the instructions from the abbot of St. Albans to the nuns of Sopwell in 1338 are in French.⁷⁵ But clerks of the younger generation in Langland's time seem to have been losing their command of the language.⁷⁶ Outside the professions, French seems to have been generally known to government officials and the more substantial burgesses in the towns. It was the language of parliament and local administration. The business of town councils and the guilds seems to have been ordinarily transacted in French, though there are scattered instances of the intrusion of English. French was very common at this time in letters and dispatches and local records, and was probably often written by people who did not habitually speak it. An anonymous chronicle of about 1381 is written in French, but, as the editor remarks, it is the French of a man who is obviously thinking in English;⁷⁷ and the poet Gower, who wrote easily in Latin, French, and English, protests that he knows little French.⁷⁸ In spite of Trevisa's statement (see § 106) about the efforts of "uplondish" men to learn French in order to liken themselves to gentlemen,⁷⁹ French can have had but little currency among the middle classes outside of the towns.⁸⁰ It is interesting to note that the chief disadvantage that Trevisa sees in the fact that children no longer learn French is that "it will be harm for them if they shall pass the sea and travel in strange lands," though his scholarly instincts led him to add "and in many other places."

⁷⁴ Although he had been carefully coached for his consecration, he stumbled at the word *metropoliticae*, and finally, when he could not pronounce it, exclaimed, *Seit pur dite* (let it be considered as said). Later, after making a vain effort to achieve the word *aenigmate*, he remarked to those present, *Par Seint Lowys, il ne fu pas curteis, qui ceste parole ici escrit* (Robert de Graystones, *Historia...Ecclesiae Dunelmensis*. Chap. 48, in *Historiae Dunelmensis Scriptores Tres*, Surtees Soc., IX, 118).

⁷⁵ *Monast. Ang.*, III, 365-66.

⁷⁶ Gramer, the ground of al, bigyleth now children;
For is none of this newe clerkes, who so nymeth hede,
That can versifye faire ne formalich enditen;

Ne **nou3t** on amonge an hundreth that an auctour can construe,
Ne rede a lettre in any langage but in Latyn or in Englissh.

(*Piers Plowman*, B-text, XV, 365-69)

⁷⁷ *The Anonimale Chronicle, 1333 to 1381, from a MS. written at St. Mary's Abbey, York*, ed. V.H.Galbraith (Manchester, 1927), p. xvii.

⁷⁸ *Mirour de l'Homme*, ed. Macaulay, I, 21775.

⁷⁹ It must be remembered that the term "uplondish" does not only refer to the rural population but doubtless includes everyone outside of London, just as the word "country" on London pillar-boxes does today.

⁸⁰ It is a mistake to argue, as has been several times done, from the *Contes Moralises* of Nichole Bozon that French was widely known among the English middle class. Though this Minorite of the later fourteenth century seems to have the middle class chiefly in mind, these brief items are not sermons, but anecdotes and memoranda for sermons, and do not furnish any evidence that the

author or those for whose help he made the collection actually preached in French. They are like the similar collections in Latin.

It is clear that the people who could speak French in the fourteenth century were bilingual. Edward III knew English,⁸¹ and Richard II addressed the people in it at the time of Wat Tyler's rebellion. Outside the royal family it would seem that even among the governing class English was the language best understood. When Edward III called a parliament in 1337 to advise him about prosecuting his claim to the throne of France, it was addressed by a lawyer who, according to Froissart, was very competent in Latin, French, and English. And he spoke in English, although, as we have seen, French was still the usual language of Parliament, "to the end that he might be better understood by all, for one always knows better what one wishes to say and propose in the language to which he is introduced in his infancy than in any other."⁸² Ten years before, a similar incident occurred when the privileges which Edward II confirmed to the city of London were read before the mayor, aldermen, and citizens assembled in the Guildhall and were explained to them in English by Andrew Horn, the city chamberlain.⁸³ In 1362 the chancellor opened Parliament for the first time with a speech in English.⁸⁴ English likewise appears at this time in the acts of towns and guilds. In 1388 Parliament required all guilds to submit a report on their foundation, statutes, property, and the like. The returns are mostly in Latin, but forty-nine of them are in English, outnumbering those in French.⁸⁵ The Customal of Winchester, which exists in an Anglo-Norman text of about 1275, was translated into English at the end of the fourteenth century.⁸⁶ Finally, in the last year of the century, in the proceedings at the deposition of Richard II, the articles of accusation were read to the assembled Parliament in Latin and English, as was the document by which Richard renounced the throne. The order deposing him was read to him in English, and Henry IV's speeches claiming the throne and later accepting it were delivered in English.⁸⁷ Thus the proceedings would seem to have been conspicuous for the absence of French. There can be no doubt in the light of instances such as these that in the fourteenth century English is again the principal tongue of all England.

⁸¹ O.F.Emerson, "English or French in the Time of Edward III," *Romanic Rev.*, 7 (1916), 127-43.

⁸² *Œuvres de Froissart*, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, II, 326.

⁸³ *Chronicles of the Reigns of Edward I and Edward II*, I, 325 (Rolls Series). Andrew Horn was a member of the Fishmongers' Company and the author of *Le Miroir des Justices*. He could doubtless have explained the privileges in French.

⁸⁴ English was again used in 1363, 1365, and 1381. *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, II, 268, 275, 283; III, 98.

⁸⁵ Printed in Toulmin Smith, *English Gilds* (Early English Text Soc., O.S. 40).

⁸⁶ J.S.Furley, *The Ancient Usages of the City of Winchester* (Oxford, 1927), p. 3.

⁸⁷ *Annales Ricardi II et Henrici IV*, pp. 281-86 (Rolls Series); *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, III, 423; J.H.Wylie, *History of England under Henry the Fourth*, I, 4-18.

105. *English in the Law Courts.*

In 1362 an important step was taken toward restoring English to its dominant place as the language of the country. For a long time, probably from a date soon after the Conquest, French had been the language of all legal proceedings. But in the fourteenth century such a practice was clearly without justification, and in 1356 the mayor and aldermen of London ordered that proceedings in the sheriffs' court of London and Middlesex be in English.⁸⁸ Six years later, in the Parliament held in October 1362, the *Statute of Pleading* was enacted, to go into effect toward the end of the following January:

Because it is often shewed to the king by the prelates, dukes, earls, barons, and all the commonalty, of the great mischiefs which have happened to divers of the realm, because the laws, customs, and statutes of this realm be not commonly known in the same realm; for that they be pleaded, shewed, and judged in the French tongue, which is much unknown in the said realm; so that the people which do implead, or be impleaded, in the king's court, and in the courts of others, have no knowledge nor understanding of that which is said for them or against them by their serjeants and other pleaders; and that reasonably the said laws and customs shall be most quickly learned and known, and better understood in the tongue used in the said realm, and by so much every man of the said realm may the better govern himself without offending of the law, and the better keep, save, and defend his heritage and possessions; and in divers regions and countries, where the king, the nobles, and others of the said realm have been, good governance and full right is done to every person, because that their laws and customs be learned and used in the tongue of the country: the king, desiring the good governance and tranquillity of his people, and to put out and eschew the harms and mischiefs which do or may happen in this behalf by the occasions aforesaid, hath ordained and established by the assent aforesaid, that all pleas which shall be pleaded in his courts whatsoever, before any of his justices whatsoever, or in his other places, or before any of his other ministers whatsoever, or in the courts and places of any other lords whatsoever within the realm, shall be pleaded, shewed, defended, answered, debated, and judged in the English tongue, and that they be entered and enrolled in Latin.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ R.R.Sharpe, *Calendar of Letter-Books...of the City of London*, Letter-Book G (London, 1905), p. 73. There are sporadic instances of the use of English in other courts even earlier. Thus in the action against the Templars in 1310 "frater Radulphus de Malton, ordinis Templi...deposuit in Anglico." Wilkins, *Concilia* (1737), II, 357; cf. also p. 391.

⁸⁹ *Statutes of the Realm*, I, 375-76. The original is in French. The petition on which it was based is in *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, II, 273.

All this might have been said in one sentence: Hereafter all lawsuits shall be conducted in English. But it is interesting to note that the reason frankly stated for the action is that “French is much unknown in the said realm.” Custom dies hard, and there is some reason to think that the statute was not fully observed at once. It constitutes, however, the official recognition of English.

106. *English in the Schools.*

From a time shortly after the Conquest, French had replaced English as the language of the schools. In the twelfth century there are patriotic complaints that Bede and others formerly taught the people in English, but their lore is lost; other people now teach our folk.⁹⁰ A statement of Ranulph Higden in the fourteenth century shows that in his day the use of French in the schools was quite general. At the end of the first book of his *Polychronicon* (c. 1327), a universal history widely circulated, he attributes the corruption of the English language which he observes in part to this cause:

This apayrynge of þe burþe tunge is bycause of tweie þinges; oon is for children in scole ^{agenst} þe vsage and manere of alle opere naciouns beþ compelled for to leue hire owne langage, and for to construe hir lessouns and here þynges in Frensche, and so þey haueþ seþ þe Normans come first in to Engelond. Also gentil men children beþ ^{i-taught} to speke Frensche from þe tyme þet þey beþ i-rokked in here cradel, and kunneþ speke and playe wiþ a childes broche; and vplondisshe men wil likne hym self to gentil men, and fondeþ wiþ greet besynesse for to speke Frensce, for to be [more] i-tolde of.⁹¹

However, after the Black Death, two Oxford schoolmasters were responsible for a great innovation in English education. When the translator of Higden's book, John Trevisa, came to the above passage he added a short but extremely interesting observation of his own:

^Pis manere was moche i-vsed to fore þe firste moreyn and is siþþe sumdel i-chaunged; for Iohn Cornwaile, a maister of grammer, chaunged þe lore in gramer scole and construccion of Frensche in to Engliche; and Richard Pencriche lerned þat manere techyng of hym and opere men of Pencrich; so þat now, þe ^{3ere} of oure Lorde a þowsand þre hundred and foure score and fyue, and of þe secounde kyng Richard after þe conquest nyne, in alle þe gramere scoles of Engelond, children leueþ Frensche and construeþ and lerneþ an Engliche,

⁹⁰ *Anglia*, 3 (1880), 424.

⁹¹ *Polychronicon*, II, 159 (Rolls Series), from the version of Trevisa made 1385–1387.

and haueþ þerby auauntage in oon side and disauauntage in anoþer side; here auauntage is, þat þey lerneþ her grammer in lasse tyme þan children were i-woned to doo; disauauntage is þat now children of grammer scole conneþ na more Frensche þan can hir lift heele, and þat is harme for hem and þey schulle passe þe see and trauaille in straunge landes and in many oþer places. Also gentil men haueþ now moche i-left for to teche here children Frensche.

By a fortunate circumstance we know that there was a John Cornwall licensed to teach Latin grammar in Oxford at this time; his name appears in the accounts of Merton in 1347, as does that of Pencrich a few years later.⁹² The innovation was probably due to a scarcity of competent teachers. At any rate, after 1349 English began to be used in the schools and by 1385 the practice had become general.

107. *Increasing Ignorance of French in the Fifteenth Century.*

The statement already quoted (page 145) from a writer of the beginning of the fourteenth century to the effect that he had seen many nobles who could not speak French indicates a condition that became more pronounced as time went on. By the fifteenth century the ability to speak French fluently seems to have been looked upon as an accomplishment.⁹³ Even the ability to write it was becoming less general among people of position. In 1400 George Dunbar, earl of March, in writing to the king in English, says: "And, noble Prince, marvel ye not that I write my letters in English, for that is more clear to my understanding than Latin or French."⁹⁴ Another very interesting case is offered by a letter from Richard Kingston, dean of Windsor, addressed to the king in 1403. Out of deference to custom, the dean begins bravely enough in French, but toward the close, when he becomes particularly earnest, he passes instinctively from French to English in the middle of a sentence.⁹⁵

An incident that occurred in 1404 seems at first sight to offer an extreme case. The king of France had refused to recognize Henry IV when he seized the English throne, and his kinsman, the count of Flanders, supported him in

⁹² W.H.Stevenson, "The Introduction of English as the Vehicle of Instruction in English Schools," *Furnivall Miscellany* (Oxford, 1901), pp. 421-29.

⁹³ Cf. the case of Richard Beauchamp, earl of Warwick, mentioned by Kingsford, *Eng. Hist. Lit.*, p. 195.

⁹⁴ *Royal and Historical Letters during the Reign of Henry IV*, I, 23-25 (Rolls Series).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 155-59. The letter ends in a strange mixture:

"Jeo prie a la Benoit Trinite que vous ottoirie bone vie ove tresentier saunttee a treslonge durre, and sende **3owe** sone to ows in helþ and prosperitee; for, in god fey, I hope to Al Mighty God that,

3ef 3e come **3oure** owne persone, **3e** schulle have the victorie of alle **3oure** enemies.

"And for salvation of **3oure** Schire and Marches al aboute, treste **3e** nought to no Leutenaunt.

"Escript a Hereford, en tresgraunte haste, a trois de la clocke apres noone, le tierce jour de Septembre."

his refusal. Outrages were soon committed by the French on English subjects, to which the English retaliated, and finally an attempt was made to settle the matter by negotiation. The English representatives included Sir Thomas Swynford⁹⁶ and one Nicholas de Ryssheton, who signs himself "Professor of Both Laws," that is, civil and ecclesiastical. Now there would be nothing remarkable about these negotiations were it not for the fact that several times the English ambassadors complain about the use of French by their French correspondents and ask them to write only in Latin. On two occasions they speak of the French language as being as unknown to them as Hebrew.⁹⁷ This statement, if taken at its face value, as has generally been done, is astonishing, to say the least. But it is quite unbelievable. De Ryssheton, as a lawyer, must have known French well.⁹⁸ We need not pause over the reasons for the statement." The statement was not true; but the English delegates would not have alleged such a reason for carrying on negotiation in Latin if it had not had a certain plausibility. Ignorance of French must have been quite common among the governing class in England from the beginning of the fifteenth century. Before the middle of the century it was necessary to have a "Secretary in the French language" among the government officials.¹⁰⁰ At the end of the century Caxton could write: "For the mooste quantyte of the people vnderstonde not latyn ne frensshe here in this noble royaume of england."

108. *French as a Language of Culture and Fashion.*

When French went out of use as a spoken language in England not only was its sphere more restricted but the reasons for its cultivation changed. In the first decade of the fifteenth century, John Barton wrote a *Donet François*, a treatise intended for adults who wished to learn French. It is interesting to note the three reasons he gives for Englishmen's learning the language. He says nothing about their needing it to communicate among themselves but says, first, it will enable them to communicate with their neighbors of the realm of France. In the second place, the laws are largely in French. And finally, he says, gentlemen and women willingly write to each other in French. The first of these reasons would be equally

⁹⁶ He was the son of Katherine de Swynford and a fairly prominent person. Indeed he was believed to have been the murderer of Richard II. At any rate he was a strong supporter of Henry IV and was one of Richard's guardians.

⁹⁷ The letters are printed in *Royal and Historical Letters during the Reign of Henry IV.*

⁹⁸ On one occasion the English king sends him instructions in French.

⁹⁹ The explanation is probably to be found in a passage in Froissart (ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove, XV, 114–15) from which it appears that ten years before, the English had had to proceed very warily in negotiating a treaty of peace; they had had trouble before through the use of French. But there was also some feeling against the desire of France to have French recognized as the language of diplomacy. A somewhat similar instance of friction occurred in 1413–1414 when a compromise was finally reached by drawing up an agreement between the two countries in both Latin and French in parallel columns. Cf. J.H. Wylie, *The Reign of Henry the Fifth*, I, 156.

¹⁰⁰ *Cal Pat. Rolls, 1436–41*, pp. 41, 471, 555, and later entries in the Close and Patent Rolls.

valid today. The other two are a heritage of the past, which in time disappeared. Later Caxton in his *Dialogues in French and English* has the merchant chiefly in mind: "Who this booke shall wylle [wish to] lerne may well enterprise or take on honde marchandise fro one land to anothir." But French had been for so long the mark of the privileged class that such cultivation of it as persisted in this century and in after times was prompted largely by the feeling that it was the language of culture and fashion. This feeling was strengthened in the eighteenth century and it is present in the minds of many people today.

109. *The Use of English in Writing.*

The last step that the English language had to make in its gradual ascent was its employment in writing. For here it had to meet the competition of Latin as well as French. The use of Latin for written communication and record was due partly to a habit formed at a time when most people who could write at all could write Latin, partly to its international character, and partly to the feeling that it was a language that had become fixed while the modern languages seemed to be variable, unregulated, and in a constant state of change. Modern languages began to encroach upon this field of Latin at a time when French was still the language of the educated and the socially prominent. French accordingly is the first language in England to dispute the monopoly of Latin in written matter, and only in the fifteenth century does English succeed in displacing both.¹⁰¹ In private and semi-official correspondence French is at its height at about 1350; the earliest English letters appear in the latter part of the century, but there are few before 1400. English letters first occur among the Paston letters and in the Stonor correspondence between 1420 and 1430. After 1450 English letters are everywhere the rule.¹⁰² It is rather similar with wills. The earliest known English will subsequent to the Conquest dates from 1383, and English wills are rare before 1400. But in 1397 the earl of Kent made his will in English, and in 1438 the countess of Stafford in doing likewise said, "I...ordeyne and make my testament in English tonge, for my most profit, redyng, and understanding in yis wise." The wills of Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI are all in English.¹⁰³

The fifteenth century also saw the adoption of English for the records of towns and guilds and in a number of branches of the central government. About 1430 a number of towns are seen translating their ordinances and their books of customs into English, and English becomes general in their transac-

¹⁰¹ The widespread use of French in writing, especially in official documents and letters, is chronicled by Helen Suggett, "The Use of French in England in the Later Middle Ages," *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 4th ser., 28 (1946), 61-83.

¹⁰² See F.J.Tanqueray, *Recueil de lettres anglo-françaises, 1265-1399* (Paris, 1916), and C.L.Kingsford, *Prejudice and Promise in XVth Century England* (Oxford, 1925), pp. 22-47.

¹⁰³ The wills mentioned are all in J.Nichols, *A Collection of All the Wills...of the Kings...* (London, 1780).

tions after 1450. It is so likewise with the guilds. English was used along with French in the ordinances of the London pepperers as early as 1345. At York the ordinances of the crafts begin to be in English from about 1400 on. An interesting resolution of the London brewers, dating about 1422, shows them adopting English by a formal action:

Whereas our mother tongue, to wit, the English tongue, hath in modern days begun to be honorably enlarged and adorned; for that our most excellent lord king Henry the Fifth hath, in his letters missive, and divers affairs touching his own person, more willingly chosen to declare the secrets of his will [in it]; and for the better understanding of his people, hath, with a diligent mind, procured the common idiom (setting aside others) to be commended by the exercise of writing; and there are many of our craft of brewers who have the knowledge of writing and reading in the said English idiom, but in others, to wit, the Latin and French, before these times used, they do not in any wise understand; for which causes, with many others, it being considered how that the greater part of the Lords and trusty Commons have begun to make their matters to be noted down in our mother tongue, so we also in our craft, following in some manner their steps, have decreed in future to commit to memory the needful things which concern us.¹⁰⁴

The records of Parliament tell a similar story. The petitions of the Commons, on which statutes were based if they met with approval, are usually in French down to 1423 and seem to have been enrolled in French even when originally presented in English. After 1423 they are often in English.¹⁰⁵ The statutes themselves are generally in Latin down to about 1300, in French until the reign of Henry VII. In 1485 they begin to appear in English alongside of French, and in 1489 French entirely disappears.

The reign of Henry V (1413–1422) seems to have marked the turning point in the use of English in writing.¹⁰⁶ The example of the king in using English in his letters and certain efforts of his to promote the use of English in writing, which

¹⁰⁴ William Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London* (2 vols., London, 1834–1836), I, 106.

¹⁰⁵ Cf. H.L. Gray, *The Influence of the Commons on Early Legislation* (Cambridge, UK, 1932), p. 231.

¹⁰⁶ New evidence is constantly coming to light reinforcing this opinion. For example, R.B. Dobson, working with the incredibly rich collection of records preserved by the Dean and Chapter of Durham, observes, "It was precisely in the second decade of the fifteenth century that the monastic and prior's registers reveal the complete and remarkably abrupt extinction of French as a language of written as well as verbal communication." See *Durham Priory, 1400–1450* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 73. See also Malcolm Richardson, "Henry V, the English Chancery, and Chancery English," *Speculum*, 55 (1980), 726–50.

we would gladly know more about, are specifically referred to as a precedent in the resolution of the London brewers quoted above. Apparently his brilliant victories over the French at Agincourt and elsewhere gave the English a pride in things English. The end of his reign and the beginning of the next mark the period at which English begins to be generally adopted in writing. If we want a round number, the year 1425 represents very well the approximate date.

110. *Middle English Literature.*

The literature written in England during the Middle English period reflects fairly accurately the changing fortunes of English. During the time that French was the language best understood by the upper classes, the books they read or listened to were in French. All of continental French literature was available for their enjoyment, and we have seen above how this source was supplemented by an important body of French poetry written in England (§ 88). The rewards of patronage were seldom to be expected by those who wrote in English; with them we must look for other incentives to writing. Such incentives were most often found among members of the religious body, interested in promoting right living and in the care of souls. Accordingly, the literature in English that has come down to us from this period (1150–1250) is almost exclusively religious or admonitory. The *Ancrene Riwe*, the *Ormulum* (c. 1200), a series of paraphrases and interpretations of Gospel passages, and a group of saints' lives and short homiletic pieces showing the survival of an Old English literary tradition in the southwest are the principal works of this class. The two outstanding exceptions are Layamon's *Brut* (c. 1200), based largely on Wace (cf. § 88), and the astonishing debate between *The Owl and the Nightingale* (c. 1195), a long poem in which two birds exchange recriminations in the liveliest fashion. There was certainly a body of popular literature that circulated orally among the people, just as at a later date the English and Scottish popular ballads did, but such literature has left slight traces in this early period. The hundred years from 1150 to 1250 have been justly called the Period of Religious Record. It is not that religious works were not written in French too for the upper classes; it is rather the absence in English of works appealing to courtly tastes that marks the English language at this time as the language of the middle and lower classes.

The separation of the English nobility from France by about 1250 and the spread of English among the upper class is manifest in the next hundred years of English literature. Types of polite literature that had hitherto appeared in French now appear in English. Of these types the most popular was the romance. Only one English romance exists from an earlier date than 1250, but from this time translations and adaptations from the French begin to be made, and in the course of the fourteenth century their number becomes quite large. The religious literature characteristic of the previous period continues; but we now have other types as well. The period from 1250 to 1350 is a Period of Religious and Secular Literature in English and indicates clearly the wider diffusion of the English language.

The general adoption of English by all classes, which had taken place by the latter half of the fourteenth century, gave rise to a body of literature that represents the high point in

English literary achievement in the Middle Ages. The period from 1350 to 1400 has been called the Period of Great Individual Writers. The chief name is that of Geoffrey Chaucer (1340–1400), the greatest English poet before Shakespeare. Not to mention his delightful minor poems, he is the author of a long narrative poem telling the story of the unhappy love of *Troilus and Criseyde* and, most famous of his works, the *Canterbury Tales*, which, besides giving us in the general prologue a matchless portrait gallery of contemporary types, constitutes in the variety of the tales a veritable anthology of medieval literature. To this period belong William Langland, the reputed author of along social allegory, *Piers Plowman* (1362–1387); John Wycliffe (d. 1384), putative translator of the Bible and author of a large and influential body of controversial prose; and the unknown poet who wrote not only the finest of the Middle English romances, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, but three allegorical and religious poems of great beauty, including *Pearl*. Any one of these men would have made the later fourteenth century an outstanding period in Middle English literature. Together they constitute a striking proof of the secure position the English language had attained.

The fifteenth century is sometimes known as the Imitative Period because so much of the poetry then written was written in emulation of Chaucer. It is also spoken of as a Transition Period, because it covers a large part of the interval between the age of Chaucer and the age of Shakespeare. The period has been unjustly neglected. Writers like Lydgate, Hoccleve, Skelton, and Hawes are not negligible, though admittedly overshadowed by some of their great predecessors, and at the end of the century we have the prose of Malory and Caxton. In the north the Scottish Chaucerians, particularly Henryson, Dunbar, Gawin Douglas, and Lindsay, produced significant work. These authors carry on the tradition of English as a literary medium into the Renaissance. Thus, Middle English literature follows and throws interesting light on the fortunes of the English language.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

F.M.Powicke's *The Loss of Normandy, 1189–1204* (Manchester, 1913) offers a good point of departure for the study of conditions affecting the position of English in the latter part of our period. The same author's *The Thirteenth Century* (2nd ed., Oxford, 1962) may also be consulted. The influx of foreigners in the thirteenth century is treated in François Mugnier, *Les Savoyards en Angleterre au XIII^e siècle* (Chambéry, France, 1890). The reaction against them is well represented by Oliver H. Richardson, *The National Movement in the Reign of Henry III and Its Culmination in the Barons' War* (New York, 1897), which may be supplemented by John R.Maddicott's *Simon De Montfort* (Cambridge, UK, 1994). On the whole, the best discussion of the Black Death is Philip Ziegler's *The Black Death* (London, 1969). For estimates of the mortality, see John Hatcher, *Plague, Population, and the English Economy, 1348–1530* (London, 1977). Walter of Bibbesworth's treatise is edited by William Rothwell (London, 1990). W.H.Stevenson does much to make John Cornwall a real person in "The Introduction of English as the Vehicle of Instruction in English Schools," *Furnivall Miscellany* (Oxford, 1901), pp. 421–29. On individual points the works cited in the footnotes to the chapter should be consulted. Other articles bearing on the relation of French and English include: M.Dominica Legge, "Anglo-Norman and the Historian," *History*, N.S., 26 (1941), 163–75; George E.Woodbine, "The Language of English Law," *Speculum*, 18 (1943), 395–436, parts of which must be used with caution; R.M. Wilson, "English and French in England 1100–1300," *History*,

N.S., 28 (1943), 37–60; and a series of studies by Rolf Berndt, “The Linguistic Situation in England from the Norman Conquest to the Loss of Normandy (1066–1204),” *Philologica Pragensia*, 8 (1965), 145–63; “The Period of the Final Decline of French in Medieval England (Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Centuries),” *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 20 (1972), 341–69; and “Reflections on the Development of Social Varieties of English in the Late(r) Middle English and Early Modern English Period,” *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, 34 (1986), 235–49. See also two essays by William Rothwell, “Lexical Borrowing in a Medieval Context,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 63 (1980–1981), 118–43, and “Stratford atte Bowe and Paris,” *Mod. Lang. Rev.*, 80 (1985), 39–54, as well as the essays by Rothwell cited in §§ 92, 99, and 101, and by Ian Short in the Bibliography for Chapter 5.