

## 7

# Middle English

### **111. *Middle English a Period of Great Change.***

The Middle English period (1150–1500) was marked by momentous changes in the English language, changes more extensive and fundamental than those that have taken place at any time before or since. Some of them were the result of the Norman Conquest and the conditions which followed in the wake of that event. Others were a continuation of tendencies that had begun to manifest themselves in Old English. These would have gone on even without the Conquest, but they took place more rapidly because the Norman invasion removed from English those conservative influences that are always felt when a language is extensively used in books and is spoken by an influential educated class. The changes of this period affected English in both its grammar and its vocabulary. They were so extensive in each department that it is difficult to say which group is the more significant. Those in the grammar reduced English from a highly inflected language to an extremely analytic one.<sup>1</sup> Those in the vocabulary involved the loss of a large part of the Old English word-stock and the addition of thousands of words from French and Latin. At the beginning of the period English is a language that must be learned like a foreign tongue; at the end it is Modern English.

### **112. *Decay of Inflectional Endings.***

The changes in English grammar may be described as a general reduction of inflections. Endings of the noun

<sup>1</sup> That the change was complete by 1500 has been shown with convincing statistics by Charles C. Fries, "On the Development of the Structural Use of Word-Order in Modern English," *Language*, 16(1940), 199–208.

and adjective marking distinctions of number and case and often of gender were so altered in pronunciation as to lose their distinctive form and hence their usefulness. To some extent the same thing is true of the verb. This leveling of inflectional endings was due partly to phonetic changes, partly to the operation of analogy. The phonetic changes were simple but far-reaching. The earliest seems to have been the change of final *-m* to *-n* wherever it occurred, i.e., in the dative plural of nouns and adjectives and in the dative singular (masculine and neuter) of adjectives when inflected according to the strong declension (see § 43). Thus *mūðum* (to the mouths) >*mūðun*, *gōdum*>*gōdun*. This *-n*, along with the *-n* of the other inflectional endings, was then dropped (*\*mūðu*, *\*gōðu*). At the same time,<sup>2</sup> the vowels *a*, *o*, *u*, *e* in inflectional endings were obscured to a sound, the so-called "indeterminate vowel," which came to be written *e* (less often *i*, *y*, *u*, depending on place and date). As a result, a number of originally distinct endings such as *-a*, *-u*, *-e*, *-an*, *-um* were reduced generally to a uniform *-e*, and such grammatical distinctions as they formerly expressed were no longer conveyed. Traces of these changes have been found in Old English manuscripts as early as the tenth century.<sup>3</sup> By the end of the twelfth century they seem to have been generally carried out. The leveling is somewhat obscured in the written language by the tendency of scribes to preserve the traditional spelling, and in some places the final *n* was retained even in the spoken language, especially as a sign of the plural (cf. § 113). The effect of these changes on the inflection of the noun and the adjective, and the further simplification that was brought about by the operation of analogy, may be readily shown.

### 113. The Noun.

A glance at the few examples of common noun declensions in Old English given in § 41 will show how seriously the inflectional endings were disturbed. For example, in the London English of Chaucer in the strong masculine declension the forms *mūð*, *mūðes*, *mūðe*, *mūð* in the singular, and *mūðas*, *mūða* and *mūðum*, *mūðas* in the plural were reduced to three: *mūð*, *mūðes*, and *mūðe*. In such words the *-e*, which was organic in the dative singular and the genitive and dative plural (i.e., stood for an ending in the Old English paradigm), was extended by analogy to the nominative and accusative singular, so that forms like *stōne*, *mūðe* appear, and the only distinctive termination is the *-s* of the possessive singular and of the nominative and accusative plural. Because these two cases of the plural were those most

<sup>2</sup> The chronology of these changes has been worked out by Samuel Moore in two articles: "Loss of Final *n* in Inflectional Syllables of Middle English," *Language*, 3 (1927), 232–59; "Earliest Morphological Changes in Middle English," *Language*, 4 (1928), 238–66.

<sup>3</sup> Kemp Malone, "When Did Middle English Begin?" *Curme Volume of Linguistic Studies* (Philadelphia, 1930), pp. 110–17.

frequently used, the *-s* came to be thought of as the sign of the plural and was extended to all plural forms. We get thus an inflection of the noun identical with that which we have today.<sup>4</sup> Other declensions suffered even more, so that in many words (*giefu*, *sunu*, etc.) the distinctions of case and even of number were completely obliterated.

In early Middle English only two methods of indicating the plural remained fairly distinctive: the *-s* or *-es* from the strong masculine declension and the *-en* (as in *oxen*) from the weak (see § 41). And for a time, at least in southern England, it would have been difficult to predict that the *-s* would become the almost universal sign of the plural that it has become. Until the thirteenth century the *-en* plural enjoyed great favor in the south, being often added to nouns which had not belonged to the weak declension in Old English. But in the rest of England the *-s* plural (and genitive singular) of the old first declension (masculine) was apparently felt to be so distinctive that it spread rapidly. Its extension took place most quickly in the north. Even in Old English many nouns originally of other declensions had gone over to this declension in the Northumbrian dialect. By 1200 *-s* was the standard plural ending in the north and north Midland areas; other forms were exceptional. Fifty years later it had conquered the rest of the Midlands, and in the course of the fourteenth century it had definitely been accepted all over England as the normal sign of the plural in English nouns. Its spread may have been helped by the early extension of *-s* throughout the plural in Anglo-Norman, but in general it may be considered as an example of the survival of the fittest in language.

#### 114. *The Adjective.*

In the adjective the leveling of forms had even greater consequences. Partly as a result of the sound-changes already described, partly through the extensive working of analogy, the form of the nominative singular was early extended to all cases of the singular, and that of the nominative plural to all cases of the plural, both in the strong and the weak declensions. The result was that in the weak declension there was no longer any distinction between the singular and the plural: both ended in *-e* (*blinda* > *blinde* and *blindan* > *blinde*). This was also true of those adjectives under the strong declension whose singular ended in *-e*. By about 1250 the strong declension had distinctive forms for the singular and plural only in certain monosyllabic adjectives which ended in a consonant in Old English (sing. *glad*, plur. *glade*). Under the circumstances the only ending which remained to the adjective was often without distinctive grammatical meaning and its use was not governed by any strong sense of adjectival inflection. Although it

<sup>4</sup> For the use of the apostrophe in the possessive, see § 180.

is clear that the *-e* ending of the weak and plural forms was available for use in poetry in both the East and West Midlands until the end of the fourteenth century, it is impossible to know the most usual status of the form in the spoken language. Certainly adjectival inflections other than *-e*, such as Chaucer's *oure aller cok*, were archaic survivals by the close of the Middle English period.<sup>5</sup>

### 115. *The Pronoun.*

The decay of inflections that brought about such a simplification of the noun and the adjective as has just been described made it necessary to depend less upon formal indications of gender, case, and (in adjectives) number, and to rely more upon juxtaposition, word order, and the use of prepositions to make clear the relation of words in a sentence. This is apparent from the corresponding decay of pronominal inflections, where the simplification of forms was due in only a slight measure to the weakening of final syllables that played so large a part in the reduction of endings in the noun and the adjective. The loss was greatest in the demonstratives. Of the numerous forms of *sē*, *sēo*, *þæt* (cf. § 44) we have only *the* and *that* surviving through Middle English and continuing in use today. A plural *tho* (those) survived to Elizabethan times. All the other forms indicative of different gender, number, and case disappeared in most dialects early in the Middle English period. The same may be said of the demonstrative *þēs*, *þēos*, *þis*<sup>6</sup> (this). Everywhere but in the south the neuter form *þis* came to be used early in Middle English for all genders and cases of the singular, while the forms of the nominative plural were similarly extended to all cases of the plural, appearing in Modern English as *those* and *these*.

In the personal pronoun the losses were not so great. Most of the distinctions that existed in Old English were retained (see the paradigm given in § 45). However the forms of the dative and accusative cases were early combined, generally under that of the dative (*him*, *her*, [*t*]*hem*). In the neuter the form of the accusative (*h*)*it* became the general objective case, partly because

<sup>5</sup> In context *oure aller cok* is translated 'the cock who wakened us all,' where the *r* of *aller* 'of us all' indicates the genitive plural of *al*. Today we have what may be considered an inflected adjective in such combinations as *men students*, *women soldiers*.

<sup>6</sup> In Old English it had the following inflection:

	SINGULAR		PLURAL	
	<i>Masc.</i>	<i>Fem.</i>	<i>Neut.</i>	<i>All Genders</i>
N.	þēs	þēos	þis	þās, þæs
G.	þisses	þisse	þisses	þissa
D.	þissum	þisse	þissum	þissum
A.	þisne	þās	þis	þās, þæs
I.	þȳs		þȳs	

it was like the nominative, and partly because the dative *him* would have been subject to confusion with the corresponding case of the masculine. One other general simplification is to be noted: the loss of the dual number. A language can get along without a distinction in pronouns for two persons and more than two; the forms *wit*, *3it*, and their oblique cases did not survive beyond the thirteenth century, and English lost the dual number.

It will be observed that the pronoun *she* had the form *hēo* in Old English. The modern form could have developed from the Old English *hēo*, but it is believed by some that it is due in part at least to the influence of the demonstrative *sēo*. A similar reinforcing influence of the demonstrative is perhaps to be seen in the forms of the third person plural, *they*, *their*, *them*, but here the source of the modern developments was undoubtedly Scandinavian (cf. § 77). The normal development of the Old English pronouns would have been *hi* (*he*), *here*, *hem*, and these are very common. In the districts, however, where Scandinavian influence was strong, the nominative *hi* began early to be replaced by the Scandinavian form *þei* (ON *þeir*), and somewhat later a similar replacement occurred in the other cases, *their* and *them*. The new forms were adopted more slowly farther south, and the usual inflection in Chaucer is *thei*, *here*, *hem*. But by the end of the Middle English period the forms *they*, *their*, *them* may be regarded as the normal English plurals.

### 116. The Verb.

Apart from some leveling of inflections and the weakening of endings in accordance with the general tendency,<sup>7</sup> the principal changes in the verb during the Middle English period were the serious losses suffered by the strong conjugation (see §§ 117–18). This conjugation, although including some of the most important verbs in the language, was relatively small<sup>8</sup> as compared with the large and steadily growing body of weak verbs.

<sup>7</sup> For example, the *-an* of the Old English infinitive became *-en* and later *-e*: OE *drīfan* > M.E. *dnīven* > *drive*.

<sup>8</sup> The facts stated in this section are based upon collections for 333 strong verbs in Old English. This number includes a few verbs for which only isolated forms occur and one (*\*stecan*) that is not recorded at all, although its existence is to be inferred from its surviving forms in Middle English.

While an occasional verb developed a strong past tense or past participle by analogy with similar strong verbs, new verbs formed from nouns and adjectives or borrowed from other languages were regularly conjugated as weak. Thus the minority position of the strong conjugation was becoming constantly more appreciable. After the Norman Conquest the loss of native words further depleted the ranks of the strong verbs. Those that survived were exposed to the influence of the majority, and many have changed over in the course of time to the weak inflection.

### 117. *Losses among the Strong Verbs.*

Nearly a third of the strong verbs in Old English seem to have died out early in the Middle English period. In any case about ninety of them have left no traces in written records after 1150. Some of them may have been current for a time in the spoken language, but except where an occasional verb survives in a modern dialect they are not recorded. Some were rare in Old English and others were in competition with weak verbs of similar derivation and meaning which superseded them. In addition to verbs that are not found at all after the Old English period there are about a dozen more that appear only in Layamon (c. 1200) or in certain twelfth-century texts based directly on the homilies of Ælfric and other Old English works. In other words, more than a hundred of the Old English strong verbs were lost at the beginning of the Middle English period.

But this was not all. The loss has continued in subsequent periods. Some thirty more became obsolete in the course of Middle English, and an equal number, which were still in use in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, finally died out except in the dialects, often after they had passed over to the weak conjugation or had developed weak forms alongside the strong. Today more than half of the Old English strong verbs have disappeared completely from the standard language.

### 118. *Strong Verbs That Became Weak.*

The principle of analogy—the tendency of language to follow certain patterns and adapt a less common form to a more familiar one—is well exemplified in the further history of the strong verbs. The weak conjugation offered a fairly consistent pattern for the past tense and the past participle, whereas there was much variety in the different classes of the strong verb. We say *sing—sang—sung*, but *drive—drove—driven*, *fall—fell—fallen*, etc. At a time when English was the language chiefly of the lower classes and largely removed from the restraining influences of education and a literary standard, it was natural that many speakers should apply the pattern of weak verbs to some which were historically strong. The tendency was not unknown even in Old English. Thus *rædan* (to advise) and *sceððan* (to injure) had already become weak in Old English, while other verbs show occasional weak forms.<sup>9</sup> In the thirteenth century the trend becomes clear in

<sup>9</sup>For example, *dwīnan* (to disappear), *rēocan* (to smoke). Ten strong verbs had developed weak forms by the twelfth century. Doubtless most of these weak forms were of occasional occurrence in Old English though they have not been recorded.

the written literature. Such verbs as *bow, brew, burn, climb, flee, flow, help, mourn, row, step, walk, weep* were then undergoing

change. By the fourteenth century the movement was at its height. No less than thirty-two verbs in addition to those already mentioned now show weak forms. After this there are fewer changes. The impulse seems to have been checked, possibly by the steady rise of English in the social scale and later by the stabilizing effect of printing. At all events the fifteenth century shows only about a dozen new weak formations and in the whole modern period there are only about as many more.

In none of the many verbs which have thus become weak was the change from the strong conjugation a sudden one. Strong forms continued to be used while the weak ones were growing up, and in many cases they continued in use long after the weak inflection had become well established. Thus *oke* as the past tense of *ache* was still written throughout the fifteenth century although the weak form *ached* had been current for a hundred years. In the same way we find *stope* beside *stepped*, *rewe* beside *rowed*, *clew* beside *clawed*. In a good many cases the strong forms remained in the language well into modern times. *Climb*, which was conjugated as a weak verb as early as the thirteenth century, still has an alternative past tense *clomb* not only in Chaucer and Spenser but in Dryden, and the strong past tense *crope* was more common than *crept* down to Shakespeare's day. *Low* for *laughed*, *shove* for *shaved*, *yold* for *yielded*, etc., were still used in the sixteenth century although these verbs were already passing over to the weak conjugation two centuries before. While the weak forms commonly won out, this was not always the case. Many strong verbs also had weak forms (*blowed* for *blew*, *knowed* for *knew*, *teared* for *tore*) that did not survive in the standard speech, while in other cases both forms have continued in use (*cleft—clove*, *crowed—crew*, *heaved—hove*, *sheared—shore*, *shrived—shrove*).

### 119. Survival of Strong Participles.

For some reason the past participle of strong verbs seems to have been more tenacious than the past tense. In a number of verbs weak participles are later in appearing and the strong form often continued in use after the verb had definitely become weak. In the verb *beat* the principle *beaten* has remained the standard form, while in a number of other verbs the strong participle (*cloven*, *graven*, *hewn*, *laden*, *molten*, *mown*, *(mis)shapen*, *shaven*, *sodden*, *swollen*) are still used, especially as adjectives.

### 120. Surviving Strong Verbs.

When we subtract the verbs that have been lost completely and the eighty-one that have become weak, there remain just sixty-eight of the Old English strong verbs in the language today. To this number may be added thirteen verbs that are conjugated in both ways or have kept one strong form. These figures indicate how extensive the loss of strong verbs in the language has been. Beside this loss the number of new strong for-

mations has been negligible.<sup>10</sup> Since the irregularity of such verbs constitutes a difficulty in language, the loss in this case must be considered a gain.

The surviving strong verbs have seldom come down to the present day in the form that would represent the normal development of their principal parts in Old English. In all periods of the language they have been subjected to various forms of leveling and analogical influence from one class to another. For example, the verb *to slay* had in Old English the forms *slēan—slōg—slōgon—slægen*. These would normally have become *slea* (pronounced *slee*)—*slough—slain*, and the present tense *slea* actually existed down to the seventeenth century. The modern *slay* is reformed from the past participle. The past tense *slew* is due to the analogy of preterites like *blew*, *grew*. In Old English the past tense commonly had a different form in the singular and the plural,<sup>11</sup> and in two large classes of verbs the vowel of the plural was also like that of the past participle (e.g., *bindan—band—bundon—bunden*). Consequently, although normally the singular form survived in Modern English, in many cases the vowel of the plural or of the past participle has taken its place. Thus *cling*, *sting*, *spin*, etc., should have had a past tense *clang*, *stang*, *span* (like *sing*), but these forms have been replaced by *clung*, *stung*, *spun* from the plural and the past participle. The past tense of *slide* should have been *slode*, but the plural and the past participle had *i* and we now say *slide—slid—slid*. Sometimes a verb has changed from one class to another. *Break* belonged originally to the fifth class of strong verbs, and had it remained there, would have had a past participle *breken*. But in Old English it was confused with verbs of the fourth class, which had *o* in the past participle, whence our form *broken*. This form has now spread to the past tense. We should be saying *brack* or *brake*, and the latter is still used in the Bible, but except in biblical language the current form is now *broke*. *Speak* has had a similar development. Almost every strong verb in the language has an interesting formhistory, but our present purpose will be sufficiently served by these few examples of the sort of fluctuation and change that was going on all through the Middle English period and which has not yet ended.

<sup>10</sup> There are fifteen such verbs. *Strive* (from French) has been inflected on the pattern of *drive*, as have *thrive* and *rive* (both from Old Norse). In some varieties of English *dive* has developed a past tense *dove*. Since the eighteenth century *stave* has had a strong form *stove*. So, too, has *reeve*, a nautical term. *Wear—wore—worn*, a weak verb in Old English, has been reformed on the analogy of verbs like *bear* and *swear*. *Spat* has been the past tense of *spit* since the sixteenth century, and the strong forms of *stick* date from the same time. An analogous formation *dug* appears as a past participle at this date and since the eighteenth century has been used as the past tense. *Fling*, *ring*, and *string* are conjugated like *cling*, *sting*, and *swing*. *Hide* and occasionally *chide* have strong past participles like *ride—ridden*. *Tug* and *drug* (like *dug*) are sometimes heard for *tagged* and *dragged* but are not in standard use. A few verbs like *show* have developed past participles on the analogy of *know*.

<sup>11</sup> The second person singular had the vowel of the plural.



### 121. *Loss of Grammatical Gender.*

One of the consequences of the decay of inflections described above was the elimination of that troublesome feature of language, grammatical gender. As explained in § 42, the gender of Old English nouns was not often determined by meaning. Sometimes it was in direct contradiction with the meaning. Thus *woman* (OE *wīf-mann*) was masculine, because the second element in the compound was masculine; *wife* and *child*, like German *Weib* and *Kind*, were neuter. Moreover, the gender of nouns in Old English was not so generally indicated by the declension as it is in a language like Latin. Instead it was revealed chiefly by the concord of the strong adjective and the demonstratives. These by their distinctive endings generally showed, at least in the singular, whether a noun was masculine, feminine, or neuter. When the inflections of these gender-distinguishing words were reduced to a single ending for the adjective, and the fixed forms of *the*, *this*, *that*, *these*, and *those* for the demonstratives, the support for grammatical gender was removed. The weakening of inflections and the confusion and loss of the old gender proceeded in a remarkably parallel course. In the north, where inflections weakened earliest, grammatical gender disappeared first. In the south it lingered longer because there the decay of inflections was slower.

Our present method of determining gender was no sudden invention of Middle English times. The recognition of sex that lies at the root of natural gender is shown in Old English by the noticeable tendency to use the personal pronouns in accordance with natural gender, even when such use involves a clear conflict with the grammatical gender of the antecedent. For example, the pronoun *it* in *Etað þisne hlāf* (masculine), *hit is mūm lichama* (Ælfric's Homilies) is exactly in accordance with modern usage when we say, *Eat this bread, it is my body*. Such a use of the personal pronouns is clearly indicative of the feeling for natural gender even while grammatical gender was in full force. With the disappearance of grammatical gender sex became the only factor in determining the gender of English nouns.

### 122. *Middle English Syntax.*

As a result of the leveling of inflections, syntactic and semantic relationships that had been signaled by the endings on words now became ambiguous. Whereas in Old English the grammatical functions of two consecutive nouns were clear from their endings in, say, the nominative and dative cases, in Middle English their functions might be uncertain. The most direct way to avoid this kind of ambiguity is through limiting the possible patterns of word order. The process of development from the highly synthetic stage of Old English (see § 40) to the highly analytic stages of Late Middle English and Modern English can be seen in the *Peterborough Chronicle*. Written in installments between 1070 and 1154, this text of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* spans the period from Old English to Early Middle English. Within the continuations of the text it is possible to trace first a significant loss of inflections and afterwards a corresponding rigidity of word order, making clear the direction of cause and effect.<sup>12</sup> This process of development and

the reality of Middle English as a separate stage of the language grammatically (as well as phonologically and lexically) can be seen in the patterns of subject and verb. In addition to the Modern English order SV, Old English had VS and, in subordinate clauses, S...V (with the finite verb in final position). All of these patterns are still possible even in the last years of the *Peterborough Chronicle*. Thus, the word order looked much like that of Old English at a time when the inflectional system looked much like that of Modern English. As Bruce Mitchell writes, "the language of the *Peterborough Chronicle* 1122–1154 is Middle, not Modern, English. It is transitional."<sup>13</sup> And as its most recent editor puts it: "before our eyes English is beginning to change from a synthetic language to an analytic one."<sup>14</sup>

It is important to emphasize that these changes which affected the grammatical structure of English after the Norman Conquest were not the result of contact with the French language. Certain idioms and syntactic usages that appear in Middle English are clearly the result of such contact.<sup>15</sup> But the decay of inflections and the confusion of forms that constitute the truly significant development in Middle English grammar are the result of the Norman Conquest only insofar as that event brought about conditions favorable to such changes. By removing the authority that a standard variety of English would have, the Norman Conquest made it easier for grammatical changes to go forward unchecked. Beyond this it is not considered a factor in syntactic changes.

### 123. *French Influence on the Vocabulary.*

While the loss of inflections and the consequent simplification of English grammar were thus only

<sup>12</sup> Although some earlier scholars believe the loss of inflections to have resulted from a fixed word order, the sequence of development is clearly the reverse. See Cecily Clark, ed., *The Peterborough Chronicle, 1070–1154* (2nd ed., Oxford, 1970), p. lxix; and Bruce Mitchell, *Old English Syntax* (2 vols., Oxford, 1985), § 3950.

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell, "Syntax and Word-Order in *The Peterborough Chronicle*," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 65 (1964), 143.

<sup>14</sup> Clark, p. lxxiii.

<sup>15</sup> F.H.Sykes, *French Elements in Middle English* (Oxford, 1899) makes an attempt to support this view. The most extensive treatment of the subject is A.A.Prins, *French Influence in English Phrasing* (Leiden, Netherlands, 1952), supplemented by articles in *English Studies*, vols. 40–41. A striking array of instances in which English reflects the use of prepositions and adverbs in French, Latin, and Danish is given in H.T.Price, *Foreign Influences on Middle English* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1947; *Univ. of Michigan Contributions in Modern Philology*, no. 10). The standard work on Middle English syntax is Tauno F.Mustanoja, *A Middle English Syntax*, part 1 (Helsinki, 1960).

indirectly due to the use of French in England, French influence is much more direct and observable upon the vocabulary. Where two languages exist side by side for a long time and the relations between the people speaking them are as intimate as they were in England, a considerable transference of words from one language to the other is inevitable. As is generally the case, the interchange was to some extent mutual. A good many English words found their way into the French spoken in England. We are naturally less interested in them here, because they concern rather the history of the Anglo-Norman language. Their number was not so large as that of the French words introduced into English. English, representing a culture that was regarded as inferior, had more to gain from French, and there were other factors involved. The number of French words that poured into English was unbelievably great. There is nothing comparable to it in the previous or subsequent history of the language.

Although this influx of French words was brought about by the victory of the Conqueror and by the political and social consequences of that victory, it was neither sudden nor immediately apparent. Rather it began slowly and continued with varying tempo for a long time. Indeed it can hardly be said to have ever stopped. The large number of French words borrowed during the Middle Ages has made it easy for us to go on borrowing, and the close cultural relations between France and England in all subsequent periods have furnished a constant opportunity for the transfer of words. But there was a time in the centuries following the Conquest when this movement had its start and a stream of French words poured into English with a momentum that continued until toward the end of the Middle English period.

In this movement two stages can be observed, an earlier and a later, with the year 1250 as the approximate dividing line. The borrowings of the first stage differ from those of the second in being much less numerous, in being more likely to show peculiarities of Anglo-Norman phonology, and, especially, in the circumstances that brought about their introduction. When we study the French words appearing in English before 1250, roughly 900 in number, we find that many of them were such as the lower classes would become familiar with through contact with a French-speaking nobility (*baron, noble, dame, servant, messenger, feast, minstrel, juggler, largess*). Others, such as *story, rime, lay, douzepers* (the twelve peers of the Charlemagne romances), obviously owed their introduction into English to literary channels. The largest single group among the words that came in early was associated with the church, where the necessity for the prompt transference of doctrine and belief from the clergy to the people is sufficient to account for the frequent transfer of words. In the period after 1250 the conditions under which French words had been making their way into English were supplemented by a new and powerful factor: those who had been accustomed to speak French were turning increasingly to the use of English. Whether to supply deficiencies in the English vocabulary or in their own imperfect command of that vocabulary, or perhaps merely yielding to a natural impulse to use a word long familiar to them and to those they addressed, the upper classes carried over into English an astonishing number of common French words. In changing from French to English they transferred much of their governmental and administrative vocabulary, their ecclesiastical, legal, and military terms, their familiar words of fashion, food, and social life, the vocabulary of art, learning, and medicine. In general we may say that in the earlier Middle English period

the French words introduced into English were such as people speaking one language often learn from those speaking another; in the century and a half following 1250, when all classes were speaking or learning to speak English, they were also such words as people who had been accustomed to speak French would carry over with them into the language of their adoption. Only in this way can we understand the nature and extent of the French importations in this period.

#### 124. *Governmental and Administrative Words.*

We should expect that English would owe many of its words dealing with government and administration to the language of those who for more than 200 years made public affairs their chief concern. The words *government*, *govern*, *administer* might appropriately introduce a list of such words. It would include such fundamental terms as *crown*, *state*, *empire*, *realm*, *reign*, *royal*, *prerogative*, *authority*, *sovereign*, *majesty*, *scepter*, *tyrant*, *usurp*, *oppress*, *court*, *council*, *parliament*, *assembly*, *statute*, *treaty*, *alliance*, *record*, *repeal*, *adjourn*, *tax*, *subsidy*, *revenue*, *tally*, *exchequer*. Intimately associated with the idea of government are also words like *subject*, *allegiance*, *rebel*, *traitor*, *treason*, *exile*, *public*, *liberty*. The word *office* and the titles of many offices are likewise French: *chancellor*, *treasurer*, *chamberlain*, *marshal*, *governor*, *councilor*, *minister*, *viscount*, *warden*, *castellan*, *mayor*, *constable*, *coroner*, and even the humble *crier*. Except for the words *king* and *queen*, *lord*, *lady*, and *earl*, most designations of rank are French: *noble*, *nobility*, *peer*, *prince*, *princess*, *duke*, *duchess*, *count*, *countess*, *marquis*, *baron*, *squire*, *page*, as well as such words as *courtier*, *retinue*, and titles of respect like *sir*, *madam*, *mistress*. The list might well be extended to include words relating to the economic organization of society—*manor*, *demesne*, *bailiff*, *vassal*, *homage*, *peasant*, *bondman*, *slave*, *servant*, and *caitiff*—since they often have a political or administrative aspect.

#### 125. *Ecclesiastical Words.*

The church was scarcely second to the government as an object of Norman interest and ambition. The higher clergy, occupying positions of wealth and power, were, as we have seen, practically all Normans. Ecclesiastical preferment opened the way to a career that often led to the highest political offices at court. In monasteries and religious houses French was for a long time the usual language. Accordingly we find in English such French words as *religion*, *theology*, *sermon*, *homily*, *sacrament*, *baptism*, *communion*, *confession*, *penance*, *prayer*, *orison*, *lesson*, *passion*, *psalmody*; such indications of rank or class as *clergy*, *clerk*, *prelate*, *cardinal*, *legate*, *dean*, *chaplain*, *parson*, *pastor*, *vicar*, *sexton*, *abbess*, *novice*, *friar*, *hermit*; the names of objects associated with the service or with the religious life, such as *crucifix*, *crozier*, *miter*, *surplice*, *censer*, *incense*, *lectern*, *image*, *chancel*, *chantry*, *chapter*, *abbey*, *convent*, *priory*, *hermitage*, *cloister*, *sanctuary*; words expressing such fundamental religious or theological concepts as *creator*, *savior*, *trinity*, *virgin*, *saint*, *miracle*, *mystery*, *faith*, *heresy*, *schism*, *reverence*, *devotion*, *sacrilege*, *simony*, *temptation*, *damnation*, *penitence*, *contrition*, *remission*, *absolution*,

*redemption, salvation, immortality*, and the more general virtues of *piety, sanctity, charity, mercy, pity, obedience*, as well as the word *virtue* itself. We should include also a number of adjectives, like *solemn, divine, reverend, devout*, and verbs, such as *preach, pray, chant, repent, confess, adore, sacrifice, convert, anoint, ordain*.

### 126. *Law.*

French was so long the language of the law courts in England that the greater part of the English legal vocabulary comes from the language of the conquerors. The fact that we speak of *justice* and *equity* instead of *geriht*, *judgment* rather than *dom* (doom), *crime* in place of *synn, gylt, undæd*, etc., shows how completely we have adopted the terminology of French law. Even where the Old English word survives it has lost its technical sense. In the same way we say *bar, assize, eyre, plea, suit, plaintiff, defendant, judge, advocate, attorney, bill, petition, complaint, inquest, summons, hue and cry, indictment, jury, juror, panel, felon, evidence, proof, bail, ransom, mainpernor, judgment, verdict, sentence, decree, award, fine, forfeit, punishment, prison, gaol, pillory*. We have likewise a rich array of verbs associated with legal processes: *sue, plead, implead, accuse, indict, arraign, depose, blame, arrest, seize, pledge, warrant, assail, assign, judge, condemn, convict, award, amerce, distrain, imprison, banish, acquit, pardon*. The names of many crimes and misdemeanors are French: *felony, trespass, assault, arson, larceny, fraud, libel, slander, perjury, adultery*, and many others. Suits involving property brought into use such words as *property, estate, tenement, chattels, appurtenances, encumbrance, bounds, seisin, tenant, dower, legacy, patrimony, heritage, heir, executor, entail*. Common adjectives like *just, innocent, culpable* have obvious legal import though they are also of wider application.

### 127. *Army and Navy.*

The large part that war played in English affairs in the Middle Ages, the fact that the control of the army and navy was in the hands of those who spoke French, and the circumstance that much of English fighting was done in France all resulted in the introduction into English of a number of French military terms. The art of war has undergone such changes since the days of Hastings and Lewes and Agincourt that many words once common are now obsolete or only in historical use. Their places have been taken by later borrowings, often likewise from French, many of them being words acquired by the French in the course of their wars in Italy during the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, we still use medieval French words when we speak of the *army* and the *navy*, of *peace, enemy, arms, battle, combat, skirmish, siege, defense, ambush, stratagem, retreat, soldier, garrison, guard, spy*, and we have kept the names of officers such as *captain, lieutenant, sergeant*. We recognize as once having had greater significance words like *dart, lance, banner, mail, buckler, hauberk, archer, chieftain, portcullis, barbican, and moat*. Sometimes we have retained a word while forgetting its original military significance. The word "*Havoc!*" was originally an order giving an army the signal to commence plundering and seizing spoil. Verbs like *to arm, array, harness*,

*brandish, vanquish, besiege, defend*, among many, suffice to remind us of this important French element in our vocabulary.

### 128. *Fashion, Meals, and Social Life.*

That the upper classes should have set the standard in fashion and dress is so obvious an assumption that the number of French words belonging to this class occasions no surprise. The words *fashion* and *dress* are themselves French, as are *apparel, habit, gown, robe, garment, attire, cape, cloak, coat, frock, collar, veil, train, chemise, petticoat*. So too are *lace, embroidery, pleat, gusset, buckle, button, tassel, plume*, and the names of such articles as *kerchief, mitten, garter, galoshes, and boots*. Verbs like *embellish* and *adorn* often occur in contexts which suggest the word *luxury*, and this in turn carries with it *satin, taffeta, fur, sable, beaver, ermine*. The colors *blue, brown, vermilion, scarlet, saffron, russet, and tawny* are French borrowings of this period. *Jewel, ornament, brooch, chaplet, ivory, and enamel* point to the luxuries of the wealthy, and it is significant that the names of all the more familiar precious stones are French: *turquoise, amethyst, topaz, garnet, ruby, emerald, sapphire, pearl, diamond*, not to mention *crystal, coral, and beryl*.

The French-speaking classes, it would seem, must also be credited with a considerable adornment of the English table. Not only are the words *dinner* and *supper* French, but also the words *feast, repast, collation, and mess* (now military). So, too, are *appetite, taste, victuals, viand, and sustenance*. One could have found on the medieval menu, had there been one, among the fish, *mackerel, sole, perch, bream, sturgeon, salmon, sardine, oyster, porpoise*; among meats, *venison, beef, veal, mutton, pork, bacon, sausage, tripe*, with a choice of *loin, chine, haunch, or brawn*, and with *gravy* included; among fowl, *poultry, pullet, pigeon*, and various game birds mentioned below. One could have *pottage, gruel, toast, biscuit, cream, sugar, olives, salad, lettuce, endive*, and for dessert *almonds*, and many fruits, including *raisin, fig, date, grape, orange, lemon, pomegranate, cherry*,<sup>16</sup> *peach*, or a *confection, pasty, tart, jelly, treacle*. Among seasoning and condiments we find *spice, clove, thyme, herb, mustard, vinegar, marjoram, cinnamon, nutmeg*. The verbs *roast, boil, parboil, stew, fry, broach, blanch, grate, and mince* describe various culinary processes, and *goblet, saucer, cruet, plate, platter* suggest French refinements in the serving of meals. It is melancholy to think what the English dinner table would have been like had there been no Norman Conquest.

A variety of new words suggests the innovations made by the French in domestic economy and social life. *Arras, curtain, couch, chair, cushion, screen, lamp, lantern, sconce, chandelier, blanket, quilt, coverlet, counterpane, towel, and basin* indicate articles of comfort or convenience, while *dais, parlor, wardrobe, closet, pantry, scullery, and garner* (storehouse) imply improvements in domestic arrangements. *Recreation, solace, jollity, leisure, dance, carol, revel, minstrel, juggler, fool, ribald, lute, tabor, melody, music, chess, checkers, dalliance, and conversation* reveal various aspects of entertainment in a baronial hall, while numerous words associated with hunting and riding are a reflection of the principal outdoor pastime of the nobility: *ambler, courser, hackney, palfrey, rouncy, stallion* for various types of horse, together with *rein, curb, crupper, rowel, curry, trot, stable, harness; mastiff, terrier, spaniel, leash, kennel, scent, retrieve; falcon, merlin, tercelet, mallard, partridge, pheasant, quail, plover, heron,*

*squirrel; forest, park, covert, warren.* One might extend the list to include other activities, with terms like *joust, tournament, pavilion*, but those given are sufficient to show how much the English vocabulary owes to French in matters of domestic and social life.

### 129. *Art, Learning, Medicine.*

The cultural and intellectual interests of the ruling class are reflected in words pertaining to the arts, architecture, literature, learning, and science, especially medicine. Such words as *art, painting, sculpture, music, beauty, color, figure, image, tone* are typical of the first class, while architecture and building have given us *cathedral, palace, mansion, chamber, ceiling, joist, cellar, garret, chimney, lintel, latch, lattice,*

*wicket, tower, pinnacle, turret, porch, bay, choir, cloister, baptistry, column, pillar, base,* and many similar words. Literature is represented by the word itself and by *poet, rime, prose, romance, lay, story, chronicle, tragedy, prologue, preface, title, volume, chapter, quire, parchment, vellum, paper, and pen,* and learning by *treatise, compilation, study, logic, geometry, grammar, noun, clause, gender,* together with verbs like *copy, expound, and compile.* Among the sciences, medicine has brought in the largest number of early French words still in common use, among them the word *medicine* itself, *chirurgy, physician, surgeon, apothecary, malady, debility, distemper, pain, ague, palsy, pleurisy, gout, jaundice, leper, paralytic, plague, pestilence, contagion, anatomy, stomach, pulse, remedy, ointment, balm, pellet, alum, arsenic, niter, sulphur, alkali, poison.* It is clear that the arts and sciences, being largely cultivated or patronized by the higher classes, owe an important part of their vocabulary to French.

### 130. *Breadth of the French Influence.*

Such classes of words as have been illustrated in the foregoing paragraphs indicate important departments in which the French language altered the English vocabulary in the Middle Ages. But they do not sufficiently indicate how very general was the adoption of French words in every province of life and thought. One has only to glance over a miscellaneous list of words—nouns, adjectives, verbs—to realize how universal was the French contribution. In the noun we may consider the range of ideas in the following list, made up of words that were already in English by 1300: *action, adventure, affection, age, air, bucket, bushel, calendar, carpenter, cheer, city, coast, comfort, cost, country, courage, courtesy, coward, crocodile, cruelty, damage, debt, deceit, dozen, ease, envy, error, face, faggot, fame, fault, flower, folly, force, gibbet, glutton, grain, grief, gum, harlot, honor, hour, jest, joy, labor, leopard, malice, manner, marriage, mason, metal, mischief, mountain, noise, number, ocean, odor, opinion, order, pair, people, peril, person, pewter, piece, point, poverty, powder, power, quality, quart, rage, rancor, reason, river, scandal, seal, season, sign, sound, sphere, spirit, square, strife, stubble, substance, sum, tailor, task, tavern, tempest, unity, use, vision, waste.* The same universality is shown in the adjective. Here the additions were of special importance since Old English was not very well provided with adjective distinctions. From nearly a thousand French adjectives in Middle English we may consider the following selection,

all the words in this list being in use in Chaucer's time: *able, abundant, active, actual, amiable, amorous, barren, blank, brief, calm, certain, chaste, chief, clear, common, contrary, courageous, courteous, covetous, coy, cruel, curious, debonair, double, eager, easy, faint, feeble, fierce, final, firm, foreign, frail, frank, gay, gentle, gracious, hardy, hasty, honest, horrible, innocent, jolly, large, liberal, luxurious, malicious, mean, moist, natural, nice, obedient, original, perfect, pertinent, plain, pliant, poor, precious, principal, probable, proper, pure, quaint, real, rude, safe, sage, savage, scarce, second, secret, simple, single, sober, solid, special, stable, stout, strange, sturdy, subtle, sudden, supple, sure, tender, treacherous, universal, usual* A list of the verbs borrowed at the same time shows equal diversity. Examples are: *advance, advise, aim, allow, apply, approach, arrange, arrive, betray, butt, carry, chafe, change, chase, close, comfort, commence, complain, conceal, consider, continue, count, cover, covet, cry, cull, deceive, declare, defeat, defer, defy, delay, desire, destroy, embrace, enclose, endure, enjoy, enter, err, excuse, flatter, flourish, force, forge, form, furnish, grant, increase, nform, inquire, join, languish, launch, marry, mount, move, murmur, muse, nourish, obey, oblige, observe, pass, pay, pierce, pinch, please, practise, praise, prefer, proceed, propose, prove, purify, pursue, push, quash, quit, receive, refuse, rejoice, relieve, remember, reply, rinse, rob, satisfy, save, scald, serve, spoil, strangle, strive, stun, succeed, summon, suppose, surprise, tax, tempt, trace, travel, tremble, trip, wait, waive, waste, wince*. Finally, the influence of French may be seen in numerous phrases and turns of expression, such as *to take leave, to draw near, to hold one's peace, to come to a head, to do justice, or make believe, hand to hand, on the point of, according to, subject to, at large, by heart, in vain, without fail*. In these and other phrases, even when the words are English the pattern is French.<sup>17</sup>

These four lists have been presented for the general impression which they create and as the basis for an inference which they clearly justify. This is, that so far as the vocabulary is concerned, what we have in the influence of the Norman Conquest is a merging of the resources of two languages, a merger in which thousands of words in common use in each language became partners in a reorganized concern. English retains a controlling interest, but French as a large minority stockholder supplements and rounds out the major organization in almost every department.

### 131. *Anglo-Norman and Central French.*

It will be observed that the French words introduced into English as a result of the Norman Conquest often present an appearance quite different from that which they have in Modern French. This is due first of all to subsequent developments that have taken place in the two languages. Thus the OF *feste* passed into Middle English as *feste*, whence it has become *feast* in Modern English, while in French the *s* disappeared before other consonants at the end of the twelfth century and we have in Modern French the form *fête*. The same difference appears in *forest*—

<sup>17</sup> See the references on page 167.



*forêt*, *hostel*—*hôtel*, *bêast*—*bete*, and many other words. The difference is not always fully revealed by the spelling but is apparent in the pronunciation. Thus the English words *judge* and *chant* preserve the early French pronunciation of *j* and *ch*, which was softened in French in the thirteenth century to [ʒ] and [ʃ] as in the Modern French *juge* and *chant*. Therefore we may recognize *charge*, *change*, *chamber*, *chase*, *chair*, *chimney*, *just*, *jewel*, *journey*, *majesty*, *gentile*, and many other words as early borrowings, while such words as *chamois*, *chaperon*, *chiffon*, *chevron*, *jabot*, *rouge*, and the like, show by their pronunciation that they have come into the language at a later date. The word *chivalry* is an early word and should be pronounced [č], but it has been influenced by such words as *chevalier* and by Modern French. A similar case is that of words like *police* and *ravine*, where we pronounce the *i* in the French manner. If these words had been borrowed early, we should pronounce them as we do *nice* and *vine*.

A second cause of difference between English words and their French counterparts is the fact that the Anglo-Norman or Anglo-French dialect spoken in England differed from the language of Paris (Central French) in numerous respects. A few examples will make this clear. In Anglo-Norman<sup>18</sup> initial *ca-* was often retained, whereas it became *cha-*, *chie-* in Central French.<sup>19</sup> For example, our word *caitiff* represents the AN *caitif*, whereas the Central French form was *chaitif*. In the same way are explained words like *carry*, *carriage*, *case* (box), *cauldron*, *carriion*, etc., since the corresponding words in the dialect of Paris were pronounced with *ch* (*charrier*, *chaudron*, etc.). In some cases English has taken over the same word in both its Norman and its Central French form. Thus AN *catel* corresponds to Central French *chatel*: one gives us our word *cattle*, the other *chattel(s)*. The English verb *catch* represents the Anglo-Norman *cachier*, while the Central French *chacier* (Modern French *chasser*) appears in the English *chase*. Or we may take another peculiarity of Anglo-Norman which appears in English. It is a well-known fact that Central French showed an early avoidance of the *wsound*, both separately and in combination with other consonants, and

<sup>18</sup> There is still considerable difference of opinion as to whether this dialect was in any real sense a unified speech. It shows great diversity of forms and this diversity may reflect the variety of the French people who settled in England. Many others besides Normans took part in William's invasion, and among those who came later every part of France was represented. In this mixture, however, it is certain that Normans predominated, and the Anglo-Norman dialect agrees in its most characteristic features with the dialects of northern France and especially with that of Normandy. Some features of the Norman dialect were characteristic also of its neighbor, Picard, and such features would be reinforced in England by the speech of those who came from the Picard area.

<sup>19</sup> This distinction as it appears in Middle English has been studied by S.H. Bush, "Old Northern French Loan-words in Middle English," *PQ*, 1 (1922), 161–72.

whether found in Latin or in words borrowed from the Germanic languages. But the dialects of northern and especially northeastern France, possibly because of their proximity to Flemish and Dutch, showed less hostility to this sound and it accordingly is found in Anglo-Norman. And so we have English *wicket* representing the old Norman French *wiket*, which became in the Paris dialect *guichet*, the form which it has in Modern French. In the same way *waste* (AN *waster*) was in Central French *guaster* or *gaster* (Mod. F. *gâter*). Other examples are *wasp* (F. *guêpe*), *warmnt* (F. *garantir*), *reward* (F. *regarder*), *wardrobe*, *wait*, *warden* (cf. *guardian*, from Central French), *wage*, *warren*, *wince*. In the combination *qu-* Central French likewise dropped the labial element while it was retained for a time in Anglo-Norman. For this reason we say *quit*, *quarter*, *quality*, *question*, *require*, etc., all with the sound of [kw], where French has a simple [k] (*quitter*, *quartier*, *qualité*, etc.).

The consonants were not alone in showing special developments in England. The vowels also at times developed differently, and these differences are likewise reflected in the words borrowed by English. One or two illustrations will have to suffice. In Old French the diphthong *ui* was originally accented on the first element (*ûi*). This accentuation was retained in Anglo-Norman and the *i* disappeared, leaving a simple *u* [y]. In Middle English this [y] became [u] or [iu], written *u*, *ui*, *ew*, etc. Hence the English word *fruit*. In Central French, on the other hand, the accentuation of this diphthong was shifted in the twelfth century from *ûi* to *uí*, and as a consequence we have in Modern French the form *fruit* with a quite different pronunciation. Again, the diphthong *ei* was retained in Anglo-Norman, but early in the twelfth century it had become *oi* in Central French. Thus we have in English *leal*, *real* (AN *leial*, *reial*) as compared with French *loyal*, *royal* (which we have also subsequently adopted). The Latin endings *-ārius*, *-ōrius* appear in Anglo-Norman as *-arie*,<sup>20</sup> *-orie*, but in Central French they developed into *-aire*, *-oire*. Hence we have English *salary*, *victory*, but in French *salaire*, *victoire*. Of course, in many respects the French spoken in England was identical in its forms with that of Paris, but the cases in which it differed are sufficient to establish the conclusion that until well into the fourteenth century English borrowed its French words generally in the form which they had in the spoken French of England.

While this statement is in accordance with inherent probability and is supported by abundant evidence so far as that evidence enables us to recognize dialectal differences, it must be qualified in one way. We have already seen (§ 101) that by the thirteenth century the preeminence of the Paris dialect was

<sup>20</sup> Also as *-er*, as in *carpenter*, *danger*.

making itself felt outside the capital and it is probable that the French of England was gradually modified in the direction of conformity with that dialect. In spite of Chaucer's jest about the French of Stratford-at-Bow and the undoubted fact that the French of England was ridiculed by those who spoke the dialect of the Ile-de-France, we know that English children were at times sent abroad to correct their accent and that there was much travel to the continent. All this could not have been without some effect in making the forms of Central French more familiar in England. There was moreover the constant influence of French literature. It is reasonable to suppose, therefore, that as time went on and the use of French in England became more artificial, a larger share of the English borrowing was from Central French. This was more particularly the case in the fifteenth century when the less popular character of many of the words borrowed suggests that they came more often through literary than through colloquial channels.<sup>21</sup>

### 132. *Popular and Literary Borrowings.*

There can be little doubt that a large proportion of the words borrowed from French were thoroughly popular in character, that is, words current in the everyday French spoken in England. At the same time the importance of literature is not to be underestimated as a means of transfer. So much of Middle English literature was based directly on French originals that it would have been rather exceptional if English writers had consistently resisted the temptation to carry French words over into their adaptations. Layamon resisted, but most others did not, and when in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries French words were being taken by the hundreds into the popular speech, the way was made easier for the entrance of literary words as well. Although literature was one of the channels by which French words entered English all through the Middle English period, in the fifteenth century it became the principal source. Words like *adolescence*, *affability*, *appellation*, *cohort*, *combustion*, *destitution*, *harangue*, *immensity*, *ingenious*, *pacification*, *representation*, *sumptuous* betray their learned or bookish origin, and in the works of Caxton at the end of the century new words like *aggravation*, *diversify*, *furtive*, *prolongation*, and *ravishment* abound. The number of such words entering the language at this time is probably no greater than in the preceding century, but they are more prominent because the adoption of popular words was now greatly curtailed by the practical disappearance of French as a spoken language in England.

### 133. *The Period of Greatest Influence.*

Some time elapsed after the Norman Conquest before its effects were felt to any appreciable degree by the

<sup>21</sup> There is a discussion of the Central French element in English in Skeat, *Principles of English Etymology*, Second Series (Oxford, 1891), chap. 8.

English vocabulary. This fact has long been recognized in a general way, but it is only within this century that the materials have been available which enable us to speak with any assurance as to the exact period when the greatest number of French words came into the language. These materials are the dated quotations in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In 1905 Otto Jespersen made a statistical study of one thousand words borrowed from French, classifying them according to the dates when they were first recorded in English and grouping them by half centuries.<sup>22</sup> The result is highly illuminating. For a hundred years after the Conquest there is no increase in the number of French words being adopted. In the last half of the twelfth century the number increases slightly and in the period from 1200 to 1250 somewhat more rapidly. But it does not become really great until after 1250. Then the full tide sets in, rising to a climax at the end of the fourteenth century. By 1400 the movement has spent its force. A sharp drop in the fifteenth century has been followed by a gradual tapering off ever since.

Although there is no way of knowing how long a word had been in the language before the earliest recorded instance, it is a striking fact that so far as surviving records show, the introduction of French words into English follows closely the progressive adoption of English by the upper classes (cf. § 95). As we have seen, the years from 1250 to 1400 mark the period when English was everywhere replacing French. During these 150 years 40 percent of all the French words in the English language came in.<sup>23</sup>

A further calculation shows that the total number of French words adopted during the Middle English period was slightly over 10,000. Of these about 75 percent are still in current use.

<sup>22</sup> *Growth and Structure of the English Language* (10th ed., 1982), p. 94. The following table differs somewhat from his. It represents an independent calculation based upon the completed dictionary. Jespersen took the first hundred words under the letters A–H and the first fifty under I and J. The method followed in compiling the present table is described in *Modern Language Notes*, 50 (1935), 90–93.

...1050	2	1301–1350	108	1601–1650	61
1051–1100	0	1351–1400	198	1651–1700	37
1101–1150	2	1401–1450	74	1701–1750	33
1151–1200	7	1451–1500	90	1751–1800	26
1201–1250	35	1501–1550	62	1801–1850	46
1251–1300	99	1551–1600	95	1851–1900	25

For statistics based on the letter A only, see F. Mossé, "On the Chronology of French Loan-Words in English," *English Studies*, 25 (1943), 33–40. See also Xavier Dekeyser, "Romance Loans in Middle English: A Re-assessment," in *Linguistics across Historical and Geographical Boundaries: In Honour of Jacek Fisiak*, ed. Dieter Kastovsky and Aleksander Szwedek (2 vols., Berlin, 1986), I, 253–65.

<sup>23</sup> As indicated in the text, a word may have been in use some time before the date at which it is first recorded in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, but such a circumstance can hardly invalidate the conclusion here stated.

### 134. Assimilation.

The rapidity with which the new French words were assimilated is evidenced by the promptness with which many of them became the basis of derivatives. English endings were apparently added to them with as much freedom as to English words. For example, the adjective *gentle* is recorded in 1225 and within five years we have it compounded with an English noun to make *gentlewoman* (1230). A little later we find *gentleman* (1275), *gentleness* (1300), and *gently* (1330). These compounds and derivatives all occur within about a century of the time when the original adjective was adopted. In the same way we have *faith* (1250) giving *faithless* and *faithful* (both by 1300), *faithfully* (1362), and *faithfulness* (1388), as well as the obsolete *faithly* (1325). The adverbial ending *-ly* seems to have been added to adjectives almost as soon as they appeared in the language. The adverbs *commonly*, *courteously*, *eagerly*, *feebly*, *fiercely*, *justly*, *peacefully*, and many more occur almost as early as the adjectives from which they are derived, while *faintly* by mere chance has been preserved in writing from a slightly earlier date than *faint*. Hybrid forms (French root with English prefix or suffix) like *chasthed* (chastity), *lecherness*, *debonairship*, *poorness*, *spusbruche* (spousebreach, adultery), *becatch*, *ungracious*, *overpraising*, *forscald*<sup>24</sup> occur quite early (mostly before 1250), while *common* (1297) has been made into *commonweal* (OE *wela*) by 1330, *battle* (1297) combined with *ax* (OE *æx*) by 1380, and so on. It is clear that the new French words were quickly assimilated, and entered into an easy and natural fusion with the native element in English.

### 135. Loss of Native Words.

Language often seems lavish, if not wasteful, in having many words that appear to duplicate each other. And yet it has been said that there are no exact synonyms in English. There are usually certain peculiarities of meaning or use that distinguish a word from others with which it has much in common. This seems to indicate that a certain sense of economy characterizes people in their use of language and causes them to get rid of a word when its function is fully performed by some other word. After the Norman Conquest, duplications frequently resulted, for many of the French words that came into use bore meanings already expressed by a native word. In such cases one of two things happened: of the two words one was eventually lost, or, where both survived, they were differentiated in meaning. In some cases the French word disappeared, but in a great many cases it was the Old English word that died out. The substitution was not always immediate; often both words continued in use for a longer or shorter time, and the

<sup>24</sup> Behrens, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der französischen Sprache in England* (Heilbronn, Germany, 1886), p. 9.

English word occasionally survives in the dialects today. Thus the OE *ēam*, which has been replaced in the standard speech by the French word *uncle*, is still in use (*eme*) in Scotland. The OE *anda* contested its position with the French *envy* until the time of Chaucer, but eventually lost out and with it went the adjective *andig* (envious) and the verb *andian* (to envy). In this way many common Old English words succumbed. The OE *æpele* yielded to F. *noble*, and *æpeling* became *nobleman*. *Dryhten* and *frēa* were displaced by the French *prince*, although the English word *lord*, which survived as a synonym, helped in the elimination. At the same time *leod* was being ousted by *people*. The OE *dēma* (judge), *dēman* (to judge), and *dōm* (judgment) gave way before French influence in matters of law, but we still use *deem* in the sense of to think or hold an opinion, and *dōm* has survived in special senses, as in *the day of doom*, or *to meet one's doom*. OE *cȳþere* (witness), *fīren* (crime), and *scyldig* (guilty) have likewise disappeared, as have *here* (army), *cempa* (warrior), and *sibb* (peace). OE *blāed* lived on beside *flower* from French until the thirteenth century, and *blēo* (color) survives dialectally as *blee*. Other common words that were lost may be illustrated by *ād* (disease), *ieldu* (age), *lof* (praise), *lyft* (air), *hold* (gracious), *earm* (poor), *slīþe* (cruel), *gēcynde* (natural), although it survived as *kind* with this meaning until the sixteenth century, *wuldor* (glory) with its adjective *wuldrig* (glorious), and *wlite* (beauty), *wlitig* (beautiful). In all these cases the place of the English word was taken by the word in parentheses, introduced from French. Many common verbs died out in the same way, such as *andettan* (confess), *beorgan* (preserve, defend), *bieldan* and *elnian* (encourage), *dihtan* (compose), *flītan* (contend; flite [dialect]), *gōdian* (improve), *healsian* (implore), *herian* (praise), *lēanian* (reward), *belīfan* (remain), *miltisian* (pity). Here likewise the words in parentheses are the French verbs that replaced the native word. Not all the Old English words that have disappeared were driven out by French equivalents. Some gave way to other more or less synonymous words in Old English. Many independently fell into disuse. Nevertheless the enormous invasion of French words not only took the place of many English words that had been lost but itself accounts for a great many of the losses from the Old English vocabulary.

### 136. Differentiation in Meaning.

Where both the English and the French words survived they were generally differentiated in meaning. The words *doom* and *judgment*, *to deem* and *to judge* are examples that have already been mentioned. In the fifteenth century *hearty* and *cordial* came to be used for feelings which were supposed to spring from the heart. Etymologically they are alike, coming respectively from the Old English and the Latin words for heart. But we have kept them both because we use them with a slight difference in meaning, *hearty* implying a certain physical vigor and downrightness, as in *a hearty dinner*, *cordial* a more quiet or conventional manifestation, as in *a cordial reception*. In the same way we have kept a number of words for *smell*. The common word in Old English was *stench*. During the Middle English period this was supplemented by the word *smell* (of unknown origin) and the French words *aroma*, *odor*, and *scent*. To these we have since added *stink* (from the

verb) and *perfume* and *fragrance*, from French. Most of these have special connotations and *smell* has become the general word. *Stench* now always means an unpleasant smell. An interesting group of words illustrating the principle is *ox*, *sheep*, *swine*, and *calf* beside the French equivalents *beef*, *mutton*, *pork*, and *veal*. The French words primarily denoted the animal, as they still do, but in English they were used from the beginning to distinguish the meat from the living beast.<sup>25</sup> Other cases of differentiation are English *house* beside *mansion* from French, *might* beside *power*, and the pairs *ask*—*demand*, *shun*—*avoid*, *seethe*—*boil*, *wish*—*desire*. In most of these cases where duplication occurred, the French word, when it came into English, was a close synonym of the corresponding English word. The discrimination between them has been a matter of gradual growth, but it justifies the retention of both words in the language.

### 137. *Curtailment of OE Processes of Derivation.*

Because language is a form of human activity, it often displays habits or tendencies that one recognizes as characteristic of the speech of a given people at a given time. These habits may be altered by circumstances. As we have already seen (§§ 49–50), Old English, like other Indo-European languages, enlarged its vocabulary chiefly by a liberal use of prefixes and suffixes and an easy power of combining native elements into self-interpreting compounds. In this way the existing resources of the language were expanded at will and any new needs were met. In the centuries following the Norman Conquest, however, there is a visible decline in the use of these old methods of word formation.

### 138. *Prefixes.*

This is first of all apparent in the matter of prefixes. Many of the Old English prefixes gradually lost their vitality, their ability to enter into new combinations. The Old English prefix *for-* (corresponding to German *ver-*) was often used to intensify the meaning of a verb or to add the idea of something destructive or prejudicial. For a while during the Middle English period it continued to be used occasionally in new formations. Thus at about 1300 we find *forhang* (put to death by hanging), *forcleave* (cut to pieces), and *forshake* (shake off). It was even combined with words borrowed from

<sup>25</sup> The well-known passage in Scott's *Ivanhoe* in which this distinction is entertainingly introduced into a conversation between Wamba and Gurth (chap. 1) is open to criticism only because the episode occurs about a century too early. *Beef* is first found in English at about 1300.

French: *forcover*, *forbar*, *forgab* (deride), *fortmvail* (tire). But while these occasional instances show that the prefix was not dead, it seems to have had no real vitality. None of these new formations lived long, and the prefix is now entirely obsolete. The only verbs in which it occurs in Modern English are *forbear*, *forbid*, *fordo*, *forget*, *forgive*, *forgo*, *forsake*, *forswear*, and the participle *forlorn*. All of them had their origin in Old English. The prefix *to-* (German *zer-*) has disappeared even more completely. Although the 1611 Bible tells us that the woman who cast a millstone upon Abimelech's head "all tobrake his skull," and expressions like *tomelt* and *toburst* lived on for a time, there is no trace of the prefix in current use. *With-* (meaning *against*) gave a few new words in Middle English such as *withdraw*, *withgo*, *withsake*, and others. *Withdraw* and *withhold* survive, together with the Old English *withstand*, but other equally useful words have been replaced by later borrowings from Latin: *withsay* by *renounce*, *withspeak* by *contradict*, *withset* by *resist*, etc. Some prefixes which are still productive today, like *over-* and *under-*, fell into comparative disuse for a time after the Norman Conquest. Most compounds of *over-* that are not of Old English origin have arisen in the modern period. The prefix *on-* (now *un-*) which was used to reverse the action of a verb as in *unbind*, *undo*, *unfold*, *unwind*, and which in Middle English gave us *unfasten*, *unbuckle*, *uncover*, and *unwrap*, seems to owe such life as it still enjoys to association with the negative prefix *un-*. The productive power which these formative elements once enjoyed has in many cases been transferred to prefixes like *counter-*, *dis-*, *re-*, *trans-*, and others of Latin origin. It is possible that some of them would have gone out of use had there been no Norman Conquest, but when we see their disuse keeping pace with the increase of the French element in the language and find them in many cases disappearing at the end of the Middle English period, at a time when French borrowings have reached their maximum, it is impossible to doubt that the wealth of easily acquired new words had weakened English habits of word formation.

### 139. Suffixes.

A similar decline is observable in the formative power of certain suffixes that were widely used in Old English. The loss here is perhaps less distinctly felt because some important endings have remained in full force. Such are the noun suffix *-ness* and the adjective endings *-ful*, *-less*, *-some*, and *-ish*. But others equally important were either lost or greatly diminished in vitality. Thus the abstract suffix *-lock* (OE *lāc*) survives only in *wedlock*, *-red* (OE *rāeden*) only in *hatred* and *kindred*. The ending *-dom* was used in Old English to form abstract nouns from other nouns (*kingdom*, *earldom*, *martyrdom*) and from adjectives (*freedom*, *wisdom*). In Middle English there are some new formations such as *dukedom* and *thralldom*, but most of the formations from adjectives, like *falsedom* and *richdom*, did not prove permanent, and the suffix is to all intents and purposes now dead. When used today it is for the most part employed in half serious coinages, such as *fandom*, *stardom*, *topsy-turvydom*. The endings *-hood* and *-ship* have had a similar history. *Manhood*, *womanhood*, *likelihood* are new formations in Middle English, showing that the suffix retained its power for a while. In fact it occasionally reasserts itself in modern times. *Boyhood* and *girlhood* date from the eighteenth century,



while *hardihood* is apparently a creation of Milton's that was revived by Macaulay. Many of the Old English abstracts in *-ship* were lost. We have kept *friendship* but not *fiendship*, and of those formed from adjectives in Old English the only one still in use is *worship* (worthship). Most of the new formations in Middle English had a short life. We have retained *hardship* but not *boldship*, *busiship*, *cleanship*, *kindship*, etc. In all these instances the ending *-ness* was preferred. As in the case of prefixes, we can see here a gradual change in English habits of word formation resulting from the available supply of French words with which to fill the needs formerly met by the native resources of the language.

#### 140. *Self-explaining Compounds.*

One further habit that was somewhat weakened, although by no means broken, was that of combining native words into self-interpreting compounds. The extent to which words like *bookhouse* or *boatswain* entered into Old English has been pointed out above (§ 49). The practice was not abandoned in Middle English, but in many cases where a new word could have been easily formed on the native model, a ready-made French word was borrowed instead. Today self-explaining compounds are still formed by a sure instinct (*picture tube*, *driver's-side air bag*, *four-wheel disc brakes*), but the method is much less universal than it once was because of new habits introduced after the Norman Conquest.

#### 141. *The Language Still English.*

It must not be thought that the extensive modification of the English language caused by the Norman Conquest had made of it something else than English. The language had undergone much simplification of its inflections, but its grammar was still English. It had absorbed several thousand French words as a natural consequence of a situation in which large numbers of people were for a time bilingual and then gradually turned from the habitual use of French to the habitual use of English. It had lost a great many native words and abandoned some of its most characteristic habits of word formation. But great and basic elements of the vocabulary were still English. No matter what class of society they belonged to, the English *ate*, *drank*, and *slept*, so to speak, in English, *worked* and *played*, *spoke* and *sang*, *walked*, *ran*, *rode*, *leaped*, and *swam* in the same language. The *house* they lived in, with its *hall*, *bower*, *rooms*, *windows*, *doors*, *floor*, *steps*, *gate*, etc., reminds us that their language was basically Germanic. Their *meat* and *drink*, *bread*, *butter*, *fish*, *milk*, *cheese*, *salt*, *pepper*, *wine*, *ale*, and *beer* were inherited from pre-Conquest days, while they could not refer to their *arms*, *legs*, *feet*, *hands*, *eyes*, *ears*, *head*, *nose*, *mouth*, or any common part of the body without using English words for the purpose. While we are under the necessity of paying considerable attention to the large French element that the Norman Conquest brought directly and indirectly into the language, we must see it in proper perspective. The language that the Normans and their successors finally adopted was English, and although it was an English changed in many important particulars from the language of King Alfred, its predominant features were those inherited from the Germanic tribes that settled in England in the fifth century.

### 142. *Latin Borrowings in Middle English.*

The influence of the Norman Conquest is generally known as the Latin Influence of the Third Period in recognition of the ultimate source of the new French words. But it is right to include also under this designation the large number of words borrowed directly from Latin in Middle English. These differed from the French borrowings in being less popular and in gaining admission generally through the written language. Of course, it must not be forgotten that Latin was a spoken language among ecclesiastics and men of learning, and a certain number of Latin words could well have passed directly into spoken English. Their number, however, is small in comparison with those that we can observe entering by way of literature. In a single work like Trevisa's translation of the *De Proprietatibus Rerum* of Bartholomew Anglicus we meet with several hundred words taken over from the Latin original. Since they are not found before this in English, we can hardly doubt that we have here a typical instance of the way such words first came to be used. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were especially prolific in Latin borrowings. An anonymous writer of the first half of the fifteenth century complains that it is not easy to translate from Latin into English, for "there ys many wordes in Latyn that we have no propre Englysh accordynge therto."<sup>26</sup> Wycliffe and his associates are credited with more than a thousand Latin words not previously found in English.<sup>27</sup> Since many of them occur in the so-called Wycliffe translation of the Bible and have been retained in subsequent translations, they have passed into common

<sup>26</sup> *The Myroure of Oure Ladye*, EETSES, 19, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Otto Dellit, *Über lateinische Elemente im Mittelenglischen* (Marburg, Germany, 1905), p. 38.

use. The innovations of other writers were not always so fortunate. Many of them, like the inkhorn terms of the Renaissance, were but passing experiments. Nevertheless the permanent additions from Latin to the English vocabulary in this period are much larger than has generally been realized.

It is unnecessary to attempt a formal classification of these borrowings. Some idea of their range and character may be gained from a selected but miscellaneous list of examples: *abject, adjacent, allegory, conspiracy, contempt, custody, distract, frustrate, genius, gesture, history, homicide, immune, incarnate, include, incredible, incubus, incumbent, index, individual, infancy, inferior, infinite, innate, innumerable, intellect, interrupt, juniper, lapidary, legal, limbo, lucrative, lunatic, magnify, malefactor, mechanical, minor, missal, moderate, necessary, nervous, notary, ornate, picture, polite, popular, prevent, private, project, promote, prosecute, prosody, pulpit, quiet, rational, reject, remit, reprehend, rosary, script, scripture, scrutiny, secular, solar, solitary, spacious, stupor, subdivide, subjugate, submit, subordinate, subscribe, substitute, summary, superabundance, supplicate, suppress, temperate, temporal, testify, testimony, tincture, tract, tributary, ulcer, zenith, zephyr*. Here we have terms relating to law, medicine, theology, science, and literature, words often justified in the beginning by technical or professional use and later acquiring a wider application. Among them may be noticed several with endings like *-able, -ible, -ent, -al, -ous, -ive*, and others, which thus became familiar in English and, reinforced often by French, now form common elements in English derivatives. All the words in the above list are accepted by the *Oxford English Dictionary* as direct borrowings from Latin. But in many cases Latin words were being borrowed by French at the same time, and the adoption of a word in English may often have been due to the impact of both languages.

### 143. *Aureate Terms.*

The introduction of unusual words from Latin (and occasionally elsewhere) became a conscious stylistic device in the fifteenth century, extensively used by poets and occasionally by writers of prose. By means of such words as *abusion, dispoine, diurne, equipolent, palestral*, and *tenebrous*, poets attempted what has been described as a kind of stylistic gilding, and this feature of their language is accordingly known as “aureate diction.”<sup>28</sup> The beginnings of this tendency have been traced back to the fourteenth century. It occurs in moderation in the poetry of Chaucer, becomes a distinct mannerism in the work of Lydgate, and runs riot in the productions of the Scottish Chaucerians—James I, Henryson, Dunbar, and the rest. How

<sup>28</sup> The standard treatment of the subject is John C. Mendenhall, *Aureate Terms* (Lancaster, PA, 1919).

far this affectation went may be seen in the opening lines of Dunbar's *Ballad of Our Lady*:

Hale, sterne superne! Hale, in eterne,  
In Godis sicht to schyne!

Lucerne in derne,<sup>29</sup> for to discern  
Be glory and grace devyne;

Hodiern, modern, sempitern,  
Angelicallregyne!

Our tern<sup>30</sup> infern for to dispersn  
Helpe, rialest Rosyne!<sup>31</sup>

The use of such "halff chongyd Latyne," as a contemporary poet describes it,<sup>32</sup> was quite artificial. The poets who affected aureate terms have been described as tearing up words from Latin "which never took root in the language, like children making a mock garden with flowers and branches stuck in the ground, which speedily wither."<sup>33</sup> This is essentially true, but not wholly so. The novelty that was sought after, and that such words had in the beginning, wore off with use; and words which were "aureate" in Chaucer, like *laureate*, *mediation*, *oriental*, *prolixity*, have sometimes become part of the common speech. These innovations are of considerable interest in the history of style; in the history of language they appear as a minor current in the stream of Latin words flowing into English in the course of the Middle Ages.

#### 144. *Synonyms at Three Levels.*

Much nonsense has been written on the relative merits of the Germanic and Romance elements in the English vocabulary.<sup>34</sup> The Latinized diction of many seventeenth- and

<sup>29</sup> lamp in darkness

<sup>30</sup> woe

<sup>31</sup> rose

<sup>32</sup> John Metham, Cf. P.H.Nichols, "Lydgate's Influence on the Aureate Terms of the Scottish Chaucerians," *PMLA*, 47 (1932), 516-22.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Campbell, *Essay on English Poetry* (London, 1848), p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> Even so sensible a scholar as Freeman could write: "This abiding corruption of our language I believe to have been the one result of the Norman Conquest which has been purely evil." (*Norman Conquest*, V, 547.)

eighteenth-century writers brought up in the tradition of the classics provoked a reaction in which the "Saxon" element of the language was glorified as the strong, simple, and direct component in contrast with the many abstract and literary words derived from Latin and French. It is easy to select pairs like *deed—exploit*, *spell—enchantment*, *take—apprehend*, *weariness—lassitude* and on the basis of such examples make generalizations about the superior directness, the homely force and concreteness of the Old English words. But such contrasts ignore the many hundreds of words from French which are equally simple and as capable of conveying a vivid image, idea, or emotion—nouns like *bar*, *beak*, *cell*, *cry*, *fool*, *frown*, *fury*, *glory*, *guile*, *gullet*, *horror*, *humor*, *isle*, *pity*, *river*, *rock*, *ruin*, *stain*, *stuff*, *touch*, *wreck*, or adjectives such as *calm*, *clear*, *cruel*, *eager*, *fierce*, *gay*, *mean*, *rude*, *safe*, *tender*, to take examples almost at random. The truth is that many of the most vivid and forceful words in English are French, and even where the French and Latin words are more literary or learned, as indeed they often are, they are no less valuable and important. Language has need for the simple, the polished, and even the recondite word. The richness of English in synonyms is largely due to the happy mingling of Latin, French, and native elements. It has been said that we have a synonym at each level—popular, literary, and learned. Although this statement must not be pressed too hard, a difference is often apparent, as in *rise—mount—ascend*, *ask—question—interrogate*, *goodness—virtue—probity*, *fast—firm—secure*, *fire—flame—conflagration*, *fear—terror—trepidation*, *holy—sacred—consecrated*, *time—age—epoch*. In each of these sets of three words the first is English, the second is from French, and the third from Latin. The difference in tone between the English and the French words is often slight; the Latin word is generally more bookish. However, it is more important to recognize the distinctive uses of each than to form prejudices in favor of one group above another.

#### 145. Words from the Low Countries.

The importance of the Romance element in English has overshadowed and caused to be neglected another source of foreign words in the vocabulary, the languages of the Low Countries—Flemish, Dutch, and Low German. The similarity of these languages to English makes it difficult often to tell whether a word has been adopted from one of them or is of native origin. Moreover, the influence was not the result of some single cause, like the introduction of Christianity or the Norman Conquest, confined more or less to a given period of time, but was rather a gradual infiltration due to the constant and close relations between England and the people of Flanders, Holland, and northern Germany. This intercourse extends from the days of William the Conqueror, whose wife was Flemish, down to the eighteenth century. All through the Middle Ages Flemings came to England in considerable numbers. In the English wars at home and abroad we repeatedly find Flemish mercenaries fighting with the English forces. Others came for more peaceful purposes and settled in the country. The wool industry was the major industry of England in the Middle Ages. Most of the wool exported from England went to supply Flemish and Dutch looms. On the other hand, weavers from the Low Countries, noted for their superior cloths, were encouraged to come to England and at various times came in large numbers. They were sufficiently numerous to arouse at intervals the antagonism of the