

that, during the first half of the fourteenth century, French was still used as the language of instruction and the medium for learning Latin, but that, during the last half of the same century, the English gradually took its place. The body of the English people were now for the first time brought into oral communication with their rulers. Hearing the French words with the Saxon, they were able to understand their meaning. Hearing them from the lips of their superiors, they naturally imitated and adopted them. Thus the new importations, bearing the stamp of elegance and fashion, passed from the circles of polite society into the language of the vulgar.

*Middle English Period, 1350-1550.*—The old inflection undergoes some further losses; the unaccented final *e* (as in *love, fame*, etc.) begins to disappear in pronunciation; but the great characteristic of this period is the immense accession of words taken from the French.

The century from 1450 to 1550 might be regarded as a distinct period. the unaccented final *e* was now generally neglected, and at length wholly lost in pronunciation; and in many ways the language assumed a more modern aspect. Literature received a new impulse from the art of printing. Among the most important of the numerous books which issued from the celebrated Caxton press (1470 to 1490) was the *Morte d'Arthur*, by Sir Thomas Malory, a prose compendium of the poetical legends concerning King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table. The translation of Froissart's *Chronicle*, by Lord Berners, which appeared in 1523-25, was not unworthy of the rich and glowing original. We may mention, also, as excellent specimens of the language at that time, the writings of Sir Thomas More, and the New Testament translation of William Tyndale, which was printed in 1526. As for the poets of that most unpoetic age, it is enough to name the rude but vigorous Skelton. The poems of Surrey and Wyatt, though written before 1550, belong more in language and character to the following period.

*Commencement of the Modern Period.*—With the middle of the sixteenth century, the English enters on a new stage of its history. Many words which were in use three hundred years ago have since become obsolete. A much larger number have