THE ROLE OF FRENCH IN THIRTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND[1]

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THE presence of more than one language in daily use in any particular region can create delicate problems of interpretation for linguists and historians alike. A case in point is the well-known dispute, many years ago, about the date at which the inhabitants of Gaul ceased to speak Latin and began to use French. Argument was rife for a long time as to whether Latin had given way to French in the early centuries of the Christian era or whether it had gone on being spoken right up into the seventh or even eighth century. In all this controversy one sure date stood out brightly against all the shadows that surround such an early period of history: that date was 813. In that year the Church recognized officially at the Council of Tours that the gap between the Latin of the Mass and the language spoken by the laity had now grown so wide as to render the people's understanding of the sacred mysteries difficult, if not impossible, and so it was decreed that in future the homily should be delivered in the vernacular of the laity. This decree constitutes a linguistic pronouncement of the greatest importance, although made by men whose minds were working on a spiritual rather than a linguistic plane.

This old controversy and the paramount importance of a contemporary statement made in ignorance of its linguistic implications is brought to mind by the almost simultaneous appearance in recent months of two widely differing articles concerned with the use of French in England at the beginning of the thirteenth century. Towards the end of 1973 there appeared in the volume of tributes presented to M. Félix Lecoy a short and amusing article by M. Yves Lefèvre: "De l'usage du français en Grande-Bretagne à la fin du XIIe siècle" (pp. 301–5);

[1] See "The Teaching of French in Medieval England", *Modern Language Review*, lxiii (1968), 37–46.

a few months later the *English Historical Review*[1] published an important article by Professor J. C. Holt : " A Vernacular Text of Magna Carta, 1215 ". The publication of these texts in such close proximity to each other invites comment in view of the light they shed on the much-debated question of the position of French in thirteenth-century Britain and its relationship with Latin on the one hand and with English on the other.

Professor Holt's article is of value both to historians and philologists in that he gives the full text of the earliest known translation of Magna Carta into French. Although the translation was found at Pont-Audemer, Professor Holt tells us that : " There is no ground for thinking that it was made at Pont-Audemer or anywhere else in France. . . . Much the most likely hypothesis is that Pont-Audemer acquired a vernacular text first produced in England. Indeed, all the evidence suggests that the translation was done to facilitate the publication of the Charter in Hampshire in the summer of 1215 " (p. 348). The linguistic importance of this text lies initially in the fact that it brings forward from 1255[2] to 1215 the date of the first political document written in the French of England : " Magna Carta 1215 now becomes the first document of political importance known to have been issued in the vernacular " (p. 349). Secondly, it is important because, as Professor Holt says : " It is written in French of good standard with some, but not many, Anglo-Norman forms " (p. 350). Professor Holt's assessment of the linguistic situation in England in the opening years of the thirteenth century is as follows : " Latin was the language of record throughout western Christendom. French was the vernacular of the ruling class on both sides of the English Channel " (p. 348). Forty years later, in the 1250s, he sees the situation as having altered : " By this time French was becoming an official language in which much of the baronial programme of 1258 and 1259 was recorded both as memoranda and final drafts " (pp. 349–50).

[1] lxxxix (1974), 346–64. I am indebted to Professor J. S. Roskell for drawing my attention to this article and to certain Latin sources referred to later in this paper.

[2] The first political document in French was hitherto thought to be the translation of the *sententia lata*.

In sharp contrast to Professor Holt's Magna Carta text, the little article by M. Lefèvre does not concern itself with momentous affairs of state, but deals simply with a piece of Latin from the pen of the irrepressible Giraldus Cambrensis. Writing at the beginning of the thirteenth century Giraldus laments the fact that, in spite of all his own lavish care and attention, a worthless nephew of his has never seen fit to raise himself above the level of the common herd by diligent application to study. In particular, he has never bothered to learn either Latin or French : " puer indisciplinatus . . . qui nec litteris indulsistis, nec linguam latinam, aut etiam gallicam, addidicistis " (p. 302). This point rankles with Giraldus, for he comes back to it a second time (p. 303), again putting Latin and French together as languages to be learned. In a society in which Latin was the foundation of all knowledge, it is understandable that the fond uncle should be upset at the boy's neglect of *grammatica*, a neglect that would ruin any chance of high scholastic attainment ; but Giraldus explicitly and on two separate occasions links French with Latin in this respect. This is the hub of the matter. The time is 1208–9, and here is unequivocal evidence, provided by a witness who has no axe to grind and who is interested in the linguistic side of things only as a stepping-stone to higher spheres, that, right at the beginning of the thirteenth century, French is to be bracketed with Latin as a language of learning. For Giraldus, knowledge of both these languages is what separates the cultivated man from the unlettered, and both languages—French as well as Latin—are to be acquired by diligent study. For Giraldus and his like in thirteenth-century England, French is no more a vernacular than is Latin. This testimony means that we shall have to look again at Magna Carta 1215 and Professor Holt's interpretation of its place in the history of French in England.

The loquacious Giraldus does not stop at censuring his nephew, however ; he goes on to give us even more linguistic evidence when eulogizing the achievements of another young man, John Blund, who has learned very good French, along with other estimable branches of knowledge, without setting foot outside England, solely by dint of his assiduity. John Blund's

excellent French, we are told, has been learned from his uncles who have behind them long years of residence and study in France. Like Giraldus himself, these men learned the French of France by crossing the Channel and had returned home to pass on to their diligent nephew a pure and elegant form of the language far removed from the rough Anglo-Norman prevalent around them—" elegans et defecatum rudique Anglorum a gallico feculento longe alienum " (p. 304). John Blund, then, was a good French scholar before ever he set foot in France in the steps of his uncles, but French was in no sense a vernacular for him : he had learned French the hard way, not at his mother's knee but by listening attentively and noting down every new word he heard together with its correct pronunciation. Detailed evidence of this kind is crucial to a correct understanding of the role of French in thirteenth-century England.

We have before us, then, two documents written in Britain within a year or two of each other, the one translated from Latin into good French, the other written in good medieval Latin and stressing the generally low standard of the French in use in England at that time. Any contradiction between these two texts is, however, more apparent than real : it is caused by the shifting of balances in the complex position of French in medieval England.

French in its different dialectal forms was clearly the vernacular—the native, spoken language—of the vast majority of those who sailed across the Channel with William the Conqueror in 1066, and it would continue to be the native speech of those who came later to settle in England from the same areas. For those amongst them, however, who made England rather than France their home and, having contracted marriages in Britain with non-French women, went on to raise the first of successive generations of children, the French language could not hope to remain for long a vernacular in the true sense of that term. Many of us have seen in the course of our own lifetime how quickly considerable numbers of immigrant people from Europe have been absorbed into our English community, with even the children of the first generation born in England often losing completely the vernacular brought over by their fathers from the

continent. Only a closed linguistic community willing to practise exclusively intermarriage amongst its own members has any chance of keeping its vernacular alive in a strange land. There is no evidence to suggest that the descendants of William's followers came into this rare category. In fact, there is firm evidence to the contrary. The writer of the *Dialogus de Scaccario*[1] tells us that, a century after the Conquest, it was impossible to tell Norman from English, so intermingled were the two races :

set iam cohabitantibus Anglicis et Normannis et alterutrum uxores ducentibus vel nubentibus, sic permixte sunt nationes ut vix decerni possit hodie, de liberis loquor, quis Anglicus quis Normannus sit genere

To postulate therefore the general retention of French as a vernacular in England a century and a half after the Battle of Hastings (i.e. about five or even six generations) is to fly in the face of common linguistic experience and historical evidence.

Yet this is precisely what has been done for many years now by writers on Anglo-Norman, who have painted a picture of a bilingual Britain lasting from some time after the Conquest until about the middle of the thirteenth century. In his Taylorian Lecture of 1948, " The Impact of French on English ", John Orr speaks of " this state of almost complete bilingualism, to put it at its lowest " (p. 5). The time he is referring to is the beginning of thirteenth century. In *Anglo-Norman in the Cloisters* (Edinburgh, 1950), Miss Legge writes of : " The complete bilingualism of the country from an early date " (p. 140) ; again, in her more recent book *Anglo-Norman Literature and its Background* (Oxford, 1963), she says : " by this time most people, down to the very poorest, were bilingual " (p. 4). The time she is writing about is the period around 1170. Even more recently, Mrs. Suggett adds her voice to these in her contribution to *Essays in Medieval History* edited by R. W. Southern (London, 1968) where she states that : " the French used in England was . . . a true vernacular whose roots had penetrated deeply into all classes of English society who could read and write " (p. 235). The crux of this statement lies in the little phrase " who could read and write ". If French really

[1] ed. Charles Johnson (London, 1950) p. 53.

had been " a true vernacular "—a native spoken language—it would not have needed to be qualified in this way, a vernacular being, by definition, independent of the written word.

The reason behind all these statements is to be found in a misunderstanding of the references made to French by writers in England during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. A number of these references were collected and interpreted many years ago by Vising, whose *Anglo-Norman Language and Literature* (London, 1923) has been the accepted authority in the field for over half a century, and it is from this work that the statements quoted above ultimately stem. In view of the widespread currency given to Vising's interpretations, it may be as well to look again at his quotations in the light of the new testimony of Giraldus.

Writing about 1180, Hue de Rotelande justifies his use of French in his romance *Ipomedon*[1] in these terms :

> Si li latin n'est translatez,
> Gaires n'i erent entendanz ;
> Por ceo voil jeo dire en romanz
> A plus brevement qe jeo savrai
> Si entendrunt et clerc et lai vv. 28–32.

[" If the Latin is not translated there will scarcely be anyone who understands it ; therefore I intend to tell it in French as concisely as I can, so both clerk and lay will understand it ".]

Hue wants his work to be read not by a few *lettrez* (v. 27)—clerks able to read Latin—but by a wider public interested in tales of love and adventure set in royal courts. *Lai* in this context simply refers to those who have no Latin. It could be applied to many a nobleman and to the majority of their wives without any hint of condescension, having no necessary connection with the lower strata of the population. The author of the early thirteenth-century *Corset* makes a spiritual, not a social, distinction between *clerc* and *lai :*

> La coroune (= tonsure) est le Dieu merk
> Ki destinte le lai del clerc.[2]

A few years later Guischard de Beauliu writes his *Sermon*[3] in

[1] ed. E. Köbling und Koschwitz (Breslau, 1889).
[2] MS. Bodleian Douce 210, f. 26 ra. 22–23.
[3] ed. A. Gabrielson (Uppsala, 1909).

French with a little introductory justification :

> Jeo larrei le latin sil dirrai en romanz :
> Cil ki ne sunt gramaires ne seient pas dutanz vv. 7–8.

[" I will abandon Latin and tell it in French. Those who have no Latin need not be afraid ".]

It is significant that Vising translated this last verse as : " they who are unlearned " (p. 15), thus creating a wrong impression, because *gramaires*, like the Latin *grammaticus*, refers only to those who have Latin. The " unlearned " that Guischard wants to reach through his use of French are not necessarily the ignorant, but simply those who have not been through the Schools and passed the *trivium*. A goodly proportion of the ruling classes in England at the end of the twelfth century would fall into this category. Yet another statement on similar lines is provided by the author of a *Vie de S. Clement*[1] who says he thinks it would be better if the *clerc* made their learning accessible to the *nun lettrez* and expressed it in what he himself calls *vulgar cumun*—French. He goes on, however, to make a significant statement which Vising and subsequent scholars seem not to have appreciated correctly :

> De si escrivre en purpos ai
> Que clerc e lai qui l'orrunt
> Bien entendre le porrunt,
> Si si vilains del tut ne seient
> Que puint de rumanz apris n'aient

[" I intend to write so that both clerk and lay who hear it may understand it well, even if the peasantry cannot grasp it at all because they have learned no French ".]

Vising misinterprets the real sense of this passage when he comments : " In the last two lines the author gives us to understand that there were *vilains*, very illiterate people, that did not know French " (p. 16). This is simply not what the writer says at all. Whatever differences the historian may list between the English and French versions of the feudal system, it is not in dispute that on both sides of the Channel the term *vilain* embraced a considerable number of people whose birth, education or wealth did not allow them to escape manual labour or such

[1] ed. N. K. Willson, Ph.D. thesis (Cambridge, 1952).

service of some sort. The writer nowhere tells us that this sizeable section of the population was made up of " very illiterate people, that did not know French ". Quite differently, he tells us in unmistakable terms that these people had not *learned* French. The key to the passage is *apris*, for the time is about 1200—just about the time when Giraldus was writing his complaint about his nephew—and here is another clear and unequivocal piece of evidence that French was a language needing to be learned by very many Englishmen, not a vernacular in almost universal use in England at the opening of the thirteenth century. In fact, the writer is telling us that if the upper classes understood French, the peasantry did not, not having learned it. Jocelyn of Brakelond, writing at the beginning of the thirteenth century, tells us that Abbot Samson confirmed a manor to a certain Englishman partly because he knew no French :

> Unum solum manerium de Torp carta sua confirmavit cuidam Anglico natione, glebe ascripto, de cuius fidelitate plenius confidebat quia bonus agricola erat, et quia nesciebat loqui Gallice.[1]

Later in his *Chronicle* he records how the Abbot used English in his sermons in preference to both Latin and French :

> et colores rethoricos et phaleras verborum et exquisitas sentencias in sermone dampnabat, dicens quod in multis ecclesiis fit sermo in conventu Gallice vel pocius Anglice, ut morum fieret edificacio, non literature ostensio[2]

This is a very far cry indeed from the claims of complete bilingualism mentioned earlier.

Before leaving Vising's interpretations, mention must be made of Denis Piramus, whose life of St. Edmund[3] contains an interesting comment about all three languages—Latin, French and English—in use in England in the second half of the twelfth century :

[1] ed. H. E. Butler (London, 1949), p. 33.
[2] Ibid, p. 128.
[3] ed. H. Kjellman (Göteborg, 1935).

Translaté l'ai desqu'a la fin
E de l'engleis e del latin
Q'en franceis le poent entendre
Li grant, [li mien] e li mendre vv. 3267–70

[" I have translated it right to the end both from English and from Latin because everybody can understand it in French ".]

Vising's comments on this passage run as follows: " Here, it is to be observed, the translation is made from English in order to be understood by *li mendre*, the lower orders " (p. 16). This can only mean that " the lower orders " understood French better than English. Whilst scholars have argued about the extent of the diffusion of French in England, no-one has so far advanced the view that the English peasantry needed to have works translated into French because they did not understand English. Not only is this in contradiction with the testimony of the translator of the *Vie de S. Clement* referred to above and commented on by Vising himself: it runs counter to simple common sense. A more likely interpretation of Denis Piramus's lines suggests itself if we read *li mendre* not as " the lower orders ", but as part of a stock phrase to be found up and down medieval French literature—*li grant, li moiien, li menur*[1]—meaning " great and small ". The " small " in many contexts could well include the bourgeois and the non-noble administrator, and should not be read as meaning what we now understand as " the lower orders ". Taken in this sense, Piramus is saying that he is using French in order to reach a broader spectrum of readers and listeners in preference to a smaller audience who could be reached through the medium of Latin or English.

In none of the contemporary statements adduced by Vising is there any tangible evidence for the assumption so often made that England at the beginning of the thirteenth century was linguistically a second France, with French being the vernacular of large numbers of the population. That French was widely used at that time no-one would deny, but there is a world of difference between a language in widespread use and a vernacular.

Having examined a certain amount of evidence from English

[1] See the dictionaries of Godefroy and Tobler-Lommatzsch for many examples of this expression.

sources it may be helpful to turn for a moment to see how Anglo-Norman was viewed from across the Channel. In that branch of the *Roman de Renart* in which the fox passes himself off as a " Breton " jongleur to elude the pursuing wolf, he puts on his new bright yellow colouring, gained from jumping into a vat of dye, and has to brazen it out at a meeting with the furious wolf. Not only does he succeed in pulling off the trick, but he even persuades the wolf to try to find him a viol with which he may earn his living as a wandering minstrel. The decisive factor in this duping of the wolf is Renart's speech. The fox establishes his credentials as a foreigner by using a Germanic greeting and a Germanic oath—*Godehere* (v. 2403) and *godistonnet* (v. 2440)—and then goes on to torture the French language almost to the point of unintelligibility, as in these two verses :

ce fout si sol, tot fout portez
et tot fout je desfigurez[1]

The sense is as follows : " If I were alone here I should be carried off and knocked about ", but this language is hardly recognisable as an off-shoot of *francien.* When it is remembered that in 1180 or thereabouts the French royal house found Conon de Béthune amusing because he used a few Picardisms in his verse, the effect of this wholesale massacre of the sounds and forms of French can only have been to produce hilarity. We are told in the text (v. 2532) that the fox spoke English to the wolf, and so we can fairly assume that we are dealing with a parody of an Englishman's French at the end of the twelfth century. Even allowing for the exaggeration inherent in this type of satirical literature, one can only conclude that, not much more than a century after the Conquest, the French spoken in England was already a joke to those living in continental France.

But to return to Giraldus : he was on the spot in Britain when the thirteenth century was young ; he was not a fool, and his assessment of the linguistic situation obtaining here cannot be lightly set aside. For him there was definitely not one learned language (Latin) and two vernaculars (French and English), but two languages requiring formal instruction (Latin

[1] Branche, I, vv. 2565–6, ed. Roques (Paris, 1948).

and French) and one vernacular (English), only this last tongue being absorbed without conscious effort by the vast majority of children with their mother's milk. When, therefore, Magna Carta was put into French of good quality it was not, as Professor Holt says, because " the vernacular was a means of ensuring more effective communication with the men of the shires " (p. 350), but simply because French was the more generally intelligible of the two non-vernaculars and so would be better appreciated by the particular class of squires from whom co-operation was required. The message was not directed to the peasantry, who might have been reached through the true vernacular (i.e. their dialectal English), but to men of substance and authority, hence the use of a non-dialectal language with an accepted—if not rigid—norm. The task of translation would probably have been carried out by an Englishman for whom French was not a vernacular but rather an acquired skill that facilitated for him and his like entry into a variety of administrative offices anywhere in the country.

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. It was a widely-used language of culture. More readily understood than Latin, it yet shared with Latin both on the continent and in England the essential quality of being a written language of educated men in which dialectal divergencies, however great they might be in the unregulated speech of the various regions of France—or of England for that matter—were kept to an acceptable minimum so as not to impede intelligibility. In France, whatever difficulties a peasant from Picardy might have experienced at the beginning of the thirteenth century in conversation with a farmer from the lower Loire valley or with a merchant from Epinal—and these difficulties would have been not inconsiderable—the written conventions of *francien* were sufficiently accepted throughout most of northern France to make possible the understanding not only of literary works but also of legal and administrative documents drafted by men from regions far apart. When the Queen Regent Alix de Champagne and her son the future Philippe-Auguste criticized the Picardisms in Conon de Béthune's

verse, the poet's defence was that he had not been brought up at Pontoise (i.e. in the Paris basin, the home of *francien*) and so could not be expected to use pure *francien*, but that nevertheless his language was near enough to the *francien* norm to be perfectly understandable. Before the end of the twelfth century, then, the form of French used in and around Paris was becoming the accepted norm for written work over the whole of northern France. Dialectal features of one kind or another are still found in many works long after this time, but the basis of these works is always *francien*, not a particular dialect.[1] *Francien* was the vernacular speech of only a minority of those living in what we now call France, but its influence as a cultural norm extended far beyond its original dialectal boundaries. Like *francien* on the continent, Anglo-Norman in Britain—in spite of its odd appearance to the French eye and its strange sounds to the French ear—provided a written language that did not break down into dialects intelligible only over a restricted area. In this lay its great advantage over English at this period. Jocelyn of Brakelond bears witness to this when he tells how Abbot Samson used the Norfolk dialect in his sermons, in spite of being a very learned man and having both Latin and French at his command. It is clear that Samson was deliberately using the local dialect in order to reach the hearts of his congregation through the medium in which they thought and felt.

> Homo erat eloquens, Gallice et Latine, magis rationi dicendorum quam ornatui verborum innitens. Scripturam Anglice scriptam legere novit elegantissime, et Anglice sermonicare solebat populo, set secundum linguam Norfolchie, ubi natus et nutritus erat[2]

In studying the historical development of any language we have to be on our guard against a form of "delayed action" that can make us fall into chronological error. The gap between Latin and the vernacular in Gaul had probably been uncomfortably wide for a long time before 813, yet only when the

[1] See Gertrud Wacker, *Über das Verhältnis von Dialekt und Schriftsprache* (Halle, 1916); L. Remacle, *Le Problème de l'ancien wallon* (Liège, 1948); C. Th. Gossen, *Französische Skriptastudien* (Vienna, 1967).

[2] *Cronica*, p. 40.

Church issued a decree making compulsory the preaching of sermons in the language of the people did the breadth of that gap become obvious and the existence of what was felt by men of the period to be a separate language become for the first time an indisputable fact. Similarly, when in 1255 the *sententia lata* was ordered to be published in English and French, this probably represented the delayed official recognition of a long-felt need to use a form of communication other than Latin to reach men outside the narrow circle of the *litterati*, those who had had the benefit of an education based on Latin. Writing of the French versions of the royal letters of 1258 confirming the Provisions of Oxford, Professor Holt states: "By this time French was becoming an official language . . . but the use of the vernacular[1] in 1215 can scarcely be explained in this way" (pp. 349–50). This apparently precocious use of French some forty years before previously realized by scholars is clearly seen as a problem. Yet this problem exists only so long as we accept the idea that French was in widespread vernacular use in England until the middle of the thirteenth century and then proceeded to become an official language. Evidence has already been produced to cast doubt on the first of these premisses: as far as the second is concerned it must be remembered that the laws of William the Conqueror had been put into French as the *Leis Willelme* as early as the middle of the twelfth century,[2] that at least one Anglo-Norman charter has survived from about 1170,[3] and that some London by-laws were couched in Anglo-Norman well before the thirteenth century.[4] In addition, Vising mentions a letter of Stephen Langton written in French in 1215 (p. 14). All this indicates that for many years before the 1250s French was being used in England for official purposes. If we bear these things in mind and now turn to look at the overall picture of Anglo-Norman in the first half of the thirteenth century,

[1] i.e. French.

[2] "Der Zusammenfall verschiedener Indizien legt uns also nahe, die Abfassung der *Leiswl.* keinesfalls später als in die Mitte des 12. Jh. zu setzen" (Jakob Wüest, *Die Leis Willelme*, Romanica Helvetica, lxxix (Bern, 1969), 74).

[3] See Helen Richardson, "A Twelfth Century Anglo-Norman Charter", *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, xxiv (1940), 168–72; ibid. xxvii (1942), 179–81.

[4] Ibid. xxiv. 171.

there are plenty of signs that make the appearance of the 1215 translation of Magna Carta seem far less strange.

Medieval writers are notoriously unhelpful when it comes to providing precise dates for their work, but from other evidence of different kinds adduced by a number of independent editors it would appear that the first half of the thirteenth century was noteworthy in England for the production of a new type of writing directed towards a public wishing to learn French as a foreign language. Bearing in mind that works of this kind would not be produced simultaneously with the creation of the demand for them, but would inevitably follow upon the rise and recognition of that demand—perhaps after some considerable delay—it is clear that we are dealing with a situation in which French must have been an acquired language for a great many people in England from the early years of the thirteenth century, if not before. Here again the little text of Giraldus Cambrensis is instructive with its reference to the uncles of John Blund having to teach him French. If he had been born about 1185, as seems likely, this would mean that French was being actively taught as a foreign tongue in Britain before the twelfth century was out.

By the middle of the thirteenth century a number of Englishmen skilled in French had produced manuals of different kinds to enable their countrymen of different status to acquire a knowledge of French or to improve their command of the language. Walter of Bibbesworth had written his *Tretiz de Langage*,[1] the *Glasgow Glossary*[2] had been drawn up, the *Tractatus Orthographiae*[3] had been produced to deal with questions of pronunciation and an unexpectedly accurate little treatise had been composed on the functioning of the verbal system in French.[4] The fact that all these appeared independently within the space of a few decades would seem to point to the recognition of a pressing demand for instruction in French at that time, so

[1] ed. A. Owen (Paris, 1929); see also *Festschrift für Walther Fischer*, ed H. Oppel (Heidelberg, 1959), pp. 21–33 for the date of the *Tretiz* (about 1250).

[2] ed. A. Ewert, *Medium Aevum*, xxv (1957), 154–63.

[3] ed. M. K. Pope, *Modern Language Review*, v (1910), 185–93.

[4] ed. Ö. Södergård, *Studia Neophilologica*, xxvii (1955), 192–4.

each of these works will be briefly examined in turn to see just what was being taught and to whom, for what purpose.

Bibbesworth tells us that his *Tretiz* was written for a noble lady—Dyonise de Mountechensi (Prologue v. 2)—to enable her to teach French to her children so as to fit them for running their estates later on in life :

> . . . tut le fraunceis cum il
> encurt en age e en estate de husbondrie
> e manaungerie. . . Prologue vv. 6–8.

["all the French he needs as he grows up and comes to deal with husbandry and management. . ."]

Dyonise was not a native speaker of French herself, and so he provides her with an English translation of words she might find difficult :

> tut dis troverez-vous primes
> le fraunceis e puis le engleise amount Prologue vv. 20–21.

[" You will always find first the French and then above it the English "]

In the course of his work he sets out to cover systematically all the areas of vocabulary necessary to an English nobleman administering his lands through the medium of French. Parts of the body, clothing, food, names of animals, trees, flowers, agricultural pursuits and implements, baking, spinning, brewing and so on—all these are treated in groups. The *Tretiz* is, in fact, the best classified vocabulary of French to appear before modern times. Clearly his patroness needed to have this vocabulary collected for her and partially glossed into English, her native tongue. Bibbesworth tells us just what her linguistic ability was as far as French is concerned when he writes that he has no need to go over elementary French, but will concentrate on more advanced areas of the language :

> E n'est pas mester tut a descrivere
> Du fraunceis ki chescun seit dire,
> . . .
> Mes jeo vous frai la mustreisoun
> De fraunceis noun pas si commun vv. 81–82 ; 85–86.

[" and there is no need to go over the French that everyone can speak . . . but I will show you less well-known French ".]

In other words, here is a noble lady of English speech who knows some French, but not enough to be able to teach it

adequately to her children growing up in an English environment. If the dating of Bibbesworth's *Tretiz* is even roughly correct, then his patroness would have been born some time during the early decades of the thirteenth century—another indication that even the English upper classes cannot be assumed to be bilingual at that time.

The Glasgow Glossary is likewise a volume of vocabularies, but written for quite a different readership. This time the starting-point is Latin, and the range of subjects is not as wide as in Bibbesworth's work. The compiler sets down groups of words in Latin—parts of the house, parts of the body, tools and utensils, names of animals and birds—and opposite the Latin he puts the French equivalent. As a teaching aid it is markedly inferior to the *Tretiz*, because there is no attempt made to put the words into context or to deal with difficulties caused by similarities in form or sound. It is this kind of manual that one might imagine being diligently used by John Blund and grossly neglected by the nephew of Giraldus. The essential requirement for anyone using this work is a good knowledge of Latin, so that we may fairly conclude that it was intended for the clerkly class who would learn French as a second language after Latin. There can be no question of its users being bilingual: they are simply going to learn the basic vocabulary of a second foreign language, much in the same way as they would have learned the basic vocabulary of Latin.

The *Tractatus Orthographiae* belies its title and deals with the pronunciation of French and not just with its spelling. Like the *Glasgow Glossary* it demands from those who would use it a good grasp of Latin, since the rules it gives are set out not in English or French but in Latin. Again like the *Glasgow Glossary* it is clearly intended for use in scholastic circles where Latin would be the usual medium of instruction. Its users would have had not only a grounding in Latin before coming to the *Tractatus*, but also at least a basic knowledge of French, because none of the examples given in French is translated. We are dealing again with people who need to learn French to a higher level as a second foreign language.

Coming perhaps even earlier than any of these works is a

remarkable little treatise on the French verb that goes right back to the early years of the thirteenth century.[1] Again written in Latin, with no concessions made to those whose Latin was poor or non-existent, this is a very perceptive attempt to show the workings of the conjugation system in Old French, not just from the point of view of morphology, but also from the standpoint of syntax. The grammarian who composed this brief work does not content himself with giving a one-for-one equivalence of tenses in Latin and French, but shows that he has mastered the essential differences between the two verbal systems as used in language :

> Preterito perfecto et plusquam [perfecto] : utinam amatum esset vel amatum fuisset, la meie volunté eust esté amé u avereit esté amé u aveit e[sté]amé, l'em avereit amé, l'em eust amé, l'em aveit amé.

As with the *Glasgow Glossary* and the *Tractatus*, this grammatical instruction is intended for the clerical class who needed to improve their command of French as a second foreign language after Latin.

These varied works not only all make their appearance in the first half of the thirteenth century, written for non-native speakers of French, but all are to be attributed to authors for whom French is an acquired language, none of them being a native Frenchman. One is again reminded very forcibly of Giraldus and his account of how the uncles of John Blund taught him French. Walter of Bibbesworth shows an excellent command of French all through his *Tretiz*, but a number of facts make it certain that he was an Englishman using a foreign language. In the first place, many of the forms he uses are insular rather than continental—e.g. *baavere* (v. 1080), *pooun* (v. 815), *bluché* (=*épluché*) (v. 822), etc. On occasion he gives an incorrect gloss, as in v. 97 where *gernoun* means " moustache ", not " temple ". Thirdly, when listing the possible French translations of the English " to break " (vv. 1049 ff.) or " red " (vv. 307 ff.) his mind is starting from the English, not the French :

[1] " ce texte remonte sans aucun doute au début du XIIIe siècle " (Ö. Södergård, art. cit. p. 192).

Ore de diverseté de fraunceiz, ki tut est dist de un engleis

Veez ci veine devaunt vous
Un chivaler bieau tut rous,
Qui une destrere sor se est munté,
Esku de goules ad porté,
Un launce rouge en l'uyn mein
De vin vermaille l'autre plein ;
Qui ne manjuwe point de peschoun
S [i] de le haranc noun

[" Now concerning the diversity of French, which is expressed in one English word. Here is a handsome red-haired knight coming up to you, riding a red (= chestnut) charger. He carries a red shield, a red lance in one hand, the other full of red wine. He eats no fish except red (= smoked) herring "]

The compiler of the *Glasgow Glossary* is no more French than Bibbesworth, as is proved by the abundance of Anglo-Norman forms in his work and the occasional English word : *palat de le buche* (p. 156) ; *keute* (p. 160) ; *buteler, camberlein* (p. 161) *riveling* (p. 161) ; *widecoc* (p. 163). Nor can there be any hesitation in affirming that the writer of the *Tractatus Orthographiae* was not a native Frenchman. One has only to look at a few of his " model " phrases to recognize immediately the typical Anglo-Norman : *l'amirall d'Engliter ; jeo sui assez ben amez de mez servauntz* (etc.) As far as the treatise on the French verb is concerned, there is not much actual French on which to base a judgement, but the presence of the old western imperfect ending *—out* in *amount* would be surprising in a continental text of this date[1] and points towards an insular origin.

The linguistic situation in medieval England from the time of the Conquest onwards was one of continuous and complicated evolution. 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. Whereas it lost increasingly to English in terms of vernacular use among widening circles of the population, it gained from Latin in terms of its own developing use as an international language of culture. We have seen

[1] See M. K. Pope, *From Latin to Modern French* (Manchester, 1934), para. 1267.

that on the political plane the French of England was beginning to replace Latin on occasion before Magna Carta was translated in 1215; on the religious plane a comparable development is discernible about this time and for similar reasons. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and the Council of Oxford in 1222 led to a marked switch from Latin to French as the language of works of religious instruction. Some time before the middle of the century had been reached Robert of Gretham had produced his vast *Mirur* or *Evangiles des Domees* in order to give those who had French but no Latin the kind of thorough teaching in all matters ecclesiastical that had hitherto been the preserve of the clerkly class with its Latin foundation.[1] It is at least possible that the same Robert is responsible for the unfinished *Corset*,[2] an extended treatise on the sacraments written in French because his patron had no Latin. About 1230 there appeared *La Petite Philosophie*,[3] an Anglo-Norman adaptation of the opening book of the *De Imagine Mundi Libri Tres*, whilst perhaps even earlier there had been written an Anglo-Norman translation of the *Elucidarium*[4]—a question-and-answer approach to religious knowledge. On yet another plane the same kind of development can be discerned at roughly the same time. About 1240 the *Chirurgia* of Roger of Salerno was put into the French of Britain[5] and other medical works are found similarly translated round about the same period, presumably for doctors unable to read the Latin of the originals.

In the first half of the thirteenth century, then, men were active in England in the preparation of manuals of different kinds to promote the teaching of French as a second or even a third language; others were engaged in making available to readers of French a number of works on religion, science and medicine hitherto restricted to those with a knowledge of Latin. Yet all this activity has little to do with French becoming an

[1] See Linda Marshall, *A Lexicographical Study of Robert of Gretham's Miroir*, M.A. thesis (Manchester, 1971).

[2] See Linda Marshall, "The Authorship of the Anglo-Norman Poem, *Corset*", *Medium Aevum*, xlii (1973), 207–23.

[3] ed. W. H. Trethewey, *A.N.T.S.*, i (1939).

[4] ed. H. Düwell (Munich, 1974).

[5] ed. D. J. A. Ross, Ph.D. thesis (London, 1940).

official language in England some time around the middle of the thirteenth century and nothing at all to do with its decline as a vernacular. These developments are to be seen as part of a parallel movement taking place on both sides of the Channel. Oddly enough, the insular branch of the movement would appear to be in advance of the continental branch—at least if we are to accept the datings generally attributed to the works in question. For example, the Anglo-Norman *Evangiles des Domees* is paralleled by a continental version some two decades later; Goussouin de Metz produced his continental *Image du Monde* in 1245, some fifteen years after *La Petite Philosophie;* continental French versions of the *Elucidarium* appear round about the same time as the Anglo-Norman one; the Anglo-Norman translation of the *Chirurgia* is followed on the continent by a number of medical works in French—the *Livre des Simples Medecines,*[1] the translation of the *Antidotarium Nicholai,*[2] the *Chirurgie de l'Abbé Poutrel.*[3]

What really matters is not so much that France or England was first in the field with this or that translation, but that French in the thirteenth century was being made into a language of culture, a vehicle for ideas that until that time had been expressed only in Latin. Whether they lived in France or in England the translators and adaptors of these works were going to the same sources, and with the same aim. Interestingly enough, a similar process was taking place in the south of France, where, for instance, Roger of Salerno's *Chirurgia* was put into Provençal as early as the very beginning of the thirteenth century.[4] Had political events in that region taken a different turn in the next few decades there is little doubt that Provençal, just like Anglo-Norman and continental French, would have become the vehicle for a widely-based culture.

In making their translations all these scholars found themselves obliged to create a vocabulary that as yet did not exist outside Latin. Sometimes their powers of lexical creation were slight, as in the case of the translator of the *Elucidarium* into

[1] ed. P. Dorveaux (Paris, 1913). [2] ed. P. Dorveaux (Paris, 1896).
[3] Forthcoming edition by O. Södergard.
[4] *Archivum Romanicum,* xxv (1941), 1–86.

Anglo-Norman, where the editor has to comment repeatedly on the failure to render a Latin term or even a whole phrase, as well as point out mistranslations.[1] On the other hand they could be active creators of vocabulary, as was Robert of Gretham in England[2] or, at a somewhat later date in France, Jean de Meung.[3] In the case of medical works the creative process is most marked, since so many of the terms involved lie right outside the domain of normal everyday speech. Often the translator has to leave a Latin term without attempting to translate it—*un clou que est apelè "zima" u "palus"* (*Chirurgia*, fol. 265^{v}); on occasion he will keep the Latin but will give a translation as well—*herpes hestionomenus que li franceais apelunt "lu"* (ibid. fol. 265^{v}); often, however, he will be bold enough to coin a new word and thereby add a new concept to French—*choses asuaj[a]ntes que repriement l'esbrasement* (="inflammation") (ibid. fol. 255^{r}). *Esbrasement* in this sense is new to French at this time. In all these spheres, however, the basic movement is the same: French is being turned not so much into an official language as into a language able to handle scientific and philosophical concepts as well as serve as a vehicle for tales of love and war, *conte pieux* and *fabliau*. By the time the thirteenth century gave way to the fourteenth this movement had borne perhaps its most remarkable fruit of all in the creation of the legal terminology that is still the foundation of English law.

Although the loss of Normandy by the English Crown in the early years of the thirteenth century was bound to hasten the decline of French as a vernacular in Britain, the British Isles remained very much a part of the cultural community of Western Europe. In that community French played a dominant role as the main non-classical vehicle of cultural ideas. Just as Latin was at one and the same time a language of culture and of official business in both classical and medieval times, similarly French, from the thirteenth century onwards, became increasingly the medium used for all manner of cultural and administrative

[1] Düwell, op. cit. pp. lxvi ff.

[2] See Linda Marshall's thesis and article mentioned above.

[3] See Gisela Hilder, *Der scholastische Wortschatz bei Jean de Meun* (Tübingen, 1972).

purposes. What the inhabitants of thirteenth-century England were witnessing was not the decline of French as a vernacular and then its adoption as an official language, but rather the upward surge of French as the second and increasingly competitive language of culture, a currency valid in most of Western Europe. Just as *francien* was accepted and used—with a varying degree of dialectal flavouring—by countless writers, scribes, officials and administrators over vast areas of northern France, quite irrespective of their own regional speech, similarly Anglo-Norman freed the written word in Britain from the trammels of dialectal boundaries and facilitated the unfettered transmission of ideas.