

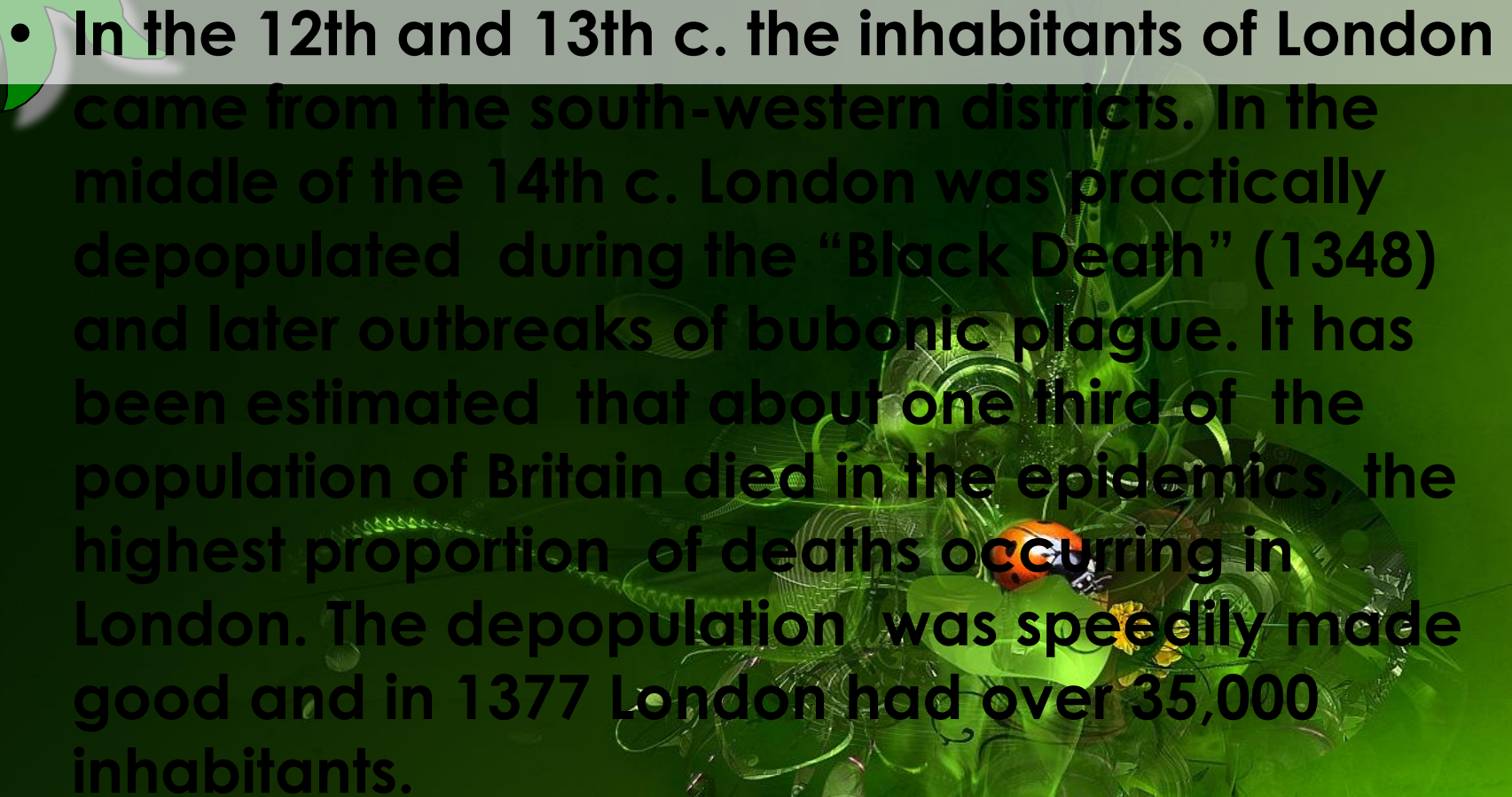


Dialects in Middle English

- **The dialect division which evolved in Early ME was on the whole preserved in later periods. In the 14th and 15th C. we find the same grouping of local dialects: the Southern group, including Kentish and the south-Western dialects, the Midland group with its minute subdivisions and the Northern group. And yet the relations among them were changing. The extension of trade beyond the confines of local boundaries, the growth of towns with a mixed population favoured the intermixture and amalgamation of the regional dialects. More intensive inter-influence of the dialects, among other facts is attested by the penetration of Scandinavian loan-words into the West Midland and Southern dialects from the North and by the spread of French borrowings in the reverse direction. The most important event in the changing linguistic situation was the rise of the London dialect as the prevalent written form of language.**

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- The history of the London dialect reveals the sources of the literary language in Late ME and also the main source and basis of the Literary Standard, both in its written and spoken forms.
 - The history of London extends back to the Roman period. Even in OE times London was by far the biggest town in Britain, although the capital of Wessex the main OE kingdom was Winchester.
 - The capital was transferred to London a few years before the Norman conquest.

- The Early ME records made in London beginning with the PROCLAMATION of 1258 show that the dialect of London was fundamentally East Saxon; in terms of the ME division, it belonged to the South Western dialect group. Later records indicate that the speech of London was becoming more mixed, with East Midland features gradually prevailing over the Southern features. The most likely explanation for the change of the dialect type and for the mixed character of London English lies in the history of the London population.

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- In the 12th and 13th c. the inhabitants of London came from the south-western districts. In the middle of the 14th c. London was practically depopulated during the “Black Death” (1348) and later outbreaks of bubonic plague. It has been estimated that about one third of the population of Britain died in the epidemics, the highest proportion of deaths occurring in London. The depopulation was speedily made good and in 1377 London had over 35,000 inhabitants.

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- **Most of the new arrivals came from the East Midlands: Norfolk, Suffolk, and other populous and wealthy counties of Medieval England, although not bordering immediately on the capital. As a result the speech of Londoners was brought much closer to the East Midland dialect. The official and literary papers produced in London in the late 14th c. display obvious East Midland features. The London dialect became more Anglian than Saxon in character.**
 - **This mixed dialect of London, which had extended to the two universities (in Oxford and Cambridge) ousted French from official spheres and from the sphere of writing.**