

**Ætym.**NOTE ON A PASSAGE IN CHAUCER'S  
'PROLOGUE.'

(9th S. vi. 365, 434, 463.)

THE proposed reading *hrægelees* (gownless) has been declared out of the question, but not on reasonable grounds. With regard to the sound of the *g* in *hrægel*, Vernon, in his 'Anglo-Saxon Guide,' gives the following rule: "*G* is never soft; when placed, however, between two of the vowels *æ*, *e*, *i*, or *y*, or at the beginning of a syllable, &c., it has the sound of *y*." But he adds in a note: "It is likely that *g* before *e* or *i*, and (like *h*) at the end of a syllable, was guttural, as it often is in German and always in Dutch." Murray ('Encyc. Brit.') says: "The Old English *g* beside the sound in 'go' had a guttural sound, as in the German *tag*, Irish *magh*, and in certain positions a palatalized form of this approaching *y*, as in 'you' if pronounced *hyou* or *ghyou*." And again: "The dialects differed in phonology, the Northern retaining the guttural values of *k*, *g*, and *sc*." Ellis states: "It is possible that there was a tendency in those times [Anglo-Saxon] to pronounce *g* final or medial as *gh*, just as the Upper Germans now do, and the Dutch pronounce their *g* in all positions." Sweet, in his 'Anglo-Saxon Reader,' gives the *g* in question the sound of *y* as in "you," but he is dealing with one dialect only, and has the qualification that the pronunciation of the letters has been determined with "considerable certainty."

According to Ellis, "in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries it is almost a straining of the meaning of words to talk of a general English pronunciation." Different versions of words, as *eyren* and *eggys*, *lie* and *ligge*, *gate* and *yate*, *much* and *muchel*, existed in different districts at one period, and still exist, except the first. As the *g* retained its guttural sounds in the fourteenth century (whatever may have been the Anglo-Saxon original), there is nothing more likely than that Chaucer, reading *hrægel*, for instance, in the poem 'Judith,' should give the *g* a guttural value, which is more to the point than the correct pronunciation, even if it could be ascertained beyond doubt. The spelling of *hrægelees* is sufficiently like *recchelees* to make the one easily mistaken for the other, either with or without the initial *h* in the former. The form *raël* occurring in the twelfth century (*raël* also occurs as *raëlhus* in Wright's 'Vocabulary,' No. 13) does not prove the other form obsolete, as it is well known that

words persist a long time in poetry and speech after they have disappeared from prose writing. *Gate* and *yate* show the persistence of two forms of a word, the one in writing, the other in local speech. *Yate* is not in the list of words in Johnson's 'Dictionary,' yet it is still used in Lancashire and in Scotland. It was also known to Johnson as used in the language of rustics, as he mentions when treating of the letter *g*.

As to the contention that an emendation is not required, if any one, not in the position of Dr. Sangrado, will read the lines concerned and think for himself, he will come to the conclusion that *recchelees* is not an appropriate word, as did Ten Brink, Skeat (1889), and Ellis; and he will further agree with the last named that "*cloysterlees* was only a gloss which crept into the text from v. 181 and renders that line a useless repetition," and is therefore not Chaucer's doing.

Chaucer relates that the monk held two "texts" directed against monks to be groundless. He acknowledges that both apply to himself: the first from his being a hunter, the second from his being *recchelees*; but he holds that the conclusion in each case does not follow. That is to say: though a hunter, the conclusion that he is not a holy man is false; though *recchelees*, the conclusion that he is like a fish out of water, and therefore doomed to destruction, is inaccurate. His opinion of the two sayings is endorsed by Chaucer in l. 183. Now, it is surely a hopeless case for a monk or any man to acknowledge himself to be reckless, and then deny that he does wrong. It is necessary that the word *recchelees* should have such a meaning that the monk could acknowledge it was applicable to him, and yet leave him a character to defend; that is, it could not be reckless. The word is used in a saying evidently different from that concerning hunting, whereas "reckless" would apply as well to a hunting monk as to a *cloisterlees* one, or better. If "reckless" were ever the word, the separate consideration of hunting is manifestly unnecessary. In the description of the monk prominence is given to two features—namely, his love of hunting and his love of fine dress; so that it is appropriate, or rather necessary, for him to hold that hunting, fine dress, and being out of a cloister were either not faults in a monk or trifling ones.

"Gownless" as a meaning suits the passage well. Like "being a hunter," it conveys a reproach to a monk, not to other men; and a monk could acknowledge himself to be gownless without acknowledging himself to be doomed to destruction.

A monk who kept horses, hounds, &c., and frequently went hunting, had no choice but to acknowledge that any saying against hunting monks applied to him; nor could he deny the epithet "gownless" if he habitually appeared in fine clothes; but it is always open to a man to make a fair appearance in defending himself against being held reckless. The explanation given by Chaucer (l. 181) may fairly be taken as a parallel saying, conveying in substance the same reproach.

Chaucer tells us that on revising a transcription of his poems he found many errors. From this it follows that an uncorrected copy by a scribe inspired by the voice and presence of the poet was unreliable; and still more unreliable is that by a scribe with second-hand inspiration.

When one criticizes Chaucer, one is far from pretending to know more than the author; one does not even pretend to know more than the scribe, only more than is actually set forth in the writing.

With regard to what might be said of one who amended an author whose language he did not know how to pronounce, nothing more could be said against him than that his emendations were wrong. Anything more would be a mere *argumentum ad hominem*, that would recoil on the head of him who used it, showing him to be one who questioned the truth of the saying, "The proof of the pudding is in the eating, not in the knowledge or reputation of the cook." A. C. W.

INSTALLATION OF A MIDWIFE (9th S. v. 475; vi. 9, 177, 274, 336, 438).—The Act 3 Henry VIII. (1511) decided that no person should exercise or occupy as a physician or surgeon in London, or within seven miles, unless he were first examined or approved by the Bishop of London or the Dean of St. Paul's, who was to be assisted in the examination by four doctors of physic and by persons expert in the art of surgery—further, that no person not so approved should practise within any diocese of England unless he had been examined and approved by the bishop of the diocese, assisted by such expert persons as the bishop might, in his discretion, think fit. Letters testimonial under the bishop's seal were to be granted to the approved persons, and any one occupying contrary to the Act incurred a forfeiture of 5*l.* a month.

According to this Act, it appears that the archbishops and bishops and the Dean of St. Paul's constituted the only authorities who could grant licences to persons to practise physic and chirurgery in England. The Privy Council, although not named in the

Act, certainly possessed the same power. It granted a licence to Adrian [*sic*] Colman, widow, to practise physic in Norwich in 1596.

Midwives were in those days licensed by the same authorities. This was an absolute necessity, inasmuch as, if there was any danger of the child dying before a priest could be summoned, the midwife was bound to baptize it. It was therefore necessary that the midwife should be not only licensed, but also endowed with authority to perform so sacred a rite as that of baptism. Consequently, before the licence was granted, an oath containing fifteen items was solemnly administered to her. She was to use "pure and clear water only, and not any rose or damask water, or water made of any confection." The Norwich Diocese Book from 1770 to 1786 contains a record of licences given to thirty persons "to perform the office, business, and functions of a midwife," to three persons (two of whom were females) to practise as surgeons, and to two others to practise phlebotomy. No licence was granted after 1786. In the Archbishop of York's injunctions to his clergy curates were enjoined "to instruct midwives openly in the church in the very words and form of baptism, to the intent that they may use them and none other." The register of Hanwell records a singular mistake which occurred at a baptism of this kind:—

"Thomas, son of Thomas Messenger and Elizabeth his wife, was born and baptized October 24th, 1731, by the midwife at the Font, called a boy, and named by the godfather Thomas, but proved a girl."

From the table of fees in the Consignation Book, Norwich, 1706, it appears that licences to practise physic, chirurgery, or midwifery were generally one shilling each, sometimes two shillings: Cecily Dey, of Marlingford, paid two shillings for a licence to practise chirurgery, and Rachel Pank, of Swanton Abbot, one shilling and sixpence for a midwife's licence.

Licences were granted at the bishop's visitations, and those which were in force had to be exhibited and a fee paid. Those who refused to appear were proceeded against in the spiritual courts. Any person who presumed to practise without a licence was fined 5*l.* a month, one half of which went to the king and the other half to the informer. An example of a midwife's licence:—

"Philip [Yonge, 1761–1783], by Divine permission Bishop of Norwich, to our beloved in Christ, Sarah the wife of Jonathan Tomlinson, of Walsoken in the county of Norfolk, within our Diocese and jurisdiction, sendeth greeting. Whereas we understand by good testimony and credible certificate