CHAUCER'S BURGESSERS

ERNEST P. KUhl

With the nine and twenty pilgrims who leave the Tabard on that April morning are five burgesses: the Haberdasher, Carpenter, Dyer, Weaver, and Tapicer. That Chaucer deliberately selected from the various guilds these five representatives no one, I believe, has hitherto suspected. It is one purpose of this paper to show the strong probabilities that this selection was carefully made.

A cursory glance at once reveals the fact that Chaucer did not choose representatives from the prominent companies of his day. If he had, he would of necessity have chosen from the victualling classes as well as from some of the prominent non-victualling classes. That there were at this time two factions is well known,—the victuallers and non-victuallers, or protectionists and free traders. First one faction was in power, then the other,—now up, now down, like the proverbial bucket in the well. Let us take a hasty glance at the civic history of London during these years. From 1377 to 1381 the victualling class (favored by the King) was in power. From 1381 to 1383 the non-victuallers (under the protection of John of Gaunt) had a representative as Mayor. In 1383 the former class again resumed power which it held for five years. After a year's administration under a goldsmith (1388–9) came a year under a grocer; then another year under a goldsmith, at which time the ar dor of the strife began to subside.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Introduction to Letter-Book, H, edited by R. R. Sharpe. The victualling class was in power, therefore, during the years when the General Prologue was probably written. The best brief account of the London Guilds is by George Unwin, The Gilds and Companies of London. London 1908(?). There is no large work on the subject that is reliable. Herbert's History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies (2 Vols. London, 1836–7), and
When the victuallers were in power prices of foods, especially fish, climbed the scale. In order to enhance the price, fish for consumption in London were hidden across the river in Southwark, till unfit for food.¹ When the free-traders resumed power prices naturally fell. There was to be no monopoly in the sale of fish, "but it shall be lawful for any freeman of the City to have vessels, nets, and other necessaries".² A loaf of bread or a draught of ale could be bought for a farthing, and a large number of coins (to the value of 80 lbs. sterling) of that denomination were minted at the Tower, "so that the baker and taverner should have no excuse for not giving change for a halfpenny."³ The reasons of the non-victuallers are too obvious when one recalls recent spectacular attempts for publicity by one or two Mayors in our own country.

This clash between the two parties reached its height in October, 1386, when ten of the non-victualling companies openly denounced Mayor Brembre in Parliament.⁴ This brings us to our second point, viz.: that Chaucer does not choose from any of these petitioners. This is highly interesting, for some of these companies were indisputably weaker, others equally powerful, and one more powerful than those selected by the poet.⁵ Before proceeding into the details of this petition let us recall that Chaucer sat at this meeting of Parliament, and therefore heard the complaints.

The ten companies who petitioned were the Mercers, Cordwainers, ‘Foundours,’ Sadlers, Painters, Armourers, Hazlitt's Livery Companies (London, 1892), are inaccurate in many places and wholly uncritical.

¹ Letter-Book, H, pp. 192 f.
² Ibid., p. 191.
³ Ibid., p. 183. Cf. Intro. p. XXXIV. Even Parsons had refused farthings "for the purpose of putting a stop to the currency of such small money . . . and also in order to make people offer more than a farthing." The Mayor and his Council ordinance, however, that "thenceforth no one shall offer at vigils of the dead or like case more than one farthing a mass, and if he fail to obtain change for a halfpenny he shall leave without making any offering." Ibid., p. 183.
⁴ Rot. Parl., III, pp. 225 ff. The Drapers, to whose company Northampton belonged, did not petition.
⁵ If we omit the Mercers and Embroiderers (who were also aldermen) there were two, Cordwainers and Sadlers, who had four representatives to the Common Council, consequently as powerful as those selected by Chaucer. Mercers had six, therefore were more powerful. For a fuller discussion see infra, pp. 655ff.
Piners, Embroiderers, Spurriers, and Bladesmiths. Their complaint was that Brembre with the aid of the King was using his influence against the wishes of the citizens. Let us look more in detail at some of the facts. Brembre, the Mayor of London, was a grocer, consequently favored by the King. John Northampton was the leader of the non-victuallers, whose arch-supporter was John of Gaunt. A crucial moment in the strife between the two parties was reached 28 March (1386) when the Mayor and citizens stated upon oath that for the peace of the City, Northampton (who had been banished) should not approach within 100 miles of London.

John of Gaunt, who had been the patron of Northampton, and had been doing his best for two years to free him, immediately became roused to indignation. Though he was preparing to leave for Spain on his wild-goose chase, he found time to defend his client. On the 7th and again on the 12th of May he wrote Brembre upbraiding him for his "unreasonable and outrageous conduct" in winning the King's confidence. On 3 June a compromise was effected when the King "at the urgent prayer" of the Duke ordered Northampton to be set free. 7 July Gaunt set sail.

Furthermore, Brembre's relations with the King became more intimate as time went on. In this year the King's servants, including his esquires, were granted the dwellings above the City gates. Moreover, though Gaunt was gone, his cause was at once taken up by one of the noblemen. For the King, times were equally troublesome. At the meeting of Parliament (October and November, 1386) his power was noticeably checked. Loans of money were refused him. A committee was appointed to investigate his household expenses. Ten days later, however, the city loaned him £4000, and afterwards took an oath to support him. Chaucer, it must be remembered, sat in this Parlia-

1 He was succeeded 13 October (1386) by Nicholas Exton—another victualler (fishmonger). Letter Book, H, pp. 289-290. Exton went into office 28 October.
2 Ibid., pp. 279-282.
3 Letter-Book, H, Intro. p. XLI.
5 Knighton, II. p. 207. Cf. S. Armitage-Smith, pp. 310-311. For additional details concerning this strife see my article on Chaucer and Aldgate, which will appear shortly.
ment. We of course do not know with whom he shared his sympathies. But I have shown elsewhere¹ that his loss of Aldgate in October and his royal preferments in December was probably the result of his having been a member of that fatal Parliament. Though he may have been neutral, we must not forget that Richard II was an erratic man. For Chaucer, therefore, to evade the ten companies who had established a precedent in presenting grievances against the King to Parliament was natural. A literary man does not court popularity by referring to enemies of his audience,—especially when it involves the loss of his house and income.² In his selection of the burgesses, therefore, Chaucer the artist becomes Chaucer the diplomat.

May we not go a step farther? We have seen that Chaucer did not select from the most powerful companies of his day; nor, on the other hand, from those companies—weak as well as powerful—who openly denounced Mayor Brembre in 1386. It will not, therefore, be without interest to glance at the companies from which he could select. We find that there is still a possibility of thirty or more. But we are at once confronted by another factor which determined the poet's selection, viz.: that from these thirty he chose the most prominent guilds. How can the comparative strength of these guilds, it may be asked, be determined?

The latter part of the fourteenth century was—as is well known—the age in which the guilds were to become all-powerful. A notable year in their development was 1376. At this time it was agreed that the Common Council of the City of London should be composed of men from the "sufficient" misteries,—"the greater misteries electing not more than six persons, and the rest, four or two, according to their size."³ Fortunately there is preserved one list of

¹ See my article referred to in previous note.
² Particularly when there are plenty of other companies from which to choose!
³ Letter-Book, H, pp. 39-40. The guilds had not had this power for a quarter of a century (Ibid., Intro. p. IV). Agitation had existed for some time whether the Common Council should be made up of guilds or by wards. Party feeling continued to rise until whispers of the agitation reached the King. He threatened to deprive the citizens of their franchise unless they maintained peace in the meantime. The City assured him that no serious dissensions existed. This privilege remained with the guilds until 1384, though an attempt had been made to oust them in 1380 (Letter-Book, H, p. V). The complaints made in 1384 were that "matters
misteries with the number of councilmen each had. This is under date of 9 Aug. 1376. The Common Council which met at that time had 156 members chosen from forty-seven guilds. A few of the more prominent crafts had five or six representatives; about one-third had four; and the remainder had two or three. Now, if we rule out those who opposed Brembre in 1386, and at the same time those who had fewer than four representatives (which were the small and obscure companies) we have the following: Drapers, Goldsmiths, Tailors, Fullers, Masons, Skinners (Pelters), Girdlers, Ironmongers, Dyers, Weavers, and Tapers. It will be observed that the Haberdashers and Carpenters are not mentioned. Concerning the former some definite evidence exists which indicates that they were one of the powerful companies. In 1377 at a meeting of the Common Council we find that the Haberdashers had four representatives. This at once places them with the more prominent companies. And, what is of unusual interest, of the thirteen companies who attended this meeting the Haberdashers, alone, had no representation in the Aldermancy, nor did they petition against Brembre in 1386. They were, therefore, a powerful as well as a neutral company.

in the Common Council had been carried by clamour rather than by reason, and sometimes by members who were not qualified to sit, whereby tumults had arisen.” (Ibid., p. 227. Cf. Intro., p. VI). In 1385 it was found that the system of electing by wards worked so well by trial that it was moved the election (by wards) should continue “forever” (Ibid., pp. 277–279). In 1389 another controversy arose, whether the Council should be vested in the guilds or wards. (Ibid., p. 347). Nothing came of it however.

1 Ibid., pp. 41 ff.

3 See previous note for list of guilds and the number of representatives each had.

4 The next year.

5 Letter-Book, H, p. 59. The others were: Mercers, Grocers, Drapers, Fishmongers, Vintners, Skinners, and Tailors, (six representatives each); Sadlers, Haberdashers, Girdlers, Chandlers, and Cordwainers (four each); Armourers (two).

6 See previous note.
With the Carpenters, however, it is entirely different. Curiously enough there was no guild by that name. There are, however, contemporary references to carpenters. For instance, there are extant three wills of persons who pursued this rather obscure calling. The City records, however, reveal nothing which can throw any light, for they appear to have been "carpenters" and nothing more. Nor is it possible to associate them with the joiners who had a guild. Old Mother Hubbard, of course, employed the services of a joiner where we to-day should consult a carpenter. It is probable, therefore, that the "Carpenter" was a later and hasty addition.

This list of twelve from which the poet might choose is still formidable enough. But, Chaucer tells us that

"Ech was worthy for to ben an alderman."

We are now in a position to ask what guilds in the reign of Richard II had representatives in the aldermancy. The following occur: Mercers, Grocers, Fishmongers, Drapers, Goldsmiths, Vintners, Skinners, Stockfishmongers, Pepperers, Ironmongers, Wax-chandlers, Tailors, Armourers, 'Broderers', Woollmongers, and Girdlers. Now, what remains of this once formidable list has dwindled down to six,—Fullers, Masons, and Haberdashers, Dyers, Weavers, and Tapicers.

To apply this method of elimination to Chaucer's selection may seem like subjecting the poet to a method which he never dreamed of. It can hardly appear thus, however, when one recalls that he chose no representative from the victualling classes, none from the ten companies who op-

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1 Thomas Oxenford (Cal. Wills, Court of Hustings. Ed. R. R. Sharpe, London, 1889-1890, II. p. 374), John Wolley (Ibid., p. 385), John Mendeham (Ibid., p. 388). There are scattering but minor references in Letter-Books, G, H, and I, to these people, but nothing that will help us. On one occasion one of them was associated with a "timbermonger."

2 The editor of the Letter-Books, to whom I have written, has not been able to give me the desired information.

3 Professor Frederick Tupper informs me that he has good evidence that the "Carpenter" is an afterthought. W. C. Hazlitt (The Livery Companies, etc., p. 405) says that Carpenters were contractors on their own account. Hazlitt, however, is very unreliable, in this respect like Herbert.

4 Beaven, The Aldermen of the City of London, Part I. London, 1908, pp. 392 ff. For a further discussion of "Aldermen" see infra pp. 665 ff. The Girdlers had their first representative in 1397, however (Ibid., I. p. 351). They joined with the Ironmongers in 1399 (Ibid., p. 403). These two had probably been in sympathy for some years.
posed Brembre in 1386, none from the smaller and obscure companies, and none from those who had representatives in the Aldermancy. These facts are manifestly significant. That Chaucer should have known the ins and outs of fifty guilds and condensed in a few lines—or even in a single line—information which shows complete mastery of the municipal situation is little short of surprising.

That Chaucer’s choice was deliberate we can test in another way. A priori we have a right to assume that he would select the most powerful companies.¹ He cannot, of course, select those companies represented in the Aldermancy. But there are as a matter of fact no large non-victualling companies (having more than four representatives in the Common Council) that had no representatives in the Aldermancy. Consequently his choice is limited to those companies with four or fewer members in the Council. But here he deliberately avoids the ten companies who petitioned against Brembre,—two of which (Sadlers and Cordwainers, having four members each) were as powerful as those selected by the poet. When one recalls that there were only six other companies, Fullers and Masons and the four chosen by Chaucer, who had four representatives, it would seem as if the poet’s choice was made with extraordinary care.

If the conclusion of this paper, thus far presented, is sound, the General Prologue was not written before the latter part of 1386.² This confines its limits, therefore, to two years.³

Is it idle to ask why he did not include the Fuller and the Mason?⁴ He probably thought that five was a sufficient number, as in fact it was. When we ask why he chose the particular four he did, it is not so easy to give a reply. However, it is doubtful if a Fuller or Mason, any more in the fourteenth century than now, held a position equal to that of those selected by the poet. In a fairly careful search

¹ For discussion see pp. 652f.
² On the question whether the Prologue was written continuously see Tatlock, The Development and Chronology, etc., p. 143 n. 2.
³ That it was not written after 1388 is now well known.
⁴ Though the Girdlers had their first representative in the Aldermancy in 1397, they joined with a company (Ironmongers) in 1399 that had had representatives earlier. The Girdlers, therefore, were on the border line.
of contemporary documents no references to the eight
councilmen1 from the guilds of the Fullers and the Masons
are found that pertain to other than affairs of their respec-
tive guilds.2 The only exception might be in the case of the
Dyers. But here again we should probably say that a per-
son engaged in the fulling of cloth would not, other things
equal, be the equal socially of a Dyer of cloth. There is,
as a matter of fact, an interesting entry preserved which
indicates that the Dyers carried on business for themselves.
In 1383 (Chaucer was Comptroller at this time) a London
Dyer (Henry Grenecobbe) had permission to "take, custom
free, five sacks of wool from the Isle of Thanet, ... to
London, there to be made into cloth."3 But let us grant that
the poet did have two alternatives when he made his selec-
tion. The important thing is the fact that this selection
was carefully made, which is at the same time a full reply
to those critics who have wondered why so few political
allusions are to be found in the Canterbury Tales.4

II

We are now prepared to take up the individual guilds
and discuss their representatives to the City Council, as
well as the "Masters" of the various crafts. Obviously, one
should hardly expect to find much material on an obscure
burgher of the fourteenth century. To be sure, if Chaucer
had included among the nine and twenty pilgrims repre-
sentatives from the more prominent companies, the mate-
rial would be plentiful enough. But, as we have just seen,
our poet was extremely cautious in his selection. Instead
of choosing from prominent companies he saw fit to select
from those—by no means obscure—which appeared neu-
tral to the two factions which were striving for supremacy
at the time the Canterbury Tales were taking shape.

1 For names see Letter-Book, H, p. 43.
2 There is one exception of minor importance. J. Lesnes was on a com-
mision pertaining to guardianship (Ibid., p. 29). This sort of thing was
very common, as dozens of other cases occur in the Letter-Book.
4 For a discussion of this latter point see Hulbert, Chaucer's Official Life,
Menasha, Wisconsin, 1912, pp. 70-71. Coulton (p. 60) states that
"Professor Raleigh has pointed out that his (Chaucer's) avoidance of
all but the slightest allusions to even the greatest of contemporary events
may well seem deliberate." Professor Legouxs likewise in his admirable
study of Chaucer (Paris, 1910) speaks of Chaucer's silence (pp. 26-8).
Chaucer's silence becomes, to a certain extent, explicable when one
recalls the facts I have just pointed out.
Instead, therefore, of considering an individual haberdasher or dyer, we shall consider the respective guilds and several members from each guild. In this way it may be possible to throw light in such a way as may serve to illuminate the descriptions of the prosperous and self-satisfied craftsmen who appear in the General Prologue.¹

The Haberdashers,² as has been noted, had two representatives in the City Council of 1376,—Robert de Lynne and Thomas Botstone.³ The latter does not appear to have been prominent. At any rate no other reference to him seems to occur. As to Lynne, however, we are more fortunate. In 1378 he was a “maintainer in a plaint.”⁴ He was sufficiently prosperous in 1379 to be mentioned as “one of the good folk” of London who lent the City 5 marks.⁵ He likewise continued to be a member of the Common Council after the election by Wards instead of by Misteries. For example, he was one of the two dozen summoned in 1384 from Farn-done Ward.⁶ He was again a member in 1386, and in 1388. The following interesting entry will throw light on the standing of the burgesses in Chaucer’s day. In 1380 Henry

¹ I have consulted, for the several dozen individuals under discussion, all contemporary documents where one might expect information. When the Calendar of Close Rolls, which are now being published, will have completed this important gap to a student of Chaucer, much information should come to light.

² There were two kinds of Haberdashers: sellers of small wares, as needles, tapes, buttons, etc., and those who dealt in hats (Letter-Book, H, p. 366 n.). In 1391 a maker of caps was charged with making caps falsely, i.e., “they had been fulled by the feet instead of by hand” (Ibid., p. 366). The spelling “haberdasher” occurs (Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1377-81, p. 449). It is not recorded in the N. E. D., and I have found no other instance.

³ Letter-Book, H, p. 43.

⁴ Ibid., p. 114. This unlawful intermeddling became so common that Parliament in 1377 strictly forbade the practice (Letter-Book, H, p. 93, note 3). Three pages (Ibid., pp. 112-115) are devoted to London burgesses who were maintainers, an excellent proof they had money. Frequently the suit was between parsons.

⁵ Letter-Book, H, p. 126. Hugh Fastolf and Richard Morell (cf. my article on Some Friends of Chaucer in P. M. L. A. XXIX, 2, pp. 270 ff.) lent a like amount (Ibid., p. 125). This was the amount given by most of the individuals. None gave any less, and only a few gave more.

⁶ Ibid., p. 239.

⁷ Ibid., p. 281.

⁸ Ibid., p. 332.
de Ferrers,¹ knight, was pardoned for assaulting "with a baslarrd" the servant of Robert Lynne "aberdasher."²

In 1377 the Haberdashers sent four men to the Common Council, but their names are not recorded.³ From time to time the guild chose masters to govern its craft. The earliest record apparently is in 1328, when they elected three of their members as masters.⁴ The next mention is in 1371, when their ordinances were approved, including the names of those sworn to govern the mistery. There were four at this time,—Thomas Botulston, Richard Spenser, John Polstede and Richard Marchal.⁵ The latter was mainpnerm for a "clerk" in 1376.⁶ At the supplication of a knight, Marchal was pardoned in 1389 for the killing of another.⁷ Of the other three nothing seems to be recorded with the exception of Richard Spenser. He likewise was a mainpnermon (in 1385), for the prior of Michelham, Surrey.⁸ A will, dated 1376, bequeaths property in London to Spenser.⁹ The following will not be without interest in throwing light on the financial standing of some obscure burgesses. In 1392 Richard Spenser and others are given a license "for the alienation in mortmain . . . of (1) eight messuages, six tofts, 274 acres of land, 2s. 9d. of rent, pasture for 60 beasts . . . and pasture for 800 sheep . . . to the prior and convent of Michulham . . . in full satisfaction of a license granted to them by the late King . . . to acquire lands, tenements and rents of the yearly value of 10 marks."¹⁰

In 1384 the masters sworn to govern the mistery were: John Silbourne, William Craft, and Michael Mordone.¹¹ Of these Craft alone seemed prominent enough to find his way into the records. In 1365,¹² and again in 1371,¹³ he was a

¹ "Ferrers" was a common name in the royal household.
² Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1377-81, p. 449. The spelling "aberdasher" is not recorded in N. E. D.
⁴ Ibid., E, p. 233.
⁸ Ibid., 1385-9, p. 72.
¹⁰ Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1391-6, p. 184. The present parish of Mickleham is 2½ miles from Dorking,—21 miles SSW of London.
¹³ Ibid., p. 286.
surety. In the following year (1385) four new masters were sworn: Roger Crane, “Sayeure” Neumann, John Fair- auntre, and John Pountfret.1 Crane was a surety in 1371.2 That he was a man of means we can infer from the following. In 1398 his executor, William Crane, is suing the widow of Roger and her present husband for £32.3

The career of John Pountfret4 was more eventful. In 1380 he was an executor,5 and a member of the Common Council in 1384.6 He was one of those summoned to the King’s Council at Reading in 1384;7 apparently a member of the Common Council in 1385.8 In the following year he was among those (from Bridge Ward) summoned “to attend in the Chamber of Common Council at the Guildhall”, for the purpose of determining whether John Northampton and his associates should be allowed to remain within forty miles of the City.9 In 1386 he was one of a number (Hugh Fastolf,10 William More,10 Henry Vanner,10 John Organ10, et al.) who “entered into a bond in the sum of £10, . . . for the sum of £500 borrowed . . . in order to safeguard the City.”11 Again in this year (1386) he was among those (Henry Vanner, William Venour, et al.) appointed to see that the schedule of murage chargeable on goods be carried into effect.12 In 1388 he was summoned to the Guildhall by the Mayor and Aldermen “to consult on certain matters touching the coming Parliament (at Cambridge) and the City itself.”13

The Weavers were an ancient organization in London. As early as 1347 we learn of foreign weavers in the City who

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1 Ibid., H, p. 273. Not until 1394 were masters again appointed. (Ibid., p. 416); then again in 1416 (Ibid., I, p. 144).
2 Ibid., G, p. 286.
3 Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1396–9, p. 438.
4 Pountefrey, Pountfract, Pontefreit, Pounfret, etc.
7 Ibid., p. 246.
8 Ibid., p. 270.
9 Ibid., p. 281.
10 See Index to the Life Records of Chaucer (Modern Philology, Vol. X, No. 4, pp. 527 ff.).
11 Ibid., H, p. 287.
12 Ibid., p. 299.
13 Ibid., p. 333. Cf. p. 332. There was also a John Pountfreyt, saddler (Ibid., pp. 42, 108, 393); another, a cornmonger (Ibid., p. 443). Cf. Calendar of Wills, Court of Hustings, etc. II. p. 877 (Index).
are to be ruled in the same manner as “denizen (privees)\(^1\) weavers of the City, and that neither should work by night at any time of the year.”\(^2\) Five years later the foreign weavers were given permission to carry on their business in England, and likewise to elect masters to supervise their craft.\(^3\) Though they had their craft, they had no representatives, as did the native weavers, in the Common Council.\(^4\) This, of course, was owing to the fact that the native workmen were jealous of their continental neighbors. Chaucer, ever on the alert, tells us that the Wife of Bath

> Of clooth-making, ... hadde swiche an haunt,
> She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.

This is a distinct appeal to the new sense of nationalism which England was feeling in the latter half of the fourteenth century.

The native weavers, on the other hand, sent four members to the City Council in 1376,—John de Bathe\(^5\) (what relation to the good Wyf?), John Gyle, William Goryng, and William Godhewe.\(^6\) Their careers in the affairs of the City and Guild resemble those of the Haberdashers. Whenever important matters were under consideration at the Guildhall they were summoned.\(^7\) Goryng and Bathe were sufficiently prominent to be masters of the guild at one time or another.\(^8\) The latter, a resident of Aldersgate Ward,\(^9\) was granted a pardon in 1378 for the killing of another.\(^10\) In an interesting will we infer that he was a well-to-do person. He left certain shops to the church of St. Botolph in Aldersgate; to the prior of another church he leaves all his “lands and tenements in Westchepe, Goderounlane, and elsewhere

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\(^1\) i. e., native.
\(^2\) *Letter-book*, F, p. 173. It has not been thought necessary to go into details concerning the masters of each mystery. The Weavers, Dyers, and Tapiers likewise elected their masters from time to time. (See *Ibid.*, H, Index).
\(^5\) Or Baathe.
\(^7\) See Index to *Letter-Book*, H.
in the parish of St. Vedast," and to his wife his dwelling-house in Aldersgate.¹

The Dyers first came into prominence in 1376, when they sent four members to the Council.² They seem to have been prominent before this time, however, for their wrongdoings, for we learn that in 1362 ordinances were set out for checking the malpractices of the Dyers as well as of the Weavers.³ In a petition presented "by good folks of the 'Lethersellers' and 'Pouchmakers'" in 1372 was an article that the "Dyers might be prevented from cheating their customers."⁴ The members to the Council in 1376 were John Claveringe, Henry Grencob, Nicholas Maynard, and Richard Godard.⁵ Grencob, of the four, is of most interest. In 1383 he had permission to bring into London, custom free, five sacks of wool, there to be made into cloth. One of his mainporners was Richard Godard.⁶ In 1398 Grencob is suing for a debt of £10.⁷ Otherwise the record of the Dyers, particularly that of Clavering, does not differ greatly from those guilds already considered. No better 'proof exists that Chaucer deliberately chose his representatives.

The Tapicers are the last to be considered. Their four Councilmen in 1376 were Giles de Kelsey, Richard Dicoun, Thomas Bonanture, and John atte Dyke.⁸ Their careers, likewise, are strikingly similar to those already discussed. Wills of Kelsey, Dyke, and Bonanture are preserved. Kelsey makes bequests to the church in which he wishes to be buried; likewise "to divers orders of friars in London, and for maintenance of Chantries, repair of poor churches, decayed bridges, roads, and other pious and charitable objects."⁹ In other respects his will parallels that of Bathe.¹⁰ Bonanture owned numerous possessions, including a brewhery and "bakehouse." He also owned lands in Berking

¹ Cal. of Wills, Court of Hustings, II. p. 284. The name "Bathe" was prominent in London (Ibid., Vols. I and II. Index).
² Letter-Book, H. p. 43.
³ Ibid., G. p. 140.
⁵ Ibid., H. p. 43.
⁷ Ibid., 1396–9, p. 305.
⁹ Cal. of Wills, Court of Hustings, II. p. 200.
¹⁰ See supra under Bathe.
(Essex), and elsewhere. Dyke owned lands in Kent, and likewise had a brewery. All three were residents in the same parish.

To repeat, in conclusion, it must have impressed the reader that the four guilds selected by Chaucer are of the same rank,—strikingly so. They are not the smallest companies, nor are they the largest. But they are the largest that were not involved in the political squabbles of the day. All this, of course, is significant in showing that Chaucer’s choice was deliberate.

It is convenient here, before passing on to more general matters, to interpret some of the lines in the description of the burgesses. In the discussion of Aldermen I assumed that the allusion in lines 371–2 was political. Since another interpretation has been the accepted one, it will be necessary to take this matter up in detail. To discuss the point, however, we must first of all dispose of the two preceding lines:

Wel semed ech of hem a fair burgeys
To sitten in a yeledehalle on a deys.

Professor Skeat thought this referred to the banquets which the various guilds held from time to time in their guildhalls. He was unaware of the fact, however, that the Common Council of the City held its meetings in the Guildhall (modern “City Hall”). Before rejecting Skeat let us render the

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1 Cal. of Wills, etc., p. 311.
2 Ibid., p. 369.
3 S. Dionisius Backchurch. For a list of other tapicers who lived in this parish see Ibid., pp. 41, 131, 179.
4 This is entirely in keeping with Chaucer’s method throughout. Professor Skeat has pointed out (Vol. V. p. 36), that Chaucer’s pilgrims were of a “superior estate.” Professor G. L. Kittredge in his brilliant study on Chaucer and his Poetry (Harvard University Press, 1915, p. 32) states that Chaucer always had such “stupendous luck” in seeing the best.
5 See supra.
6 Everich for the wisdom that he kan
Was shaply for to been an alderman.
7 See reference to Hinckley, infra.
8 369–370.
9 Vol. V. p. 36.
verses into modern English. "Each of them seemed a capital freeman of the City to sit on the raised platform (dais) in a guildhall"—says the poet.

Of course the entire Common Council (150 members) did not sit in a body on the dais. This distinction belonged only to the Mayor and to the Aldermen. The Reverend Mr. Beaven, in a letter to the present writer, makes this plain when he says: "In the Court of Common Council consisting of Lord Mayor, Aldermen, and Common Councillors, the Lord Mayor presides and he and the Aldermen occupy seats on the dais by prescriptive right. The Common Councillors have seats "on the floor"; indeed that phrase is constantly used to denote a Councillor as distinguished from an Alderman."

The passage, therefore, seems to mean: each of the worthy was fit to be an Alderman or a Mayor. Either interpretation will satisfy, though the reference to the Aldermen seems preferable.

That the allusion is political is strengthened by the following lines:

Everich for the wisdom that he kan
Was shaply for to been an alderman.

Here we are on a definite footing and can reject Professor Skeat altogether. Hinckley was the first to suggest that Chaucer used "Alderman" in its modern sense of "municipal magistrate," instead of "head-officer of the guild,"—Pro-

1 I wish to express here my thanks to the great authority on the municipal history of London for his courteous and generous attention to my letter of inquiry. Without his assistance this portion of my paper would have been materially weakened.

2 As a matter of fact the Sheriffs also sat on the dais. But there is no Sheriff between 1371 and 1407 who did not also attain Aldermanic rank. That is, a Sheriff who was not an Alderman when he entered office became one soon afterwards. There were 74 Sheriffs between 1371 and 1407. (Beaven, II. p. XXXVII. This statement in substance has been repeated by the authority just cited in response to my inquiry.) For the list of Sheriffs see Index to Letter-Book, H.

fessor Skeat's interpretation. With the aid of the Reverend Mr. Beaven's exceedingly helpful book\(^1\) one is able to prove conclusively that Chaucer's reference is political. The following guilds had representation in the Aldemancy between 1377 and 1400: Mercers,\(^2\) twenty representatives; Grocers, nineteen; Fishmongers, nine; Drapers, eight; Goldsmiths, eight; Vintners, eight; Skinners, seven; Stockfishmongers, six; Pepperers, two; Ironmongers, two; Wax-chandlers, Tailors, Armourers,\(^2\) 'Broderers,'\(^2\) Woolmongers and Girdlers, one each. It will be observed that the particular guilds referred to by Chaucer had no representation, nor were they to have until a century later.\(^4\) This is, therefore, one of the few political allusions to be found in the *Canterbury Tales*. The lines, therefore, appear to mean: each of the five burgesses was a capital freeman to sit on the rostrum as an Alderman (or a Mayor) and,—*moreover*, everyone knew enough to be an Alderman.\(^5\)

If the above interpretation is correct, one is tempted to ask if any evidence exists that Chaucer's burgesses were attempting to gain the Aldemancy. We know

hir wyves wolde it wel assente.\(^6\)

One bit of evidence, at any rate, has come down to us. In 1397, we are told, the elections of Aldermen in the past had

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\(^1\) *op. cit.* pp. 392 ff. I have not counted those who were re-elected, but none as far back as 1365 belonged to other companies than those mentioned above. One alderman of Tower Ward, John Morton, for the year 1377, I have not been able to identify. His predecessors and successors at Tower Ward were either grocers, mercers, or fishmongers. These were the prominent companies, and Morton probably belonged to one of them.

\(^2\) Among those who entered a petition against Brembre in Parliament (1386). The Mercers and 'Broderers' had representatives in the Aldemancy at the time. (Beaven, I. pp. 336, 354.)

\(^3\) Does not include those who had been re-elected. Cf. note 2.

\(^4\) The Haberdashers were the first to be represented,—in 1471 (Beaven, I. p. 346). The Dyers first in 1601 (*Ibid.*, I. p. 349). Weavers in 1626 (*Ibid.*, I. p. 353). Carpenters in 1711 (*Ibid.*, I. p. 352). The Tapicers later lost their identity. It is curious to note that Chaucer's guildspeople had a greater number of representatives in the Common Council than some of those who were represented in the Aldemancy. For example, the Wax-chandlers.

\(^5\) If Chaucer had the Aldermen in mind in the previous stanza, this is a sort of incremental repetition, as Professor Kittredge has pointed out to me. I am indebted to Professor Kittredge for suggestions in the interpretation of these lines.

\(^6\) A. 374.
been “headstrong, partial, and imprudent.” And, as a consequence, “damages, dissensions, and perils... had oftentimes happened in divers Wards” by reason of such elections.\(^1\) Though this complaint came ten years after the General Prologue was written, it is not without significance. As a matter of fact, between 1376 and 1384 there had been a great deal of discussion as to the tenure of office for an Alderman. In 1376 a Charter was issued by Edward III setting forth that no Alderman should hold office for more than a year.\(^2\) In the following year, the Common Council of the City passed a resolution that “Aldermen who had misbehaved themselves and been removed from office should on no account be re-elected, but that an Alderman who had conducted himself well might be re-elected after the lapse of a year.”\(^3\) In 1384 Mayor Brembre issued a “precept” for the election of an alderman as follows: “Either one who is already or has been an Alderman, or some one else.”\(^4\) He thereby ignored the year’s interval, and by what authority is not known. The King assented to this particular election “and is willing that the same mode... shall continue, provided it appear to the members of the next Parliament for the better government of the City.”\(^5\) Parliament sanctioned the change\(^6\) later in the year (1384).\(^7\) Though we do not know Brembre’s motives, they undoubtedly were selfish. At any rate the very fact that a victualling mayor of his own motion disregarded an existing law and issued his own precept which was condoned by the King would not reduce friction among the guilds. Chaucer’s non-victuallers may have chafed more, and probably did chafe more, than the records reveal.

Moreover, it is interesting to note that no new aldermen had been elected between 1383 and 1388, save one in 1387.\(^8\)

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\(^1\) Letter-Book, H, p. 436.


\(^3\) Letter-Book, H, p. 60.

\(^4\) Ibid., p. 228.

\(^5\) Ibid., p. 231.

\(^6\) Letter-Book, H, p. IX.

\(^7\) Beaven, II. p. XIX. In 1394 annual elections ceased and an alderman henceforth could not be removed without just cause (Letter-Book, H, pp. 409-410). This law is still operative (Beaven, II. p. XIX).

\(^8\) Beaven, I. p. 400. Cf. pp. 398-400. This was in March. In 1388 two new aldermen were elected, and but one in 1389. It is interesting to note that all four were members of non-victualling guilds.
Did the Londoners desire an infusion of new blood in the Aldermany? Or was Chaucer's reference a sly thrust at the Mayor's precept of 1384? If the latter, it is a capital touch.¹

That there was rivalry because it implied a minimum bank account seems certain. Though Chaucer does not tell us that a burgess to be an alderman must have a certain amount of worldly goods, he implies it.

For catel hadde they ynoth and rente.²

As a matter of fact, a minimum was necessary. Earlier in the century a law was passed stating that each alderman must have three horses.³

Nor was the spectacular element absent in an Alderman's career. Though not of great importance its social influence was not negligible. Fortunately there is preserved a highly interesting entry which throws light on this point, as well as on the feeling of civic consciousness which was developing at this time. Incidentally, the Host's

And who so wole my Juggement withseye
Shal paye al that we spenden by the weye,⁴

is apropos. In 1382⁵ the Mayor and Aldermen agreed unanimously that "for the dignity of the said city" all the Aldermen "should be arrayed upon the Feast of Pentecost (Whit Monday) . . . . in cloaks of green lined with green taffeta, or tartaryn." Anybody who refused was to pay a penalty which was to be determined by the Mayor and such Aldermen as were properly garbed. But on the appointed Mon-

¹ Chaucer, it may be observed, exhibits his usual subtlety in his allusions to contemporary events.
² A. 373.
³ Letter-Book, C, p. 154. Cf. Liber Albus, I, p. XLVII. In an ordinance of 1397 a man to be an alderman had to be "fit in morals and worldly goods." (Letter-Book, H, p. 436). This ordinance implies a minimum. Though little information exists we discover, beginning with the next century, some interesting facts. For example, in 1469 a man to be an alderman must have £1000; in 1710, £15000; in 1812, £30000. Aldermen frequently refused to serve (Beaven, II, p. XXXIX). For enviable privileges of an alderman see Liber Albus, I, pp. 32 ff. Among other privileges they were not required to pay anything for the enrollment of their charters or deeds (Ibid., p. 35). There were heavy penalties for insulting an alderman (Ibid.). See oath taken by aldermen (Ibid., pp. 307-8). That they were not to sell victuals while in office is of interest.
day when the distinguished men met in St. Peter’s, Cornhill, “to go in procession from thence through the City, according to the ancient custom, to the Church of St. Paul,” John Sely\(^1\) appeared in his business suit.\(^2\) Punishment was meted on the spot. It was decided then and there that Sely should give a dinner at his home\(^3\) on the following Thursday to his fellow Aldermen and the Mayor. Not only that, but he “was to line his cloak in manner aforesaid; and so it was done.” Moreover, any alderman in the future who is not properly attired for a procession shall pay a like penalty.\(^4\)

Every scrap of evidence one can find indicates that the guildspeople had sufficient property and income. As has been pointed out\(^5\) the guilds became all-powerful after 1376. They had gained not only in worldly goods but in municipal power as well. Though the King had favored the stronger (victuallers) for a number of years, Chaucer lived to see the day when the purchasing power of all London guilds was curbed. This was in 1391. In this year Parliament enacted a statute whereby the guilds were to be “subject to a license of amortization.” Sharpe points out that this indicates “that up to that time they had enjoyed unlimited power of acquiring property in mortmain without such license.”\(^6\)

This statute, presumably the result of jealousy,\(^7\) had its beginnings in 1388. In November of that year (shortly after the meeting of Parliament at Cambridge) “under the auspices of the lords appellant”\(^8\) “an important step was taken towards regulating not only the Guilds of the City of

\(1\) Alderman of Walbrook.
\(2\) “Cloak that was single and without a lining.”
\(3\) “At his house, and that at the proper costs of the said John.”
\(4\) Cf *in passim* the apprentice in the *Cook’s Prologue*. (A. 4365 ff).
\(5\) See pp. 1 ff.
\(6\) *Letter-Book*, H, p. XLIX. Cf. *Stat.*, 15 Richard II, Cap. V. Some of the guildspeople held property to the uses of religious houses. For a discussion of this complicated and vague question see text. Sharpe (*Letter-Book*, H, XLIX) quotes Stubbs (*Const. Hist.*, III, pp. 586, 590) in saying that jealousy on the part of the governing body of the City provoked this statute. The reason given is, the City enjoyed no such privilege. This however does not seem to me a sufficient reason for the governing body of London was composed of guildspeople. I have not been able to find the reference to Stubbs.
\(7\) See previous note.
London, which had occasioned so much disquietude of late years (and which the lords had already shown a desire to take in hand), but also all kindred associations throughout the country, for the King issued writs to the Sheriff of every county to make a return of all Guilds within his bailiwick, with full particulars of their origin, government, and possessions.”

Sharpe thinks that one “of the chief enactments (in 1391) was the interpretation of the Statute of Mortmain as comprising property held by laymen to the uses of religious houses or by perpetual corporations, such as guilds and fraternities.”

One record, of extraordinary interest because unique, is preserved which indicates that the women had a direct interest in the business affairs of that day. In 1372 an arrangement was made between the Dyers, Leathersellers, and Purser of the Bridge defining their respective duties and obligations. Of the three dyers who subscribe the Articles,

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1 Two separate writs dated 1 November were sent to the Mayor, and Sheriffs of London; one bids them “for certain reasons laid before the King and his Council at the last Parliament held at Cambridge, to make proclamations for all Masters, Wardens, and Surveyors of misteries and crafts in the City and suburbs who have in their possession any charters or letters patent from the King . . . . touching the said misteries and crafts, to bring into the King’s Chancery such charters”—before Feb. 2, 1389. The other writ is for all “Masters and Wardens of guilds and fraternities in the City and suburb” to make returns of their foundation, government, and property. (Letter-Book, H, pp. XLVIII, 336). See Toulmin Smith, English Guilds (E. E. T. S., Vol. 40, pp. 127-131), for a translation of these writs. The guilds were to make returns of the “true annual value of the said lands, tenements, and possessions and the true worth of the said goods and chattels” (Ibid., p. 128). Sharpe says (Letter-Book, H, p. XLVIII) that the “first writ applied to the Guilds which controlled the various trades and crafts of the City, but which also possessed incidentally a religious and social element; the second referred to unchartered associations formed solely for religious and social purposes. No returns to the first writ appear to be extant (if, indeed, they were ever made), whilst only thirty-one returns have been discovered to the second writ. Among the latter are returns of four fraternities bearing the names of craft Guilds, viz: the Whitelawyers, the Barbers, the Cutlers, and the Glovers, but only as social and religious associations. A seventeenth-century copy of the return made by the fraternity of Barbers is printed in Mr. Sidney Young’s “Annals of the Barber-Surgeons” (pp. 30-34). A copy of Young’s Annals is in the Harvard Library. To what extent the guilds had a social and religious purpose is not known. See Miss S. E. Moffat, London Fraternities in the Fourteenth Century (printed in The Clare Market Review, May, 1906). A copy of this article is in the library of Harvard University. Cf. Hinckley, Notes, etc., p. 27.

the wives are associated as parties.\textsuperscript{1} Were the wives, one
is tempted to ask, assisting their husbands in the dyeing
of materials, in order to purchase the required number of
horses?

Observation has been made that some of the burgesses
owned property outside of London, and that one man in
particular\textsuperscript{2} held lands in Kent. This at once raises the
question in what part of Kent, and if along the Pilgrim's Road.
One interesting entry to the student of Chaucer is preserved.
In 1374 Giles de Kelsey\textsuperscript{3}, "tapicer", and citizen of London,
Thomas Hermesthorp, formerly a parson of London, and
William Bollak receive from the latter's brother John, a
"tapicer," "lands, rents and services in Hallyng, Cokelston
and Rochester."\textsuperscript{4} Hallyng lay six miles south of Rochester,
and Cokelston apparently was on the Isle of Sheppey.
Rochester, of course, was the chief city between London
and Canterbury, and readers of Chaucer will recall the Host's
"Lo! Rouchestre"\textsuperscript{5} uttered with evident national pride.

Possession of property along the Pilgrim's Road was com-
mon enough. Highly interesting is the fact that a number
of the poet's fellow Justices of Peace owned land along the
route, and in some cases actually lived on the Road. At
Ospringe, for example, Sir Arnold Savage, Robert Bealknap,
and others acquired a manor in 1374.\textsuperscript{6} Thomas Shardelowe
lived at Dartford.\textsuperscript{7} Arnold Savage was of an old family
that had long been settled two miles from Sittingbourne\textsuperscript{8} (at

\textsuperscript{1} A complete translation of the Articles is set forth in the History of
Cf. Letter-Book, G, p. 293. The Dyers were somewhat notorious, also,
for cheating their customers. This complaint was included in the Articles.
The names of the Dyers are: "John Blackthorne and Agnes his wife,
Robert Whitynge and Lucy his wife, and Richard Westone, 'dier,'
and Katherine his wife."

\textsuperscript{2} Dyk. See supra.

\textsuperscript{3} See supra.

\textsuperscript{4} Cal. Close Rolls, 1374–7, pp. 96 ff. In his will he makes bequests to
Dyk and his wife, and to his sister,—the wife of Kelsey (Cal. of Wills,
etc., II. p. 179). This intimacy between people of the same guild is not
without interest.

\textsuperscript{5} B. 3116.

\textsuperscript{6} Cal. Close Rolls, 1374–7, pp. 107 ff. Ospringe was one of the halting-
places for pilgrims. Dartford and Rochester were the other two. See
Skeat, V. p. 415.

\textsuperscript{7} Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1381–5, p. 409.

Bobbing)—likewise mentioned in the *Canterbury Tales*. Eleanor, sister of Arnold Savage, and William, son of Lewis Clifford (a known friend of Chaucer), were joint owners of property at Bobbing.¹ John Cobham lived at Cooling (Cowling) near the Pilgrim’s Road.² Thomas Brokhill, presumably the father of the poet’s fellow J. P., owned a manor six miles south of Dartford.³ Simon Burley had interest in the manor of Parrok near Gravesend.⁴ Six prominent Justices of the Peace, therefore, lived or owned property on or near the Pilgrim’s Road, and some actually lived at the usual halting places for the night. This is manifestly significant. That Chaucer in making a pilgrimage to Canterbury was entertained by one of his colleagues we like to imagine. At any rate, the minute knowledge necessary for the portrait of the Franklin was not got in London. The poet not only saw this country gentleman enjoy his morning draught, but he also heard belated travellers ask for a night’s lodging. Nor are these facts which one ordinarily gleans at midday. Furthermore, not to press the point, when Chaucer pays the Franklin the great compliment of being the Saint Julian does he not infer that this worthy gentleman lived on the Pilgrim’s Road?⁵ What other highway in Kent would be so likely to have belated travellers? Finally, it may be observed that Chaucer succeeded Shardelowe (who lived at Dartford) as J. P., when the latter died. Shardelowe was an old man who had been J. P. for years, and

Ful ofte tyme he was Knyght of the shire.⁶

Mention has been made of the fact that Kelsey left money for the repair of bridges. What bridges we do not know. From other sources, however, we may infer that one of them was the bridge over the Medway between Strood and Rochester,—the bridge the Pilgrims had to cross. That some of the London burgesses did contribute towards its construction or repair we do know. In 1373

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⁵ Assuming of course that the Franklin was a resident of Kent.
⁶ In my doctoral dissertation on *Illustrations in Chaucer*, which I hope to publish shortly, I have made a fuller biography of Shardelowe.
Thomas atte Legh, a stockfishmonger, left 40 shillings towards the work; John Rous, a fishmonger, left money in 1381 for like purpose; and likewise a London skinner in 1386. Three similar bequests were made in the first quarter of the fifteenth century. The burden of the expense, however, was carried by Sir John Cobham (fellow J. P. of Chaucer) and Sir Robert Knolles—two famous knights of the fourteenth century—who rebuilt the bridge in 1388.

The matter of wearing apparel is not without interest also. When but a comparatively few wills are preserved one should not expect many by obscure people. And such is actually the case. Even when the will is given it is likely to be brief or the trade of the testator omitted. However, a sufficient number of interesting wills have come down to us which make pertinent some scattering observations. A very interesting will of a London tailor, dated 1393, exists. John Dymmok, “tailour”, leaves among other things “a girdle of black silk harnessed with silver.” Also “a long gown of striped cloth . . . furred with bever, a silver girdle, a baselard harnessed with silver, a doublet with coat of mail, a palet with hood.” He likewise leaves several robes and another basilard with silver trimmings. He therefore owned two girdles and two basilards “harnessed with silver.” A “clothpakker” (fuller) in 1418 leaves a “girdle garnished with silver and . . . basilard garnished with silver.” In glancing through other wills one is impressed by the number of silver girdles, daggers, spoons, cups, etc., which tradespeople possessed—even “bedes of haumbre.” Chaucer’s people had knives (presumably the basilards, used for protection against robbers) capped, as the poet tells us, not with brass but with silver. The Reve from the “north contree” had a rusty sword, however,—another reason for his shyness.

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1 *Cal. of Wills*, etc., II, p. 154.
4 *Ibid.*, pp. 392, 428, 433. The bridge was in need of repair a good deal of the time apparently.
6 In many cases, through the aid of the *Letter-Books*, I have been able to identify the man’s business.
7 Tailors had six representatives in the Common Council.
Money frequently was left for persons to make pilgrimages to shrines. In one will, made by a vintner in 1361, twenty shillings were left to anyone willing to walk to Canterbury “with naked feet;”² forty shillings to anyone willing to go to “S. Mary de Walsingham.”³ A silver girdle and forty shillings are left in 1373 by a brewer to anyone who will go to Santiago⁴ (Spain). Ten marks are left in 1376 by a woolmonger for the like purpose⁵ (to Santiago). A mercer in 1384 leaves bequests for sending two pilgrims to Rome, there to remain forty days.⁶ A draper, in 1383, makes provision for someone to go to Rome in case he die before he can perform the vow in person.⁷ A poulterer in 1397 makes provision for sending a pilgrim to Rome.⁸ It will be observed that no one belonging to a small non-victualling company left a will of this sort. Drapers and mercers, of course, were among the wealthiest. The victualers, however, fared particularly well in Chaucer’s day,—even as to-day.

² Ibid., p. 107.
³ Ibid., p. 165.
⁴ Ibid., p. 211.
⁵ Ibid., p. 243.
⁶ Ibid., p. 251.
⁷ Ibid., p. 335.