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Chaucer's pronunciation  
and the spelling of the  
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CHAUCER'S  
PRONUNCIATION

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CHAUCER'S  
PRONUNCIATION

AND THE SPELLING OF THE  
ELLESMERE MS

BY

GEORGE HEMPL PHD

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For out of olde felde as men seyth  
Cometh al this newe corn from yere to yere  
And out of olde bokes in good feyth  
Cometh al this newe science that men lere  
*Parlement of Fowles*

BOSTON  
D C HEATH & CO

1893

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## PREFACE.

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There are various ways of reading Chaucer. Not a few attempt to read the works of the Middle-English poet as though they were written in the speech of to-day, and succeed in getting a disjointed jargon that is neither poetry nor prose. Others pronounce the vowels approximately as in German, and, slipping in or leaving out enough e's to give a passable rhythm, revel in the glamour of a bogus antiquity. Still others, and they mostly foreigners, strive, with more or less success, to attain a scientific reproduction of the speech of the poet. It is my pleasant duty each year to introduce a hundred odd students to the study of Chaucer; and, much as I despise the naïve and the capricious methods of reading the poet's works, I shrink from imposing a minute study of Middle-English phonology upon a class of undergraduate students, lest at the end of the brief time allotted the subject they find they have the shell but not the kernel.

Still, in these matters one is largely limited by the books in the market. The *Prolog* and *The Knight's Tale* doubtless form the most acceptable pieces for undergraduate students, though the *Tale* does get rather long before it ends; and the Morris-Skeat edition, in spite of its weaknesses, is the best text with a glossary. But the student is there referred to Skeat's edition of another poem for a treatment of the subject of pronunciation, and this is found to be based upon the idiosyncrasies of an inferior MS and to require the gentle correction of Prof. Skeat. I use the Morris-Skeat

book, but I have found that the introduction to the subject is made at a much more rapid pace and in a far more satisfactory manner by the aid of the marked texts in Sweet's *Second Middle-English Primer*. Sweet's excellent treatment of the pronunciation offers, however, unnecessary difficulties to non-philological students; while the choppy and inadequate presentation of the subject in Skeat's echo\* of Sweet's *Primer* is quite unsatisfactory. I have therefore tried to meet the needs of my students in this little book, and shall use along with it Sweet's *Primer*, to be followed by the Morris-Skeat book.

My aim at first was to print but half a dozen pages; as it is, I have not put in anything that I do not try to have my young people master. Others may find it advisable to omit or postpone some sections. Still others may deem it necessary to neglect some of the distinctions I have made: to sound  $\bar{e}$  like  $\bar{e}$  or even  $\bar{a}$  like  $\bar{e}$ , and to pronounce the words in § 33,  $\bar{z}$ , and perhaps even those containing  $\bar{e}$  and  $\bar{u}$  as in M<sup>n</sup>E. Surely the failure to prolong double consonants (§ 39) need not be considered a serious matter in the case of the ordinary student. But I should think it folly to ignore the difference between  $\bar{q}$  and  $\bar{o}$ , which has its counterpart in M<sup>n</sup>E. The section treating of the Relation of ME Vowels to M<sup>n</sup>E Vowels is meant to be of practical use in acquiring the right pronunciation of the ME vowels, especially when the student uses an unmarked text.

I have taken pains to cite instances of nearly every word mentioned, if possible, in the *Prolog* or *The Knight's Tale*. The spelling is, with rare exceptions, that of the Ellesmere MS; the numbers refer to the lines in the Six-Text Edition, which for the *Prolog* accord with the numbering in Sweet and Skeat, and for *The Knight's Tale* will be found in brackets in Skeat's edition.

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\* School Edition of Chaucer's Prologue, Oxford, 1891.

I have stuck closely to the matter of spelling and pronunciation; but, should my treatment of the subject prove to be of use to others, I hope to find time to prepare an Introduction to the Study of Chaucer that will aim to meet the wants of American students.

GEORGE HEMPL.

Ann Arbor, October 1, 1893.



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## TERMS, ABBREVIATIONS, SIGNS, &c.

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§ 1. 1) A *voiced consonant* is one made while the vocal chords are vibrating: *b, l, w, g, &c.*

A *voiceless consonant* is one made while the glottis is wide open and the vocal chords silent: *p, s* in *so, t, f, &c.*

A *whispered consonant* is one made while the vocal chords are contracted but not put into vibration, like M<sup>n</sup> E *is, his, with, of, &c.* at the end of a sentence, cf. § 33, 2.

If the tongue is pressed forward during the formation of a vowel, it is called a *front vowel*: *e, i* or *y, ü*; if drawn back, a *back vowel*: *a, o, Q, u.*

A vowel is said to be *low, mid, or high*, according as the tongue is lowered a good deal, but moderately, or very little: *i, ü, and u* are high vowels; *e* and *Q* are low vowels; the rest are mid vowels. *e* and *Q* are also called *open* vowels when compared with the *close* mid vowels *ē* and *ō*.

- 2) OE Old English (= "Anglo-Saxon").  
ME Middle English.  
M<sup>n</sup> E Modern English.

The transition from OE to ME was in the 12th Century, that from ME to M<sup>n</sup> E in the 15th century.

- OF Old French.  
M<sup>n</sup> F Modern French.  
E Ms The Ellesmere manuscript.  
C The Complaint to Pity.  
FA The Former Age.  
P The Pardoner's Tale.

All other references are to the *Prolog* or *The Knight's Tale*, the numbers being those of the lines in the Six-Text Edition (also given in Sweet and Skeat).

3) Letters in italics are almost invariably phonetic signs; the following may need explanation:

<i>f</i>	“	“	“	ch	“	<i>church</i> .
ʒ	“	“	“	s	“	<i>pleasure</i> .
dʒ	“	“	“	j and g	in	<i>joy, gin</i> .
æ	“	“	“	a	in	<i>hat</i> .
a	“	“	“	a	in	<i>artistic</i> .
ā	“	“	“	a	“	<i>art</i> .
au	“	“	“	ow	in	<i>now</i> .
ai	“	“	“	ai	in	<i>aisle</i> .
u	“	“	“	u	in	<i>full</i> .
ū	“	“	“	u	in	<i>rude</i> .
iū	“	“	“	u	in	<i>use</i> .
e	“	“	“	e	in	<i>met</i> .
ē	“	“	“	e	in	<i>there</i> .
ə	“	“	“	a	in	<i>idea</i> , § 4 Note.
ē	“	“	“	e	in	<i>her</i> .
v	“	“	“	u	in	<i>hut</i> .
ɔ	“	“	“	ɔ	in	<i>what</i> .
o	“	“	“	o	in	<i>or</i> .

For *ē* or *ei* and *ō* or *ou* cf. § 14 Note 1, also p. 17 ft. nt. and p. 18 ft. nt. For the ME letters with diacritical marks see §§ 3-8, 28, 1.

> is a sign meaning “becomes” or “became.”

## GENERAL REMARKS ON ME. SPELLING, &c.

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§ 2. In considering the spelling and pronunciation of Middle English we must remember that the language contained French elements incorporated with the native English; that the English of that time was in some respects like Old English and in others more like Modern English, while the French elements had come into the language from Old French and consequently were more like that than like Modern French; and, furthermore, that in Middle-English times the Old-French system of spelling was in vogue in England. Old French was, of course, derived from Latin, but essential changes had taken place in the pronunciation, and students who have learned Latin according to the Roman method of pronunciation will have to be very careful not to introduce this into Middle English. On the other hand, those that are familiar with Modern French pronunciation must guard against using this in Middle English.

(a) Thus the OE word *ūt* was pronounced just the same in ME as in OE, but as the sound of long *u* (M<sup>n</sup>E "oo" in "spool") was represented by "ou" in French, the word was spelled "out" in ME, which spelling has been retained in M<sup>n</sup>E though the long *u* has become the diphthong *au*. While *ow* was often used for *ou* (§ 2 *c*), the sound was just the same. But there was a diphthong in native words which too was spelled *ou* or *ow*; this may be distinguished from the long vowel by the fact that while the vowel has now become *au* (thou, how), the diphthong *ou* or *ow* is still pronounced

with an  $\bar{o}$  or  $\bar{q}$  sound (though 68, *sōwed* 685, *thoughte* 385). Dr Sweet's text also helps the learner by leaving the long vowel *ou* unmarked (*thou*) and printing the diphthong with an  $\bar{o}$  before *gh* (*thogh*) and with a diacritical mark over or under the  $\bar{o}$  in other situations (*grōwen*, *sq̄ule*).

NOTE. (a) Before *gh*, (1) the vowel  $\bar{u}$  is almost uniformly written *ou* (*ynough* 888) § 17; and (2) *u* is written *o* (*drōghte* 2) § 7 and § 2c; but (3) the diphthong *ou* is written not only *ou* (*thoughte* 385), but frequently *o* (*oghte* 660), and this spelling is uniformly employed by Sweet to avoid confusion with (1) above; § 6  $\bar{o}$ . (b) Before *n* the *u* of *ou* =  $\bar{u}$  is often omitted (*seḡon* 19, *nācions* 53), or indicated only by a mark over the *n* (*reḡoñ condicioñ* 37).

(b) The letter *u* (initially *v*, § 2 f) was, in accordance with French usage, often retained for short *u*, especially in closed syllables: *ful* 22, but 74, *vntō* 71, *lusty* (cf. however *c* below); but it was also used for the sound of "u" in French "just", "nature," &c., and is printed by Sweet  $\bar{u}$  (in imitation of German  $\bar{u}$ ) when short,  $\bar{u}$  ( $\bar{u}$  would have been better) when long, and  $\bar{u}$  when it had acquired the sound of *eu*, § 4 N<sup>5</sup>.

(c) As *i* (which was generally not dotted) and *u* might easily cause confusion when written next other letters made of similar short straight lines (for ex., *n*, *m*, *w*, *u* = *v*), the French usage of writing *o* for *u* and *y* for *i* in such (and some other) situations was adopted (Sweet prints such an *o* with a curl above it,  $\bar{o}$ , to suggest a *u*): *yōnge* *sōnne* 7, *wōrthy* 43, *lōued* 45, *sōmtyme* 65, *bismōtered* 76, *observe* *lōuyere* 80 but *lusty* in the same line; also *cōrages* 11, *cōppe* 134, *cōsyn* 1234, *sōper* 348; *veyne* 3, *nyght* 10, *nȳne* 24, *wȳde* 28, *tyme* 35, but usually, "w<sup>t</sup>" (=with) 31, "in" 6. Similarly, *I* is sometimes used for *i* next *nn*: *Inne* 1618, w<sup>t</sup> *Inne* 'within' 1669. (d) The letter *y* was also used for *i* initially (1) as a capital in proper names: *ypocras* 431, *ypres* 448, *ypolita* 1685, and (2) in participles: *yrōnne* 8, *ywroght* 196, *ybqre* 378. (e) The letters *y* and *w* were often used for *i* and *u*, especially

finally and next other vowels: *query* 3, *melodye* 9, *day* 19, *felaweshipe* 26, *yow* 38, *vnknqwe* 126, *trōwe* 155; also next *n*, *m*, *w*, *u* = *v*, &c.: *veyne* 3, *Lyeys* 58, *slayn* 63, *knyght* 43, *wyped* 133, *ferthyng* 134, *pleyyng* 1061, *lyuen* 335; and elsewhere: *bawdryk* 116, *tretys* 152.

(*f*) The letter *v* was used initially for *v* and the vowel *u*: *veyne* 3, *verray* 338, *venerie* 166, *Vēnus* 1918, *vertū* 4, *vil-eynyē* 70, *victorie* 872, *vnder* 106, *vs* 411, *vntō* 225, *vpon* 1036, &c.; while *u* was used medially for both sounds: *query* 3, *deuout* 22, *deuyse* 34, *haue* 35, *reuerence* 305, *lyuen* 335, &c. Medial *v* is rare in the E Ms: *āventūre* 25, *everychqn* 31, *avañce* 246, *envyñed* 342, &c. Cf. note to *k* below. (*g*) The letter *I* was used not only as a capital *i*: *I* 34, *It* 155, &c., (cf. also *c* end); but also for the consonant *j*, both small and capital: *Iūliān* 34, *Iuste* 96, *Ierusalem* 463, *Ianglere* 560, *Ialous* 1329, *Iāpes* 705, &c. *J* and *i* for *j* are rare in the E Ms: *Jūno* 1329, *iāped* 1729.

NOTE.—The fact that *j* occurred only initially and that initial *v* was in fact much more frequently a consonant than a vowel (see the examples above) led to their complete differentiation (“*v*” and “*j*” consonants, “*u*” and “*i*” vowels); this differentiation is also made by Sweet in his *Second Middle-English Primer* and generally by Skeat.

(*h*) To distinguish the open long *e* and *o* from the close, it is customary to print the former *ē* and *ō* and the latter *ē* and *ō*. It will, thus, be observed that not only a straight mark above a vowel, but also a hook under it, indicates a long vowel, but the hook also shows that the vowel is open. If, as is often the case, a long vowel is doubled in the Ms, there is no need of a long mark over it: *degree* 40, *tō doon* 78; but the hook is necessary if the vowel is open: *brēth* 5, *gqqn* 12. In the MSS and an unmarked text like Skeat’s, both *o* and *oo* may stand for *ō* or *ō*, the doubling showing only that the vowel is long, and being only occasionally used.

(*i*) In OF “*g*” was pronounced *dʒ* before front vowels (*e*,

i or y), and this pronunciation was taken up into ME and is still retained; the learner must not be misled into using in ME the changed pronunciation of M<sup>n</sup>F. The letter j had the same pronunciation. (*k*) Similarly, "ch" had in OF, as well as in ME and M<sup>n</sup>E, the sound of *tʃ*, and lost the *t* only in M<sup>n</sup>F. M<sup>n</sup>E has more or less generally changed the pronunciation of a few of these words under the influence of M<sup>n</sup>F usage, for ex., chivalry; but the student of ME must take particular pains to preserve ch as in English *chip*. (*l*) He must also avoid bringing into ME the French nasal vowels for vowel + n or m; the most successful ME attempt at imitating what there was of this in OF seems to have been the au for nasal a in *straunge* 13, *acordaunt* 37, *Alisaundre* 51, *daunce* 96, &c.



## THE PRONUNCIATION OF THE VOWELS.

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§3. a was as in *artistic*: Whan that Aprille 1.

ā was as in *art*: bāthed 3, smāle 9.

ai or ay was as in *aisle*: day 19, cōmpaignye 24.

au or aw was as in *sauerkraut*: straunge 13, lawe 309.

§4. e was as in *men*: yet 70, twenty 82.

NOTE 1. Unstressed e was pronounced as in German, or nearly like final a in M<sup>n</sup> E (for ex., in *idea*) but weaker: soote 1, perced 2, engendred 4. The sound is printed ə in books on phonetics. It was, in fact, so weak already in ME times that it generally became quite silent in certain situations, cf. §23.

ē was as in *they*\*: swēte 5, slēpen.

NOTE 2.—So too e, ē, or e preceded or followed by i or y (ie\*, ye, ēi, ey, eī, &c.): chief 1057, they 18, curteisie 46. But ie often =  $\bar{i} + \bar{a}$ , or  $\bar{i}$ , when final in French words, §18,5; it =  $i + e$  in science 316, pācient 415, &c.; and consonantal  $\bar{i} + \bar{a}$  in other cases, cf. §27.

e was as in *there*: brēeth 5, wēren eged 29.

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\* Really ē, ie, or ye were the long, close e-vowel, while eī, ēi, eī were diphthongs ending in  $\bar{i}$ . In M<sup>n</sup> E all are pronounced as a diphthong (most distinctly so in southern England, about Philadelphia, &c.) or all are pronounced a pure e-vowel (so in Scotland and the larger part of the U. S., at least when not over-long, §14 Note 1); and it is hardly practicable to make general students distinguish the vowel from the diphthong in reading ME.

NOTE 3.—This sound occurs only before *r* in M<sup>n</sup>E and will require attention in other positions in ME. It is practically the sound of “*e*” in *met* prolonged. Cf. § 2*h*. The poet sometimes rimes it with  $\bar{e}$ , cf. § 9.

ei, ey, &c., Note 2.

$\bar{e}u$  or  $e\bar{u} = e + u$ , now common for *a + u* as a dialectic pronunciation of “ow” in *cow* &c.: *rēule* 173, *fēwe* 639, *shewe* C 55.

NOTE 4.—Care must be taken not to substitute  $i\bar{u}$  or  $\bar{u}$  for this sound, as in M<sup>n</sup>E. It is most readily acquired by putting one’s self in the mood of mocking one who uses the dialectic pronunciation mentioned above; the standard *au* in *cow* is not the sound.

NOTE 5.—The same sound is to be given to *u* (also written *eu*, and printed  $\hat{u}$  by Sweet, § 2*b*) in an open syllable in French words: *vertü* 4, *vertüous* 251, *letüaries* 426, *lhęsü* 689.

§ 5. *i* or *y* was as in *pin*: *Aprille* with *hise* 1.

*I* or  $\bar{y}$  was as in *machine*: *inspired* 6, *I* 20, *my* 21.

NOTE.—Skeat generally prints *y* for the long vowel and *i* for the short, except in diphthongs.

For *ie*, &c., cf. § 4, Note 2. For unstressed *i* or *y* before a vowel cf. § 27.

§ 6. *o* was as in the New England dialectic pronunciation of *boat*, *road*, *stone*, &c., or like  $\delta$  in German, French, &c., not like M<sup>n</sup>E “short *o*”: of 2, *holt* 6, *croppes* 7.

For *o*(gh) cf.  $\delta$ ; for  $\delta$  cf. § 7.

$\bar{o}$  was as in *no*\*: *anöther* 66, *tö* *doon* 78. So *too* *o* or *ou* before *gh* (§ 2*a* Note), and  $\bar{o}$  or *o* with following *u* or *w*\*: *though* 68, *dough*, *cough*, *trough*, *noht* 768, and

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\* Really  $\bar{o}$  was the long close *o*-vowel; while *o*(*u*) before *gh* and  $\bar{o}u$  and *qu* were diphthongs ending in *u*. M<sup>n</sup>E has the long *o*-vowel or the diphthong for both (cf. § 14, Note 1), and it is hardly practicable to try to distinguish the ME vowel from the diphthong in ordinary classes.

verbs like foughten 62, thoughte 385, oghte 660, (a)boght wrought 3099; lqwely 99, sōwed 685.

Q was as in *broad*: spqken everychqn 31, mq sqq 102.  
Cf. § 2 h.

oi or oy was as in *boy*: point 114, coy 119.

ōu, qw, &c., cf. 5. For ou = long u, cf. below.

§7. u or w, also ō (§ 2 c), was as in *put*: ful 22, duseyne 578, yelw, yōnge sōnne 7, drōghte 2, dōghty, but cf. § 2 a Note.

For ū cf. § 4, Note 5.

ou or ow was as in *soup*: houndes 146, sownynge 275, Plowman 529; before gh (§ 2 a Note) in ynough 888, Plough 887, bough 1980, swough 1979, slough, tough.

For ōu, q<sup>u</sup> cf. § 6 5.

§8. ü was as in German *Müller*\*, or short French "u": brüstles 556, Iüstice 314, süster 1820.

ū or ui was as in German *grün*\*, or long French "u": nātūre 11, entūned 123, cūrious 196, Iūān 340.

y = i, § 5.

NOTE.—It may be well to point out the chief difficulties that the student will meet in pronouncing the ME vowels: (a) Short o may be to him a new and difficult sound (§ 6), and he will have to remember that Sweet's symbol ɔ = short u and not short o (§ 7). The vowel ü, too, is often found difficult to master (§ 8 and ft. nt.). (b) After learning the values of the ME vowels, he will still be prone to admit certain M<sup>n</sup>E modifications, for ex., to round the vowel a next l or w (§ 20), and to sound e, i, and u, before r as in M<sup>n</sup>E (§ 19 b). (c) He will want to sound eu as to-day, or substitute au (as in *cow*) for eu (§ 4 N<sup>4</sup> and Preface p. 4). (d) After learning the correct pronunciation of long a, e, i, he will be apt to use it for short a, e, i, though thus departing from both ME and

\* Ger. *grün* and *Müller* are like Eng. *green* and *miller*, but the lips are nearly closed—or "rounded"—during the formation of the vowel.

## CHAUCER'S PRONUNCIATION.

M<sup>o</sup>E usage. (*e*) He will be apt to confound ai ay with ei ey (§ 15 N and Preface p. 4), and o with  $\bar{o}$  (§ 6, <sup>3</sup>~~2~~h, and Preface p. 4). (*f*) One is most apt to be careless with unstressed syllables, for example, to say tu dō for tō dō.

## IMPERFECT RIMES, &c.

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§ 9. Chaucer was a careful rimer but allowed himself certain liberties.

1) The open sounds occasionally rimed with the close, and the spelling was usually changed to suit: *yēer sōpēr* 347, *weel deēl* 367, *lēne ysēne* &c. 591, 660, *twō dō* 1039\*, *mō tō* 2725, *anqn ydōn* 1025, *Sēē bē* 60, *spēche tēche* 307, *dog-gēre spēre* 113. Similarly, *ai* and *ei* are occasionally rimed, and *ai* had doubtless begun to approach *ei* in popular pronunciation (the spelling generally rimes too): *way* (for *wey*) *day* 1413, 1481, &c., *agayn playn* (for *pleyn*) 1092, *pleyn ageyn* (for *agayn*) 1488, but *agayn slayn* 1741. And there are other impure rimes: *al sendāl* 440, *wēl catel* 540, *mōneye twēye* 703, *fynde Inde P.* 75. Different consonants are rarely joined in rime: *sāuth Significāuit* 662.

2) The pronunciation, and usually the orthography, of foreign names was fearlessly twisted to make *it* rime with native words or suit the metre: thus, usually *Palamoun* 1070, 1341, &c., but often *Palamqn* 1014, 2118, &c.; *Emely'e* 871, but *Emē'lyā* 1078; *A'thēn(e)s* 873, *Athē'n(e)s* 1194, *A'thēnes* 973; *Perothē'us* 1202, but *P(e)rō'theus* 1205 'Pirithous'.

3) Diversity of usage in pronunciation was put to use for the same purpose: usually *yēue* 223, but in rime *yiue* 225,

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\* "Two" must still have had *q*: in the Knight's Tale "two" rimes with *ō* not more than twice (1039 and perhaps 1705) but with *q* at least 13 times. Thus 1039 and (?) 1705 are impure rimes like *dō sq* 1195, *doon ēhqqn*, *anqn*, *gqqn* 2655, 1025, 2675, 2963, *tō mq* 2725.

505; usually koude 130, but in rime kouthe 390; usually groue 1478, 1481, 1505, &c., in rime greue 1495, 1507, &c.; there being a dearth of rimes for "live", "grove", &c. Regularly nqnes but nqnys to rime with nqn is 523.

## THE QUANTITY OF VOWELS.

§ 10. The quantity of the OE vowels remained the same in ME except that—

1) Vowels in stressed open\* syllables became long: mā-ken 9, open 10, hāre 191, mēte 127, spēke 462.

NOTE 1.—The high vowels *i* and *u* (§ 1) generally remain short: cōme 23, wōne sōne 335, pp. write 161 (the infinitive had original *i*, 96) riden 48, cōmen 671, prikyng 191, lōuede 444, lyue 583. As final *-e* in these cases was silent (§ 23,4), the *i*, *u*, was in a closed syllable.

NOTE 2.—(a) Often the inflection or use of a word presents some open\* and some closed syllables and consequently both long and short vowels: smāle 9, smal 153. (b) If the closed syllable constitutes a monosyllable, it sometimes prevails, that is, the vowel remains short throughout and the following consonant is doubled before another vowel: god 1665, goddess 1800, goddesse 1904. (c) If the closed syllable is in a word of more than one syllable (particularly words ending in *l*, *n*, *r*, and *i* or *y*), the closed syllable or the open prevails according as the one or the other happened to be most in use in each particular case; usually it was the closed syllable that prevailed: many qqn 317 but, with consonantal *y*, many a 60, 212, &c., so bisy a 321, bisier 322, studie 303, 438, berye merye 208, bod'yes 942, 944, but bodȳ'es 997. But the open syllable and long vowel prevailed in open 10, ēvene 83, &c. (d) Occasionally a long vowel is shortened under the same circumstances: crīst 698, but crīsten 55.

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\* A syllable that ends in a vowel is called an *Open Syllable*; one that ends in a consonant, a *Closed Syllable*. A single consonant belongs to the following syllable. Open syllables: tō the roo-te (but the and -te are unstressed); closed syllables: of March hath per-ced.

2) A long vowel in a closed\* syllable usually became short if another consonant was added: wȳs 68, but wysdōm 865, clēne 133, but clense 631; still mental association could nullify this rule: clēnnesse 506.

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\*Cf. ft. nt. p. 23.



## RELATION OF ME. VOWELS TO M<sup>NE</sup>. VOWELS.

§ 11. English has always shown a greater tendency to change the sound of its vowels than to change that of its consonants; consequently the pronunciation of the ME vowels differs more than that of ME consonants does from M<sup>NE</sup> usage.

### GENERAL CHANGES.

§ 12. The general changes that have taken place in the pronunciation of English vowels since ME times may be briefly stated as follows. Observe that the ME spelling is often retained in M<sup>NE</sup>.

#### Short Vowels.

§ 13. *a* > *æ*: man 43, bigan 44.

*e* remains *e*: yet 70; wente 78.

*i* " *i*: in 19, riden 48.

*ü* > *v*: Caunterbütry 27, sübtilly 610.

*u* usually > *v*: Vnder 105, löued 45, ffustiān 75;  
but often remains *u* between a labial consonant and *l*: ful 22  
wölf 513.

*o* > *ɔ* or *a*: on 21, of 54, for 13, God 533.

#### Long Vowels.

§ 14. *ā* > *ē* or *ei* (spelled "a"): bāthed 3, pāle 205.

*ē* & *ē* > *ī* or *ij* (spelled "e", "ee", or "ea"): mē  
ęch 39, slēues 93.

*ī* > *ai* (spelled "i" or "y"): rīden 45, thȳ 1283.

*ū* (printed *u* by Sweet when not written *ui* or *uy*) >  
*iū* or *iuw*: lūce 350, suyte 2873.

$\bar{u}$  (spelled ou or ow) > au: out 45, oure 62, gowne 93, how 284.

$\bar{o}$  (§ 2 h end) >  $\bar{u}$ : bootes 203, tō dō 942.

o (§ 2 h end) >  $\bar{o}$  or ou: open 10, so 11, shQQN 198.

NOTE 1.—In other words, there is little change in the short vowels, while all the long vowels have changed and tend to become diphthongs, especially in England, the long vowels (particularly  $\bar{I}$  and  $\bar{u}$ , not so generally  $\bar{e}$  and  $\bar{o}$ ) still being common in Scotland and the United States. Cf. p. 17 ft. nt., p. 18 ft. nt.

NOTE 2.—Observe particularly that ME  $\bar{o}$  > M<sup>n</sup>E  $\bar{u}$  (though still spelled "o" or "oo"), and ME o > M<sup>n</sup>E  $\bar{o}$  (spelled "oa" or "o-e"). The word o or on 'one' and all its derivatives have the vowel o, though their M<sup>n</sup>E equivalents show various irregularities: o 304, QQN 317, nQQN 210, anqn 32, allqne 1633, qqny 1373.

### Diphthongs.

§15 ai and ei >  $\bar{e}$  or ei: mayde 69, gay 74, grēye 152, deyntee 168, seint 173.

oi remains oi: point 114, oystre 182.

au > o: ytaught 127, sauce 129, drawe 396.

eu (or  $\bar{u}$ ) and  $\bar{e}$  >  $i\bar{u}$  or  $iuw$ : nēwe, 176, rēule 173, Muwe 349, vertuous 515, ~~stature 83, Julian 340.~~

ou >  $\bar{o}$  or ou: though 68, bqwe 108, grōwe 156.

NOTE.—Observe that ai and ei, though now pronounced alike, were distinguished in ME; in fact, we now sometimes write "ai" or "ay" for "ei": feith 62, seint 173, streit 174. Observe also that ME au was a phonetic spelling, as in Latin and German, and had not yet gotten the vowel sound it has in M<sup>n</sup>E.

For  $\bar{e}$ ,  $\bar{o}$ ,  $i\bar{u}$ , or ei, ou,  $iuw$ , see §14 Note 1.

### SPECIFIC CHANGES.

§ 16. There are many less general changes, that is, such as effect only a number of the words containing a certain vowel; but it would be out of place here to point out more than three or four of the most important.

§ 17. Vowels in closed\* syllables (and, by analogy, in related open ones), are sometimes shortened, particularly before dentals, that is, consonants made with the tip of the tongue (d, t, th, n): *breēd* *deēd* 147, *stēde* 231, *reēde* 90, *hood* 103, *wood good* 183, *blood* 635; *breēth* 5, *deēth* but *heēth* 605, *seith* 178, *seyde* 219, *dooth* 171; *hqote* 97, *leet* 128; *Mōnthe* 92, *wynd* 170, after *r* in *freēnd* 299 but not *feēnd*; *heeld* 176; *book* 185, *look* 289, *took* 303. Observe the shortening of *ō* before *-ther*: *anōther* 66, *brōther* 529; and of *q* before *-ng*: *lqng* 93, *strqng* 239.

§ 18. Lack of stress gives rise to slurred forms by the side of the full ones: *my* 21 now strong *mai* and weak *mi* or *ma*; sometimes one (often the weak) form prevails: *been* 85, strong *bin* in England, weak *bin* in America: *sayde* 70, generally weak *sed*; *you* 34, the strong *jū* > *jau* in early M<sup>E</sup> as thou > *thau* § 14, but weak *you* C 108 (= *ju*) supplanted strong *jau*, and when it was stressed it got a long vowel *jū* (now often *iū*), that is, the very pronunciation the ME strong form had; in *koude* 94 the weak *u* has prevailed; observe weak *have* with *æ*, but stressed *behave* with *ē*; any and many now have *e* but stressed *manifold* has the regular *æ*.

NOTE.—If a syllable that was or might be stressed in ME is now unstressed, its vowel is not what would be expected by §§ 13–15, but usually the obscure vowel *ə*: *licour* 3, *men-cioun* 893, *frēdōm* 46, *Squīer* 97, *licenciāt* 220, *visāge* 109.

§ 19. The sound *r* has always much affected preceding vowels; the chief cases are:—

(a) Before *r* and another consonant, *e* > *a*, later *ā* (cf. *b* below): *sterue* 1144, *darknesse* 1451, *hertely* 762, *ferther* 36, *ferthyng* 255, *sterres* 268, *yerde smerte* 268, *Dertemouthe* 389, *werre* 47, see 2 and (e).

\* Cf. ft. nt. p. 23.

NOTE.—In most classical words the *e* was retained or restored, and later (according to *b* below) changed to  $\hat{e}$ : serued 187, certeyn 375, mercy, 950, seruants 101. But even in these cases the rule (*e* > *a*) prevailed among the uneducated; and in a few usage varies, so Sergeant 309, Clerk 285, &c., while we distinguish between “parson” (persoñ 478) and “person” (persqne 521).

(*b*). Before *r* (but see note above)—

*a* >  $\bar{a}$ : Arm 393, barre 1075, and those in (*a*).

*ai*, *ei* (and sometimes *e*) > *e*: faire 94, preyēres 231, thēr 34, ēr 255.

*e*, *i*, *u*,  $\bar{u}$  >  $\hat{e}$ : serued 187 (cf. note above), first 44, curteisie 46, purchās 256, wōrthy 47, wōrld 176, Sūrgerye 413.

NOTE.—But if there is no consonant other than *y* before a following vowel, the *a* regularly (§ 13) becomes  $\alpha$ : carie 130, mariāge 212; and *e* remains *e*: berye merye 207.

(*c*) Observe the abnormal M<sup>n</sup>E vowel after *r* in brqqd 155, grēēt 203.

§ 20. A following *l* and a preceding *w* have in many cases rounded the vowel *a* or  $\bar{a}$  to *ɔ* or *o*: smāle 9, al 10, yfalle 25, palfrey 207, was 43, what 40, werre 47 (*e* had become *a* by (*a*) above), so were 555. Be very careful not to introduce this pronunciation into ME.

§ 21. The standard form of to-day is not always the regular descendant of the form usual in Chaucer, but has been changed for some special cause or is a dialectic variant; hence the form shown by the modern word is not what would be expected by §§ 13–15: gēte 291, snēwed 345, trōuthe 46, embrquded 89, bār 105, gretteste 120, lenger 330, hēng 160, yēue 223 (Chaucer uses *yiue* for a rime 225).

## THE LOSS OF VOWELS.

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§ 22. An unstressed vowel may be lost, particularly if next another vowel or a weakly stressed syllable. This is most apt to happen to the unstressed vowel that is produced with least displacement of the tongue, namely *a*, written *e* in ME as in German, cf. § 4 Note 1.

NOTE.—Words that only occasionally lose final *e*, retain it at the end of a verse; the student will need to exercise special caution in this matter.

### Loss of Weak E.

§ 23. Unstressed *e* is generally silent under the following circumstances:—

1) When two adjoining syllables contain weak *e*, one *e* only is sounded: *lōued(e)* 166, *sēmed(e)* 39, *bismōt(e)red* or *-er(e)d* 76, *feth(e)res* 107, *fyng[e]res* 129, *neu(e)re* or *neuer(e)* 70, *wedded[e]* 868 (cf. *ten* Brink top p. 140; *ther* has evidently been lost before the “the”).

2) After an unstressed syllable that may bear the stress: *pilgrim(e)s* 26, *ma'ner[e]* 71 but *manē're* 140. (In *bod'yes* 942, 944, &c., *i* or *y* is consonantal and not syllabic, cf. § 32.) Similarly after secondary stress: *shirrēu(e)* 359.

3) In words that ordinarily have little stress, for ex., prepositions, possessives, demonstratives, auxiliary verbs, &c.: *befor(e)*, *ther(e)*, *her(e)*, *his(e)* 1, *our(e)* 34, *hir(e)* 139, and the other possessives, *swich(e)* (unless adjective plural) and *which(e)* (unless adjective plural or after “the”) 40, 578, and

sōm(e) and this(e) 701, 2570; regularly wēr(e) 23, nēr(e) 875, often hau(e) 35, 886, hadd(e) 64, 146 (but hadde 164, &c.), koud(e) 130 (but koude 95).

4) When final in words having a short high vowel (i, u) followed by a single consonant: sōn(e), wōn(e) 1040, often lōu(e), and the past participles driu(e), writ(e), cōm(e) 77, &c. (but also driuen, cōmen 671, &c.); usually sounded in infinitive cōme, yiue for yiuen, &c.

5) Usually in French words ending in stressed -ye, -aye, -eye, &c.: vileynȝ(e) 70, curteisī(e) 132, remedi(e)s 475, but fantasȝe FA 51, and probably not at the end of a verse: meloȝe 9, scōleye 302, &c. For unstressed -ye cf. § 27. 32

6) In the ending -en after a vowel or l or r: yshqrn 589, bqrn 87, woln, hān, leyn, slayn 63, &c.

7) Occasionally medially: usually sēmely 123, 136, occasionally seem(e)ly 751 and always seemliest, usually nāthelēȝs 35, 2472, and trēwely 761, 1268, &c., but trēw(e)ly 481, &c., also lyu(e)ree 363, sōu(e)reyn 67, nām(e)ly 1268. The medial *e* is always silent in for(e)ward 829, eu(e)ry 3, 6, 15, &c., and usually in ēu(e)rich 241.

8) Occasionally in other cases, where the metre requires its silence, especially before a weak syllable followed by a heavily stressed one: lōu(e)d for lōued(e) before weak pronouns 206, 334, &c., belōu(e)d and 215, lōu(e)st my 1581, fall(e)th nat 1669, nōbl(e) ensample 496, delyu(e)r(e) and 84, pēpl(e) h)is āpes 706, Qu(e)r al thēr 249, 547, ēu(e)r (h)ē kan 588, 622; also gown(e) 93, tȝm(e) 102, &c.

9) Before a word beginning with a vowel (a silent h is, of course, not counted), final e is elided: see the examples in lines 382-3, also morw(e) a 334, Aristotl(e) and 295, festn(e) h)is 195, ordr(e) h)ē 214, 220, Alisaundr(e) h)ē 51 (in tendre herte 150 and the like, the h is stressed and not silent, and the -e is therefore not elided), fith(ell)e or 296, ēu(e)r(e) h)is 335, 343, &c.

(a) The -e of ne 'not' (for nē 'neither' see § 24) was always elided: N(e) I n(e) axe 2239, nys 901, I nam 1122, n(e) h)ath 923, and with lost w: nēre 875, nas, n(e) w)ōlde 550. (b) The -e of 'the' was almost always elided: th(e) ūsāge 110, thilke 182, thencreęs 275, &c.; the -ē of thē 'thee' occasionally, cf. § 24.

#### Other Cases of Loss of Vowel.

§ 24. 1) Occasionally the final vowel of a weakly stressed monosyllable was elided before another (especially an unstressed) vowel: m(ē) awręke C 11, t(ō) abyden 927, t(ō) h)ave 2239. The ē of nē 'neither' is usually retained: nē of *estaat* nē āge 2592; but it may be elided.

2) The i of weak "is" was frequently dropped, especially after "that" and "this", as in M<sup>n</sup>E: that (i)s 180, thi(s) i)s 1091, pouertē (i)s C 35. Similarly, it = I it 829.

3) A weak vowel is apt to fall out, especially if preceded and followed by the same consonant: in (a)nōther 1401, th(e) thrqtē 2458; par(i)sshe 491 (but *parisshe* 494), pos(i)-tif 1167, the Latin Si(g)n(i)ficāuit 662, usually ben(e)d(i)-citee 2115 (but *benedicite* 1785), always Ier(u)salēm 463. Observe *Caun'terb(ū)ry* 16, 22, with silent ū and stress as in present British English, but *Caun'terbū'ry* 27 with ū and American stress.

## THE PRONUNCIATION OF THE CONSONANTS.

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§ 25. In general the consonants were pronounced in ME as in M<sup>D</sup>E; it will be most necessary to observe the following points in learning ME pronunciation.

c.

§ 26. As in M<sup>D</sup>E, c was back (or guttural), = *k*, before consonants and back vowels (a, o, u): crulle 81, acordaunt 37, caas 585, curteisie 132; and front (or palatal), = *s*\*, before front vowels (e, i or y): spāce pāce 36, Prūce 53, certeinly 235, Maunciple 567. For ci + vowel, see § 32 Note. So sc before a front vowel (probably also in scendre 587) was sounded *s*: science 316, conscience 142, cf. § 32 Note.

ch.

§ 27. Old-English *c* before old front vowels had also become palatal and was sounded *tʃ* (similarly Latin *c* in some cases); as this sound was written "ch" in French (chiualrie 45, Chapeleyne 164), it was also written ch in native English words: everychqn 31, whiche 40, swich 43. Double ch was written cch: reccheleēs 179, wrecche 931.

ME ch must never be pronounced *f*, or like English sh, as is done in M<sup>D</sup>E, cf. § 2 *k*; nor like *k*.

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\*This *s*-sound of *c* occurs only in French words; Latin *c* before front vowels became palatal, this became *ts* (as still in German) and this became *s* (as in French and English).



## g.

§ 28. 1) ME, like M<sup>D</sup>E, g was regularly front (or palatal), that is, = *dʒ*, as in *gin*, when before a front vowel (e, i or y) in a word from the French: *gentil* 72, *gypoun* 75, *Age* 82, *barge* 410, *habergeoun* 76 (in which the e is silent); also in some native words; *sengen*, *eḡḡe*, FA 19, &c. This g Sweet prints with a dot above it, to suggest j.

2) Elsewhere g was back (or guttural), like *g* in *go*—French: *glorie* 870, *gōuernyng* 599; English: *God* 533, *gQQN* 459, *Syngyng* 91, *gesse* 82, *bigynne* 428, *grēce* 135, *drōgges* 426, *legges* 591, *daggere* 392. The g from older gu in a few French words is also guttural: *gise* 663, *gŷ(d)e* 1950, *gyle* 2596; also in *ger-* from *gr-*: *gerner* 593, *Gernāde* 56.

NOTE 1.—Thus g was not yet silent in long, sing, &c., but pronounced just as it still is in *longer*, *finger*, &c.: *yōnge* 7, *lqng* 12, *syngyng* 91.

NOTE 2.—The g of gn was already silent: *digne* 141, *signe* 226, *cōmpaignȝe* 24. In a few cases the g has been restored in M<sup>D</sup>E through classical influence: *dignity* from ME *dignitee*.

## gh.

§ 29. ME gh was a back (or guttural) sound after back vowels (a, o, u): *ytaught* 127, *ynogh* 373, *thoughte* 385; and a front (or palatal) sound before front vowels (e, i or y): *knyght* 72, *wight* 280, *heigh* (or *high*) 1065. The sounds and their use are just the same as those of German *ch* in *Buch* and in *ich*. They may be heard and learned by whispering *koo* and *kee* and dwelling on the sound following the *k*.

NOTE 1.—ME gh is usually dropped between vowels, a preceding i or u being then written y or w (§ 2 e): *heigh* 316, plural and adverb *hȝe* 2463, 271 (whence, by analogy, singular *hȝ* 306), *hȝer* 399; *ynogh* 373, pl. *ynowe*; compare German *hoch*, but *hohē* and *hōher* with silent *h*.

NOTE 2.—In M<sup>n</sup>E gh has become silent (igh becoming I and then ai: nyght 10) or f: ynogh 373.

j.

§ 30. Latin j had in OF become *dʒ*, which sound it has retained in English in words derived from the French (avoid the M<sup>n</sup>F sound *ʒ*): Iulian 340, Iolitee 680, Iāpes 705. For the spelling see § 2 *g*.

h.

§ 31. H was sounded as it is to-day. It was silent:—

1) In some words from the French-Latin: *hostelrye* 23, honour 46, *honeste* 246; but sounded in French words from Celtic, &c.: *harneised* 114.

2) After t in foreign words (cf. § 33<sub>3</sub>); also in *Ihęsū* 698, *Iohn* 1106.

3) As to-day in unaffected speech, in unstressed words not beginning a clause: *hē* 45, 51, *his(e)* 1, 5, 8, *hym* 102, *hem* 31, *hath* 18, *hadde* 64; and in cases like *shuld(e)r (h)an-gynge* 2163, cf. the cases in § 32.

NOTE.—Silent *h* has been restored in M<sup>n</sup>E pronunciation in some words, for ex., *humble*, *humor*, &c.

#### Consonantal i and u.

§ 32. 1) Before unstressed e, unstressed i, or y, is usually unsyllabic, u occasionally so—English: *berye merye* 207, *bisier* 322, *lōuyere* 80, *tarien* 2820, *lādyes* 898, 991, 999, but *lādy'es* 996; *Wylu(gh) Elm* 2420, *yel(o)w* as 675; French: *Apothecāries* 425, *myscarie* 513; *perpetuelly* 1024, and with elided -e (§ 23): *glōri(e)* and 870, 917, *victōri(e)* and 872, 916, *victōri(e)* of 1235, *solitāri(e) h)ē* 1472, *contrāri(e)* of 1667, 3057, *studi(e) h)ē* 1530, *lili(e) vpon* 1036, in: *Yif mē the vic'torie I as'ke thee nāmQQre* 2420, -ie I = consonantal y; *statū(e)* of 2265, 975. In *hostelrye* 23, *curteiste* 46, &c., the I is stressed; in *conscience* 526, *pācient* 415, &c., the e is often stressed.

2) Before other vowels, *i* or *y* is most commonly syllabic, the following vowel being capable of stress: *nācijas* 53, *cordial* 443, *Religioun* 477; still, specially 15, *glorious* 1955, with consonantal *i*.

NOTE—Avoid giving to *i* in this situation the modern sound of *f* or *g*: specially 15, *cordial* 443.

*f*, *s*, *th*.

§ 33. 1) The fricatives *f*, *s* and *th* were voiceless (as in *off*, *so*, *thick*): *hymself* 219, *ful sēmeely* 123, *inspired* 6, *QQth* 120, *thynketh* 37, *breęth* 5; and so in compounds, &c.: *þifel* 19, *yfalle* 25;—except between two vowels or a vowel and a voiced consonant, and then they were voiced (as in *of*, *rose*, *the*) and *f* was usually written *u*: so *u* in *hymseluen* 184, *siluer* 115, *s* in *ryse* 33, *ęsed* 29, *th* in *bathed* 3, *oother* 113, *wörthy* 43.

2) Fricatives are now voiced in unstressed syllables and words. Such forms as *quod* 1224 and *bidęne*, for *queth* and *bi the ęne*, show us that this voicing had begun in late ME; but the *d* as clearly shows that the voiced fricative was not yet used in stressed forms (London *Academy*, April 25, 1891). We are therefore justified in assuming that when unstressed (that is, in suffixes and in weak forms of such words as *his* 8, 47, as 49, 69, was 32, 68, is 229, with 79, 81, of 2, 82, than 42, 98, *thęr* 34, 43, *this* 36, 64, *that* 41, 45, *the* 2, 44 and *nātheleęs* 35), fricatives were voiced (or at least whispered, § 1), but were voiceless when stressed, and so in monosyllables in rime (*his* 55, 73, as 20, 34, 89, was 47, 51, is 4, 69, with 1, 5, 31, of 2676, though 68, *thęrtō* 48, *that* 1, 36, 43, *the* 38, *they* 59, 81). This distinction between voiced “with” (*with all’*) and voiceless “with” (*with’ them*) is still made by many Americans. The voicing of unstressed *wh*- probably began later.

3) Foreign *th* had the sound of *t* (as it still has in *thyme*, *Thomas*, and the familiar *Art(h)*, *Lut(h)*, *T(h)om*, for *Arthur* &c.) and had not yet succumbed to the influence of the more frequent native fricative spelled *th*: Apothecāries 425, Scithia 867, Athēnes 873, Thēbes 939; at times it was spelled *t*: Cartāge 404, Trāce 1638, trone 2529.

NOTE 1.—The old *þ* for *th* in native words is rare in the E MS: *þt* = that 68, 146, *þe* = the 171, &c. This form of "the" was in time corrupted in writing to something like "ye" and later so printed—but never so pronounced!

NOTE 2.—Many words with *-ther* in M<sup>n</sup>E, had *-der* in ME: *fāder* 100, *hider* 672, *thider* 1263, *gadrede* vs *tōgidre* 'gathered us together' 824.

sh.

§ 34. The sound of *ʃ* was spelled *sh* or *sch*, *sh* in the E MS. For double *sh* cf. § 39 end.

r.

§ 35. R was probably distinctly trilled with the tip of the tongue, finally as well as elsewhere.

wh.

§ 36. Wh was distinguished from *w*, as is still done in the larger part of America: *whistlynge wýnd* 170. Cf. § 33,<sub>2</sub> end.

z.

§ 37. Z was pronounced as in M<sup>n</sup>E, but was rarely used: *Zephirus* 5, *duszeyne* 578.

#### Silent Letters.

§ 38. The *k* of *kn-* and the *l* of *-lk*, &c., did not become silent until long after ME times; and the *w* of *wr* was still sounded, either separately or as a rounding, or labialization, of the following *r* (as is now done by many speakers in sounding initial *r*): *knyght* 43, *knyues* 233, *folk* 12, *Palmeres*

13, shōlde 249, wōlde 255, but *could* (koude 130) had not yet assumed l by analogy to these.

### Double Consonants.

§ 39. Double consonants were really double, that is, they were held, or prolonged, not repeated; in M<sup>n</sup>E we pronounce such consonants as though single: croppes sōnne 7, yrōnne 8. In some French words double consonants were sounded single: Assise 314, excellence 311, office 292. Double k was usually written kk, not ck: nekke 238, lokkes 677. Double palatal g was written gg and not yet dg: abreggē alleggē 2999. Double ch was written cch and not yet tch, cf. below. ff was one way of writing capital F: fful 47, 52, fflaundes 86, &c. Digraphs usually double only the first letter: cch, ssh: wrecche 931, 1106, fresshe 90, flesshe 147, Asshen 1302. Sh is always doubled medially and finally; but perhaps this was still a phonetic spelling for *s + f*. When final, double consonants were usually written single: al 10, alle 26. But englissh 265, &c., as above.

## CORRIGENDA.

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- p. 12, below, read 'a in *what*', not 'o in *what*'.
- p. 14, Note, line 2, read § 7, not § 37.
- p. 15, (*g*), line 3, read Iuliān 340.
- p. 17, § 4, line 2, read 'slēpen 10'.
- N<sup>2</sup>, line 3, read § 23, not § 18.
- line 5, read § 32, not § 27.
- p. 18, § 5, line 2, read inspired.
- Note, last line, read § 32, not § 27.
- p. 19, § 7, last line, read qu, not qr.
- § 8, line 4, read Iuliān.
- p. 20, line 2, read § 2 *h*, not *z* *h*.
- last word should be 'dō', not 'do'.
- p. 21, § 9, 2, line 2, read 'them', not 'it'.
- p. 25, line before last, read *ū*, not *ü*.
- p. 26, Note 1, line 3, read 'the long vowels *ī* and *ū* (not so generally *ē* and *ō*) still.'
- § 15, line 5, cross out 'and *ü*'.
- line 6, cross out 'stātūe 83, Jūliān 340.'
- p. 30, 5 end, read § 32, not § 27.











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Hempl, George  
Chaucer's pronunciation  
and the spelling of the  
Ellesmere ms.

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