

The Regulaytor's Tale—Professor Stephen Littlechild

A recent RPI regulatory conference in Oxford was told about witchcraft and Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. On the same day the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) released its draft customer survey in connection with its investigation of the domestic energy market. A newly-discovered fragment of Chaucer's work sheds light on these issues. Here is an excerpt from The Regulaytor's Tale.

"Tell us, friend, what dost thou regulayte?" "Wychcrafte, for I am Hedde of the Wychcrafte Conducte Authoritie".

"How dost thou this?" "The wyches nowe must acte moste Faire. The Gateshedde wyche was wont to give a speciall kisse to menne of Newcastle. Twas not faire to menne of Gateshedde, so wee stop'd her." "Dyd not menne of Newcastle proteste?" "Indeede they dyd, but now tis Faire that nonne shall have that kisse."

"They say the Wyf of Bathe doth lyke it nowe. The learnedd George of Oxforde oft hath spyd her in Newcastle of a Sat'day nighte, in fulle enjoymente of the local ale and local menne, and sommetymes with her skyrte above her heade. Methinks she sees in George a housbonde sixe." "That Wyf of Bathe hath what wee calle presente biasse, she doth value too muche gratificationne nowe."

"Do menne alsoe have such biasse?" "Aye, of mennie kindes. They maye buy wychcrafte juste to sette their minde at reste, or sommetymes if they lyke the wych. Forsooth our taske is to bringe reasonne to theyr mindes." "How dost thou this?" "By makeing Symple that wiche nowe is notte. Some wyches charge in fyshes, some in bredd. Our Rules nowe saye their charge in groates muste bee." "But do these symple folkes have monie sych to paye?" "It matters notte, theire symple myndes can nowe compare, and reasonn'd actionnes tayke."

"Butte doe theye actionnes tayke at alle? Hath not Catheryne of Norwyche showne, by carefull calculationne wyth mathmatick and muche observationne, that menne are driv'n by gaine nott Payne, and nowe less wont to use a wyche?" "Fie on thee, shalle wee bee guided by what menne doe, or what they saye is in their Soules?"

"How shalle the publicke knowe of this?" "Tis beste begunne with chyldrenne. In schooles wee teache themme rimes, lyke Whych Wyche? Dytche and Swyche."

"How knowe the wyches what's requyred of themme?" "Tis inne a scrolle, of many gospell leyngthe. Some twentie monkes of Millbanke Abbeye work upon it nighte and daye, and have donne nowe for sixe longe yeare." "But canne the wyches reede it, pray?" "Th'illuminated pycture att the fronte, of marylus bewtie, shoud suffyce for themme."

"What iff these wyches ne'er obeye thy Rules?" "Thenne in sych case wee use the Duckinge Stoole." "And dothe that worke?" "If notte, more Duckinge Stooles." "But doth notte threate of Duckinge Stooles drive offe goode wyches, to the publicke detrymente?" "But the publicke much doth lyke the use of Duckinge Stooles."

"So Regulaytor, now doe tell, was there nott a Greate Surveye of wychcrafte in this londe?" "Indeede there was, by Authoritie of the Lorde Comptroller of Marketts." "Pray, whatt didd itt aske?" "Of many personnes, is thine incomme each weeke one groat, one farthinge or one turnip? Whenne didst thou laste use a wyche? Dost thou truste thy local wyche? Dost thou knowe thou canst change thy wychcrafte provyder?"

"Ande what founde the Surveye? No doubte didd shewe the benefittes of thy worke. A goodlie markett nowe, trustedd wyches everiewheyre, withe charges Faire and Symple, and alle menne acte withe reasonne, to enjoye theyre choyce of wyche. Certes, a merrie ande fittinge endinge to thy tale."

"Alas, nott soe", the Regulaytor saide. "No wyches coulde the Surveye finde in Englonde todaye. Tis nowe too difficulite, the former wyches saye. Somme nowe milkemaides are, somme serve in tavernnes, and somme e'en scrybe for Regulaytorie Authoryties."

"Can thys be truu? That wychcrafte's drivenn from oure londe, by excesse regulaytionne?" "It seemes to bee." "I'faithe, a morall theyre, goode Regulaytor. But one sadd thinge for thee: there is no longer neede of wychcrafte regulaytione."

"How so, my fellowe pilgramme? Do nott wee neede itt juste inn case?"