EVERYMAN, I WILL GO WITH THEE IN THY MOST NEED TO GO BY THY SIDE.
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POETRY AND
THE DRAMA

PIERS PLOWMAN
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
ARTHUR BURRELL, M.A.
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In four styles of binding: Cloth, flat back, coloured top; Leather, round corners, gilt top; Library binding in cloth, & quarter pigskin.

Poets are the trumpets which sing to battle. Poets are the unacknowledged legislators of the world. Shelley.
PIERS PLOWMAN
The Vision of a Peoples Christ by William Langland.
A Version for the Modern Reader.
BY ARTHUR BURRELL MA

LONDON & TORONTO
J.M. DENT & SONS LTD.
NEW YORK
E.P. DUTTON & CO
First Issue of this Edition . 1912
Reprinted . . . . 1916, 1919
INTRODUCTION

In bringing before the reader a version of this amazing book, I wish, as in the case of my edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, to disarm, if I can, the criticism of the scholar. My version is not intended in any sense for those who can read with ease the alliterative poems of the fourteenth or earlier centuries. Knowing, however, that it requires very careful study to read *Piers Plowman* with ease and pleasure, I have occasionally omitted and always simplified. I have tried to preserve and bring out the meaning, the careless alliteration, and the elusive rhythm. I have regularly modernised the spelling, and have indeed followed the example set by the most learned editor of the poem, who has himself published a modernised text: indeed there are several of such texts in the market. This, as in the case of the Chaucer, is the whole of my offence. The specialist will find echoes from M. Jusserand and Professor Skeat everywhere.

*Piers Plowman* is regarded as the poor mans book. But, though I hope the spirit is preserved, I have resolutely avoided by any phrase reading into it a special message for to-day. A comment with notes inwoven has indeed called attention to singular survivals, parallels in social life, but these parallels would, even without the reference to them, force themselves upon the attention of any one.

Much has been made about the confusion in the poem; but the main scheme is perfectly clear. Under the favourite form of a vision, it is a picture and an arraignment of the England of Edward III. and Richard II. As the first Isaiah, said to have been a young aristocrat, listened to the call in the Temple, and left a life of ease to act for thirty years as the unsparing critic of the Jerusalem and Judah of his day, so *per contra* our author, a man of humble extraction, it would seem, and of no social pretension, hurled his invective, his satire, and his grim fun at the London and the England of Chaucers time. He is an Old vii
Testament prophet with English humour added to Hebrew seriousness. We are, whatever we think of the question of authorship, in the presence of one who when in earnest is terribly in earnest, whether he is describing the great plain which lies below Malvern Hills, or the marriage of Jobbery to Falsehood, or the shriving of Gluttony and Wrath, or the iniquities of the hated lawyers at Westminster, or the beauty of Charity, or the triumphant march on Hell by Piers Plowman, the man Christ Jesus. Picture after picture paints the same story, preaches the same sermon; and the story and the sermon are these. The world is good enough if man were not so bad; the birds sing blissfully enough if underneath there droned not on the note of misery; life is sweet and jolly enough if men were not so bitter; Malvern Hills are fair enough if only in the plain, in the great Field Full of Folk, there were more charity, more honesty, more simplicity, more useful work, and a greater wish to set forth on the great pilgrimage. This pilgrimage is not to Canterbury or Walsingham or Compostella or Rome; it is a pilgrimage to Truth, the saint whom men so regularly disregard.

"Knowest thou a holy saint that men call Truth? Canst thou tell us of the way where that saint dwelleth?"

"God bless me, nay," quoth this fellow then. "Never saw I palmer with pike-staff and with scrip, till ye now in this place."

Instead of seeking Truth, men seek money; instead of honouring Love, they honour Wrath; instead of dealing honestly, they bow down before Pride, Flattery, Bribery, Corruption, and Jobbery, branded under the title of Lady Meed, who is the thin disguise of Alice Perrers, the infamous mistress of Edward III. Kings are weak, barons are cats that seize and poss about the people of the realm, knights are idle hunters, lawyers are thieves; monks and nuns are no better than they should be, merchants are swindlers, bankers are coin-clippers, and all the wonderful array of papal officers and English churchmen are mere plunderers of the land, pocket-fillers, and cheaters of the people. As for Friars, "there was one good Friar, in the days of Francis, but that was long ago." Neither Wit nor Learning, Scripture nor Imagination, helps the seeker one
jot in his pilgrimage; words, words, words, are the end of them. The working man, God save the mark, is an idler, a drinker, a spoil-work, a wastrel, a loafer, and an unemployable; the professional beggar, with limbs professionally broken for his trade, is no worse than he; and ruffling Regulars, covetous lords, cheating shopmen, idle priests, lying pilgrims, and fine-furred harlots, jostle one another in the chaos of the scene. Through all, warning all, and at times tearing and punishing all, stalk the shadow forms of Plague and Storm and Famine, regularly visiting England, God's messengers to the generation that have clean forgotten Him; and though Piers Plowman may go down to Hell and fetch Humanity from Satan's grip, yet there rises the dread shape of Antichrist and sweeps that sweet and gentle figure from the scene; "and it was night."

This is the first impression that one gets of the book known as Piers Plowman; but it is a first impression only. Another reading shows another side. Kings may be weak, but they are resolved to deal sharply with Lady Meed. Reason and Conscience have by no means left the land; they plead passionately for the punishment of Wrong (the king's officer). Barons and knights are not all wicked; they can rule far better than the people could who would try their hand at government; and it is they who will, when the time comes, bring the Church to the bar of judgment. Gentlemen are willing and even anxious, though almost impotent, to help against the disorders of the day; some lawyers here and there will plead for God's poor and take no fee for it; some monks and nuns stay in their convents, some hermits in their cells, and there they work or pray; some honesty is still left in trade; and a bishop here and there knows his business, and parish priests here and there do not skip away to London, but stay in their parishes and comfort and feed their people. Unity and Peace and Conscience and Charity never cease to do their work in the human heart, and they raise the banner of the Christ in the field of Armageddon. The working man, the real, true, leal, honest, uncomplaining, working man, is up early and hard at work for very few pence; the cottage woman holds her head up and "puts a good face on it;" some of the beggars are Christ's poor who can perforce do nothing but lie as Lazarus did at Dives' door; and in the mob that fill
the Malvern plain, stretching to Worcester roofs, are honest traders, good ancles, and a stray woman of the streets, eager for the great pilgrimage. Through all, warning all, encouraging all, comes at length, though foreshadowed throughout the former scenes, an ordinary man, Piers Plowman, the people’s man, the people’s Christ, poor humanity adorned with love, hardworking humanity armed with indignation, sympathetic humanity clad in the intelligence that knows all and—makes allowances; at one time setting high-born ladies to work, at another passionately attacking the insolent priest, at another calling upon Famine to help him against the loafing, growling wastrel of the streets; but always encouraging the penitent sinful, helping the weak, leading the way in the great journey; a strange figure, Christ in humanity, humanity Christ-clothed, neither all a poor man, nor all a ploughman, nor all a Jesus, but fading and vanishing and reappearing in all forms of his humanised divinity, and ending as the Christ conqueror that from the Cross went down and burst the doors and defied the brazen guns of hell, and brought Piers Plowmans Fruit home with victory; yet, even in this majestic battle with Lucifer and Belial, Ragamuffin and Goblin, no omnipotent God far removed from the cares and sorrows of fourteenth-century England, but—

One like the Good Samaritan and somewhat like Piers Plowman, Barefoot, bootless, without spur or spear, Riding on an asses back, brightly he looked, Like one that cometh to be dubbed knight, To get him his gilt spurs and his slashed shoon.

This is the general picture of the poem, or of such parts as are here wholly or partly transcribed.

The teaching of the book is negative in that, in face of the tremendous issues, it counsels no opposition to King, Church, Barons, or Knights. It is not inflammatory; it is no harbinger of the Reformation, though it contains a startling prophecy of that great event. It cannot be looked upon as anti-papal, though it was written in the time of the Great Schism; it distinctly disbelieves in the extremes of what the modern world calls democracy, although moral collectivism is its watchword; and it nowhere gives any support to the notion that it foresaw the coming of the great revolt of 1381, or approved of that revolt when it
came. It seems, notwithstanding a few political allusions, to be as remote from politics as are the Gospels themselves, and for the same reason. No form of government, it would say, is in itself bad, if men have the religious spirit; every form of government is bad if they have it not.

On the other hand, the teaching of the book is positive enough, in that it puts its finger on the abuses of the time, lawlessness, falseness, dishonesty, jobbery, money-grubbing, luxury, and idleness. Idleness of all things it cannot away with; the idle rich are scourged as much as the idle poor; idleness, with all its accompanying evils—begging, gluttony, dishonourable dealing, simony, neglect of plain duty, luxury senseless and unbridled, idleness is the unpardonable sin; and Professor Minto has sketched a curious parallel between this poem and the teaching of Thomas Carlyle, who possibly never had the book in his hands. If the undecided king is the victim of his circumstances, the wasters among the rich are what they are because they have not enough true work to do. The same may be said of the unworthy prelate—he does not do his true work. It may equally be said of pardoner, merchant, knight, lady, hermit, pilgrim, huckster and hewer, ditcher and delver. Truth (who stands confusedly for God the Father) rules that each man should have his work and do it well; and the heaviest condemnation of Truth is for those in all ranks of life who instead of working go a-hunting or sit by the road and sing "Hey Trolley Lolly" and "God save you, Lady Em." Piers Plowman himself preaches work; he puts his mittens on and hangs a basket round his neck, a mock pilgrim, and off he goes to plough his half-acre. Indeed, the motto of the poem might be EACH MAN MUST PLOUGH HIS HALF-ACRE; but it must be ploughed without the thought of self-enrichment at the cost of others. Work is not enough; Pride and Flattery work, traitors work, lechers work, disers and minstrels work, thieves work, Liar works for the Friars, the Friars themselves work, merchants and their 'prentices work, the Pardoner works hard—they are all Judas children. It is not enough to work; a man must work honestly for himself and for his fellows; he must work for his religion, for his king, and for his country.

In the humorous section dealing with his own life, the writer condemns himself for idleness; and we in our day
should say he condemns himself with justice. His definite teaching is that of the Gospel, "The poor ye have always with you: more shame to you. Your rich England should have no poor: it is your bounden duty to rid the world of the miserably poor, and you can do it if you will, by making all work for all." "The poor ye shall have always with you" is a text he never refers to, because he knows that he cannot find it in the Gospels. No autocrat can be more severe than he upon those who will not work. He has one word for the able-bodied loafer, and one alone: "Starve him;" and he knows that such an heroic remedy had not been tried in his own day, any more than it has been tried since.

Along with this gospel of true work for self and others, for home and country, is his definite preaching of home sympathy. England for England is his cry throughout the poem. He hates to see the Pope meddle in the appointment of foreigners to livings that have not fallen vacant; he hates to see men carry good English money to Avignon or Rome; he hates to see men make pilgrimages to St. James and St. Peter, when the pilgrimages they should make are to jails and hospitals, and to their poorer neighbours cottages. If Englishmen go to Sinai and Bethlehem to seek the saints, for Gods sake let them stay there, he says; we want no such pilgrims here. You can find your true pilgrimage by going the round of your own parish.

Again, he is definite enough, as we should expect, in his demand for a clean life. The King has his Alice Perrers; she must go; the bishops have their lemans, the hermits and pilgrims their girls; the beggars breed like rabbits, and are never married. Luxury, lust, and lechery spell the same thing for him, and with unnecessary wealth comes unnecessary wantonness. In passage after passage he declaims against the fatal gift of Constantine and legacies to the Church: religion goes a-hunting with a pack of hounds at his tail, and with this wealth in money and lands comes the ill life, the life of wantonness. Stained windows and gorgeous churches, fine vestments and full church pockets, are as much anathema to him as are the evil deeds of Richard II. and of the king's officers who pay the poor in receipts instead of in money, and who rob the honest worker of his horse, of his wife's honour, and his maid's innocence.
He pleads too for a saner education and for wholesome correction. The working man is told to go and get two sticks and beat his idle wife; another is blamed because his wife’s bonnet costs three pounds and his own cost five shillings. The gentleman cockers his children because he is afraid of their catching the plague; he never takes a stick to them. “Spare the switch and spill the son” is to him a maxim equally true if it be applied to idler, wife, thief, beggar, or child. He praises the good school, and laments that not enough money is spent in what we should call scholarships.

Finally, he devoutly prays that the Church will reform herself, and prophesies that if she will not do so the king and the barons will reform her in a way she will not like: and for the idler he begs that Famine will return to England, for only in the sharp correction of drought and hunger will England learn her lesson. That she will learn it finally he cannot hope; for after Calvary comes Antichrist, and Pride and Flattery regain their places; and with this his indignant spirit passes sadly into the dark.

No one can quite tell how far the author represents the true picture of his time. He is in general agreement with Chaucer, who was as earnest as he: any one will see this who cares to look below the surface of the Canterbury Tales. It is the custom to say Chaucer is the poet of the rich and Langland of the poor; that Chaucer laughed at and tolerated with Horatian sang-froid the foibles, the vices, and even the miseries of his day. Nothing, to my mind, can be further from the truth; and the plain fact is that while Langland is sardonic, indignant, fierce, you never know when you turn a page of Chaucer how near you are to tears; and it must be remembered by those who consider Chaucer an aristocrat and Langland a democrat, that Chaucer’s poems include the figures of the Parson, Janicula, Griselda, the old man of the Pardoners Tale, and the numberless pictures of the good and charitable rich.

The questions that surround this poem as a text are most difficult. The reader may be referred to Professor Skeats monumental edition, of which it is needless to say I have made the fullest use; to Professor Manlys chapter in the second volume of the Cambridge History of English Literature; to Jusserands beautiful and loving studies of the
poem; and to the bibliography given in the *Cambridge History*. Any one, however, who would feel the poem as it ought to be felt must have in his hands, if only for an hour, two books, first a black letter copy of the poem which in these days of reprints cries aloud for publicity, and secondly the volume in which Bishop Stubbs in a fine spirit of recognition has written of our author, *Christ in English Literature*.

We do not know for certain what was the original form of the poem; nor do we know when, how, or with what object the great additions to this form were made. The criterion of allusion will not fully serve as a means for settling dates; for when a work written before the days of printing is being, through forty years or more, constantly altered, contemporary allusion may creep in at any time. The utmost that can, at the present moment, be asserted without fear of contradiction is that the poem was written between 1360 and 1400; that it was constantly and in many cases carelessly revised, and large additions were made; that it was known well in some form by 1381, when a part at least of its teaching and the name of its central figure, Piers Plowman, were made free use of by the leaders of the mob which broke into London, hung the archbishop, killed the lawyers, and dragged the Flemings out of the churches to butcher them in the streets, and that traditionally it has thus been, most unfairly, regarded as the herald and literary expression of that mysterious, ill-timed, and unsuccessful movement. The reader will do well to bear in mind that though the temptation to enlarge upon such an unprecedented event as the sack of part of London must have been great, there is no word in the latest recension of this poem to describe, praise or condemn the movement of Wat Tyler, John Straw, or the Rev. John Ball. Most editors explain this allusion-silence of the last recension by saying the poet was afraid, in consequence of the reaction following, to refer to the uprising of the people; I would rather see in his abjuration of revolt, in his failure to describe the revolt, a continuation of the attitude always adopted by him, that what England needed was a change of heart and not an exchange of purses. The hateful relapses into savagery which marked the Jacquerie, the French Revolution, and the lynching states of to-day
would be to him the negation of the spirit of Piers Plowman, and the throwing away of all that men of all classes have laboriously acquired in the domain of legislation, self-government, and self-control. Thus I hold, while admiring greatly the historical novel called *Long Will*, that the talented authoress, Miss Florence Converse, has erred in her interpretation of the part played by the author and his poem in the troublesome days and awful scenes which marked the year 1381.

And if one is uncertain about the exact date of composition, we are still more in doubt as to the authorship. The poem is attributed variously to Robert or William Langland of Cleobury Mortimer and to William Langley; but no outside allusion of any importance save that of tradition tells us who the writer was. We gather his biography, if it can so be called, from his work. The humorous description of himself occurring only in one text may have been added at any date and by any chantry priest or other person, and it is impossible to say what he means by it; and this section, the fable of the rats, the long additions which follow God's bull of pardon, and the interludes of the Harrowing of Hell and the Coming of Antichrist, seem to the present editor to point to the composite character of the authorship, a composite character strongly maintained by Professor Manly and denied by Jusserand. It is often forgotten that when a poem dealing with social miseries is produced it may be made a vehicle to represent the feelings and aspirations of thousands more than the author; and that when in addition it becomes popular and is written in an easily imitable form, many hands, authorised and unauthorised, set to work to help, alter, continue, strengthen, weaken, and enlarge. One thinks instinctively of the *Book of Psalms*, the prophecies of Isaiah, the plays of Shakespeare, the Sonnets of Shakespeare, the Wiclif Bible, the Anglo-Saxon Gospels, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, all of which were (and some of which are still) assigned to one individual author or editor, though criticism has in nearly every case disputed the absolute claims set up for David, Isaiah, Shakespeare, Wiclif, Alfred, and Homer respectively. Such a composite authorship, I think, is the only thing that will account for the almost senseless "improvements" which we con-
tinually meet with in the latest text: and I believe that a
careful comparative study of the texts themselves will do
more to clear up difficulties than any reasoning from
history or allusion. Such study the poem has not yet
received. The metre and dialect have received fullest
attention; but they yield more information about the
scribes than about the author. Yet the scribes themselves
may have been the chief offenders.

If we try to reconstruct from a careful reading what
manner of man or men penned these visions, we might
arrive at some picture like the following. They were or he
was a man who loved the country for its birds and flowers,
but loved London better for its people; who had been to
school and read and remembered eagerly and lovingly,
with greater intelligence than care, the Latin Bible and the
Latin Fathers; who lived a precarious, poor, tramping
life of mass or chantry priest, earning little and continually
consorting, partly by choice and partly by necessity, in
the most intimate way, with friars, theologians, merchants,
pilgrims, beggars, drunkards, loose women, and with the
honest and hard-working poor; who knew all the tricks
of shop and cheaping, of mendicancy and mendacity; who
was not averse from honest idleness, and who was stung
to penitence and indignation by what he saw, heard, and
felt in himself and in those around him; who hated the
trickery, the aristocracy, and intricacies of law which he
did not understand, and who loved the scenes in the
gentleman's dining-hall and in the taverns, where he was
quite at home; who abhorred—perhaps with envy—the
easy life of the rich noble and the fat priest; who by his
reading, his monastic training, and his own poverty
imagined that the saviour of society would come from and
belong to the only class he thoroughly understood; who
wrote roughly the rough alliterative verse, indigenous to the
land and very pedestrian, but who in his inspired hours,
which were many, almost rose, notwithstanding his awkward
tools, to the spiritual heights of Bunyan and Shelley and
to the poetic heights of the Old Testament prophets. Like
Bunyan and Shelley, he lived in stormy times; like them,
he had, as an individual, been through some of the moral
cataclysms of which he spoke; like them, he was prone to
fall, but ready to rise; but he did not use the nervous
beauty of Bunyan's prose or the metaphysical wings of Shelleys scholarship, strengthened by his unearthly and Titanic force. This, however, was his advantage, for his work was capable of being enlarged and successfully imitated. For he wrote for the ordinary man, who, whether he be king or baron, bishop or pardoner, merchant or Lombard, hermit or pilgrim, knight or knave, may, if his heart counsel him, echo the last words:

And wend as wide
To seek—Piers Plowman."

"I will become a pilgrim,
as the world lasteth"

ARTHUR BURRELL.

ISLEWORTH, January 1, 1912.

USEFUL BOOKS

Professor Skeat's edition of Piers Plowman. 2 vols.
J. Jusserand, L'épopée Mystique (the book has been translated).
Professor Manly's chapter and bibliography in the Cambridge History of English Literature.
Black Letter editions of the Poem (British Museum).
Trevelyan's England in the Times of Wyclif.
Cutts' Scenes of the Middle Ages.
Florence Converse, historical novel, Long Will.
Riley's Illustrations of London Life from Original Documents.
Bishop Stubbs' Christ in English Literature.

Much interesting matter will be found in pamphlets and magazines. These can be identified s.v. Langland or Plowman, or in the bibliographies of Periodical Literature in the British Museum.
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xviii
To all who understand or would understand

PIERS PLOWMAN

I saw myself, a youth, almost a boy, in a low-pitched wooden church. The slim wax candles gleamed, spots of red, before the old pictures of the saints. There stood before me many people, all fair-haired peasant heads. From time to time they began swaying, falling, rising again, like the ripe ears of wheat when the wind in summer passes over them. All at once a man came up from behind and stood beside me. I did not turn towards him, but I felt that the man was Christ. Emotion, curiosity, awe, overmastered me. I made an effort and looked at my neighbour. A face like everyones, a face like all mens faces. The eyes looked a little upward, quietly and intently; the lips closed, not compressed; the upper lip as it were resting on the other; a small beard parted in two; the hands folded and still; and the clothes on him like everyones.

"What sort of Christ is this?" I thought. "Such an ordinary, ordinary man. It cannot be." I turned away, but I had hardly turned my eyes from this ordinary man when I felt again that it was really none other than Christ standing beside me. Suddenly my heart sank and I came to myself. Only then I realised that just such a face is the face of Christ—a face like all mens faces.

Turgenev.
I wente forth wyde-where in a wyde wyldernesse.
THE VISION
OF THE
FIELD FULL OF FOLK
In a summer season, when soft was the sun,  
In rough cloth I robed me, as I a shepherd were,  
In habit like a hermit in his works unholy,  
And through the wide world I went, wonders to hear.

But on a May morning, on Malvern hills,  
A marvel befel me—sure from Faery it came—  
I had wandered me weary, so weary, I rested me  
On a broad bank by a merry-sounding burn;  
And as I lay and leaned and looked into the waters  
I slumbered in a sleeping, it rippled so merrily,  
And I dreamed—marvellously,  
And I dreamed—marvellously.

All the worlds weal, all the worlds woe,  
Truth and trickery, treason and guile,  
All I saw, sleeping.

I was in a wilderness, wist I not where,  
And eastward I looked against the sun.  
I saw a Tower on an hill, fairly fashioned,  
Beneath it a Dell, and in the Dell a dungeon,  
With deep ditches and dark and dreadful to see,  
And Death and wicked spirits dwelt therein,  
And all between, between the Hill and Dungeon,

A FAIR FIELD  
FULL OF FOLK

1 Readers are referred to the Comment (p. 179) and to the Index for further explanatory matter regarding the poem.
Rich and poor, all manner of men, as in the world we must.
Working and wandering and played full seldom,
Working and wandering and sweated hard,
Some were for ploughing, with gluttony destroy.
Set their seed and sowed their seed, in parade of apparel.
To win what wastrels
Some were for pride, ay, many a one, for love of our Lord
Some were for prayers and penance, that held in their cells,
Living strait lives the country side and beg,
In hope of heavenly bliss their body to please.
Anchorites, hermits, they threw the best.
And coveted not to roam
Nor with dainty living
Some chose merchandise;
Some chose merchandise;
And some were for music, the music of minstrels,
Gold getting, gleeful, in an innocent heart.
But jesters and janglers, Judas children,
Feigning their fancies, and fooling the crowds,
With wit enough to work, if work they would,
Paul preacheth about them —no more will I say—
the music of minstrels, is the Devils man.
Be that speaketh filthily
There were tramps and beggars fast about flitting,
Crammed with bread in wallet and belly,
Lying for their food, and fighting in the taverns,
Going to bed in gluttony, rising from bed in ribaldry,
Gangs of mean thieves. pursue them ever.
Sleep and sorry sloth
Pilgrims and palmers plighted together,
Vision of the Field Full of Folk

To seek S. James in Spain,
They went upon their way
And had leave to lie
I saw some of them,

Each told a different tale
Their tongues tuned to lying,

Hermits, a heap of them,
Were walking to Walsingham

Great long lubbers,
Clad in copes
To pass for hermits,

Friars? All the four orders,
Preaching to the people,
For their own profit.

Many of these masters
Money and their preaching
Gods love has turned trader,
And we in few years
If Gods love and the Church
The greatest mischief in the world

Look there, a Pardoner,
A papal bull he brought,
He can assoil them all,

The simple fools believed him, loved his words,
Came and knelt
He bunched his "letters" in their faces
And his parchment roll robbed them

and S. Peter in Rome;
with many a wise tale,
all their life after.
O, they had gone the pil-
grimage,
—every one a lie—
and not to truth.

with hooked staves,
—each had his wench with him—
that loth were to work,
to be known for hermits,
and have an easy life.

I found them there,
and glosing the gospel
may dress as they will,
soon meet one another.
and the rich pay high,
have seen wonderful things.
do not cut down such Friars,
will mount up full fast.

preaching like a priest,
sealed by the bishop,
of fasting, falsehood, and of broken vows.

The simple fools believed him, loved his words,
Came and knelt
He bunched his "letters" in their faces
And his parchment roll robbed them

and kissed his bull,
and blinded their eyes,
of rings and brooches.
Thus, men, ye give your gold  
And lend it to loafers

If the bishop were holy  
He would not send his seal  
But against the bishop  
For the parson and the Pardoner  
Which the parish poor would get

Some parish priests  
The parish was poor  
Praying for licence  
And sing masses for souls

Bishops and deacons,  
With cures under Christ  
Who ought to shrive their people  
They lie in London,

Some serve the king,  
In the Court of Chancery,  
They claim his debts,

Conscience accused them,  
"Ye suffer idolatry  
"And bring your iron-bound boxes  
"Many a wax candle hangs  
"But all the world knows well,  
"It profiteth your purses  
"That men should live and die

"And all the world is worse  
to keep gluttons going,  
that follow lechery.

and worth both his ears,  
to deceive the people,  
your Pardoner preaches not,

share the sermon-silver,

if the Pardoner were away.

complained to the bishop,  
since the Great Pestilence,  
in London to dwell,  
for silver is sweet.

masters and doctors,  
and tonsured to show it,

and pray and feed their flocks,  
in Lent, ay, all the year;

collecting his moneys,  
in the wards and ward-motes,  
his dues of waifs and strays.

and the commons heard it,  
in many sundry places,

to take the untrue tolls.  
as record of a miracle,  
that miracle is none.

and ye prelates suffer it  
and believe—in their ignorance.

for this your covetise."
Vision of the Field Full of Folk

(The writer digresses)

What trouble and mischance
Through two false priests,
They were discomfited
And for Eli saw them sin
And chastened them not
As it was prophesied,
And Elis sons were slain.
From his chair where he sat
And brake his neck a-two.
All this was Gods vengeance,
And, since they were priests
God was the angrier

Therefore ye priests and
Churchmen
Ye who should their fathers be
God shall take vengeance,
Than ever on Eli,
For your wicked tolerance,
Your mass and your mattins
Are done undevoutly;
Christ in his consistory

I know well the power
To bind and unbind,
He left the power, with love,
Cardinal virtues,
Heavens gates, where Christ dwelleth.
But of court cardinals
Presuming of themselves
And holding the power
I will not deny it them,
Lieth the great election of a Pope.

"Speak not against it," saith
Conscience,
" for Holy Church sake."
(The narrative proceeds)

Then came a king
The power of the people

Then came Common Sense

That Common Sense and knighthood
Should see that the people

With Common Sense the people
And for profit of all men
To till and work,
To live their day with loyal work

Then looked up a lean lunatic
"Christ keep thee, sir king,
"And grant thee so to rule,
"And thou, for thy righteous rule,

Then bent an angel down,
Who cannot jangle in the courts
But they must serve and suffer,
He spake to the clergy and the king.

"King and a Prince art thou,
"To-morrow nothing;
"Thou that of Christ the King
"Dost keep the way,
"Be just, shew mercy,
"And carry out His will.
"Mercy is justice still,
"Sow and reap mercy."

Then rose a buffoon,
a glutton of words

If the King keep not the Law
He is the name—but not the thing.
And all the people cried to the Council in Latin

The precepts of the King and small mice with them,
These be our bond of law.

for profit of them all.

Then ran a rout of rats
And came to a council
For a Court Cat
caught them as he would,

Leapt among them lightly,
Perilously played with them
and possed them about.

“We dare not look up,” said
they,

“And if we grumble at his games
“Scratch us and claw us
“We loathe our life
“If we with any wit
“We might be lords on earth

A rat of renown
Told them a sovrán cure.
“Háve I seen great dogs
“Wearing collars, bright gold,
“Necklaces of crafty work.
“Uncoupled they wend,
“Were a bell on the collar

“Therefore,” the rat says,
“We should buy a brass bell
“And set it on a collar
“And hang it on the cats neck.
“When he rides, when he rests,
“And if he list to play
“And appear in his presence
“And if he be wroth,

All this rout of rats
But when the bell was bought ready of tongue

in cities and in towns
all about their necks,
They go where they will,
through warren and waste;
men might know them—and run.

“reason shóweth me
or of bright silver,
for profit of us all,
Then can we hear
or when he runs to play.
then we may look
while he will play.
beware and shun his paths.”

to this reason assented,
and on a collar hung,
Was no rat in the rout  
That durst have bound the bell  
And they held themselves cowards  
And their labour lost.

A mouse that knew much  
"Though we kill the Cat  
"To snatch us and our kind,  
"Therefore my counsel is,  
"And be never so bold  
"For I heard my sire say,  
"Where the cat is a kitten  
"Holy Writ witnesseth.

Woe to thee thou land whose King is a child.—Solomon.

"For me," quoth the mouse,  
"Never shall cat or kitten  
"Nor should men prate of collars.  
"For though it cost me dear,  
"And suffer the Cat  
"Mischief that chastens many  
"Were the Cat and his kittens  
"We mice would eat up  
"Ye rats would waken men that rest;  
"If ye had your will  
What this rat-dream meaneth  
Divine it—I dare not—

There wandered a hundred,  
Serjeants they seemed,  
Pleading the Law,  
Unlocking their lips never  
Thou mightest better mete the mist  
Than get a mutter from their money.

for all the realm of France  
about the cats neck.  
and their counsel feeble  
stood forth and said:  
yet another should come  
though we crept under benches.  
LET THE CAT BE,  
to show him the bell,  
seven years ago,  
the Court is full ailing  
I would never buy collar  
I would hold my counsel to do as he will.  
will teach the Cat better.  
not ready to spring on us,  
many a mans malt,  
yourselves ye could not rule."  
ye merry men,  
by dear God in heaven.

in hoods of silk,  
and served at the Bar,  
for pennies and for pounds,  
for love of our Lord.  
on Malvern hills
I saw bold bishops
Made clerks of accounts
Deacons and archdeacons,
Who should preach to the people
They leapt away to London
To be clerks of the Kings Bench
and bachelors of divinity
to serve the king,
men full of dignity,
and feed the poor,
(their bishops gave them leave)
and to despoil the land.
Yet I dreamed more,
Barons and burgesses,
I saw in this assembly,
Many a butcher, baker, brewer,
Woolweavers, linenweavers,
Masons and miners
Ditchers and delvers,
And spend the livelong day in song,
Cooks and their men were crying,
"Good pork, good goose;
Taverners told the same tale,
"White wine, red wine,
All this I saw sleeping,
of mean men and of rich,
bondmen of villages;
as ye shall hear after,
tailors and tinkers,
toll-takers in the markets,
and many another craft,
that do their work ill,
"God save you, Lady Em."
"Pies hot, all hot,
"A drink of wine for nothing,
to wash the roast meat down."
nay, seven times more.
THE VISION
OF HOLY CHURCH
THE VISION OF HOLY CHURCH

What this mountain meaneth
And the FIELD FULL OF FOLK

A lady lovely to look on,
Came from that castle down;
"Will, sleepest thou?" she cried,
"Seest thou this people,
How busy they be
The greater part
Have their heaven here,
Of other heaven but this

I was afeard of her face,
"My lady," said I,

"The Tower on the hill,
O would that ye wrought
He is Faiths father,
He gave you five senses
Therefore he biddeth earth
With wool, with linen,
In moderate measure
He of his courtesy
Things three, no more;
The one is clothing,
The one is meat,
The third is drink when thou driest
Lest thou be the worse

Lot in his lifeday
Wickedly wrought

and the dark dale
fairly I shall show.
all in linen clad,

Will, sleepest thou?" she cried,
"Seest thou this people,
in the medley and the maze?
that pass upon this earth
they wish no other;
keep they no reckoning."

fair though she was;
"what meaneth it all?"

Truth liveth therein,
as his word teacheth you.
he formed you all;
wherewith to serve him.
to help you each one
with needful livelihood,
that ye may be at ease.
set for common use
but three are needful.
to save thee from chill,
for thy health sake,

but none out of reason
when thou shouldst work.
did a lecherous deed,
and wrathed God Almighty,
"And all that wicked deed
"Through wine and women
"Dread the delight of drink
"Though thou long for more,
"What the belly asketh
"What the soul loveth

"Trust not thy body,
"The lying wretched world
"The Fiend and thy flesh
"This one and that
"And whisper evil to thy heart.

"My lady, thanks," quoth I,
"But tell me, my lady,
"That men so closely love,

"Go to the Gospel,
"When with a penny
"Should they with the penny
"And God them asked
"And the image also
""Of Cæsar,' said they,
""Render to Cæsar,' quoth he,
""And what is Gods to God;

"Right fully reason
"And Common Sense your warden be
"To be banker of your treasure
"Reason, Thrift and Common Sense

Then I would know of her,
"The deep dark vale
'Beseech thee, my lady,

he laid—on wine;
was Lot snared.
and thou shalt do the better.
Measure is Medicine.
is not all good for the ghost,
is not all food for the body.
a liar is his teacher,
that would thee betray,
follow hard after thee,
pursue thy soul,
Therefore, beware."

"thy teaching I like well,
of the money of this world
to whom belongeth it?

hear what God said,
they posed him in the Temple.
honour King Cæsar?
of whom the letters spake
that stood upon the coin.
'we know that well enough.'
'that that Cæsars is,
else ye do ill.'

should rule you all,
your wealth to keep,
and give it you at need.
all go together."

for His sake that made her,
so dreadful to see,
what may this mean?"
"Care Castle," said she,
"May curse that he was born
"Therein one dwelleth,
"Father of falseness,
"He egged to evil
"He counselled Cain
"He cheated Judas
"And hung him on the elder tree.
"He is a love-hinderer,
"Who trust in earthly treasure,

Then I wondered in my wit
That such wise words
And by the High Name I asked
Who she was certainly

"Holy Church am I," quoth she,
"I took thee in my arms first
"To me thou broughtest sureties
"All thy life long

Then I kneeled down
And prayed her piteously
And eek to teach me kindly
That I might work His will
"Teach me no treasure-gaining
"Thou that art called a saint,

"When all treasures are tried,
"GOD IS LOVE.
"It is as dear a treasure
"This tells thee Truth.
"For he who is True with his tongue,

"he that cometh therein
a body and a soul;
whose name is Wrong,
he framed it himself;
Adam and Eve,
to kill his brother,
with Jewish silver,

what woman she might be,
from Holy Writ showed me,
to tell me ere she went,
that counselled me, that taught me.

"thou oughtest me to know,
I made thee free.
to do all my bidding
to love me, to believe me,

and cried her grace,
to pray for my sins,
on Christ to believe,
who made me man:
but tell me this,
how may I save my soul?

TRUTH IS THE BEST.
To this text I appeal.
as dear God himself;

True with his hands,
"Working True works there-
with,
" He is a god, the gospel says,
" And by S. Lukes words
" The learned know it

" For Christians and un-
Christians

" Kings and knights
" Righteously roaming
" Taking transgressors,
" Till Truth determine
" David in his day
" And made them swear on
the sword
" That is the plain profession
" And not to fast on Friday
" But to serve him or her
" And never to leave them
" The knight that doth it not
" His duty is not to fast
" But faithfully defend

" When God began heaven
" He made knights in his courts,
" Cherubim, Seraphim,
" Lucifer loveliest,
" He was an archangel,
" But he brake his obedience
" And from that fellowship,
" Fell to deep hell
" More thousands with him
" Leapt with Lucifer
" For they believed him and his lying words:

And wishing ill to none,
in earth and heaven,
like to our Lord.
and should teach it every-
where,
claim to be taught the Truth.
should keep the Truth,
the realm around,
tying them fast,
their trespass to the end.
dubbed his knights
to serve Truth ever;
belonging unto knights,
for a hundred years,
that asketh for the Truth,
for money or for favour.
is traitor to his order;
and not to doff his shirt,
and fight for Truth.
in the great bliss of it,
creatures ten,
seven more and one other,
next to our Lord.
one of Gods knights,
and lost his bliss;
in a Fiends likeness,
to dwell evermore.
than man could number
in loathly form

For they believed him and his lying words:

I shall sit in the sides of the north: like I shall be to
the Highest."
(The writer speaks)
Lord, why should he then
Leap to the north
Were it not for northern folk
But I blame none.
Safer by far is it

And where the fiend flew
Where he is hell is
And over against him—Christ.

(The narrative proceeds)
"Then fell he and his fellows,
"Out of heaven into hell
"Some in air are, some on earth,
"And all that work wrong
"Shall wend to him
"But they that work well,
"Eastward to heaven shall go,
"Where is the throne of Truth.
"Teach it to the simple
"TRUTH IS TREASURE

"Nay, but I know not,"
quoth I,
"How doth Truth grow in me?"

"Thou doted daff,
dull is thy wit,
"Little Latin hast thou learnt in the days of thy youth."

Woe for my barren youth days spent in vain.
"Thou knowest, well enough. To love the Lord
"And rather than do deadly sin to die.

Better die than live ill.

"This is Truth, I trow,
"Suffer him to tell thee

the wretched Lucifer
and abide not in the sun?
I could you tell
where the sun reigneth.

he failed and fell
and he there bound

they turned to fiends,
fast they hobbled,
some in deep hell,
after their death-day
and dwell with that shrew.
as Holy Writ telleth,
there to abide
the learned know it well,
the best tried on earth."

"ye must teach me better.
is it beyond my ken?"

whoso can teach thee better
and learn his lesson;
"Truth telleth thee that Love is the treacle of sin, for body and soul.
"A sovran salve is most precious of the virtues, so heavy was Love, eaten its fill;
"Love is the plant of Peace, upon a linden tree, the flesh and blood of man.
"Till Heaven could not hold it, as a needles point, nor no high walls.
"Then it had of this earth
"Till it had of this earth
"Of the Lords folk in heaven between the king and people.
"Than never lighter was a leaf
"Than Love was when it took
to the poor.
"Fluttering, piercing
"No armour may it stay.
"No armour may it stay.
"Therefore is Love the leader of the Lords folk in heaven
"And, as a mayor, a mediator on man for his misdeeds,
"Right so Love shapes the law in the deep well of thee, the mighty Truth is born;
"Love lays on man the payment due; that formed us all, and let his Son die
"In thy hearts conscience, on them that wrought him pain,
"In thy heart and in thy head he prayed for mercy, that pained him to his death.
"That was the Fathers deed.
"And looked on us with love, on man for his misdeeds,
"Meekly for our misdeeds.
"And yet Christ willed no woe of the Lords folk in heaven
"With his meek mouth in the deep well of thee, the mighty Truth is born;
"For pity on the people that formed us all, and let his Son die
"Therefore I counsel you, ye rich, have pity on the poor,
"Though ye be mighty at the law be ye meek in your deeds;
"The same measure ye mete, wrong or right,
"Ye shall be weighed thereby, when ye go hence.
"Though thou be true tongued, though thou trade honestly, that weepeth at its christening, and lend to the poor,
"And be innocent as a wean that weepeth at its christening, and lend to the poor.
"Save thou love loyally,
"And share with him in godly wise
"Your Masses and your Hours
"Than slut Malkyns maidenhead

"James the gentle
"Faith without fact
"As dead as a door-tree

Faith without works is dead.

"Chastity without charity
"It is but as an unlighted lamp.
"Many chaplains are chaste,
"There are no harder, hungrier men
"None more avarous than they
"Unkind to kinsmen
"They eat up their 'charity'

"Many parish priests
"But, cumbered with covetise,
"So close hath avarice
"Avarice is no virtue,
"It teaches the lay people
"Therefore in the gospel

Give and it shall be given to you; I gave you all.

"This is the key of love,
"To comfort the sorrowful
"Love is the leech of life,
"It is the graft of grace,

"Therefore I say to thee,
"All treasures tried,
"Love it," quoth she,
"Learning thee what Love is,"

Gods gifts to thee, bring you no more merit
that none desireth.

said in his writings,

is nothing worth,

unless deeds follow.

lies chained in hell,

but where is their charity?

than men of Holy Church,

when they are set on high,

and to all Christian souls,

and grumble for more.

are clean in body,

they cannot drive it forth,

clasped them together,

it is hell treachery,

ungenerously to give,

these words be written,

it openeth Gods grace,

that are with sin entangled.

next to our Lord,

it is the nearest road to heaven.

TRUTH IS THE BEST;

"no longer may I stay

and with that she left me.
THE VISION OF LADY MEED
AND OF HER
MARRIAGE TO FALSEHOOD
Yet kneeled I on my knees,
"Mercy, my lady,
"That bare the blissful Child,
"By some craft teach me

"Look on thy left hand,
"Falsehood and Flattery,
I looked on my left hand,
And was ware of a woman,
Her robe fur-edged,
Crowned with a crown,
Fairly her fingers
And in the rings red rubies,
And diamonds of dearest price,
Sapphires and beryls

Her rich robe
Her ribbons set with gold,
Her array ravished me;
I wondered who she was,

"What is this woman," said I,
Quoth she, "That is Meed the maid;
"She hath slandered my love
"And belied her to lords
"In the Popes palace,

and cried her grace,
for Marys love of heaven,
who bought us on the Rood,
to know the False."

lo, where he standeth,
and many of their friends."

as the Lady told me,
wonderly clad,
the finest on earth,
the king hath no better,
were fretted with rings,
as red as a furnace,
and double sapphires,
poison to destroy.

of scarlet dye,
red gold, rare stones;
such riches saw I never;
and whose wife she were.

"so wonderly clad?"

she oft hath harmed me,
that is named Loyalty,
that have the laws to keep.
she is private as I,
"But Truth would not have it so,
"Falsehood her father is
"That, since he came to earth,
"And Meed is mannered after him,
Like father, like son: Every good tree maketh good fruits.

"I should be higher than she,
"My father, the Great God,
"One God without beginning,
"He gave me Mercy
"Any man that is merciful
"Shall be my lord and I his love
"And he that taketh Meed to wife,
"Shall lose for love of her
"How speaketh David King
"And of men on the earth
"And of the way to safety?
Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle? etc.

"And now will Meed be wedded
"False Fickle-Tongue,
"Flattery with his fair speech
"And Liar brought it about,
"There shalt thou know
"That belong to the lordship
"Blame them not, let them be,
"Till Honesty punish;
"I leave thee to Christ,
"Be thou but good

Then my lady left me
And dreaming I beheld

for Meed is a bastard,
with fickle tongue,
ever said sooth,
as nature will.
of better stock I came,
ground of all grace,
and I his good daughter.
that I might marry him.
and loves me true
in the high heaven;
I wager my head,
a heap of Gods charity.
of men that take Meed,
who maintain the truth,
The Psalter beareth witness:
all to a cursèd shrew,
begotten of a fiend.
this people hath enchanted
and to-morrow is the bridal.
the small and the great
of Flattery and Meed.
keep thy tongue still,
then say thy say.
and his clean mother,
and save thee from Covetise."

lying there asleep
THE MARRIAGE OF MEED

When she had gone from me
All the rich retinue,
Were bidden to the bridal,
Knights, clerks and commons,
Sheriffs and sheriffs men,
Middlemen, brokers,
No reckoning the rout

They sent Simony
That Falsehood and Flattery
To make them over
There was no hall nor house
And EVERY FIELD WAS FULL OF FOLK.

On a mountain, in midst of it,
They pitched a proud pavilion,
For knights from afar
For jurors, for summoners,
For the flattering Friars,
That all might witness
When Meed was married to Falsehood.

Simony, Law and Juryman
But Flattery was the first
To give her away
When Simony and Lawyer
They assented thereto

Then leaped out Liar,
"That Guile with great oaths
And Simony and Lawyer
Unfolding the deed
Thus they began,
Know all men by these presents . . .
"Witness all men

I looked and beheld
whose root is false-living,
poor and rich,
jurymen and summoners,
beadles and bailiffs,
victuallers, pleaders;
that ran at Meeds heels.

to seal the papers,
for their fines held,
Meeds dowry for ever.
that could harbour the people,
at mid-morning tide,
and ten thousand tents,
and for strange comers,
for labourers on farms,
all the Four Orders,
what the writing said,
were Meeds nearest friends,
to fetch her from her bower,
and join her to Falsehood.
saw their desire,
—at Silvers prayer.

"A charter, a charter,
hath given them both."
stood forth both of them
that Falsehood had writ;
and loud they cried:
dwelling on the earth,
"Mee is here married,
But—for her goods.
Falsehood loveth her,
Flattery Fickle-speech
To be princes in pride,
To backbite, to boast,
To scorn men, to scold men,
To be bold to disobey,
With the kingdom of Covetise
With the island of Usury,
Gluttony and Oaths
To serve the devil
I grant possession
Of the earldom of Envy
I grant them all.

"Bargain and brokerage,
All that lordship of Lechery,
In its words, its works,
In its raiment, its longings,
When lust willeth,

Gluttony gave them,
To drink the long day
To jangle and jest,
To eat on fast-days,
And sit and sup
To breed like town swine
To wake in despair
"(They shall think they be lost,
"To have and to hold
"A home with the devil,
"With all the appurtenance
"To dwell in woe with Satan
not for virtue nor rank,
for he knoweth her riches,
granteth the pair—
to despise poverty,
to bear false witness,
to beget slanders,
to break the Commandments,
and all the coasts about,
I crown these two.
I give them as their own,
with all delights and lusts.
in Sloths service
and the Castle of Strife;
and the borough of Theft,
its length and breadth,
its watching eyes,
its idle thoughts,
and flesh at last faileth."

and swore it with oaths,
at divers taverns,
and judge their fellow-
Christians,
to feast before the hour.
till sleep came over them,
to be slothful and sleek,
with no will to do better:
this is the end of them;
and their heirs after them
and be damned for ever.
of purgatory and hell,
while God is in heaven."
Then answered Theology
"Sorrow upon thee,
"For Meed is a lady,
"Though Falsehood her father was,
"And save Amends consent
"God granteth Meed to Truth,
"Thou hast given her to Guile,
"The text telleth not so;
The labourer is worthy of his Meed.

"I, Theology, know
"Lying on the gridiron
"Looked up and cried to God,
"'For I, man, of thy mercy
"And since a man may in heaven
"It seemeth right on earth

"All by lies thou livest
"Simony and thou
"The lawyers and ye
"Ye shall abide it dear
"Well ye know, ye liars,
"That Falsehood is faithless
"Beelzebubs bastard,
"And might kiss the king
"Work ye by wisdom

and said to Lawyer:
to bring about such wedding,
daughter of Amends,
Amends was her mother,
she may not be wedded.
God give thee sorrow,
Truth knoweth sooth

how Laurence the Levite
near unto death,
'Open heavens gates,
have deserved MEED;' 
merit MEED of God
to wed MEED to Truth.

and lecherous works.
shame Holy Church;
hurt the people;
by God that made me;
if your wits are worth aught,
and fickle in works,
and Meed a high-born maiden
as his cousin if she would.
and by common sense,
And lead her to London
If any law will let them
Ay, though any judges judge
Yet beware of wedding them,
And Conscience is with him
If he find you at fault
It shall at the last
To this Civil Law agreed
Nor yet the lawyers
Then Flattery fetched florins,
And bade Guile give
To the lawyers in special,
And bade him fee Falsewitness
He can win Meed over
When this gold was given
To Falsehood and Flattery
And men came and comforted
Sure, sir, we shall not cease
For we have mastered Meed
She is ready to go
To see if Law will join you
two
Then was Falsehood merry
And every man summoned
And bid them be ready,
To wend with them to Westminister,

where law is given,
lie together;
she may be joined to Falsehood,
—Wise is the Truth;
and knoweth each one of you,
and by falsehood holden,
press sore on your souls.”
but not Sir Simony,
—till silver had changed hands.
florins in heaps,
gold all about,
“ that none of them fail us,”
with florins enow;
and bring her to my will.”
great thankings were made
for their fair gifts,
Falsehood.
till Meed be thy wedded wife,
by our merry talk.
with a good will to London,
in joy for evermore.’
and Flattery blithe,
in all shires about,
poor and rich,
to witness this deed.

(The Journey to Westminster)

Then looked they for horses
eyet hacks had they none
But Guile began to borrow
to carry them thither,
save hacks that were hired,
from many a great lord,
And Flattery brought out
He set Meed on a sheriff,
Falsehood on a juryman,
Flattery on a flatterer,

The lawyers had no horses,
For Simony and Civil Law
And Simony and Civil swore
And Provisors be appareled

“Deans and subdeans,” quoth
Civil,
“Archdeacons, officials,
“Saddle them with silver bribes
“Adultery, divorce,
“They shall carry the bishops
“Paulines people shall serve me
“Harness the Bishops officer,
“And buy us victuals
“And get from Liar a long cart
“Friars and beggars

Thus Falsehood and Flattery
And Meed in the midst of all.
I have no time to tell
Of many manner of men
Guile went ahead

True-talk looked well at Guile
But spurred his palfrey,
And came to the kings Court,
And Conscience told the king.

“Now,” says the king, “by Christ,
“Falsehood or Flattery

foals of the best;
shod all new,
trotting softly,
with fair trappings.

angry men were they,
must needs go a foot;
summoners should be saddled,
in palfrey wise.

“come you together,
and all you registrars;
to make sins the lighter,
and the dark ways of usury.
to do their visitations,
to complain in the courts,
he shall draw us in a cart,
from his fines for fornication;
to carry all the lot of them,
that are running on their feet.”
fared forth together,
and all the household after.
the rag-tag that followed them,
that live upon earth;
and guided them all.

and said but little,
and passed them all,
and told it Conscience,

if I can catch
or any of their fellows,
"I would wreak vengeance on wretches that do so, and all that maintain them; and bail for any one, shall sentence fall on all.

"And hang them by the neck, he commands a constable, in spite of all his gifts, let him go no further, in face of them all.

"Never in this world shall man I send you to warn them by them for ever.

"But as the Law looketh on men let him not escape, for all his prayers, let none evade thee."

"I would wreak vengeance on wretches that do so, and all that maintain them; and bail for any one, shall sentence fall on all.

"And hang them by the neck, he commands a constable, in spite of all his gifts, let him go no further, in face of them all.

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"But as the Law looketh on men let him not escape, for all his prayers, let none evade thee."

"Attach those traitors,"

"Tether Falsehood fast he commands a constable, in spite of all his gifts, let him go no further, in face of them all.

"And roll off Guiles head,"

"And bring Meed before me"

"For Simony and Civil Law, I send you to warn them by them for ever.

"For fear the Church be harmed let him not escape, for all his prayers, let none evade thee."

"harmed"

"And if ye catch Liar"

"Till he be set in the pillory"

"Watch for them well,"

Dread stood at the door I send you to warn them by them for ever.

And went and bade Falsehood flee he commands a constable, in spite of all his gifts, let him go no further, in face of them all.

Falsehood for fear then and all his fellows.

And Guile hurried aghast flew to the friars, at thought of death, and made him stay with them, to show men their wares, to serve the people.

But the merchants met him leapt away thence, lugged here and there, for his many tales, bad pack and go.

And shut him in their shops and pulled him in to them, and wound him in a gown, with bishops seals to churches, to all people—for pence.

And dressed him as a 'prentice Lightly Liar leapt away thence, lugged here and there, for his many tales, bad pack and go.

Lurking in by-ways, and pulled him in to them, and wound him in a gown, with bishops seals to churches, to all people—for pence.

He was nowhere welcome and pulled him in to them, and wound him in a gown, with bishops seals to churches, to all people—for pence.

Hooted everywhere,
Then the doctors heard of this
To come and stay with them,
Spicers spoke with him
For he was learned in their
craft
Minstrels and messengers
And maintained him half a
year
But Friars with their fair
speech
And coped him like a Friar,
Yet hath he leave to leap out
And is welcome when he
cometh
Simony and Civil Law
And put them in the Popes
hands
But Conscience accused them;
"Sir King," says he,
"Thy kingdom through their
avarice
"And Holy Church be harmed

All fled for fear
None durst abide
And truth to tell,
And when she was attached
and wrote Liar letters
and study mens water.
to look at their ware,
and knew many a gum.
met Liar once,
and eleven days.
fetched him off thence,
that none who came should
know him,
as often as he will,
and oft with them dwelleth.
sent messages to Rome
and appealed against the king,
"save clerks amend,
will wholly change,
for ever."
and flew to hiding places,
save Meed the maid,
she shook for fear,
she wrung her hands and wept.
THE VISION OF LADY MEED TRIED BEFORE THE KING
THE VISION OF LADY MEED TRIED BEFORE THE KING

Now is Meed the maid, by bedels and bailiffs, 
None other with her, brought before the king, 
Then the king called a clerk, his name I know not, 
To take her and set her at ease.

"I will assay her, myself will question her, 
"What man upon earth she loveth best, 
"And if she doth wisely and followeth my will, 
"I will forgive her this guilt, so God help me." 
The clerk took Meed and led her to the chamber; 
Mirth was made and minstrelsy Meed to please withal; 
They that dwell at Westminster all honour her.

Joyfully, gently, came the Justices 
Where this beauty dwelt; they hurried to her bower, 
Gat leave of the clerk and offered her comfort: 
"Mourn not, Meed, make thou no sorrow, 
"We will counsel the king, we will shape thy path, 
"Thou shalt wed as thou wilt, and whom thou wilt, 
"For all that Conscience may plot or do. 
"Might and mastery shall be thine and to do thine own pleasure 
"With King, with Commons, and with Court."

Mreed thanked them mildly and gave to each 
A cup of gold, or a goblet of silver, 
Or a ruby ring, or other rich gift; 
The least man of her crew had a golden piece, 
And with that they took their leave.
Then came the Clerks to comfort her;  
"Be blithe,  
"To work thy will  

And Meed sweetly  
"I will love you loyally,  
"And get livings for you,  
"And buy you benefices;  
"And your names be called aloud  
"If I love a clerk,  
"I am well known,  
"And cunning clerks that know me not

Then came a Confessor,  
And whispered soft  
"Though gentle and simple  
"And Falsehood kept thee mistress  
"For a load of wheats price  
"And will be thy beadsman  
"Among clerks and knights

Then Meed kneeled to the man  
And shrove her of her sins,  
Told him a tale  
To be her beadsman  

And he assoiled her  
"We have a window a-making,  
"Wilt thou glaze the gable, Meed,  
"Sure shall thy soul be  
"At mass and at mattins  
"In thine honour solemnly

promised the same:  
and make lords of you,  
—while your silver lasteth—  
ye shall be pluralists,  
in the Bishops courts.  
no ignorance shall stay him,  
he shall go forward,  
shall couch behind."

gowned like a Friar,  
as though in shrift:  
have lain by thy side,  
this forty year,  
I will assoil thee,  
and will do thine errands  
and Conscience defeat."

for all her evil deeds,  
the shameless one;  
and gave him a guinea,  
and her go-between.  
of her sins, and said:  
'twill cost us high,  
and grave thy name thereon?  
to see heaven;  
we will sing for thy soul,  
as Sister of our Order."
Lovely she laughed and said:
"If that I wist
"I would not make or mend
"I will be your friend, Friar,
"While ye show love to lords
"And blame not those ladies
"'Tis but frailty of flesh
"If one scape the slander,
"'Tis but one of the seven sins,
"Be merciful, Friar,
"And I will cover your kirk,
"I will whiten and glaze
"I will paint the picture
"Every wight shall see and say:

(The writer speaks to his generation)
But God defend all good folk
Or to write in church windows
For with your name is painted
God knoweth your conscience
And what you spend and what
you hoard
Lords, leave such work
Or to call the priest to help you
Perchance here only is your
reward
Let not thy left hand know
Thus, says the Gospel,
Give it so privily
In mens sight, or in your soul;
Who is courteous, who kind,

(He turns to speak of corruption in small trade and of adulteration)
Women that bake and brew,
They are the people
They harm the poor
there is no window nor altar
and write MEED thereon;
I will never fail you,
that follow lechery,
that love the same,
—from it we all come—
soon the harm is mended;
none sooner shriven.
to them that follow it,
and I will build your cloister,
your walls and your windows,
of her that paid for the making,
'MEED—Sister of the Order.'"
And secretly and oft
They grow rich on their retail
If they sold honestly
Nor buy their tenures.
Mayors and their officers
Between the king and commons
They should punish these

And the poor kneel and cry
Here on earth

But Meed the maiden
To take a bribe
"Or take you presents,
"Silver cups and rings,
"For love of me
"And suffer them to sell

In whose hand wickednesses be; their right hand is ful-

filled with gifts.

Solomon the sage
To amend mayors and them
He witnesseth what cometh

Fire shall destroy their tabernacles that gladly take gifts.

"Fire shall fall and burn
"The houses and the homes
"Presents and yearly gifts,

(The narrative proceeds)

Then came the king from his
Council house
And sent for her to see him,
Courteously as became a king
Blamed her a little
And for wishing to be wedded
Till Truth had brought her
"Foolishly, woman,

they poison them;
with what the poor should eat,
they become landlords,
they would not build so high,
the kings go-betweens
to keep the laws,
in pillories and stocks.

to Christ to avenge them
or else in hell.

besought the mayor
of all these hucksters:
(the coin avoiding),
and uphold their ways,
love them all,
somewhat against the law."

he made a sermon,
that carry out the laws,
when men take Meed:

all to blue ashes
of them that ask for gifts,
because of their office."

and called for Meed,
the king blamed her,
for loving Guile,
without his will,
a token from himself.
hast thou often done;
"I have forgiven thee many a time
"Thee and thine,
"But the longer I let thee go
"And never hast thou worse done
"Hence to thy death-day
"God forbid that any more
"If thou shalt so do

"Or in a place far worse
"And hurt thee and harm thee
"Shall be ware by thy case
"I will teach thee to love truth

"I have a knight named Conscience;
"If he will wed thee,

"Yea, my lord," saith she,
"If I be not at thy bidding,
Then was Conscience called
Before the king and his council.
To wit the kings will

"Wilt thou wed this woman
"She is fain to be

"Christ forbid," quoth Conscience,
"Woe betide me,
"She is frail of her faith,
"She maketh men sin
"Trust in her treasure
"To wives and widows
"Your father she killed
"She poisoneth Popes

and granted thee my grace, in hope thou shouldest amend, the less truth is with thee, than to take to thee Falsehood; do so no more; thou trouble Truth and me. in Corfe Castle I shall shut thee, to live there as a nun, that all wanton women and shall ban thee and thine. and take counsel of Reason.

he came from afar; wilt thou have him?"

"God forbid it me hang me at once." to come and appear

Conscience kneeled low and what he must do.

if I assent? thy fellow and thy mate."

if such a wife I wed, fickle in her speech, many score times, betrayeth many, she teacheth wantonness, through her false behests, and harmeth the Church;
"Chattering in her tongue,
"As common as the pavement
"Monks and minstrels,
"Gentle and simple,
"Jurymen and summoners
"Sheriffs in shires
"She taketh mens life and land,
"She payeth the gaolers gold
"And taketh true men by the top
"For hatred she hangeth them
"For excommunication
"She giveth the bishops man a cope
"When she will she is assoiled of sin
"What the kings secret seal
"For she is in the Popes secrets
"Simony and she

"She consecrateth bishops,
"She giveth parsons prebends,
"With their mistresses and darlings
"To bring forth children
"Woe to the realm

"With her jewels, by Jesus,
"And fighteth against Law
"He may not get forth,
"She leadeth Law where she pleaseth
"And maketh men through love of her

lustful of her body,
to every man that walketh,
lepers in hedges,
are her lovers when they will;
are the men that praise her,
were lost if MEED were gone;
setteth laws prisoners free,
to let the false go far and wide,
and bindeth and hangeth them,
who never did her harm.
she careth not a rush,
and his clerk a coat,
and in one month can do
can do in three,
—foreign priests know it—
seal the Popes letters.

ignorant though they be,
she abetteth priests
all their life long,
against the Church law.
when MEED is well with the king.
she shameth your justices,
and stoppeth Faith at the gate,
her florins fly so thickly;
and holdeth her courts
lose what justice oweth.
"To the poor the courts are a maze
"Law is so lordly
"Without money paid in presents

"Barons and burgesses
"And all that are care-worn

"Clergy and avarice
"This is that ladys life,
"And all that uphold her,
"Poor men have no chance
"No, though they be in pain,

Then Meed wept
To give her grace to speak;
"Excuse thee if thou canst,
"For Conscience accuseth thee

"Nay, my lord," quoth she,
"When ye wot truly

"Wherever great mischief is
"And Conscience knoweth
"Nor to deprave him,
"Well knowest thou, false one,
"Thou hast hung on my side
"Hast had thy grip on my gold
"It maketh me wonder
"I can crown thee with gifts,

"Fouly thou defamest me
"I never killed no king,
"Not for me was the king hurt

if he plead there all his life, and loth to end his case;
Law listeneth to few.

she bringeth to sorrow, and would live in truth.

she coupleth together;
God give her sorrow,
mischance betide them,
to plead their cause,
so strong is MEED."

and prayed the king
and the king granted it:
I can say but that,
and would exile thee for ever."

"believe him not a whit,
with whom the wrong lieth.

there MEED can help,
I came not to chide
with a proud heart.
unless thou wilt lie,
ten times and more
to give it where pleased thee,
why thou art wroth with me.
help thee more than thou knowest;

here before the king.
no, nor counselled it,
that time in Normandy;
"Thou, Conscience, shamedst him,
"Thou thoughtest winter
"Thou fearedst death
"Hurriedst to England

"Thou, robber pitiless,
"Poor mens money hadst thou

"I stayed there with my lord
"I made his men merry
"I patted their backs,
"I made them hop for hope
"Had I been marshal of his men,
"I durst have wagered my life,
"He should have had France
"And been king of that nation
"The least bairn of his blood

"Then Conscience like a coward
"To leave his lordship
"The richest realm

"It becometh a king
"To give MEED to men
"To aliens, to all men,
"MEED maketh him loved,
"Emperors, earls,
"By MEED get yeomen
"The Pope and his prelates
"Give MEED to men
"Servants for their service
"Beggars for their prayers
"Minstrels for their mirth
"The king MEEDETH his men
"Men that teach children
"Priests that preach

crepest into tents for cold,
ever would cease,
for the dim cloud,
for thy hungry belly.

robdest the poor;
Calais to sell.

his life to save,
and stopped all mourning,
I boldened their hearts,
to get MEED when they would;
by Mary of Heaven,
no less wager,
in length and in breadth,
his own kin to help;
a barons peer had been.

counselling him thence,
for a little silver,
the clouds hang over.

who keepeth his realm
who humbly serve him,
to honour them with gifts,
MEED maketh him a man;
all manner of lords,
to run and ride;
take gifts and MEED,
to uphold their laws;
take MEED of their masters;
give MEED that they pray for;
ask men for MEED;
to keep peace in his land;
crave of them MEED;
and teach the people
“Ask MEED and mass-pence and their food also;
Men of all crafts crave MEED for their’prentices;
Merchants and MEED go the road together,
No wight I ween without MEED can live.”

Saith the king to Conscience, “By Christ, methinketh, 
“Meed is right worthy to have the mastery.”

“Nay,” quoth Conscience, “clerks know the truth, 
“That Meed is evermore maintainer of Guile;
There are two manner of MEEDS, my lord; in the bliss of heaven
One is given by Gods grace while they be here,
To them that well work and in the Psalter put it;
The prophet preached of it Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle?

Take no Meed, my lord, of men that be true,
Love them, believe them, for our Lords love in heaven;
Gods Meed and Gods mercy therewith shalt thou win.

“ But there is Meed and Wage and both men think
Desert for a deed, open or secretly,
Meed many a time is given before the deed,
And that is neither right nor reason and no nations law
“For man to take wage save he deserves it.
The man is overbold or else he is not true,
That before work is done is paid or pay asketh.
Harlots and whores, and false physicians,
They ask their hire-money ere they have deserved it.
The guileful give before and good men after,
When the deed is done and the day ended.
That is no Meed but wage a due debt for the doing,
And if it be not paid the payer is to blame,
As in the Book that bids none should withhold
The hirelings hire until the morning:
The work of thine hired man shall not dwell with thee till the morrow=tide.
"Priests and parsons
That take Meed and money
Here they have their reward.

"What labourers and low men
Is no manner of Meed,
take from their masters
it is measurable hire.

"In merchandise is no Meed,
It is an open change,
I well avow it,
one pennyworth for another,
"And though the king of his courtesy, or Kaiser or Pope,
or other large gifts,
love is the reason,
be unloyal after,
and the crowned Pope
and others endow with it,
ever more after
be bold to claim
in property or rent.

"God gave Solomon
Riches and reason,
I think he be in hell.

"So God giveth nothing
And King and Pope
And take it again
but with, *If thou dost well*,
"And King and Pope may give and grant
And take it again from them that do ill,
"Who so readeth Kings
may read of MEED.
"She brought Absalom
to hang on the tree,
"And since King Saul saved a king for MEED

"Against Gods orders;
That Saul for that sin
God sent to Saul
by Samuel the prophet
"That Agag of Amalek
and all his liege people
"Should die for a deed
their fathers had done:
'Therefore,' said Samuel, 'Be obedient and ready 'Wend with thy host 'Children and churls, 'Look thou kill the king, 'For millions of money; 'Children and cattle

And for he killed not Coveted fair cattle, God sent to say And all his seed for that sin Such mischief MEED God hated him ever

The end of this story For fear I offend For so goes the world If a man tell them truths

Right as Agag had Samuel shall slay him, David be diadem'd And one Christian king MEED shall no more But Love and Lowliness

And he that trespasseth Loyalty shall teach him law

And no sergeant wear silk Nor fur on his cloak MEED paid by misdoers That Law is waxed a proud lord Unkindness is in power,

God himself biddeth thee his bidding to do, women to kill, chop them to death; covet not his goods, murder them each, burn all to ashes.' as God himself bad and killed not his beasts, that Saul should die shamefully end. brought on the king, and his heirs after him.

I care not to show; no end will I make; with them that have power he the sooner is blamed. it shall happen to—some; Saul shall be blamed, and defy them all, shall keep us his people, be master on earth, and Loyalty together. against the Truth, or lose his life.

for service that he doth, for pleading at the Bar. so rich men maketh and Loyalty is poor; Kindness is banished,
"But human love shall yet come,
And make lawyers labourers;
And such peace among the people
That Jews shall wax glad
Their King be come from Heaven,
Moses or the Messiah,
And all that wear daggers,
Axes and hatchets,
Shall be doomed to the death
To scythe or sickle,
And they shall beat together their swords into shares and their spears into scythes.

Each man shall play with a plough,
Shall spin or spread dung,
Priests and parsons
Their psalters and their Seven Psalms,
If any of them use
He shall lose his livelihood,
Neither king nor constable,
Shall trouble the people,
Nor put them on a jury-list
But as a deed is done
Mercy or no mercy.

Kings court, commons courts,
All shall be one court,
His name is tidy True-tongue,
Battles shall be none,
And if a smith smithy one
Then shall not rear folk against folk a sword.
And see this good fortune fall
Six suns and a ship be seen,
And mid-moon shall make
And Saracens shall see and sing
And on Mahomet and Meed
Better is a good name than many riches.
As wroth as the wind
"See what Solomon saith,
"They that give gifts
"And have much honour withal."

"I believe thee, lady,
"Thou art like the lady
"Try all things
"The leaf ended at those words,
"Had she looked on the left
"She would have found:
"So he that readeth Wisdom
"A full sad text
"There was no cunning clerk
He that giveth gifts winneth the victory
And hath much honour withal, but he taketh away the soul
of him that receiveth them.

"Worship he winneth
"But the soul that taketh the gift

men shall find worse fortune,
and half a sheaf of arrows,
Jews to be converted,
Glory to God in the highest,
mishap shall come.
was Meed at that,
in the Book of Wisdom,
win the victory,
thy text is true,
that a verse read
—that pleased her heart,—
and turned the leaf over,
Hold fast to that which is true.
shall find a text of woe,
to them that take this MEED;
to turn your leaf for you,
who will give MEED,
by that gift is bound."
THE VISION OF REASON

CONSCIENCE AND THE KING
THE VISION OF REASON

"Cease," quoth the king,
"Ye shall be friends
"Kiss her, Conscience,

"Nay, by Christ," says he,
"Save Reason bid me

"Then," quoth the king,
"And fetch me Reason
"And he shall rule my realm
"Of thee, Conscience,
"How thou leadest my people,

"I am glad of that covenant," said Conscience, "if faith," and rode forth to Reason

"I am ready," says Reason,
And called Cato his man,
And Tommy True-Tongue-Nor-merry-lies-
"Set my saddle
"Fasten it well
"And hang the heavy bridle on
"He will wince and kick

Then Conscience on his way
And Reason with him
"What a Queen Meed is,

One Waryn Wisdom
Followed them fast,

"I suffer it no longer,
and serve me both of you;
I bid thee kiss her."

"congee me for ever,
I would rather die."

"haste thee and ride,
and bid him come
and take account of thee,
so Christ help me,
learned and lowly."

"Rest thou a while,"
courteous of speech,
Tell-me-no-Tales-
I-never-loved-them.
on Suffer-till-I-see-my-time,
with Wise-word girths
to hold his head low,
er he comes to the Court."

set forth to ride,
whispering together,
among rich and poor."

and his mate Wily-man
which had to do
With Exchequer, chancery,  
And rode fast, that Reason 
And save them, for silver,  
and discharges of debts;  
should counsel them well  
from shame and from harm.

"Here come they," quoth  
Conscience,  
"Ride on, Sir Reason,  
"Where wrath is and wrangling,  
"Where love is and loyalty,  
"slaves of covetise,  
and reck not of either  
there will they bide,  
their hearts are not.

Sorrow and cursedness is in the ways of them.

"They give of their goods,  
The dread of God is not before their eyes.

"They would do more  
"Or a dozen capons,  
"Than for love of our Lord  
"Let them ride on, Reason,  
"I, Conscience, know them not,  
for a dozen chickens,  
or a seam of oats,  
or all his dear Saints;  
—rich folks—by themselves,  
nay, nor doth Christ."

On rode Reason  
Conscience guiding,  
by the strait high gate,  
till they came to the king.

Courteously the king met him  
Between himself and the Prince  
and set him on a bench  
and talked long together.

Then came Peace to Parlia-
ment  
"Wrong has taken my wife  
"He has ravished Rose,  
"And Margarets maidenhead  
"My geese and pigs  
"I dare not for dread of him  
"Borrowed my horse of me,  
and put forth a bill:  
against my will,  
Reginalds love,  
—when he met her late;  
his fellows fetch,  
fight nor chide;  
brought him home never,
"And never a farthing,
To S. Giles fair
He watcheth me well
Which way I go
He maintaineth his men
He forestalleth my goods
He breaketh up my barn door
And giveth me a tally
Me and mine he threateneth,
Nor am I strong enough

The king knew he said truth,
Wrong was a wicked wretch

Then was Wrong afeard,
Offered him pence:
"I would not reck if Peace
Then Wisdom and Waryn
"He that worketh by lust
"I say it of thee
"If Meed will not help thee
"Thy life and thy land
Then vowed Wrong
To make peace with his pence,
Wisdom and Wit then
And took Meed with them

Peace put his head forth,
"Guiltless, God wot,
"Conscience knoweth it

But Wisdom and Wit
To win the king with bribes.

The king swore, by Christ,
Wrong for his evil deeds
for all I cared plead;
I dare not take money,
when I take silver with me,
to rifle and rob me;
to murder my labourers,
and fighteth when I sell;

and carrieth off my wheat,
for ten quarters of oats,
lieth with my maid,
even to look on him."

Conscience told him,
and wrought much sorrow.

begged Wisdom make his peace,
"Had I the kings love
rained for ever."
warned Wrong wisely,
oft maketh wrath.
thou shalt it well find
thy harm is sure,
lie in her grace.”
to Wisdom full eagerly
and paid "handy dandy."

went together,
mercy to win.

his scalp all bloody;
gat I this scathe,
and the true commons.”

went their ways

and by his crown,
should suffer woe,
Commanded the constable
“Let him not see his feet
to cast him in irons;
for this seven year.”

“God wot,” saith Wisdom,
“If he will make amends
And he shall give sureties
Amend what is mis-done
this is not the best way,
let him have bail,
and buy him his remedy,
and evermore be better.”

Wit agreed:
“Thin for ill to be beaten,
Better is a remedy
and remedy no better.”

Then Meed bethought her
Proferred Peace a present
“Take this, man, from me,
And I will wager Wrong
and begged for him mercy,
all of pure gold:
to heal thy hurt,
shall do so no more.”

Then Peace pitifully
To have mercy on the man
prayed to the king
that had so often wronged
him:
and—I forgive him,
I can no more say,
I ask no more.”

“He hath paid me well,
“So that the king assent,
“Meed hath made amends,
“Nay,” quoth the king,
“Wrong goeth not so away,
“If he slip lightly off
“And be the bolder
“If Reason hath not pity
“As long as he liveth,
“Christ help me,
I will learn more of this;
then will he laugh at me,
to beat my servants;
he shall stay in my stocks
till lowliness be bail.”

Some men counselled Reason:
“Advise the king,
“To let Meed go bail for Wrong.”

“Counsel me no pity,” says Reason,
“Till lords and ladies
love the truth,
"Till they hate the loose word to hear it or speak it,
"Till the harlots kirtle be hidden away,
"Till children be cherished with the stroke of the rod,
"Till holiness of the wicked be taken at its worth,
"Till the clergy be covetous to clothe the poor,
"Till the rambling monks be kept to their cloister,
"Till preachers preaching be proved by their lives,
"Till the kings Council be the profit of the people,
"Till bishops horses be sold for houses,
"Their hawks and their hounds to help Gods poor,
"Till men go on pilgrimage to where the sick lie,
"In prisons and in humble cots; save where I send them,
"And if men go a pilgriming, let them stay there for ever.

To Rome or Spain

"Till Rome-runners carry no silver over sea,
"Graven or ungraven, for the robber Pope of France,
"On forfeiture of it if it be found at Dover,
"(Saving it be merchant,
or messenger with letters,
"Or appointed priests returning to the Pope.)

"By the rood of Christ no pity will I have
"While Meed is mistress in this Council hall;
"If I were crownèd king to keep a realm
"Never should Wrong go unpunished,
"Nor get my mercy by bribes, God save my soul,
"No, not unless penitence went with the fine.
"The man EVIL shall ever meet the man PUNISHMENT
"The man GOOD shall ever meet REWARD.

"If thou, king, wilt do this, I wager my hands
Lawyers shall turn labourers, and lead the dung a-field,
"And Love shall be the leader in thy land."

I saw Meed in the Council hall wink at the lawyers,
And they laughed and went and many left Reason.
All the righteous knew
And Kind-Wit and Conscience
And rich and poor loved him.

"We see well," they said,
"Meekness is master of Meed at the last."

Love made light of Meed,
And they cried to Conscience
"If a man take Meed to wife
"Cut off my nose

Mead mourned then

For the commons called her

A juror and a summoner
And a sheriffs clerk
"Full oft have I
"And yet ye never gave me

Neither Wisdom
Could frame a word
They stared and studied

The king agreed, by Christ,
And rehearsed all that Reason
"But, by my head, 'tis hard
"All my liege people

"By him that stretched
"If I rule not thy realm thus
"If so be obedience
"And bring all men to bow to me
"Without fines, without murders,
"I would it were well,"
"Therefore, Reason, indeed
"But be my chief chancellor
"And Conscience Justice
"I assent if thou, king,
"Hear the other side.
"No sufferance of wrong
"Nor shall there be stay of proceedings.
"Then I wager my life
"To pay thy wages
"More than all thy merchants,
"Or Lombards of Italy,

The king commanded Conscience to congee his officers
And take those whom Reason loved,

quoth the king, "the world over;
thou shalt not ride hence,
in Exchequer and in Parliament,
in all my courts."
wilt hear causes too.
Among aldermen and commoners
shall seal your secret letters,
that Love will lend thee silver
and help to win thee gold
or thy mitred bishops,
that live by Jews usury."

and with that I woke.
THE WRITERS LIFE
THE WRITERS LIFE

Thus I woke, God wot, (Kit my wife and I,)
And among the London lollers
And among the hermits
For I made verses on them

Once when I had my health,
And my limbs to labour with,
And nothing in life to do,
In health of body and mind,
I came on Conscience,
He met and questioned me,
And Reason reproved me.

"Canst thou serve as a priest
"Make a haycock in the field
"Canst mow or stock
"Canst reap or guide the reapers?
"Canst blow the horn,
"Lie out o’ nights,

"Make shoes or clothes,
"Trim hedge, use harrow,
"Or do any other work
"To win some living

"Nay," said I, "God help me,
"I am too weak to work
"I am too long, believe me,
"Or to last for any time

where I dwelt in Cornhill,
dressed like a loller,
little was I set by,
(trust me for that),
as my wit taught me.
in hot harvest time,
and loved good fare,
but drink and sleep,
and Reason met me,
and my memory roamed back,
or sing in church?
or pitch the hay?
or bind the sheaves?
Canst rise early?
and keep the kine together,
and save my corn from thieves?
or herd the sheep?
or drive the swine and geese,
that the people need
for them that be bedridden?"

with sickle or with scythe.
to stoop low down,
as a true working man."
"Then hast thou lands to live by
"That findeth thee thy food?
"Thou art a spender and canst spend;
"Or thou beggest thy living
"Thou art a Friday-beggar,

"A lollers life is thine,
"Righteousness rewardeth men
Thou shalt yield to each man
"Thou art maybe broken
"Maimed maybe through mishap,

"When I was young," quoth I,
"My father and my friends
"Till I knew throughly
"What is best for the body,
"Yet never did I find
"A life that pleased me
"If I must live by labour
"I must needs labour

Each man in what calling be is called there dwell be.

"I live in London
"The tools I labour with,
"Are the Lords Prayer, my Primer,
"And sometimes my Psalter
"I sing masses for the souls
"And they that find me food
"Man or woman, once a month,
"No bag have I nor bottle,

"Moreover, my lord Reason,
"Constrain no cleric

or rich lineage
An idle man thou seemest;
thou art a spill-time,
at mens buttery hatches;
a feast-day beggar in the churches;
little to be praised.
as they deserve.
after his works.
in body or limb,
therefore art thou excused?

"many a year ago,
set me to school
what Holy Scripture said,
what is safest for the soul.
since my friends died
save in these long clothes,
and earn my living
at the work I learned.

and I live on London,
to get my living by,
my Dirges and my Vespers,
and the Seven Psalms;
of those that give me help,
welcome me when I come,
into their houses;
only my belly.

men should, methinks,
to do common work,
"The tonsured clerk, a man of understanding, 
"Should neither sweat nor toil, nor swear at inquests, 
"Nor fight in the van of battle, nor hurt his foe. 

Render not evil for evil. 
"They be the heirs of heaven, all that are ordained, 
"And in choir and church Christ's own ministers. 

The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance. 
"Clerks it becometh for to serve Christ, 
"And for folk unordained to cart and work, 
"And no clerk should be save he be the son 
"Of frankleyns and free men and of wedded folk; 
"Bondmen and bastards and beggars children, 
"These are the sons of labour, these are to serve lords, 
"To serve God and the good as their station asketh. 

But since bondmens sons are made into bishops, 
"And bastard bairns are made archdeacons, 
"And soap-makers and their are knights for silvers sake, 
"sons save he be the son 
"And lords sons be their and of wedded folk; 
"labourers and beggars children, 
"And to support this realm these are to serve lords, 
"To comfort the Commons as their station asketh. 
"And monks and nuns are made into bishops, 
"Have made their own kin are made archdeacons, 
"knights are knights for silvers sake, 
"Popes and patrons and have mortgaged their rents 
"And take the sons of Mammon have ridden against our foes 
'Holiness of life and Love and honour the king, 
"And will be till these things that should support the poor 
wear out, and paid the fees for it, 
"Therefore, rebuke me not, refuse poor gentle blood, 
"For in my conscience I know to keep the Sanctuary; 
"Prayers of a perfect man have long to us been strangers, 
"These be the dearest work or they be somehow changed. 

Reason, I pray thee, 
what Christ would have me do. 
and his discreet penance, 
that our Lord loveth."
Quoth Conscience, "By Christ, "But to beg your life in cities "Save you be in obedience

"That’s truth," said I, "That I have lost my time, "And yet I hope that even as one "And always lost and lost "To buy him such a bargain "And all his loss is at the last "Such a winning is his, The kingdom of heaven is like treasure . . . etcetera, A woman who found a piece of silver . . . etcetera, "Even so hope I to have "A gobbet of His grace; "That shall turn to profit

"I do acknowledge it, mis-spent my time, who oft hath bought and sold and at the last hath happened that he is better for ever only as a leaf, under Gods grace, the woman who found a piece of silver . . . etcetera, of Him that is Almighty and then begin a time all the days of my life."

"I counsel thee," quoth Reason, "The life that is commendable "Aye, and continue in it;"

So to the kirk I went Before the Cross upon my knees Sighing for my sins, Weeping and wailing

"hurry to begin and dear to the soul;" quoth Conscience.

to honour my Lord;

I knocked my breast, saying my prayer, till again I was asleep.
THE VISION OF REASONS SERMON
PREACHED TO THE FIELD FULL OF FOLK, AND OF THE
SHRIVING OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS
THE VISION OF REASONS SERMON

The king and his knights to the kirk went,
To hear the days mattins and the mass after.
Then I waked from my slumber and woe it was to me
That I had not slept sounder and seen the more,
But ere I fared a furlong faintness took me;
I could go no foot further for want of sleep,
And sat me softly down, and said my creed,
Babbled my prayers, they brought me sleep.

Then I saw much more than I have told before,
I saw the FIELD FULL OF FOLK. and preached to all the king-
Reason arrayed himself dom,
And held a cross before the and thus began:
king have pity on themselves.

He prayed the people were for pure sin.
He proved these Pestilences on Saturday even,
The South-West hurricane for nothing else,
Was openly for pride, puffed to earth,
Pear trees, plum trees, ye should live better lives.
An example, ye men, blown to the ground,
Beeches and broad oaks in token of dread,
Their roots up-turned shall ruin us all.
That deadly sin at Doomsday

He bade wasters go work at what they best knew,
And with some kind of craft earn what they wasted now.

He prayed Parnel the gay put by her broidered robe,
And keep it in her coffer to serve her at her need.
Tom Stowe he told
And bring home Felice to take two sticks,
from the scolding-stool.
Watt he warned
Her bonnet cost a half-mark,
his wife was in the wrong,
his hood a groat.
Batt he bad go and cut
And beat Betty with it a bough or two,
if she would not work.
Merchants he charged
to chasten their children
And let no money pamper
them
And not to cocker them
His wife was in the wrong,
while they be young,
for any plague that comes.
"My sire told me and my dame
That the dearer the child is
Solomon that wrote Wisdom
said the same:
Qui parcit virgae odi filium.
"The English of this Latin is,
if any one would know it,
"Spare the switch,
spill the son."
And then he prayed prelates:
"Live as ye teach us,
"What ye preach, do,
we shall trust you the better."
Then he bade Religion
"Lest the king and the
commons
keep to her Rule,
"And be stewards in your
places
take your wealth
till ye be better governed."
"Gregory that great clerk
wrote the Rule down—
As fishes in drought
die for water,
"Even so Religion
rotteth and starveth
"When out of cloister
it coveteth to dwell:
"For if there be heaven on
or ease to any soul,
earth,
"It is in the cloister or the school.
not to chide nor fight,
"To the cloister man cometh
"All is book and obedience, reading and learning;
"In the school the clerk is scorned
"Great love and liking there;
if he will not learn;
each loveth other.

"But now is Religion a rider,
a roamer through the streets,
"A leader at the love-day,
a buyer of the land,
"Pricking on a palfrey
from manor to manor,
"A heap of hounds at his back
as tho he were a lord,
"And if his servant kneel not
when he brings his cup,
"He loureth on him asking
who taught him courtesy,
"Badly have lords done
to give their heirs lands
that have no pity;
"Away to the Orders
living at ease
"Money rains upon their altars.
that is their 'charity.'
"There where such parsons be
your lands are too broad,
"They have no pity on the poor;
and he shall shrive you all
"Ye hold you as lords;
for breaking of your Rule.
"But there shall come a king
you canons and you nuns,
"And beat you as the Bible saith
and make you walk in old paths
"He shall mend you monks
shall blame and reprove you.
"And put you to your penance
And barons and their sons
These in chariots and these in horses . . . they be bound and fell down.
and shall find the key
"Friars in their begging
in which is the money
"To Constantines coffers
wickedly wasted.
"That Gregorys godchildren
and his niece the abbess
"For the Abbot of Abingdon
and the wound shall be mortal.
"Shall be knocked on their crowns
so chronicles tell me,
"But ere that king come,
shall be clothed new."
"The church and the clergy
they are thy treasure,"

Then he counselled the king
"And treacle in thy need.
"Rich and commons should agree
"Let no manner of counsel
"But in sense and good will
"In heaven on high
"Till liar Lucifer
"Worthier and wittier

"Hold ye then in unity
"Is cause of all that cumbers

Then he prayed the pope
And grant no grace
Among all kings
"And all confessors
"Give Peace as your penance
"For all manner deeds

"And ye that seek S. James,
"Seek ye Saint Truth,
Who with the Father and the Son . . .
"Fair befall them
So ended Reason.

(Here begin the Repentance and Shriving of the Seven Deadly Sins)
Then ran Repentance and repeated Reasons words
And made me, William, weep.

(PRIDE OF WOMAN)

Parnel proud-hearted lay flat upon the earth,
Long she lay ere she looked "O God, have mercy."
Promised to Him that made us all
She would unsew her shift and set a hair shirt there,
To tame her flesh so fierce to sin:
"Pride shall not draw me,
"I will let me be slandered,
"Now I will meek me,
"All this till now

"Repent thee," quoth Repentance,
"Shrive thee and sharply

"as Reason hath taught thee,
and shake off thy pride."

(PRIDE OF MAN)

"I, Pride, patiently,
"First to father and mother
"Unabashed to offend
"Inobedient to the Church
"I judged her for her vices;
"With word and wit

"Scorning them and others
"That simple folk should think me
"Proud of my apparel;
"Other than I was
"Willing men to think me,
"Rich and eloquent,
"A boaster, a braggart, I,
"Vaunting my vainglory
"Singular, alone,
"Some time in one faith,
"Wishing men should think
"My craft the cleverest,
"My strength the stiffest,
"My love the sweetest,
"Proud of my fair features,

"What I gave for Gods love
"For them to think me holy,

I will hold me low,
that did I never;
mercy beseeching;
have I hated in my heart."

ask for penance,
was I inobedient,
God and the good,
and to them that serve her,
I urged on others,
the churchmens evil works to show,
when I saw my time

witty and wise.
appearing among men
in mind or in wealth;
for the goods I had,
righteous in my life;
full of bold oaths,
in face of all reproof;
for none was like to me;
some time in another,
my work was the best,
my riding the strongest,
my face the handsomest,
my crimes the boldest,
proud of my shrill song.

I told my gossips all about it
holy and free of alms;
"None so bold a beggar
A teller of tales
Things that none had thought on
Them that sat beside me
'Lo, if ye believe me not
'Ask him, ask her,
What I suffered, what I saw,
What I once could do,
I would men knew it all
To be praised among the people."

If I pleased men I could not be Christ's servant, no man can serve two masters.

"Now God of his goodness give thee grace to amend,"
Quoth Repentance.

(LECHERY)

Then said Lechery, "Alas, "Lady, to thy dear Son, "To have pity on me lustful "I will drink with the duck "I am guilty in spirit, "In words, in dress, "Every maid I met "Some would I kiss and handle "On fast days, on Fridays, "In Lent and out of Lent, "Such work with me and them "Merry tales we had "Clever songs we made; "To win with guile "Some I won by sorcery, "I took the loveliest "When I was old and hoar "Then would I laugh at lecherous tales. "Now, Lord, of thy grace,

O our Lady, pray for me now; of his pure mercy and grace; and dine but once on Saturday. I am guilty in body, in watching for eyes. I made her a sin-sign, till our lust was one; on feast-day vigils, all times were one to me; was never out of season. of lust and paramours, we sent out bawds, women to my will. some I won by strength; and never loved them after. and had lost my nature on Lechers have mercy."
(ENVY)

Envy with heavy heart
"My fault," says he,
His clothes were of cursing
He was pale as a stone;
And like a leek that had lain
So looked he with long cheeks
His body was all swollen with wrath;
And went wringing his fists;
With word or deed
Every word he threw
Of chiding and of challenging
Backbiting and calumny
This was his courtesy

"I would be shriven," quoth this shrew,
"I would be gladder, by God,
"Than if I this week had won
"I have a neighbour near me,
"Blamed him behind his back,
"Lied to lords about him,
"Made his friends his foes,
"His weal and his good chances
"Between him and his servants
"His life and his limbs

"When at market I meet
"I hail him kindly
"I dare do no other,
"Had I mastery and might

"When I come to the kirk
"And pray for the people

"asked for his shrift,
cursing all his enemies.
and of keen words;
in a palsy he seemed,
long in the sun
fouly louring.

he bit his lips,
he would wreak vengeance
when his time he saw.
was of an adders tongue;
all his living was;
and bearing of false witness,
where'er he showed his face.

"if for shame I durst.
if Gilbert had a hurt
a wey of Essex cheese.
I have envied him often,
to bring slander on him,
to make him lose his silver,
through my false tongue;
grieve me full sore,
have I made strife,
were lost through my speech.

him I most hate,
as I his friend were;
he is stronger than I.
God knows what I would do.

and should kneel to the Rood,
as the priest preacheth,
"Then I cry on my knees:
"'That took away my bowl

"Then from the altar
"Heyne hath a new coat,
"I wish it were mine

"When men lose I laugh,
"When they win I weep,
"I deem that they do ill
"And if any rebuke me
"I would that each man
"If one hath more than I
"Thus I live loveless
"And all my body swelleth

"I blame men behind them
"What I hear from Will,
"All I know from Watkin,
"I make foes of friends

"I burn myself within me
"Through my power of talk,
"I take my vengeance
"Against Christ's counsel.

"And when I cannot master them
"That I catch cramp,
"Ague or fever,
"The leechcraft of our Lord
"No clerk can help me
"Like the cobbler of Southwark
"God and His words
"Like a chance charm I have;

'Christ give them sorrow, and my torn sheet.'

I turn my eyes and see—and his wife another, and all the piece it came from.

my heart loveth that, and wail to think of it, when I do far worse, I hate him deadly evermore. were my servant. that angrieth me sore, like a vicious dog, so bitter is my gall.

and pray for their mischance; I tell it to Watkin, Will hears it after. through a false and fickle tongue; as with a tailors shears. through many a trick, and curse my fellow-Christians

I take such melancholy, and sometimes spasms, till I forget and believe in the wizards. no, nor Christ,

or Dame Em of Shoreditch. give me no help that chiefly cured me.
"For many a year I could not eat
"For envy and ill-will
"No sugar nor sweet thing
"Nor any remedy on earth
"No, neither shrift nor shame,

"Yes, there is remedy," quoth Repentance,
"Sorrow for sin

"I am sorry," says he,
"That makes me meagre,

"I am a broker of backbiting,
"When he sold and I did not
"To lie and to glower
"Their works and their words,
"Now it grieves me in my mind
"Ere I my life leave, O Lord,
"Grant me, good Lord,

as a man should,
be hard things to digest;
may assuage my swelling,
drive it from my heart,
save one should scrape my maw."

and gave him counsel of the best,
is salvation of soul."

"seldom am I not;
for I cannot avenge me.

I blame mens wares.
then was I ready
and blame my neighbours,
wherever I was.

that ever I did so;
grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,

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grant me of thy love,

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grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,

grant me of thy love,
"Sometimes in summer,
"If weather were not as I wished

"Mid all kinds of men
"With gentle and simple

"I am Wrath.
"Gardener in the convent,
"I grafted lies
"And the lies bare leaves
"And entered my ladys bower
"Now comes the fruit.—
"To preachers and visitors
"Parsons soon see
"Then parsons preach
"And Friars blame parsons;
"I, Wrath, walk mid all,

"Both vaunt their spiritual power,
"Each contemns the other,
"Or else ride about rich,

"I, Wrath, never rest

"I have an aunt, a Nun,
"They would sooner faint or die
"I was cook in their kitchen,
"Many months with them,
"Broth for the prioress I made
"Broth and soup made out of chatter.
"Sister Joan was a bastard.
"Sister Clarice a knights daughter,

and sometimes in harvest, then I blamed God.

my dwelling is, that love to hear harm.

Once I was a Friar, grafting slips; on preachers and visitors, and blossomed abroad, to hear confessions. Men will go shrive them and not to their parsons, these share their shrift-money, and defame the Friars, all men know it. I teach them from the book of Wrath

their spiritual power is Wrath, and all come to poverty, and their spiritual power is mine. from following these wicked.

another an Abbess, than suffer any penance. I served the convent, and many with the monks, and for other poor ladies, Thus it went.

her father a cuckold;
"'Sister Pernella a priestswench, not fit to be prioress;
'She bore a child in cherry-time, all the chapter knew it,
'They challenged her with it at her election day.'

'I, Wrath, their pottage made all out of wicked words.

' Liar thou art,' cries one, 'Liar, liar,' cries the other, under the cheekbone,
' Each hit the other
'Had they had knives, by Christ, each had killed the other.

'all the chapter knew it,

'All ladies loathe me that love honourable ways.

'Among wives and widows I am wont to sit,
'High fenced in the high pews in church, how I hate Lettice;
'The parson knoweth well and she and I met and chid,
'She took the Sacrament off with our clothes,
'before me and cheeks bloody.

'Each called the other whore.

'Heads were bare,

'Each hit the other

'Had they had knives, by Christ, each had killed the other.

'Among the monks I might be but often I shun it,
'There be so many cruel men my doings to espy,
'The Prior, the sub-prior, and Father abbot,
'If there I tell my angry tales they meet and take me
'And make me fast on Fridays on bread and water.
'I am challenged in the chapter as though I were a child,
'Birched on the bare back-side and never a shirt between.

'I have no liking to live among the monks,
'They eat more fish than flesh; they drink feeble ale,
'And once when wine cometh and I sit and drink late
'I have a flux of foul words for five days after.
'All the wickedness I know of any in our convent
'I cough it up in our cloisters and all the world hears it.'
“Repent ye,” quoth Repentance,
“The counsel that thou knowest
“Nor drink delicate drink,
“Lest thy will and thy wit
“Be thou sober,” says he,
And bad him pray to God

“and never more repeat
by thy look or by thy speech,
nor drink deep at all,
should turn to wrath.
and gave him absolution
to be his prospering help.

(COVETOUSNESS OR AVARICE)

Then came Covetise,
So hungry and hollow
Beetle-browed, babber-lipped,
And, like a leather purse,
Below his chin
A hood upon his head,
A tawny cloak upon him,
All torn and rotten
But, if a louse could leap away,
So threadbare was the cloth of it.

“ I have been covetous,” quoth this caitiff,

“Once I served Sim At-stile,
“First I learnt to lie,
“Then to weigh false
“To Winchester and Weyhill
“With all kinds of merchandise
“But had not grace of Guile
“They had been unsold seven years,

“Then I passed to the drapers,
“To draw the edges out

“ I do acknowledge it,
and was his ’prentice bound,
a page or two of lies,
was my second lesson,
I went to the fair
as my master bad,
gone with me and my goods,
Gods my witness.

to learn my other lessons,
that the flannel might seem longer.
"Among the rich striped cloths
"Threaded them with pack-needles,
"Put them in a press,
"Till ten yards or twelve

"My wife was a weaver,
"She spake to her spinners
"But the pound-weight she paid by
"Than my own balance did,
"I used to buy her barley,
"Penny ale and thick ale,
"For labourers and poor folk.
"The best ale in my bower,
"Any man that boozed of that
"Fourpence a gallon,
"When it was served in cups.
"Rose of the Small Shop
"She has been a huckster

"But now I swear, so may I thrive,
"Nevermore will I weigh false,
"But I will wend me to Wal-singham,
"And pray to Bromholm cross,

"Didst ever repent?

"Yes, once I was in an inn,
"I rose when they were sleeping,

"That was no restitution,
"Thou hadst deserved hanging for that

I learned another lesson, fastened them together, pinned them down therein, made out—thirteen.

woollen cloth she made, to spin it soft,

weighed a quarter more when I weighed fair.

she brewed it to sell, she mixed it together, It lay by itself; or in my bedchamber; never bought other, and no good measure either

In that my wife was cunning: was her true name, these eleven winters.

this cheating I will stop, nor cheat in selling, and my wife with me, to save me from my sins."

didst never restitution make?"

with a heap of travellers, and rifled their packs."

that was a robbers theft; more than for all thy cheating else."
"I thought rifling was restitution," says he,
"I know no French i'faith,
"Didst ever use usury,
"Nay, saving in my youth,
"I weighed pence with a weight,
"And lent money on pledge,
"I wrote me out agreements;
"I gat me more wealth

"I have lent to lords and ladies,
"I lent to folk that were willing to lose
"I had bankers letters
"I counted it right here,

"Didst ever lend to lords

"Ay, I have lent to lords;
"I have made many a knight
"They gave me colours to wear,
"Never a pair of gloves

"Hast thou pitied the poor,

"Ay, as much pity
"Would kill them an they catch them,

"Art thou free among thy neighbours

"I never learned my book; only from far Norfolk." in all thy lifetime?"
with Lombards and Jews,
I pared the heaviest, the pledge was worth more than the loan.
if the borrower failed his day, than through merciful lending.
and myself redeemed the pledge;
and took my coin to Rome, but there it was less."
in return for their protection?"
they never loved me after; into mercer and draper, thus they were my 'prentices, did they pay me for the same."
who sometimes needs must borrow?"
as pedlars have on cats, for the sake of their skins."
with thy meat and drink?"
The Vision of the Seven Sins

"I am held as courteous as a dog is in a kitchen;
"That is the name I have among them."

"God grant thee never his grace through all thy life,
"Save thou repent thee soon and use well thy goods.
"God grant thy sons after thee no joy of that thou winnest,
"And thine executors no profit in that thou leavest them;
"That which was won by shall be spent by the wicked,
wrong hath ever power
"For neither Pope nor Par- save thou make reparation."
"doner restitution be made.

"Ay, I have won my goods with false word and wit,
"I have gathered what I have with glosing and with guile;
"I mixed my merchandise; I made a fine array,
"But the best was outside the shop and the worst inside—
"There was wit in that.

"And if my neighbour had better at all than mine,
man or beast to get it for mine own,
"I tried many a trick at the last I stole it;
"And, save I got it otherwise, or I picked his locks.
"I shook his purse out
"I pinched of his half-acre, of my neighbours land,
"If I went to the plough, or bad them that reaped for me
"A foot or a furrow what I never sowed.
"If I reaped I would reach over,
"Seize with their sickles when I heard mass,
"In holy-days at church, to weep my sins;
"I had no will and not my bodys guilt,
"Nay, I mourned my loss of goods,
"When I did deadly sin,
As when I lent and thought it lost
If I sent my servant
To do traffic with money
No man could comfort me,
Nor penance done,
My mind was on my goods,
Where your treasure is there shall your heart be also.

"In sooth," Repentance said,
Were I a Friar, in good faith,
I would take no money of thine,
Nor mend our church with gold of thine,
By my souls health I would not
For the best book in our House,
If I knew thee to be what thou sayest
Better die than live ill.

"I counsel any faithful Friar
I would liever, by our Lord,
Than have food and finding
When thou eatest rich food thou art another's slave;
Feed on thine own loaf and be free:

"Thou art unnatural;
Make reparation,
All that take of thy goods,
Are bound at the High Judgment
The priest that taketh tithe of thee,
Shall share thy purgatory

I feared it not so much, when payment was delayed.
to Bruges or Prussia-land, and to make exchange, nor mass nor mattins, nor paternoster prayed; not on Gods grace.

"I have pity on thy life, for all the gold in earth, nor robe me in goods of thine, nor take a dinners cost from thee;
tho the leaves were burnt gold;
I would sooner starve.

never to sit at board of thine, live upon watercress from a false mans fortune.

I cannot pardon thee and reckon with them all. God is my witness, to help thee to restore.

if he know thee what thou art, and help to pay thy debt.
"Never workman in this world shall thrive on thy winnings; what usury doth mean, who is proud of thine offerings; may more boldly pay church tithe than an arrant usurer like thee, and would have hanged himself, him thus: and in thy prayers pray for it, than all His other works, that man can work or think, than is a spark in Thames. to buy thee a wastel cake, or work of thy two hands. began in falsehood, thou payest not but borrowest more; to whom to make thy reparation, bid him use it for thy soul; at the High Judgment day, (GLUTTONY)

Now beginneth Gluttony to go to shrieve him, And fare to churchward his sins to show.
Forth he went upon his way
But Betty the brewster
And asked of him withal

"I go to church," says he,
"And then will I be shriven,

"Gossip," says she, "I have good ale;

"What hast thou?" says he,

"Pepper and peony seeds;"
says she,

"And a farthings worth of fennel,

Then in goes Glutton

Cis the shoemaker
Watt the gamekeeper
Tom the tinker
Hick the hackneyman,
Clarice of Cock Lane
Parson Piers of Pray-to-God
Daw the ditcher
A fiddler, a ratter,
A ropemaker, a trooper,
A watchman and a hermit,
Godfrey the garlic seller,
All early in the morning
To try the new good ale.

Then cobbler Clement
And said it was for sale
Hick the hackneyman
And bad Bet the butcher
Two then were chosen

...
He that had the hood
The two rose readily,
And went aside
They could not in their con-
science
Till Robin the ropemaker
And named an umpire
Hick the ostler
And Clement took Hicks hood
And held him satisfied;
Sir Glutton should be treated

There was laughing and chatter-
ing,
Bargains and toasts and songs,
And Glutton had gulped down

He could neither step nor stand
Then gan he walk
Now to this side, now to that,
Like a man who lays lines
And when he drew to the doorstep,
He stumbled on the threshold
Then Cobbler Clement
To lift him up on high
But Glutton was a heavy churl
And coughed up his drink

With all the trouble in the world
Bore him home to his bed
And after all this surfeit
All Saturday and Sunday slept
Then waked he from his winking
And the firstword he threw was,
should have somewhat within.—
and whispered together,
and valued the goods,
truly agree;
was bidden to arise,
that quarrel should be none.
took the cloak,
and a cup of ale,
for if one should repent of it
to a gallon of ale.

and, “Pass the cup round,”
and so they sat—till evensong,
a gallon and a gill.
till he had his staff,
like a blind singers dog,
and sometimes backward,
to catch wild birds;
then his eyes grew dim,
and fell flat on the floor;
caught him by the waist
and get him to his knees;
and groaned as he lifted him,
in Clements lap.

his wife and his wench
and laid him therein;
he had a sleeping fit;
till the sun went to rest.
and wiped his eyes,
“Where’s the tankard?”
His wife and his conscience
He waxed ashamed, that shrew,
And to Repentance cried,
"Thou, Lord, that art on high
To thee, God, I, Glutton,
"Guilty of trespass with my
  tongue,
"'By Gods soul, By Gods sides,
"When there was no need of oath.
"I have over eaten at supper-
  time
"More than my body
"And then I, Glutton, cast it up
"And spoilt what might have well been
"Over daintily on fasting days
"Sitting so long at table,
"Hereof, good God,
"Of all my vicious living
Then gan Glutton weep
And vowed to fast:
"Never shall fish on Friday
"Till Aunt Abstinence allows
"This showing shrift," says Repentance,
rebuked him for his sin,
and swiftly asked for shrift,
"Have pity on me,
and all lives didst shape,
confess me guilty,
how oft I cannot tell,
So help me God Almighty,' sometimes at breakfast-time,
might well digest;
er I had walked a mile,
spent upon the hungry.
I have eaten and have drunken;
I slept and ate at once.
grant me forgiveness
all my life long.’
and made great dole,
"Hungry and thirsty though I be,
be eaten or swallowed
whom all my life I hated.”
"shall be of merit to thee.”

(PARSON SLOTH)
Then came Sloth, beslabbered, with two slimy eyes,
"I must sit down,” says he,
"I cannot stand or stoop,
"Once I am in bed,
"Till I am ripe for dinner.”
“or I shall nap,
or kneel without a footstool,
o bell-ringing can rouse me
He began with a belch
And stretched him out and yawned

"What, wake, man, wake," cried Repentance,

"Should I die, by this day,
"I know not my paternoster,
"I know rhymes of Robin Hood
"But of our Lord and of our Lady—none,

"I have made forty vows

"Never penance have I done
"And never was I sorry for my sins.
"If I tell my beads
"My heart is two miles away
"Each day am I busy,
"With idle tales at the ale,
"Gods passion and pain

"I never visited the weak
"I had liever hear loose talk
"Or laugh at lying tales,
"Than all that ever they wrote,
"Vigils and fast days
"I lie abed in Lent
"Till mattins and mass be done.
"If I hear the last word

"Save sickness makes me
"Do I confession make,

and beat his breast in penitence
—and then he snored.

"and haste thee to shrift."

I dread me sore,
as the priest sings it,
and Randolph Earl of Chester,
not the shortest ever made.

and forgot them in the morning,
as the priest bade me,
(unless I be in wrath),
from the words of my mouth;
holy days and others,
and idle tales in church.
on that I think seldom.

or fettered men in prisons,
at a cobblers merrymaking,
or slander my neighbour,
Matthew, Mark, or Luke or John.
I can clean forget them all,
with my leman in my arms,

Then I go to the Friars
I hold myself satisfied.

not twice in ten years
and then I tell not half my sins.
"I have been priest and parson,
But I cannot solfa or sing,
But I can find a hare,
Better than construe the first Psalm
I can hold a friendly meeting,
But in mass book or Popes edict

"If I buy or borrow,
I forget it as soon as bought;
Six times or seven
Thus have I served true men

"My servants wages go unpaid,
When with wrath and wicked wish
If a man do me service,
I am unkind when he is courteous,
I have and always had
I am not lured with love;

"The kindness my brother-Christian,
I, Sloth, have forgotten it,
By what I said and what I left unsaid.

"Many a time have I spoilt
Bread, ale, butter,
All wasted by my keeping them;

"In my youth I ran about,
for thirty winters past,
or read a Latin life of saints;
in a field or in a furrow,
or explain it to the parish.
I can cast a shires accounts,
I cannot read a line.
unless the score be up against me,
and if a man ask me
I deny it with oaths.
ten hundred times.

it is sad on settling-day,
my workmen I pay.
or help me in my need,
I cannot understand him.
the manners of a hawk,
there must be meat under the thumb.

showed me of old,
ay, sixty times have I,

fish, flesh, and other food,
milk and cheese,
and I have set my house a-fire.
I gave me not to service,
"And ever since have been a beggar, all for my foul sloth, "O me, my barren, barren days."

"Repent thee," quoth Repentance, and with that Sloth swooned, Till Wake the watchman threw water in his eyes And flapped it on his face and said: for he would betray thee, "Beware thee of Despair pray God for grace and beat "Say, 'I am sorry for my sin,' thy breast; "No guilt so great that His goodness is not greater."

Then sat Sloth up and signed him ever and again, And vowed before God: "No Sunday shall go by "(Save I be sick), that I shall not early go "To the dear church and hear mass and mattins; "Nor shall ale after dinner keep me thence, "Till I have heard evensong: by the Cross I swear it.

"Ay and I will pay again (if I the money have), "All that I made wickedly since I had art to make it; "And though my living fail yet I will not cease; "Every man shall have his own, ere I go hence. "And with the remnant, by the Chester Rood, "Before I pilgrim it to Rome, I will seek—Saint Truth."

THE PRAYER OF REPENTANCE FOR THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Then had Repentance pity and bad them all kneel: "For all sinful souls I pray our Saviour, "To mend you your misdeeds, to be mercifull to all. "God who of Thy goodness of old made the world,
"Making all out of nothing, and making man like Thee, and brought sickness on us all—
"All for the best as I believe O blessed fault, O necessary sin of Adam,
"For through that sin thy Son down to this earth was sent mankind to save,
"And became man, son of a maid, Son like us in body and soul,
"Thou that madest Thyself Thy I am in the Father and the Father in me and be that seeth me seeth my Father,
"Thou that with thy Son in our flesh didst die,
"For mans sake on Good Friday and felt our sorrow,
He led captivity captive, lost for a time his light,
"When the sun for sorrow feeding our forefathers with thy fresh blood,
"When most light is at midday; The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light.
"At midday mealtime of thy saints
The light that leapt from out thee blinded Lucifer,
"And brought thy blessed from his power into the bliss of heaven;
"Thou that on the third day after in our mortal flesh didst go
"Where the sinner Mary saw thee, before Mary thy mother,
"For comfort of the sinful thou sufferedst her to see thee first:
I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to re-
pentance,
"All that Mark hath written, Matthew, Luke and John
"Of thy doughtiest deeds all was done by thee as man;
The Word was made flesh,
"Thou to whom therefore
"Thou that wert first our Father
"And above all our Saviour:
"Thou that hast told us
"For our deeds done ill,
"Damned we shall be never:
I will not remember his iniquities any more,
"Because of this Thy mercy,
"Have pity on these wicked men
"That ever they have angered thee,
Then seized Hope a horn
And blew it to the sound of
And all the saints in heaven
A thousand men crowded and cried
For grace to go to Truth,—
we may more surely pray,
and in thy flesh our Brother,
BE MERCIFUL TO US.
when we be sorry
if we acknowledge them and cry,
Damned we shall be never:
3 will not remember his iniquities any more,
for the love of Mary Thy mother,
that repent them sore
in word, or thought, or deed."
Lord - thou - shalt - turn - and - quicken-us,
Blessed are they whose iniquity is forgiven,
together sang the hymn,
to Christ and his dear mother
God grant they may.
THE VISION OF
THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH
AND OF THE
COMING OF PIERS PLOWMAN
THE VISION OF THE SEARCH
FOR TRUTH

But no wight was so wise
They blustered forth like beasts,
Long was the way and late
In pilgrims dress apparelled;
Bound with broad list
A bowl and bag,
And on his hat a hundred flasks of lead,
Many a cross from Sinai,
Cross-keys from Rome,
Signs of his pilgrimage,

This folk required of him
"From Sinai," says he,
"Bethlehem, Babylon,
"Ye may see by my signs,
"Good saints have I sought
"Walking full wide

"Knowest thou a holy saint
"Canst thou tell us the way

"Nay, God bless me;"
"Never saw I palmer
"That asked after Truth

that knew the way to Truth;
over the valleys and the hills;
when they met a palmer,
he had a staff in hand,
like bindweed twisted round it,
he bare at his side,
scallop-shells of Spain,
and the portraiture of Christ,
that men might know his saints.

whence he had come;
"and from our Lords Sepulchre,
Alexandria, Armenia, and Damascus;
that be upon my hat
for my souls health,
in wet and dry."

that men call TRUTH?
where that saint dwelleth?"
said the fellow then,
with pike-staff or with scrip
till ye now in this place."
HERE FIRST APPEARETH PIERS PLOWMAN

"By Peter," quoth a plowman, and forward put his head, as scholar does his book.
"I know Truth as well led me to his place, to serve him evermore;
"Conscience and my own wit all this fifty winter, herded his beasts, carried it home,
"Made me his man watching his profit;
"I have been his follower all that Truth biddeth me, now I weave, now I wind;
"Sown his seed, he put me to learn all;
"Cared for his corn, I am his good servant,
"In his house, outside his
"house, sometimes more than good;
"I ditch, I dig, I do, that poor man can know, past the evening time, lovely in speech;
"Now I sow, and now I thresh; where Truth dwelleth
"I am his tailor and his tinker, I am his good servant,
"And, though I myself do say it, sometimes more than good;
"And I have good wage from him, that poor man can know, past the evening time, lovely in speech;
"He is the readiest paymaster where Truth dwelleth
"Never withholds mans hire
"He is gentle as a lamb, lovely in speech;
"If ye will know
"I will show you the way home. where Truth dwelleth

"Yea, dear Piers," quoth they, and offered him money.

"Nay, by my souls health, for all S. Thomas shrine, for were it told to Truth
"I would not touch a farthing, a long time after. this is the way thither.
"He would love me less
"But if ye will to go right, all, men and women,

"Ye must go through meek- ness, all, men and women,
"Till ye come to Conscience-Love-first-our-Lord-God
"And-then-your-neighbour-next-and-as-you-would-
"Bend by a brook, Be-sweet-of-speech
"And find a ford
"Wade in the water,
"And ye shall leap the nimbler
"Then shalt thou see *Swear-not-save-it-be-for-need*
"Swear ye not idly
"Then shall ye come by a croft,
"It is called *Covet-not-mens-goods-or-wives-or-servants*.
"Break no branch there,
"Two stocks stand there,
"Strike forth by both

"Turn at a hill,
"It is closed in with florins
"Pluck no plant there

"Then shalt thou see *Say-sooth-

"Thou shalt come to a court
"The moat around is mercy,

"The walls of Wit
"The Creed its buttress,
"Halls and chambers
"The drawbridge of prayer,
"The door-hooks are of alms.

"The gatekeeper is Grace,
"Give him this token
"I HAVE PERFORMED MY PENANCE,
"AND SHALL BE WHEN I THINK ON THEM

"Bid Amendment ask his Lord
"To open and undo
"That Adam and Eve

By Eve the door was shut to all, and by the Virgin Mary
it again was opened.

*Honour-your-father*
wash you well there,
all your life after.

*Swear-not-save-it-be-for-need*
by the name of God Almighty.
enter not therein,
save it be thine own.

*Steal-not, Slay-not,*
and leave them on thy left.

*Bear-no-false-witness*
and many another fee:
on peril of thy soul.

*and-nothing-else-for-any-man.*
as bright as the sun,
the battlements of Christen-
dom,
to hold Lust out,
and all the house is roofed,
not with lead but with Love;
the pillars of penance,
his man is Amendment;

*TRUTH-KNOWS-SOOTH* 
*I AM SORRY FOR MY SINS,*

THOUGH I WERE A POPE.

to lift the wicket up
the high gate of heaven
against us all shut.
"A full loyal lady
She hath the key of the lock,
And may lead in whom she will

And if God grant thee
Thou shalt find Truth
In a chain of charity
But beware of Wrath,
For he curseth him
And poketh in pride
 Thy good deeds make thee bold,
Then shalt thou be driven forth,
Keyed and locked,
Haply a hundred winter
Think well of thyself

But there are seven sisters
Porters of the Posterns;
Humility, Charity, Chastity
Patience and Peace
Lady Almsgiving
She hath helped a thousand
Whoso is akin
Wondrous welcome is he
Who is not akin
It is full hard for you

By Christ," says a cut-purse,
"Nor I," says a monkey-man,
"God help me," says a cake-maker,
"No foot further would I go

"Yea," says Piers, "go ye on,"
"Mercy is a maiden there,
unlocked it by her grace,
 tho the king slept,
as her love pleaseth her.
to go in in this wise,
resting in thine heart,
as tho thou wert a child;
he is a wicked one,
that in thy heart is sealed,
to make thee praise thyself.
thine eyes are blinded,
and the door closed,
to keep thee out.
ere thou shalt enter;
and thou mayst lose his love.
ever serving Truth
one called Abstinence,
be the chief maidens there;
help many a one,
lets in full many;
from the devils pinfold;
to these sisters seven
and received well;
to some of them
to get entrance at the gate."

" no kin have I there,"
" for aught I know."
" if I knew this for true
for any friars sermon."
and pushed all the right way:
mightiest of them all;
"She is akin to all the sinful,  
"And through their help  
"Thou mayst get her grace

"Yea, I have bought a house,"  quoth one,  
"To see how it pleaseth me."  
Another needs must follow  
"And I must go at once  
"Therefore, I pray you, Piers,  
"Tell Truth I am excused."  
"And I have wedded a wife," says one,  
"Were I a sevennight from her sight  
"And lour on me and lightly chide  
"Therefore, Piers Plowman,  
"I cannot come for Kits sake,  

Quoth Contemplation,  
"Famine and trouble,  
"But the way is so bad  
"To follow us each foot

"By S. Paul," says a Pardoner,  
"I will go fetch my box of writing  
"By Christ," says a woman of the streets,  
"Thou shalt say I am sister of thine

(She looks round and sees they two are alone)

"I know not where they be gone."

"She and her son,  
—hope thou none other—  
if thou go but in time."

"and I must hie me thither  
He took his leave of Piers.  
five yoke of oxen,  
and drive them straight;  
if perchance ye meet him

" wanton in her ways,  
she would fall into sin,  
and say I love another;  
I pray thee tell Truth  
she cleaveth so to me."

" Though I suffer woe,  
I will follow Piers,  
unless we had a guide  
for dread of mis-turnings."

" perchance I am not known there;  
and my bishops letters."

" I will come in thy company;  

"I know not where they be gone."
THE VISION OF PIERS COUNSEL TO THE PILGRIMS OF TRUTH
Then says Perkin Plowman:
"I have half-an-acre to plough
Had I ploughed my half-acre
I would wend with you,

"That were a long waiting
time,"
"What should we women

"Some shall sew the sacks,
"And ye wives that have wool,
"And spin it speedily,
"Save it be holiday
"Look forth your linen,
"See the needy and the naked,
"Throw clothes upon them,
"For I shall give the poor a living
"For the Lords love in heaven,

"And ye lovely ladies,
"Take silk and sendal,
"Chasubles for chaplains

"Wives and widows,
"Make cloth, I counsel you,
"Conscience biddeth you
"For the profit of the poor
"And for all manner men
"Help them to work well,

"By S. Peter of Rome
by the high way;
and sown it afterward,
I would show you the way."

said a veiled lady,
work meanwhile?"

for fear the wheat be spilt,
work it fast,
spare not your fingers,
or a saints vigil.
labour ye hard on it,
take thought how they lie;
Truth would love that,
as long as I live
unless the land fail.

with your long fingers,
and sew while there be time
the churches to honour.

spin your flax and wool,
and teach your daughters so,
to make the cloth
and for pleasure to yourselves,
that live by meat and drink
who win your food for you."
"By Christ," says a gentleman,
"But on this theme truly
"But lead me," says he,
"I will help thee labour

"Surely, Sir Knight,
"And all my life
"If thou wilt keep
"From the wasters and the wicked
"Go thou and hunt
"The boars and badgers,
"And tame thy falcons
"That come to my croft Courteously the knight replied:
"By my power, Piers,
"To fulfil the covenant

"But yet one point," says Piers,
"Trouble not thy tenants,
"And though ye be right to fine
"And let meekness be your master
"And though the poor proffer you
"Take them not; perchance
"Thou shall pay it all again
"In the full perilous place

"Do no harm to thy bondman,
"He is here thine underling,
"He may be better set
"Save thou do work
Friend, go up higher.

"he teacheth us the best,
ever was I taught,
"and I will learn to plough while my life lasteth."

I shall toil for both of us,
will labour for love of thee,
my church and me

that would us destroy.
the hares and foxes,
that break my hedges down;
wild birds to kill,
and crop my wheat."

I plight thee my troth,
while I may stand."

"I ask thee more;
save Truth assenteth,
let mercy be your tax-master,
for all that Meed may do;
presents and gifts
ye do not them deserve:
at the years end,
named Purgatory.

that it be well with thee,
but it may hap in heaven
and happier too than thou,
and live as thou shouldst.
"At church and in the charnel vault
Or whether one be Queen or quean
Be thou true of thy tongue,
Save of wisdom and sense
Tales of kindness

Hold not with the loose storiers,
Avoid them at thy meat time.

"I assent," says the knight,

"And I," says Piers, "shall apparel me
And wend with you I will
I will cast clothes on me,
My stockings, my cuffs,
And hang my basket round my neck,
And a bushel of bread-corn within.
I will sow it myself,
On pilgrimage, as palmers do,
My ploughfoot shall my pike-staff be,
And help my hoe to cut
And all that help me plough and weed
Shall have leave by our Lord
And make merry with their winning,

And all kind of craftsmen
I will find them food
Saving Jack the Juggler,

churls be hard to tell
knight or knave.
and hate all tales,
to chasten thy workmen,
of battles or of Truth.
they are the devils talkers;
Dost thou understand?"

"while my life dureth."

in pilgrims wise,
till we find Truth,
mended and clouted,
for the cold of my nails,
by way of pilgrims scrip,
and then with you will wend
my pardon to win.
to pick the roots in two,
and cleanse the furrows.
to come and glean after me,
let him grudge who will.

that can live by Truth,
who live faithfully,—
and Janet of the Stews,
"And the ribald Robert
And Friar the beggar,
Truth told me once

They shall be blotted from the book of life.

No tithe shall be taken,

They shall not be written with the righteous.

And, ere I wend,

Now am I old and hoar,
On pilgrimage and in penance

They are in luck; they need not pay;

No tithe shall be taken,

God mend them.

I have goods of my own,

On pilgrimage and in penance

Will I pass with all these others

Will write my will and testament."

THE TESTAMENT OF PIERS PLOWMAN

"In the name of God, amen,

He shall have my soul,

And defend it from the Fiend,

Till I come to his account,

And gain forgiveness of my debts

On that remission I believe.

The Church shall have my body

Of my corn and of my substance;

I paid her readily,

She is bound, I hope,

And keep me in her memory

My wife shall have that I earned,

And share it with my friends,

Though I should die to-day,

I make this testament myself.

that all souls made,

for so is my faith,

as my Creed telleth me,

and remission of my sins;

and shall keep my bones,

I paid her my tithes,

for peril of my soul;

to bear me in mind,

with all Christian souls.

earned with truth and no more,

and my dear children.

my debts are paid;
"I bare back all I borrowed
"And with the residue,
"I will honour Truth with it
"For poor mens sake."

Now are Piers and the pilgrims
To plough his half-acre;
Ditchers and delvers
Thereat was Piers pleased
Others there were
Each man in his way
And some to please Perkin

At high prime Piers
And himself looked over all
He should be hired again

Some did their work thus;
And helped to plough the half-acre

"Now by the prince of
Paradise,"
"If ye rise not straightway
"No grain that groweth here
"Nay though ye die for dole

Then were idlers afeard,
Some crooked their legs beneath them,
And made their moan to Piers

"But, Piers; we will pray for you,
"That God in His grace
"And pay you back for all your alms
"We, we can neither toil nor
sweat,
ear I went home to bed,
by Chester Rood,
and be his pilgrim at the plough,
(The narration proceeds)
to the ploughing gone,
many a one helped him,
dug up the ridges,
and paid their full wages.
that worked full willingly,
found him work to do,
picked away the weeds.

let the plough stand
to see who best had wrought,
in harvest time.

they sat and sang and drank,
with, "Hey trolly lolly."

says Piers in his wrath,
and haste you to work,
shall gladden you at need,
—devil take him that cares."

and feigned them to be blind,
as such beggars can,
how that they could not work.

for you and for your plough,
will multiply your grain,
that you have given us here;
such sickness aileth us."
"If ye were good," says Piers, "But high Truth will have no tricks
"Ye be wastrels, I know well, "All that good land-tilling men
"But Truth shall teach you "Or barley bread shall be your food

"But if any be blind,
"He shall eat wheaten bread,
"Till God in his goodness

"But ye, ye could work as Truth would; ye could earn meat and drink,
"Keeping kine in the field,
"Ditching and delving,
"Helping to make mortar,

"In lechery, in lying,
"And only through sufferance
"Hermits and anchorites,
"They shall have of my alms
"And friars that flatter not,
"What! I and mine shall find them

"But Robert Gadabout
"Nor preachers, saving they can preach
"They shall have bread and pottage
"Religion is unreasonable

Then gan a wastrel rise in wrath
Threw down his glove,  
Bad Piers go with his plough

"Wilt thou or wilt thou not,  
"Of thy flour and of thy flesh,  
"Ay and make merry with it

Then Piers PLOWMAN  
To keep him as his covenant was

"Avenge me of these wastrels  
"There be no plenty in the land

Courteously the knight,  
Warned wastrels all

"Or thou shalt dear aby it,  
"I shall beat thee by the law  
"I was not wont to work," says Wastrel,

Made light of the law,  
Piers was worth a peascod,  
And threatened Piers and his men

"By my souls peril,"  
"I will repay you all

And shouted after Hunger,  
"Take vengeance on these wastrels,

Hunger came in haste,  
Wrung him by the womb,  

He buffeted the Breton man  
That he looked like a lantern  
He beat both the boys,

a Breton man, a braggart,  
for a cursed starveling.

we will have our will  
will take it when we please,  
for all thy grudging."

complained him to the knight,

from the wolfish wastrels:
that make the world so dear,

and the plough lieth still.”

as his manner was,  
and bad them do better:
by my knightly order,  
and bring thee to the stocks.”

" and I will not begin.”

set less by the knight,  
he and his plough,

when next they met.

says Piers PLOWMAN,  
for your proud words,”

(Hunger heard him soon),  

for the knight will not.”

took Wastrel by the mouth,  
brought water to his eyes.

about both his cheeks,  
all his life after.
he near burst their ribs.
Had not Piers with a pease loaf prayed Hunger cease
They had like been in their graves.
"Have mercy on them, Hunger,
"Suffer them to live,
"What was baked for my horses and let me boil them beans,
and let them eat with hogs;
shall be their food."

Idlers for fear of this fled into barns,
Flapped away with flails, from morning to evening,
That Hunger was not bold
to cast an eye on them
enough that Piers wife made them.
For a potful of peases took them spades,
A heap of hermits made them short coats,
Cut their copes away, to weed and mow,
Went out as workmen to drive Hunger away;
Digging and ditching;
Spaded, spread dung,
to drive Hunger away.

Blind and bedridden were healed by the thousand,
Lame men he cured with lungs of beasts;
They that lay broken legged, sitting to beg silver,
On soft warm Sundays by the high way,
Them Hunger healed with a red-hot cake.

Lame mens limbs were loosened and lithe;
They became servants to keep Piers beasts,
And prayed for charity to dwell with him,
For the sake of his bread to drive Hunger away.
For what was baked for the was food for the hungry,
horses to do Piers bidding.
And many a beggar ready to keep Piers beasts,
And every poor man well paid to dwell with him,
Ready as a sparrowhawk to drive Hunger away.

Piers was proud of that was food for the hungry,
Daubing and delving, to take pease for his hire,
Gave them meat and money to do Piers bidding.
Then had Piers pity and put them all to work,
as they might deserve;
on all poor people,
The Vision of Piers Counsel

And bade Hunger in haste Home to his own place "I am well avenged," says he, hie out of the land, and keep him ever there, "on wastrels through thy power, ere thou wend with bidders and beggars ill will they work. for now they be so weak, this folk is at my will. but for fear of famine. for all their fair speeches, God bought us all. to love each one of them after their need. what were the best, and make them work."

"and hold my words for wisdom, that well can work with horse bread and hounds bread, bid them to work when they have earned it. that ill fortune hath harmed, try such to know; for Christs love in heaven, Gods law teacheth so. in mischief and disease, —let God take vengeance—
"Though they have evil done—let God alone for that—Vengeance is mine, and I will repay.
"And if thou wilt be dear to God
"Make thee loved among the lowly
Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness.
"God I would not grieve," said Piers, "for all the gold in earth, and yet sinless be?"

"Yea, I bid thee," says Hunger, "or else the Bible lieth, the father of us all.”
"Go to Genesis the beginning
With swynk and swot
Toil thou and travel
"And Wisdom saith the same I saw it in the Bible.
The sluggard would not plough for sloth; he shall beg in winter and it shall not be given him.

"Matthew with a mans face tells of one that lent,
"To three manner of men to traffick with, to profit by,
"And he that best laboured was best allowed,
"And for his labouring was lord of his lords goods,
"The wicked servant had a talent but as he would not work
talent ever more after.

"Nothing had he of his master
Common sense wills that every wight should work
"In ditching or in digging, in teaching or in prayer,
"Life active or life contemplative.
"The man that feedeth himself in faithful labour
"He is blessed by the Book in body and in soul.”
"By Christ,” quoth Piers the Plowman, For thou shalt eat the labour of thy bands, etcetera.
"these sentences will I show
"To the beggars and the boys
"But yet I pray you of your charity
"Teach it me, my dear,
"Work not for a whole week

"Ye have eaten over much,"
quoth Hunger,"
"I bid thee drink no day
"And eat not I bid thee
"And send thee his sauce
"Keep some till supper time,
"Arise ere appetite

"Let not Lord Surfeit
"For he is lecherous
"And after many kinds of meat

"Dives for his delicate life
"And Lazarus the lean.
"(And yet he gat them not,
"Yet, since, I saw him sit,
"In all manner of ease,
"And if thou be a man of power,
"To all that cry at thy gate
"Give them of thy bread,
"Give them of thy loaf,

"And though liars and latch-lifters
"Let them bide till the board
"But bear no crumbs to them,
"Till thy needy neighbours
"If thus thou diet thee
"Physick shall sell his furred hood

that are so loth to work;
if ye know any leechcraft,
for some of my servants
so much our body acheth."

"that maketh you groan.
erе thou have somewhat eaten,
erе hunger take thee;
to taste with thy lips.
sit not too long,
hath gotten his fill.

sit down at thy table,
and of lickerish tongue,
he is an-hungerd still.

to the devil went,
that longèd for the crumbs,
for I, Hunger, killed him),
as he a Lord were,
in Abrahams lap;
Piers, I counsel thee,
for food for love of God,
thy pottage and thy sauce,
yea, though thou have less to chew,

and lollers go on knocking
be put aside,

have made their meal.
I will wager both mine ears
to get him food withal,
"And shall pawn for his dinner
And be fain to let his physick
go
"For many doctors be mur-derers
"And men die through their drinks

"By S. Paul," quoth Piers,
"Wend thy way when thou wilt
"This is a lovely lesson,

"I will not hence," says Hunger,

Says Piers "I have no penny
"No, neither goose nor pig,
"A few curds, a little cream,
"And two loaves of beans and bran
"And, by my soul, I say
"No nor a cookboy
"But I have parsley, cabbage, leeks
"And a mare to draw the dung asfield
"And on this living we must live
"By then I hope to have
"Then may I do thee thy dinner
But all the poor people
Their beans and baken apples,
Onions and salads,
And prepared Piers this present
his Italian cloak,
and labour with his hands;
(God mend them)
er e destiny would have it."

"thou pointest nigh the truth, and be it well with thee;
Lord grant thee recompence."

"ere I have dined and drunk."

pullets for to buy, but only two green cheeses, and a haver-cake, baked for my little ones; I have no salt bacon, collops to make, and a cow and a calf, while the drought lasteth;
till Lammas time, harvest in my croft, as I fain would do."

 fetched their peascods, they brought them in their laps, and many ripe cherries, to please Hunger withal.
The Vision of Piers Counsel

Hunger ate it all in haste,
Then poor people for fear
With pease and green onions,
and asked for more,
fed Hunger gladly;
they thought to poison him.

By this it came near harvest
time,
Then folk were fain
With good ale as Glutton bad,
new corn was in the market,
feed Hunger with the best,
and made Hunger go sleep.

Then would not the wastrels
work
but wandered about,
Nor would beggars eat
bread with beans in it,
But stamped bread, fine bread,
clean wheaten bread;
They would no halfpenny ale,
but of the best and brownest.

Labourers with no land
Deigned not to dine
but only their hands work
De no penny a gallon did for them
on day-old vegetables;
But pork, fish or fresh flesh,
nor a piece of bacon,
And that chaud, plus chaud,
fried or baked,
And but he has high wages
for the chill of their maw.
And bewail the day
else will he chide,
Curses the king with a will,
he ever became a working
That make such laws
man;
And but he has high wages
and all his Parliament,
And bewail the day
to keep the labourer down.
Curses the king with a will,
else will he chide,
That make such laws
none then would chide,
And but he has high wages
so stern did Hunger look.
And bewail the day
earn while ye can,
Curses the king with a will
hitherward again;
That make such laws
to chasten the wastrel,
And but he has high wages
famine shall arise.
And bewail the day
So saith Saturn
WHEN YE SEE THE SUN
AMISS,
AND A MAIDEN BE QUEEN,

THE PLAGUE SHALL GO
AWAY HOME,
AND DAN THE DITCHER
SAVE GOD IN HIS GOOD-
NESS

and sent me to warn you

AND TWO MONKS HEADS,
THEN MULTIPLY BY
EIGHT,

DEARTH SHALL BE JUDGE,
SHALL DIE FOR HUNGER,

GRANT US A TRUCE.
THE VISION

OF

GODS BULL OF PARDON
THE VISION OF GODS BULL OF PARDON

Truth heard tell of all
And bid him take his team
And brought him a Pardon,
For Piers and for Piers heirs
"Bide thou at home," said
Truth,
And all that should help Piers
Or do aught else,
To them Truth granted;

Kings and knights
Who rule the people
They have Pardon too,
And fellowship in paradise

And consecrated bishops,
If they preach to the people

And, if they can, amend
And dread no lords,
And are bitter on bad men,
And fear not to put down,
Lechery among lords
They are one with the apostles;

And they sit on the high thrones

And merchants—in the margin

he sent to Piers
and till the earth
Pardon and forgiveness,
for evermore.

"and plough thy field;"
to set or sow
Pardon perpetual
PARDON,—WITH PIERS.

that Holy Church defend,
in their realms righteously,
light purgatory,
with patriarchs and prophets.

if their lives be holy,
to love God and their neighbour,
all sinful souls,
and are mild to the good,
unless they repent,
as far as they may,
and their evil ways,
PIERS PARDON PROVES IT,
at the Judgment Day.

—had many a year remitted,
But no full pardon
And why? They keep not holy days
They swear, "By my soul, God help me it is so,"
and their clean consciences defile.

But under secret seal
"Buy your goods boldly,
"And sell when ye will,
"But use ye your winnings
"To maintain the scholar,
"To dower girls
"To build the broken bridge,
"To help the monks,
"And I will send you
"And never a fiend shall frighten you
"For I will save you
"And bring your souls in safety

Truth sent them a letter:
buy when ye will,
and take your winnings,
to rebuild almshouses,
to help the stricken,
or make them nuns,
and mend the bad road,
and make rents reasonable,
Michael my archangel,
or harm you at your death;
from all despair,
to my saints in joy."

and wept for gladness,
for the Pardon he had gotten.

Lawyers should take pains to plead
And princes and bishops
Thou shalt not take gifts upon the innocent.

for the innocent and help them
should pay the lawyers fee.

But many a magistrate,
Will do more for John
But a lawyer that spendeth his speech

and many a jury,
than for Gods love,

and speaketh for the poor
The Vision of Gods Bull of Pardon

The innocent and needy poor
Who comforteth the poor
And declareth law
No devil on hi' deathbed
The Psalter beareth witness,
Lord, who shall dwell...

For who would buy or sell
These four our Heavenly Father

Treasuries of Truth
And never shall they wax or wane

Ye who plead for the poor
Ye lawyers, ye advocates,
When ye draw near to death,
Your pardon at your parting hence
S. Matthew bids me tell you this

Whatev'rye would that men should do to you, do ye also unto them.

But for all that labour for their lives,
Fair work, fair wages,
These have the Pardon perpetual

Tramps and beggars,

Except their beggary be true,
Else they be false as hell,
And beguile the giver,
Would give to the poor indeed
Cato knoweth these men well

See to whom thou givest.

that never hath harmed any, and taketh no fee, for our Lords love, shall have him a whit, he and his soul are safe.

water, wind, or wit, or fire, gave to his sheep for common use, the true to help, save by Gods will.

and take money at their hands, be sure of this; and pray for pardon, will be but small;

and if I lie blame him.

and their plea fair, and they defraud the needy, who, if he knew the truth, and help the neediest of all.

nay, their names are not there, and the master of stories
And again
Keep thine alms in thine hand and watch to whom thou givest

But yet Gregory the good bad us give to all
To all that ask for Him that gave us all.
Choose not whom thou shalt pity.

Ye know not who is worthy, God knoweth who hath need;
The treason is in him that if treason be,
taketh, and the beggar borroweth,
For the giver giveth, their surety is almighty God,
Beggars are ever borrowers, —and their interest—
Who giveth to them that gave their interest is almighty God,
Why didst thou not give my and their interest—
money to the bank . . . ?

Beg not, beggars, save ye have great need,
Whoso hath money to buy him bread,
he hath enough.

The neediest are our neighbours if we give heed to them,
Prisoners in the dungeon, the poor in the cottage,
Charged with a crew of children and with a landlords rent.
What they win by their spinning
Milk and meal, to make their porridge with,
The babes that continually to satisfy the babes,—
This they must spend on the rent of their houses,
Ay and themselves suffer with hunger,
With woe in winter rising a-nights,
In the narrow room to rock the cradle,
Carding, combing, clouting, rubbing, winding, peeling
washing,
rushes.
Pitiful is it to read the cottage-womens woe,
Ay and many another that puts a good face on it,
Ashamed to beg, ashamed to let neighbours
know
All that they need,  
Many the children,  
To clothe and feed them;  
And many mouths

noontide and evening.  
and nought but a mans hands  
and few pennies come in,  
to eat the pennies up.

Bread and thin ale  
Cold flesh and cold fish  
A farthings worth of mussels,  
Were a feast for them  
It were charity to help these  
To comfort the cottager,

for them are a banquet,  
are like roast venison,  
a farthings worth of cockles  
on Friday or fast-days,  
that be at heavy charges,  
the crooked and the blind.

But for beggars with their bags,  
Save they be blind or broken,  
Reck not, ye rich,  
For every man that hath his health,  
If he useth a lollers life

whose churches are the taverns,  
or else sick,  
but let such wastrels starve;

Yet are there other beggars,  
But they want wit,  
Lunatic lollers,  
Mad as the moon changes,  
Caring for neither cold nor heat,

in health enow,  
men and women,  
leaping around,  
witless, moneyless,

As Peter and Paul wandered  
But many a time prophesying,  
Yet since God is strong enough

wandering walkers,  
yet preaching not,  
to please themselves it seems,

To give to each man  
And lets them go, these lunatics,  
His apostles,  
He sent them silverless,  
With neither bread nor baggage.

wit, wealth and health,  
they are, I think,  
his private disciples;  
in summer raiment clad,

Barefoot go these disciples,  
If they meet the mayor  
They reverence him not,  
Such men we should have home,

begging of men,  
amidst the street,  
o, no more than another.

and help them when they come.
They are merry singers,
Gods boys, jesters,
If any man is seen to be wise let him be made a fool that be he wise.

It is the way of the rich
For the lords and ladies sake
Men suffer all they say
Ay and give them gifts and gold,
Right so, ye rich,
Gods minstrels, Gods messengers
These lunatic lollers
For under Gods secret seal

They carry no bags,
They are not like the lollers
Slyly lurking
Hoping to sit at eventide
Uncross their legs
Resting them, roasting them,
Drinking to the last drop,
And when they will and please,
And, when they rise, roam out,
Where they may get a breakfast,
Silver or sod meat
A loaf, half a loaf,
And home they carry it
And live in idleness
Every fellow of their flock
Bag at his back,
And yet knows some kind of craft,
Could get him bread and ale
And yet lives like a loller

heavens minstrels, as the Bible saith;

It to keep all manner of minstrels, in whose house they stay, and take it in good part,
ered they go thence, ye should welcome and honour
and Gods merry jesters.

and Gods merry jesters. that leap around you
hidden are their sins.

They hide no bottles, and the hermits false,
to catch mens alms.
by the house fire, and lie at their ease,
turning round to the fire, slowly turning to bed, in morning to arise,
and easily espy

first a round of bacon, and sometimes both,
a lump of cheese, to their hovels
while others work.
that wanders about, beggar-fashion,

which, if he would, and a suit of raiment —Gods law damns him.
"Lollers living in sloth,
Are not in my Pardon
The Book blameth all beggary,
I have been young and now am old yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken or his seed begging their bread.

It needeth none
And tell these lollers
It blameth all beggars,
They live in no love,
They wed no women
They bring forth bastards,
They break a child's back,
And go a-begging with infants
There are more mis-shapen
Than in all other trades

They that live this life
In penance or in prayer.

But old white-headed men,
And women with child,
The blind, the bed-ridden,
And all poor sufferers,
Lepers and the truly poor,
Prisoners, pilgrims,
Men slandered on the sly
Men brought to poverty
Who take their mischief meekly,
For their humility
Penance and purgatory
And A PARDON WITH PIERS,
And all holy hermits

But hermits that dwell
And in inns among brewers,
Seeking all that holy hermits
Such as riches, reverence,
(These lollers and latchlifters
Now, naturally, by Christ,
For by English of elders
He that lolleth is lame,
Is maimed in some member,
Even so truly
Loll against the Creed
Where see ye them on Sundays
As at mattins in the morning
Or labouring for their living
But at midday mealtime
Coming in a cope,
And for the cloth upon him
He washeth and wipeth
When he worked in this world
He sat at the side-bench
No wine came then his way
Nor blanket on his bed
The cause of all this caitiffry
Who suffer such sloth

"Piers," quoth a priest then,
"I will construe each clause
   for thee"

Piers at his prayer
And I stood behind them
   both
All in two lines it lay,
They that have done good shall go to life eternal
But they that have done evil to everlasting fire

"In sooth," says the priest then,
"Only—'Do well and fare well—
hate and despise,
and rich mens alms,
covet it all)
be such called lollers,
and old mens teaching
his leg out of joint,
it meaneth some mischief;
such manner of hermits
and the Law of Holy Church.
the service to hear,
till mass begin?
as the law would?
I meet with them oft,
as if they clergy were,
he is called Friar;
and sitteth with the best.
and won his meat honestly,
and at the second table;
through the long week,
nor white bread before him.
cometh from many bishops
and other sins to reign.

"thy Pardon I must read,
and teach it thee in English."

unfolded his Pardon,
and beheld all the bull,
not a letter more.

"I can see no Pardon here,
and—God shall save thy soul—
The Vision of Gods Bull of Pardon

— 'Do evil and fare evil—
— 'Hope for nought else—
And Piers for pure anger.
And, says he,

If I walk in the midst of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for Thou art with me.

"I shall cease my sowing," quoth Piers, "and work not so hard, about by belly and its joys, though I eat no wheaten bread, in penance and in sorrow, as the psalter saith, his living is simple.

My tears have been my meat day and night.

"And Luke teacheth us by the fowls of the air, not to be too busy about the worlds bliss, how to teach ourselves; who finds them meat in winter? God findeth for them all."

"What," quoth the priest, "thou art learned then.
"Who taught thee, Perkyn, to read thy book?"

"Abbess Abstinence," says taught me a.b.c. Piers, and taught me much more."

"Conscience followed," thou mightest preach anywhere, "Wert thou only a priest, and for thy text Piers, "Doctor of Divinity The fool hath said."

"Ignorant loon," says Piers, "little lookest thou on thy Bible, "Seldom hast thou beheld King Solomons saws"

Cast out the scorners and bis scornings with him.
The priest and Piers
I through their words awoke,
And saw the sun in the south
Meatless and moneyless,
I mused upon this dream,

Many a time hath this dream
For love of PIERS PLOWMAN
And for his Pardon,
And how the priest reviled it with
But I have no care of dreams;
Cato and Church lawyers
Care not for dreams.
Yet the Bible, the Book,
How Daniel divined
To Nebuchadnezzar,
And Daniel said, "Sir king,
"Strange knights shall come
"And among humbler lords
"And as he divined
"The king lost his lordship,

"Ay, and Joseph dreamed
"And the eleven stars
"Then Jacob judged him:
"'In famine we all

So befel it
Joseph was justice
As his father had said,
All this maketh me think
Many a time at midnight
I think on PIERS THE PLOWMAN
And how the priest attacked it
But I deem that Do-well

jangled of the Pardon,
and waited about,
sinking at even.
on Malvern Hills,
and went upon my way.

made me to study,
pensive in my heart,
for the comfort of all people,
"The fool hath said—"
oft I see them fail,
bid us to leave them.
it beareth witness,
for a king his dream,
so named by the learned;
the dream is this;
and cleave thy kingdom,
thy land be parted;"
it fell out indeed
and humbler men took it.
— the sun and moon
bowed all to him,—
'Beau fils,' quoth he,
shall seek thee in our need.'

in Pharaohs time,
and governed Egypt,
his friends sought Joseph.
somewhat of dreams,
when men should sleep,
and the Pardon that he had,
and reasoned it away,
had need of no indulgence,
Nor of pardon for two years, pardon for three years,
Or Bishops letters.
Do-well at Doomsday is worthily received
And doth without any pardon
The pope hath no power
For men without penance
This is a leaf out of my creed

**Whatever thou shalt bind on earth...**

And so I believe with fealty,
That pardon and penance
Souls that have sinned
But for your three-years pardon,
It is not so certain for a soul

Therefore, I counsel you,
Who trust for your treasure

Be ye not bold enough

And specially, ye masters,
Ye that have the world's wealth,
When ye purchase pardon,
At the dreadful Doomsday,
And all come before Christ
How did we lead our lives,
How did we day by day,
Though ye be a Brother
Though ye have a pocket full,
And Doublefold Indulgences,
Your patents and your pardons

Therefore I counsel Christian souls,
And Mary his mother
That God give us grace,

Cry God mercy
to be our go-between
ere we go hence,
Such works to work, while we be here,
That after our death day Do-well may say
At the day of doom, we did as he taught.
    Amen.

Here endeth Williams Vision of Piers Plowman.

(A brief abstract follows of the books not fully transcribed.)
THE VISIONS OF DO-WELL, DO-BETTER AND DO-BEST
THE VISIONS OF DO-WELL,
DO-BETTER AND DO-BEST

DO-WELL

Thus robed in russet
All a summer season
And oft I asked
Where Do-well was
Never wight as I went
Till on a Friday
For they be men
Through countries, courts,
Princes palaces,
And know Do-well—and Do-evil.

I roamed about,
Do-well to seek,
the folk I met
and what man he might be.
could tell me where,
two Friars I saw;
that walk most widely
and many kinds of places,
and poor mens cots,

"Among us," quoth they,
"And ever hath been

"Nay," said I, "man sins
"Therefore he is not alway
"He is elsewhere now and then

seven times a day,
among you Friars,
and teacheth the people."

"My son," said the Friar,
"How the good man sinneth

"I shall soon show thee
seven times a day.

"Set a man in a boat
"The wind and the water
"Make him stumble, if he stand
"Through steering the boat
"Yet is he safe and sound

on a broad water;
and boat wagging
never so stiffly;
he bendeth and boweth,
so is it with the righteous;
"Though he fall he falleth not,
And he is safe and sound.
Thus is it with men;
Goods are the great waves,
The boat is our body;
And thro' the fiend and the flesh
The just man sinneth
But deadly sin he doth not,
He strengtheneth man to stand
And though thy body bow
Yet is thy soul safe."

"Nay I cannot understand
But if I live and look about me
"Christ keep thee," quoth he;
"And give you grace
Thus I went wide-where,
In a wide wilderness,
Bliss of the birds song
And on a lawn under a linden
To listen to their lays,
The mirth of their mouths
And mid that bliss

—he is in the boat—
the water is the world,
wallowing about,
and the frail world
seven times a day.
Do-well him guardeth,
and steereth his soul,
as boat doth in the water,
all your wise words,
I shall go learn better."

"Christ keep thee," quoth he;
"And give you grace
walking alone,
by a wood side.
made me abide there,
I leaned awhile
their lovely notes;
made me to sleep,
I dreamed—marvellously."

Thought came and gave me over to Wit to tell me where dwelt Do-well. And Wit told me, "In a castle near, watched by Sense, and the Castles name is Flesh;" and Wit spoke much to me on the foolishness of man. But Wits wife came, named Study, lean of body, and wondrous wroth with him. Quoth she,
"Wise art thou, Wit,
"To fools or flatterers

wisdom to tell
or frantic folk."
She blamed him, she banned him,
"Cast not your pearls to hogs;
"Wisdom and Wit now
"Save when carded with covetise
"Whoso can contrive deceit,
"Lead a merry meeting
"His counsel is called for."

It was so in Jobs time, it is so to-day, said she. They that preach the truth are little cared for. You find men arguing of Christ, arguing of the Trinity, drivelling about the Deity when their belly is full.

"But the careful cry" and call at their gates,
"Hungry, thirsty," chilly quaking,
"None calls him nearer" his woes to amend,
"They shoo him off as a hound" and bid him go,
"God is not in that house" nor His help neither.

"The learned talk of God," and His name is on their lips
"But the poor have Him in their heart.

"God is deaf now-a-days" and deigneth not hear us,
"And prayers have no power" the Plague to stay,
"Yet the wretches of this world" take no heed of it,
"Nor for dread of death" withdraw them from pride,
"Nor share their plenty with the poor;" they glut themselves with wealth,
"But in gaiety, in gluttony" wealth and riches,
"And the more they win," the less they part with.

"And lord it over lands,"

"Hast thou much, spend generously;" so says the Book,
"Whoso hath little spend as he may.
"We have no warrant of our lives
"These lessons, lords
"And not to fare
"From one feast to another
"And hate abiding at home;
"Miserable is the hall

"Now have the rich a rule
"In a private parlour
"Because of the poor in the hall."

Thus Study railed at her husband and at me.

And when Wit was ware
He was dumb as death
And smiled and louted
In sign I should

"Mercy," said I, "madame,
"To work your will
"Tell me what is Do-well."

"For thy meekness, man,
"I will send thee to my cousins

"Give Clergy this sign;
"And greet his wife Scripture,
"Logic I taught her,
"Grammar for boys
"And would they learn not
"I made tools
"For carpenters, carvers,
"Taught them level and line,
"But Theology wearied me
"The more I muse thereon

how long they be,
should love to hear,
like fiddlers or Friars
at other mens houses
where lord and lady will not sit;
to eat by themselves,
or in a chamber with a chimney
what the dame said,
and drew him back,
and looked at Study,
hers grace beseech.
your man I am,
while my life lasteth.
and thy mild speech, Clergy and Scripture.

I set him to school
I taught her all,
music I taught her,
I bad men write,
I beat them with a broom;
for every craft,
and the compass for masons;
though now I look blind.
ten score times,
the mistier it seemeth."
Then I thanked her and went on my way to Learning (Clergy) and got his words. He told me Do-well was to believe the articles of the faith; but his talk was long.

"This is a long lesson," quoth I, "and little am I the wiser, where Do-well or Do-better is; taught by Theology, and my name entered long ere I was born, for some wickedness of mine."

But, I said, I find the unexpected in heaven and the builders of holy church in danger of being lost, as were the carpenters of Noahs ark who never got inside.

"On Good Friday I find a felon was saved, with lying and with theft."
"That all his life had lived and shrove him to Christ than S. John the Baptist or any of the Prophets."
"Yet for he repented him many long years;"
"He was sooner saved rather than they to perpetual bliss."
"Or he repented him or than Adam or Isaiah"
"That had lain with Lucifer many long years;"
"He was sooner saved rather than they to perpetual bliss."
"Or than Adam or Isaiah"
"That had lain with Lucifer many long years;"
"A robber was ransomed rather than they to perpetual bliss."
"Without purgatory penance"

"Then, Mary Magdalen, what woman lived worse?"
"Who worse than David that Uriah destroyed,"
"Or Paul the Apostle that had no pity;"
"The doughtiest doctor Augustine the old"
"Said thus in a sermon, I saw it once,"

Lo, very idiots seize heaven, and we wise are plunged in hell.

"None sooner ravished from the right creed"
"Than cunning clerks that con most books,"
"None sooner saved, none surer in creed,"
"Than plowmen, shepherds, and poor common people,"
"Cobblers and labourers, land-tilling folk,"
"Pierce with a prayer the palace of heaven."
"Ye men know clerks that curse the day
"That ever they learnt more than this,
I believe in God the Father.

Then Scripture scorned me and gave reasons,
And blamed me—in Latin and set light by me,
And I wept for woe and wrath at her speech
And in a winking I was brought away.

I met then with Fortune and, with her, two damsels, Lust of the Eyes and Lust of the Flesh and Recklessness, who praised poverty to me;

"Although it be sore to suffer there cometh sweet after,
"As without a walnut is a bitter bark,
"And after that, the shell being gone,
"Is a kernel of comfort; so is it with poverty.

"It maketh man have mind on God and his mercy crave,
"And safer he sleepeth, the man that is poor,
"And dreadeth death less, or the thief in the dark,
"Than the right rich man—reason beareth witness—
I am poor and play and thou art rich and art heavy.

"Lo, lo, lords, lo, and ladies, take heed,
"Not so long doth it last, your liquor sweet,
"As peascods and pears, as cherries and plums,
"Worldly wealth is a wicked thing to them that keep it."

He went on to speak to me of Abraham and Job—both poor men once; and told me of the merchant and the messenger. No one stayeth the messenger upon his message (even though he go through the standing corn), for it is urgent and he is but poor; but the merchant is stayed and pays money on his goods and is in fear of robbery to boot;

"Ye wit well, ye wise, what this meaneth,
"The merchants are the rich, to Christ accountable,
"They must hold the high way and the ten Commandments out of their riches, and Christ is their toll-taker;"
"And have pity and help men
"Tithe their goods truly
"Bear ye one anothers burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Then after Recklessness had spoken, Nature came near and complained that all animals excepting man follow Reason, and I saw it was so;

I bowed my body, beholding all about me,
Saw sun and sea, and the sand of the shore,
Where birds and beasts with their mates wandered,
Wild serpents in the woods and wonderful birds,
Flecked with many a coloured feather;
Man and his mate,
Poverty and plenty,
And I saw all beasts following Reason,
In eating and drinking and gendering their kind;
Man and his mate alone were Reason-less.
Birds I beheld making nests in the bushes,
I wondered from whom and where the pie learnt
To lay the sticks that lie in her nest,
Hiding and covering in mire and in water
In marshes on moors "Dear God," said I,
Divers dived. changing my mood,
"Where gat these wild things following Reason,
But that which most moved me "so widely thou reignest
Was that I saw all beasts man and his mate?"
Save man and mankind; and keep not measure,
"Wherefore," said I, in dress and in women,
"Dost thou not rule and only they—none other."
"None surfeit as he does "Reck thou never
"In meat and in drink, "Who suffereth more than
"They overdo it day and night God?"
But Reason reasoned me;
"Why I suffer or suffer not.
"Who suffereth more than
God?"
"No man, by my life,
"He might amend in a minute all that is amiss, "But He suffereth to show us that we should all suffer."

Then I saw one near me called Imagination. He rebuked me for my ignorance and for my presumption in that I thought I knew how God ruled the world of man and bird and beast. Nature understandeth more than man. Man knoweth little; no, he knoweth not why Adam ate the apple, nor why the homely lark is sweeter than the rich peacock, nor whether Saracens shall come to heaven, where the pagan Trajan is. "Hadst thou held thy tongue," said he, "thou hadst been wise."

And therewith I awaked all but witless, And forth gan walk in mendicant wise, And my dreams I pondered. at my most need, Fortune had failed me that all my power should Age had threatened me vanish, Friars had shown me they followed the rich, And no corpse in their kirkyard would they bury, If he had not bequeathed them to quit their debts, And Nature had told me his love for beasts, And Imagination had spoken and vanished.

And I lay down and slept again. Then came Conscience to comfort me, And bad me come to his court with Learning to dine. There saw I a master, his name I knew not, That louted low to Scripture, and Conscience knew him, They washed and wiped and went to dinner, But Patience in the palace in pilgrims clothes, stood And prayed for meat for as he a palmer were, charity, Like to PIERS PLOWMAN.

The master was made sit as one that was most worthy
And Learning and Conscience and Patience—came after.
Patience and I were put to be mates
At a side-table.

They served us with simple food; but the master and his man on the high dais would eat nothing but the daintiest food, the sins of men.

Patience was proud
And made mirth at his meat
For the doctor on the dais
He ate sundry meats,
Wild boar and tripe,
Then said I to myself,
"Tis not four days since,
"This fellow preached
"Why, this Gods glutton
"Hath no pity on us poor;
"What he preacheth he liveth not;"
That the dishes and the plates
And Mahomet the devil with them.
But I sat still as Patience bad
Rubbed his cheeks
"What is Do-well, Sir Doctor,
"Do-well," quoth the doctor,
"Do thy neighbour no harm,
"By this day, Sir Doctor,
"Ye have harmed us two,
"Minces and other meat,
"I would change my penance with yours."

"Now, Learning," said Con-
science, "tell us what is Do-well."
"I have seven sons," said he,
"Where liveth the lord of Life
Till I see those seven
For one PIERS PLOWMAN
And set all sciences at naught
And no text he taketh
But these two,
Love God and thy neighbour.
Lord who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle, etc.
And saith that Do-well and
Do-better
And they imperfects, with faith,
And he shall save mens souls,

Conscience then with Patience went,
And Patience in his pocket
Sobriety and simple-speech
To care for him and Conscience,
Where are Unkindness and Covetise,
pilgrims as it were,
took victuals pilgrim-wise,
and true-belief,
if they came anywhere
two hungry countries,

As we went on talking we met a minstrel and we asked him of his craft. He was, he said, a waferer and his name Active Life. "I am hater of idleness," says he, "I am no singer or fiddler, jester or dancer. From Michaelmas to Michaelmas I sell my wafers: all London knows me.

"They grumble when my cakes come not to town,
"With baked bread from Stratford.
"When the commons were full of care
"In the date of our drought
"One thousand three hundred
"My cakes were scarce

'Tis not long since
and workmen were aghast,
in a dry April,
twice thirty and ten
when Chichester was mayor."

I looked at him. His coat was Christian, it is true; but full...
of spots; a spot of pride, a spot of rough speech, of scorn, of careless bearing, boasting and bragging; he belonged to an order of hermits and he the only person in the order; he was religious without rule and blamed all men. "By Christ, Hankyn," said Conscience, "thy coat must be washed." "Ay," said he, "it has many stains."

And Hankyn asked and Patience told him of Poverty and of Riches, and of the nine blessings of Poverty; and Poverty avoideth the Seven Deadly Sins. "It is," said Patience, "a hateful blessing, it judges none (for it is too poor to be made a judge); it is wealth without calumny; it is the gift of God; it is mother of health; it is a road of peace; it is a well of wisdom; it is business without loss; and it is happiness without care."

When Hankyn heard this he wept and wailed and with that I waked.
DO-BETTER

But after my waking
Ere I could know Do-well;
And some blamed my life
And set me for a lazy wretch
Lords or ladies,
Or persons in fine fur
I never once said
And never louted low
Till Reason had ruth on me

it was wondrous long
and all my wits waned,
and few allowed it,
that would not reverence
or any others lives,
with pendants of silver;
"God save you, lords,"
and men held me a fool,
and rocked me to sleep.

Then I met with Free Will and he told me of Charity, the
beautiful story of Charity.

"Charity," quoth I,
"I have lived in London
"I have lived in land,
"Yet never found I Charity
"Never saw I a man,
"But would ask for his own,
"Things that he needed not
"Clerks tell me that Christ
"But never saw I Him truly

"Where may that be found?
many long years,
my name is Long Will,
before or behind,
so God help me,
and other times covet
and take them if he could.
is in all places,
save in a mirror;"

NOW darkly, then face to face.

"He is proud of a penny
"As glad of a gown
"As of a Tartar tunic
"Glad with the glad,
"Sorry when he seeth men sorry
"When one sweareth 'tis true
"He weeneth no man
"Nor any guile or grieve his fellow.
"All sickness and sorrow
"And all manner mischief

as of a pound of gold,
made of grey russet,
or of dyed scarlet;
good to all wicked,
even as children are.
for truth he trusteth it,
would swear and lie
he taketh as solace,
as ministry from heaven;
"Of death and of dearth
"Nor wept though he lost
"That never paid penny
"Hath he rents or riches
"Of rents and of riches
"A friend he hath that finds him
"Thy will be done
"He can write Paternoster
"And often his wont is
"Where lie poor men and prisoners
"Tho he bear them no bread
"He loveth them
"And when he is weary
"Labour in a laundry
"Run back to his youth
"To his pride and its purtenance
"And wash it clean
"And then singeth he at the washing
An humble and a contrite heart Lord thou wilt not despise.
"By Christ I would I knew him
"Without help of Piers Plowman
"Do not clerks know him
"Clerks have no knowledge
"But Piers the Plowman
God seeth their thoughts.
adread he was never, or lent to the man in the place when he borrowed."
or any rich friends?"
recketh he never,
and fails him never.
feeds him evermore.
and paint it with Aves, to wend in pilgrimage,
his pardon to have.
his help is sweeter,
and looketh how they fare.
then will he often for half an hour,
and roundly will speak
and pack it together, with his eyes warm water,
and often weepeth
By Christ I would I knew him
"Without help of Piers Plowman
"Do not clerks know him
"Clerks have no knowledge
"But Piers the Plowman
God seeth their thoughts.
"For there be proud-hearted men
"And sweet in their bearing
"But to the poor
"And look as a lion
"And there are beggars
"Looking like lambs
"But all to have their meat
"Not for penance or perfectness
"Therefore not by colour,
"Nor by words nor by works
"But by Piers Plowman

"I have seen him in silk
"In grey and in fur
"And gladly he gave it
"Edmund and Edward
"Each was a saint
"I have seen him singing
"But in rich robes
"With cap and oiled hair
"And cleanly clothed
"In a Friars frock
"In Saint Francis time

patient of tongue,
to lords and to burgesses,
they have pepper in the nose,
when men blame their deeds.
bidders and bedesmen,
and seeming life-holy,
with such an easy face;
do they follow poverty.
no nor by learning,
shalt thou know Charity,
and that is CHRIST.

I have seen him in russet,
and in gilt armour,
to men that it needed,
each was a king,
and theirs too was Charity.
in ragged weeds,
often he walketh
and his crown shaven,
in black and Tartar silk.
one was he found
—but it is long ago."

Then Free Will told me of the lives of the hermits, the lives of the Saints and of the bringing of heathen England to Christ; of the life of Mahomet and of the days of Constantine when lands and rents and lordships were first showered upon the church, and when from heaven came the angels voice condemning the gifts to the churches;

This gift to-day hath poison drunk
And those that have S. Peters power are poisoned all.

And he went on to tell of Christ's miracles and how Saracens may yet be saved.
Pharisees and Saracens, 
Are folk of one faith 
And since they know

I believe in God the Father Almighty

Prelates of provinces
Little by little

And in Jesus Christ His Son
Till they could speak and spell the third,
And in the Holy Ghost,
And say it and set it down with

the remission of sins, the resurrection of the dead and the
life everlasting.

Then I met with PIERS PLOWMAN and he showed me the
tree of Charity and the three props of it to keep it from the
World, the Flesh, and the Devil: and he went on to tell me the
story of the Cross.

And I awaked therewith and wiped mine eyes,
And after PIERS PLOWMAN I looked and stared,
Eastward and westward I watched well,
And went forth as a fool in the lands to espy
After PIERS PLOWMAN.

And anon I saw Abraham with Lazarus and he told me his
story; and I met the Good Samaritan going to a tournament
at Jerusalem and heard of his help to the man upon the Jericho
Road when Hope and Faith fled away and would not help.
And he talked with me; but at the last,

"I may no longer stay," said he, and pricked his grey steed
And went away like the wind.

(Here follows the Harrowing of Hell fully transcribed.)
THE VISION OF THE TRIUMPH OF PIERS PLOWMAN
AND OF THE HARROWING OF HELL

WOE-WEARY, wetshod,
Like a reckless man
Like a beggar went I,
Till I waxed weary of this
  world
I rested me till Lent came,
I dreamed of maidens singing

And old folk sang Hosanna to the organs.

One like the Good Samaritan,
Came barefoot, bootless,
Riding on an ass'se back,
Like one that cometh to be dubbed knight,
To get him his gilt spurs

Faith sat in a window high,
As a herald crieth when the
  adventurous
And Jews sang for joy.
Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord.

Then I asked Faith
And who should fight the
tourney
“Jesus,” says he, “and he
  shall fetch
“PIERS PLOWMANS FRUIT.”

went I forth afterwards,
that recketh not of sorrow,
all the days of my life,
and wished that I could sleep.
and long time I slept.
“GLORY LAUD AND
  HONOUR”

Jesus,” says he, “and he
shall fetch
what the Fiend claimeth
in Jerusalem.
what might this to-do all mean,
"Is Piers then in this place?" said I, and Faith stared upon me:
"This Jesus of his nobility for love hath undertaken,
"Not to be known as Perfect but in Piers Plowman's arms
to joust,
"His helmet and his breast-—the nature of mankind.
plate
"In Piers plate-armor
"No dinting blow shall harm him." this armed knight shall ride,

"And who shall joust with Shall the scribes? the Jews?"
Jesus? False Judgment, Death.

"Nay, but the Fiend,
"Death saith he will bring down and spoil
"All that liveth and lurketh,
"Life saith he lieth,
"That for all that Death can
do
"Jesus from the Fiend shall fetch
"And put them where he will
"And beat and burn for ever-
more
Death, I will be the death of thee.

Then came Pilate and much people
To see how doughtily Death should do

The Jews and justices And all the court cried loud on him

Then stood out a robber And the court cried loud on him
"This Jesus jested at our temple,
and sat upon the judgment-seat,
and to judge betwixt them twain.
were against Jesus,
"Crucify."

before Pilate and said:
he would destroy it in a day,
"And build it in three days again,
"Build it as long and large,
"As broad as e'er it was.

"Crucify him," cries a catch-pole,
"Away, away," says another,
And began to make a garland
And set it sore upon his head.
"Ave, Rabbi," quoth the ribald,
And nailed him with nails
And set poison on a pole
And bid him drink his death draught; "Your day is done.
"And if thou subtle be,
"If thou be Christ,
"Come adown from this rood,
"We will believe Life loveth thee

"It is finished," quoth Christ,
Piteous and pale

The Lord of life and light
The day for dread withdrew,
The temple-wall wagged and clave
The hard rock was riven,
The earth shook and quaked,
And from their deep graves came the dead,
And told why that tempest

"Life and Death in this darkness
"And none shall know in very truth

here he stands that said it,
as high and deep,
We all can witness it."

"I warrant he is a witch,"
and took keen thorns
out of a green tree,

and shot reeds in his eyes,
all naked on the rood,
and put it to his lips

and began to swoon,
as a prisoner that dieth.

laid his eyes together.

and dark became the sun,
and all the world quivered,
right dark night it seemed,
as though life it had,

for so long time endured.

are fighting one the other,
who shall have the mastery,
“Till Sunday about dawn.”
Some said he was Gods son
Some said, “He knoweth sorcery,
“Ere he be taken down

Two thieves suffered on the cross
Quickly came a catchpole
And their arms after
But nobody was so bold
For he was Knight and Kings son
That none should be so hardy

But then came forth a blind knight
Longc. was his name,
And before Pilate and the rest
And whether he would or no
All they that waited
To touch him or to handle him

But this blind Bachelor
The blood sprang down his spear
Then fell he on his knees
“Against my will it was,” says he,
He sighed and said:
“The deed that I have done;
“My lands, my body,
“And have mercy on me, righteous Jesu,”

Then gan Faith fouilly
And called them cursed caitiffs:

With that they sank to earth, that had so beautifully died;
and well is it to try
if he be dead or no.”

beside him at that time,
and cracked their legs a-two,
of either of these thieves,
to touch Gods body,

—Nature would have it thus,
to lay a hand upon him.

with keen-ground spear,
his sight had he long lost,
he stood and waited,
they made him strike at Jesus,
were not bold enough
or take him down and grave him;
thrust him through the heart.

and opened the knights eyes.
and cried, “Jesu, mercy,

“I wounded thee so sore.”
“Sorely it troubleth me
I put me in thy hands,
take all at thy will,

and with that he wept.

the false Jews to despise,
“This was vile villainy,
"Vengeance on you all,
"One that is dead;
"Cursed caitiffs,
"With any bright weapon
"Yet for all his grievous wounds
"For your champion chevalier,
"Yields himself vanquished in the tilt,
"And when this darkness is past by
"And ye lordings have lost the day
"Your freedom shall be thraldom;
"Them shall ye never
"But ye shall be barren men,
"The life which our Lord God
"Now are your good days done,
"When Christ overcame

When the Holy of Holies cease.

All for fear of this
I moved me in that darkness

Then saw I walking from the west
Mercy her name, mild and kind,
Her sister comely and clean
Truth was her name and strong
And when these maidens met,
Each asked the other
Of the darkness and the din
And of the light and gleam

that made blind man beat ’tis a boys deed.
it was never knighthood, to strike a body bound;
hath Jesus won the prize, chief knight of you all, and is at Jesus will.
Death will be vanquished,
for Life shall have the mastery,
your children shall be churls, make lords of land to till it, ye shall live by usury, in all your laws forbade.
as David told of you, your kingdom should depart.”

and of the false Jews towards Hell where He had gone.

a maiden looking hell-ward,
a maiden lovely in speech, softly walking from the east, is the power that went with her.
Mercy and Truth, of the great wonder, and of the dawning light, which lay before Hell gate.
"I marvel at this," said Truth, "and go to know its meaning."
"Marvel not," saith Mercy, "it meaneth mirth.
A maid named Mary, mother immaculate,
Conceived and was with child
And without childbirth taint
And since this child was born
He died and suffered
That is the cause of this eclipse
Meaning that man shall be
While this light and gleam thou seest

"Patriarchs and prophets
The thing that through a tree was lost
And that which death brought down to hell

That thou tellest," says Truth,
"For Adam, Eve and Abraham,
All that lie in pain,

Or have them out of hell?
It is but trifling talk;
The thing that once was in hell
Job, the perfect patriarch,
In hell is no redemption.

Through what I have learnt," says Mercy, "I hope they shall be saved;
Venom cureth venom,
And Adam and Eve
Of all biting venoms for that I have proof,
the vilest is the scorpions;
"No medicine may amend
"Till he be dead and put upon
"The first poison,
"So shall this Death destroy,
"All that Death did first
"And even as thro’ guile
"So shall Grace that began all things
"And beguile Guile
Art shall deceive art.

"Stay," said Truth,
"From out the nipping north,
"Righteousness running;
"He knoweth more than we,

"That is Truth," quoth Mercy,
"Peace comes playing
"Love hath long coveted her;
"He hath sent her some letter
"That thus hangeth over Hell,

When Peace in patience clad
Righteousness saluted her
And prayed Peace tell
In her gay garments

"My will is to wend," says she,
"Adam and Eve
"Moses and many more
"And I shall dance and thou,
"For Jesus jousted well
At morning time there shall be joy.

"Love, my dear one,
"That my sister Mercy and I
"And that God hath forgiven

the place where he stingeth, the spot; and then he destroyeth through power of himself,
I dare lay my life,
thro’ the devils enticements;
man was beguiled,
make a good end,
and that is good cunning."

"I see, methinketh,
not far from hence,
rest we a while,
of old he was before us."

"and I see from the south
and in patience clothed.
nay, I believe,
to say what this light meaneth,
and she shall tell us all."

approached the two,
in her rich clothing,
to what place she wended
and whom she thought to greet.

"and welcome them all,
and many more in hell,
shall sing the Song of Mary,
sister, shalt dance to it,
and joy beginneth to dawn.

such letters sent me,
mankind should save,
and granted to all mankind,
"That Mercy and I
"Christ hath changed
"To fear and pity,

"Lo here the patent and the token

In peace I shall sleep and take rest.

"Ravest thou," saith Righteousness,
"Believeth thou yon light
"And save mans soul?

"At the beginning
"Adam and Eve,
"Should die downright
"If they touched the tree
"And Adam afterwards,
"Ate of the fruit
"The loyal love of our Lord
"And followed the teaching of the Fiend
"Against reason I, Righteousness,
"Their pain is perpetual,
"Let them chew as they chose
"It is a bootless bale,

"And I shall pray," says Peace,
"Their woe change into weal.
"Had they known no woe
"No wight knoweth weal
"No man knoweth hunger
"Who could by nature
"If all the world were swan-white;
"Who could tell clearly

shall go bail for all.
the nature of righteousness
of his pure grace.

that the deed shall endure."

"or art thou right drunk?
may unlock hell,
Sister, believe it never.

God gave the doom himself
and their issue all,
and dwell in pain eternal,
and of its fruit did eat,
against the warning,
and, as it were, forsook
and his teaching,

and the will of his flesh.

remember this in truth;
no prayers may them help,
and let us not chide,
the bit which they once ate."

"their pain may have an end
they had not known their weal.
that never suffered woe;
that never felt want;
tell me what colour is,

and if no night were
what means the day?
"Had God never suffered
Never had He clearly known
at other hands than his
if death were sour or sweet.

"So God that made all
And suffered himself
became man of a maiden,
Death that unknitteth every
care
To know what weal was.
For till famine come on us
Therfore God of his goodness
and is the beginning of rest;
"In solace and in sovran mirth,
one knoweth what is enough.
"And then suffered him to sin,
set the first man Adam
to feel sorrow,
To know what all woe is
and took Adams nature
So shall it fare with this
and endless joy;
folk;
Shall teach them what love is
when peace reigneth,
"For no wight knoweth what
'well-a-day' teach him.'
war is

There was one there
with two broad eyes,
Father Book was his name
a bold man of speech;
"By Gods body," says this
'I will bear witness
Book,
there blazed a star,
"When this child was born
in one word agreed
"That all the wise of this
a child was born
world
and sin destroy.
"That in Bethlehem city
bare witness unto that.
"To save mans soul
that he was God Almighty,
"And all the elements
took a star-comet,
"The welkin first showed
to reverence his birth,
"Those that were in heaven
to the earth below.
"And lighted it as a torch
That light followed the Lord
"The water witnessed he was God,
"Peter the apostle
"And as he went upon the water
Lord, bid me come to Thee upon the waters.

"Lo, how the sun gan lock
"When she saw him suffer death
"Lo, the earth for sorrow
"Quaked like a quick thing
"Hell could not hold,
"And let out Simeons sons

He shall not see death...

"Now shall Lucifer believe it tho loth he be,
"For Jesus, like a giant, cometh yonder with an engine
"To beat and break down all that be against him
"And to have out all he will.
"I, Father Book, will be burnt,
"And comfort all his kinsmen if Jesus rise not unto life,
"And disjoin and destroy and bring them out of care,
"And save they reverence his resurrection the joy of all the Jews,
"And on a new law believe and honour the Rood
"Stay we," said Truth they shall be lost life and soul."
"Speaking to hell."

Lift up your gates.
And in the Light a voice cried loud to Lucifer;
"Ye Princes of this palace; unpin, unlock the gates;
"Here cometh unto his crown the King of all glory."

Then sighed Satan and said: Lazarus once fetched,
"Such a light against our will
“Cold care and trouble
If this king come in to us
And lead them all where
Lazarus is
Patriarchs and prophets
That such a lord and such a light

Rise up, Ragamuffin,
That Belial thy grandfather
And I shall stay this lord
Ere through brightness we be blinded,
Check him and chain all up,
That no light may leap in,
Ashtaroth, cry thou loud,
Colting and all his kin,
Cast upon their heads
Brimstone burning, boiling.
Set bows with levers,
Shoot out shot enough
Set Mahomet at the catapults
With crooks and calthrops

Listen,” quoth Lucifer,
Both this lord and this light
No death can harm him,
And where he will he takes his way
If he rob me of my right
For by right and reason
Be mine body and soul
For he himself hath said,
Adam and Eve and all their sons
If that they touched the tree
Thus this Lord of Light allowed.

is come upon us all.
mankind he will fetch too
and lightly will he bind me.
have spoken of this thing
shall lead them all hence.
and bring us all the bars
and thy dam hammered out, and stop his light,
bar we our gates.
and each chink stop,
at loover or at loophole;
and have out all our knaves, and save all we own;
who come anigh the walls
and brazen guns,
their squadrons to blind;
and hurl millstones on them, harass them all.”

“I know this lord well,
long time I have known them,
nor no devils craft,
but beware him of the peril.
he robbeth me by strength,
the men that be in hell
good and evil;
who is the father of hell,
should die and dwell with us for ever,
or took an apple of the fruit,
"And, since he be so true a lord,
"We have been possessed of them
"Never was word against it said,
"He were a traitor to his word

"That is true," saith Satan,
"For we gat these men with guile,
"Against his love, against his leave
"Not in fiendly fashion
"And sat up in the apple-tree,

"And we promised her and him
"As the gods do, as God himself,
With treason and with treachery
"And made them break obedience
"Thus gat we them as ours

"Yet where guile is at the root
"And God will not be guiled,
"We have no true title to them;
"Therefore I dread me,
"As thou didst cheat Gods image
"So hath he cheated us

"Thirty winters hath he come
I ween he will not rob us;
seven thousand winters;
and if he now began
—and he, the Witness of Truth."

"but I sore doubt me
and we his garden entered
and went upon his land,
but in a serpents form,
and egged Eve to eat.

that after they should know
both good and ill,
we deceived them both,
through our false behest;
and brought them hither at the last;
what is gotten is ill gotten."
says Goblin, "nor be tricked;
though our treasures they were judged,
lest Truth will fetch them.
in going like a snake,
in coming like a Man.
"And gone about and preached,"
"I have assailed him with sin;
"Short answer made he me."
"And when I saw that it was so,
"What kind of man he was
"I would have lengthened his life;
"And his soul came hitherward
"This body, while it went alive,
"To teach men to be true
"The which life and custom
"He will undo us devils

"And now I see his soul,
"With glory and great light;
"I counsel that we flee,
"It were better not to be
"Through thy lies, O Lucifer,
"And out of heaven hither
"We believed in thy lies,
"And now, for thy last lying,
"We have lost our lordship
Now shall the prince of this world be cast forth.

(The writer speaks)
As Satan rebuked Lucifer
I believe our Lord
And requite them the wretchedness
Be ye ware, ye wise clerks,
Ye deceive not the simple;
What is the liars end;
Thou shalt destroy all that speak lying.
A little have I overleapt,
And have not said what I saw

says the fiend Goblin.
I have asked if he be God,
I warned Pilates wife,
for the Jews hated him.
I knew that if he died
he would despoil us all.
ever it went about
and each to love the other,
he used long.
and bring us all down.
sailing hitherwards,
'tis God, I know well;
flee fast all of us,
than abide in his sight.
we first lost our joy,
thy pride made us to fall;
and thus we lost our bliss,
we have lost Adam,
on water and in hell."

then for his lying
will rebuke liars here,
that on earth is wrought.
ye witty men of law,
David witnesseth
because of lying,
and followed my story.
When Light bad unlock the gates,
“What lord art thou?” says
Lucifer.
“The Lord of Might and Main,
“Thou duke of this dim place,
“That Christ may enter in

With that word hell brake
For aught that any wight could
do,
Wide the gates opened.
The people that sat in darkness
Behold, the Lamb of God.
Lucifer could not look up,
And those whom our Lord had
loved
“Lo, I am here,” saith He,
“For all sinful souls,

“Mine were they; of me they
came;
“Although reason may re-
member,
“That, if they ate the apple,
“I declared for them no hell for
ever.
“The deadly sin they did
“With guile thou gainedst
them,
“For in my palace Paradise,
“Falsely thou fetchedst thence
“Thou like a lizard with a ladys face
“Trappedst them, beguiledst
them,
“Against my love, against my leave;
“The old law teacheth

And a voice said aloud,
that made all things,
anon undo thy gates,
the Kings Son of heaven.”

and all Belials bars,

or porter of the gate.
Patriarchs and prophets
sang with S. John

the light so blinded him,

with that light departed forth;
“life and soul both
to save the rights of them and
me;

I may the better claim them;

and my own right too,
all should die,
by thy deceit was done;

against all reason,
in form of an adder,

things that I loved.

breaking my garden through,

beguilers are beguiled,
"And in their cunning fall;
"And whoso hitteth out mans eye
Eye for eye, tooth for tooth.

"So life shall be lost
"Life for a life,
"Soul for a soul,
"Adam and his issue
the same pain shall he have.

"I, that am lord of life,
"And, for that drink to-day, I died.
"I will drink of no ditch,
"But from the Common Cups
when life hath taken life.
the old Law asketh so,
and by that Law I claim it,
at my will for evermore.

"I fought so for mans sake
love is my drink,

3 thirst.
"No nectar and no cyder
of no deep knowledge,
"Shall moisten me,
—all Christian souls—
"Until the vintage fall
and deep hell thy bowl.
that yet,
"And I drink ripe wine,

And have out of Hell

and no costly drink
or slake my thirst,

"But thy drink is death,
in the valley of Josaphat,
I fought so for mans sake
the resurrection of the dead.
that yet,
then shall I as king

I, that am lord of life,

3 thirst.

"But from the Common Cups
come with angels and with crowns,
"But thy drink is death,
all mens souls.
I, that am lord of life,

"I, that am lord of life,

3 thirst.

But from the Common Cups
the old Law asketh so,
I fought so for mans sake

love is my drink,

3 thirst.

"But thy drink is death,
that yet,

I, that am lord of life,

3 thirst.

"But thy drink is death,
that yet,

"I, that am lord of life,

3 thirst.

"But thy drink is death,
that yet,
"Law willeth that the king
give life
" I that am king of kings
" Where the death-doom
"And if Law will I look on them
"Whether they die or do not die
" And if their sins be bold
" Though Holy Writ will I be avenged

No evil deed unpunished, etcetera.
" They shall be cleansed clearly
" In my prison purgatory
" For blood may see blood
" But blood may not see blood bleed
" But my righteousness and my right shall reign in Hell,
" And mercy and mankind

" I were an unkind king
" At such a time of need.

Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, O Lord.

" Thus, by right of Law,
" All that loved me
" But, for the lie, Lucifer,
" Thou shalt abide it bitterly" (quoth God), and bound him with chains.

Astrot and all others
They durst not look upon our Lord
But let him lead forth what he list
And many hundred angels

The flesh sinmeth, the flesh redeemeth, the flesh reigneth,
God of God.

Then piped Peace
" After sharpest showers,

if the felon look on him.
shall come at such a time
condemneth all the wicked,
it lieth in my grace,
did they never so ill;
I may do mercy,
on them that did ill.

and washed from all their sins,
till pardon suffer it.
a-hungered and a-cold,
without ruth and pity.
shall stand before me in heaven;
if I helped not my kin

I lead away hence
and believed in my coming;
that thou didst lie to Eve,
hid themselves in darkness,
the least of them all,
and leave them whom he would,
harped and sang;
a note of poetry and sang;
most shining is the sun;
"There is no warmer weather than after watery clouds, nor is love sweeter, nor are friends dearer, than after war and wrack when Love and Peace have gotten the victory. "War never was in this world, nor wicked envy, "Which Love if he would could not to laughter bring, "And Peace through patience all perils end." "A truce," quoth Truth, "thou tellest truth, "Embrace we in covenant of it; each of us kiss the other;"

"And let no people," quoth Peace, "see that we chide
"For nothing is impossible to him that is almighty."

"Thou sayest sooth," says Righteousness, and kissed Peace reverently
And Peace kissed her world without end. 
Mercy and truth have met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.

Truth then trumpeted and sang;
We praise Thee, O God.
And Love luted in a loud note;
See how good and joyful a thing it is ... 
Till the day dawned these damsels danced,
And men rang in the resurrection morning.

With that I woke and called to Kitty my wife
And to Kalot my daughter and said:
"Arise, do reverence to Gods resurrection,
"Creep on your knees to the cross and kiss it for a jewel,
"And the most righteous relic, none richer on the earth,
"For for our redemption it bare Gods blessed body,
"And so great is its power it frighteneth every fiend,
"That where its shadow falls no grisly ghost may glide."

(An abstract of the concluding books follows.)
DO-BEST

Thus I waked and wrote
And dight me ready
To hear the mass
In midst of the mass
I fell soon asleep
That Piers the Plowman
And came in with a cross
Like in all his limbs
And then I called Conscience
"Is this Jesus the Jouster"
"Or is it Piers Plowman?"
And Conscience kneeled,
"His colours, his coat-armour,
"It is Christ with his Cross
all I had dreamed,
and went me to church,
and be houlsed after.
when men went to offering,
and suddenly—a dream,
was painted all bloody
before the common people,
to our Lord Jesu,
to tell me the truth;
that the Jews did to death,
who painted him so red?"
"These be Piers arms,
but He that cometh so bloody
conqueror of Christendom."

Then Conscience told me of Christ's resurrection and how He
gave his power to Piers Plowman, and anon departed into
heaven and sent the Holy Ghost to Piers and to his fellows and
gave them many gifts, the four gospels and the four fathers,
Austin, Ambrose, Gregory and Jerome, and four seeds; and Piers
sowed them all, cardinal virtues, Prudence and Temperance and
Justice and Bravery.

Then came Pride and gathered his host together against
Piers and against Grace and against Conscience and all Chris-
tians, and sent out Spill-love mounted on his horse Speak-ill-
behind. And Piers and his people gathered to Fort Unity and
dug a trench about it, and Conscience called Piers army to the
sacrament.

"Come," cries Conscience,
"Ye that laboured loyally
"Here is bread blessèd
"Christians and dine
all this Lent time
and Gods body there-under."
"How," quoth the common men,
"All that we owe
That is my counsel,
Then be forgiven,

"Yea, baw," cries a brewer,
"By fear, for all your jangling
Nor follow Conscience
Dregs and draff
Thick ale and thin ale,
Not to toil after holiness."

"I am a curate of the church,"
"Never man told me
I never knew Cardinal
And we parsons pay for them,
And the robbers that ride with them.

"Therefore," says this vicar,
"No Cardinal should come
Let them and their holiness
With the Jews at Avignon."
With the holy thou shalt be holy.
"Or in Rome as their rule bids
to keep relics there.

"And thou Conscience, thy place

"And Grace that thou pratest of

"And Piers with his new plough
"Should be Emperor of all the world
"Imperfect is the Pope

"and must we needs pay ere we go to housling?"
each forgive other, and then—the altar."

"I will not be ruled with your spirit of justice, while I can sell and draw it at one tap that is my trade
cries a fool vicar, of cardinal virtues, that came not from the Pope, their furs and their palfreys, them.

" by very God, I would among the common people, hold them still

is in the Kings courts should guide all clerks

and eke with his old and make it all Christian, that should all people help,
"And sendeth men to slay
And God bless Piers Plowman
As well for wastrels
As for his servants and himself
And travaileth and tilleth
As for a true tidy man
As for the commons
The counsel of Conscience

Then out laughed a lord,
"I hold it right and reason
All that my auditors
Counsel me by their books
With the spirit of understanding
With the spirit of bravery

Then there came a king
"I am king
"And holy church and learning
And if me lacketh aught
Where soonest I find it.
"And what I take of you
"Of the spirit of justice,
"I may be safely housled

"In condition," quoth Conscience
"And rule thy realm in reason
"Then shalt thou have thine asking."

All is thine to defend, but not thine to rob.
The vicars home was far off
And I awaked

Then for the last time I went upon my way and I met Need. He reviled me for meekly listening when the lord and the king
had spoken so boldly. "Couldst thou not excuse thyself?" says he. "The king steals, the lord steals; and thy need, thy necessity may well steal too. Need hath no Law."

He sinneth not
And if he seeth a cloth
Need anon taketh it
And if he list to drink
He should drink at any ditch
So Need at greed need
Without counsel of Conscience
Save the spirit of temperance.
Wise men forsook wealth
And dwelt in deserts
And God all his great joy
And came and took mankind
in him
Both fox and fowl
Fishes have fins
Need hath taken hold on me
And suffer sorrows sour.
Be not abashed
Since He that wrought all the
world
Never a one so needy

that winneth his food thus,
and can make no better bargain
and keepeth it for surety.
the law of nature would
ere he for thirst died;
may take as for his own
or any cardinal virtues
for they would be needy,
and would not be rich,
spiritually left
and became needy;
may flee to holes and creep,
to fleet therewith to rest,
and I must needs stay
to beg and to be needy,
was willingly needy,
nor none died so poor.

THE VISION OF ANTICHRIST

When Need left me
And dreamed marvellously
Antichrist came,
Turned upside down
And made the false spring and
spread
In every country where he
came
And made guile grow there

anon I fell asleep
that in mans form
and all the crop of truth
and overset the root
increasing mens needs.
he cut truth away,
as though he were God.
Friars followed that fiend
Convents reverenced him
And all the house came forth
To welcome his, to welcome
him,
And they would rather die than
live
Antichrist had thus soon
Pride bare it boldly

"I counsel you," says Con-
cience,
"Into the Fort of Unity
"Cry we to Nature
"From the hurts of the fiend
"Cry we to all the commons
"And there abide and fight

Nature heard Conscience
And sent forth his foragers,
Coughs and heart-catches
Rheums and red eyes
Boils and botches
Frenzies and foul ills
Pricked and preyed
That a legion lost their lives.
"Harrow and help," they cried,
"With dreadful Death
The lecherous lord
To a knight called Comfort
"To arms," cried Comfort,
Then met the battle
Or heralds of arms

Old Age hoary
Bare the banner before Death,
for he gave them copes,
and rang their bells,
to welcome the tyrant
save fools alone,
since loyalty was blamed.
hundreds at his banner,
and a lecherous lord.

"come with me, ye fools,
and hold we us there,
to come and defend us
for love of PIERS PLOW-
MAN.
to come into Unity
against Belials children."
and from the planets came,
fevers and fluxes,
cramps and toothaches,
and running scabs,
and burning ague,
the foragers of Nature,
on peoples heads

"here cometh Nature
to undo us all."
then cried aloud
to bear his banner.
"each keep his own life."
ere minstrels could pipe
had named the knights.
went in the vanward,
by right he claimed it;
Nature came after
Pocks and pestilence,
Death drove down after him
Kings and Knights,
Learned and foolish,
Whom he hit straight
Many a lovely lady,
Swooned and died

with many keen sores,
and slew much people;
and pushed all to dust,
Kaisers and Popes,
let no man stand,
never stirred after;
many a knights leman
for sorrow of Deaths dints.

Nature besought
and see if they would
and be perfect Christian;
to see the people mend.

Conscience of his courtesy
To cease and suffer them
Leave Pride privily
And Nature ceased

the few that lived,
and sent out Lechery
unwedded and wedded,
all against Conscience.
with a laughing face,
and painted word,
and in high looks,
and many broad arrows,
and many a false truth,
troubled full oft
of holy church the teachers.

Fortune gan flatter
Long life he promised them
Among all manner men
And gathered a great host
Lechery did his will
With privy speech
Armed him in idleness
A bow he bare in hand
Feathered with fair promise
And his untidy tales
Conscience and his company

Then came Covetise
Overcome Conscience
Armed him in avarice
His weapons all wiles
And with glosing and with gabbing
Simony sent him
To hold with Antichrist
And bid them come
Made Good Faith flee
And boldly brought down

casting how he might
and the cardinal virtues,
and lived hungerly,
to win and to hide,
he guiled the people.
to preach to the prelates
and save their stipends
to Court to Conscience
and Falsehood stay,
with many a bright bribe
The Vision of Antichrist

The wit and wisdom of Westminster Hall; Rode at a judge and tilted at his ear And overset his truth with "Take-this-and-help-us;" Then to the Court of Arches and turned Law to Simony, And with a miniver mantle bribed its officers, Matrimony went his way ere death departed them And devised divorce.

"A," cried Conscience, "would Covetise were Chris-

"So keen a fighter tian,

Then laughed Life so bold and biding."
And armed him in haste and slashed his clothes, Held Holiness for a jest in ribald words, And Loyalty a churl and Kindness for a spend- thrift, Conscience and Counsel and Liar a gentleman, Thus Life boasted he counted it folly. And pricked forth with Pride when things seemed better, Cared not how many Nature and praised no virtue, slew And kill all earthly creatures who at the last shall come And kindled a jest save Conscience alone.

Life leapt aside and caught a leman to him, "Health and I," cried he, "and an high heart "Shall keep thee from dread of Death or Eld, "We will forget sorrow and care naught for sin."
This pleased Life and Fortune his leman, And they gloried and begat a gadding at last, One that wrought much woe, —Sloth was his name— And Sloth waxed wondrously and soon was of age, And wedded Wanhope a wench from a brothel; Her sire was a juryman that never swore true, One Tommy Two-tongues tainted in every court,
Then Sloth spied war
And threw dread of despair
And Conscience cried on Eld
Bad him fight for the right

Then Eld took heart
And waved away Wanhope
And Life fled away
Besought him succour
Gave gold, good measure
The doctors gave him
Life believed that leechcraft
And with drinks and drugs

Sloth with his sling
Proud priests came with him
With cloaks and pointed shoes
They came on Conscience,
"By Mary," quoth a cursed priest
"I count Conscience not a whit
"No not so much as

So said sixty
And shot their shots against us,
Broad-hooked arrows

And almost brought down Holiness and Unity.

Then came the Friars to help Conscience; but they knew not how to fight. Yet Need pleaded for them and at last Conscience smiled and took them in to the Castle of Unity.

"Keep you in Unity,
"Learned or simple
"I will be your surety
"If ye leave Logic

and made a sling ready
twelve mile around him,
and frighten Despair.

and was hastily shriven
and fought with Life,
to Physic for help,
and used his salves,
that gladdened his heart
a glass house to live in.
should stay the steps of Eld
drive away Death.

an hard assault he made,
more than a thousand,
and long blades dangling;
they fought for Covetise,
(was of the Irish border),
if so be I get silver,
a draught of good ale."

of the same country,
many a sheaf of oaths,
"By-Gods-heart, by-Gods-nails,"

and envy none,
but live by your rule
for your bread and for your clothes
and learn instead to Love."
The Vision of Antichrist

Conscience held him
And made Peace porter
All tale tellers
Hypocrisy and envy
Conscience called a leech
Salve those that sick be
Shrift shaped sharp salve
"Pay that thou owest."

Some liked not this leech
"Was any surgeon in the fort
Love-to-live-in-Lechery
He had fasted on a Friday
"One Friar Flattery," says he,

"We have no need," says Conscience,
"Parson or parish priest,
"Than one Piers Plowman
"Yet will I suffer
"Friar Flattery be fetched

Friar Flattery heard of it,
To a lord for a letter
As though he were curate,
Boldly to the bishop
Came there where Conscience was
Peace unpinned it,
And in haste asked him

"Ifaith," quoth this Friar,
"For his profit and health,
"He is sick," quoth Peace,
"Hypocrisy hath hurt them,
in holy church Unity,
to pin the gates;
and idle titterers,
an hard assault made;
that well could shrive,
and by sin wounded;
and made men do penance,

and sent up letters
with softer plasters?"
lay there and groaned,
and fared as he would die,
"is surgeon and physician."

"I wot no better leech
penitencier or bishop,
that ruleth them all.
since ye desire it
to physic all you sick."

hied him fast
to have leave to cure
and came with his letters
and gat his brief;
and knocked at the gate,
porter of Fort Unity,
what was his wish.

"I would talk with Contrition
for this I came hither."

"and many another,
hardly will they recover."
"But I am surgeon,
"I pray thee then," saith Peace,
"Who art thou then?
"Certes," says he,
"Yea, go thy gate," says Peace,
"I knew one like thee
"Came in a cope
"Was my lords leech
"This preacher salved the women,
"Till some were with child."

But Kind-speech bid Peace open the gates,
"Let in the Friar;
"Life by his teaching he may here see
"And dread Death leave all Covetise
"And be at one with Conscience."

"Thou art welcome," quoth Conscience, "canst heal the sick?
"Here is Contrition my cousin, wounded,
"Comfort him and care for his sores
"The parsons plaster biteth him deep,
"He left it on him overlong, from one Lent to another."

"I shall amend it," said the Preacher, and gave him a plaster
And goes and grips Contrition and to one he says,
Made of a private payment; and for all your friends,
"I shall pray for you Sister of an Order,
To another, "I shall make you for a little silver."
"At mass and mattins, my lady,
Thus he goeth and gathered and flattereth when he gold,
Till Contrition clean forgot
to cry and weep,
And lie awake for his wicked
as once he was wont,
deeds
that is the sovran salve,
And Contrition left contrition
And took his comfort from the Friar.
that is the sovran salve,

Conscience cried aloud
and bad Learning help him
And called upon Contrition
to help and keep the gate;
Saith Peace, "He lieth and
and so doth many another;"
dreameth
this folk hath enchanted,
"The Friar with his physic
they dread no sin."
" And plastered them so

" By Christ," quoth Conscience, "I will become a pilgrim
pleasantly
as the world lasteth
" And walk as wide
"To seek—PIERS PLOWMAN."

"To seek—PIERS PLOWMAN."

(Here endeth PIERs PLOWMAN.)
COMMENT
COMMENT

Comfort the poor, protect and shelter the weak, and with all thy might right that which is wrong. Then shall the Lord love thee and God Himself shall be thy great reward.—Attributed to King Alfred.

Every literature has its dreamers. It is so simple to sit down, fall asleep, and then assail your enemies and support yourself by dreaming your opinions. If any objection be taken, well, it was a dream. Plato dreamed his beautiful myths; the wonderful relation of Er at the close of the Republic was but the dream of one who had been dead; the moody tinker of Bedford dreamed the Pilgrims Progress; Roman literature has its Somnium Scipionis; Chaucer dreamed Scipios dream again in the Parlement of Foules; Dantes vision was but a vision when sleep came on him in the wood; the whole of the Faerie Queene may be said to be a dream. The dream is as common to poet and prose writer as is the invisible cap or the impossible task to the folk and fairy lorist.

It must be admitted at the outset that some dreams—whatever the machinery may be for their production—are artistic, finished, jointed, logical. We recall them in the morning; beyond their incongruity, their horror or their fun, we can find no fault with them. Indeed we are amazed at their cleverness. All is in order; every incident proceeds from what has gone before; they are admirably prepared; and good dreamers will certainly support and believe R. L. Stevensons statement that the dreaming brain can make excellent plots. The well-known essay on Dreams gives, apparently in good faith, an illustration of this, and Stevensons dream-plot, if unmarketable, is, at least, most striking.

But other dreams, literary or no, are as confused as the welter of waves on a rocky shore. You make out the general movement, but no more. New waves are continually breaking from all sides; and it is to this order of dream that the vision of Piers Plowman belongs. As I said in the Preface, the general scheme is clear; but the detailed pictures are inconsistent, detached, and in some instances apparently useless for the main purpose.
The writer is always falling asleep; half-way through the book he is dead and buried; the vision finishes and begins again; the end is no end; the Plowman himself is an elusive dream-figure with many shades of meaning in him; apparently, though it was twice revised, the work had no final revision. It is of a piece with its chaotic century. We should not be surprised to find that the book was based on a dream.

But the confusion of the dream is nothing to the confusion of the allegory. Even the sexes of the various figures seem indeterminate; and Wit, Wisdom, Clergy, Scripture, Imagination, the Active Man, Peace, Mercy, Reason, Righteousness, Repentance, must not be driven hard towards consistency. It will be well for the reader, if he wishes to get a clear picture of the dream, not to insist upon its details. That such a clear picture may be obtained I hope I have shown in my Preface; but few allegories may be pushed roughly to their conclusions. Even Professor Saintsbury, that eulogist of the Faerie Queene, is constrained to admit that you may if you like leave the allegory alone; it "won't hurt you."

The book definitely promises a picture of England between 1350 and 1400. The dates of course are not given, but these are supplied by the evidence of its contents. We are to see the Field full of Folk. We are not going to look on any Dutch interiors, or mere portraiture of a few saints and a few sinners; there are to be no "nine and twenty in a company of sundry folk by aventure ifalle;" something wider, bigger is promised us, nothing short of a birds-eye view of the English world with London for its centre, while the dreamers body lies on the Malvern Hills, and over him sing the birds of early summer, and the brook runs babbling by and mingles its sound with the noise of a great multitude. You shall see the Pope, titular head of Christendom, finding it hard as the King does to guide men as he would; cardinals against whose election you and I may not speak, for we are no Lollards, not we; bishops running freely through all sorts of offices and doing all kinds of work as William of Wykeham and Bishop Spencer of Norwich did; unable, for all their cleverness, to rule their dioceses and to keep the robber pardoners and the meddling friar away; priests, deacons and subdeacons, acolytes, exorcists, readers and doorkeepers, all the seven "minor orders" of the Church; you shall see abbots, men of business, Priors, men of management, and all the people under their rule; monks and professed brethren, clerks and
novices; you shall see the hard-working parish priest, passably ignorant, miserably poor and made poorer by his mortal enemy the friar; the friars, all the four orders, Franciscans, Dominicans, Carmelites and Austins, pledged to poverty and pursuing wealth; the chantry priest and the gild priest each bent on making an income and filling a soft place; and with them the good and bad accompaniments of a great Church, hermits, anchorites, pilgrims and palmers. But there are more to be seen than these; and in the great plain are officials of every kind, sheriffs and bedels, assizers and jurymen, whose business it seems to be to prey upon humanity. Turn your eyes in another direction and Edward III. is slowly dying (alas for the Black Prince who might have done so much—he is gone) and Lady Meed is stripping off his ring; the kitten Richard II., so helpless at first, so foolish afterwards, is in the hands of Parliament or nobles; the nobles are quarrelling, the Commons are curbing them; disorder, disorganisation and attempted reform can all be seen from Malvern Hills. As for the lawyers, you shall see enough of them, all dressed in furs, all pleading for pence, all open to bribery, and juries and witnesses, judges and pleaders are on the look-out for florins. Then the merchants pass by and the moneylenders, the big and little traders, till we come to the very dregs and find ourselves face to face with the Seven Deadly Sins of London. London itself and its narrow ways, its bridges, its palaces, its convents, its hovels, its brothels, you shall see them all and almost catch the conversations as the people pass by us. You can be present at the great Stourbridge fair and there see Venetian glass, Bruges linen, Spanish iron, Norwegian tar, Hanse fur, Cornish tin and Cretan wine, all for sale in the half of a square mile which was occupied for three whole weeks. Then you shall come forth into the country and watch the misery of the country poor, hear of their work, their food, their dress; and so along the roads past the crowds of beggars and wastrels, till perhaps you shall get a dinner in some great mans house and take part, from a side-bench, in a discussion of some useless point of theology. Nothing shall escape you by the way, the burial-places of the Great Pestilence, the stocks, the pillory, the cucking-stool, the alehouse, the hospital, the prison, the recluse in his cell, the doctor murdering his patients, the minstrel telling his love stories, the juggler and the monkey-man, the farmer and his stots, the poor priest preaching, the lunatic loller prophesying, and the train of Lady Meed. Nay, you may, if
you be fortunate, see Piers himself, sowing his seed and preaching to the pilgrims of Truth, and may dream of him, as Jesus, leaving the world with Piers Plowmans fruit—poor humanity—in his arms, the only Saviour of the world. This world-wide "landscape with figures" is the promise of William Langland—a promise more than fulfilled, for not half the scenes have been enumerated, not a quarter of the characters named. Could any one to-day, in Langlands social position, dream, promise and perform so great an undertaking as this?

We take the story from the writers standpoint. It is not, as some histories tell us, that the kings wars were unimportant; but they were to the writer and to the people whom he represents the least important of his visions. No one in editing a peoples book to-day should begin with discussing the European position, or the change of an Indian capital; but the price of sugar, the picture palace, the emptiness of churches, the six-penny doctor, the schools, the football field, the public-house and the district nurse would attract the Langland of to-day first. By the Langland of to-day I mean Mr. Masterman, Miss Loane, Mr. Lyons, Mr. Pett Ridge, Mr. H. G. Wells, Mr. Harold Begbie and Mr. Stephen Reynolds. I begin then with the book picture of the writer himself, always premising that in this work the writer set himself an enormous task, that his view may be one-sided and extreme, and that, even in his self-revelations, we may be on ground as treacherous as when we try to recover Charles Lamb from the hints of Elia.

"Long Will," as he calls himself, in one memorable line, was set to school in early days and learned to love the school and cloister; for one who afterwards was so severe a critic of this world, he speaks kindly of these early days. It may have been at Malvern; and he may have gained then his vague and rather intellectual love of the country and its sights. But in this he never approached Chaucer, who is filled through and through with the outdoor Englishmans appreciation of field and forest and stream; for Langland was as much a town man as Dr. Johnson.

His learning is remarkable. The Bible is, if roughly quoted, at his fingers ends; but he never uses the Wycliffite version, though it must have been accessible in some form before the last recension of the manuscript. In this however he is not singular; for Wyclif never quotes from what is called his own translation. The usual reading of the Fathers supplies Langland
with a few texts and a few illustrations; Gregory, Jerome, Austin and of course Cato are among the writers he has heard most of; indeed to the medievalist Cato may be regarded as a Church Father. The apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus may have helped him in that tremendous section of his poem in which Piers Plowmans fruit, *i.e.* humanity, is brought from Hell; but it is unsafe to dogmatise, for so much was known by being heard and repeated orally that before Caxtons time a man might possess a very liberal education and yet have never seen a book at all; so much did the writer of that day rely upon his memory. A few French sentences prove little; Chaucer himself, who must have spoken French well, avoids French speech more than Shakespeare does; and there is no hint of Langlands knowing any Greek. It is interesting to think he may have read Chaucers Prologue; let us hope, for the sake of his own peace of mind, that he did not; for he would, I fear, have reckoned Chaucer among the minstrels.

He must have drifted to London for he knows it well: he certainly represents himself as preferring the easy life of a chantry priest to that of a hard-working man. Cornhill and S. Pauls are the most respectable parts of London mentioned by him; but the poorer or disreputable parts mentioned, such as Cocks Lane, Shoreditch, with their stews and their quacks, are many, and their characters are drawn to the life. He says he was married and had a daughter; but he is careful to give wife and daughter equivocal names, which he need not have done. He convicts himself of lax practice in regard to honesty in work. He is extremely careful to point out that whatever may be thought of his opinions in the poem, he is not a loller; indeed, he made verses on the lollers when he lived in Cornhill. He was always poor, always welcome, always critical; but in London his opinions developed and he became one with the mass which new ideas were slowly moving. He found himself the apostle of the poor, the honest quiet poor, whom he came to love passionately. Their poverty, grinding and unceasing, he ascribed to want of philanthropy, robbery, jobbery and bad government. He never ascribed it to simony at Avignon—the sinful city—nor to the French wars, as he might have done had he been writing to-day of his own work; nor, of course, did he understand that there may be a dozen causes for misery, some of the causes being directly attributable to the miserable themselves. He is not in the least ashamed of begging for the poor
or for himself; and indeed the magnificent philanthropy of the medieval Church in its best days had encouraged begging, and perhaps produced the poverty it strove to alleviate. In all centuries (at any rate in England) the condition of the poor has been watched over and alleviated by the rich and the moderately rich in a way that shows, gainsay it who may, that the teaching of Christ in regard to individual responsibility has up to now permeated the country; and though poverty may have overtaken benevolence, and though benevolence itself may be a mistake and philanthropy a crime, no friend of the poor would care to imagine an England denuded instantly of all that has been given and is being freely and gladly given to the poor from definitely religious and Christian sources. This is more true even of pre-Reformation than of post-Reformation England, for in Langlands day the state assumed no responsibility. It must be remembered that he wrote a quarter of a century after the Black Death and England had not in any sense recovered; and it must be further remembered that in his day the alleged enmities of class and class, sex and sex, capital and labour, had not been felt. The rich and the poor, notwithstanding the Peasants Revolt, were nearer one another than they are to-day. The enmities in Langlands day were those of king and nobles, nobles and the middle class; neither the king nor the rich merchant was in theory or practice unfriendly to the people.

Yet, whether he understood the problems or no, his book is more valuable than any contemporary writing: for he wrote from the inside. He tells us what the poor wanted; and only lately, notwithstanding the fact that his book and his teaching have been accessible for five hundred years, has this lesson been learnt. It is a new discovery to us, that the poor have opinions regarding their betterment. It comes almost as a shock to us to read in his pages that his poor required lower rents, better and less adulterated food, warm clothes, and above all the kindly sympathy of people who lived among them and tried to understand them. We can almost hear him saying to us: “Give us these first, and then, if you like, you can go on to model villages and sterilised milk.” I respectfully wonder if Mr. Stephen Reynolds and Miss M. Loane, who write with knowledge of our poor, have carefully looked through Piers Plowman; if they have they must have been startled.

Besides loving the poor and hating the wastrel, Langland loved
the Church and hated its household enemies. It is true that (considering his century) a minimum of dogma satisfied him: but with this he combined a maximum of Christ. The Pope, as such, is a legitimate ruler; he seems to know nothing of the rottenness of Rome and Avignon; even the Church machinery was good; but it was worked ill. We who live in a time when the clergy (I use the word of the ministers of all denominations) work hard, are not over-dressed, do not carry forbidden revolvers, do not rob the poor, do not pay money out of the country, do not plead in papal courts, are not absenteees or pluralists, and certainly are not rich, can hardly understand that a man of Langlands sympathies should have been, as he certainly was, so strong a defender of the fourteenth-century Church. In it he sees the only bulwark against Antichrist; and he cannot even see this bulwark raised unless the friars and monks and parish priests and bishops come with Piers Plowman into the Castle of Unity.

And if he loves the Church, he is at least respectful to the king. Beyond a sharp word now and again to Edward III. and a remonstrance to Richard II., Langland is a kings man; it seems to me that he even has some insight into the difficulties of both sovereigns when he writes that pathetic line:

"But it is hard," quoth the king, "to guide my people to honesty."

Even the great and rich he does not attack indiscriminately; and he certainly believed in those class distinctions which every society and every section of society makes, though it hides them as decently as it can and professes to abhor them.

But lawyers, theologians, most minstrels, physicians and unemployables he cannot away with; and here we see for the first time the narrowness of one who did not understand law or theology, and who could not fiddle or cure the sick. For there must have been, and indeed he allows it, many lawyers who were not bribable, many theologians who knew what they were talking about, some decent-mouthed minstrels and a few satisfactory doctors; but his lines about the unemployable might have been written in 1916.

Here then is the man; a reformer of Church and State and a defender of the poor; failing perhaps from the very immensity of his canvas to paint all his pictures equally well, yet contriving even in his bitterest moments to follow his own advice to the king, "Hear the other side." Again and again he pleads against
his own writing, and you may seek in vain through all the book for one word of self-praise.

His humour is not Chaucers; his coarse passages may be numbered on the fingers of one hand, and they are then very brief and blunt; while Chaucer, like Shakespeare and all the Elizabethans, is crammed with passages which Langland would never have tolerated. He is too much in earnest to waste his time in loose talk; though, if he had wished to do so, the sardonic writer of the Seven Deadly Sins could have put to shame Skelton, Dryden and Wycherley in their own peculiar mistakes. Fun there is, satire there is, in abundance; but there is no filth, nor, alas, except in one passage, are there any tears. He is dry-eyed, staring at Antichrist. England is hurrying to the precipice and Piers Plowman is gone.

His choice of metre, if metre it can be called, was no doubt intentional; he meant to get to the ears of the people and this he could only do by alliteration or by ballad. The Chaucerian line would have stamped him as a dilettante in social reform. The result is that the book is not a poem; no juggling will reduce it to rules; no whitewashing will make it all interesting; but it stands crammed with living pictures and full of a terrible anger. Whether he did gain the peoples ear is very doubtful; the one quotation in the trumpet-calls of the 1381 revolt is not at all conclusive; apart from ballad, song and folk-tale, literature has never been thoroughly assimilated by the English people; the people have no time to read. The Bible alone and a certain amount of economic prophecy have sunk deep.

I cannot understand why his book has never been seized on by artists and illustrators; and I venture to call the readers attention particularly to the following descriptions which are full of the power of a poet who carelessly let the poetry go—the ride to Westminster, the Vision of the Sins, the description of Piers service to Truth, the description of the cottager, the character of Charity, and the descent into Hell.

This then was the man and this the book which set out to describe fourteenth-century England: for whom was the book intended and why was it written? what were the real pictures as we have them from other sources? is Piers Plowmans indictment true?

Langland was born into a world the great fact of which was the Church. It was everywhere. It possessed nearly, not
quite, all the learning of his day; it filled offices which have long since been handed to the laity. Its courts controlled Church affairs and a good deal more than Church affairs—personal morality (save the mark) came largely under its lash and its fine. It was wealthy, national, proud at heart; as the Good Parliament showed, it hated Roman aggression; but it was waiting for a chance of burning heretics—which soon came. Its buildings filled the streets of London and Oxford; the parish church, the cathedral church, the friars convent, the monks abbey, the chantry, the anchorites cell, the mesondieux, and even the schools, all were—the Church. It was as impossible for a reformer to write a poem and not to fill it with the Church as it would seem absurd for a modern reformer to regard the Church as the centre of all. It is the custom to deride the fourteenth-century Church. Langland and Wyclif, so different in other matters, denounce the wholesale simony, the traffic in pardons, the whole institution of the friars, the power of foreign priests, the misused wealth of the Church and the misspent time of her sons; and Chaucer, who could not rise to these heights of indignation, never loses a chance of satire. Even the modern Catholic historian Lingard cannot point to the fourteenth century with satisfaction; and the French Jusserand admits fully the charges of the poets. It is well therefore to realise that if there is no other side to the question, in two respects at least the Church of the fourteenth century has had scanty justice done to it. And first of all, it was not blind to its own defects. The abuses noted in Chaucer and Langland are condemned strongly in a papal letter of the time. In 1340 the Bishop of Durham, in 1378 the Archbishop of Canterbury, pleaded for reform. “Nothing can give a better idea of the wickedness of Pardoners than the actual letters of Popes and Bishops” (Jusserand). Again, the Church was democratic in this, that by it and by it alone the poor man’s son saw and took his chance. A long list of archbishops and bishops might easily be written out, all of whom came from the homes of the poor. It was no uncommon thing for a promising serf to receive freedom and to be trained in the service of Church and State; and it is precisely this carelessness as regards the birth, or even the legitimacy, of its clergy that draws down Langlands strong criticism: for Langland, apostle of the poor, believed in gentle birth. The knightly Chaucer, who had been about the world and fought, thinks nothing of the fact that his parson, the
gentlest, sweetest saint in all his writings, was own brother to a ploughman who had "ilad of donge ful many a fother," but Langland wishes that the Church would keep the poor in their places. The following paragraph quoted freely is worth consideration: "The most striking feature of the centuries to the sixteenth is the way in which the Church opened up a career to all ranks and classes of the people. There was of course always a strong aristocratical element among the clergy . . . the middle classes supplied a great number of parish chaplains, assistant curates, chantry priests, gild priests; young men born and bred as serfs were not infrequently educated and ordained. Among archbishops only, Richard came from humble parents; E. Rich was son of a merchant, R. Kilwardby was a Dominican friar; W. Reynolds was son of a baker; Chichele was a shepherd boy picked up and educated by William of Wykeham; Cranmers people were small squires; R. Flambard, the great justiciar of Henry I., was the son of a poor Norman priest; Richard of Wych, the saintly bishop of Winchester, was son of a decayed farmer at Droitwich, and for several years worked as a labourer; the famous Grosseteste was of a poor family at Stradbrooke in Suffolk" (Cutts, *Parish Priests*, 133). Sir Robert Sale, who died so heroically in 1381, fighting against the insurgents, was himself a serf who had risen to knighthood, and was captain-general of Norwich. Only through the theory and practice of the medieval Church did poor mens sons become lawyers, architects, sheriffs, scribes, physicians and teachers.

Chaucer understands the theory of the Church Catholic, a theory which has never changed, that all men before it are equal. In this Eastern and Western religions are alike. The practice of the Church has indeed varied; but the curious anomaly may be noted that the world has invariably taken a view which is at variance with that of the Church. The worlds practice is to treat men as equal, as far as it can, and not to hurt their feelings; that they are equal in any sense it never will believe.

In another matter the medieval Church demands the respect of its modern critic. It aided education; indeed, it was the only educator, and, directly by its teaching, indirectly by its encouragement of benevolence, it founded places of education which flourished till the Reformation. Writers as diverse as Mr. A. F. Leach, Mr. Bass Mullinger, Professor Thorold Rogers, relying on statutes, sermons, charters, and quoting freely from
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contemporary authors, come to the same conclusion, that the pre-Reformation Church was the friend, not the enemy, of the education of the poor; for the rich man either derided all education or had his own peculiar way of obtaining it. If Church advice had been followed, "the battle of and for modern education, especially primary education, would have been infinitely easier to fight." Richard II. rejected a proposal to forbid villeins to send their children to school to learn clergée (knowledge): "Every man or woman, of what state or condition he be, shall be free to set their son or daughter to take learning at any school that pleaseth them within the realm."

The Church then, full of mistakes, crammed with internecine and often unpatriotic quarrels, but still in theory, and to a great extent in practice, the poor man’s Church, filled the picture. Its spiritual pretensions were high—its ecclesiastical pretensions were enormous—but its social pretensions were not those of some of the later centuries. The world will always yield (or has till now always yielded) to spiritual pretensions when adequately supported by the consistent life. It clings even now to the legend of S. Francis, whose spiritual pretensions, under the guise of humility, were an unconscious travesty of those of his Master; even ecclesiastical pretensions it will listen to, though with a smile, when based on what it loves—sympathy, charity, humanity; but the social pretension which grew from wealth and from an ill-defined class feeling, it cannot reconcile with the teaching of the poor parson of the Canterbury Tales. Classes there must always be; man is not happy without them, and they exist in every station of society; but society knows at heart that they should be decently covered, and the truest mark of a "gentleman" is to hide his "gentlemanliness." Castes there must always be; Piers Plowman himself belonged to the very highest, whether we look at him in his mittens or as riding to the gates of Hell; and of all the characters in the poem his spiritual pretensions are the greatest. Yet, by virtue of his freedom from social pretensions, he is intensely democratic.

The Church of any country, any century, can hope to recover lost ground among what are called the masses, not by a whittling down of dogma, nor by a renunciation of claims to denounce the sins of society—for the human society is the Church—but by a frank abjuration of all social and economic pretensions. The history of the friars, as well as that of the Salvation Army, point alike to the right road and to the parting of the ways.
The parish church was the special property of the people who lived round it. When small, it still had some gild window, some long-remembered connection with the great or small village names. It rose, as it often rises to-day, the only building of the human souls ambition, above the meaner roofs; it was the centre of village life and the meeting-place of the dead. When large, it served for examination room, playhouse, even dancing floor; it was open every day and all day; it had its daily services. It was the rallying-point of the English villages. Parsons might be and were absentee; it might be served by the unworthy; but it and its services were there. Langland points clearly to abuses. Once a fortnight perhaps some interfering friar of one of the four orders (Cain they were pleasantly nicknamed by Wyclif) would come preaching in the churchyard; and sometimes the pardoners or limiter would invade even the church itself, when the priest was not strong enough to prevent it. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that a most worldly acquisitiveness was the secret of the friars activity and of the parsons hatred of them; they laid their hands on shrift money and on the widows mite, and they persuaded the richer people to ask for and to pay for letters of fraternity. The beautiful description of a friars church in Piers Plowmans Creed might without change of a word be written of any well-preserved Gothic church; it must be remembered that all this wealth of stone and carving and gold was then new, burnished, shining, not toned down to melancholy beauty by the lapse of centuries.

Friar and parson were, it is probable, unlearned; the parsons charged the friars with interference, the friars charged the parsons with ignorance and neglect of their parishes. The terrible picture of Parson Sloth in Langland must of course apply only to a few, but comic instances of parsonic ignorance are many. "Robert de Umfraville, clerk, was instituted in 1317 by Bishop Stapledon to the rectory of Lapford, but the bishop required he should go to grammar school and should come to the bishop once a year, that the bishop might know what progress he was making. The young man sent in his resignation in 1320." Against such a picture may always be quoted the poor parson of the Prologue. The friar, however, was the better speaker, for it was his métier to speak; and the occasional visitor gets more credit than the preacher to whom the parish is accustomed. The friar was ready, polite, pleasant, popular; and his ways with women were so successful as to become proverbial.
Nothing in Langland said against the friars comes near the bitter satire of Chaucer's laugh; and the praise of the friar by the wife of Bath would have shamed any one but a friar.

If the parson objected to the friar he must in many cases have objected to the chantry priest also. Rarely could a man, a paid cleric, go on singing masses every day without interfering with the parish. It was a lucrative and easy life. Sometimes the church itself was turned into a chantry, sometimes the chantry priest kept a little school. In S. Pauls alone there were 70 chantries and 111 obits (for occasional masses), and in 1378 the weak Archbishop Sudbury, who was murdered by the 1381 mob, speaks of the lives of these mass-singers as tending to the detestable scandal of churchmen (Besant, 2, 134). It could not have been satisfactory for the parson, learned or unlearned, good or bad, to have so many inspectors and critics of his work about him. He lived in a limelight which darkens shadows, and strange to say, he has had no apologist but Chaucer the courtly poet. Pity the poor parson in any century who does his multifarious work unnoticed by superiors and sometimes unthanked by his people.

The parson, the friar, the seller of pardons, as well as the higher ecclesiastics, and of course all monks, were vowed to celibacy, but it does not seem that celibacy meant chastity, or that it prevented, in the case of Parsons, the irregular marriages which the Church frowned on even to the days of Queen Elizabeth. "The secular cleric," says Cutts, "was not bound to be celibate. But if his marriage came up before the ecclesiastical courts it was then voidable. Consequently, to make his marriage incapable of legal proof, he had it performed irregularly in some particular. Then it was illegal, derogatory, but not immoral or disreputable." In this the Church theory conquered till the Reformation. As Matthew Paris said long before, "the Pope deprived the clergy of sons and the devil sent them nephews." Langland, however, admits the chastity of many churchmen, and when Langland speaks well of even part of a class we must be careful of condemning it.

In any comment on Langland the monks, nuns and their convents may be almost disregarded. There were no doubt many who came out of the cloister and who rode to hounds; many nuns who deserved the terrible picture drawn by Wrath (p. 78); but they receive less castigation at the hands of the poets than does the rest of the ecclesiastical machinery. Indeed, the
monks seem to be outside the machinery; and the fierce envy of conventual wealth, which was one of the main causes of the Reformation, had not yet made itself greatly felt. As for the reformers of the day, they plainly derided the monks and passed them by.

But the picture of Church matters is by no means even outlined in as yet. There remains to be considered the rabble of hangers-on, and under this uncomplimentary term may be included foreign agents, pardoners, pilgrims, palmers, hermits, anacles, recluses of all kinds, and those officials who got their living out of Church moneys, fines, or offerings. They indeed form a motley crowd. Chaucer's picture of some (e.g. the Pardoner and Summoner) is very clear; we see the papal agent, approved or connived at by the English bishop, selling and showing his absurd relics to the gaping crowd; the summoner ready to pounce on any defenceless person and bring him or her before an ecclesiastical court. For the summoner there may be some defence. For the pardonner it seems there is none. M. Jusserand, who would defend him if he could, admits that Chaucer's picture is true; it is more damaging to admit that the truly Catholic Langland is more contemptuous even than Chaucer. But nothing disturbs the pardonner; for insolence of hypocrisy which recognises itself there is nothing to beat his Prologue and his beautiful tale; only the scathing Billingsgate of the Host brings a flush of anger to his cheek. It is true that to-day the pardonner has vanished from the streets of England; but his audiences have not vanished; and the crowds that buy nostrums from the magazine advertisements and bottles at street corners, and the stealthier and richer clients of the crystal-gazer, cannot afford even to laugh at fourteenth-century England. The pardonner has turned quack and gipsy: that is all.

The foreigner met with less approval than the pardonner. In 1353 and 1393 Englishmen were forbidden to appeal to the papal courts; Langland sees them appealing against the king. In 1351 foreigners were forbidden to hold English livings. Both these statutes aimed at extinguishing what were felt to be un-English proceedings.

But the pilgrim and the recluse were nearer to the people than the summoner, the pardonner, or the foreigner. On every road the pilgrim, with his liquified saints blood, his vernicle picture, and his scallop-shell, told of his escapes, his travels and his relics. He was a genuine person—when he had travelled; he
had been, as the wife of Bath had, over many a strange stream, and if he liked had leave to lie all his life after. Langlands and Chaucers pictures are so familiar that we may illustrate from one of their contemporaries, Sir John Mandeville, a clergyman, who, writing his book in Latin, French and English, distinctly states that he had been a great traveller. The cross and reed and sponge he saw at Constantinople; he fought against Arabs for the Sultan of Babylon; he vouches for Ethiopians with one large foot and one only, used as an umbrella; for miraculous draughts of fishes, which came to the shore to be caught out of pure reverence for the king of the country, who has a very large family; men without heads, men with eyes in their shoulders, dwerghes (dwarfs) with no mouths, but only a lytyle round hole, men with horses feet, all the marvels of the medieval map-makers are vouched for by Sir John. On his return he showed his book to the Pope, who had his statements of things seen and heard, examined, and "my book was proved for true." In the Roman du Renart the fox starts on pilgrimage with staff and scrip and takes sheep and donkey (Bernart the arch-priest) with him. Long before Erasmus, with his bitter satire, the people had begun to laugh at the pilgrim; he knew too much, he had been too far. But pilgrimages are by no means things of the past, nor can they be lightly laughed at. "They were dangerous, meritorious, and they showed a way to heaven. They relieved a man of work, they showed him amusing people. He and his licence were free of the roads" (Besant). With staff (bourdon) and scrip (a small bag), with bottle, rosary, shells and flasks, or other adornments, he proved his story; if he came from Palestine he wore strips of coloured cloth, sewn cross-wise on the shoulder, and the palm was sewn to clothes or carried in the hand. Vernicles (the picture of Christ), crosskeys and effigies of S. Peter and S. Paul were worn by Roman pilgrims; but alas, the Rome or Compostella pilgrim had not always been there. "W. Blakeney, shetil-maker, who pretended to be a hermit, was brought into the Guildhall for that whereas he was able to work for his food and raiment, he went about barefoot and with long hair under the guise of sanctity, and pretending to be a hermit, saying he was such and that he had made pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Rome, Venice and the city of Seville in Spain, and had received many good things from divers persons ... he acknowledged that for the last six years he had lived by such fetches and deceits, and that he never was in the parts
aforesaid" (Riley, 1412). At home, besides the great S. Thomas and the many roods, S. Cuthbert at Durham, S. William of York, little S. William of Norwich, S. Wulfstan of Worcester, and S. Swithin of Winchester were among saints to whom pilgrimages were frequently made (Cutts). The reader must be reminded that there is no adequate ground for questioning the occasional "miracles" which occurred and still occur in such pilgrimages. One of the most brilliant modern productions of a cultivated mind and of a religious life, I refer to the Saintes Evangelies of M. Lasserre, owes its origin directly to a miraculous cure wrought at Lourdes. Scientists may explain, Protestants may question; but neither pilgrimages nor "miracles" are dead—yet.

The recluse—the true, strict recluse—has nothing to recommend him or her. The ghastly silence, the dirty walled-up cell, the long lone cold hours, form a picture compared with which the strictest life of Carmelite or Brigittine was comfort itself. It is suggested that the slits called lepers windows were for the use of anchorites, who had their cells outside the church walls. It is true that the recluse could in some cases talk to the outside world, and was sometimes so much consulted by the women of the place that he became a nuisance; it is equally true that some recluses did enjoy comparative comfort, though they were tied to one cell; but the true ancre was one of those who, like monk of the desert or trappist of to-day, is isolated, silent, dead. The service read over him and the subsequent condition of his days may be read and understood by the reader of Besants London.

Hermits were the good-tempered Timons of the day; they lived in houses, they helped travellers, they were not always poor. There is no need to waste pity on the hermit; he came from all ranks of society, as his modern counterpart does. It is not every man who is smitten with the love of the society of his own kind; and there are to-day hermits even in cities, as there were in Langlands time.

But all of whom I have been speaking were officially connected with the Church. There remains another class of friars who roamed the country before Langland had ceased writing, and who carried no licence from pope, bishop or archdeacon. I refer to Wyclifs poor priests. It is doubtful whether Langland means us to take any notice of them; whatever may have been his attitude to Wyclif, he either does not know the name of
Lollard, or he intends to sever himself entirely from lollers or Lollards. There is no question connected with the 1381 revolt which is so obscure as this: did Wyclif through his poor priests preach a social as well as an ecclesiastical revolution? When we find historians such as Mr. Thorold Rogers and Mr. Trevelyan disagreeing toto cælo on this point, it is well for the ordinary reader to suspend judgment. It may be enough for us to note that there seems to be no proof that Langlands book or any part of it was used to inflame the social unrest, and another interpretation may be put upon the often quoted passages in the message from the Great Society.

A much more profitable inquiry turns us away from pope and cardinal, friar and monk, hermit and pilgrim, Wyclif and Swynderby, to the central figure which, as I have said before, glances in and out of the work in such elusive and mysterious fashion. It is long before we meet Piers Plowman, but when we do meet him he never wholly leaves the stage; if not actually speaking, his presence is felt: it is the book of Piers Plowman. So strongly does the reader feel this that it has been suggested that we have here but a fragment of genuine alliterative folklore of which Piers Plowman is the hero. The Plowman leads the way to Truth, whose servant he is, and the cutpurse and the pardoners desert him; a stray common woman is left, and he and she begin, but others join in the great pilgrimage. Before it is begun the half-acre has to be ploughed, and knight and wastrel have to help. Ladies must help too; the work of all is for the weal of all, and Piers makes his last will and testament. Then the unemployables wrangle and Piers calls Hunger and Famine to help him; the gentry cannot. The pardon is sent by the Almighty to poor Piers Plowman, and henceforth he is a symbol which leads men to Do-well, Do-better and Do-best. He is referred to as the great example, the great teacher, until again he appears upon the scene riding to Jerusalem as the Good Samaritan to joust with death for the deliverance of humanity from hell. As Prince he sails hell-wards and the victory is assured. But Piers as Christ is gone, and Antichrist takes his place; the Piers that follows is the spirit of Church unity; the mysterious plowman, saviour, man, Christ, is now again lost, and must be sought for in a new Grail quest over the wide world. Small wonder that readers are in doubt as to Langland's meaning. I take it that Langland wilfully confused the character, for in his own mind there was no separation
between the God-in-man and the man-in-God. As Bishop Stubbs says, “The full likeness to Jesus Christ, the ideal Son of God, is stored up in the Plowman, in the common man of the street and of the mill and of the workshop.” Above every class and caste, sympathising with all, thinking nothing too high, nothing too low for him to notice, Piers represents the best religious thought of which Langland was capable, mans likeness to Christ and even his identification with him being made possible by the very nature of Christs appearance in the world. Love could not bear to remain in heaven; it must take mankind on it or die.

Allegory pressed hard loses its charm. If Piers Plowman were as clear outlined as Christian, the mystery of the Plowman would not fit in as it does with the chaos of the scene. He seems to suit the kaleidoscope of the field full of folk which is now a city, now a plain, now a procession, now a church, now a court, now a desolate land along which trains of pilgrims go—and always a dream. Battles and law courts vanish, Cornhill and Jerusalem disappear, and the sleeper is left upon the misty hills. From the Malvern Hills the mist never wholly goes; only now and then stands out, as in the Arthurian vision, the great figure—crowned.

Yet, though the writer leaves his work in despondency and gloom, something had been accomplished. To have seen Piers Plowman working in that whirl and worry of politics was something: to have realised that figure made life worth living to the writer, though death should be but, as he called it, the unknitter of all care and the beginning of rest.

This is the reward of the spiritual reformer, whether he be a Francis, a Shelley or a Langland: that he catches glimpses of the impossible. The light that never will be on land or sea is his inspiration, and far above any amelioration of social ethics is the spiritual sense of the son of man ploughing the fourteenth-century fields, pushing the pilgrims through the strait gate and riding through Cheapside or Jerusalem to get him his gilt spurs and his slashed shoon. Langland, the poor wandering mass-priest, saw over old S. Pauls the vision splendid, as a later singer, poorer than Langland, in the same London, almost in the same street, saw it and could write:

"O world invisible, we view thee;
O world intangible, we touch thee;
O world unknowable, we know thee;
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee.
The angels keep their ancient places,
Turn but a stone and start a wing;
'Tis ye, 'tis your estranged faces
That miss the many-splendoured thing.

But (when so sad thou canst not sadder)
Cry; and upon thy so sore loss
Shall shine the traffic of Jacobs ladder,
Pitched betwixt Heaven and Charing Cross.

Yea, in the night, my Soul, my Daughter,
Cry—clinging Heaven by the hems;
And lo, Christ walking on the water,
Not of Gennesareth but Thames!"

If we leave the religious outlook and look upon the social side of England, we are struck by the constant repetition of the note of misery. Yet it does not appear that the century was as bad as its successor. The drain of the French wars must have been felt; yet the Great Pestilence had, in its awful way, lessened by fifty per cent. the number of mouths that had to be fed.

But Langlands complaint is not merely that the poor want food and raiment; it would appear from him that they needed protection against themselves and against the great. The adulteration of food and drink, the want of the poor man's lawyer, the general corruption and deceit all round him, the extremes of luxury and penury—these are the things that wring his heart. By way of illustration the following may be quoted from Riley as instances of dishonesty in trade; the first instance being one of the eternal quack, without whom no century can live.

In 1382, "Roger Clerk was attached to make answer to Roger atte Hacche that whereas no physician or surgeon should intermeddle with medicines but those who are experienced, the said Roger Clerk, who knew nothing of the arts aforesaid nor understood anything of letters, came to the house of him Roger atte Hacche and there saw one Johanna, the wife of the said Roger, who was then lying ill, and gave the said Roger to understand that he was experienced and skilled in the art of medicine. "Whereupon the said Roger gave him 12 pence in part payment of a larger sum that he was to pay him in case the said Johanna should be healed. And upon this the same Roger Clerk gave the said Roger an old parchment cut or scratched
across, being the leaf of a certain book, and rolled it up in a piece of cloth of gold, and this he put about her neck, but in no way did it profit her.

"And the said Roger Clerk was asked what the worth of such a parchment was, whereupon he said that upon it was written a good charm for fevers. Upon being asked by the court what were the words of this charm, he said, 'Anima Christi sanctifica me, corpus Christi salva me, sanguis Christi inebria me,' and the parchment being then examined, not one of these words was found written thereon. And he was told by the court that a straw beneath his foot would be of as much avail for fevers as this said charm of his was, whereupon he fully granted that it would be so. And because that the said Roger was in no way a literate man, and seeing that he was found to be an infidel and altogether ignorant of the art of physic, it was adjudged that the same Roger Clerk should be led through the middle of the city with trumpets and pipes, he riding upon an horse without a saddle, the said parchment and a whetstone for his lies being hung about his neck, an urinal also being hung before him and another urinal on his back" (Riley, 465).

The following are referred to:

"... making pots of bad metal that come to nothing and melt; mixing any manner of wares whereof the good thing may be impaired by the old; the dubbing or moistening of any merchandise, by reason whereof the weight may be increased; selling putrid beef; making of hats, shoes or brides of poor or forbidden material ... stealing dough by making holes in the tables used for baking; using false nets in the Thames; selling ale out of tankards with thickened bottoms.

"Godfrey le Rede was attached with his bread, and this bread was weighed and adjudicated upon before Stephen de Alyndone, mayor, and it was found that the penny loaf of light bread of the said Godfrey weighed 15s., and was wanting of its right weight to the amount of 8.2½, and upon this he said he did not make the loaf aforesaid nor had any share therein for gain or for love, and he put himself upon the country as to the same. And the country (jury) came by John de Kyngyestone, pelterer, and others in the panel. Who being sworn said upon their oath that George the aforesaid is partner with John de Jernemue and Robert de Donstaple, bakers, who keep a bakehouse without
Newgate just opposite Cokkes-lane, and that he shares with them in the said bakehouse and is their oven-man. Therefore it was adjudged that he should have the punishment of the hurdle” (Riley, 119).

“John Rightwys and John Penrose, taverners, being accused of selling red wine unsound and unwholesome, John Rightwys was acquitted and John Penrose shall drink a draught of the same wine and the remainder shall be poured on his head” (Riley, 1364).

“Robin Porter, servant of John Gibbe, baker of Stratford, when the bread inspection came, knowing that the bread of his master was not of full weight, took a penny loaf and in it falsely and fraudulently inserted a piece of iron weighing about 4 oz. with intent to make the said loaf weigh more in deceit of the people” (Riley, 1387).

As a lover of the poor Langland hated adulteration; but it is difficult to understand why he shared so clearly with the 1381 rebellion its hatred of lawyers. We can see why the Rev. John Ball and his well-to-do friends burnt manor-rolls and charters and hunted lawyers to death. A lawyer to them meant a man who carried out or brought into operation the hated statutes which for forty years tried to fix wages after the Black Death. But Langland, as Jusserand says, cursed the revolt, and explicitly states that he did not sympathise with the cry for high wages. I think the explanation lies in Langlands belief that no juryman or siser, no panel, no inquest or collection of witnesses and neighbours collected to weigh the truth was ever honest. They were all got at by Meed. And the poor man, being poor and unversed in the ways of bribery, could get no lawyer to help him. There was no man to set the poor right in the usage of the law courts, civil and ecclesiastical. Justice should have been freely administered, not bought and sold, nor even paid for. Langlands Utopia is still Utopia, for even to-day the friendly lawyer will counsel his friend to keep clear of the honest but distrusted courts—distrusted because of long bills and unsatisfactory conclusions. The poor mans doctor is with us, a real blessing; but the poor mans lawyer has not yet made his appearance in the land.

Of corruption Langland cannot say enough. Meed is over all; Simony, the worst bane of the medieval Church (as a Catholic
writer puts it), was only one of the hydrias heads. The most shameless bribery went on in high places, and no more disgraceful instance can be given than that of Richard Lyon, a condemned minister of the Crown, who actually sent a barrel of gold to the dying Prince, in order to win his help. To insult the Black Prince thus at any time of his life would have been bad enough, but so to deride and flatter the purest friend of the commons when he lay helpless and in grievous pain seems one of the most shameless acts in history.

Beyond the corruption and the inability to get justice done for the poor man, Langland turned his careful and observant eye on luxury, especially on luxury in dress. Chaucer is at one with him, and though he laughs at the excess of dress in his poems, in his prose he very nearly calls it one of the eight deadly sins. It would seem as if modern luxury in dress were really less than that of the fourteenth century, and the wife of Baths matinée hat was as broad as is a targe, surely an acreage to which we have not yet attained. The regulations of the time are very particular in their condemnation of the use of various furs by the common lewd women who dwell in the city of London, forbidding them to wear any manner of noble budge; but Pernel Proudheart was by no means the only offender; in 1363 sumptuary laws had been passed regulating the dress of England. Even the clergy dressed in all colours and carried short swords, and it is said did not always take the trouble to put on a black gown at a funeral.

As for arms and armour, Langland seems to hate them far more than the luxurious dress. He was no soldier like Chaucer, and took no delight in enumerating the pieces of armour worn by the knight. To him armour meant weapons and weapons meant wounds, and war was as barbarous as it had seemed to the old Hebrew prophet. Chivalry and its accompanying virtues meant less than nothing and vanity to the chantry priest; and very greatly would he have disapproved of Robert Newby, rector of Whitchurch, who leaves his brother his best sword; of the vicar of Gaynford, who leaves his best suit of armour and all of his arrows; still more would he have admonished John Wyndhill, reector of Arnecliffe, who in 1431 leaves a copy of *Piers Plowman* and green sanguine and murrey gowns and a baseland (knife) with ivory and silver handle.

He dislikes the feasting and the minstrels as much as the weapons; they are Judas children, tellers of loose stories, and
he would have answered to any one of them who said he had a licence as the indignant sixteenth-century writer answered, "Have you a licence from Christ Jesus?"

These fighters and minstrels and wastrels moved him to fierce indignation. But his heaviest wrath is reserved for the discontented workman, and for the man who will not work. Though he hated lawyers who tried to get the Statute of Labourers enforced, he had no sympathy at all with the men who wished to force wages higher. It is amusing to see how many statutes and regulations were passed against the able-bodied beggars. No person, according to statute, was allowed to relieve them, and in 1359 occurs the following entry:

"Forasmuch as many men and women and others of divers counties who might work to the help of the common people have betaken themselves out of their own country to the City of London, and do go about begging there so as to have their own ease and repose, not wishing to labour or work for their sustenance, to the great damage of such the common people, and also do waste divers alms which would otherwise be given to many poor folk such as lepers, blind, halt and persons oppressed with old age and divers other maladies, we do therefore command that all those who go about begging and who are able to work shall quit the said city between now and Monday next" (Riley).

"John Warde of York and R. Lynham of Somerset were questioned for that whereas they were stout enough to work for their food and raiment and had their tongues to talk with, they did pretend they were mutes, they went about carrying a two-ell measure and an iron hook and pincers and a piece of leather in shape like a part of a tongue edged with silver and with writing around it: 'This is the tongue of R. Warde:' with which instruments they gave persons to understand they were traders and that they had been plundered and robbed of their goods, they making an horrible noise like unto a roaring and opening their mouths, to the manifest deceit of the whole of the people" (Riley, 1380).

An extract from the Standard of October 6, 1911, is interesting by way of comment:

"William Thomas, a blind maker, of East Surrey Road, was charged with begging from foot passengers at Rosebery Avenue,
A constable said he heard Thomas say to a gentleman: 'Give a penny to a poor old cripple.'

"Thomas was bound and bandaged on his first appearance in court, splinters and slings being used for his arms and legs. He now came up on remand without any of these professional impedimenta. The officer said that there was only an old wrist strain. He was sentenced to three months' hard labour."

And in the daily press of October 11, 1911, I find a magistrate recommending an iron muzzle for quarrelsome women. In Langlands time branks (leathern gags) were used. As for the inefficiency of work of which Langland so bitterly complains, the reader may be referred to The Common Growth of Miss M. Loane, written last year:

"In another small town where lads professed that work of any kind was extremely hard to get, I found an old established tradesman, a leading councillor and a J.P., taking down the shutters and sweeping out the shop. . . . I had the loafing son of a widow in my mind. The worthy justice also knew the widows son and many others. Clinging to his broom he hastily assured me that the loss of time was nothing compared with what he had wasted in trying to make boys do the work."

And Langlands beggars, who will have hot meat quite hot, and that of the best, find their modern counterparts:

"As to bacon, I can't get them (cottagers) to try good Danish at 8½d., though ordinary English is up to 1½d. just now, and the best is at a fancy price. And none but the best English cheese will do for them, however small a bit their money will run to."—The Common Growth (Miss M. Loane), 1911.

Truly the fourteenth century does not seem to be so very far away.

The tragic events in the period of history over which Langland cast his eye were the Black Death of 1349, the death of the Black Prince in 1376, and the Peasants Revolt of 1381. The Black Death, by emptying the land of labour, was the cause of the famous statute by which for forty years an attempt was made to regulate and keep down the wages of the free-contracting labourer. The consequent discontent, rendered greater by the continuation of the French wars, swelled into the Peasants
Comment

Revolt; but that revolt would in all probability never have occurred had the Black Prince, who was on the side of the disaffected, lived to make headway against the nobles. Parliament, though ready to fight for the people, could do little; the deeds of the Good Parliament of 1376 were writ in water; "all its acts were cancelled, and the statute-book bears no trace of the greatest assembly of the period." The day of reckoning came. Opinions are freely divided on the subject of the revolt. We seem to know everything about it except the answer to this question, "Who was at the back of it?" Some say the well-to-do middle class in the country; some hint that the youthful king used the revolt, if he did not actually suggest it, as a weapon against the great nobles. Some again say, while others deny, that Wyclifs poor priests engineered what was known as the Great Society. We may be certain of this, that Langland strongly disapproved of it, although, as Professor Thorold Rogers thinks, the revolt may have put back the Reformation for a century and a half. The revolt failed, and Langland, seeing only its turbulence and murders, was content that it should fail; he had no hopes for his day from any social change; the horizon was that of "the collied night;" he was a social reformer from one standpoint only—the standpoint of religion. Without this, according to him, all social reform is meaningless, and must lead to greater luxury and greater discontent. None but Piers Plowman can save the people that he loved.

For above all writers he is the peoples friend. None is more intolerant of their sad condition, none is more outspoken than he to king, bishop, knight, friar and huckster. The poor he has always in his heart. We do well to put up statues to Howard and to Quintin Hogg, and Guy dreams in stone among the people whom he helped; but as yet no statue stands in Cornhill, no glass blazes in the Abbey in memory of this champion of the poor. Perhaps it is better so, considering his indignant condemnation of the stained window and the church advertisement. Like Thomas à Kempis, he would prefer to be unknown and thought nothing of; and his work is, by wicked irony, interesting only to the student of history and the examinee. The book, however, demands—and never more loudly than now—that it should be read again and again by any who care to see the bitterness and the hope, the despair and the exultation of him who wrote four centuries ago the Vision of the Peoples Christ.
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