

William's Vision  
of  
Piers Plowman

by  
William Langland

Edited  
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# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

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# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Preface

**W**ILLIAM'S *Vision of Piers Plowman* is one of the great masterpieces of Middle English, alongside Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. However, one of the reasons it has remained in the shadow of Chaucer's works is that little else can be said about it without any certainty. The generally accepted facts are as follows, though you can usually find academic argument to dispute them.

It is a lengthy, allegorical poem, written around 1379. It tells the story of a man who, falling asleep on the Malvern Hills, dreams a series of dreams. The first shows a tower, a dungeon and a "fair field full of folk" inbetween, representing heaven, hell and the physical world. The dreams also describe a parliament of rats, confessions of the Seven Deadly Sins, the search for the allegorical characters "Do-Well, Do-Better and Do-Best", and the hopes and fears of Piers Plowman, an everyman.

It is generally thought to have been written by William Langland, mostly from internal references and puns on his name in the text. Langland was born c. 1330, in Ledbury, near the Malvern Hills; though Cleobury Mortimer also has a claim. He died c. 1386.

The text itself exists in a number of different forms and versions, none of which can be assembled into any progressive series of evolution. The text conforms to three major types, named A, B and C by the scholar Walter Skeat. A is relatively short, B is the most common version, and C appears to be a revision of B, though B versions exist with some of the C material throughout them. It is generally accepted that B is the most useful and enjoyable version of the poem, and it was this version that formed the first printed edition, produced by Robert Crowley in 1550.

The text has been thought to be subversive and rebellious, possibly encouraging the Peasant's Revolt of 1381. The C text is considered to be a revision after this date, toning down some of the more dangerous sentiment. However, it is equally possible to argue that Langland's text calls for the maintenance of the established order. The work has also been seen by some as a precursor of the Reformation, as it satirises and condemns the practises of the religious classes, and espouses the virtue of honest labour.

The B version of the text was the first one to be printed, by Robert Crowley in 1550. This is significantly later than the publication of the other major Middle English poem, *The Canterbury Tales*, which was printed by William Caxton in 1476. In his preface, Crowley writes:

*“Langland wrote altogether in metre, but not after the manner of our rhymers that write nowadays (for his verses end not alike), but the nature of his metre is to have three words, at the least, in every verse which begin with some one letter. This thing being noted, the metre shall be very pleasant to read. The English is according to the time it was written in, and the sense somewhat dark, but not so hard but that it may be understood of such as will not stick to break the shell of the nut for the kernel’s sake.”*

### Editorial Treatment

The purpose of this editorial treatment is to allow a modern reader, having little experience of Middle English, to come as close to the original text as possible. No doubt that some scholars will complain that the treatment has gone too far: however, those who can use it have the original text at their disposal. There may similarly be those for whom the treatment is not enough: but those who cannot read the original will at least have been given some help.

Starting with the B-version of the text, the method for editing has followed these simple rules:

1. Word order is maintained, and amendments and additions to the text are kept to a minimum.
2. All spelling has been modernised, where a modern English word exists with the same meaning.
3. All words, phrases and verb endings familiar to readers of Shakespeare or the King James’ Bible have been retained, e.g. *thee, thou, ye, -eth, -est, -edst, God wot, if ye list*, etc.
4. All other archaic pronouns, and archaic forms of existing modern English verbs, have been modernised.
5. Archaic words, with no apparent modern English equivalent, have been retained with a definition. Definitions are also supplied for words that have different meanings from their modern English counterpart.

Where a more common spelling of an archaic word exists, it has been substituted. Definitions appear in italics, to the right of the text.

6. Prefixes to verbs, such as *mis-*, *be-* *a-* *for-* and *y-*, have been retained, though the verb itself may have been altered to a modern day spelling.

Thus:

For may no renk ther reſte have for ratons by nyghte.

For many mennes malt we mees wolde destruye,

becomes

For may no renk his reſt have for rats by night.

*man*

For many men's malt we mice would deſtroy,

A major feature of this poem is the alliteration, which has been entirely preserved.

### Latin quotations

Assuming that those unfamiliar with Middle English are also less likely to be familiar with the vagaries of mediaeval Latin, the Latin quotations have all been respelt in classical Latin. Thus:

*Michi* becomes *mibi*

*sapiencie* becomes *sapientiae*

*celum* becomes *caelum*

*sompnia* becomes *somnia*

etc.

Wherever possible, the Latin quotations have been checked against their source text, such as the Vulgate.

Previous editions of the B-text use a line-numbering scheme that does not count some of the Latin quotations. This edition follows that scheme for the purposes of comparison.

The Latin has been translated in footnotes and, wherever possible, the source of the quotation cited. Biblical quotations are translated using the *King James Bible*, with the exception of Psalms, which are taken from the Great Bible translation used in the *Book of Common Prayer*. It should be noted that the numbering scheme of the Psalms differs from the Latin Vulgate.

### Guide to Mediaeval English

This edition is meant to be a bridge, allowing those with little or no experience with Middle English to gain some access to the style and language, but the text may still pose some awkwardness. Most confusing will be those words common now whose meaning has changed over the years:

*As* means *But*; *But* means *Except*. *Except* means *Unless*. *For* means *Because* or *to avoid*. *Forth* means *Therefore*. *Other* means *Or*. *That* often means *that which*.

Many words have meanings that are broader in scale than their modern counterparts, which have become more precise. For instance, *Loyalty* (*leaute*) suggests not only faithfulness but also steadfastness to one's word, and possibly even justice and equity. Similarly, *Kind Wit* encompasses natural intelligence; perhaps common sense. A full glossary is to be found towards the end of the book.

The word order of the original has, for the most part, been retained, and readers more familiar with the positional syntax of Modern English may find verb objects in unusual, if not ambiguous, places.

### Original sources

There are a number of B-text versions available free on the Internet; there are also several published editions, which may have more complete annotations. Students, whose interest has been aroused, may well find this edition, in conjunction with an original text, to be of great use.



# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Prologue

- I**N a summer season, when soft was the sun,  
I shaped me into shrouds as I a sheep were,  
In habit as an hermit, unholy of works,  
Went wide in this world wonders to hear.
- 5 As on a May morning on Malvern Hills *But*  
Me befell a ferly, of Fairy me thought. *wonder*  
I was weary of wandering and went me to rest  
Under a broad bank by a bourne side. *river*  
And as I lay and leaned and looked on the waters,
- 10 I slumbered into a sleeping, it sweyed so merry. *sounded*  
Then gan I to mete a marvellous swevene: *began; to dream; dream*  
That I was in a wilderness, wist I never where. *knew*  
As I beheld into the East and high to the sun,  
I saw a tower on a tuft, tryly y-made; *excellently*  
15 A deep dale beneath, a dungeon therein, *valley*  
With deep ditches and dark and dreadful of sight.  
A fair field full of folk found I there between;  
Of all manner of men, the mean and the rich, *poor*  
Working and wandering as the world asketh.
- 20 Some put them to the plough, played full seldom, *relaxed rarely*  
In setting and sowing swonked full hard, *toiled*  
And won what these wasters with gluttony destroyeth. *earned*  
And some put them to pride, apparalled them thereafter,  
In countenance of clothing came disguised.
- 25 In prayers and penance put them many,  
All for love of Our Lord lived full straight  
In hope to have heavenly bliss,  
As anchorites and hermits that hold them in their cells,  
Covet not in country to cair about *move to & fro*
- 30 For no lecherous livelihood their likame to please. *body*  
And some chose chaffer; they chieved the better *trade; achieved*  
As it seemeth to our sight that such men thriveth;  
And some mirth to make as minstrels ken, *know*

- And get gold with their glee — guiltless, I lieve— *believe*  
 35 As japers and janglers, Judas's children  
 Feign them fantasies, and fools them maketh;  
 And have wit at will to work if they would.  
 That Paul preacheth of them I will not prove it here:  
*Qui loquitur turpiloquium*<sup>1</sup> is Lucifer's hind. *servant*  
 40 Bidders and beggars fast about went  
 Till their belly and their bag were breadful y-crammed,  
 Faited for their food, fought at the ale. *Deceived*  
 In gluttony, God wot, go they to bed, *knows*  
 And rise with ribaldry, the robber knaves;  
 45 Sleep and sorry sloth sueth them ever. *follow*  
 Pilgrims and palmers plight them together *vow*  
 For to seek Saint James and saints at Rome;  
 Went forth in their way with many wise tales,  
 And had leave to lie all their life after. *permission*  
 50 I saw some that said they had y-sought saints:  
 To each a tale that they told, their tongue was tempered to lie  
 More than to say sooth, it seemed by their speech.  
 Hermits on an heap with hooked staves, *crowd*  
 Went to Walsingham — and their wenches after:  
 55 Great lobbies and long that loath were to swink, *lubbers; toil*  
 Clothed them in copes to be known from others,  
 And shaped them as hermits, their ease to have.  
 I found there friars, all the four orders,  
 Preaching the people for profit of the womb: *belly*  
 60 Glossed the goſpel as they good liked; *Expounded*  
 For covetousness of copes construed it as they would.  
 Many of these master friars may clothe them at liking  
 For their money and their merchandise march together.  
 Since charity hath been chapman and chief to shrive lords, *merchant*  
 65 Many ferlies had fallen in a few years. *wonders*  
 But Holy Church and they hold better together,  
 The moſt mischief on mold is mounting up fast. *earth*

---

1. He who utters foul speech.

There preached a pardoner as he a priest were:  
 Brought forth a bull with bishop's seals,  
 70 And said that himself might assoil them all *absolve*  
 Of falsehood of fasting, of avows y-broken.  
 Lewed men lieved him well and liked his words, *ignorant; believed*  
 Came up kneeling to kiss his bulls.  
 He bunched them with his brevet and bleared their eyes, *bit; indulgence*  
 75 And raught with his ragman rings and broaches. *reached; papal bull*  
 Thus ye give your gold, gluttons to help,  
 And lendeth it (*to*) losels that lechery haunt! *the lost*  
 Were the bishop y-blessed and worth both his ears,  
 His seal should not be sent to deceive the people.  
 80 As it is not by the bishop that the boy preacheth —  
 For the parish priest and the pardoner part the silver *divide*  
 That the poor of the parish should have if they ne were.  
 Parsons and parish priests plained them to the bishop *complained*  
 That their parishes were poor since the pestilence time,  
 85 To have a licence, and leave at London to dwell, *permission*  
 And sing there for simony, for silver is sweet. *payment*  
 Bishops and bachelors, both masters and doctors —  
 That have cure under Christ, and crowning in token *charge; tonsure*  
 And sign that they should shrive their parishoners,  
 90 Preach and pray for them, and the poor feed;  
 Lie at London in Lent and else. *othertimes*  
 Some serve the King and his silver tell, *count*  
 In Chequer and in Chancery, challenge his debts  
 Of wards and of wardmotes, waifs and strays. *court of a ward*  
 95 And some serve as servants (*to*) lords and ladies,  
 And in stead of stewards sit and deem. *judge*  
 Their mass and their matins and many of their hours  
 Are done undevoutly; dread is at the last  
 Least Christ in his Consistory accurse full many!  
 100 I perceived of the power that Peter had to keep;  
 To bind and unbind, as the Book telleth:<sup>2</sup>

---

2. Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. *Matthew 16:19*

- How he it left with love as Our Lord hight *commanded*  
 Among four virtues, most virtuous of all virtues,  
 That cardinals be called and closing gates  
 105 Where Christ is in kingdom, to close and to shut,  
 And to open it to them and heaven's bliss shew.  
 As of the Cardinals at court, that caught of that name  
 And power presumed in them a Pope to make,  
 To have the power that Peter had, impugn I nelle. *will not*  
 110 For in love and in letterure the election belongeth; *scripture; (of Popes)*  
 Forth I ken and can not of court speak more.  
     Then came there a King; Knighthood he led;  
 Might of the commons made him to reign. *people*  
 And then came Kind Wit, and clerks he made *Natural Intelligence*  
 115 For to counsel the King and the commons save.  
 The King and Knighthood and Clergy both  
 Cast that the commons should themselves find. *Arranged; sustain*  
 The commons contrived of Kind Wit crafts  
 And, for profit of all the people, plowmen ordained  
 120 To till and to travail as true life asketh.  
 The King, and the Commons, and Kind Wit the third  
 Shaped law and loyalty — each life to know his own.  
     Then looked up a lunatic, a lean thing withal,  
 And kneeling to the King clerghially he said, *learnedly*  
 125 "Christ keep thee, sir King, and thy king-riche, *kingdom*  
 And lene thee lead thy land so loyalty thee love, *grant*  
 And for thy rightful ruling be rewarded in heaven!"  
     And since in the air on high an angel of heaven  
 Lowed to speak in Latin — for lewed men ne could  
 130 Jangle nor judge that justify him should, *argue*  
 But suffer and serve — forth said the angel:  
     "*Sum Rex, sum Princeps, — neutrum fortasse deinceps*

---

3. 'I am King, I am prince'; but you may be neither hereafter. O you who administer the sublime laws of Christ the King, in order to act better, be pious as you are just; Naked Law wishes to be clothed by you with a sense of duty to God. Sow such grain as you wish to reap. If the law is stripped bare by you, then let nude judgment be measured out to you. If goodness is sown by you, may you reap goodness.

- O qui iura regis Christi specialia regis,  
 Hoc quod agas melius — iustus es, esto pius*  
 135 *Nudum ius a te vestiri vult pietate.  
 Qualia vis metere, talia grana sere:  
 Si ius nudatur, nudo de iure metatur;  
 Si seritur pietas, de pietate metas.”*<sup>3</sup>
- Then grieved him a goliard, a glutton of words, jester  
 140 And to the angel on high answered after:  
*“Dum ‘rex’ a ‘regere’ dicatur nomen habere,  
 Nomen habet sine re nisi studet iura tenere.”*<sup>4</sup>
- And then gan all the commons cry in verse of Latin people; began  
 To the King’s counsel — construe whoso would—  
 145 *“Præcepta Regis sunt nobis vincula legis.”*<sup>5</sup>
- With that, ran there a rout of rats at once throng  
 And small mice mid them: more than a thousand  
 Came to a council for their common profit.  
 For a cat of a court came when he liked  
 150 And overleapt them lightly and laughed them at his will, siezed  
 And played with them perilously and pushed them about.  
 “For doubt of diverse dreads we dare not well look!  
 And if we grudge of his game he will grieve us all,  
 Cratch us or claw us and in his clutches hold, Scratch  
 155 That we loatheth the life e’er he let us pass.  
 Might we with any wit his will withstand,  
 We might be lords aloft and live at our ease.”
- A rat of renown, most renable of tongue, eloquent  
 Said for a sovereign salve to them all, perfect remedy  
 160 “I have y-seen segges,” quoth he, “in the City of London men  
 Bear beighs full bright about their necks, necklaces  
 And some collars of crafty work; uncoupled they wend  
 Both in warren and in waste where them leave liketh,  
 And other while they are elsewhere, as I here tell.  
 165 Were there a bell on their beigh, by Jesu, as me thinketh,

4. As the word ‘king’ is from ‘to rule’ taken, a ruler has the name only, without the fact, unless he works hard to maintain the law.

5. The King’s precepts are for us a binding law.

- Men might wit where they went and away run. *know*  
 And right so," quoth that rat, "reason me sheweth  
 To buy a bell of brass or of bright silver  
 And knit it on a collar for our common profit  
 170 And hang it upon the cat's halse. Then hear we may *neck*  
 Where he ride or rest or roameth to play;  
 And if him list for to laik, then look we may *to play sport*  
 And peer in his presence the while he play liketh, *appear*  
 And if he wratheth, be ware and his way shun."
- 175 All this rout of rats to this reason assented;  
 As then the bell was y-bought and on the beigh hanged  
 There ne was rat in all the rout, for all the realm of France,  
 That durst have bound the bell about the cat's neck, *dare*  
 Nor hang it about his halse all England to win,  
 180 And held them unhardy and their counsel feeble,  
 And let their labour lost and all their long study.  
 A mouse that much good couth, as me then thought, *knew*  
 Strook forth sternly and stood before them all, *Advanced*  
 And to the rout of rats rehearsed these words:
- 185 "Though we had y-killed the cat, yet should there come another  
 To cratch us and all our kind, though we crept under benches.  
 Forth I counsel all the commons to let the cat worth, *be*  
 And be we never so bold the bell him to shew.  
 The while he catcheth conies, he coveteth not our carrion, *rabbits*  
 190 But feedeth him all with venison; defame we him never.  
 For better is a little loss than a long sorrow:  
 The maze among us all, though we miss a shrew! *confusion; villain*  
 For I heard my sire say, is seven year y-passed,  
 'Where the cat is a kitten, the court is full elenge'. *wretched*  
 195 That witnesseth Holy Writ, whoso will it read:  
*Vae terrae ubi puer rex est!*<sup>6</sup>  
 For may no renk his rest have for rats by night. *man*  
 For many men's malt we mice would destroy,  
 And also ye rout of rat rend men's clothes,

---

6. Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a child. *Ecclesiastes* 10:16  
 (Richard II was ten years old when he ascended to the throne in 1377.)

- 200 Nere the cat of the court that can you overleap; *Were it not for*  
 For had ye rats your rake, ye could not rule yourselves. *way*  
 "I say it for me," quoth the mouse, "I see so much after,  
 Shall never the cat nor the kitten by my counsel be grieved,  
 Nor carping of this collar that cost me never.
- 205 And though it cost me chattel, be-know it I nolde, *wealth; would not*  
 But suffer as himself would so do as him liketh;  
 Coupled and uncoupled to catch what they may.  
 Further each a wis wight I warn — wit well his own!" *true spirit*  
 (What this metels be-meaneth, ye men that be merry, *dream*
- 210 Divine ye — for I ne dare, by dear God in heaven!)  
 Yet hoved there an hundred in howves of silk: *hoods*  
 Sergeants, it seemed, that served at the Bar,  
 Pleded for pennies and pounded the law,  
 And not for love of Our Lord unloose their lips once.
- 215 Thou mightest better mete mist on Malvern Hills *measure*  
 Than get a 'mom' of their mouth till money be shewed!  
 Barons and burgesses and bondsmen also *serfs*  
 I saw in this assembly, as ye shall hear after;  
 Bakers and brewers and butchers many,
- 220 Woollen websters and weavers of linen,  
 Tailors and tinkers and tollers in markets, *toll-collectors*  
 Masons and miners and many other crafts:  
 Of all kinds living labourers leapt forth some,  
 As dikers and delvers that do their deeds ill
- 225 And driveth forth the long day with "*Dieu save Dame Emme!*"  
 Cooks and their knaves cried, "Hot pies, hot!  
 Good geese and grice! Go we dine, go we!" *young pigs*  
 Taverners unto them told the same:  
 "White wine of Alsace and wine of Gascony,
- 230 Of the Rhine and of La Rochelle, the roast to defy!" *digest*  
 All this I saw sleeping, and seven sithes more. *times*



# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 1

- W**HAT this mountain be-meaneth, and the murk dale *dark*  
And the field full of folk, I shall you fair shew.
- A lovely lady of leer in linen y-clothed *face*  
Came down from the castle and called me fair,  
5 And said, "Son, sleepest thou? Seest thou this people;  
How busy they be about the maze?  
The most part of this people that passeth on this earth  
Have their worship in this world, they will no better; *desire*  
Of other heaven than here hold they no tally." *account*
- 10 I was a-feared of her face, though she fair were,  
And said, "Mercy, madam, what may this be to mean?"  
"The tower upon the tuft," quoth she, "Truth is therein,  
And would that ye wrought as his word teacheth. *did*  
For he is father of faith, and formed you all
- 15 Both with fell and with face and gave you five wits *skin*  
For to worship him therewith while that ye be here.  
And therefore he hight the earth to help you each one: *commanded*  
Of wool, of linen, of livelihood at need  
In measurable manner to make you at ease;
- 20 And commanded of his courtesy in common three things:  
Are none needful but those, and name them I think, *intend*  
And reckon them by reason; rehearse thou them after. *repeat*  
"That one is vesture, from chill thee to save,  
And meat at meal for misease of thyself,
- 25 And drink when thou driest; as do naught out of reason, *outside*  
That thou worth the worse when thou work shouldest. *become*  
For Lot in his lifedays, for liking of drink,  
Did by his daughters that the devil liked:  
Delighted he in drink as the devil would,
- 30 And lechery him laughed, and lay by them both; *took*  
And all he wit it the wine, that wicked deed: *blamed*



*Inebriemus eum vino dormiamusque cum eo,  
ut servare possimus de patre nostro semen.<sup>1</sup>*

Through wine and through women there was Lot encumbered,  
And there got in gluttony gurles that were churls. *children; ill-bred*

“Forth dread delightful drink, and thou shalt do the better.

35 Measure is medicine, though thou much yearn.

All is not good to the ghost that the gut asketh,

Nor livelihood to the likame that lief is to the soul. *body; dear*

Lieve not thy likame, for a liar him teacheth — *Believe*

That is the wretched world, would thee betray.

40 For the fiend and thy flesh follow together,

And that shendeth thy soul and seeth it in thine heart. *ruins*

And for thou shouldest be aware, I wiss thee the best.” *advise*

“Ah, madam, mercy,” quoth I, “me liketh well your words.

As the money of this mold that men so fast holdeth — *world*

45 Telleth me to whom that treasure appendeth.” *belongs*

“Go to the Gosþel,” quoth she, “that God said himself,

When the people him apposed with a penny in the Temple *asked*

Whether they should therewith worship the king Caesar.

And God asked of them, of whom spake the letter,

50 And the image y-like that therein standeth?

‘Caesar’s,’ they said, ‘we see it well each one.’

‘*Reddite Caesari*,’ quoth God, ‘that Caesar befallerth,

*Et que sunt Dei, Deo,*<sup>2</sup> or else ye do ill.’

For rightfully Reason should rule you all,

55 And Kind Wit be warden, your wealth to keep, *Natural Intelligence*

And tutor of your treasure, and take it you at need;

For husbandry and he hold together.”

Then I frayned her fair, for Him that her made, *asked*

“That dungeon in the dale that dreadful is of sight.

60 What may it bemean, madam, I you beseech?”

“That is the castle of Care — whoso cometh therein *Grief*

1. Come, let us make him drunk with wine, and let us lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father. *Genesis* 19:32

2. Render under Caesar that which is Caesar’s; and render unto God that which is God’s. *Matthew* 22:21

- May ban that he born was to body or to soul! *curse*  
 Therein woneth a wight that Wrong is y-hote, *dwells; called*  
 Father of falsehood — and founded it himself.
- 65 Adam and Eve he egged to ill,  
 Counsellèd Cain to kill his brother,  
 Judas he japed with Jewish silver,  
 And since on an elder, hanged him after. *elder-tree*  
 He is letter of love and lieth (*to*) them all: *hinderer*
- 70 That truſt on his treasure betrayed are soonest.”  
 Then had I wonder in my wit what woman it were  
 That such wise words of Holy Writ shewed,  
 And halsed her on the high name, ere she thence went, *beseched*  
 What she were witterly that wissed me so fair. *truly; guided*
- 75 “Holy Church I am,” quoth she, “thou oughtest me to know.  
 I underfeng thee first and the faith taught. *received*  
 Thou broughtest me borghs my bidding to fulfil, *pledges*  
 And to love me leally the while thy life endureth.” *truly*  
 Then I curbed on my knees and cried her of grace, *bent*
- 80 And prayed her piteously to pray for my sins,  
 And also ken me kindly on Christ to believe, *teach*  
 That I might work His will that wrought me to man:  
 “Teach me to no treasure, but tell me this ilk: *same*  
 How I may save my soul, that saint art y-holden.” *holy; held*
- 85 “When all treasures are tried,” quoth she, “Truth is the best.  
 I do it on *Deus caritas*<sup>3</sup> to deem the sooth;  
 It is as dearworth a drury as dear God himself. *precious; object of affection*  
 Who is true of his tongue and telleth none other,  
 And doeth the works therewith and willeth no man ill, *wishes*
- 90 He is a god by the Gospel, aground and aloft,  
 And y-like to Our Lord, by Saint Luke’s words.<sup>4</sup>  
 The clerks that know this should ken it about, *make known*  
 For Christen and unchristen claimeth it each one.  
 “Kings and knights should keep it by reason —

---

3. God is love. 1 *John* 4:8

4. *Luke* 12:33-34

- 95 Ride and rap down in realms about, *hurry*  
 And take transgressors and tie them fast  
 Till truth had determined their trespass to the end.  
 For David in his days dubbed knights,  
 And did them swear on their sword to serve truth ever.
- 100 And that is the profession apertly that appendeth to knights,  
*openly; belongs*  
 And not to fast on Friday in five score winter,  
 But hold with him and with her that would all truth,  
 And never leave them for love nor for lacking of silver —  
 And whoso passeth that point is apostate in the order.
- 105 “But Christ, king of kings, knighted ten:  
 Cherubim and Seraphim, such seven and another;  
 And gave them might in his majesty, the merrier they thought,  
 And over his mean meynee made them archangels; *household*  
 Taught them by the Trinity truth to know,  
 110 To be buxom at his bidding — he bade them naught else. *obedient*  
 “Lucifer with legions learned it in heaven,  
 And was the loveliest of light after Our Lord’s self  
 Till he brake buxomness; his bliss began he tyne, *broke; obedience; lose*  
 And fell from that fellowship in a fiend’s likeness
- 115 Into a deep dark hell to dwell there for ever.  
 And more thousands mid him than man could number  
 Leapt out with Lucifer in loathly form  
 For they lieved upon him that lied in this manner: *believed*  
*Ponam pedem in aquilone, et similis ero Altissimo.*<sup>5</sup>
- 120 And all that hoped it might be so, no heaven might them hold,  
 But fell out in fiend’s likeness for nine days together,  
 Till God of his goodness gart the heaven to stekie *caused; be fastened*  
 And began stable it and stint and stand in quiet.  
 “When these wicked went out, wonder-wise they fell: *marvellously*
- 125 Some in air, some in earth, some in hell deep;  
 As Lucifer lowest lieth of them all:  
 For pride that he put out, his pain hath no end.

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5. I shall set my foot in the north, and I shall be like the Most High. St Augustine.

- And all that work with wrong, wend they shall  
 After their death day and dwell with that shrew;  
 130 As those that work well as Holy Writ telleth,  
 And end, as I ere said, in truth that is the best, *before*  
 May be secure that their souls shall wend to heaven,  
 Where Truth is in Trinity and throneth them all.  
 Forth I say, as I said ere, by sight of these texts;  
 135 When all treasures are tried, Truth is the best.  
 Learneth it thus, lewed men, for lettered it knoweth *unlearned; educated*  
 That Truth is treasure the triest on earth." *best*  
 "Yet have I no kind knowing," quoth I, "yet must ye ken me better  
 By what craft in my corse it comseth, and where." *body; begins*  
 140 "Thou doted daft!" quoth she, "dull are thy wits.  
 Too little Latin thou learnedst, leode, in thy youth: *man*  
*Heu mihi quia sterilem duxi vitam iuvenilem!*<sup>6</sup>  
 It is a kind knowing that kenneth in thine heart  
 For to love thy Lord liefer than thyself, *dearer*  
 No deadly sin to do, die though thou shouldest —  
 145 This I trow be truth; who can teach thee better,  
 Look thou suffer him to say, and since learn it after;  
 For thus witnesseth his word; work thou thereafter.  
 "For Truth telleth that love is treacle of heaven: *remedy*  
 May no sin be on him seen that that spice useth.  
 150 And all his works he wrought with love as he list, *likes*  
 And learned it Moses for the liefest thing and most like to heaven, *dearest*  
 And also the plant of peace, most precious of virtues:  
 For heaven might not hold it, so was it heavy of itself,  
 Till it had of the earth eaten its fill.  
 155 And when it had of this fold flesh and blood taken, *world*  
 Was never leaf upon linden lighter thereafter,  
 And portative and persaunt as the point of a needle, *portable; piercing*  
 That might no armour it let, nor no high walls. *stop*  
 "Forth is love leader of the Lord of heaven's folk,  
 160 And a mean, as the mayor is, in-midst the king and the commons;

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6. Alas, what a useless life I led in my youth!

Right so is love a leader and the law shapeth:  
 Upon man for his misdeeds the amercement he taxeth.  
 And for to know it kindly — it comseth by might,  
 And in the heart, there is the head and the high well. fount  
 165 For in kind knowing in heart there comseth a might;  
 And that falleth to the Father that formed us all,  
 Looked on us with love and let his son die  
 Meekly for our misdeeds, to amend us all.  
 And yet would he them no woe that wrought him that pain,  
 170 But meekly with mouth mercy he besought,  
 To have pity on that people that pained him to death.  
 “Here might thou see examples in himself one;  
 That he was mightful and meek, and mercy gan grant  
 To them that hanged him high and his heart thirled. pierced  
 175 “Forth I read you rich, haveth ruth on the poor, advise; pity  
 Though ye be mighty to moot, be meek in your works, dispute in law  
 For the same measure that ye mete, amiss other else, or  
 Ye shall be weighed therewith when ye wend hence:  
*Eadem mensura qua mensi fueritis remetietur vobis.*<sup>7</sup>  
 For though ye be true of your tongue and truly win, pleasant  
 180 And as chaste as a child that in church weepeth,  
 But if ye love leally and lene the poor, truly; give to  
 Of such goods as God you sent goodly parteth,  
 Ye ne have no more merit in mass nor in hours  
 Than Malkin of her maidenhead, that no man desireth.  
 185 For James the gentle judged in his books  
 That faith without feat is feebler than naught,  
 And as dead as a door-nail but if the deeds follow:  
*Fides sine operibus mortua est &c.*<sup>8</sup>  
 “Forth chastity without charity worth chained in hell; will be  
 It is as lewed as a lamp that no light is in. worthless  
 190 Many chaplains are chaste, as charity is away; absent  
 Are none harder than they when they be advanced:  
 Unkind to their kin and to all Christen, Christians

7. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again. *Luke 6:38*

8. Faith, if it have not works, is dead in itself. *James 2: 17*

- Chew their charity and chide after more; *will be*  
 Such chaſtity without charity worth chained in hell.  
 195 Many curates keep them clean of their bodies;  
 They be encumbered with covetousness, they can not out creep,  
 So hard hath avarice y-haſped them together. *faſtened*  
 And that is no truth of the Trinity, but treachery of hell,  
 And learning to lewed men the latter to deal.  
 200 For these be words written in the Evangelist:  
 “*Date, et dabitur vobis*<sup>9</sup> — for I deal you all.  
 And that is the lock of love that letteth out my grace, *gift*  
 To comfort the careful, encumbered with sin.  
 “Love is leech of life and next (*to*) Our Lord’s self, *healer*  
 205 And also the graith gate that goeth into heaven. *direct*  
 Forth I say, as I said ere, by sight of these texts: *before*  
 When all treasures be tried, Truth is the best.  
 “Now have I told thee what truth is — that no treasure is better—  
 I may no longer linger thee with; now look thee Our Lord!” *protect*



9. Give, and it shall be given unto you. *Luke 6:38*

# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 2

- D**ET I curbed on my knees and cried her of grace,  
And said, "Mercy, madam, for Mary love of heaven,  
That bore that blissful bairn that bought us on the Rood,  
Ken me by some craft to know the false." *Teach*
- 5 "Look upon thy left half, and lo where he standeth:  
Both False and Favel, and their feres many!"  
*Falsehood; Flattery; companions*
- I looked on my left half as the Lady me taught,  
And was ware of a woman wonderly y-clothed:  
Purfled with pelure, the purest on earth, *embroidered; fur*
- 10 Y-crowned with a crown; the King hath none better.  
Featously her fingers were fretted with gold wire, *Elegantly*  
And thereon red rubies as red as any glead, *glowing coal*  
And diamonds of dearest price and double manner sapphires,  
Orientals and ewages envenoms to destroy. *beryls; poisons*
- 15 Her robe was full rich, of red scarlet engrained, *dyed*  
With ribbons of red gold and of rich stones.  
Her array me ravished, such riches saw I never.  
I had wonder what she was and whose wife she were.  
"What is this woman," quoth I, "so worthily attired?"
- 20 "That is Meed the maid," quoth she, "hath noyed me full oft,  
*Reward; annoyed*  
And y-lacked my leman that Loyalty is hote, *criticized; sweetheart; called*  
And be-loved him to lords that laws have to keep. *falsely accused*  
In the Pope's palace she is privy as myself,  
But Soothness would not so; for she is a bastard,  
25 For False was her father, that hath a fickle tongue,  
And never sooth said since he came to earth;  
And Meed is mannered after him, right as kind asketh:  
*Qualis pater, talis filius. Bona arbor bonum fructum facit.*<sup>1</sup>  
"I ought be higher than she — I come of a better.

---

1. Like father, like son. (*proverbial*) A good tree bears good fruit. (*Matthew 7:17*)

My father the great God is and ground of all graces, root  
 30 One God without ginning, and I his good daughter, beginning  
 And hath given me Mercy to marry with myself;  
 And what man be merciful and leally me love truly  
 Shall be my lord and I his lief in the high heaven; dear  
 And what man taketh Meed, mine head dare I lay wager  
 35 That he shall lose for her love a lap of *Caritatis*. portion; Charity  
 “How construeth David the King of men that catcheth Meed,  
 And men of this mold that maintaineth truth,  
 And how ye shall save yourself? The Psalter beareth witness:  
*Domine, quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo, &c.*<sup>2</sup>  
 40 “And now worth this Meed y-married to a mansed shrew, [will be; becomes; cursed  
offspring  
 To one False Fickle-tongue, a fiend’s beget.  
 Favel through his fair s̄peech hath this folk enchanted,  
 And all is Liar’s leading that she is thus y-wedded.  
 Tomorrow worth y-made the maiden’s bridal; will be  
 45 And there might thou wit if thou wilt which they be all  
 That long to that lordship, the less and the more.  
 Know them there if thou canst, and keep thee from them all,  
 And lack them not but let them worth, till Loyalty be Justice blame; be  
 And have power to punish them — then put forth thy reason.  
 50 Now I be-ken thee Christ,” quoth she, “and his clean mother, commend  
 And let no conscience encumber thee for coveting of Meed.”  
 Thus left me that lady lying asleep,  
 And how Meed was y-married in metels me thought — dreams  
 That all the rich retinue that reigneth with the False  
 55 Were bidden to the bridal on both two sides,  
 Of all manner of men, the mean and the rich.  
 To marry this maid was many man assembled,  
 As of knights and of clerks and other common people,  
 As sisours and summoners, sheriffs and their clerks, jurors  
 60 Beadles and bailiffs and brokers of chaffer,  
 Forgoers and victuallers and vokettes of the Arches; Purveyors; advocates

2. Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle? *Psalm 15:1*



I can not reckon the rout that ran about Meed. *crowd*  
 As Simony, and Civil, and sisours of courts  
 Were most privy with Meed of any men, me thought.  
 65 As Favel was the first that fetched her out of bower  
 And as a broker brought her to be with False enjoined.  
 When Simony and Civil saw her both will,  
 They assented for silver to say as both would.  
 Then leapt Liar forth and said, "Lo! here a charter  
 70 That Guile with his great oaths gave them together,"  
 And prayed Civil to see and Simony to read it.  
 Then Simony and Civil stood forth both  
 And unfoldeth the feoffment that False hath y-made, *deed*  
 And thus began these gomes to grede full high: *men; cry out*  
*"Sciant presentes & futuri, &c."*<sup>3</sup>  
 75 Witeth and witnesseth, that woneth upon this earth,  
 That Meed is y-married more for her goods  
 Than for any virtue or fairness or any free kind. *nobility*  
 Falseness is fain of her for he wot her rich;  
 And Favel with his fickle sþeech feoffeth by this charter *endows*  
 80 To be princess in Pride, and poverty to despise,  
 To backbite and to boast and bear false witness,  
 To scorn and to scold and slander to make,  
 Unbuxom, and bold to break the ten hests. *Disobedient; commandments*  
 And the earldom of Envy and Wrath together,  
 85 With the chatelet of Chest and chattering out of reason. *little castle; Strife*

The county of Covetousness and all the coasts about —  
 That is Usury and Avarice — all I them grant  
 In bargains and in brokerage with all the borough of Theft,  
 And all the lordship of Lechery in length and in breadth;  
 90 As in works and in words and in waitings with eyes,  
 And in weenings and in wishings and with idle thoughts *hopes*  
 Where as will would and workmanship faileth."  
 Gluttony he gave them eke and great oaths together, *also*

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3. Be it known to all present and to come. (legal formula)

- And all day to drink at diverse taverns,  
 95 And there to jangle and jape and judge their even-cristen, *fellow Christian*  
 And in fasting days to fret ere full time were. *devour*  
 And then to sit and sup till sleep them assail,  
 And breed as borough swine, and bed them easily,  
 Till Sloth and sleep slick his sides;  
 100 And then Wanhope to awaken him so, with no will to amend, *Despair*  
 For he lieveth be loſt — this is his laſt end. *believe*  
 “And they to have and to hold, and their heirs after,  
 A dwelling with the devil, and damned be for ever,  
 With all the appurtenances of Purgatory into the pine of hell; *torment*  
 105 Yielding for this thing at one year’s end  
 Their souls to Satan, to suffer with him pains,  
 And with him to wone with woe while God is in heaven.”  *dwell*  
 In witness of which thing Wrong was the firſt,  
 And Piers the Pardoner of Pauline doctrine,  
 110 Bette, the Beadle of Buckinghamshire, *Shire*  
 Reynald, the Reeve of Rutland Sokene,  
 Munde the Miller — and many more other.  
 “In the date of the devil this deed is a-sealed  
 By sight of Sir Simony and Civil’s leave.”  
 115 Then teened him Theology when he this tale heard, *grieved*  
 And ſaid to Civil, “Now sorrow may thou have,  
 Such weddings to work to wrath with Truth!  
 And ere this wedding be wrought, woe thee betide!  
 For Meed is mulier, of Amends engendered;  *lady; born*  
 120 And God granted to give Meed to Truth,  
 And thou haſt given her to a guiler — now God give thee sorrow!  
 The text telleth thee not ſo, Truth wot the ſooth,  
 For *Dignus eſt operarius*<sup>4</sup> his hire to have — *wages*  
 And thou haſt fixed her to False; fie on thy law!  
 125 For all by leasings thou liveſt and lecherous works. *lies*  
 Simony and thyſelf ſhend Holy Church, *disgrace*  
 The notaries and ye noy the people. *annoy*

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4. For the labourer is worthy of his hire. *Luke 10:7*

Ye shall a-buy it both, by God that me made!  
 “Well ye wit, wernards, but if your wit fail,  
 130 That False is faithless and fickle in his works  
 And as a bastard y-born of Beelzebub’s kin.  
 And Meed is mulier, a maiden of good, *lady*  
 And might kiss the King for cousin and she would. *if*  
 Forth worketh by wisdom and by wit also,  
 135 And leadeth her to London, where law is y-shewed,  
 If any law will lock their lies together.  
 And though justices judge her to be joined with False,  
 Yet be ware of the wedding — for witty is Truth,  
 And Conscience is of his counsel and knoweth you each one,  
 140 And if he find you in default and with the False held, *fault*  
 It shall beset your souls full sour at the last.”  
 Hereto assenteth Civil, as Simony ne would,  
 Till he had silver for his seal and signs of notaries.  
 Then fetched Favel forth florins enough  
 145 And bade Guile, “Go give gold all about,  
 And namely to the notaries, that them none fail;  
 And feoff False-witness with florins enough, *endow*  
 For he may Meed a-master and make at my will.”  
 When this gold was y-given, great was the thanking  
 150 To False and to Favel for their fair gifts,  
 And (*they*) came to comfort from care the False, *grief*  
 And said, “Certain, sire, cease shall we never,  
 Till Meed be thy wedded wife through wits of us all;  
 For we have Meed a-mastered through our merry s̄peech,  
 155 That she granteth to go with a good will  
 To London, to look if the law would  
 Judge you jointly in joy for ever.”  
 Then was Falseness fain and Favel as blithe,  
 And let summon all the segges in shires about, *people*  
 160 And bade them all be boun, beggars and other, *ready*  
 To wend with them to Westminster to witness this deed.  
 As then cared they for caples to carry them thither; *horses*  
 And Favel fetched forth then foals<sup>5</sup> enough

- And set Meed upon a sheriff, shod all new,  
 165 And False sat on a sisour that softly trotted *juror*  
 And Favel on a flatterer, fetisly attired. *neatly*  
 Then had notaries none; annoyed they were  
 For Simony and Civil should on their feet go.  
 As then swore Simony and Civil both  
 170 That summoners should be saddled and serve them each one.  
 "And let apparel these provisors<sup>6</sup> in palfrey wise;  
 Sir Simony himself shall sit upon their backs.  
 Deans and subdeans, draw you together;  
 Archdeacons and officials and all your registrars,  
 175 Let saddle them with silver, our sin to suffer —  
 As devoutry and divorces and dern usury — *adultery; secret*  
 To bear bishops about abroad in visiting.  
 Pauline privys for plaints in consistory *pleas*  
 Shall serve myself that Civil is named.  
 180 And cart-saddle the commissary; our cart shall he draw,  
 And fetch us victuals at fornicators,  
 And maketh of Liar a long cart to lead all these others,  
 As fobbers and faitours that on their feet run." *tricksters; deceivers*  
 And thus False and Favel fareth forth together,  
 185 And Meed in the midst and all these men after.  
 I have no time to tell the tail that them followeth, *queue*  
 Of many manner man that on this mold liveth, *world*  
 As Guile was fore-goer and guided them all. *leader*  
 Soothness saw them well, and said but little,  
 190 And pricked his palfrey and passed them all, *spurred*  
 And came to the King's court and Conscience it told,  
 And Conscience to the King carped it after.  
 "Now, by Christ!" quoth the King, "and I catch might  
 False or Favel or any of his feres, *companions*  
 195 I would be wroke of those wretches that worketh so ill, *avenged*  
 And do them hang by the halse, and all that them maintaineth. *neck*

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5. A pun with 'fools', originally.

6. One to whom the pope promises employment

- Shall never man of this mold mainprise the least, *bail*  
 But right as the law looketh, let fall on them all!”  
 And commanded a constable that came at the first:
- 200 “Go attack those tyrants, for any treasure, I hote, *in spite of; command*  
 And fetter Falseness fast, for any kind (of) gifts,  
 And girdeth off Guile’s head — let him go no further;  
 And bringeth Meed to me, maugree them all! *in spite of*  
 And if ye lack Liar, let him not escape
- 205 Ere he be put on the pillory, for any prayer, I hote.”  
 Dread at the door stood and the doom heard, *judgment*  
 And how the King commanded constables and sergeants  
 Falseness and his fellowship to fetter and to bind.  
 Then Dread went wightly and warned the False, *swiftly*
- 210 And bade him flee for fear, and his feres all.  
 Falseness for fear then fled to the friars  
 And Guile doeth him to go, aghast for to die. *makes*  
 As merchants met with him and made him abide,  
 And be-shut him in their shops to shew their wares,
- 215 Apparelled him as a prentice, the people to serve.  
 Lightly Liar leapt away thence,  
 Lurking through lanes, to-lugged of many. *dragged about*  
 He was nowhere welcome for his many tales,  
 Over all y-hunted and y-hote truss, *bid; bundle*
- 220 Till pardoners had pity, and pulled him into house.  
 They washed him and wiped him and wound him in clouts, *rags*  
 And sent him on Sundays with seals to churches,  
 And gave pardon for pence pound-meal about. *a pound a time*
- 225 Then loured leeches, and letters they sent *scowled; doctors*  
 That he should wone with them, waters to look. *dwell; inspect*  
 Spicers spoke to him to spy their wares,  
 For he couth on their craft and knew many gums.  
 As minstrels and messengers met with him once,  
 And withheld him an half year and eleven days.
- 230 Friars with fair speech fetched him thence,  
 And for knowing of comers coped him as a friar; *strangers; dressed*  
 As he hath leave to leap out as oft as he liketh,

	And is welcome when he will, and woneth with them oft.	<i>dwells</i>
	All fled for fear and flew into hernes;	<i>corners</i>
235	Save Meed the maid no more durst abide.	<i>dared</i>
	As truly to tell, she trembled for fear,	
	And eke wept and wrung when she was attacked.	<i>arrested</i>



# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 3

**N**ow is Meed the maid and no more of them all,  
With beadles and bailiffs brought before the King.  
The King called a clerk — I ken not his name—

To take Meed the maid and make her at ease.

5 "I shall assay her myself and soothly appose *try; question*  
What man of this world that her were liefest. *dearest*  
And if she work by my wit, and my will follow,  
I will forgive her this guilt, so me God help!"

Courteously the clerk then, as the King hight, *bid*  
10 Took Meed by the middle and brought her into chamber.  
As there was mirth and minstrelsy Meed to please;  
That woneth at Westminster worshipeth her all. *dwelt*

Gently with joy the justices some  
Busked them to the bower where the bird dwelled, *Went; lady*  
15 Comforted her kindly by Clergy's leave,  
And said, "Mourn not, Meed, nor make thou no sorrow,  
For we will wiss the King, and thy way shape *guide*  
To be wedded at thy will and where thy lief liketh  
For all Conscience's cast or craft, as I trow." *plan; skill; believe*

20 Mildly Meed then mercied them all *thanked*  
Of their great goodness; and gave them each one  
Cups of clean gold and cups of silver,  
Rings with rubies and riches many,  
The least man of her meynee a mutton of gold. *household; coin*

25 Then laught their leave these lords at Meed. *took*  
With that came clerks to comfort her the same,  
And bade her be blithe — "For we be thine own  
For to work thy will the while thou might last."

Hendily she then be-hight them the same: *courteously*  
30 To love them leally and lords to make, *loyally*  
And in the consistory at the court to call their names.

"Shall no lewdness let the clerk that I love, *ignorance hinder*  
That he ne worth first advanced, for I am be-known *will be*

- Where cunning clerks shall clock behind." *limp*
- 35 Then came there a confessor, coped as a friar;  
 To Meed the maid meekly he louted *bowed*  
 And said full softly, in shrift as it were,  
 "Though lewed men and learned men had lain by thee both,  
 And Falsehood had y-followed thee all these fifty winter,  
 40 I shall assoil thee myself for a seem of wheat, *absolve; horse-load*  
 And also be thy beadsman, and bear well thine errand  
*one who prays for another*  
 Among knights and clerks, Conscience to turn."
- Then Meed for her misdeeds to that man kneeled,  
 And shrove her of her shrewedness; shamelessly, I trow; *wickedness*
- 45 Told him a tale and took him a noble *coin*  
 For to be her beadsman and her broker also.  
 Then he assoilled her soon, and since he said, *absolved*  
 "We have a window a-working, will stand us full high;  
 Wouldst thou glaze that gable and grave therein thy name, *cost*  
 50 Secure should thy soul be heaven to have?" *engrave*  
 "Wist I that," quoth the woman, "I would not spare *Knew*  
 For to be your friend, friar, and fail you never  
 While ye love lords that lechery haunt  
 And lacketh not ladies that love well the same. *blame*
- 55 It is a frailty of flesh —ye find it in books—  
 And a course of Kind, whereof we come all. *way; Nature*  
 Who may scape the scandal, the scathe is soon amended;  
 It is sin of the seven soonest released. *forgiven*  
 Have mercy," quoth Meed, "of men that it haunteth
- 60 And I shall cover your church, your cloister do make,  
 Walls do whiten and windows glaze,  
 Do paint and portray who payed for the making,  
 That every segge shall see I am sister of your house."
- As God to all good folk such graving defendeth — *forbids*
- 65 To write in windows of their well deeds —  
 An aventure pride be painted there, and pomp of the world; *chance*  
 For God knoweth thy conscience and thy kind will, *true mind*  
 Thy cost and thy covetousness and who the chattel ought. *possessed*



Forth I learn you lords, leave such works;  
 70 To write in windows of your well deeds  
 Or to grede after God's men when ye give doles, *cry out; alms*  
 On aventure ye have your hire here and your heaven also. *chance; reward*  
*Nesciat sinistra quid faciat dextra:*<sup>1</sup>  
 Let not thy left half, late nor rathe, *early*  
 Wit what thou workeſt with thy right side: *Know*  
 75 For thus the Goſpel bids good men do their alms.  
 Mayors and macers, that means be between *mace-bearers*  
 The king and the commons to keep the laws, *people*  
 To punish on pillories and on pining ſtools *torture*  
 Brewers and bakers, butchers and cooks:  
 80 For these are men on this mold that moſt harm worketh  
 To the poor people that parcel-meal buy. *piece-meal*  
 For they poison the people, privily and often,  
 They rich through regratery, and rents them buy *retail*  
 With what the poor people should put in their womb.  
 85 For took they on truly, they timbered not so high, *built*  
 Nor bought no burgages — be ye full certain! *eſtates*  
 As Meed the maid the mayor she be-sought *beseechd*  
 Of all such seller's silver to take,  
 Or presents without pence — as pieces of silver,  
 90 Rings or other riches, the regratiers to maintain. *retailers*  
 “For my love,” quoth that lady, “love them each one,  
 And suffer them to sell something againſt reason.” *unreasonably*  
 Solomon the sage a sermon he made  
 For to amend mayors and men that keep laws,  
 95 And told them this theme that I tell think:  
*Ignis devorabit tabernacula eorum qui libenter accipiunt munera, &c.*<sup>2</sup>  
 Among these lettered leodes this Latin is to mean *men*  
 That fire shall fall and burn all to blue ashes  
 The houses and the homes of them that desireth  
 100 Gifts or yearsgifts because of their offices. *annual gifts*  
 The King from counsel came, and called after Meed,

1. Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth. *Matthew* 6:3

2. Fire shall consume the tabernacles of bribery. *Job* 15:34

- And of-sent her as swithe with sergeants many *sent for; quickly*  
 That brought her to bower with bliss and with joy. *chamber*
- Courteously the King then comsed to tell; *commenced*
- 105 To Meed the maid he melleth these words: *spoke*  
 “Unwittily, woman, wrought haſt thou oft;  
 As worse wroughteſt thou never than when thou False took.  
 But I forgive thee that guilt, and grant thee my grace;  
 Hence to thy death day do so no more!
- 110 I have a knight, Conscience, come late from beyond;  
 If he willeth thee to wife, wilt thou him have?” *desires*  
 “Yea, lord,” quoth that lady, “Lord forbid it else!  
 But I be wholly at your heſt, let hang me else!” *bidding*  
 Then was Conscience called to come and appear
- 115 Before the King and his counsel, as clerks and other.  
 Kneeling, Conscience to the King louted, *bowed*  
 To wit what his will were and what he do should.  
 “Wilt thou wed this woman,” quoth the King, “if I will assent?  
 For she is fain of thy fellowship, for to be thy make.” *mate*
- 120 Quoth Conscience to the King, “Christ it me forbid!  
 Ere I wed such a wife, woe me betide!” *Before*  
 For she is frail of her faith and fickle of her ſpeech,  
 And maketh men mis-do many score times. *do ill*  
 In truſt of their treasure she teeneth full many: *vexes*
- 125 Wives and widows wantonness she teacheth,  
 And learneth them lechery that loveth her gifts.  
 Your father she felled through false beheſt,  
 And hath a-poisoned popes and paired Holy Church. *injured*  
 Is naught a better bawd, by Him that me made, *harlot*
- 130 Between heaven and hell and earth though men sought!  
 For she is tickle of her tail, tale-wise of tongue, *loose; slanderous*  
 As common as the cart-way to knaves and to all —  
 To monks, to minſtrels, to measles in hedges; *lepers*  
 Sisours and summoners, such men her praiseth,
- 135 Sheriffs of shires were shent if she ne were; *ruined*  
 For she doth men lose their land and their life both.  
 She letteth pass prisoners and payeth for them oft,

And giveth the gaolers gold and groats together  
 To unfetter the False — flee where he liketh;  
 140 And taketh Truth by the top and tieth him fast, *hair*  
 And hangeth him for hatred that harmed never.  
 “To be cursed in Consistory she counteth not a rush  
 For she copeth the commissary and coateth his clerks. *clothes in copes*  
 She is assoilled as soon as herself liketh; *absolved*  
 145 She may nigh as much do in a month once  
 As your secret seal in six score days!  
 She is privy with the Pope — provisors it knoweth,  
 For Sir Simony and herself sealethe their bulls.  
 She blesseth these bishops, though they be lewed; *ignorant*  
 150 Provendereth parsons, and priests she maintaineth *gives prebends to*  
 To hold lemans and lotebies all their life days *sweethearts; concubines*  
 And bring forth bairns against forbidding laws.  
 “Where she is well with the king, woe is the realm —  
 For she is favourable to False and defouleth truth oft.  
 155 By Jesus! with her jewels your justice she shendeth *ruins*  
 And lieth against the law and letteth him the gate, *hinders; way*  
 That faith may not have his forth, her florins go so thick. *passage*  
 She leadeth the law as she list and love-days maketh,  
 And doth men lose through her love that law might win —  
 160 The maze for a mean man, though he moot ever! *confusion; litigate*  
 Law is so lordly, and loath to make end:  
 Without presents or pence she pleaseth well few.  
 “Barons and burgesses she bringeth in sorrow,  
 And all the commons in care that covet life in truth, *grief*  
 165 For clergy and covetousness she coupleth together.  
 This is the life of that lady — now Lord give her sorrow,  
 And all that maintaineth her men, mischance them betide!  
 For poor men may have no power to plain them, though they smart,  
 Such a master is Meed among men of goods.”  
 170 Then mourned Meed and meant her to the King *complained*  
 To have space to speak, speed if she might. *success*  
 The King granted her grace with a good will:  
 “Excuse thee if thou canst; I can no more say,

- For Conscience accuseth thee, to congee thee for ever." *dismiss*
- 175 "Nay, lord," quoth that lady, "lieveth him the worse *believe*  
 When ye wit witterly where the wrong lieth.  
 Where that mischief is great, Meed may help.  
 And thou knowest, Conscience, I came not to chide,  
 Nor to deprave thy person with a proud heart.
- 180 Well thou woest, wernard, but if thou would gab, *know; liar; lie*  
 Thou hast hanged on mine half eleven times,  
 And also gripped my gold, and given it where thee liked.  
 Why wrathest thee now, wonder me thinketh!  
 Yet I may, as I might, menske thee with gifts *honour*
- 185 And maintain thy manhood more than thou knowest.  
 "As thou hast famed me foul before the King here; *defamed*  
 For killed I never no king, nor counselled thereafter,  
 Nor did as thou deemest — I do it on the King!  
 In Normandy, was he not noyed for my sake,
- 190 As thou thyself, soothly, shamed him oft?  
 Crept into a cabin for cold of thy nails,  
 Weened that winter would have y-lasted ever, *Hoped*  
 And dreaded to be dead for a dim cloud,  
 And hied homeward for hunger of thy womb.
- 195 Without pity, pilour, poor men thou robbed *plunderer*  
 And bore their brass at thy back to Calais to sell,  
 There I left with my lord, his life for to save.  
 I made his men merry and mourning let; *hindered*  
 I battered them on the back and boldened their hearts,
- 200 And did them hop for hope to have me at will.  
 Had I been marshal of his men, by Mary of heaven!  
 I durst have laid my life and no lass wed, *would dare*  
 He should have been lord of that land in length and in breadth,  
 And also king of that kith his kin for to help — *country*
- 205 The least brawl of his blood a baron's peer! *brat*  
 Cowardly thou, Conscience, counselledst him thence —  
 To leave his lordship for a little silver,  
 That is the richest realm that rain over-hoveth.  
 "It becometh to a king that keepeth a realm

- 210 To give men meed that meekly him serveth — reward  
 To aliens and to all men, to honour them with gifts;  
 Meed maketh him beloved and for a man holden. held  
 Emperors and earls and all manner lords  
 Through gifts have yeomen to yern and to ride. run
- 215 The Pope and all prelates presents under-fongen receive  
 And meedeth men themselves to maintain their laws. reward  
 Servants for their service, we seeth well the sooth,  
 Take meed of their masters, as they may accord. agree  
 Beggars, for their bidding, bid men meed;
- 220 Minstrals for their mirth meed they ask.  
 The King hath meed of his men to make peace in land.  
 Men that ken clerks crave of them meed. teach  
 Priests that preach the people to good  
 Ask meed and mass-pence and their meat also.
- 225 All kinds crafty men crave meed for their prentice. training  
 Merchandise and meed must needs go together:  
 No wight, as I ween, without Meed may live!" suppose  
 Quoth the King to Conscience, "By Christ, as me thinketh,  
 Meed is worthy the mastery to have!"
- 230 "Nay," quoth Conscience to the King and kneeled to the earth,  
 "There are two manner of meeds, my lord, by your leave.  
 That one God of his grace granteth in his bliss  
 To those that well work while they be here.  
 The Prophet preacheth thereof and put it in the Psalter:  
*Domine, quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo?*<sup>3</sup>
- 235 Lord, who shall wone in thy wones with thine holy saints dwellings  
 Or rest in thine holy hills? — This asketh David.  
 And David answereth it himself, as the Psalter telleth:  
*Qui ingreditur sine macula et operatur iustitiam.*<sup>4</sup>  
 Those that enter of one colour and of one will,  
 And have y-wrought works with right and with reason,
- 240 And he that ne useth not the life of usury  
 And informeth poor men and pursueth truth:

3. Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle? *Psalm 15:1*

4. He that leadeth an uncorrupt life and doeth the thing which is right. *Psalm 15:2*

*Qui pecuniam suam non dedit ad usuram, et munera super innocentem &c.*<sup>5</sup>

And all that help the innocent and hold with the rightful,  
Without meed doth them good and the truth helpeth.  
Such manner men, my lord, shall have this first meed

245 Of God at a great need, when they go hence.

There is another meed, measureless, that masters desireth:  
To maintain misdoers, meed they take,  
And thereof saith the Psalter in a psalm's end —

*In quorum manibus iniquitates sunt; dextra eorum repleta est muneribus.*<sup>6</sup>

250 And he that grippeth her gold, so me God help,

Shall a-buy it full bitter, or the Book lieth!

pay for

Priests and parsons that pleasing desireth,

That take meed and money for masses that they singeth,

Take their meed here as Matthew us teacheth:

*Amen, amen, receperunt mercedem suam.*<sup>7</sup>

255 That labourers and lewed leodes take of their masters,

It is no manner meed but a measurable hire.

In merchandise is no meed, I may it well avow:

It is a permutation apertly — a pennyworth for another.

exchange

“As readeſt thou never *Regum*,<sup>8</sup> thou recreant Meed,

260 Why the vengeance fell on Saul and on his children?

God sent to Saul by Samuel the prophet

That Agag of Amalek and all his people after

Should die for a deed that done had their elders.

“Forth,” said Samuel to Saul, “God himself hoteth thee

265 To be buxom at his bidding, his will to fulfil.

Wend to Amalek with thine hoſt, and what thou findeſt there, slay it:

Bairns and beaſts — burn them to death!

Widows and wives, women and children,

Movables and unmovables, and all thou might find:

270 Burn it, bear it not away, be it never so rich;

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5. He that hath not given his money upon usury, nor taken reward againſt the innocent.

*Psalm 15:6*

6. In whose hands is wickedness: and their right hand is full of gifts. *Psalm 26:10*

7. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. *Matthew 6:5*

8. Kings. see 1 *Samuel*, chapter 15.

For meed nor for money, look thou destroy it! ensure  
 Spill it, and spare it not — thou shalt speed the better.” Destroy; fare  
 And for he coveted their cattle and the king spared,  
 Forbare him and his beasts both, as the Bible witnesseth,  
 275 Otherwise than he was warned of the prophet,  
 God said to Samuel that Saul should die,  
 And all his seed for that sin shamefully end.  
 Such a mischief Meed made the king to have  
 That God hated him for ever and all his heirs after.  
 280 “The *culorum* of this case keep I not to shew; conclusion  
 On aventure it noyed me, no end will I make, chance  
 For so is this world went with them that have power  
 That whoso saith them sootheſt is ſoonest y-blamed!  
 “I, Conscience, know this, for Kind Wit it me taught: Common Sense  
 285 That Reason shall reign and realms govern,  
 And right as Agag had, hap shall some: happen  
 Samuel shall slay him and Saul shall be blamed,  
 And David shall be diademed and daunt them all, crowned; overcome  
 And one Christen king keep us each one.  
 290 Shall no more Meed be master as she is now,  
 As love and lowliness and loyalty together —  
 These shall be masters on mold, true men to save.  
 And whoso trespasseth against truth or taketh against his will,  
 Loyalty shall do him law, and no life else.  
 295 Shall no sergeant for his service wear a sik howve, hood  
 Nor no pelure in his cloak for pleading at the bar. fur  
 “Meed of misdoers maketh many lords,  
 And over lords’ laws lordeth the realms.  
 As kind love shall come yet and Conscience together  
 300 And make of law a labourer; such love shall arise  
 And such peace among the people and a perfect truth  
 That Jews shall ween in their wit, and wax wondrous glad, hope  
 That Moses or Messiah be come into this earth,  
 And have wonder in their hearts that men be so true.  
 305 “All that bear baslard, broadsword or lance, dagger  
 Axe, other hatchet or any weapon else,

- Shall be deemed to the death but if he do it smith *unless; forge*  
 Into sickle or to scythe, to share or to colter — *plough-blade*  
*Conflabunt gladios suos in vomeres, &c.*<sup>9</sup>  
 Each man to play with a plow, pickaxe or spade,  
 310 Spin, or spread dung, or spill hymself with sloth; *destroy*  
 Priests and parsons with *Placebo*<sup>10</sup> to hunt,  
 And dingen upon David each day till eve. *beat*  
 Hunting or hawking if any of them use,  
 His boast of his benefice worth be-nomen him after. *will be taken*  
 315 “Shall neither king nor knight, constable nor mayor  
 Overcharge the commons nor to the court summon, *people*  
 Nor put them in panel to do them plight their troth; *jury; pledge*  
 But after the deed that is done, one doom shall reward: *judgment*  
 Mercy or no mercy, as Truth must accord.  
 320 “King’s court and common court, Consistory and chapter  
 All shall be but one court, and one baron be justice:  
 That worth True-tongue, a tidy man that teened me never. *respectable*  
 Battles shall none be, nor no man bear weapon,  
 And what smith that any smitheth be smitten therewith to death!  
*Non levabit gens contra gentem gladium &c.*<sup>11</sup>  
 325 “And ere this fortune fall, find men shall the worst, *befall*  
 By six suns and a ship and half a sheaf of arrows;  
 And the middle of a moon shall make the Jews turn,  
 And Saracens for that sight shall sing *Gloria in excelsis*;<sup>12</sup>  
 For Mahomet and Meed mishap shall that time;  
 330 For *Melius est bonum nomen quam divitiae multae.*<sup>13</sup>  
 Also wrath as the wind waxed Meed in a while.  
 “I ken no Latin?” quoth she. “Clerks wit the sooth!  
 See what Solomon saith in *Sapience* books: *Wisdom*  
 That they that give gifts the victory winneth,  
 335 And much worship have therewith, as Holy Writ telleth —

9. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares. *Isaiah* 2:4

10. I will please God (in the land of the living). *Psalms* 116:8

11. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation. *Isaiah* 2:4

12. Glory (to God) in the highest.

13. A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches. *Proverbs* 22:1



*Honorem acquireret qui dat munera.*<sup>14</sup>

- “I lieve well, lady,” quoth Conscience, “that thy Latin be true.  
 As thou art like a lady that read a lesson once,  
 Was *omnia probate*,<sup>15</sup> and that pleased her heart —
- 340 For that line was no longer at the leaf’s end. page’s  
 Had she looked that other half and the leaf turned,  
 She should have found fele words following thereafter: many  
*Quod bonum est tenete*<sup>16</sup> — Truth that text made.  
 And so, madam, fared ye — ye could no more find
- 345 Though ye on *Sapience* looked, sitting in your study.  
 This text that ye have told were tidy for lords, lacked  
 As you failed a cunning clerk that could the leaf have turned. again  
 And if ye seek *Sapience* eft, find shall ye that followeth troublesome  
 A full teenful text to them that taketh meed:
- 350 And that is *Animam autem aufert accipientium*.<sup>17</sup>  
 And that is the tail of the text of that tale ye shewed — end  
 That though we win worship and with meed have victory,  
 The soul that the soude taketh, by so much is bound. payment



14. Victory and honour comes to him that gives gifts. *Proverbs* 22:9

15. Prove all things. 1 *Thessalonians* 5:21

16. Hold fast that which is good. 1 *Thessalonians* 5:21

17. But he carrieth away the souls of the receivers. *Proverbs* 22:9

# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 4

- “**Q**UAESE!” said the King, “I suffer you no longer.  
Ye shall saught, forsooth, and serve me both. *reconcile*  
“Kiss her,” quoth the King, “Conscience, I hote!” *command*  
“Nay, by Christ!” quoth Conscience, “congee me rather! *dismiss*  
5 But Reason read me thereto, rather will I die.” *advise*  
“And I command thee,” quoth the King to Conscience then,  
“Rap thee to ride, and Reason that thou fetch. *Hasten*  
Command him that he come my counsel to hear,  
For he shall rule my realm and read me the best *advise*  
10 Of Meed and of more other, what man shall her wed,  
And account with thee, Conscience, so me Christ help,  
How thou learneſt the people, the learned and the lewed!”  
“I am fain of that foreward,” said the freke then, *agreement; bold man*  
And rode right to Reason and rouneth in his ear, *whispered*  
15 And said him as the King said, and since took his leave.  
“I shall array me to ride,” quoth Reason, “reſt thee a while.” *prepare*  
And called Cato his knave, courteous of ſpeech,  
And also Tom True-tongue-tell-me-no-tales-  
Nor leasing-to-laugh-of-for-I-loved-them-never.  
20 And set my saddle upon Suffer-till-I-see-my-time,  
And let warroke him well with Witty-word’s girths. *faſten*  
Hang on him the heavy bridle to hold his head low,  
For he will make ‘wa-hay’ twice ere he be there.”  
Then Conscience on his caple caireth forth faſt, *horse*  
25 And Reason with him rode, rouning together *whispering*  
Which maſteries Meed maketh on this earth.  
One Warren Wisdom and Witty his fere *companion*  
Followed them faſt, for they had to do  
In the Chequer and in the Chancery, to be discharged of things,  
30 And rode faſt; for Reason should read them the best *advise*  
For to save them for silver from shame and from harm.  
As Conscience knew them well, they loved covetousness,  
And bade Reason ride faſt and reach of them neither:

“There are wiles in their words, and with Meed they dwelleth:  
 35 Where as wrath and wrangling is, there win they silver;  
 As where is love and loyalty, they will not come there:  
*Contritio et infelicitas in viis eorum &c.*<sup>1</sup>  
 They ne giveth not of God one goose wing; *care little for*  
*Non est timor Dei ante oculos eorum &c.*<sup>2</sup>  
 For they would do more for a dozen chickens  
 Than for the love of Our Lord or all his lief saints! *dear*  
 40 Forth, Reason, let them ride, those rich, by themselves —  
 For Conscience knoweth them not, nor Christ, as I trow.” *believe*  
 And then Reason rode fast the right high gate, *way*  
 As Conscience him kenned, till they came to the King.  
 Courteously the King then came against Reason,  
 45 And between himself and his son set him on bench,  
 And worded well wisely a great while together. *spoke*  
 And then came Peace into parliament and put up a bill:  
 How Wrong, against his will, had his wife taken,  
 And how he ravished Rose, Reginald’s love,  
 50 And Margaret of her maidenhood, maugree her kicks. *in spite of*  
 “Both my geese and my grice his gadlings fetcheth; *pigs; vagabonds*  
 I dare not for fear of them fight nor chide.  
 He borrowed of me bayard and brought him home never, *bay horse*  
 Ne no farthing therefore, for naught I could plead.  
 55 He maintaineth his men to murder mine hewen, *servants*  
 Forstalleth my fairs and fighteth in my cheaping, *market*  
 And breaketh up my barn doors and beareth away my wheat,  
 And taketh me but a tally for ten quarters oats.  
 And yet he beateth me thereto and lieth by my maid;  
 60 I am not hardy for him unnethe to look!” *scarcely*  
 The King knew he said sooth, for Conscience him told  
 That Wrong was a wicked luft and much sorrow wrought. *worthless fellow*  
 Wrong was a-feared then, and Wisdom he sought  
 To make peace with his pence, and proffered him many,

1. Destruction and unhappiness is in their ways. *Psalm 14:7*

2. There is no fear of God before their eyes. *Psalm 14:7*

- 65 And said, "Had I love of my lord the King, little would I reck *care*  
 Though Peace and his powers plained them ever!"  
 Then went Wisdom and Sir Warren the Witty,  
 For that Wrong had y-wrought so wicked a deed,  
 And warned Wrong though with such a wise tale:
- 70 "Whoso worketh by will, wrath maketh oft.  
 I say it by thyself — thou shalt it well find:  
 But if Meed it make, thy mischief is up;  
 For both thy life and thy land lieth in his grace."
- Then wooed Wrong Wisdom full yerne *eagerly*  
 75 To make his peace with his pence, handy-dandy payed. *forfeit, bribery*  
 Wisdom and Wit then went together,  
 And took Meed mid them, mercy to win.  
 Peace put forth his head and his pan bloody: *skull*  
 "Without guilt, God wot, got I this scathe." *wound*
- 80 Conscience and the commons know well the sooth,  
 As Wisdom and Wit were about fast  
 To overcome the King with chattel, if they might. *wealth*  
 The King swore by Christ and by his crown both  
 That Wrong for his works should woe thole, *suffer*
- 85 And commanded a constable to cast him in irons,  
 "And let him not these seven year see his feet once.  
 "God wot," quoth Wisdom, "that were not the best!  
 And he amends must make, let Mainprise him have *Bail*  
 And be borgh for his bale, and buy him boot, *surety; sorrow; relief*
- 90 And so amend that is mis-done, and evermore the better."  
 Wit accorded therewith, and said the same,  
 "Better is that boot bale a-down bring *remedy sorrow*  
 Than bale be y-beat, and boot never the better!" *beaten*  
 Then gan Meed to meek her, and mercy besought, *humble*
- 95 And proffered Peace a present all of pure gold.  
 "Have this, man, of me," quoth she, "to amend thy scathe,  
 For I will wage for Wrong, he will do so no more."
- Piteously Peace then prayed to the King  
 To have mercy on that man that mis-did him so oft.
- 100 "For he hath waged me well, as Wisdom him taught, *paid*

- And I forgive him that guilt with a good will.  
 So that the King assent, I can say no better,  
 For Meed hath made mine amends — I may no more ask.”  
 “Nay”, quoth the King then, “so me Christ help!  
 105 Wrong wendeth not so away ere I wit more.  
 Leapt he so lightly, laugh he would, *Ran away*  
 And eft the bolder be to beat mine hewen. *again; servants*  
 But Reason have ruth on him, he shall rest in my stocks  
 As long as I live, but lowliness him borgh.” *bail*  
 110 Some read Reason then to have ruth on that shrew, *advised; pity*  
 And for to counsel the King and Conscience after  
 That Meed must be mainpernor, Reason they besought. *surety*  
 “Read me not,” quoth Reason, “no ruth to have  
 Till lords and ladies love all truth  
 115 And hate all harlotry, to hear or to mouth it;  
 Till Pernelles’ purple be put in their hutch *concubines; fur; chest*  
 And children cherishing be chastised with yards, *rods*  
 And harlots’ holiness be held for an hine; *servant*  
 Til clerks’ covetousness be to clothe the poor and feed,  
 120 And religious roamers’ *Recordare*<sup>3</sup> in their cloisters  
 As Saint Benedic̄t them bade, Bernard and Francis;  
 And till preachers’ preaching be proved on themselves;  
 Till the King’s counsel be the common profit;  
 Till bishops’ bayards buy beggers’ chambers,  
 125 Their hawks and their hounds help the poor religious;  
 And till Saint James be sought where I shall assign;  
 That no man go to Galicia but if he go for ever;  
 And all Rome-runners, for robbers of beyond, *abroad*  
 Bear no silver over sea that sign of king sheweth  
 130 —Neither graven nor ungraven, gold neither silver—  
 Upon forfeiture of that fee, who finds him at Dover,  
 But if it be merchant or his man, or messenger with letters,  
 Provisor or priest, or penitent for his sins.  
 “And yet,” quoth Reason, “by the Rood! I shall no ruth have

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3. Sing *Recordare* (Remember), i.e. perform their duties.

- 135 While Meed hath the mastery in this moot-hall.  
 As I may shew examples as I see others.  
 I say it by myself," quoth he, "and it so were  
 That I were king with crown to keep a realm,  
 Should never Wrong in this world that I wit might
- 140 Be unpunished in my power, for peril of my soul,  
 Nor get my grace through gifts, so me God save!  
 Nor for no meed have mercy, but meekness it made;  
 For 'Nullum malum the man met with *inpunitum*  
 And bade *Nullum bonum* be *irremuneratum*.'<sup>4</sup>
- 145 Let thy confessor, sir King, construe this in English,  
 And if ye work it in work, I wed mine ears *bet*  
 That Law shall be a labourer and lead a-field dung,  
 And Love shall lead thy land as thee lief liketh." *dear*  
 Clerks that were confessors coupled them together
- 150 All to construe this clause, and for the King's profit,  
 As naught for comfort of the commons, nor for the King's soul,  
 For I saw Meed in the moot-hall on men of law wink,  
 And they, laughing, leapt to her and left Reason many.  
 Warren Wisdom winked upon Meed
- 155 And said, "Madam, I am your man; what so my mouth jangle,  
 I fall in florins," quoth that freke, "and fail speech oft."  
 All (*the*) rightful recorded that Reason truth told.  
 Kind Wit accorded therewith and commended his words,  
 And the most people in the hall and many of the great,
- 160 And let Meekness a master and Meed a mansed shrew. *held; cursed*  
 Love let of her light, and Loyalty yet less, *regarded her little*  
 And said it so high that all the hall it heard:  
 "Whoso willeth her to wife, for wealth of her goods —  
 But he be known for a cuckold, cut off my nose!"
- 165 Meed mourned then, and made heavy cheer,  
 For the most common of that court called her an whore.  
 As a sisour and a summoner sued her fast, *juror; followed*  
 And a sheriff's clerk be-shrewed all the rout: *cursed; crowd*

4. Nothing bad (goodness) the man met with Unpunished, and bade nothing good (badness) be unrewarded.

“For oft have I,” quoth he, “holpen you at the bar, *helped*  
 170 And yet gan ye me never the worth of a rush!”  
 The King called Conscience, and afterward Reason,  
 And recorded that Reason had rightfully shewed;  
 And moodily upon Meed with might the King looked, *angrily*  
 And gan wax wroth with Law, for Meed almost had shent it, *ruined*  
 175 And said, “Through your Law, as I lieve, I lose many cheats; *forfeitures*  
 Meed over-mastereth law and much truth letteth. *hinders*  
 As Reason shall reckon with you, if I reign any while,  
 And deem you, by this day, as ye have deserved.  
 Meed shall not mainprise you, by the Mary of heaven! *bail*  
 180 I will have loyalty in law, and let be all your jangling, *ceased*  
 And as most folk witnesseth well, Wrong shall be deemed.” *judged*  
 Quoth Conscience to the King, “But the common will assent,  
 It is full hard, by mine head, hereto to bring it,  
 And all your liege leodes to lead thus even.” *subject*  
 185 “By Him that raught on the Rood!” quoth Reason to the King, *stretched*  
  
 “But if I rule thus your realm, rend out my guts;  
 If ye bid buxomness, be of mine assent.” *obedience*  
 “And I assent,” saith the King, “by Saint Mary my lady,  
 By my counsel come of clerks and of earls,  
 190 As readily, Reason, thou shalt not ride hence;  
 For as long as I live, let thee I nelle.” *abandon; will not*  
 “I am all ready,” quoth Reason, “to rest with you ever;  
 So Conscience be of our counsel, I keep no better.”  
 “And I grant,” quoth the King, “God forbid he fail!  
 195 As long as our life lasteth, live we together!”



# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 5

- T**HE King and his knights to the church went  
To hear matins of the day and the mass after.  
Then waked I of my winking, and woe was withal *also*  
That I ne had slept sadder and y-seen more. *sounder*
- 5 As ere I had fared a furlong, faintness me hente, *siezed*  
That I ne might further a foot for default of sleeping. *lack*  
I sat softly a-down and said my belief, *Creed*  
And so I babbled on my beads, they brought me asleep. *prayers*
- 10 And then saw I much more than I before told:  
For I saw the field full of folk that I before of said,  
And how Reason gan array him all the realm to preach, *prepare*  
And with a cross afore the King comsed thus to teach. *began*
- 15 He proved that these pestilences were for pure sin,  
And the south-western wind on Saturday at even  
Was pertly for pride and for no point else. *plainly*  
Pear and plum-trees were puffed to the earth  
In example, ye segges, that ye should do the better. *men*  
Beeches and broad oaks were blown to the ground  
And turned upward their tails in tokening of dread
- 20 That deadly sin ere doomsday shall for-do them all. *destroy*  
Of this matter I might mumble full long,  
As I shall say as I saw, so me God help,  
How pertly afore the people to preach gan Reason.
- 25 He bade Waster go work what he best couth *knew*  
And win his wasting with some manner craft. *earn; skill*  
He prayed Pernelle her purple to leave, *fur trim*  
And keep it in her coffer for chattel at her need. *wealth*
- 30 Tom Stowe he taught to take two staves  
And fetch Phyllis home from wife's pine. *torment*  
He warned Wat his wife was to blame  
For her head was worth half (a) mark and his hood not worth a groat;  
And bade Betty cut a bough other twain *or two*  
And beat Betty therewith but if she would work.



And then he charged chapmen to chaſten their children:

35 “Let no winning forwanȝe them while they be young, *ſpoil*  
Nor for no pouſtee of peſtilence pleaſe them not out of reaſon. *power*

My ſir ſaid ſo to me, and ſo did my dame,  
That the liefer child the more lore behoveth; *dearer; learning requires*  
And Solomon ſaid the ſame, that *Sapience* made:

*Qui parcit virgae odit filium.<sup>1</sup>*

40 Whoſo ſpareth the ſprig, ſpoileth his children.”

And ſince, he prayed prelates and prieſts together:

“That ye preach to the people, prove it yourſelf,  
And doeth it in deed — it ſhall draw you to good.  
If ye live as ye learn us, we ſhall lieve you the better.”

45 And ſince he read Religion their rule to hold —

“Leſt the King and his Counſel your commons appair *people harm*  
And be ſtewards of your ſteeds til ye be ſtewed better.” *eſtabliſhed*

And ſince he counſelled the King his commons to love:

“It is thy treaſure, if treaſon ne were, and treacle at thy need.” *remedy*

50 And ſince he prayed the Pope have pity on Holy Church,  
And ere he give any grace, govern firſt himſelf.

“And ye that have laws to keep, let Truth be your covetouſneſſe

More than gold or other gifts, if ye will God pleaſe;  
For whoſo contrarieth Truth, He telleth in the Goſpel,

55 *Amen dico vobis, nescio vos.<sup>2</sup>*

And ye that ſeek Saint James and ſaints of Rome,  
Seeketh Saint Truth, for he may ſave you all.

*Qui cum Patre et Filio<sup>3</sup>* — that fair them befall

That ſueth my ſermon” — and thus ſaid Reaſon. *follow*

60 Then ran Repentance and rehearſed his theme *repeated*

And gart Will to weep water with his eyes. *cauſed*

Pernelle Proud-heart platte her to the earth *fell*

And lay long ere ſhe looked, and “Lord, mercy!” cried,

And be-hight to Him that us all made *promiſed*

65 She ſhould unſew her ſerk and ſet there an hair *ſhirt; hair-cloth*

1. He that ſpareth his rod hateth his ſon. *Proverbs* 13:24

2. Verily, I ſay unto you, I know you not. *Matthew* 25:12

3. Who with the Father and the Son... is worſhipped and glorified. *i.e.* the Holy Ghoſt. (*Creed*)

- To affect her flesh that fierce was to sin.  
 “Shall never high heart me hente, but hold me low sieve  
 And suffer to be mis-said — and so did I never.  
 But now will I meek me and mercy beseech  
 70 For all that I have hated in mine heart.”  
 Then Lecher said “Alas!” and on Our Lady he cried,  
 To make mercy for his mis-deeds between God and his soul  
 With that he should the Saturday seven year thereafter  
 Drink but mid the duck and dine but once.  
 75 Envy with heavy heart asked after shrift  
 And carefully *mea culpa*<sup>4</sup> he comsed to shew.  
 He was as pale as a pellet, in the palsy he seemed,  
 And clothed in a caury-maury; I could it not describe; course material  
 In kirtle and courtepy, and a knife by his side; tunic; coat  
 80 Of a friar’s frock were the fore-sleeves.  
 And as a leek that had y-lain long in the sun,  
 So looked he with lean cheeks, louring foul. scowling  
 His body was to-bollen for wrath, that he bit his lips, swollen  
 And wrung with the fist, to wreak himself he thought avenge  
 85 With works or with words when he saw his time.  
 Each a word that he warp was of an adder’s tongue; threw out  
 Of chiding and of challenging was his chief livelihood,  
 With backbiting and be-smear and bearing of false witness: scorn  
 This was all his courtesy where that ever he shewed him.  
 90 “I would be y-shriven,” quoth this shrew, “and I for shame durst.  
 I would be gladder, by God! that Gib had mischance  
 Then though I had this week y-won a weight of Essex cheese!  
 I have a neighbour nigh me, I have annoyed him oft,  
 And lied on him to lords to do him lose his silver,  
 95 And made his friends be his foe through my false tongue.  
 His grace and his good haps grieve me full sore.  
 Between meynee and meynee I make debate oft, household  
 That both life and limb is lost through my speech.  
 And when I meet him in market that I most hate,

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4. My fault. (from the Confession)

- 100 I hail him hendily, as I his friend were; *courteously*  
 For he is doughtier than I, I dare do none other; *braver*  
 As had I mastery and might — God wot my will! *knows*  
 “And when I come to the church and should kneel to the Rood  
 And pray for the people as the priest teacheth —
- 105 For pilgrims and for palmers, for all the people after —  
 Then I cry on my knees that Christ give them sorrow  
 That bare away my bowl and my broken sheet. *torn*  
 Away from the altar then turn I mine eyes  
 And behold how Elaine hath a new coat;
- 110 I wish then it were mine, and all the web after. *cloth*  
 And of his losing I laugh — that lighteth mine heart; *cheers*  
 As for his winning I weep and wail the time;  
 And deem men that they do ill, where I do well worse:  
 Whoso undernymeth me hereof, I hate him deadly after. *reprove*
- 115 I would that each a wight were my knave,  
 For whoso hath more than I, that angereth me sore.  
 “And thus I live loveless, like a lither dog, *treacherous*  
 That all my body bolleth for bitter of my gall. *swells*  
 I might not eat many years as a man ought,
- 120 For envy and evil-will is evil to defy. *hard to digest*  
 May no sugar nor sweet thing assuage my swelling,  
 Ne no *diapenidion* drive it from mine heart, *cough medicine*  
 Nor neither shrift nor shame, but whoso scrape my maw?” *stomach*  
 “Yes, readily!” quoth Repentance, and read him to the best, *advised*
- 125 “Sorrow for sins is salvation of souls.”  
 “I am ever sorry,” quoth Envy, “I am but seldom other,  
 And that maketh me thus meagre, for I ne may me avenge.  
 Among burgesses have I been, buying at London,  
 And gart backbiting by a broker to blame men’s wares. *caused*
- 130 When he sold and I not, then was I ready  
 To lie and to lour on my neighbour and to lack his chaffer. *blame; trade*  
 I will amend this if I may, through might of God Almighty.”  
 Now awaketh Wrath, with two white eyes,  
 And neveling with the nose, and his neck hanging. *snivelling*
- 135 “I am Wrath,” quoth he, “I was some time a friar,

- And the convent's gardener for to graft impes. *shoots*  
 On limiters and lectors leasings I imped, *lies; grafted*  
 Till they bore leaves of low sþeech, lords to please,  
 And since they blossomed abroad in bower to hear shrifts.  
 140 And now is fallen thereof a fruit — that folk would well liefer *rather*  
 Shew their shrifts to them than shrive them to their parsons.  
 And now parsons have perceived that friars part with them,  
 These possessioners preach and deprave friars; *slander*  
 And friars findeth them in default, as folk beareth witness,  
 145 That when they preach the people in many places about,  
 I, Wrath, walk with them and wiss them of my books. *advise*  
 Thus they sþeak of sþirituality, that either desþiseth other,  
 Till they be both beggars and by my sþirituality live,  
 Or else all rich and ride about; I, Wrath, rest never  
 150 That I ne must follow these wicked folk, for such is my grace.  
 "I have an aunt to nun and an abbes:  
 She would liefer swoon or swelt than suffer any pain. *rather; die*  
 I have been cook in her kitchen, and the convent served  
 Many months with them; and with monks both.  
 155 I was the prioress' pottager and other poor ladies', *stew-maker*  
 And made them joutes of jangling; that Dame Joan was a bastard, *soups*  
 And Dame Clarice, a knight's daughter — as a cuckold was her sire,  
 And Dame Pernelle, a priest's file: Prioress worth she never, *mistress; will*  
 For she had child in cherry-time, all our Chapter it wiþt! *knew*  
 160 Of wicked words I, Wrath, their worts made, *vegetables*  
 Till "Thou liest!" and "Thou liest!" leapt out at once  
 And either hit other under the cheek;  
 Had they had knives, by Christ! they either had killed other.  
 Saint Gregory was a good pope, and had a good fore-wit *forethought*  
 165 That no Prioress were priest — for that he provided:  
 They had then been *infamis* the first day,<sup>5</sup> they can so evil hold counsel.  
 "Among monks I might be, as many time I shun them,  
 For there be many fell frekes my feers to esþy — *wicked men; dealings*  
 Both Prior and Subprior and our *Pater Abbas*;<sup>6</sup>

5. infamous on the first day: see *Genesis* ch.3

6. Father Abbot

- 170 And if I tell any tales, they take them together,  
 And do me fast Fridays to bread and to water;  
 And yet am I challenged in the Chapter-house as I a child were,  
 And balesed on the bare arse — and no breaches between! *beaten*  
 Forth have I no liking with those leodes to wone; *men; dwell*
- 175 I eat there un-thende fish and feeble ale drink. *out-of-season*  
 As other while when wine cometh, when I drink well at eve,  
 I have a flux of a foul mouth well five days after. *discharge*  
 All the wickedness that I wot by any of our brethren,  
 I cough it in our cloister, that all the convent wot it.” *knows*
- 180 “Now repent thee,” quoth Repentance, “and rehearse thou never  
 Counsel that thou knowest, by countenance nor by speech;  
 And drink not over-delicately, nor too deep neither,  
 That thy will by cause thereof to wrath might turn.”  
*Esto sobrius!*”<sup>7</sup> he said, and assoiled me after, *absolved*
- 185 And bade me will to weep, my wickedness to amend. *desire*  
 And then came Covetousness, I can him not describe:  
 So hungrily and hollowly Sir Harvey him looked.  
 He was beetle-browed and blubber-lipped, with two bleared eyes;  
 And as a leather purse lolled his cheeks —
- 190 Well sidder than his chin they chiveled for elde; *lower; shivered; age*  
 And as a bondsman of his bacon, his beard was bedraveled. *slobbered*  
 With an hood on his head, a lousy hat above,  
 In a torn tabard of twelve winter’s age;  
 But if a louse could leap the better,
- 195 She should not wander on that Welsh, so was it threadbare! *Welsh cloth*  
 “I have been covetous,” quoth this caitiff, “I be-know it here;  
 For some time I served Simon-at-Stile,  
 And was his prentice y-plight, his profit to wait. *engaged*  
 First I learned to lie a leaf other twain: *or two*
- 200 Wickedly to weigh was my first lesson.  
 To Weyhill and to Winchester I went to the fair  
 With many manner merchandise, as my master me hight.  
 Nor had the grace of guile y-gone amongst my ware,

- It had been unsold these seven year, so me God help!
- 205 “Then drew I me among drapers, my Donet to learn, *grammar*  
 To draw the liser along — the longer it seemed; *edge of cloth*  
 Among the rich rayes I rendered a lesson: *striped cloth*  
 To broach them with a pack-needle, and plait them together,  
 And put them in a press and pine them therein *torture*
- 210 Till ten yards or twelve tolled out thirteen.  
 “My wife was a webber and woollen cloth made; *weaver*  
 She s̄poke to s̄pinsters to s̄pin it out. *s̄pinners*  
 The pound that she payed by poised a quarter more *weighed*  
 Than mine own aunsel when I weighed true. *scales*
- 215 “I bought her barley — she brewed it to sell.  
 Penny ale and pudding ale she poured together;  
 For labourers and low folk, that lay by themselves.  
 The best ale lay in my bower or in my bedchamber,  
 And whoso bummed thereof, he bought it thereafter; *tasted*
- 220 A gallon for a groat, God wot no less,  
 When it came in cup-meal — this craft my wife used! *cupful*  
 Rose the Reqrater was her right name; *Retailer*  
 She hath held huckery these eleven winter. *business dealing*  
 As I swear now (so thee [as] I!) that sin will I let, *leave*
- 225 And never wickedly weigh nor wicked chaffer use, *dealing*  
 But wend to Walsingham, and my wife also,  
 And bid the Rood of Bromholm bring me out of debt.”  
 “Repentest thou ever?” quoth Repentance, “or restitution made?”  
 “Yes: once I was y-harboured,” quoth he, “with an heap of chapmen:  
 230 I rose when they were arest and rifled their mails.” *bags*  
 “That was no restitution,” quoth Repentance, “but a robber’s theft;  
 Thou hadst better be hanged therefore  
 Than for all that that thou hast here shewed!”  
 “I wend rifling were restitution,” quoth he, “for I learned never (to)  
 read on (a) book. *supposed*
- 235 And I ken no French, in faith, but of the farthest end of Norfolk.”  
 “Used thou ever usury,” quoth Repentance, “in all thy lifetime?”  
 “Nay, soothly,” he said, “save in my youth;  
 I learned among Lombards a lesson, and of Jews:

To weigh pence with a poise, and pare the heaviest, *weight; clip*  
 240 And lend it for love of the cross, to lay a wed and lese it. *pledge; redeem*  
 Such deeds I did write if he his day break; *default*  
 I have more manors through rearages than through *miseretur et*  
*commodat.*<sup>8</sup> *arrears*  
 I have lent lords and ladies my chaffers, *goods*  
 And been their broker after, and bought it myself.  
 245 Exchanges and chevisances: with such chaffers I deal, *agreements*  
 And lend folk that lose will a lap at every noble. *portion; coin*  
 And with Lombard's letters I laid gold to Rome,  
 And took it by tally here and told them there less."  
 "Lenteſt thou ever lords for love of their maintenance?"  
 250 "Yea, I have lent lords, (*who*) loved me never after,  
 And have y-made many a knight both mercer and draper  
 That payed never for his prenticehood not a pair of gloves!"  
 "Haſt thou pity on poor men that purely muſt needs borrow?"  
 "I have as much pity of poor men as pedlar hath of cats,  
 255 That would kill them, if he catch them might, for covetousness of their  
 skins!"  
 "Art thou manly among thy neighbours of thy meat and drink?"  
*courteous*  
 "I am holden," quoth he, "at hand as hound is in kitchen;  
 Amongſt my neighbours namely such a name I have." *held*  
 "Now but thou repent thee rather," quoth Repentance, *eſpecially*  
 "God lend thee never" *sooner*  
 260 The grace on this ground, thy good will to beset, *use*  
 Nor thine heirs after thee have joy of that thou winneſt, *earn*  
 Nor thine executors well beset the silver that thou them leaveſt:  
 And what was won with wrong, with wicked men be deſpended. *ſpent*  
 For were I a friar of that house where good faith and charity is,  
 265 I would not cope us with thy chattel, nor our church amend, *money*  
 Nor have a penny to my pittance, by my ſoul's health,  
 For the beſt book in our house, though burnt gold were the leaves,  
 And I wiſt witterly thou were such as thou telleſt! *If I knew truly*

8. A good man is merciful and lendeth. *Psalm 112:5*

*Servus es alterius, dum fercula pinguia quaeris.*

*Pane tuo potius vescere, liber eris.*<sup>9</sup>

270 “Thou art an unkind creature — I can thee not assoil absolve  
Till thou make restitution,” quoth Repentance, “and reckon  
with them all.

And since that Reason roll it in the Register of heaven until; enrolls

That thou haſt made each man good, I may thee not absolve.

*Non dimittitur peccatum donec restituatur ablatum.*<sup>10</sup>

For all that have of thy goods, have God my truth,

Be held at the high doom to help thee to reſtitute;

275 And who so lieveth not this be sooth, look in the Psalter gloss,

In *Miserere mei, Deus*, where I mean truth:

*Ecce enim veritatem dilexiſti, &c.*<sup>11</sup>

Shall never workman in this world thrive with that thou winneſt.

*Cum ſancto ſanctus eris:*<sup>12</sup> conſtrue me this in English.” interpret

280 Then waxed that shrew in wanhope, and would have hanged himself  
Ne had Repentance the rather re-comforted him in this manner:

“Have mercy in thy mind, and with thy mouth beseech it,

For His mercy is more than all his other works:

*Misericordia eius super omnia opera eius, &c.*<sup>13</sup>

And all the wickedness in this world that man might work or think

Is no more to the mercy of God than in midſt the sea a gleed: ember

*Omnis iniquitas quantum ad misericordiam Dei eſt*

*quasi scintilla in medio maris.*<sup>14</sup>

285 Forth have mercy in thy mind — and merchandise, leave it!

For thou haſt no good ground to get thee with a wastel cake

But if it were with thy tongue or else with thy two hands.

For the goods that thou haſt got began all with falsehood,

And as long as thou liveſt therewith, thou yieldeſt not, but borroweſt.

9. Seek costly foods, another’s slave you’ll be; but eat your own bread, you’ll stay free.

10. The sin is not forgiven until the stolen goods are returned. St Augustine, *Epistle* 153

11. *Psalm* 51. Have mercy on me, O God. *v.1*; But lo, thou requireſt truth in the inward parts: (and shalt make me to understand wisdom secretly). *v.6*

12. With the holy thou shalt be holy. *Psalm* 18:25

13. His mercy is over all his works. *Psalm* 145:9

14. All wickedness, compared to the mercy of God is like a spark of fire in the midſt of the sea.

St Augustine



- 290 And if thou wit never to whom nor where to reſtitute, *know*  
 Bear it to the Biſhop, and bid him of his grace  
 Beſet it himſelf as beſt is for thy ſoul.  
 For he ſhall answer for thee at the high doom,  
 For thee and for many more that man ſhall give a reckoning;
- 295 What he learned you in Lent, lieve thou none other, *believe*  
 And what he lent you of Our Lord's good, to let you from ſin."  
 Now beginneth Glutton for to go to ſhrift,  
 And caireth him to church-ward his coupe to ſhew. *went; fault*  
 As Betty the Brewer bade him good morrow  
 300 And with that asked of him whitherward he would.  
 "To Holy Church," quoth he, "for to hear maſs,  
 And ſince I will be ſhriven, and ſin no more."  
 "I have good ale, goſſip," quoth ſhe, "Glutton, wilt thou aſſay?"  
 "Haſt thou," quoth he, "any hot ſpices?"  
 305 "I have pepper and peony," quoth ſhe, "and a pound of garlic,  
 A farthingworth of fennel ſeed for faſting days."  
 Then goeth Glutton in, and great oaths after.  
 Ceſs the Souterreſs ſat on the bench, *ſhoe-ſeller*  
 Wat the Warrener and his wife both,  
 310 Tim the Tinker and twain of his knaves, *two*  
 Hick the Hackneyman and Hugh the Needler, *horse-dealer*  
 Clarice of Cock's Lane and the Clerk of the church,  
 Sir Piers of Pridie and Pernelle of Flanders,  
 Davey the Diker, and a dozen others:  
 315 A Ribibour, a Ratoner, a Rakiere of Cheap(*ſide*),  
*fiddler; rat-catcher; meſſenger*  
 A Roper, a Riding-king, and Rose the Diſher,  
 Godfrey of Garlic-hithe and Griffin the Welſh,  
 And of upholers an heap, early by the morrow, *tradesmen*  
 Gave Glutton with glad cheer good ale to hanſel. *try*
- 320 Clement the Cobbler caſt off his cloak,  
 And at the new fair named it to ſell.  
 Hick the Hackneyman hit his hood after,  
 And bade Betty the Butcher be on his ſide.  
 There were chapmen y-chosen this chaffer to price:

- 325 Whoso had the hood should have amends of the cloak. *compensation*  
 They rose up in rap and rounded together, *haste; whispered*  
 And priced the pennyworths apart by themselves. *bargains*  
 There were oaths an heap, for one should have the worse;  
 They could not by their conscience accord in truth, *agree*
- 330 Till Robin the Roper arise they besought,  
 And named him for an umpire, that no debate were.  
 Hick the Hosteller had the cloak  
 In covenant that Clement should the cup fill  
 And have Hick the Hosteller's hood, and hold him y-served;
- 335 And whoso repented ratherst should arise after *soonest*  
 And greet Sir Glutton with a gallon ale. *treat*  
 There was laughing and louring and "Let go the cup!" *scowling*  
 Bargains and beverages began to arise;  
 And sat so till evensong, and sang awhile,
- 340 Till Glutton had y-glubbed a gallon and a gill.  
 His guts began to gothele as two greedy sows; *growl*  
 He pissed a pot in a *Paternoster*-while, *in the time in takes to say...*  
 And blew his round ruwet at his ruggebone's end, *trumpet; backbone's*  
 That all that heard that horn held their nose after
- 345 And wished it had been waxed with a wiþ of furze! *thorns*  
 He might neither step nor stand ere he his staff had,  
 And then gan he to go like a glee-man's bitch *minstrel's*  
 Sometimes a-side and sometimes a-rear,  
 As whoso layeth lines for to latch fowls. *catch*
- 350 And when he drew to the door, then dimmed his eyes;  
 He thrumbled on the threshfold and threw to the earth. *stumbled; fell*  
 Clement the Cobbler caught him by the middle  
 For to lift him aloft, and laid him on his knees.  
 As Glutton was a great churl and a grim in the lifting, *peasant*
- 355 And coughed up a cawdel in Clement's lap. *mess*  
 Is none so hungry hound in Hertfordshire  
 Durst lap up that leaving, so unlovely it smelt!  
 With all the woe of this world, his wife and his wench *servant*  
 Bore him to his bed and brought him therein;
- 360 And after all this excess he had an accidie, *sloth*

That he slept Saturday and Sunday, till sun went to rest.  
 Then waked he of his winking and wiped his eyes;  
 The first word that he sþoke was — “Where is the bowl?”

His wife and his wit gan edwite him then how wickedly he lived.

365 And Repentance right so rebuked him that time: *[blame*  
 “As thou with words and works hast wrought evil in thy life,  
 Shrive thee and be shamed thereof, and shew it with thy mouth.”

“I, Glutton,” quoth the gome, “guilty me yield:

That I have tresþassed with my tongue, I can not tell how oft  
 370 Sworn ‘God’s soul and his sides!’ and ‘So help me God and halidom!’  
 Where no need ne was nine hundred times; *[relics*

And overseen me at my supper and sometime at noon,  
 That I, Glutton, girt it up ere I had gone a mile, *vomited*  
 And y-sþilt that might be sþared and sþent on some hungry;

375 Over-delicately on feasting days drank and ate both,  
 And sat sometimes so long there that I sleep and eat at once.  
 For love of tales in taverns into drink the more I dined;  
 And hied to the meat ere noon when it fasting days were.”

“This shewing shrift,” quoth Repentance, “shall be merit to thee.”

380 And then gan Glutton greet, and great dole to make *cry*  
 For his lither life that he lived had, *evil*

And avowed to fast: “For hunger or for thirst,  
 Shall never fish on Friday defy in my womb *digest*  
 Till Abstinence, mine aunt, have given me leave;

385 And yet have I hated her all my lifetime!”

Then came Sloth, all be-slobbered, with two slimy eyes.

“I must sit,” said the segge, “or else should I nap. *man*

I may not stand nor stoop nor without a stool kneel.

Were I brought a-bed, but if my tail-end it made,

390 Should no ringing do me rise ere I were ripe to dine.”

He began *Benedicite* with a bolck, and his breast knocked, *belch*  
 Raxed, and roared, and rutt at the last. *Stretched; snored*

“What? Awake, renk!” quoth Repentance, “and rap thee to shrift!”

“If I should die by this day,” quoth he, “me list not to look. *desire*

395 I ken not perfectly my *Paternoſter* as the priest it singeth,  
 But I ken rhymes of Robin Hood and Randolf, Earl of Chester,

- As neither of Our Lord nor of Our Lady the least that ever was made.  
 I have made avows forty, and forgot them on the morrow;  
 I performed never penance as the priest me hight,  
 400 Nor right sorry for my sins since was I never.  
 And if I bid any beads, but if it be in wrath, *prayers*  
 That I tell with my tongue is two mile from mine heart.  
 I am occupied each day, holiday and other,  
 With idle tales at the ale and otherwhile in churches;  
 405 God's pain and his passion, pure seldom think I thereon;  
 "I visited never feeble men nor fettered folk in puttes; *prisons*  
 I had liefer hear an harlotry or a summer game of souters, *cobblers*  
 Or leasings to laugh of and belie my neighbours,  
 Than all that ever Mark made, Matthew, John and Luke.  
 410 And vigils and fasting days — all these let I pass,  
 And lie a-bed in Lent and my leman in mine arms *leman*  
 Till matins and mass be done, and then must to the Friars;  
 Come I to *Ite, missa est*,<sup>15</sup> I hold me y-served.  
 I am not shriven some time, but if sickness it make,  
 415 Not twice in two year, and then tell I up guess.  
 "I have been priest and parson passing thirty winter,  
 Yet can I neither *sol-fa*, nor sing, nor saints' lives read; *read music*  
 But I can find in a field or in a furlong an hare  
 Better than in *Beatus vir* or in *Beati omnes*<sup>16</sup>  
 420 Construe clause-meal and ken it to my parishoners, *line by line; teach*  
 I can hold love-days and hear a reeve's reckoning,  
 As in Canon nor in Decretals I can not read a line.  
 "If I buy and borrow aught, but if it be y-tallied, *accounted*  
 I forget it as yerne, and if men me it ask *quickly*  
 425 Six sithes or seven, I forsake it with oaths; *times; deny*  
 And thus teen I true men ten hundred times. *vex*  
 And my servants some time, their salary is behind:  
 Ruth is to hear the reckoning when we shall read accounts, *A pity*  
 So with wicked will and wrath my workmen I pay!  
 430 "If any man doth me a benefit or helpeth me at need,

15. Go. The mass is finished. (The last words spoken at mass.)

16. *Psalms* 1 and 128, respectively.

- I am unkind against his courtesy and can not understand it;  
 For I have and have had something (*of a*) hawk's manner:  
 I am not lured with love but where lie aught under the thumb.  
 The kindness that mine even-christen kidde me formerly *made known*  
 435 Sixty sithes I, Sloth, have forgot it since *times*  
 In speech and in sparing of speech; y-spilt many a time  
 Both flesh and fish and many other victuals,  
 Both bread and ale, butter, milk and cheese  
 For-slothed in my service till it might serve no man.  
 440 I yarned about in youth, and gave me naught to learn *ran*  
 And ever since have I been beggared by my foul sloth:  
*Heu mihi quia sterilem vitam duxi iuvenilem!*<sup>17</sup>  
 "Repenteſt thou not?" quoth Repentance; and right with that he  
 swooned  
 Till *Vigilate* the Veille fetched water at his eyes *Watcher*  
 And flatted it on his face and fast on him cried *cast*  
 445 And said, "Ware thee, for Wanhope would thee betray. *Despair*  
 'I am sorry for my sins,' say to thyself,  
 And beat thyself on the breast, and bid Him of grace,  
 For is no guilt here so great that his goodness is (*not*) more."  
 Then sat Sloth up and signed him swithe, *crossed; greatly*  
 450 And made a vow to-fore God for his foul sloth: *before*  
 "Shall no Sunday be this seven year, but sickness it make,  
 That I ne shall do me ere day to the dear church  
 And hear matins and mass as I a monk were.  
 Shall no ale after meat hold me thence  
 455 Till I have evensong heard — I behote to the Rood! *promise; cross*  
 And yet will I yield again, if I so much have,  
 All that I wickedly won since I wit had;  
 And though my livelihood lack, let I nelle *cease; will not*  
 That each man shall have his, ere I hence wend;  
 460 And with the residue and the remnant, by the Rood of Chester,  
 I shall seek truth erst ere I see Rome!" *first before*  
 Robert the Robber on *Reddite*<sup>18</sup> looked,

17. Alas, what a useless life I led in my youth!

18. Render (therefore to all their dues). *Romans* 13:7

- And for there was naught wherewith, he wept swithe sore. greatly  
 And yet the sinful shrew said to himself:  
 465 “Christ, that on Calvary upon the cross diest,  
 Though *Dysmas*<sup>19</sup> my brother besought thee of grace,  
 And hadst mercy on that man for *Memento*<sup>20</sup> sake;  
 So rue on this Robber[t] that *Reddere* ne have, pity  
 Nor never ween to win with craft that I know; hope; skill  
 470 But for thy much mercy, mitigation I beseech: great  
 Damn me not at Doomsday for that I did so ill!”  
 What befell of this felon I can not fair shew.  
 Well I wot he wept fast water with his eyes,  
 And knowledged his coupe to Christ yet eft-soon, guilt; again  
 475 That *Penitentia*’s pike he should polish new Penitence  
 And leap with him over land all his lifetime,  
 For he had laid by *Latro*, Lucifer’s Aunt. Robbery  
 And then had Repentance ruth and read them all to kneel.  
 “For I shall beseech for all sinful Our Saviour of grace  
 480 To amend us of our misdeeds and do mercy to us all.  
 Now God,” quoth he, “that of Thy goodness gan the world make,  
 And of naught madest aught and man most like to Thyself,  
 And since sufferest him to sin, a sickness to us all —  
 And all for the best, as I believe, whatever the Book telleth:  
*O felix culpa! O necessarium peccatum Adae!*<sup>21</sup>  
 485 For through that sin Thy son sent was to this earth  
 And became man of a maid, mankind to save —  
 And madest Thyself with Thy son us sinful alike:  
*Faciamus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem nostram;*  
*Et alibi: Qui manet in caritate, in Deo manet, et Deus in eo;*<sup>22</sup>  
 And since with Thy self son in our suit died form  
 On Good Friday for man’s sake at full time of the day;  
 490 Where Thyself nor Thy son no sorrow in death felt,

19. The penitent thief, crucified with Jesus. *Luke* 23:42

20. Remember (me when thou comest into thy kingdom). *Luke* 23:42

21. O happy fault! O necessary sin of Adam! (*Liturgy of Easter Saturday*.)

22. Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. (*Genesis* 1:26); and elsewhere: He that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him. 1 *John* 4:16

But in our sect was the sorrow, and Thy son it led:

*Captivum duxit captivitatem.*<sup>23</sup>

The sun for sorrow thereof lost sight for a time

About midday when most light is and mealtime of saints —

Feedest thou with Thy fresh blood our forefathers in darkness:

*Populus qui ambulabat in tenebris vidit lucem magnam.*<sup>24</sup>

495 And the light that leapt out of Thee, Lucifer it blente, blinded

And blew all Thy blessed into the bliss of Paradise!

“The third day thereafter Thou went in our suit:

A sinful Mary Thee saw ere Saint Mary Thy dame, form

And all to solace sinful Thou sufferedst it so were: before; mother

*Non veni vocare iustos sed peccatores ad penitentiam.*<sup>25</sup>

500 “And all that Mark hath y-made, Matthew, John and Luke

Of Thy doughtiest deeds was done in our arms:

*Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis.*<sup>26</sup>

And by so much it seemeth the sickerer we may more surely

Bid and beseech, if it be Thy will

That art our father and our brother — be merciable to us,

505 And have ruth on these ribalds that repent them sore

That ever they wrathed Thee in this world, in word, thought or deed!”

Then hente Hope an horn of *Deus, tu conversus vivificabis nos*<sup>27</sup>

And blew it with *Beati quorum remissae sunt iniquitates*<sup>28</sup>

That all Saints in heaven sang at once:

*‘Homines et iumenta salvabis, quemadmodum multiplicasti misericordiam tuam, Deus.’*<sup>29</sup>

510 A thousand of men then thronged together,

Cried upward to Christ and to his clean mother

To have grace to go to seek Truth — God leave that they might!

As there was wight none so wise, the way thither couth,

23. He led captivity captive. *Ephesians* 4:8

24. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light. *Isaiah* 9:2

25. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. *Mark* 2:17

26. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us. *John* 1:4

27. Wilt thou not turn again and quicken us? *Psalms* 85:6

28. Blessed are they whose unrighteousness is forgiven. *Psalms* 32:1

29. Thou Lord, shalt save both man and beast: how excellent is thy mercy, O God. *Psalms* 36:7

- But blustered forth as beasts over baches and hills, *valleys*  
 515 Till late was and long, that they a leode met *man*  
 Apparelled as a pagan in pilgrim's wise.  
 He bore a burden y-bound with a broad list *staff; edge of cloth*  
 In a with-wind wise y-wound about.  
 A bowl and a bag he bore by his side.  
 520 An hundred of ampules on his hat sat,  
 Signs of Assisi and shells of Galicia,  
 And many a cross on his cloak, and keys of Rome,  
 And the vernicle before, for men should know *image of Christ*  
 And see by his signs whom he sought had.  
 525 These folk frayed him first from whence he came. *asked*  
 "From Sinai," he said, "and from the Sepulchre.  
 In Bethlehem and in Babylon, I have been in both,  
 In Armenia, in Alexandria, in many other places.  
 Ye may see by my signs that sit on mine hat  
 530 That I have walked full wide in wet and in dry  
 And sought good saints for my soul's health."  
 "Knowest thou aught a corsaint, that men call Truth? *relic*  
 Couldst thou wiss us the way where that wight dwelleth?" *advise*  
 "Nay, so me God help!" said the gome then. *man*  
 535 "I saw never palmer with pike nor with scrip *bag*  
 Ask after him ere now in this place."  
 "Peter!" quoth a Plowman, and put forth his head,  
 "I know him as kindly as clerk doth his books. *naturally*  
 Conscience and Kind Wit kenned me to his place *Natural Intelligence*  
 540 And did me swear him since to serve him for ever,  
 Both to sow and to set, the while I swink might. *labour*  
 I have been his follower all these forty winter —  
 Both y-sown his seed and sued his beasts, *followed*  
 Within and without waited his profit.  
 545 I dike and I delve, I do that he hoteth. *orders*  
 Sometime I sow and sometime I thresh,  
 In tailor's craft and tinker's craft, what Truth can devise,  
 I weave and I wind and do what Truth hoteth.  
 For though I say it myself, I serve him to pay; *his satisfaction*



- 550 I have mine hire of him well and otherwhile more. *payment*  
 He is the presteſt payer that poor men knoweth: *quickeſt*  
 He withholdſ no hewe's hire that he ne hath it at even. *ſervant's; evening*  
 He is as low as a lamb and lovely of ſpeech. *humble*  
 And if ye willeth to wit where that he dwelleth,
- 555 I will wiſſ you the way well right to hiſ place."  
 "Yea, lief Piers!" quoth theſe pilgrims, and proffered him hire. *dear*  
 "Nay, by the peril of my ſoul!" quoth Piers and gan to ſwear,  
 "I nolde fang a farthing, for Saint Thomas's ſhrine! *would not receive*  
 Truth would love me the leſſ a long time after.
- 560 As if ye willeth to wend well, thiſ iſ the way thither:  
 Ye muſt go through Meekneſſ, both men and wiſeſ,  
 Till ye come into Conſcience, that Chriſt wit the ſooth,  
 That ye love Our Lord God liefeſt of all thingſ, *deareſt*  
 And then your neighbourſ next in no wiſe appar *harm*
- 565 Otherwiſe then thou wouldſt be wrought to thyſelf.  
 "And ſo bow forth by a brook, 'Be-buſom-of-ſpeech', *proceed*  
 For to ye find a ford, 'Your-fatherſ-honoureth':  
*Honora patrem et matrem.*<sup>30</sup>  
 Wadeth in that water and waſeth you well there,  
 And ye ſhall leap the lightloker all your lifetime. *more lightly*
- 570 And ſo ſhalt thou ſee 'Swear-not-but-if-it-be-for-need  
 And-namely-on-idle-the-name-of-God-Almighty'.  
 "Then ſhalt thou come by a croft, but come thou not therein:  
 The croft hatte 'Covet-not-men's-chattel-nor-their-wiſeſ *iſ called*  
 Nor-none-of-their-ſervantſ-that-noy-them-might'. *annoy*
- 575 Look thou break no boughſ there but if it be thine own.  
 "Two ſtockſ there ſtandeth, but ſtint thou not there: *tree-trunkſ*  
 They hight 'Steal-not' and 'Slay-not' — ſtrike forth by both,  
 And leave them on thy left half and look not thereafter,  
 And hold well thine holiday high till even.
- 580 "Then ſhalt thou blench at a berg, 'Bare-no-ſaſe-wiſneſſ'; *finch; hill*  
 He iſ frithed in with florinſ and other feeſ many: *protected*  
 Look thou pluck no plant there, for peril of thy ſoul.

30. Honour thy father and thy mother. *Exodus* 20:12

- “Then shalt thou see ‘Say-sooth-so-it-be-to-do  
 In-no-manner-else-not-for-no-man’s-bidding’  
 585 “Then shalt thou come to a court as clear as the sun. *bright*  
 The moat is of Mercy, the manor about,  
 And all the walls be of Wit to hold Will out,  
 And crenelated with Christendom that Kind to save,  
 Buttressed with ‘Believe-so-or-thou-be-not-saved’.  
 590 And all the houses be hiled, halls and chambers, *covered*  
 With no lead but with love and low sþeech, as brethren of one womb.  
 The bridge is of ‘Bid-well-the-better-may-thou-sþeed’;  
 Each pillar is of penance, of prayers to saints;  
 Of alms-deeds are the hooks that the gates hang on.  
 595 “Grace hatte the gateward, a good man for sooth; *is called; porter*  
 His man hatte ‘Amend-you’ — many man him knoweth.  
 Telleth him this token: ‘Truth wot the sooth:  
 I performed the penance that the priest me enjoined  
 And am sorry for my sins and so I shall ever  
 600 When I think thereon, though I were a Pope.’  
 “Biddeth Amend-you meek him to his master once *humble himself*  
 To waive up the wicket that the woman shut *open; gate*  
 When Adam and Eve ate apples unroasted.  
*Per Evam cunctis clausa est et per Mariam virginem iterum patefacta est.*<sup>31</sup>  
 For he hath the key and the clicket, though the king sleep. *latch*  
 605 And if Grace grant thee to go in in this wise, *way*  
 Thou shalt see in thyself Truth sit in thine heart  
 In a chain of charity, as thou a child were,  
 To suffer him and say naught against thy sire’s will.  
 “As beware then of ‘Wrath-thee’, that wicked shrew:  
 610 For he hath envy to him that in thine heart sitteth,  
 And poketh forth pride to praise thyself.  
 The boldness of thy benefits maketh thee blind then  
 And so wouldst thou be driven out as dew, and the door closed,  
 Keyed and clicketed to keep thee without *latched*  
 615 Happily an hundred winter ere thou eft enter!

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31. Through Eve the gate was closed, and through the Virgin Mary it shall be opened again.

Thus might thou lose his love, to let well by thyself,  
And get it again through grace as through no gift else.

“As there are seven sisters that serve Truth ever  
And are porters of the posterns that to the place longeth. *belong*

620 That one hadde Abstinence, and Humility another;  
Charity and Chastity be her chief maidens;  
Patience and Peace, much people they helpeth;  
Largesse the lady, she let in full many —  
She hath helped a thousand out of the devil’s pynfold. *enclosure*

625 And who is sib to these seven, so me God help, *related*  
He is wonderly welcome and fair underfongen. *received*

And but if ye be sib to some of these seven —  
It is full hard, by mine head,” quoth Piers, “for any of you all  
To get in-going at any gate but grace be the more!” *entrance*

630 “Now, by Christ!” quoth a cut-purse, “I have no kin there.”  
“Nor I,” quoth an apeward, “by aught that I know.” *bee-keeper*

“Wit God,” quoth a waferer, “wist I this for sooth,  
Should I never further a foot for no friar’s preaching.” *cake-maker*

635 “Yes!” quoth Piers the Plowman, and poked them all to good, *urged*  
“Mercy is a maiden there, hath might over them all;

And she is sib to all sinful, and her son also,  
And through the help of them two —hope thou none other—  
Thou might get grace there — so thou go betimes.” *early*

“By Saint Paul!” quoth a pardoner, “peradventure I be not known  
there:

640 I will go fetch my box with my brevets and a bull with bishop’s letters.  
“By Christ!” quoth a common woman, “thy company will I follow.  
Thou shalt say I am thy sister.” I ne wot where they be-came. *went*



## William's Vision of Piers Plowman

### Passus 6

“THIS were a wicked way but whoso had a guide  
That might follow us each a foot” — thus this folk them moaned.  
Quoth Perkin<sup>1</sup> the Plowman, “By Saint Peter of Rome!  
I have an half acre to erie by the highway; *plough*  
5 Had I eried this half acre and sown it after,  
I would wend with you and the way teach.”  
“This were a long letting,” quoth a lady in a scleyre; *delay; veil*  
“What should we women work the while?”  
“Some shall sew the sacks” quoth Piers, “for shedding of the wheat;  
10 And ye lovely ladies with your long fingers,  
That ye have silk and cendel to sew when time is, *silk cloth*  
Chasubles for chaplains, churches to honour.  
Wives and widows, wool and flax spinneth:  
Maketh cloth, I counsel you, and kenneth so your daughters. *teach*  
15 The needy and the naked, nymeth heed how they lieth, *take*  
And casteth them clothes, for so commandeth Truth. *make*  
For I shall lene them livelihood, but if the land fail, *grant*  
As long as I live, for the Lord of heaven’s love.  
And all manner of men that by meat and drink liveth,  
20 Helpeth them to work wightly that winneth your food.” *vigorously*  
“By Christ!” quoth a knight then, “he kenneth us the best;  
As on the theme, trully, taught was I never.  
As ken me,” quoth the knight, “and by Christ I will assay!”  
“By Saint Paul!” quoth Perkin, “Ye proffer you so fair  
25 That I shall swink and sweat and sow for us both, *toil*  
And other labours do for thy love all my lifetime,  
In covenant that thou keep Holy Church and myself  
From wasters and from wicked men that this world destroyeth;  
And go hunt hardily to hares and foxes,  
30 To boars and to bucks that break down mine hedges;  
And go affait thy falcons wild fowls to kill, *train*

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1. The names Perkin and Piers are used interchangeably for the same character.

For such cometh to my croft and croppeth my wheat.”

Courteously the knight then conceived these words:

“By my power, Piers, I plight thee my troth  
 35 To fulfil this forward, though I fight should; *pledge; oath*  
 As long as I live I shall thee maintain.” *agreement*

“Yea, and yet a point,” quoth Piers, “I pray you of more:

Look ye teen no tenant but Truth will assent; *vex*  
 And though ye may amerce men, let mercy be taxer *fine*  
 40 And meekness thy master, maugree Meed’s checks. *in spite of M’s rebukes*

And though poor men proffer you presents and gifts,  
 Nyme it not, an aventure thou may it not deserve; *Take; chance*  
 For thou shalt yield it again at one year’s end  
 In a full perilous place — Purgatory it hatte.

45 And mis-bid not thy bondsmen, the better may thou speed;  
 Though he be thine underling here, well may hap in heaven  
 That he worth worthier set and with more bliss: *will be*

*Amice, ascende superius.<sup>2</sup>*

For in a charnel at church, churls be evil to know, *vault; peasants; hard*  
 Or a knight from a knave there — know this in thine heart.

50 And that thou be true of thy tongue, and tales that thou hate,  
 But if they be of wisdom or of wit, thy workmen to chaſten.

Hold not with no harlots nor hear not their tales,

And namely at the meat such men eschew —

For it be the devil’s disours, I do thee to understand.” *minstrels*

55 “I assent, by Saint James,” said the knight then,  
 “For to work by thy words the while my life dureth.” *endures*

“And I shall apparel me,” quoth Perkin, “in pilgrim’s wise  
 And wend with you I will, till we find Truth.”

He caſt on his clothes, y-clouted and whole, *patched*  
 60 His cockers and his cuffs for cold of his nails, *gaiters*

And hung his hopper at his halse in ſtead of a scrip: *seed-basket; neck; bag*  
 “A buſhel of bread-corn bring me therein,

For I will ſow it myſelf, and ſince will I wend

To pilgrimage as palmers do, pardon for to have.

65 And whoſo helpeth me to erie or ſow here ere I wend, *plough*

2. Friend, go up higher. *Luke 14:10*

- Shall have leave, by Our Lord, to lese here in harvest take  
 And make him merry there-amid, maugree whoso begrudgeth it.  
 And all kinds crafty men that can live in truth,  
 I shall find them food that faithfully liveth —
- 70 Save Jake the Juggler and Janet of the Stews, Brothels  
 And Daniel the Dice-player and Denote the Bawd,  
 And Friar the Faitour, and folk of his order, pretender  
 And Robin the Ribald, for his rusty words.  
 Truth told me once and bade me tell it forth:
- 75 *Deleantur de libro viventium*<sup>3</sup> — I should not deal with them,  
 For Holy Church is hote of them no tithes to ask, commanded  
*Quia cum iustis non scribantur.*<sup>4</sup>  
 They be escaped good aventure — now God them amend!" chance  
     'Dame Work-when-time-is, Piers' wife hight; is called  
 His daughter hight 'Do-right-so-or-thy-dame-shall-thee-beat';
- 80 His son hight 'Suffer-thy-Sovereigns-to-have-their-will:  
 Deem-them-not-for-if-thou-dost-thou-shalt-it-dear-a-buy;  
 Let-God-y-worth-withal-for-so-His-word-teacheth!  
 "For now I am old and hoar and have of mine own, grey  
 To penance and to pilgrimage I will pass with these others;
- 85 Forth I will ere I wend do write my bequest.  
     "*In Dei nomine, Amen,*<sup>5</sup> I make it myself.  
 He shall have my soul that best hath deserved it,  
 And defend it from the fiend, for so I believe,  
 Till I come to his account as my creed me telleth,
- 90 To have a release and a remission — on that rental I lieve.  
     "The church shall have my carrion, and keep my bones,  
 For of my corn and chattel he craved the tithes.  
 I paid it him prestly, for peril of my soul; promptly  
 Forth is he holden, I hope, to have me in his mass obliged
- 95 And mengen me in his memory amongst all Christen. commemorate  
     "My wife shall have of that I won with truth, and no more,  
 And deal among my daughters and my dear children;

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3. Let them be wiped out of the book of the living...

4. ...and not be written among the righteous. *Psalm* 69:29

5. In the name of the Lord, Amen.

- For though I die today, my debt is y-quitted;  
 I bore home that I borrowed ere I to bed went.  
 100 And with the residue and the remnant, by the Rood of Luke!  
 I will worship therewith Truth by my life,  
 And be His pilgrim at plow for poor men's sake.  
 My plow-foot shall be my pikestaff, and pick a-two the roots, *in half*  
 And help my colter to carve and clean the furrows." *plough-blade*
- 105 Now Perkin and these pilgrims to the plow fared.  
 To erie this half-acre holpen him many; *plough; helped*  
 Dikers and delvers digged up the balks; *ridges*  
 Therewith was Perkin a-payd and praised them fast. *pleased*  
 Other workmen there were that wrought full yerne: *eagerly*
- 110 Each man in his manner made himself to do,  
 And some to please Perkin picked up the weeds.  
 At high prime Piers let the plough stand,  
 To oversee them himself; whoso best wrought,  
 He should be hired thereafter, when harvest time come.
- 115 And then sat some and sang at ale,  
 And helped erie this half acre with "How trolly lolly!"<sup>6</sup> *plough*  
 "Now, by the peril of my soul!" quoth Piers all in pure teen,  
 "But ye arise the rather and rap you to work,  
 Shall no grain that here groweth gladden you at need,  
 120 And though ye die for dole, the devil have that recks!" *cares*
- Then were faitours a-feared, and feigned them blind;  
 Some laid their legs aliry, as such losels kenneth, *across; wasters know*  
 And made their plaint to Piers and prayed him of grace:  
 "For we have no limbs to labour with, Lord, y-graced be ye!  
 125 As we pray for you, Piers, and for your plough both,  
 That God of his grace your grain multiply  
 And yield you of your alms that ye give us here;  
 For we may neither swink nor sweat, such sickness us aileth."  
 "If it be sooth," quoth Piers, "that ye say, I shall it soon espy.  
 130 Ye be wasters, I wot well, and Truth wot the sooth;  
 And I am his old hind and hight him to warn *servant; bidden*

6. literally coarse lace; but also the title of a song: "Hey trolly lolly lo."

- Which they were in this world his workmen appaired. *harmed*  
 Ye waste what men win with travail and with teen;  
 As Truth shall teach you his team to drive,  
 135 Or ye shall eat barley bread and of the brook drink;  
 But if he be blind or broke-legged or bolted with irons,  
 He shall eat wheat bread and drink with myself  
 Till God of his goodness garrison him send. *deliverance*  
 As ye might travail as Truth would and take meat and hire  
 140 To keep cows in the field, the corn from the beasts,  
 Dike or delve or ding upon sheaves, *thresh*  
 Or help make mortar or bear muck a-field.  
 In lechery and losengery ye live, and in sloth, *lying*  
 And all is through sufferance that vengeance you ne taketh!  
 145 “As anchorites and hermits that eat but at noon  
 And no more ere morrow — mine alms shall they have,  
 And of my chattel to cope them with that have cloisters and churches.  
 As Robert Runabout shall not receive of mine,  
 Nor postles, but they preach can and have power of the bishop: *apostles*  
 150 They shall have payn and potage and put themselves at ease: *bread*  
 For it is an unreasonable Religion that hath right naught of certain.”  
 Then gan Waster to wrath him and would have y-fought,  
 And to Piers the Plowman he proffered his glove.  
 A Breton, a braggart, a-boasted Piers also  
 155 And bade him go piss with his plow, for-pined shrew! *wretched*  
 “Willy or nilly, we will have our will *Like it or not*  
 And of thy flour and of thy flesh fetch when us liketh,  
 And make us merry there amid, maugree thy checks.” *in spite of; rebukes*  
 Then Piers the Plowman plained him to the knight *pleaded*  
 160 To keep him, as covenant was, from cursed shrews  
 And from these waster wolves-kins that maketh the world dere: *harm*  
 “For they waste and win naught, and that while ilk *earn; (they do)*  
 Worth never plenty among the people, the while my plow lieth.” *Will be*  
 Courteously the knight then, as his kind would, *nature required*  
 165 Warned Waster and wissed him better: *advised*  
 “Or thou shalt a-buy by the law, by the order that I bear!” *pay*  
 “I was not wont to work,” quoth Waster, “and now will I not begin!”



And let light of the law, and less of the knight, *thought little*  
 And set Piers at a pea's(-*price*), and his plow both,  
 170 And menaced Piers and his men if they met eftsoon. *again*  
 "Now, by the peril of my soul!" quoth Piers, "I shall appair you all."  
 And hooped after Hunger, that heard him at the first. *shouted*  
 "A-wreck me of these wasters," quoth he, "that this world shendeth!"  
*Avenge; ruin*  
 Hunger in haste then hente Waster by the maw *siezed; stomach*  
 175 And wrung him so by the womb that all watered his eyes.  
 He buffeted the Breton about the cheeks  
 That he looked like a lantern all his life after.  
 He beat them so both, he burst near their guts;  
 Ne had Piers with a pease-loaf prayed him be-leave,  
 180 They had been dolven both — ne deem thou none other. *buried*  
 "Suffer them live," he said, "and let them eat with hogs,  
 Or else beans and bran y-bake together."  
 Faitours for fear thereof flew into barns *Cheats*  
 And flapped on with flails from morrow till even, *threshed*  
 185 That Hunger was not hardy on them for to look  
 For a potful of pease that Piers had y-made.  
 An heap of hermits hente them spades *siezed*  
 And cut their copes and courtepies them made. *short coats*  
 And went as workmen with spades and with shovels,  
 190 And delved and diked to drive away Hunger.  
 Blind and bed-ridden were booted a thousand, *healed*  
 That sat to beg silver, soon were they healed;  
 For what was baked for bayard was boot for many hungry; *succour*  
 And many a begger for beans buxom was to swink, *obedient; work*  
 195 And each a poor man well a-payd to have pease for his hire,  
 And what Piers prayed them to do as prest as a sparrow-hawk. *quick*  
 And thereof was Piers proud, and put them to work  
 And gave them meat as he might afford and measurable hire.  
 Then had Piers pity, and prayed Hunger to wend *go*  
 200 Home into his own erd and hold him there ever: *native land*  
 "For I am well a-wrecked of wasters through thy might. *avenged*  
 As I pray thee, ere thou pass," quoth Piers then to Hunger,

- “Of beggars and of bidders: what best be to do?  
 For I wot well, be thou went, they will work full ill; gone  
 205 Mischief it maketh they be so meek now,  
 And for default of their food this folk is at my will. lack  
 And they are my bloody brethren, for God bought us all.  
 Truth taught me once to love them each one  
 And to help them of all thing, aye as them needeth. always  
 210 Now would I wit of thee, what were the best,  
 And how I might a-master them and make them to work.” govern  
 “Hear now,” quoth Hunger, “and hold it for a wisdom:  
 Bold beggars and big that must their bread be-swink, work for  
 With hounds’ bread and horse bread hold up their hearts —  
 215 Abave them with beans, for bolling of their womb; Confounded; swelling  
 And if the gomes grudge, bid them go and swink, work  
 And he shall sup sweeter when he it hath deserved.  
 As if thou find any freke that Fortune hath appaired harmed  
 Or any manner false men, find thou such to know:  
 220 Comfort them with thy chattel for Christ’s love of heaven;  
 Love them and lend them, for so law of Kind would: Nature  
*Alter alterius onera portate.*<sup>7</sup>  
 And all manner of men that thou might esþy  
 That needy be or naked, nourish them with thy goods,  
 Love them and lack them not — let God take the vengeance; blame  
 225 Though they do evil, let thou God y-worth: be  
*Mibi vindictam et ego retribuam.*<sup>8</sup>  
 And if thou wilt be gracious to God, do as the Gosþel teacheth,  
 And be-low thee amongst low men — so shalt thou latch grace: get  
*Facite vobis amicos de mamona iniquitatis.*<sup>9</sup>  
 “I would not grieve God,” quoth Piers, “for all the good on ground!”  
 Might I sinless do as thou sayest?” said Piers then.  
 230 “Yea, I behote thee,” quoth Hunger, “or else the Bible lieth. promise  
 Go to *Genesis* the giant, the engenderer of us all: creator  
*In sudore*<sup>10</sup> and swink thou shalt thy meat till, toil; earn

7. Bear ye one another’s burdens. *Galatians* 6:2

8. Vengeance is mine: I will repay. *Romans* 12:19

9. Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness. *Luke* 16:9

And labour for thy livelihood,' and so Our Lord hight.  
 And *Sapience* saith the same — I saw it in the Bible:  
 235 'Piger pro frigore'<sup>11</sup> no field would till —  
 And therefore he shall beg and bid, and no man beat his hunger.' pray  
 Matthew-with-man's-face moutheth these words:  
 That *servus nequam*<sup>12</sup> had a mnam, and for he would not chaffer,  
 coin; trade  
 He had maugre of his master evermore after; ill-will  
 240 And be-nim him his mnam for he ne would work, took away  
 And gave that mnam to him that ten mnam had,  
 And with that he said, that Holy Church it heard:  
 'He that hath shall have and help where it needeth;  
 And he that naught hath shall naught have, and no man him help,  
 245 And what he weeneth well to have, I will it him bereave.' supposes  
 "Kind Wit would that each a wight wrought, Common Sense  
 Or in ditching or in delving or travailing in prayers; working  
 Contemplative life or active life, Christ would men wrought.  
 The Psalter saith in the psalm of *Beati omnes*, Psalm 128  
 250 The freke that feedeth himself with his faithful labour,  
 He is blessed by the book in body and in soul:  
*Labores manuum tuarum &c.*<sup>13</sup>  
 "Yet I pray you," quoth Piers, "pour *charité*, and ye ken for *charité*; if  
 Any leaf of leechcraft, learn it me, my dear; medicine  
 For some of my servants and myself both  
 255 Of all a week work not, so our womb acheth."  
 "I wot well," quoth Hunger, "what sickness you aileth;  
 Ye have manged over much — that maketh you groan. eaten  
 As I hote thee," quoth Hunger, "as thou thine health willest, command  
 That thou drink no day ere thou dine somewhat.  
 260 Eat naught, I hote thee, ere Hunger thee take  
 And send thee of his sauce to savour with thy lips;  
 And keep some till supper time and sit not too long;

10. In the sweat (of thy face shalt thou eat bread). *Genesis* 3:19

11. The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold. *Proverbs* 20:4

12. A wicked servant. *Luke* 19:12ff.

13. (For thou shalt eat) the labours of thine hands. *Psalm* 128:2

- Arise up ere appetite have eaten his fill.  
 Let not Sir Surfeit sit at thy board — *table*
- 265 Lieve him not, for he is lecherous and likerous of tongue, *greedy*  
 And after many manner meats his maw is a-hungered. *stomach*  
 “And if thou diet thee thus, I dare lay mine ears  
 That Physic shall his furred hood for his food sell,  
 And his cloak of Calabria with all the knaps of gold, *buttons*
- 270 And be fain, by my faith, his physic to let,  
 And learn to labour with land, lest livelihood him fail.  
 There are more liars than leeches — Lord them amend! *doctors*  
 They do men die through their drinks ere destiny it would.” *potions*  
 “By Saint Paul,” quoth Piers, “these are profitable words!
- 275 For this is a lovely lesson, Lord it thee for-yield! *reward*  
 Wend now, Hunger, when thou wilt, that well be thou ever.”  
 “I behote God,” quoth Hunger, “hence ne will I wend *promise*  
 Ere I have dined by this day and y-drunk both.”  
 “I have no penny,” quoth Piers, “poulets for to buy,
- 280 Ne neither geese nor grice; but two green cheeses,  
 A few curds and cream and cake of oates,  
 And two loaves of beans and bran y-baked for my faunts. *children*  
 And yet I say, by my soul, I have no salt bacon  
 Nor no cockney, by Christ, collops to make! *cook; scallops*
- 285 As I have parsley and porrets and many plant coles, *leeks; cabbages*  
 And eke a cow and a calf, and a cart mare *also*  
 To draw afield my dung the while the drought lasteth.  
 And by this livelihood we must live till Lammas time. *1st August*  
 And by that I hope to have harvest in my croft;
- 290 Then may I dight thy dinner as me dear liketh.” *prepare*  
 All the poor people then pea-pods fetched;  
 Beans and baked apples they brought in their laps,  
 Chibols and chervils and ripe cherries many, *onions; cow-weed*  
 And proffered Piers this present to please with Hunger.
- 295 All Hunger ate in haste and asked after more.  
 Then poor folk for fear fed Hunger yerne; *eagerly*  
 With green porret and peas to poison him they thought!  
 By that it nighed near harvest and new corn came to cheaping; *market*

Then was folk fain, and fed Hunger with the best —  
 300 With good ale, as Glutton taught — and gart Hunger to sleep. *caused*  
 And then would Waster not work, but wander about,  
 Nor no beggar eat bread that beans in were,  
 But of cocket and cler-matin or else of clean wheat, *quality bread; corn*  
 Nor no halfpenny ale in none wise drink,  
 305 But of the best and of the brownest that brewers sell.  
 Labourers that have no land to live on but their hands  
 Deigned not to dine a-day night-old worts; *vegetables*  
 May no penny ale them pay, nor no piece of bacon *satisfy*  
 But if it be fresh flesh, other fish fried, other y-baked; *or*  
 310 And that *chaud* and *plus chaud*,<sup>14</sup> for chilling of their maw.  
 And but if he be highly hired, else will he chide,  
 And that he was workman wrought warie the time. *curse*  
 Against Cato's counsel comseth he to jangle: *begins; dispute*  
*Paupertatis onus patienter ferre memento.*<sup>15</sup>  
 He grieveth him against God and grudgeth against Reason.  
 315 And then curseth he the King and all his Counsel after  
 Such laws to look, labourers to grieve.  
 As while Hunger was their master, then would none of them chide,  
 Nor strive against his statute, so sternly he looked!  
 As I warn you workmen — winneth while ye may, *reap*  
 320 For Hunger hitherwards hasteth him fast!  
 He shall awake through water, wasters to chasten,  
 Ere five year be fulfilled such famine shall arise:  
 Through floods and through foul weathers, fruits shall fail —  
 And so saith Saturn and sends you to warn:  
 325 When ye see the sun amiss and two monks' heads,  
 And a maid have the mastery, and multiplied by eight,  
 Then shall Death withdraw and Dearth be justice,  
 And Davey the Diker die for hunger  
 But if God of his goodness grant us a truce.



14. Hot; hotter (*French*)

15. Remember to bear patiently the burden of poverty. Cato, *Distichs* 1:21

# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 7

- T**RUTH heard tell hereof, and to Piers sent  
To take his team and till the earth,  
And purchased him a pardon *a poena et a culpa*<sup>1</sup>  
For him and for his heirs for evermore after;
- 5 And bade him hold him at home and erien his leas, *plough; lands*  
And all that holpen him to erie, to set or to sow, *helped*  
Or any manner mester that might Piers avail; *occupation*  
Pardon with Piers Plowman Truth hath y-granted.
- Kings and knights that keep Holy Church  
10 And rightfully in realms rule the people,  
Have pardon through purgatory to pass full lightly,  
With patriarchs and prophets in paradise to be fellows.  
Bishops y-blessed, if they be as they should,  
Legisters of both laws, the lewed therewith to preach, *Legislators*
- 15 And, in as much as they must amend all sinful,  
Are peers with the Apostles — this pardon Piers sheweth—  
And at the day of doom at the high dais to sit.  
Merchants in the margin had many years, *purgatory*  
As no *a poena et a culpa* the Pope would them grant.
- 20 For they hold not their holy-days as Holy Church teacheth,  
And for they swear 'by their souls' and 'so God must them help',  
Against clean Conscience, their chattel to sell. *goods*  
As under his secret seal Truth sent them a letter,  
And bade them buy boldly what them best liked
- 25 And since sell it again and save the winnings,  
And amend *maison-dieux* therewith and miseased folk help; *hospitals*  
And wicked ways wightly amend, *bad roads; swiftly*  
And do boot to bridges that to-broken were; *repair*  
Marry (*off*) maidens or make them nuns;
- 30 Poor people and prisoners find them their food,  
And set scholars to school or to some other crafts;  
Relieve Religion and render them better.

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1. A plenary indulgence, which grants absolution *from torment and from guilt*.

“And I shall send you myself Saint Michael mine angel,  
 That no devil shall you dere, nor dread in your dying, harm  
 35 And wit you from wanhope, if ye will thus work, guard; despair  
 And send your souls in safety to my Saints in joy.”

Then were merchants merry — many wept for joy  
 And praised Piers the Plowman, that purchased this bull.

Men of law leaſt pardon had that pleaded for meed,  
 40 For the Psalter saveth them not, such as take gifts,  
 And namely of innocents that no evil ne kenneth: eſpecially; know

*Super innocentem munera non accipies.*<sup>2</sup>

Pleaders should pain them to plead for such and help;  
 Princes and prelates should pay for their travail:

*A regibus et principibus erit merces eorum.*<sup>3</sup>

As many a juſtice and juror would for John do more  
 45 Than *pro Dei pietate*<sup>4</sup> — lieve thou none other!  
 As he that ſpendeth his ſpeech and ſpeaketh for the poor  
 That is innocent and needy and no man appaireth, harms  
 Comforteth him in that case, coveteth not his gifts,

And for Our Lord’s love law for him sheweth —  
 50 Shall no devil at his death day dere him a mite harm  
 That he ne worth saved and his soul, the Psalter beareth witness: will be

*Domine, quis habitabit in tabernaculo tuo?*<sup>5</sup>

As to buy water, or wind, or wit, or fire the fourth:  
 These four the Father of Heaven made to this fold in common: earth  
 These be Truth’s treasures, true folk to help,  
 55 That never shall wax nor wane without God himself.

When they draw on to the death, and indulgences would have,  
 His pardon is full petite at his parting hence small

That any meed of mean men for their mooting taketh.  
 Ye legiſters and lawyers; if I lie witeth Mathew: knows

*Quodcumque vultis ut faciant vobis homines, facite eis.*<sup>6</sup>

2. ...nor taken reward againſt the innocent. *Psalm* 15:6

3. Their payment shall be from kings and princes.

4. for the love of God.

5. Lord, who shall dwell in thy tabernacle? *Psalm* 15:1

6. Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.

*Matthew* 7:12

- 60 All living labourers that live with their hands,  
 That truly take and truly win,  
 And live in love and in law, for their low hearts  
 Haveth the same absolution that sent was to Piers.  
 Beggars and bidders be not in the bull
- 65 But if the suggestion be sooth that shapeth them to beg: *reason*  
 For he that beggeth or bids, but it he have need,  
 He is false with the fiend and defraudeth the needy,  
 And also guileth the giver against his will;  
 For if he wist he were not needy, he would give that (to) another
- 70 That were more needy than he, so the neediest should be helped.  
 Cato kenneth me thus, and the Clerk of the Stories:<sup>7</sup>  
*Cui des, videto*<sup>8</sup> is Cato's teaching;  
 And in the Stories he teacheth to bestow thine alms:  
*Sit elemosina tua in manu tua donec studes cui des.*<sup>9</sup>  
 As Gregory was a good man, and bade us give all
- 75 That asketh for His love that us all leneth: *grants*  
*Non eligas cui misereris, ne forte pretereas illum qui meretur accipere;*  
*quia incertum est pro quo Deo magis placeas.*<sup>10</sup>  
 For wit ye never who is worthy, as God wot who hath need.  
 In him that taketh is the treachery, if any treason walk—  
 For he that giveth, yieldeth, and yarketh him to rest, *prepares*  
 And he that biddeth, borroweth, and bringeth himself in debt.
- 80 For beggars borrow evermore, and their borgh is God Almighty. *pledge*  
 To yield them that giveth them, and yet usure more:  
*Quare non dedisti pecuniam meam ad mensam,*  
*ut ego veniens cum usuris exegissem utique illam?*<sup>11</sup>  
 Forth biddeth not, ye beggars, but if ye have great need. *beg*  
 For whoso hath to buy him bread, the Book beareth witness:

7. Peter Comestor (d. 1178) *Historia Scholastica*

8. Take heed to whom you give. Cato, *Distichs*.

9. Let your alms remain in your hand until you have taken pains to find out whom you should give to.

10. Do not choose whom to take mercy upon, for it may be that you will pass over someone who deserves to receive; for it is not certain for which you may please God more. St Jerome.

11. Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? *Luke 19:23*



He hath enough that hath bread enough, though he have naught else:

*Satis dives est qui non indiget pane.*<sup>12</sup>

85 Let usage be your solace of saints' lives reading;  
The Book banneth beggary, and blameth them in this manner:

*Iunior fui et enim senui, et non vidi iustum derelictum,  
nec semen eius quaerens panem.*<sup>13</sup>

For they live in no love, nor no law hold:

They ne wed no woman that they with deal,

90 But as wild beasts with 'wa-hay!' worth up and work, mount

And bring forth bairns that bastards men calleth.

Or the back or some bone they breaketh in his youth, Either

And go and fait with their faunts for evermore after. beg; children

There is more mis-shapen amongst these beggars

95 Than of all other manner men that on this mold walketh. earth

Those that live thus their life may loathe the time

That ever he was man wrought, when he shall hence fare.

As old men and hoar that helpless be of strength, grey

And women with child that work no more,

100 Blind and bed-ridden and broken in their members, lepers

That take this mischief meekly, as measles and others,

Have as plain pardon as the Plowman himself.

For love of their low hearts, Our Lord hath them granted

Their penance and their Purgatory upon this pure earth.

105 "Piers," quoth a priest then, "thy pardon must I read;

For I shall construe each clause and ken it thee in English."

And Piers at his prayer the pardon unfoldeth,

And I behind them both beheld all the bull.

In two lines it lay, and not a letter more,

110 And was written right thus in witness of truth:

*Et qui bona egerunt ibunt in vitam eternam.*

*Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum.*<sup>14</sup>

12. He is rich enough, who does not lack bread. St Jerome

13. I have been young and now am old, and yet saw I never the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging their bread. *Psalm 37:25*

14. And those who have done good shall go into eternal life; but those who have done evil shall go into eternal fire. *Athanasian Creed*.

- “Peter!” quoth the priest then, “I can no pardon find  
 But ‘Do well and have well, and God shall have thy soul,’  
 And ‘Do evil and have evil, and hope thou none other  
 That after thy death-day the devil shall have thy soul!’”
- 115 And Piers for pure teen pulled it a-twain vexation; in two  
 And said, *Si ambulavero in medio umbre mortis*  
*Non timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum es.*<sup>15</sup>
- “I shall cease of my sowing,” quoth Piers, “and swink not so hard,  
 Nor about my belly-joy so busy be no more; appetite  
 120 Of prayers and of penance my plough shall be hereafter,  
 And weep when I should sleep, though wheat bread me fail.
- “The prophet his payn ate in penance and in sorrow, bread  
 By that the Psalter saith — so did other many.  
 That loveth God leally, his livelihood is full easy: truly  
*Fuerunt mihi lacrimae meae panes die ac nocte.*<sup>16</sup>
- 125 And but if Luke lie, he learneth us by fowls  
 We should not be too busy about the world’s bliss:  
*Ne solliciti sitis,*<sup>17</sup> he saith in the Gosþel,  
 And sheweth us by examples ourselves to wiss. guide  
 The fowls in the field, who finds them meat at winter?
- 130 Have they no garner to go to, but God finds (*for*) them all.” granary  
 “What!” quoth the priest to Perkin, “Peter! as me thinketh,  
 Thou art lettered a little — who learned thee on book?”  
 “Abstinence the Abbess,” quoth Piers, “mine ABC me taught,  
 And Conscience came afterward and kenned me much more.”
- 135 “Were thou a priest, Piers,” quoth he, “thou mightest preach where  
 thou wouldst  
 As diviner in divinity, with *Dixit insipiens*<sup>18</sup> to thy theme.”  
 “Lewed lorel!” quoth Piers, “little lookest thou on the Bible; lost soul  
 On Solomon’s sayings seldom thou beholdest:  
*Eice derisores et iurgia cum eis ne crescant &c.*”<sup>19</sup>

15. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me. *Psalm* 23:4

16. My tears have been my meat day and night. *Psalm* 42:3

17. Take no thought for your life. *Luke* 12:22 and *Matthew* 6:25

18. The fool hath said (in his heart, there is no God). *Psalm* 14:1

- The priest and Perkin opposed either other  
 140 And I through their words awoke, and waited about,  
 And saw the sun in the south sit that time.  
 Meatless and moneyless on Malvern Hills,  
 Musing on these metels a mile-way I went. *dreams*
- Many time these metels hath made me to study  
 145 Of that I saw sleeping — if it so be might;  
 And for Piers the Plowman, full pensive in heart,  
 And which a pardon Piers had, all the people to comfort,  
 And how the priest impugned it with two proper words.  
 As I have no savour in songe-warie, for I see it oft fail;  
*pleasure; dream interpretation*
- 150 Cato and canonists counsel us to leave  
 To set sadness in songe-warie — for *somnia ne cures*.<sup>20</sup> *soberness*  
 As for the book Bible beareth witness  
 How Daniel divined the dreams of a king  
 That was Nebuchadnezzar named of clerks.
- 155 Daniel said, “Sire King, thy dreams betokeneth  
 That uncouth knights shall come thy kingdom to claim;  
 Amongst lower lords thy land shall be de-parted.” *divided*  
 And as Daniel divined, in deed it fell after:  
 The king lost his lordship, and lower men it had.
- 160 And Joseph mette marvellously how the moon and the sun *dreamed*  
 And the eleven stars hailed him all.  
 Then Jacob judged Joseph’s sweven: *dream*  
 “*Beau fils,*” quoth his father, “for default we shall —  
 I myself and my sons— seech thee for need.”
- 165 It befell as his father said, in Pharaoh’s time,  
 That Joseph was Justice, Egypt to look: *govern*  
 It befell as his father told — his friends there him sought.  
 All this maketh me on metels to think — *dreams*  
 And how the priest proved no pardon to Do-well,  
 170 And deemed that Do-well indulgences passed,  
 Biennials and triennials and bishop’s letters,

19. Cast out the scorner, and contention shall go out. *Proverbs* 22:10

20. Take no account of dreams. Cato, *Distichs*, 11:31

- And how Do-well at the day of doom is dignely under-fongen,  
*worthily received*
- And passeth all the pardons of Saint Peter's church.  
 Now hath the Pope power pardon to grant
- 175 The people without penance to pass into joy;  
 This is our belief, as lettered men us teacheth:  
*Quodcumque ligaveris super terram erit ligatum et in caelis &c.*<sup>21</sup>
- And so I lieve leally (Lord forbid else!) *believe truly*  
 That pardon and penance and prayers do save  
 Souls that have sinned seven sithes deadly. *times*
- 180 As to trust these triennials — truly, me thinketh,  
 It is not so secure for the soul, certain, as is Do-well.  
 Forth I read you renks that rich be on this earth, *advise; men*  
 Upon trust of your treasure, triennials to have;  
 Be ye never the bolder to break the ten hests; *commandments*
- 185 And namely ye masters, mayors and judges,  
 That have the wealth of this world and wise men be holden, *held*  
 To purchase you pardon and the Pope's bulls.  
 At the dreadful doom, when dead shall arise  
 And come all before Christ, accounts to yield:  
 How thou led thy life here and his laws kept,
- 190 And how thou didst day by day, the doom will rehearse. *relate*  
 A pokeful of pardon there, nor provincials' letters, *bagful*  
 Though ye be found in the fraternity of all the four orders  
 And have indulgences doublefold — but Do-well you help,  
 I set your patents and your pardon at one pie's heel! *value; crust*
- 195 Forth I counsel all Christen to cry God mercy,  
 And Mary his mother be our mean between,  
 That God give us grace here, ere we go hence,  
 Such works to work, while we be here,  
 That after our death-day, Do-well rehearse *relate*
- 200 At the day of doom, we did as he hight.




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21. Whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven. *Matthew* 16:19

# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 8

**T**HUS y-robed in russet I roamed about  
All a summer season for to seek Do-well,  
And frayed full oft of folk that I met *asked*  
If any wight wist where Do-well was at inn, *knew*  
5 And what man he might be, of many men I asked.  
Was never wight as I went that me wiss could *man; advise*  
Where this leode lingered, less nor more —  
Till it befell on a Friday, two friars I met,  
Masters of the Minors, men of great wit.  
10 I hailed them hendily, as I had y-learnt, *courteously*  
And prayed them, *pour charité*,<sup>1</sup> ere they passed further,  
If they knew any country or coasts about  
Where that Do-well dwelleth — “Doeth me to wit: *know*  
For ye be men of this mold that most wide walk,  
15 And know countries and courts and many kinds places —  
Both princes’ palaces and poor men’s cotes, *cottages*  
And Do-well and Do-evil, where they dwell both.”  
“Marry!” quoth those Minors, “among us he dwelleth,  
And ever hath, as I hope, and ever shall hereafter.”  
20 “*Contra!*”<sup>2</sup> quoth I as a clerk, and comsed to disþute, *started*  
And said, “Soothly, *Septies in die cadit iustus*.<sup>3</sup>  
Seven sithes, saith the Book, sinneth the rightful, *times*  
And whoso sinneth,” I said, “doeth evil, as me thinketh,  
And Do-well and Do-evil must not dwell together.  
25 *Ergo* he is not alway at home amongst you friars: *Therefore*  
He is otherwhile elsewhere to wiss the people.” *teach*  
“I shall say thee, my son,” said the friar then,  
“How seven sithes the sad man sinneth on the day. *times*  
By a forbisne,” quoth the friar, “I shall thee fair shew. *example*  
30 “Let bring a man in a boat amid a broad water:

1. For charity. (*French*)

2. Latin for ‘against’; suggesting disagreement.

3. For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again. *Proverbs* 24:16

- The wind and the water and the wagging of the boat  
 Maketh the man many time to fall and to stand.  
 For stand he never so stiff, he stumbleth if he move —  
 As yet is he safe and sound, and so him behoveth; *needs to be*
- 35 For if he ne arise the rather and raught to the steer, *sooner; reached; helm*  
 The wind would with the water the boat overthrow,  
 And then were his life lost through laches of himself. *fault*
- “And thus it fareth,” quoth the friar, “by folk here on earth.  
 The water is likened to the world, that waneth and waxeth;  
 40 The goods of this ground are like to the great waves  
 That as winds and weathers walweth about; *roll*  
 The boat is likened to our body that brittle is of kind, *nature*  
 That through the fiend and the flesh and the frail world  
 Sinneth the sad man seven sithes a day. *times*
- 45 “As deadly sin doth he not, for Do-well him keepeth,  
 And that is Charity the champion, chief help against sin;  
 For she strengtheneth man to stand, and steereth man’s soul  
 That, though thy body bows as boat doth in the water,  
 Aye is thy soul safe but thou thyself will *Always*
- 50 Do a deadly sin and drench so thyself.  
 God will suffer well thy sloth, if thyself liketh;  
 For he gave thee a yearsgift to yeme well thyself *govern*  
 And that is wit and free will, to every wight a portion,  
 To flying fowls, to fishes and to beasts;
- 55 As man hath most thereof, and most is to blame  
 But if he work well therewith, as Do-well him teacheth.”  
 “I have no kind knowing,” quoth I, “to conceive all thy words,  
 As if I may live and look, I shall go learn better.”  
 “I be-ken thee Christ,” quoth he, “that on the cross died.” *commend*
- 60 And I said, “The same save you from mischance,  
 And give you grace on this ground good men to worth!”  
 And thus I went wide-where, walking mine own, *far and wide*  
 By a wild wilderness, and by a wood’s side;  
 Bliss of the birds abide me made,
- 65 And, under a linden upon a land, leaned I a stounde *time*  
 To lythe the lays those lovely fowls made. *listen to; songs*

- Mirth of their mouths made me there to sleep;  
 The most marvellous metels mette me then *dreams dreamed*  
 That ever wight dreamed in world, as I ween. *suppose*
- 70 A much man, as me thought, like to myself, *tall*  
 Came and called me by my kind name. *own*  
 "What art thou?" quoth I then, "that thou my name knowest?"  
 "That thou wost well," quoth he, "and no wight better." *know; man*  
 "Wot I," quoth I, "who art thou?" "Thought," said he then.
- 75 "I have sued thee this seven year; saw thou me no rather?" *earlier*  
 "Art thou Thought?" quoth I then, "Thou couldest me wiss *advise*  
 Where that Do-well dwelleth, and do me to know."  
 "Dowel," quoth he, "and Do-better, and Do-beſt the third,  
 Are three fair virtues, and be not far to find.
- 80 Whoso is true of his tongue and of his two hands,  
 And through his labour or through his land his livelihood winneth,  
 And is trusty of his tally, taketh but his own, *accounting*  
 And is not drunkelew nor disdainous: Do-well him followeth. *given to drink; full of disdain*
- 85 "Do-better doeth right thus, as he doth much more;  
 He is as low as a lamb and lovely of ſpeech,  
 And helpeth all men after that them needeth.  
 The bags and the brigirdles, he hath to-broken them all *breech-girdles*  
 That the Earl Avarice held, and his heirs;
- 90 And with Mammon's money he hath made him friends,  
 And is run into Religion, and hath rendered the Bible, *expounded*  
 And preacheth to the people Saint Paul's words:  
*Libenter ſuffertis inſipientes cum ſitis ipſi ſapientes.*<sup>4</sup>  
 Ye wiſe, ſuffereth the unwiſe with you to live,  
 And with glad will doeth them good, for ſo God you hoteth. *commands*
- 95 "Do-beſt is above both, and beareth a biſhop's croſs,  
 Is hooked on that one end to haul men from hell.  
 A pike is on that potence, to put a-down the wicked *ſtaff*  
 That wait any wickedneſs, Do-well to teen. *vex*  
 And Do-well and Do-better ordained them amongſt

4. For ye ſuffer fools gladly, ſeeing ye yourſelves are wiſe. 2 *Corinthians* 11:19

- 100 To crown one to be king to keep them both,  
 That if Do-well or Do-better did against Do-beſt,  
 Then ſhould the king come and caſt them in irons,  
 And but if Do-beſt bid for them, they to be there for ever.  
 “Thus Do-well, and Do-better, and Do-beſt the third  
 105 Crowned one to be king to keep them all  
 And rule the realm by their three wits  
 And otherwiſe nor elſe not, but as they three aſſented.”  
 I thanked Thought then that he me ſo taught.  
 “As yet ſavoureth me not thy ſaying, ſo me Chriſt help!  
 110 For more kind knowing I covet to learn —  
 How Do-well, Do-better and Do-beſt do among the people.”  
 “But Wit can wiſſ thee,” quoth Thought, “where thoſe three dwell;  
 Elſe wot I none that can, that now is alive.”  
 Thought and I thus three days we went  
 115 Diſputing upon Do-well, day after other.  
 And ere we aware were, with Wit gan we meet. *before*  
 He was long and lean, like to none other;  
 Was no pride on his apparel, nor poverty neither;  
 Sad of his ſemblance and of a ſoft ſpeech. *Serious*  
 120 I durſt move no matter to make him to jangle *dared; argue*  
 But as I bade Thought then be mean between *mediator*  
 And put forth ſome purpoſe to prove his wits,  
 What was Do-well from Do-better, and Do-beſt from them both.  
 Then Thought in that time ſaid theſe words:  
 125 “Where Do-well and Do-better and Do-beſt be in land,  
 Here Will<sup>5</sup> would wit, if Wit could teach him;  
 And whether he be man or no man, this man fain would eſpy  
 And work as they three would — this is his intent.”



5. Determination, purpoſe or deſire; and poſſibly alſo a reference to the dreamer, and author, of the poem, Will(iam Langland).



## William's Vision of Piers Plowman

### Passus 9

- “**S**IR Do-well dwelleth,” quoth Wit, “not a day hence,  
In a castle that Kind made of four kinds (*of*) things. Nature  
Of earth and air is it made, meddled together, mixed
- 5 Kind hath closed therein craftily withal  
A leman that he loveth like to himself. sweetheart  
*Anima*<sup>1</sup> she hatte. To her hath envy is called  
A proud pricker of France, *Princeps huius mundi*,<sup>2</sup> horseman  
And would win her away with wiles, and he might. if
- 10 “As Kind knoweth this well and keepeth her the better,  
And hath done her with Sir Do-well, duke of these marches. placed  
Do-better is her damsel, Sir Do-well’s daughter,  
To serve this lady loyally both late and rathe. early  
Do-best is above both, a bishop’s peer;
- 15 That he bids must be done — he biddeth them all. commands  
By his learning is lead that lady *Anima*.  
“As the Constable of that castle, that keepeth them all,  
Is a wise knight withal — Sir In-wit he hatte, Conscience  
And hath five fair sons by his first wife:
- 20 Sir See-well, and Say-well, and Sir Hear-well the hende, courteous  
Sir Work-well-with-thine-hand, a wight man of strength, powerful  
And Sir Godfrey Go-well — great lords all.  
These five be set to save this lady *Anima*  
Till Kind come or send to keep her himself.”
- 25 “What kind (*of*) thing is Kind?” quoth I, “canst thou me tell?”  
“Kind,” quoth Wit, “is creator of all kinds (*of*) things,  
Father and former of all that ever was made.  
And that is the great God that ginning had never,  
Lord of life and of light, of liss and of pain. joy
- 30 Angels and all things are at his will,  
As man is him most like of mark and of shape.

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1. Soul.

2. The Prince of this world (the Devil). *John* 16:11

- For through the word that he warped waxed forth beasts: *uttered*  
*Dixit et facta sunt.*<sup>3</sup>  
 “And made man most like to himself,  
 And Eve of his rib bone without any mean. *help*  
 35 For he was singular himself and said *Faciamus*<sup>4</sup> —  
 As who saith, ‘More must hereto (*be*) than my word one:  
 My might must help now with my s̄peech.’  
 Right as a lord should make letters, and him lacked no parchment,  
 Though he could write never so well, if he wield no pen,  
 40 The letter, for all the lordship, I lieve were never y-made!  
 And so it seemeth by him, as the Bible telleth, there he said  
*Faciamus hominem ad imaginem nostram.*<sup>4</sup>  
 He must work with his word and his wit shew.  
 And in this manner was man made through might of God almighty,  
 45 With his word and workmanship and with life to last.  
 And thus God gave him a ghost, of the godhead of heaven,  
 And of his great grace granted him bliss —  
 And that is life that aye shall last to all his lineage after. *ever*  
 And that is the castle that Kind made, *Caro* it hatte, *Flesh*  
 50 And is as much to mean as ‘man with a soul’.  
 And that he wrought with work and with word both:  
 Through might of the majesty man was y-made.  
 “In-wit and all wits y-closed be therein *senses*  
 For love of the lady *Anima*, that life is y-named.  
 55 Over all in man’s body she walketh and wandereth,  
 As in the heart is her home and her most rest.  
 As In-wit is in the head, and to the heart he looketh  
 What *Anima* is lief or loath — he lets her at his will;  
 For after the grace of God, the greatest is In-wit.  
 60 “Much woe worth that wight that mis-ruleth his In-wit, *will be*  
 And that be gluttonous glubbers; their God is their womb: *gulpers*  
*Quorum deus venter est.*<sup>5</sup>  
 For they serve Satan, their souls shall he have

3. He s̄pake the word, and they were made. *Psalm* 148:5

4. Let us make man in our image. *Genesis* 1:26

5. ...whose God is their belly. *Philippians* 3:19

That live sinful life here, their soul is like the devil.  
 And all that live good life are like to God Almighty:

*Qui manet in caritate, in Deo manet &c.*<sup>6</sup>

65 “Alas! that drink shall for-do that God dear bought, destroy  
 And doth God forsake them that he shaped to his likeness:  
*Amen dico vobis, nescio vos.*

*Et alibi: Et dimisi eos secundum desideria eorum.*<sup>7</sup>

Fools that fault In-wit, I find that Holy Church lack  
 Should find them what they faulteth, and fatherless children, provide  
 And widows that have not wherewith to win them their food,  
 70 Madmen and maidens that helpless were —  
 All these lack In-wit, and lore behoveth. teaching need

“Of this matter I might make a long tale  
 And find fele witnesses among the four doctors, many  
 And that I lie not of that I learn thee, Luke beareth witness.

75 “Godfather and godmother that see their godchildren  
 At mis-ease and at mischief and must them amend  
 Shall have penance in purgatory, but if they them help.  
 For more belongeth to the little bairn ere he the law know  
 Than naming of a name, and he never the wiser!  
 80 Should no Christen creature cry at the gate  
 Nor fail payn nor potage, and prelates did as they should. bread; if  
 A Jew would not see a Jew go jangling for default  
 For all the moebles on this mold, and he amend it might. furniture; world

“Alas that a Christen creature shall be unkind to another!  
 85 Since Jews, that we judge Judas’ fellows,  
 Either helpeth other of that that him needeth.  
 Why nel we Christen of Christ’s goods as kind aren’t  
 As Jews, that be our loresmen? Shame to us all! teachers  
 The commons for their unkindness, I dread me, shall a-buy. pay

90 “Bishops shall be blamed for beggar’s sake;  
 Than Judas he is worse that giveth a japer silver fool  
 And biddeth the beggar go, for his broken clothes:

6. He that abideth in charity abideth in God. 1 *John* 4:16

7. Verily, I say unto you, I know you not. *Matthew* 25:12; And elsewhere: So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lusts. *Psalm* 81:13

*Proditor est prelatus cum Iuda qui patrimonium Christi minus distribuit.  
Et alibi: perniciosus dispensator est qui res pauperum Christi  
inutiliter consumit.*<sup>8</sup>

He doth not well that doeth thus, nor dreads not God almighty,  
Nor loveth not Solomon's sayings, that Sapience taught:

*Initium sapientiae timor Domini.*<sup>9</sup>

- 95 "That dreadeth God, he doth well; that dreadeth him for love  
And not for dread of vengeance, doth therefore the better.  
He doth best that withdraweth him by day and by night  
To spill any speech or any space of time: waste
- Qui offendit in verbo, in omnibus est reus.*<sup>10</sup>
- "Tying of time, Truth wot the sooth, Losing
- 100 Is most y-hated upon earth of them that be in heaven;  
And since to spill speech, that spire is of grace, offshoot  
And God's glee-man and a game of heaven. minstrel; pleasure  
Would never the faithful father his fiddle were untempered,  
Nor his glee-man a gadling, a goer to taverns. vagabond
- 105 "To all true tidy men that travail desire,  
Our Lord loveth them and lent, loud other still, at any time  
Grace to go to them and obtain their livelihood:
- Inquirentes autem Dominum non minuentur omni bono.*<sup>11</sup>
- "True wedded living folk in this world is Do-well,  
For they must work and win and the world sustain.
- 110 For of their kind they come that Confessors be named,  
Kings and knights, kaisers and clerks,  
Maidens and martyrs — out of one man come.  
The wife was made the wye for to help work, man  
And thus was wedlock y-wrought with a mean person, mediator
- 115 First by the father's will and the friend's counsel,  
And since by assent of themselves, as they two might accord;

8. The prelate who distributes Christ's goods poorly is a traitor with Judas. And elsewhere: a ruinous giver is he who idly consumes that which is due to Christ's poor.

9. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. *Psalm* 111:10

10. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. *Hebrews* 2:10

11. They who seek the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good. *Psalm* 34:10

And thus was wedlock y-wrought, and God himself it made;  
In earth the heaven is — himself was the witness.

“As false folk faithless, thieves and liars,  
120 Wasters and wretches out of wedlock, I trow,  
Conceived be in evil time, as Cain was on Eve.  
Of such sinful shrews the Psalter maketh mind: *takes note*  
*Concepit dolorem et peperit iniquitatem.*<sup>12</sup>  
And all that come of that Cain came to evil end.

“For God sent to Seth and said by an angel,  
125 “Thine issue in thine issue, I will that they be wedded,  
And not thy kind with Cain’s y-coupled nor y-sþoused.’

“Yet some, agaiñst the sonde of Our Saviour of heaven, *message*  
Cain’s kind and his kind coupled together —  
Till God wrathed with their works, and such a word said,

130 “That I made man, now it me for-thinketh: *regret*  
*Penitet me fecisse hominem.*<sup>13</sup>

“And come to Noah anon and bade him not let: *delay*  
‘Swithe go shape a ship of shides and of boards. *Quickly; plank*  
Thyself and thy sons three and sithen your wives, *afterwards*  
Busketh you to that boat and bideth therein *Go*

135 Till forty days be fulfilled, that flood have y-washed  
Clean away the cursèd blood that Cain hath y-made.  
“Beaſts that now be shall ban the time *curse*

That ever that cursèd Cain came on this earth.  
All shall die for his deeds by dales and hills,  
140 And the fowls that flee forth with other beaſts,  
Except only of each kind a couple  
That in thy shingled ship shall be y-saved.’

“Here a-bought the bairn the belsire’s guilts, *paid; forefather’s*  
And all for their forefathers they feared the worse.  
145 The Goſpel is here agaiñst in one degree, I find:

*Filius non portabit iniquitatem patris et pater non portabit iniquitatem filii.*<sup>14</sup>

12. He travailleth with mischief, he hath conceived sorrow. *Psalm 7:15*

13. It repenteth me that I have made them. *Genesis 6:7*

14. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. *Ezekiel 18:20; also John 9:1-3*

- As I find, if the father be false and a shrew,  
 That sometimes the son shall have the sire's taches. *faults*  
 Imp on an elder; and if thine apple be sweet *Graft*  
 150 Much marvel me thinketh; and more of a shrew  
 That bringeth forth any bairn, but if he be the same  
 And have a savour after the sire — seldom seest thou other: *taste*  
*Numquam colligunt de spinis uvas nec de tribulis ficus.*<sup>15</sup>  
 “And thus through cursed Cain came care upon earth, *grief*  
 155 And all for they wrought wedlocks, God's will against.  
 Forth have they maugree of their marriages, that marry so their children.  
 For some, as I see now, sooth for to tell,  
 For covetousness of chattel unkindly be wedded.  
 As careful conception cometh of such marriages *woeful*  
 As befell of the folk that I before of told.  
 160 For good should wed good, though they no goods had;  
 ‘I am *via et veritas*,<sup>16</sup> saith Christ, ‘I may advance all.’  
 “It is an uncomely couple, by Christ! as me thinketh  
 To give a young wench to an old feeble,  
 Or wed any widow for wealth of her goods  
 165 That never shall bairn bear but if it be in arms!  
 In jealousy joyless and jangling on bed, *arguing*  
 Many a pair since the pestilence have plight them together. *pledged*  
 The fruit that they bring forth are many foul words;  
 Have they no children but chest and chop them between. *strife; beat*  
 170 Though they do them to Dunmow,<sup>17</sup> but if the devil help  
 To follow after the flesh, fetch they it never; *meat*  
 But they both be foresworn, that bacon they tyne. *lose*  
 “Forth I counsel all Christen, covet not (to) be wedded  
 For covetousness of chattel nor of kindred rich;  
 175 As maidens and maidens make you together;  
 Widowers and widows, worketh the same;  
 For no lands, but for love, look ye be wedded,  
 And then get ye the grace of God, and good enough to live with.

15. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? *Matthew* 7:16

16. I am the way, the truth (and the life). *John* 14:6

17. A town in Essex, where a side of bacon was awarded to couples who did not argue for a year.

- “And every manner secular that may not continue, layman  
 180 Wisely go wed, and ware him from sin;  
 For lechery in liking is lime-yard of hell. snare  
 Whilst thou art young, and thy weapon keen,  
 Wreak thee with wiving, if thou wilt be excused:  
*Dum sis vir fortis, ne des tua robora scortis.*  
*Scribitur in portis, meretrix est ianua mortis.*<sup>18</sup>
- “When ye have wived, be ware, and worketh in time —  
 185 Not as Adam and Eve when Cain was engendered.  
 For in un-time, truly, between man and woman wrong time  
 Ne should no bedboard be: but if they both were clean  
 Of life and of soul, and in leal charity,  
 That ilke dern deed do no man ne should. same dark
- 190 As if they lead thus their lives, it liketh God almighty,  
 For he made wedlock first and himself it said:  
*Bonum est ut unusquisque uxorem suam habeat propter fornicationem.*<sup>19</sup>
- “That otherwise be got, for gadlings are holden, vagabonds; held  
 And false folk, foundlings, faitours and liars,  
 195 Ungracious to get good or love of the people;  
 Wander and waste what they catch must.  
 Against Do-well they do evil and the devil serve,  
 And after their death-day shall dwell with the same  
 But God give them grace here themselves to amend.
- 200 “Do-well, my friend, is to do as law teacheth.  
 To love thy friend and thy foe — lieve me, that is Do-better.  
 To give and to yemen both young and old, care for  
 To heal and to help, is Do-best of all.  
 “And thus Do-well is to dread God, and Do-better to suffer,  
 205 And so cometh Do-best of both, and bringeth a-down the moody proud  
 And that is wicked will that many works shendeth,  
 And driveth away Do-well through deadly sins.”



18. While a young, strong man, give not your strength to whores; it is written on the gates:

‘A Harlot is the door of death.

19. To avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife. 1 *Corinthians* 7:2

## William's Vision of Piers Plowman

### PASSUS 10

**T**HEN had Wit a wife, was hote Dame Study, called  
That lean was of leer and of lich both. face; body  
She was wonderly wrath that Wit me thus taught,  
And all staring Dame Study sternly said. spoke  
5 “Well art thou wise,” quoth she to Wit, “any wisdoms to tell  
To flatterers or to fools that frenetic be of wits!”  
And blamed him and banned him and bade him be still.  
“With such wise words to wiss any sots!” advise; fools  
And said, “*Nolite mittere*,<sup>1</sup> man, margery-pearls  
10 Among hogs that have haws at will. hawthorns  
They do but drivel thereon — dregs were (to) them liefer dearer  
Then all the precious perrie that in paradise waxeth. jewels  
I say it by such,” quoth she, “that sheweth by their works  
That they were liefer land and lordship on earth, rather  
15 Or riches or rents and rest at their will  
Than all the sooth sayings that Solomon said ever.  
“Wisdom and wit now is not worth a curse  
But if it be carded with covetousness as clothers comb their wool.  
Whoso can contrive deceits and conspire wrongs  
20 And lead forth a loveday to let the truth. settlement; hinder  
That such crafts kenn, to counsel are cleped; know; called  
They lead lords with leasings and belieth truth.  
“Job the gentle in his gests witnesseth deeds  
That wicked men, they wield the wealth of this world,  
25 And that they be lords of each a land, that out of law liveth:  
*Quare impii vivunt? Bene est omnibus qui prevaricantur et inique agunt?*<sup>2</sup>  
“The Psalter saith the same by such that do ill:  
*Ecce ipsi peccatores habundantes in saeculo obtinuerunt divicias.*<sup>3</sup>  
‘Lo!’ saith holy letterure, ‘which lords be these shrews!’ scripture

1. Cast not (pearls before swine). *Matthew* 7:6

2. Wherefore do the wicked live? *Job* 21:7; Wherefore are all they happy that deal very treacherously? *Jeremiah* 12:1

3. Lo, these are the ungodly, these prosper in the world, and these have riches in possession. *Psalms* 72:12



- Those that God most goods giveth, God most grieveth —  
 lest goods they dealeth,  
 And most unkind to the commons, that most chattel wieldeth: *people*  
*Quae perfecisti destruxerunt, iustus autem, quid fecit?*<sup>4</sup>
- 30 Harlots for their harlotry may have of their goods,  
 And japers and jugglers and janglers of jests;  
 As he that hath Holy Writ aye in his mouth *always*  
 And can tell of Tobias and of the twelve Apostles  
 Or preach of the penance that Pilate wrought
- 35 To Jesu the gentle, that Jews to-drew: *tore apart*  
 Little is he loved that such a lesson sheweth,  
 Or daunted or drawn forth — I do it on God himself! *flattered; declare*  
 “But those that fain them foolish and with faining liveth *deceiving*  
 Against the law of Our Lord, and lie on themselves,
- 40 Spit and spew and speak foul words,  
 Drink and drivel and do men for to gape,  
 Liken men and lie on them that lendeth them no gifts: *Satirise*  
 They ken no more minstrelsy nor music men to gladden  
 Than Munde the Miller of *Multa fecit Deus*.<sup>5</sup>
- 45 Nor were their vile harlotry, have God my troth, *pledge*  
 Should never king, nor knight, nor canon of Saint Paul’s  
 Give them to their yearsgift the value of a groat! *annual gift*  
 As mirth and minstrelsy among men is now  
 Lechery, losengery and losels’ tales *lying; wastrels’*
- 50 Gluttony and great oaths, this game they loveth.  
 “As if they carp of Christ, these clerks and these lewed,  
 At meat, in their mirth when minstrels be still,  
 Then telleth they of the Trinity, how two slew the third,  
 And bring forth a bald reason, and take Bernard to witness,
- 55 And put forth a presumption to prove the sooth.  
 Thus they drivel at their dais the deity to know,  
 And gnaw God with the gorge when their guts fill. *throat*  
 “As the careful may cry and carp at the gate, *woeful*

4. For they have destroyed that which thou hast made; and what hath the righteous done?

*Psalm 11:3*

6. Great are the wonders which thou hast done. *Psalm 40:6*

- Both a-hungered and a-thirst, and for chill quake;  
 60 Is none to nyme him in, nor his noy amend, *take; annoyance*  
 But hunt him as an hound and hote him go thence. *bid*  
 Little loveth he that Lord that lent him all that bliss,  
 That thus parteth with the poor a parcel when him needeth!  
 Nor were mercy in mean men more than in rich, *lowly*  
 65 Mendicants meatless might go to bed.  
 God is much in the gorge of these great masters,  
 As amongst mean men his mercy and his works.  
 And so saith the Psalter — I have seen it in *Memento*:<sup>6</sup>  
*Ecce audivimus eam in Efrata; invenimus eam in campis silvae.*<sup>6</sup>  
 Clerks and other kinsmen carp of God fast,  
 70 And have him much in their mouth, as mean men in heart.  
 “Friars and faitours have found up such questions  
 To please with proud men since the pestilence time,  
 And preach at Saint Paul’s, for pure envy of clerks,  
 That folk is not firmed in the faith, nor free of their goods,  
 75 Nor sorry for their sins; so is pride waxed  
 In religion and in all the realm amongst rich and poor  
 That prayers have no power these pestilences to let. *stop*  
 For God is deaf nowadays and daineth not us to hear,  
 That gurls for their guilts he for-grint them all. *children; destroys*  
 80 And yet the wretches of this world is none y-ware by other,  
 Nor for dread of the death withdraw not their pride,  
 Nor be plenteous to the poor as pure charity would,  
 But in gayness and gluttony for-glutten their good themselves, *gorge*  
 And breaketh not to the beggar as the Book teacheth:  
*Frangere esurienti panem tuum &c.*<sup>7</sup>  
 85 And the more he winneth and wieldes wealth and riches  
 And lordeth in lands, the less good he dealeth.  
 “Tobias teacheth you not so! Taketh heed, ye rich,  
 How the book Bible of him beareth witness:  
*Si tibi sit copia, abundanter tribue; si autem exiguum,*  
*illud impertiri libenter.*<sup>8</sup>

6. Lo, we heard the same at Ephrata, and found it in the wood. *Psalm* 132:6 (Remember...)

7. Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry? *Isaiah* 58:7

Whoso hath much, spend manly — so meaneth Tobias— *humanely*  
 90 And whoso little wieldeth, look him thereafter;  
 For we have no letter of our life, how long it shall dure. *contract*  
 Such lessons lords should love to hear,  
 And how he might most meynee manly find, *company; boldly provide*  
 Not to fare as a fiddler or a friar to seek feasts,  
 95 Homely at other men's houses, and hate their own.  
 "Elenge is the hall, each day in the week, *Wretched*  
 Where the lord nor the lady liketh not to sit.  
 Now hath each rich a rule — to eat by himself  
 In a privy parlour for poor men's sake,  
 100 Or in a chamber with a chimney, and leave the chief hall  
 That was made for meals, men to eat in,  
 And all to spare to spill that spend shall another.  
 "I have y-heard high men eating at the table  
 Carp, as they clerks were, of Christ and of his might,  
 105 And laid faults upon the father that formed us all,  
 And carp against clerks crabbed words:  
 'Why would Our Saviour suffer such a worm in his bliss, *serpent*  
 That bewiled the woman and the wye after, *man*  
 Through which wiles and words they went to hell,  
 110 And all their seed for their sin the same death suffered?'  
 "Here lieth your lore,' these lords ginneth dispute,  
 'Of that ye clerks us kenneth of Christ by the Gospel:  
*Filius non portabit iniquitatem patris &c.*<sup>9</sup>  
 Why should we that now be, for the works of Adam  
 Rot and to-rend? Reason would it never! *be torn*  
*Unusquisque portabit onus suum &c.*<sup>10</sup>  
 115 "Such motives they move, these masters in their glory,  
 And make men in misbelief that muse much on their words.  
 Imaginative hereafterward shall answer to your purpose.  
 Augustine to such arguers, he telleth them this theme:

8. If thou hast abundance, give alms accordingly: if thou have but a little, be not afraid to give according to that little. *Tobias* 4:8

9. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father. *Ezekiel* 18:20; and *John* 9:1-3

10. For every man shall bear his own burden. *Galatians* 6:5

*Non plus sapere quam oportet.*"

- Willeth never to wit why that God would  
 120 Suffer Satan his seed to beguile;  
 As believeth leally in the lore of Holy Church,  
 And pray him of pardon and penance in thy life,  
 And for his much mercy to amend you here. *great*  
 For all that willeth to wit the whys of God almighty,  
 125 I would his eye were in his arse and his finger after  
 That ever willeth to wit why that God would  
 Suffer Satan his seed to beguile,  
 Or Judas the Jew Jesu betray.  
 All was as he would — Lord, y-worshipped be thou—  
 130 And all worth as thou wilt, whatso we disþute. *will be*  
 “And those that useth these havylons to a-blind men’s wits *tricks*  
 What is Do-well from Do-better, now deaf must he worth, *be*  
 Since he willeth to wit which they be all.  
 But if he live in the life that longeth to Do-well,  
 135 I dare be his bold borgh that Do-better will he never, *surety*  
 Though Do-beþ draw on him day after other.”  
 And when that Wit was y-ware what Dame Study told,  
 He became so confused he could not look,  
 And as dumb as a doornail and drew him a-rear.  
 140 And for no carping I could after, nor kneeling to the ground,  
 I might get no grain of his great wits,  
 But all laughing he louted and looked upon Study *bowed*  
 In sign that I should beseech her of grace.  
 And when I was ware of his will, to his wife gan I lout, *bow*  
 145 And said, “Mercy, madam; your man shall I worth *be*  
 As long as I live, both late and rathe, *early*  
 And for to work your will the while my life dureth,  
 With that ye ken me kindly to know what is Do-well.”  
 “For thy meekness, man,” quoth she, “and for thy mild sþeech,  
 150 I shall ken thee to my cousin that Clergy is hote. *called*  
 He hath wedded a wife within these six months,  
 Is sib to the seven arts — Scripture is her name.

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11. Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think. *Romans* 12:3

- They two, as I hope, after my teaching,  
 Shall wiss thee to Do-well, I dare well undertake.” *guide*
- 155 Then was I as fain as fowl of fair morrow, *glad*  
 And gladder than the glee-man that gold hath to gift, *minstrel*  
 And asked her the highway where that Clergy dwelt,  
 “And tell me some token,” quoth I, “for time is that I wend.”  
 “Ask the highway,” quoth she, “hence to Suffer-
- 160 Both-well-and-woe, if that thou wilt learn;  
 And ride forth by riches, as rest thou not therein,  
 For if thou couplest thee therewith, to Clergy comest thou never.  
 And also the lecherous land that Lechery has,  
 Leave him on thy left half a large mile or more, *side*
- 165 Till thou come to a court, Keep-well-thy-tongue-  
 From-leasings-and-lither-speech-and-lecherous-drinks. *lies; evil*  
 Then shalt thou see Sobriety and Simplicity-of-speech,  
 That each wight be in will his wit thee to shew;  
 And thus shalt thou come to Clergy, that kens many things.
- 170 “Say him this sign: I set him to school,  
 And that I greet well his wife, for I wrote her the bible,  
 And set her to Sapience and to the Psalter glossed.  
 Logic I learned her, and all the Law after,  
 And all the musons in Music I made her to know. *measures*
- 175 “Plato the poet, I put him first to book;  
 Aristotle and other more to argue I taught.  
 Grammar for gurls I gart first written, *children; caused*  
 And beat them with a baleys but if they would learn. *birch*  
 Of all kinds crafts I contrived tools:
- 180 Of carpentry, of carvers, and compassed masons,  
 And learned them level and line, though I look dim. *see faintly*  
 “As Theology hath teened me ten score times: *vexed*  
 The more I muse therein, the mistier it seemeth,  
 And the deeper I divine, the darker me it thinketh.
- 185 It is no science, forsooth, for to subtle in. *be cunning*  
 A full lethi thing it were if that love therein nere; *empty; were not*  
 As for it letteth best by love, I love it the better,  
 For where that love is leader, ne lacked never grace.

- Look thou love leally, if thee liketh Do-well,  
 190 For Do-better and Do-best be of love's kin.  
     In other science it saith — I saw it in Cato  
*Qui simulat verbis, nec corde est fidus amicus,  
 Tu quoque fac simile; sic ars deluditur arte:*<sup>12</sup>  
 Whoso glosseth as guilers do, go me to the same,  
 195 And so shalt thou false folk and faithless beguile.  
 This is Cato's kenning to clerks that he learneth. teaching  
 As Theology teacheth not so, whoso taketh yeme; heed  
 He kenneth us the contrary against Cato's words,  
 For he biddeth us be as brethren, and bid for our enemies, pray  
 200 And love them that lie on us, and lend them when them needeth,  
 And do good against evil — God himself hoteth: commands  
*Dum tempus habemus, operemur bonum ad omnes,  
 maxime autem ad domesticos fidei.*<sup>13</sup>  
 "Paul preached the people, that perfectness loved,  
 To do good for God's love and give men that asked,  
 And to such namely that sue our believe, follow  
 205 And all that lacketh us or lieth us, Our Lord teacheth us to love,  
 And not to grieve them that grieveth us — God himself forbade it:  
*Mihi vindictam et ego retribuam.*<sup>14</sup>  
 Forth look thou love as long as thou durest, endure  
 For is no science under sun so sovereign for the soul.  
 As Astronomy is hard thing, and evil for to know,  
 210 Geometry and Geomesy is ginful of s̄peech; guileful  
 Whoso thinketh work with those three thriveth full late —  
 For sorcery is the sovereign book that to the sciences belongeth.  
 "Yet are there fibicches in forcers of fele men's making, tricks; boxes  
 Experiments of Alchemy the people to deceive;  
 215 If thou think to do well, deal therewith never!  
 All these sciences I myself subtled and ordained, contrived

12. Whoever dissimulates in words but is not at heart a faithful friend,

Treat him the same way: thus sleight is deluded by sleight. Cato, *Distichs* 1:26

13. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. *Galatians* 6:10

14. Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. *Deuteronomy* 32:35; *Romans* 12:19

And founded them foremost, folk to deceive.

Tell Clergy these tokens, and to Scripture after,

To counsel thee kindly to know what is Do-well."

220 I said, "Grant mercy, madam," and meekly her greeted,

And went wightly my way without more letting

And till I come to Clergy I could never stint.

*cease*

I greeted the good man as the good wife me taught,

And afterwards the wife, and worshipped them both,

*bowed to*

225 And told them the tokens that me taught were.

Was never come upon this ground, since God made the world,

Fairer under-fongen nor friendlier at ease

*received*

Than myself, soothly, soon so he wist

That I was of Wit's house and with his wife Dame Study.

230 I said to them soothly that sent was I thither

Do-well and I and Do-better to learn.

"It is a common life," quoth Clergy, "on Holy Church to believe,

With all the articles of the faith that falleth to be known:

And that is to believe leally, both learned and lewed,

235 On the great God that ginning had never,

And on the soothfast Son that saved mankind

*true*

From the deadly death and the devil's power

Through the help of the Holy Ghost, the which ghost is of both,

Three proper persons, as not in plural number;

240 For all is but one God and each is God himself:

*Deus Pater, Deus Filius, Deus Spiritus Sanctus:*<sup>15</sup>

God the Father, God the Son, God Holy Ghost of both,

Maker of mankind and of animals both.

"Augustine the old hereof made books,

And himself ordained to set us in belief.

245 Who was his author? All the four Evangelists;

*authority*

And Christ cleped himself so, the same beareth witness:

*called*

*Ego in patre et pater in me est, et qui videt me videt patrem meum.*<sup>16</sup>

"All the clerks under Christ ne could this assoil,

*answer*

But thus it belongeth to believe to lewed that will do-well.

15. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

16. I am in the Father, and the Father in me; he that hath seen me hath seen the Father. *John* 14:9

- For had never freke fine wit the faith to disþute, man  
 250 Ne man had no merit, might it be y-proved:  
*Fides non habet meritum ubi humana ratio prebet experimentum.*<sup>17</sup>  
 “Since is Do-better to suffer for thy soul’s health  
 All that the Book bids by Holy Church’s teaching:  
 And that is, man, by thy might, for mercy’s sake,  
 Look thou work it in work that thy word sheweth;  
 255 Such as thou seemest in sight be in assay y-found: trial  
*Appare quod es vel esto quod appares.*<sup>18</sup>  
 And let nobody be by thy bearing beguiled,  
 But be such in thy soul as thou seemest without. outside  
 “Then is Do-best to be bold to blame the guilty,  
 Since thou seeest thyself as in soul clean;  
 260 As blame thou never body and thou be blameworthy:  
*Si culpares velis culpabilis esse cavebis,*  
*Dogma tuum sordet cum te tua culpa remordet.*<sup>19</sup>  
 God in the Gosþel grimly reproveth rebukes  
 All that lacketh any life and lacks have themselves: blame; faults  
*Quid consideras festucam in oculo fratris tui, trabem in oculo tuo, &c.*<sup>20</sup>  
 Why moveest thou thy mood for a mote in thy brother’s eye, speck of dust  
 Since a beam in thine own a-blindeth thyself? timber  
*Eice primum trabem de oculo tuo, &c.*<sup>21</sup>  
 265 Which letteth thee to look, less other more? hinders  
 I read each a blind bosard do boot to himself; oaf; heal  
 As parsons and parish priests, that preach should and teach  
 All manner men to amend, by her might.  
 This text was told you to be ware, ere ye taught,  
 270 That ye were such as ye said to salve with other. heal  
 For God’s word would not be lost — for that worketh ever;

17. There is no merit in faith that human reason has proved by experience. Gregory, *Homilies on the Gosþels* 11, 26.)

18. Seem what you are; be what you seem. (pseudo-Chrysostom, *Homily 45 on Matthew*)

19. If you would blame others, beware your are not culpable. Your teaching shall be tainted when your own faults bite back. (Anon.)

20. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother’s eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? *Matthew* 7:3

21. Cast out first the beam out of thine own eye. *Luke* 6:42



If it availed not the commons, it might avail yourself.

“As it seemeth now soothly, to sight of the world,  
That God’s word worketh no wight on learned nor on lewed

275 But in such a manner as Mark meaneth in the Gosþel:

*Dum caecus ducit caecum, ambo in foveam cadunt.*<sup>22</sup>

Lewed men may liken you thus — that the beam lieth in your eyes,

And the festu is fallen, for your default, *splinter*

In all manner men through mansed priests.

The Bible beareth witness that all the bairns of Israel

280 Bitter a-bought the guilts of two bad priests, *paid for*

Hophni and Phinehas — for their covetousness

*Archa Dei*<sup>23</sup> mis-happed and Eli brake his neck.

“Forth, ye correctors, claweth hereon, and correcteth first yourselves,

And then may ye manly say, as David made the Psalter:

285 *Existimasti inique quod ero tui similis:*

*Arguam te, et statuam contra faciem tuam.*<sup>24</sup>

“And then shall borrel clerks be abashed to blame you or to grieve,

And carp not as they carp now, and call you dumb hounds:

*Canes non valentes latrare.*<sup>25</sup>

And dread to wrath you in any word, your workmanship to let,

And be prester at your prayer than for a pound of nobles. *quicker; coins*

290 And all for your holiness — have ye this in heart.

“Amongst rightful religious this rule should be held.

Gregory, the great clerk and the good pope,

Of religion the rule rehearseth in his *Morals*<sup>26</sup>

And saith it in example, for they should do thereafter:

295 ‘When fishes fail the flood or the fresh water, *lack*

They die for drought, when they dry lie;

Right so religion roileth and starveth *men of religion; rove*

That out of convent and cloister covet to live.’

For if heaven be on this earth, and ease to any soul,

22. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. *Matthew* 15:14

23. The Ark of God (of the covenant). See 1 Kings 4:11 ff for the story.

24. Thou thoughtest unjustly that I should be like unto thee: but I will reprove thee and set them before thy face. *Psalms* 50:21

25. They are all dumb dogs, they cannot bark. *Isaiah* 56:10

26. *Moralia in Iob*, Pope Gregory (590-604)

- 300 It is in cloister or in school, by many skills I find. *reasons*  
 For in cloister cometh no man to chide nor to fight,  
 But all is buxomness there, and books to read and to learn. *co-operation*  
 “In school there is scorn but if a clerk will learn,  
 And great love and liking, for each of them learneth other.
- 305 As now is Religion a rider, a roamer by streets,  
 A leader of lovedays and a land buyer,  
 A pricker on a palfrey from manor to manor, *horseman*  
 An heap of hounds at his arse as he a lord were;  
 And but if his knave kneel, that shall his cup bring,
- 310 He loureth on him and asketh him who taught him courtesy? *scowls*  
 Little had lords to do, to give land from their heirs  
 To religious that have no ruth, though it rain on their altars! *care*  
 “In many places where they parsons be, be themselves at ease,  
 Of the poor have they no pity — and that is their pure charity,
- 315 As they let them as lords, their land lieth so broad.  
 “As there shall come a king and confess you religiouses, *clerics*  
 And beat you, as the Bible telleth, for breaking of your rule,  
 And amend monials, monks and canons, *nuns*  
 And put them to their penance, *ad pristinum statum ire*,<sup>27</sup>
- 320 And barons with earls beget, through *Beatus vir*’s<sup>28</sup> teaching, *obtain*  
 That which bairns claim, and blame you foul: *children*  
*Hii in curribus et hii in equis ipsi obligati sunt &c.*<sup>29</sup>  
 “And then friars in their frater shall find a key *refectory*  
 Of Constantine’s coffers, in which is the chattel  
 That Gregory’s godchildren had evil de-spent. *wrongly spent*
- 325 And then shall the Abbot of Abingdon and all his issue for ever  
 Have a knock of a king, and incurable the wound. *blow*  
 That this worth sooth, seek ye that oft oversee the Bible: *will be true*  
*Quomodo cessavit exactor, quievit tributum? Contrivit Dominus baculum*  
*impiorum, et virgam dominantium caedencium plaga insanabili.*<sup>30</sup>

27. Returned to a pristine state.

28. Psalm 1.

29. Some put their trust in chariots, and some in horses. *Psalm* 20:7

30. How hath the oppressor ceased, the tribute ceased? The Lord hath broken the staff of the wicked, and the sceptre of the rulers with a continual stroke. *Isaiah* 14:4-6

- “As ere that king come, Cain shall awake,  
 As Do-well shall ding him a-down and destroy his might.” *strike*  
 330 “Then is Do-well and Do-better,” quoth I, “*dominus*<sup>31</sup> and knighthood?”  
 “I nell not scorn,” quoth Scripture; “but if scrivens lie, *will not; scribes*  
 Kinghood nor knighthood, by naught I can a-weigh,  
 Helpeth not to heavenward one hair’s end,  
 Nor riches right naught, nor royalty of lords.  
 335 “Paul proveth it impossible rich men to have heaven.  
 Solomon saith also that silver is worst to love:  
*Nihil iniquius quam amare pecuniam.*<sup>32</sup>  
 And Cato kenneth us to covet it not, but at need:  
*Dilige denarium sed parce dilige formam.*<sup>33</sup>  
 And patriarchs and prophets and poets both  
 Wrote to wiss us to will no riches, *advise; desire*  
 340 And praised poverty with patience; the Apostles beareth witness  
 That they have heritage in heaven — and by true right *inheritance*  
 Where rich men no right may claim, but of ruth and grace.”  
 “*Contra*,” quoth I, “by Christ! That can I reprove,  
 And prove it by Peter and by Paul both:  
 345 That is baptized be safe, be he rich or poor.”  
 “That is *in extremis*,” quoth Scripture, “amongst Saracens and Jews,  
 They may be saved so, and that is our belief:  
 That an un-Christen in that case may Christen an heathen,  
 And for his leal belief, when he the life tyneth, *true; loses*  
 350 Have the heritage of heaven as any man Christen.  
 “As Christen men without more may not come to heaven,  
 For that Christ for Christen men died, and confirmed the law  
 That whoso would and willeth with Christ to arise,  
*Si cum Christo surrexistis &c.*<sup>34</sup>  
 He should love and lene and the law fulfil. *give*  
 355 That is, love thy Lord God liefest above all, *most dearly*  
 And after, all Christen creatures in common, each man other;

31. Literally, lord, but in this context, lordship.

32. Nothing is more wicked than to love money. *Ecclesiastes* 10:10

33. Esteem money, but not for its own sake. Cato, *Distichs*, 4:4

34. If ye then be risen with Christ, (seek those things which are above). *Colossians* 3:10

- And thus belongeth to love, that lieveth to be saved.  
 And but we do thus in deed ere the day of doom, before; judgment  
 It shall be-sit us full sour, the silver that we keep,
- 360 And our backs that moth-eaten be, and see beggars go naked, coats  
 Or delight in wine and wildfowl, and wit any in default. know; need  
 For every Christen creature should be kind to other,  
 And since heathen to help in hope of amendment.
- “God hoteth high and low that no man hurt other, commands  
 365 And saith, ‘Slay not that semblable is to mine own likeness, alike  
 But if I send thee some token,’ and saith ‘*Non mecaberis*;<sup>35</sup>  
 Is slay not but suffer, and also for the best,  
 For *Mihi vindictam et ego retribuam*.<sup>36</sup>  
 For I shall punish in purgatory or in the pit of hell
- 370 Each man for his misdeeds, but mercy it let.”  
 “This is a long lesson,” quoth I, “and little am I the wiser!  
 Where Do-well is or Do-better darkly ye shew.  
 Many tales ye tell that Theology learneth, teaches  
 And that I man made was, and my name y-entered
- 375 In the legend of life long ere I were,  
 Or else unwritten for some wickedness, as Holy Writ witnesseth:  
*Nemo ascendit ad caelum nisi qui de caelo descendit*.<sup>37</sup>  
 “And I lieve it well, by Our Lord and on no letterure better.  
 For Solomon the sage that *Sapience* made, Books of Wisdom  
 God gave him grace of wit and all goods after
- 380 To rule the realm and rich (*it*) to make;  
 He deemed well and wisely, as Holy Writ telleth. judged  
 Aristotle and he — who wissed men better? taught  
 Masters that of God’s mercy teach men and preach,  
 Of their words they wiss us for wisest in their time: advise
- 385 And all Holy Church holdeth them both in hell!  
 And if I should work by their works to win me heaven,  
 That for their works and wit now woneth in pine; dwell; torment  
 Then wrought I unwisely, whatsoever ye preach!

35. Do not commit adultery; (...Do not kill). *Luke* 18:20 (quoting *Exodus* 20:13)

36. Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. *Deuteronomy* 32:35; *Romans* 12:19

37. And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but that he came down from heaven. *John* 3:13

- “As of fele witty, in faith, little ferly I have *many; wonder*  
 390 Though their ghost be ungracious God for to please.  
 For many men on this mold more set their heart  
 In goods than in God — forth them grace faileth  
 At their most mischief, when men shall life let,  
 As Solomon did and such others, that shewed great wits,  
 395 As their works, as Holy Writ saith, was ever the contrary.  
 Forth wise-witted men and well-y-lettered clerks  
 As they say themselves seldom do thereafter:  
*Super cathedram Moysi &c.*<sup>38</sup>
- “As I ween it worth of many as was in Noah’s time *suppose; will be*  
 When he shaped that ship of shides and of boards:  
 400 Was never wright saved that wrought thereon, nor other workman else,  
 But birds and beasts and the blessed Noah  
 And his wife with his sons and also their wives:  
 Of wrights that it wrought was none of them y-saved.  
 “God lene it fare not so by folk that the faith teacheth *grant*  
 405 Of Holy Church, that harbour is and God’s house, to save  
 And shield us from shame therein, as Noah’s ship did beasts.  
 And men that made it amid the flood a-drenched.  
 The *culorum* of this clause curates is to mean, *conclusion; bemoan*  
 That be carpenters Holy Church to make for Christ’s own beasts:  
*Homines et iumenta salvabis, Domine, &c.*<sup>39</sup>
- 410 At doomsday the deluge worth of death and fire at once; *will be*  
 Forth I counsel you clerks, of Holy Church the wrights,  
 Worketh ye works as ye see y-written, lest ye worth not therein! *will be*  
 “On Good Friday, I find, a felon was y-saved  
 That had lived all his life with leasings and with theft;  
 415 And for he be-knew on the cross and to Christ shrove him,  
 He was sooner y-saved than Saint John the Baptist  
 And or Adam or Isaiah or any of the prophets,  
 That had y-lain with Lucifer many long years.  
 A robber was y-ransomed rather than they all  
 420 Without penance of purgatory to perpetual bliss.

38. The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat. *Matthew* 23:2

39. Thou Lord, shalt save both man and beast. *Psalms* 36:7

- “Than Mary Magdalene, who might do worse?  
 Or who worse did than David, that Uriah’s death conspired?<sup>40</sup>  
 Or Paul the Apostle that no pity had  
 Christen kind to kill to death?  
 425 And now be these as sovereigns with saints in heaven —  
 Those that wrought wickedlokest in world though they were;  
*most wickedly*
- And those that wisely worded and wrote many books  
 Of wit and of wisdom, with damned souls wone.  *dwell*  
 “That Solomon saith, I trow be sooth and certain of us all:  
*Sunt iusti atque sapientes, et opera eorum in manu Dei sunt, &c.*<sup>41</sup>
- 430 There are witty and well living, as their works be y-hid  
 In the hands of Almighty God, and he wot the sooth;  
 Where for love a man worth allowed there and his leal works,  
 Or else for his evil will and envy of heart,  
 And be allowed as he lived so, for by lither men knoweth the good  *evil*
- 435 “And whereby wiſt men which is white, if all things black were,  
 And who were a good man but if there were some shrew?  
 Forth live we forth with lither men — I lieve few be good:  *evil*  
 For ‘*quant OPORTET vient en place il ny ad que PATI,*’<sup>42</sup>  
 And he that may all amend, have mercy on us all!
- 440 For soothest word that ever God said was when he said *Nemo bonus.*<sup>43</sup>  
 And yet have I forgot further of five wit’s teaching,  
 That Clergy though of Christ’s mouth commended was it little;  
 For he said to Saint Peter and to such as he loved,  
*Dum steteritis ante reges et praesides &c.*<sup>44</sup>
- “Though ye come before kings and clerks of the law,  
 445 Be not abashed, for I shall be in your mouths,  
 And give you wit at will with cunning to conclude them  
 All that against you of Christendom disþute.  
 “David maketh mention, he spake amongſt kings,

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40. See 2 Kings 11

41. The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God. *Ecclesiastes* 9:1

42. When MUST comes on the scene, there’s nothing but to ENDURE. (*proverbial*)

43. No man is good. *Luke* 18:19

44. Ye shall be brought before rulers and kings for my sake. *Mark* 13:9

- And might no king overcome him as by cunning of sþeech.  
 450 But wit nor wisdom won never the mastery  
 When man was at mischief without the more grace.  
 “The doughtiest doctør and diviner of the Trinity,  
 Was Augustine the old, and highest of the four,<sup>45</sup>  
 Said thus in a sermon — I saw it written once:  
 455 *Ecce ipsi idiote rapiunt caelum ubi nos sapientes in inferno mergimur.*<sup>46</sup>  
 And is to mean to English men, more or less,  
 Are none rather y-ravished from the right belief  
 Than are these cunning clerks that ken many books;  
 Nor none sooner saved, nor sadder of belief *more serious*  
 460 Than plowmen and pastors and poor common labourers?  
 Souters and shepherds — such lewed juttēs *Cobblers; nobodies*  
 Pierce with a *Paternoſter* the palace of heaven  
 And pass purgatory penance-less at their hence parting  
 Into the bliss of paradise for their pure belief,  
 465 That imperfectly here knew and eke lived. *also*  
 “Yea, men know clerks that have cursed the time  
 That ever they couth or knew more than *Credo in Deum patrem*<sup>47</sup>  
 And principally their *Paternoſter* — many a parson hath wished.  
 “I see examples myself, and so may many other,  
 470 That servants that serve lords seldom fall in arrearage *debt*  
 But those that keep the lord’s chattel — clerks and reeves. *property*  
 Right so lewed men and of little knowing,  
 Seldom fall they so foul and so far in sin  
 As clerks of Holy Church that keep Christ’s treasure:  
 475 The which is man’s soul to save, as God saith in the Goſpel:  
*‘Ite vos in vineam meam.’*<sup>48</sup>



45. St Gregory the Great, St Ambrose, St Augustine, and St Jerome.

46. Lo, the unlearned themselves take heaven by force while we wise ones are drowned in hell.

St. Augustine, *Confessions* VIII, 8

47. I believe in God the Father. From the *Creed*.

48. Go ye also into the vineyard. *Matthew* 20:4

# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 11

**T**HEN Scripture scorned me and a skill told, reason  
And lacked me in Latin and light by me she set, scolded  
And said, "*Multi multa sciunt et se ipsos nesciunt.*"<sup>1</sup>  
Then wept I for woe and wrath of her speech  
5 And in a winking worth till I was asleep.  
A marvellous metels mette me then. dream dreamed  
For I was ravished right there — for Fortune me fetched taken  
And into the land of longing and love she me brought,  
And in a mirror that hight Middle-Earth she made me to behold. called  
10 Since she said to me, "Here might thou see wonders,  
And know what thou covetest, and come thereto, peradventure."  
Then had Fortune following her two fair damsels:  
*Concupiscentia Carnis*<sup>2</sup> men called the elder maid,  
And Covetousness-of-Eyes y-called was that other.  
15 Pride-of-Perfect-Living pursued them both,  
And bade me for my countenance account Clergy light.  
*Concupiscentia Carnis* colled me about the neck embraced  
And said, "Thou art young and yepe and hast years enough nimble  
For to live long and ladies to love;  
20 And in this mirror thou might see mirths full many  
That lead thee will to liking all thy lifetime." pleasure  
The second said the same: "I shall sue thy will follow  
Till thou be a lord and have land, let thee I nelle, leave; will not  
That I ne shall follow thy fellowship, if Fortune it like."  
25 "He shall find me his friend," quoth Fortune thereafter;  
"The freke that followed my will failed never bliss."  
Then was there one that hight Elde, that heavy was of cheer, Old Age  
"Man," quoth he, "if I meet with thee, by Mary of heaven,  
Thou shalt find Fortune thee fail at thy most need,  
30 And *Concupiscentia Carnis* clean thee forsake.  
Bitterly shalt thou ban then, both days and nights, curse

1. Many know much, but do not know themselves. St Bernard, *Meditationes*

2. Lust of the Flesh. 1 *John* 2:16



Covetousness-of-Eyes, that ever thou her knew;  
And Pride-of-Perfect-Living to much peril thee bring.”

“Yea? Reck thee never!” quoth Recklessness, stood forth in ragged  
clothes.

Care

35 “Follow forth what Fortune will: thou hast well far till Elde. Old Age  
A man may stoop time enough when he shall tyne the crown. lose hair

*Homo proponit*,<sup>3</sup> quoth a poet, and Plato he hight,

And *Deus disponit*,<sup>4</sup> quoth he, let God do his will.

If Truth will witness it be well done, Fortune to follow,

40 *Concupiscentia Carnis* nor Covetousness-of-Eyes  
Ne shall not grieve thee graithly, nor beguile thee but thou will.” readily

“Yea, farewell, Phippe!” quoth Fauntlety,<sup>5</sup> and forth gan me draw,  
Till *Concupiscentia Carnis* accorded to all my works.

“Alas, Oh!” quoth Elde and Holiness both,

45 “That wit shall turn to wretchedness for will to have his liking!” pleasure

Covetousness-of-Eyes comforted me anon after

And followed me forty winter and a fifth more,

That of Do-well nor Do-better no dainty me thought. pleasure

I had no liking, lieve me, of the least of them ought to know.

50 Covetousness-of-Eyes came offer in my mind  
Than Do-well or Do-better among my deeds all.

Covetousness-of-Eyes comforted me oft,

And said, “Have no conscience how thou come to goods.

Go confess thee to some friar and shew him thy sins.

55 For while Fortune is thy friend, friars will thee love,  
And fetch thee to their fraternity and for thee beseech

To their Prior Provincial a pardon for to have,

And pray for thee poll by poll if thou be *pecuniosus*.<sup>6</sup>

*Poenā pecuniaria non sufficit pro spiritualibus delictis.*<sup>7</sup>

By wissing of this wench I did, her words were so sweet,

60 Till I forgot youth and gan into elde.

3. Man proposes. Plato

4. God disposes. after *Proverbs* 16:9.

5. Phippe: short for Philip, but also a Sparrow. Fauntlety: childishness

6. Pray for thee head by head (i.e. collectively) if thou be pecunious.

7. Pecuniary penance does not suffice for spiritual faults.

- And then was Fortune my foe, for all her fair behest, promise  
 And poverty pursued me and put me low.  
 And then found I the friar a-feared and flitting both  
 Against our first forward, for I said I nolde agreement; would not  
 65 Be buried at their house, but at my parish church  
 (For I heard once how Conscience it told  
 That where a man were christened, by kind he should be buried).  
 And for I said thus to friars, a fool they me held,  
 And loved me the less for my leal sþeech. honest  
 70 As yet I cried on my confessor that held himself so cunning.  
 "By my faith, friar!" quoth I, "Ye fare like these woovers behave; suitors  
 That wed no widows but for to wield their goods.  
 Right so, by the rood, rought ye never cross; care  
 Where my body were buried, by so ye had my silver!  
 75 I have much marvel of you, and so hath many another,  
 Why your convent coveteth to confess and to bury  
 Rather than to baptize bairns that be catechumens. catechumens  
 Baptizing and burying both be full needful;  
 As much more meritory me thinketh it is to baptize; meritorious  
 80 For a baptized man may, as masters telleth,  
 Through contrition come to the high heaven:  
*Sola contritio delet peccatum.*<sup>8</sup>  
 As a bairn without baptism may not be so saved:  
*Nisi quis renatus fuerit...*<sup>9</sup>  
 Look, ye lettered men, whether I lie or do not."  
 And Loyalty then laughed on me, and I loured after. scowled  
 85 "Wherefore lourest thou?" quoth Loyalty and looked on me hard.  
 "If I durst amongst men," quoth I, "this metels avow!" dare; dream  
 "Yea, by Peter and by Paul!" quoth he, "and take them both to witness:  
*Non oderis fratres secreta in corde tuo sed publice argue illos.*"<sup>10</sup>  
 "They will allege also," quoth I, "and by the Gosþel prove:  
 90 *Nolite iudicare quemquam.*"<sup>11</sup>

8. Only contrition may blot out sin.

9. Except a man be reborn... (he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.) *John* 3:5

10. Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart, but rebuke him openly. *Leviticus* 19:17

11. Judge not, that ye be not judged. *Matthew* 7:1

- “And whereof serveth law,” quoth Loyalty, “if no life undertook it —  
 Falseness nor faitery? For somewhat the Apostle said *deceit*  
*Non oderis fratrem.*<sup>12</sup>  
 And in the Psalter also saith David the prophet  
 95 *Existimasti inique quod ero tui similis &c.*<sup>13</sup>  
 It is *licitum* for lewed men to say the sooth *lawful*  
 If them liketh and list — each a law it granteth.  
 Except parsons and priests and prelates of Holy Church:  
 It falleth not for that folk no tales to tell —  
 100 Though the tale were true and it touched sin. *concerned*  
 “Thing that all the world wot, wherefore shouldst thou spare  
 To read it in rhetoric to arate deadly sin? *blame*  
 As be nevermore the first the default to blame;  
 Though thou see evil, say it not first — be sorry it n’ere amended.  
 105 No thing that is privy, publish thou it never;  
 Neither for love laud it not, nor lack it for envy: *blame*  
*Parum lauda; vitupera parcius.*”<sup>14</sup>  
 “He saith sooth,” quoth Scripture then, and skipped an high and  
 preached;  
 As the matter that she moved, if lewed men it knew,  
 The less, as I lieve, love it they would  
 110 The belief of Our Lord that lettered men teacheth.  
 This was her theme and her text — I took full good heed:  
*“Multi*<sup>15</sup> to a mangerie and to the meat were summoned;  
 And when the people was plener come, the porter unpinned the gate  
 And plucked in *Pauci*<sup>15</sup> privilege and let the remnant go roam.”  
 115 All for teen of her text trembled mine heart, *fear*  
 And in a weer gan I wax, and with myself to dispute *doubt*  
 Whether I were chosen or not chosen; on Holy Church I thought,  
 That underfonged me at font for one of God’s chosen. *received*  
 For Christ cleped us all, come if we would: *called*  
 120 Saracens and schismatics, and so he did the Jews:

12. Thou shalt not hate thy brothers.

13. Thou thoughtest unjustly that I should be like unto thee. *Psalms* 50:21

14. Praise little; blame less. (*attrib.* Seneca.)

15. Many (are called, but) few (are chosen.) *Matthew* 22:14

*O vos omnes sitientes, venite &c.*<sup>16</sup>

And bade them suck for sin salve at his breast.

And drink boot for bale, brook it whoso might. *heal; sorrow; bear*

“Then may all Christen come,” quoth I, “and claim their entry  
By the blood that he bought us with and through baptism after:

*Qui crediderit et baptizatus fuerit &c.*<sup>17</sup>

125 For though a Christen man coveted his Christendom to renege,  
Rightfully to renege (*it*) no reason it would. *renounce*

“For may no churl charter make, nor his chattel sell *peasant*

Without leave of his lord — no law will it grant.

As he may run in arrearage and roam from home,

130 And as a renounced caitiff recklessly about.

As Reason shall reckon with him and rebuke him at the last,

And Conscience account with him and cast him in arrearage,

And put him after in prison in purgatory to burn,

For his arrearages reward him there right to the day of doom,

135 But if Contrition will come and cry by his life

Mercy for his misdeeds with mouth or with heart.”

“That is sooth,” said Scripture, “may no sin let

Mercy all to amend, and meekness her follow; *if*

For they be, as our books telleth, above God’s works:

*Misericordia eius super omnia opera eius.*<sup>18</sup>

140 “Yea, bah for books!” quoth one was broken out of hell.

“I *Troianus*, a true knight, take witness at a pope

How I was dead and damned to dwell in pine *torment*

For an unchristen creature; clerks wit the sooth;

That all the clergy under Christ ne might me cratch from hell

145 But only love and loyalty and my lawful dooms.

Gregory wist this well, and willed to my soul *knew*

Salvation for the soothness that he saw in my works.

And after that he wept and willed me were granted grace,

Without any bead bidding his boon was underfongen, *praying; received*

150 And I saved, as ye may see, without singing of masses,

16. Every one that thirsteth, come ye (to the waters). *Isaiah 55:1*

17. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. *Mark 16:16*

18. His mercies are over all his works. *Psalms 145:9*

- By love and by learning of my living in truth,  
 Brought me from bitter pain where no bidding might *praying*
- Lo! ye lords, what loyalty did by an Emperor of Rome  
 That was an unchristened creature, as clerks findeth in books.
- 155 Not through prayer of a pope, but for his pure truth  
 Was that Saracen saved, as Saint Gregory beareth witness.  
 Well ought ye lords that laws keep this lesson to have in mind,  
 And on *Troianus*' truth to think; and do truth to the people.
- 160 "This matter is murk for many of you — as men of Holy Church,  
 The *Legenda Sanctorum*<sup>19</sup> you learneth more larger than I you tell.  
 As thus leal love and living in truth *true*  
 Pulled out of pine a pagan of Rome. *torment*  
 Y-blessed be truth that so brake hell's gates  
 And saved the Saracen from Satan and his power,
- 165 Where no clergy ne could, nor cunning of laws!  
 Love and loyalty is a leal science,  
 For that is the book blessed of bliss and of joy:  
 God wrought it and wrote it with his own finger  
 And took it to Moses upon the mount, all men to learn.
- 170 "Law without love," quoth *Troianus*, "lay there a bean —  
 Or any science under sun, the seven arts and all!  
 But they be learned for Our Lord's love, loſt is all the time,  
 For no cause to catch silver thereby, nor to be called a maſter,  
 But all for love of Our Lord and the better to love the people.  
 "For Saint John said it, and sooth are his words:
- 175 *Qui non diligit manet in morte.*<sup>20</sup>  
 Whoso loveth not, lieve me, he liveth in death dying;  
 And that all manner men, enemies and friends,  
 Love their either other, and lene them as themselves. *give to*
- 180 Whoso leneth not, he loveth not, Our Lord wot the sooth  
 And commandeth each creature to conform him to love  
 His neighbour as himself and his enemies after.  
 For them that hate us (*it*) is our merit to love,  
 And poor people to please — their prayers may us help.

19. *Legend of the Saints*, a hagiography compiled by Jacopo de Voragine (1230 - 1298)

20. He that loveth not... abideth in death. 1 *John* 3:14

- For our joy and our jewel, Jesu Christ of heaven,  
 185 In a poor man's apparel pursueth us ever,  
 And looketh on us in our likeness and that with lovely cheer,  
 To know us by our kind heart and casting of our eyes,  
 Whether we love the lords here before the Lord of bliss  
 And exciteth us by the Evangelist that when we make feasts,  
 We should not clepe our kin thereto, nor none kind rich: call
- 190 *Cum facitis conviva, nolite invitare amicos.*<sup>21</sup>  
 "As calleth the careful thereto, the crooked and the poor; crippled  
 For your friends will feed you, and fond you to quit strive; repay  
 Your feasting and your fair gift — each friend quitteth so other.  
 As for the poor I shall pay, and pure well quit their travail
- 195 That giveth them meat or money and loveth them for my sake.  
 "Almighty God might have made rich all men, if he would,  
 As for the best be some rich and some beggars and poor.  
 For all are we Christ's creatures, and of his coffers rich,  
 And brethren as of one blood, as well beggars as earls.
- 200 For at Calvary, of Christ's blood Christendom gan spring,  
 And bloody brethren we become there, of one body y-won,  
 As *quasi modo geniti*<sup>22</sup> gentle men each one —  
 No beggar nor boy amongst us but if it sin made.  
*Qui facit peccatum servus est peccati.*<sup>23</sup>
- 205 In the old law, as the letter telleth, 'men's sons' men called us,  
 Of Adam's issue and Eve, aye till God-Man died;  
 And after his resurrection, *Redemptor* was his name. Redeemer  
 And we his brethren through him y-bought, both rich and poor.  
 Forth love we as lief children shall, and each man laugh of other,  
 And of that each man may forbear, amend there it needeth,
- 210 And every man help other — for hence shall we all:  
*Alter alterius onera portate.*<sup>24</sup>  
 And be we not unkind of our chattel, nor of our cunning neither,  
 For wot no man how nigh it is to be y-nome from both. taken

21. When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends. *Luke* 14:12

22. As newborn babes. 1 *Peter* 2:2

23. Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. *John* 8:34

24. Bear ye one another's burdens. *Galatians* 6:2

- 215 Forth lack no life other, though he more Latin know, *criticise*  
 Nor under-nyme not foul, for is none without default. *rebuke*  
 For whatever clerks carp of Christendom or else,  
 Christ to a common woman said in common at a feast  
 That *Fides sua*<sup>25</sup> should save her and save her of sins.  
 “Then is belief a leal help, above logic or law.  
 220 Of logic nor of law in *Legenda Sanctorum*  
 Is little allowance made, but if belief them help;  
 For it is overlong ere logic any lesson assoil, *before; explain*  
 And law is loath to love but if he lack silver.  
 Both logic and law, that loveth not to lie,  
 I counsel all Christen, cleave not thereon too sore,  
 225 For some words I find written were of Faith’s teaching,  
 That saved sinful men, as Saint John beareth witness:  
*Eadem mensura qua mensi fueritis remetietur vobis.*<sup>26</sup>  
 Forth learn we the law of love as Our Lord taught;  
 And as Saint Gregory said, for man’s soul health,  
*Melius est scrutari scelera nostra quam naturas rerum.*<sup>27</sup>  
 230 “Why I move this matter is most for the poor;  
 For in their likeness Our Lord oft hath been y-known.  
 Witness in the Paschal week when he went to Emmaus: *Luke 24:30*  
 Cleophas ne knew him not, that he Christ were,  
 For his poor apparel and pilgrim’s weeds, *rags*  
 235 Till he blessed and brake the bread that they ate.  
 So by his works they wist that he was Jesus,  
 As by clothing they knew him not, nor by carping of tongue. *speaking*  
 And all was example, for sooth, to us sinful here,  
 That we should be low and lovely of speech,  
 240 And apparel us not over proudly — for pilgrims are we all.  
 And in the apparel of a poor man and pilgrim’s likeness  
 Many times God hath been met among needy people,  
 Where never segge him see in sect of the rich. *men; class*  
 “Saint John and other saints were seen in poor clothing,

24. Her faith. *Luke 7:50*

25. With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. *Matthew 7:2; Luke 6:38*

26. It is better to examine our sins than the nature of things.

- 245 And as poor pilgrims prayed men's goodness.  
 Jesu Christ on a Jew's daughter lit: gentle woman though she were,  
 Was a pure poor maid and to a poor man y-wedded.  
 "Martha on Mary Magdalene an huge plaint she made, complaint  
 And to Our Saviour self said these words:
- 250 *Domine, non est tibi cure quod soror mea reliquit me solam ministrare?*<sup>27</sup>  
 And hastily God answered, and either's will followed,  
 Both Martha's and Mary's, as Matthew beareth witness;  
 As poverty God put before, and praised it the better:  
*Maria optimam partem elegit, quae non auferetur ab ea.*<sup>28</sup>  
 "And all the wise that ever were, by aught I can espy,  
 255 Praise poverty for best life, if patience it follow,  
 And both better and blesseder by many fold than riches. times  
 Although it be sour to suffer, there cometh sweet after;  
 As on a walnut — without is a bitter bark, outside  
 And after that bitter bark, be the shell away,  
 260 Is a kernel of comfort, Kind to restore. Nature  
 So is after poverty or penance patiently y-taken,  
 Maketh a man to have mind in God and a great will  
 To weep and to well-bid, whereof waxeth mercy, pray  
 Of which Christ is a kernel to comfort the soul.
- 265 And well secure he sleepeth, the segge that is poor,  
 And less he dreadeth death and in dark to be y-robbed  
 Than he that is right rich — Reason beareth witness:  
*Pauper ego ludo dum tu dives meditaris.*<sup>29</sup>  
 "Although Solomon said, as folk seeth in the Bible,  
*Divitias nec paupertates &c.*<sup>30</sup>
- 270 (One,) Wiser than Solomon was, beareth witness and taught  
 That perfect poverty was no possession to have,  
 And life most liking to God, as Luke beareth witness:  
*Si vis perfectus esse, vade et vende &c.*<sup>31</sup>

27. Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? *Luke* 10:40

28. Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her. *Luke* 10:42

29. Poor, I play, while you, being wealthy, ponder.

30. Give me neither poverty nor riches. *Proverbs* 30:8

31. If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast. *Matthew* 19:21



- And is to mean to men that on this mold live, earth  
 Whoso will be pure perfect must possession forsake,  
 275 Or sell it, as saith the Book, and the silver deal  
 To beggars that go and beg and bid goods for God's love.  
 For failed never man meat that mightful God serveth, lacked  
 As David saith in the Psalter; to such that be in will  
 To serve God goodly, nor grieveth him no penance —  
*Nihil impossibile volenti.*<sup>32</sup>  
 280 Nor lacketh never livelihood, linen nor wool:  
*Inquirentes autem Dominum non minuentur omni bono.*<sup>33</sup>  
 "If priests were wise, they would no silver take  
 For masses, nor for matins, not their meat of usurers,  
 Nor neither kirtel nor coat, though they for cold should die, tunic  
 And they their *devoir* did, as David saith in the Psalter: duty  
*Iudica me, Deus, et discerne causam meam.*<sup>34</sup>  
 285 "*Spera in Deo*<sup>35</sup> speaketh of priests that have no spending silver  
 That if they travail truly and trust in God Almighty,  
 They should lack no livelihood, neither linen nor wool.  
 And the title that ye take orders by telleth ye be advanced;  
 Then needeth you not to nyme silver for masses that ye sing.  
 290 For he that took you your title should take you your wages,  
 Or the bishop that blessed you, if that ye be worthy.  
 "For made never king nor knight but he had chattel to spend  
 As befell for a knight, or fond him for his strength. strive  
 It is a careful knight, and of a caitiff king's making  
 295 That hath no land, nor lineage rich, nor good loos of his hands.  
reputation  
 The same I say for sooth by all such priests  
 That have neither cunning nor kin, but a crown one only  
 And a title, a tale of naught, to his livelihood at mischief.  
 He hath more belief, as I lieve, to latch through his crown get  
 300 Cure than for cunning or 'known for clean of bearing'.

32. Nothing shall be impossible unto you. *Matthew* 17:20

33. They who seek the Lord shall want no manner of thing that is good. *Psalm* 34:10

34. Give sentence with me, O God, and defend my cause. *Psalm* 43:1

35. O put thy trust in God. *Psalm* 42:7, 15; 43:6

I have wonder for why and wherefore the bishop  
Maketh such priests, that lewed men betray!

“A charter is challengeable before a chief justice  
If false Latin be in that letter, the law it impugneþ,  
305 Or painted parentrelynarie, parcels overskipped. *Stripes*  
The gome that glosseth so charters, for a goky is held. *man; fool*  
So is it a goky, by God! that in his goþpel failleth  
Or in mass or in matins maketh any default:

*Qui offendit in uno, in omnibus est reus.*<sup>36</sup>

And also in the Psalter saith David to over-skippers,  
310 *Psallite Deo nostro, psallite; quoniam rex terrae Deus Israel, psallite*  
*sapienter.*<sup>37</sup>

“The bishop shall be blamed before God, as I lieve,  
That crowneth such God’s knights that kenneth not *Sapienter*<sup>38</sup>  
Sing, nor psalms read, nor say a mass of the day.  
As never neither is blameless, the bishop nor the chaplain;  
315 For their either is indicted, and that of ‘*Ignorantia*  
*Non excusat episcopos nec*’<sup>39</sup> idiot priests.”

“This looking on lewed priests hath done me leap from poverty —  
The which I praise, where patience is, more perfect than riches.

As much more in meting thus with me gan one disþute; *dreaming*  
320 And sleeping I saw all this; and since came Kind *Nature*  
And named me by my name, and bade me nyemen heed, *take*  
And through the wonders of this world wit for to take.  
And on a mountain that Middle-Earth hight, as me then thought,  
I was fetched forth by examples to know,  
325 Through each a creature, Kind my creator to love. *Nature*  
I saw the sun and the sea and the sand after,  
And where that birds and beasts by their make they yeden, *mate; went*  
Wild worms in woods, and wonderful fowls  
With flecked feathers and of fele colours. *many*

36. Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. *James 2:10*

37. O sing praises, sing praises unto our God. For God is the King of all the earth; sing ye praises with understanding. *Psalms 47: 7-8*

38. The Book of *Wisdom*

39. Ignorance does not excuse bishops.

- 330 Man and his make I might see both; *mate*  
 Poverty and plenty, both peace and war,  
 Bliss and bale — both I saw at once, *sorrow*  
 And how men took Meed and Mercy refused.  
 Reason I saw soothly sue all beasts *follow*
- 335 In eating, in drinking and in engendering of kind. *reproducing*  
 And after course of conception, none took keep of other  
 As when they had riden in rotey time; anonright thereafter *mating*  
 Males drew them to males a-morning by themselves,  
 And in evenings also went males from females.
- 340 There ne was cow nor cowkind that conceived had  
 That would bellow after bulls, nor boar after sow.  
 Both horse and hounds and all other beasts  
 Meddled not with their mates that mid-foal were.  
 Birds I beheld that in bushes made nests;
- 345 Had never wight wit to work the least. *man; knowledge*  
 I had wonder at whom and where the pye *maggie*  
 Learned to lay the sticks in which she layeth and breedeth.  
 There is no wright, as I ween, should work their nest to pay; *suppose*  
 If any mason made a mould thereto, much wonder it were.
- 350 And yet me marvelled more: many other birds  
 Hid and hiled their eggs full dern *covered; secret*  
 In mires and moors, for men should them not find,  
 And hid their eggs when they therefrom went,  
 For fear of other fowls and for wild beasts.
- 355 And some troden their mates and on trees bred *copulated with*  
 And brought forth their birds so all above the ground.  
 And some birds at the bill through breathing conceived,  
 And some caulked; I took keep how peacocks bred. *trod*  
 Much marvelled me what master they had,
- 360 And who taught them on trees to timber so high *build*  
 That neither berne nor beast may their birds reach. *man*  
 And since I looked on the sea and so forth on the stars;  
 Many selcouths I saw, by not to say nouthe. *wonders; nothing*  
 I saw flowers in the frith and their fair colours, *forest*
- 365 And how among the green grass grew so many hues,

- And some sour and some sweet — selcouth me thought. wonder  
 Of their kind and their colour to carp it were too long.  
 As that most moved me and my mood changed —  
 That Reason rewarded and ruled all beasts  
 370 Save man and his make: many time and oft  
 No Reason them followed, neither rich nor poor.  
 And then I rebuked Reason, and right to himself I said.  
 “I have wonder of thee, that witty art held,  
 Why thou ne suest man and his make, that no mis-feat them follow.”  
 375 And Reason arated me, and said, “Reck thee never berated; Care  
 Why I suffer or not suffer — thyself hast naught to do.  
 Amend thou it, if thou might, for my time is to abide.  
 Sufferance is a sovereign virtue, and a swift vengeance.  
 Who suffereth more than God?” quoth he, “no gome, as I lieve.  
 He might amend in a minute while all that mis-standeth,  
 380 Ac he suffereth for some man’s good, and so is our better.  
 Holy Writ,” quoth that wight, “wisseth men to suffer: guides  
*Propter Deum subiecti estote omni creature.*<sup>40</sup>  
 French men and free men affaiteth thus their children: train  
*Bele vertue est suffraunce; mal dire est petite vengeance.*  
*Bien dire et bien souffrir fait lui souffrant a bien venir.*<sup>41</sup>  
 385 Forth I read thee,” quoth Reason, “thou rule thy tongue better,  
 And ere thou lack my life, look if thou be to praise. blame  
 For is no creature under Christ can form himself,  
 And if a man might make himself good,  
 Each life would be lackless — lieve thou none other. blameless  
 390 Nor thou shalt find but few fain for to hear  
 Of their defaults foul before them rehearsed.  
 “The wise and the witty wrote thus in the Bible:  
*De re que te non molestat noli certare.*<sup>42</sup>  
 For be a man fair or foul, it falleth not to lack blame  
 395 The shape nor the shaft that God shaped himself; form

40. Be ye subject therefore to every human creature for God’s sake. 1 *Peter* 2:13

41. Patience is a good virtue; Speak-evil is a petty vengeance. Say-well and Suffer-well make a man come through well.

42. Strive not in a matter which doth not concern thee. *Ecclesiasticus* 11:9

For all that he wrought was well y-done, as Holy Writ witnesseth:

*Et vidit Deus cuncta que fecerat, et erant valde bona.*<sup>43</sup>

And bade every creature in his kind increase,

All to mirth with man that most woe tholeth *suffers*

In fonding of the flesh and of the fiend both. *temptation*

400 For man was made of such a matter he may not well a-start *escape*

That some time him betides to follow his kind.

Cato accordeth therewith — *Nemo sine crimine vivit!*<sup>44</sup>

Then caught I colour anon and comsed to be ashamed, *blushed*

And awoke therewith. Woe was me then

405 That I in metels ne might more have y-known. *dreams*

And then said I to myself, and chided that time,

“Now I wot what Do-well is,” quoth I, “by dear God, as me thinketh!”

And as I cast up mine eyes, one looked on me and asked

Of me, what thing it were? “Ywis, sire,” I said, *truly*

410 “To see much and suffer more, certes,” quoth I, “is Do-well.” *certainly*

“Hadst thou suffered,” he said, “sleeping though thou were,

Thou shouldst have known that Clergy ken, and conceived more  
through Reason;

For Reason would have rehearsed thee right as Clergy said.

As for thine entermeting here art thou forsaken: *interfering*

*Philosophus esses, si tacuisses.*<sup>45</sup>

415 “Adam, whilst he spake not, had paradise at will;

As when he mamelled about meat and entermeted to know

*prattled; interfered*

The wisdom and the wit of God, he was put from bliss.

And right so fared Reason by thee — thou with thy rude speech

Lacked and lost (*the*) thing that (*be*)longed not thee to do.

420 Then had he no liking for to learn thee more.

“Pride now and presumption peradventure will thee appeal,

That Clergy thy company ne keepeth not to sue.

For shall never challenging nor chiding chaſte a man so soon

43. And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. *Genesis* 1:31

44. No-one lives without sin. Cato, *Distichs* 1:5

45. If you would have kept quiet, you would have been a philosopher. Adapted from Boethius, *De consolatione Philosophiae* 11, pr. vii, 74-6

- As shall shame, and shend him, and shape him to amend.  
 425 For let a drunken daff in a dike fall, *fool*  
 Let him lie, look not on him till he list arise. *chooses to*  
 For though Reason rebuked him then, recketh he never; *cares*  
 Of Clergy nor of his counsel he counteth not a rush.  
 To blame or for to beat him then, it were but pure sin.  
 430 As when need nymeth him up, for doubt lest he starve, *takes*  
 And shame scrapeth his clothes and his shins washeth,  
 Then wot the drunken daff wherefore he is to blame."  
 "Ye say sooth, by my soul," quoth I, "I have y-seen it oft.  
 There smites no thing so smart, nor smelleth so foul  
 435 As shame, where he sheweth him; for every man shuneth his fellowship.  
 Why ye wiss me thus," quoth I, "was for I rebuked Reason."  
 "Certes," quoth he, "that is sooth," and shaped him for to walk. *Surely*  
 And I arose up right with that and raught him after, *set off*  
 And craved him of his courtesy to tell me his name.



# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 12

“I am Imaginative,” quoth he, “idle was I never,  
Though I sit by myself, in sickness nor in health.  
I have followed thee, in faith, these five and forty winter  
And many times have moved thee to think on thine end,  
5 And how fele fern-years are fared, and so few to come: *many past years*  
And of thy wild wantonness when thou young were,  
To amend it in thy middle age, lest might thee fail  
In thine old elde, that evil can suffer *old age*  
Poverty or penance, or prayers bid:  
*Si non in prima vigilia nec in secunda &c.*<sup>1</sup>  
10 “Amend thee while thou might; thou hast been warned off  
With poustees of pestilence, with poverty and with angers, *powers*  
And with these bitter baleys God beateth his dear children: *rods*  
*Quem diligo, castigo.*<sup>2</sup>  
And David in the Psalter saith, of such that loveth Jesus,  
*‘Virga tua et baculus tuus, ipsa me consolata sunt.’*<sup>3</sup>  
Although thou strike me with thy staff, with stick or with yard,  
15 It is but mirth, as for me to amend my soul.  
And thou meddleth thee with makings: and mightest go see thy Psalter,  
And bid for them that giveth thee bread; for there are books enough  
To tell men what Do-well is, Do-better and Do-beſt both,  
And preachers to prove what it is, of many a pair friars.”  
20 I saw well he said me sooth and, somewhat me to excuse,  
Said, “Cato comforted his son that, clerk though he were,  
To solace him some time — also I do when I make:  
*Interpone tuis interdum gaudia curis.*<sup>4</sup>  
“And of holy men I heard,” quoth I, “how they otherwhile  
Played, the perfecter to be, in places many. *more perfect*  
25 As if there were any wight that would me tell  
What were Do-well and Do-better and Do-beſt at the laſt,

1. If not in the first watch, nor in the second. (see *Luke* 12:38)

2. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. *Revelation* 3:19

3. Thy rod and thy staff comforteth me. *Psalms* 23:4

4. Intersperse now and again your cares with joy. Cato, *Distichs* 3:6

Would I never do work, but wend to Holy Church  
And there bid my beads but when I eat or sleep.” prayers

“Paul in his epistle,” quoth he, “proveth what is Do-well:

*Fides, spes, caritas, et maior horum &c.*<sup>5</sup>

30 Faith, hope and charity, and all be good,  
And save men sundry times, as none so soon as charity.  
For he doeth well, without doubt, that doeth as loyalty teacheth;  
That is, if thou be man married, thy make thou love, mate  
And live forth as law will while ye live both.

35 “Right so, if thou be religious, run thou never further  
To Rome nor to Rocamadour,<sup>6</sup> but as thy rule teacheth,  
And hold thee under obedience, that highway is to heaven.

“And if thou be maiden to marry, and might well continue,  
Seek thou never saint further for no soul health!

40 For what made Lucifer to lose the high heaven,  
Or Solomon his sapience, or Samson his strength?  
Job the Jew his joy dear he it a-bought; paid for  
Aristotle and other more, Hippocrates and Virgil,  
Alexander that all won, elengly ended. wretchedly

45 Chattel and Kind Wit<sup>7</sup> was cumbrance to them all.

“Phyllis<sup>8</sup> her fairness fell her all to slander,  
And Rosamunde<sup>9</sup> right so ruefully beset  
The beauty of her body, in badness she despended.  
Of many such I may read —of men and or women—

50 That wise words would shew and work the contrary:  
*Sunt homines nequam bene de virtute loquentes.*<sup>10</sup>  
“And rich renks right so gather and spare, save

And then men that they most hate minister it at the last;  
And for they suffer and see so many needy folks  
And love them not as Our Lord bid, lose their souls:

5. Faith, hope, charity; ...but the greatest of these (is charity). 1 *Corinthians* 13:13

6. Place of pilgrimage in France.

7. Natural understanding, or Common Sense.

8. From the romance of *Guy of Warwick*.

9. Mistress of Henry II, supposedly poisoned by Queen Eleanor.

10. They are evil men who speak well of virtue. Godfrey of Winchester



*Date et dabitur vobis.*<sup>11</sup>

55 So chattel and kind wit encumbereth full many;  
Woe is him that them wieldeth but he them well despendis:

*Scientes et non facientes variis flagellis vapulabunt.*<sup>12</sup>

Sapience, saith the Book, swelleth a man's soul:

*Sapientia inflat &c.*<sup>13</sup>

And riches right so, but if the root be true.

“As grace is a grass therefore, those grievances to abate.

*herb*

60 As grace ne groweth not but amongst gomes low:

*simple men*

Patience and poverty the place is where it groweth,

And in leal living men and in life holy,

And through the gift of the Holy Ghost, as the Gospel telleth:

*Spiritus ubi vult spirat.*<sup>14</sup>

“Clergy and kind wit cometh of sight and teaching,

*Learning*

65 As the Book beareth witness to bernes that can read:

*men*

*Quod scimus loquimur, quod vidimus testamur.*<sup>15</sup>

Of *quod scimus* cometh clergy, a cunning of heaven,

*science*

And of *quod vidimus* cometh kind wit, of sight of diverse people.

As grace is a gift of God, and of great love sþringeth;

Knew never clerk how it cometh forth, nor kind wit the ways:

*Nescit aliquis unde venit aut quo vadit &c.*<sup>16</sup>

70 “As yet is clergy to commend, and kind wit both,

*be commended*

And namely clergy for Christ's love, that of clergy is root.

For Moses witnesseth that God wrote for to wiss the people

*guide*

In the Old Law, as the letter telleth, that was the law of Jews,

That what woman were in adultery taken, were she rich or poor,

75 With stones men should her strike, and stone her to death.

A woman, as we find, was guilty of that deed;

As Christ of his courtesy through clergy her saved.

For through characters that Christ wrote, the Jews knew themselves

Guiltier as afore God, and greater in sin

11. Give, and it shall be given unto you. *Luke* 6:38

12. Those who know and do not act shall be beaten with many whips. (see *Luke* 12:47)

13. Knowledge puffeth up. *1 Corinthians* 8:1

14. The wind bloweth where it listeth. *John* 3:8

15. We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen. *John* 3:11

16. But canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. *John* 3:8

- 80 Than the woman that there was, and went away for shame.  
 The clergy that there was comforted the woman. *Teaching*  
 Holy Church knoweth this — that Christ's writing saved;  
 So clergy is comfort to creatures that repent,  
 And to mansed men mischief at their end. *cursed*
- 85 "For God's body might not be of bread without clergy,  
 The which body is both boot to the rightful, *succour*  
 And death and damnation to them that dieth evil;  
 As Christ's characters comforted and both culpable shewed  
 The woman that the Jews brought, that Jesus thought to save:  
*Nolite iudicare et non iudicabimini.*<sup>17</sup>
- 90 Right so God's body, brethren, but it be worthily taken,  
 Damneth us at the day of doom as did the characters the Jews.  
 "Forth I counsel thee for Christ's sake, clergy that thou love,  
 For kind wit is of his kin and nigh cousins both  
 To Our Lord, lieve me — forth love them, I read. *advise*
- 95 For both be as mirrors to amend our defaults,  
 And leaders for lewed men and for lettered both.  
 "Forth lack thou never logic, law not his customs, *blame; argue*  
 Nor counter-plead clerks — I counsel thee for ever! *contradict*  
 For as a man may not see that misseth his eyes,
- 100 No more ken no clerk but if he caught it first through books.  
 Although men made books, God was the master,  
 And Saint Spirit the samplary, and said what men should write. *example*  
 And right as sight serveth a man to see the high street,  
 Right so learneth letterure lewed men to reason. *scripture*
- 105 And as a blind man in battle beareth weapon to fight,  
 And hath none hap with his axe his enemy to hit, *chance*  
 No more can a kind-witted man, but clerks him teach,  
 Come, for all his kind wit, to Christendom and be saved —  
 Which is the coffer of Christ's treasure, and clerks keep the keys,
- 110 To unlock it at their liking, and to the lewed people  
 Give mercy for their misdeeds, if men it will ask  
 Buxomly and benignly, and bid it of grace. *obediently*  
 "Archa Dei<sup>18</sup> in the Old Law, Levites it kept;

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17. Judge not, that ye be not judged. *Matthew* 7:1

- Had never lewed man leave to lay hand on that chest  
 115 But he were priest or priest's son, patriarch or prophet.  
 "Saul, for he sacrificed, sorrow him betided,  
 And his sons also for that sin mischieved,  
 And many more other men that were no Levites, 2 Samuel 6:7  
 That with *Archa Dei* went, in reverence and in worship,  
 120 And laid hand thereon to lift it up — and lost their life after.  
 "Forth I counsel all creatures no clergy to despise,  
 Nor set short by their science, whatso they do themselves.  
 Take we their words at worth, for their witnesses be true,  
 And meddle we not much with them to move any wrath,  
 125 Lest chest chafe us to chop each man other: suggest  
strife  
*Nolite tangere christos meos &c.*<sup>19</sup>  
 "For clergy is keeper under Christ of heaven;  
 Come there never no knight but clergy him made.  
 As kind wit cometh of all kinds (*of*) sights —  
 Of birds and of beasts, of bliss and of sorrow,  
 130 Of tastes of truth and of deceits.  
 "Old livers to-fore us used to mark before  
wonders  
 The selcouths that they saw, their sons for to teach,  
 And held it an high science their wits to know.  
 As through their science soothly was never no soul y-saved,  
 135 Nor brought by their books to bliss nor to joy;  
 For all their kind knowing comes but of diverse sights.  
 "Patriarchs and prophets reproved their science,  
 And said their words nor their wisdoms was but a folly;  
 As to the clergy of Christ, counted it but a trifle:  
*Sapientia huius mundi stultitia est apud Deum.*<sup>20</sup>  
 140 "For the high Holy Ghost heaven shall to-leave,  
 And love shall leap out after into this low earth,  
 And cleanness shall catch it and clerks shall it find:  
*Pastores loquebantur ad invicem.*<sup>21</sup>

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18. The Ark of God.

19. Touch not mine Anointed. *Psalm* 105:15

20. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. *1 Corinthians* 3:19

21. The shepherds said one to another. *Luke* 2:15

“He speaketh there of rich men right naught, nor of right witty,  
Nor of lords that were lewed men, but of the highest lettered out:

*Ibant magi ab oriente.*<sup>22</sup>

145 (If any friar were found there, I give thee five shillings!)  
Nor in none begger’s cote was that bairn born,  
But in a burgess’s place, of Bethlem the best:

*Sed non erat ei locus in diversorio: et pauper non habet diversorium.*<sup>23</sup>

“To pastors and to poets appeared the angel,  
And bade them go to Bethlem, God’s birth to honour,  
150 And sung a song of solace, *Gloria in excelsis Deo*.<sup>24</sup>  
Rich men routed then and in their rest were, *snored*  
Then it shone to shepherds, a shower of bliss.

Clerks knew it well and came with their presents,  
And did their homage honourably to him that was almighty.

155 “Why I have told thee I this — I took full good heed  
How thou contraried clergy with crabbed words, *opposed; bitter*  
How that lewed men lightloker than lettered were saved *more lightly*  
Than clerks or kind-witted men, of Christen people.  
And thou saidst sooth of some — as see in what manner.

160 “Take two strong men and in Thames cast them,  
And both naked as a needle, their none sickerer than other; *more surely*  
That one hath cunning and can swim and dive,  
That other is lewed of that labour, learned never swim. *ignorant*  
Which trowest thou of those two in Thames is in most dread: *think*

165 He that never ne dived, nor naught ken of swimming;  
Or the swimmer that is safe by so himself like,  
Where his fellow fleeteth forth as the flood liketh,  
And is in dread to drench, that never did swim?” *drown*

“That swim can not,” I said, “it seemeth to my wits.”

170 “Right so,” quoth the renk, “reason it sheweth,  
That he that knoweth clergy can sooner arise  
Out of sin and be safe, though he sin oft,  
If him liketh and list, than any lewed, leally. *wants; ignoramus; truly*

22. There came wise men from the east. *Matthew 2:1*

23. But there was no room for them in the inn: (*Luke 2:7*) and a beggar does not have an inn!

24. Glory to God in the highest.

For if the clerk be cunning, he knoweth what is sin,  
 175 And how contrition without confession comforteth the soul,  
 As thou seeſt in the Psalter in psalms one or twain, *two*  
 How contrition is commended for it catcheth away sin:  
*Beati quorum remissae sunt iniquitates et quorum tecta sunt peccata.*<sup>25</sup>  
 And this comforteth each a clerk and covereth him from wanhope,  
 In which flood the fiend fondeth a man hardest; *tempts*  
 180 There the lewed lieth still and looketh after Lent,  
 And hath no contrition ere he come to shrift: and then can he little tell,  
 But as his loresman learneth him believeth and troweth, *thinks*  
 And that is after parson or parish priest, and peradventure both  
 uncunning.  
 To learn lewed men, as Luke beareth witness:  
*Dum caecus ducit caecum &c.*<sup>26</sup>  
 185 “Woe was him marked that wade must with the lewed! *go amongst*  
 Well may the bairn bless that him to book set,  
 That living after letterure saved him, life and soul. *scripture*  
*Dominus pars haereditatis meae*<sup>27</sup> is a merry verse  
 That hath taken from Tyburn twenty strong thieves,  
 190 Where lewed thieves be lolled up — look how they be saved!  
 “The thief that had grace of God on Good Friday as thou speak,  
 Was for he yielded him creant to Christ on the cross and knowledged  
 him guilty, *vanquished*  
 And grace asked of God, that to grant is ever ready  
 To them that buxomly biddeth it, and be in will to amend them.  
 195 As though that thief had heaven, he had none high bliss,  
 As Saint John and other saints that deserved had better.  
 Right as some man give me meat and set me amid the floor:  
 I had meat more than enough, as not so much worship  
 As those that sit at the side table or with the sovereigns of the hall,  
 200 But sit as a begger boardless by myself on the ground. *table-less*  
 So it fareth by that felon that a Good Friday was saved:  
 He sat neither with Saint John, Simeon, nor Jude,

25. Blessed is he whose unrighteousness is forgiven, and whose sin is covered. *Psalm* 32:1

26. If the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch. *Matthew* 15:14

27. The Lord himself is the portion of mine inheritance. *Psalm* 16:5

- Nor with maidens, nor with martyrs, nor confessors, nor widows,  
 But by himself as a soleyn, and served on the earth. *alone*
- 205 For he that is once a thief is evermore in danger,  
 And as law liketh to live or to die:  
*De peccato propitiato noli esse sine metu.*<sup>28</sup>  
 And for to serve a saint and such a thief together —  
 It were neither reason nor right to reward both alike.
- 210 “And right as *Troianus* the true knight tilde not deep in hell *dwelt*  
 That Our Lord ne had him lightly out, so lieve I the thief be in heaven:  
 For he is in the lowest of heaven, if our believ be true,  
 And well loosely he lolleth there, by the law of Holy Church, *lounge*  
*Quia reddit unicuique iuxta opera sua.*<sup>29</sup>  
 “As why that one thief on the cross creant him yielded *vanquished*  
 Rather than that other thief, though thou wouldest appose, *ask*  
 215 All the clerks under Christ ne could the skill assoil: *reason; answer*  
*Quare placuit? Quia voluit.*<sup>30</sup>  
 And so I say by thee, that seekest after the whys  
 And a-reasoned Reason, a rebuking as it were,  
 And willest of birds and of beasts and of their breeding know,  
 Why some be a-low and some aloft, thy liking it were;
- 220 And of the flowers in the frith and of their fair hues — *forest*  
 Whereof they catch their colours so clear and so bright,  
 And of the stones and of the stars — thou studieſt, as I lieve,  
 How every beast other bird hath so breme wits... *or; fierce*
- 225 “Clergy nor Kind Wit ne knew never the cause,  
 As Kind knoweth the cause himself and no creature else. *Nature*  
 He is the pie’s patron and putteth it in her ear *magpie’s*  
 That where the thorn is thickest to build and breed.  
 And Kind kenned the peacock to cauk in such a kind, *couple*  
 And Kind kenned Adam to know his privy members,
- 230 And taught him and Eve to hile them with leaves. *cover*  
 “Lewed men many times masters they appose, *ask*  
 Why Adam ne hiled not first his mouth that ate the apple, *covered*

28. Be not without fear to add sin unto sin. *Ecclesiasticus* 5:5

29. For he rewardest every man according to his work. *Psalms* 62:12

30. Why was he pleased? Because he willed it. (see *Job* 23:13)

- Rather than his likame a-low? — lewed ask thus clerks. *body debase*  
 Kind knoweth why he did so, as no clerk else!
- 235 “As of birds and of beasts men by old time  
 Example token and terms, as telleth these poets,  
 And that the fairest fowl foulest engendereth, *breeds*  
 And feeblest fowl of flight is that flieth or swimmeth.  
 And that is the peacock and the peahen: proud rich men they  
 betokeneth;
- 240 For the peacock and men (*who*) pursue him may not fly high:  
 For the trailing of his tail, overtaken is he soon.  
 And his flesh is foul flesh, and his feet both,  
 And unlovely of leden and loath for to hear. *voice*  
 “Right so the rich, if he his riches keep
- 245 And dealeth it not till his death day, the tail of all is sorrow.  
 Right as the pens of the peacock paineth him in his flight, *feathers*  
 So is possession pain of pence and of nobles *coins*  
 To all them that it holdeth till their tail be plucked.  
 And though the rich repent then and be-rue the time
- 250 That ever he gathered so great and gave thereof so little,  
 Though he cry to Christ then with keen will, I lieve  
 His leden be in Our Lord’s ear like a pye’s; *voice; magpie*  
 And when his carrion shall come in cave to be buried,  
 I lieve it flame full foul the fold all about, *smell; earth*
- 255 And all the other where it lieth en-venomed through his attre.  
 By the peacock’s feet is understood, as I have learned in *Avianus*,  
 Executors — false friends that fulfil not his will  
 That was written, and they witness to work right as it would.  
 Thus the poet proveth that the peacock for his feathers is revered;
- 260 Right so is the rich by reason of his goods.  
 “The lark, that is a less fowl, is more lovely of leden, *voice*  
 And well away of wing swifter than the peacock,  
 And of flesh by felefold fatter and sweeter; *many times*  
 To low living men the lark is resembled. *likened*
- 265 “Aristotle the great clerk, such tales he telleth;  
 Thus he likeneth in his logic the least fowl out.  
 And whether he be saved or not saved, the sooth wot no clergy,

- Nor of Socrates, nor of Solomon no scripture can tell.  
 As God is so good, I hope that since he gave them wits  
 270 To wiss us wights therewith, that wish to be saved, guide  
 (And the better for their books) to bid we be held  
 That God for his grace give their souls rest —  
 For lettered men were lewed yet, ne were lore of their books.”  
 “All these clerks,” quoth I then, “that on Christ lieve,  
 275 Say in their sermons that neither Saracens nor Jews  
 Nor no creature of Christ’s likeness without Christendom worth saved.”  
 “*Contra!*” quoth Imaginative then, and comsed for to lour, scowl  
 And said, “*Salvabitur vix iustus in die iudicii,*  
*Ergo — salvabitur!*”<sup>31</sup> quoth he, and said no more Latin.  
 280 “Troianus was a true knight and took never Christendom,  
 And he is safe, so saith the book, and his soul in heaven.  
 As there is fulling of font and fulling in blood shedding, baptism  
 And through fire is fulling, and that is firm belief:  
*Advenit ignis divinus, non comburens sed illuminans &c.*<sup>32</sup>  
 “As truth that trespassed never nor traversed against his law,  
 285 But liveth as his law teacheth and lieveth there be no better,  
 (And if there were, he would amend) and in such will dieth —  
 Ne would never true God but true truth were allowed.  
 And whether it worth or not worth, the belief is great of truth, will be  
 And an hope hanging therein to have a meed for his truth; reward  
 290 For *Deus dicitur quasi dans vitam eternam suis, hoc est fidelibus.*  
*Et alibi: si ambulavero in medio umbre mortis &c.*<sup>33</sup>  
 The gloss granteth upon that verse a great meed to truth.  
 And wit and wisdom,” quoth that wight, “was some time treasure  
 To keep with a common — no chattel was held better—  
 295 And much mirth and manhood.” And right with that he vanished. humanity



31. The just shall scarcely be saved (see 1 Peter 4:18) on judgment day; therefore he will be saved.

32. There came a divine fire, not burning but illuminating.

33. God is spoken of as giving eternal life to his own, that is the faithful. (see John 17:2)  
 And elsewhere: though I walk through... the shadow of death. (Psalm 23:4)



William's Vision of Piers Plowman  
Passus 13

**A**ND I awaked therewith, witless nearhand, nearly  
And as a freke that fey were, forth gan I walk man; doomed  
In manner of a mendicant many year after,  
And of this metyng many time much thought I had: dreaming  
5 First how Fortune me failed at my most need,  
And how that Elde menaced me, might we ever meet; Old Age  
And how that friars followed folk that was rich,  
And people that was poor at little price they set,  
And no corpse in their churchyard nor in their church was buried  
10 But quick he bequeath them aught or should help quit their debts; alive  
And how this covetousness overcame clerks and priests;  
And how that lewed men be led, but Our Lord them help,  
Through uncunning curates to incurable pains;  
And how that Imaginative in dreams me told  
15 Of Kind and of his cunning, and how courteous he is to beasts, Nature  
And how loving he is to beasts on land and on water:  
Leneth he no life less nor more; Gives  
The creatures that creep of Kind be engendered;  
And since how Imaginative said, "*Vix iustus salvabitur*,"<sup>1</sup>  
20 And when he had said so, how suddenly he passed.  
I lay down long in this thought, and at the last I slept;  
And as Christ would, there came Conscience to comfort me that time,  
And bade me come to his court — with Clergy should I dine.  
And for Conscience of Clergy spake, I came well the rather; sooner  
25 And there I saw a master — what man he was I nyste — knew not  
That low louted and lovely to Scripture. bowed  
Conscience knew him well and welcomed him fair;  
They washed and wiped and went to the dinner.  
As Patience in the palace stood in pilgrim's clothes,  
30 And prayed meat *pour charité* for a poor hermit. for charity  
Conscience called him in, and courteously said,

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1. The just shall scarcely be saved. 1 *Peter* 4:18

- “Welcome, wight, go and wash; thou shalt sit soon.”  
 This master was made (to) sit as for the most worthy,  
 And then Clergy, and Conscience, and Patience came after.
- 35 Patience and I were put to be mettes, *companions*  
 And sat by ourselves at a side board.  
 Conscience called after meat, and then came Scripture  
 And served them thus soon of sundry meats many —  
 Of Augustine, of Ambrose, of all the four Evangelists:  
*Edentes et bibentes quae apud eos sunt.*<sup>2</sup>
- 40 As this master nor his man no manner flesh ate,  
 As they ate meat of more cost — mortrews and potages: *stews; soups*  
 Of that men mis-won, they made them well at ease.  
 As their sauce was over-sour and unsavourly ground  
 In a mortar, *post mortem*, of many bitter pain —
- 45 But if they sing for those souls and weep salt tears:  
*Vos qui peccata hominum comeditis, nisi pro eis lacrimas et orationes  
 effuderitis, ea quae in deliciis comeditis, in tormentis evometis.*<sup>3</sup>
- Conscience full courteously then commanded Scripture  
 Before Patience bread to bring, and me that was his mette. *companion*  
 He set a sour loaf to-fore us and said, “*Agite penitentiam*,”<sup>4</sup> *before*  
 And since he drew us drink: “*Dia perseverans*”<sup>5</sup> —
- 50 As long,” quoth he, “as life and likame may dure.” *body; endure*  
 “Here is proper service,” quoth Patience, “there fareth no prince better!”  
 And he brought us of *Beati quorum* of *Beatus vir*’s<sup>6</sup> making,  
 And then he brought us forth a mess of other meat, of  
*Miserere mei, Deus*<sup>7</sup>  
*Et quorum tecta sunt peccata*<sup>8</sup>
- 55 In a dish of dern shrift, *Dixi & confitebor tibi*.<sup>9</sup> *secret confession*

2. Eating and drinking such things as they give. *Luke* 10:7

3. You who feast on men’s sins: unless you pour out tears and prayers for them, you will vomit forth in torment what you eat with pleasure. (*Anon.*)

4. Repent ye. *Matthew* 3:2

5. Long-suffering (see *Matthew* 10:22)

6. *Psalm* 32: Blessed is he whose unrighteous is forgiven... (v.1); Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth no sin. (v.2).

7. Have mercy upon me, O God. *Psalm* 51:1

8. ...and whose sin is covered. *Psalm* 32:1

“Bring Patience some pittance,” privily quoth Conscience;  
And then had Patience a pittance, *Pro haec orabit ad te omnis sanctus in  
tempore oportuno.*<sup>10</sup>

And Conscience comforted us, and carped us merry tales:  
*Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicias.*<sup>11</sup>

Patience was proud of that proper service,  
60 And made him mirth with his meat; as I mourned ever,  
For this doctor on the high daïs drank wine so fast:  
*Ve vobis qui potentes estis ad bibendum vinum!*<sup>12</sup>  
He ate many sundry meats, mortrews and puddings, stews  
Womb clouts and wild brawn and eggs y-fried with grease.

Then said I to myself so Patience it heard,  
65 “It is not four days that this freke, before the dean of Paul’s,  
Preached of penances that Paul the Apostle suffered:  
*In fame et frigore*<sup>13</sup> and flaps of scourges: strikes  
*Ter cesus sum; et a Iudeis quinquies quadragenas &c.*<sup>14</sup>

As one word they overhop at each a time that they preach  
That Paul in his epistle to all the people told:  
70 *Periculum est in falsis fratribus!*<sup>15</sup>

(Holy Writ bids men be ware — I will not write it here  
In English, on aventure it should be rehearsed too oft chance  
And grieve therewith that good men be, as grammarians shall read:  
*Unusquisque a fratre se custodiat, quia, ut dicitur, periculum est in falsis  
fratribus.*<sup>16</sup>

As I wiſt never freke that as a friar went before men in English  
75 Taken it for his theme, and tell it without glossing!  
They preach that penance is profitable to the soul,  
And what mischief and mal-ease Christ for man tholed.) suffered  
“As this God’s glutton,” quoth I, “with his great cheeks,

9. I said, I will confess my sins unto the Lord. *Psalm* 32:6

10. For this shall every one that is godly make his prayer unto thee in a time. *Psalm* 32:7

11. A broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise. *Psalm* 51:17

12. Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine. *Isaiah* 5:22

13. In hunger and thirst. 2 *Corinthians* 11:27 (further verses below)

14. Thrice was I beaten with rods.(v.25) Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes. (v.24)

15. In perils among false brethren. (v.26)

16. Let every man guard himself from a brother, for, as they say, there is danger in false brethren.

- Hath no pity on us poor; he performeth evil.  
 80 That he preacheth, he proveth not," to Patience I told,  
 And wished witterly, with will full eager, *truly*  
 That dishes and doublers this doctor before *platters*  
 Were molten lead in his maw, and Mahoun amidst! *the devil*  
 "I shall jangle to this jordan with his just womb *pot; vessel*  
 85 To tell me what penance is, of which he preached rather!"  
 Patience perceived what I thought, and preynt on me to be still,  
 And said, "Thou shalt see thus soon, when he may no more,  
 He shall have a penance in his paunch and puff at each a word, *belch*  
 And then shall his guts gothele, and he shall galp after; *growl; yawn*  
 90 For now he hath drunk so deep he will divine soon  
 And prove it by his Apocalypse and passion of Saint Avarice  
 That neither bacon, nor brawn, nor blancmange, nor mortrews *stews*  
 Is neither fish nor flesh, but food for a penitent.  
 And then shall he testify of a trinity, and take his fellow to witness  
 95 What he found in a forel after a friar's living; *box*  
 And but the first leaf be leasing, lieve me never after!  
 And then is time to take and to appose this doctor  
 Of Do-well and Do-better and if Do-best be any penance."  
 And I sat still as Patience said, and thus soon this doctor,  
 100 As ruddy as a rose rubbed his cheeks,  
 Coughed and carped; and Conscience him heard,  
 And told him of a trinity, and toward us he looked.  
 "What is Do-well, sir doctor?" quoth I, "is Do-best any penance?"  
 "Do-well?" quoth this doctor — and drank after —  
 105 "Do none evil to thine even-christen — naught by thy power."  
 "By this day, sir doctor," quoth I, "then be ye not in Do-well!  
 For ye have harmed us two in that ye ate the pudding,  
 Mortrews and other meat — and we no morsel had.  
 And if ye fare so in your infirmary, ferly me thinketh *wonder*  
 110 But cheest be where charity should be, and young children durst plain!  
 I would permute my penance with yours — for I am in point to  
 Do-well." *exchange; ready*  
 Then Conscience full courteously a countenance he made,  
 And preynte upon Patience to pray me to be still, *winked*

- And said himself, "Sir doctor, and it be your will,  
 115 What is Do-well and Do-better? Ye diviners knoweth."  
 "Do-well?" quoth this doctor, "do as clerks teacheth;  
 And Do-better is he that teacheth and travaileth to teach other;  
 And Do-beſt doth himself so as he saith and preacheth:  
*Qui facit et docuerit magnus vocabitur in regno caelorum.*<sup>17</sup>  
 "Now thou, Clergy," quoth Conscience, "carp us what is Do-well."  
 120 "I have seven sons," he said, "serve in a castle  
 Where the lord of life woneth, to learn them what is Do-well. *dwells*  
 Till I see those seven and myself accord,  
 I am unhardy," quoth he, "to any wight to prove it. *unconfident*  
 For one Piers the Plowman hath impugned us all,  
 125 And set all sciences at a sop, save love one; *alone*  
 And no text ne taketh to maintain his cause  
 But *Dilige Deum*<sup>18</sup> and *Domine quis habitabit*;<sup>19</sup>  
 And saith that Do-well and Do-better are two infinites,  
 Which infinites with a faith find out Do-beſt,  
 130 Which shall save man's soul — thus saith Piers the Plowman."  
 "I ken not hereon," quoth Conscience, "as I know well Piers.  
 He will not against Holy Writ ſpeak, I dare well undertake.  
 Then pass we over till Piers come and prove this in deed.  
 Patience hath been in many place, and peradventure knoweth  
 135 That no clerk ne ken, as Chriſt beareth witness:  
*Patientes vincunt &c.*<sup>20</sup>  
 "At your prayer," quoth Patience then, "so no man diſpleaſe him:  
*Disce*," quoth he, "*doce; dilige inimicos.*<sup>21</sup>  
*Disce*, and Do-well; *doce*, and Do-better;  
*Dilige*, and Do-beſt — do thus taught me once  
 140 A leman that I loved — Love was her name. *sweetheart*  
 'With words and with works,' quoth she, 'and will of thine heart  
 Thou love leally thy soul all thy life time.

17. But he that shall do and teach, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. *Matthew* 5:19

18. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God. *Matthew* 22:37

19. Lord, who shall dwell (in thy tabernacle). *Psalms* 15:1

20. Those who suffer shall conquer. (lit. The patient shall win.) *Testament of Job*, 27:10

21. Learn, teach, love your enemies. (see *Luke* 6:27)

- And so thou learn thee to love, for the Lord of heaven's love,  
 Thine enemy in all wise evenforth with thyself. equally
- 145 Cast coals on his head of all kind sþeech;  
 Both with works and with words fond his love to win, try  
 And lay on him thus with love till he laugh on thee;  
 And but he bow for this beating, blind must he worth!" be  
 "As for to fare thus with thy friend — folly it were;
- 150 For he that loveth thee leally, little of thine coveteth.  
 Kind love coveteth not no chattel but sþeech. wealth  
 With half a lamp line in Latin, *Ex vi transitionis*,<sup>22</sup>  
 I bear therein about, fast y-bound Do-well,  
 In a sign of the Saturday that set first the calendar,
- 155 And all the wit of the Wednesday of the next week after;  
 The middle of the moon is the might of both.  
 And herewith am I welcome where I have it with me.  
 "Undo it — let this doctør see if Do-well be therein;  
 For, by him that me made, might never poverty,
- 160 Misease nor mischief, nor man with his tongue,  
 Cold nor care, nor company of thieves.  
 Nor neither heat, nor hail, nor none hell's puck, demon  
 Nor neither fire, nor flood, nor fear of thine enemy  
 Teen thee any time, and thou take it with thee: grieve  
*Caritas nihil timet.*<sup>23</sup>
- 165 "And eke, have God my soul! and thou wilt it crave,  
 There nys neither emperor nor emperess, earl nor baron, is not  
 Pope nor patriarch, that pure reason ne shall make thee  
 Master of all those men through might of this riddle —  
 Not through witchcraft but through wit; and thou wilt thyself
- 170 Do king and queen and all the commons after make; people  
 Give thee all that they may give, as thee for best yemere, guardian  
 And as thou deemeþ will they do all their days after:  
*Patientes vincunt.*"
- "It is but a dido," quoth this doctør, "a disour's tale!  
 All the wit of this world and wight men's strength story; minstrel's

22. From the power of passing.

23. There is no fear in charity. 1 *John* 4:18

- 175 Can not perform a peace between the Pope and his enemies,  
 Nor between two Christen kings can no wight peace make  
 Profitable to either people — and put the table from him,  
 And took Clergy and Conscience to counsel, as it were,  
 That Patience then must pass — for pilgrims can well lie.”
- 180 As Conscience carped loud and courteously said,  
 “Friends, fareth well,” and fair spake to Clergy,  
 “For I will go with this gome, if God will give me grace,  
 And be pilgrim with Patience till I have proved more.”  
 “What!” quoth Clergy to Conscience, “are ye covetous now
- 185 After yearsgifts or gifts, or yearn to read riddles?  
 I shall bring you a Bible, a book of the old law,  
 And learn you, if you like, the least point to know,  
 That Patience the pilgrim perfectly knew never.”  
 “Nay, by Christ!” quoth Conscience to Clergy, “God thee for-yeild.
- 190 For all that Patience me proffereth, proud am I little;  
 As the will of the wight and the will of folk here  
 Hath moved my mood to mourn for my sins.  
 The good will of a wight was never bought to the full:  
 For there nys no treasure thereto to a true will.
- 195 “Had not Mary Magdalene more for a box of salve  
 Than Zacheus for he said, “*Dimidium bonorum meorum do pauperibus,*”<sup>24</sup>  
 And the poor widow for a pair of mites  
 Than all those that offered into *gazophilacium*?”<sup>25</sup>
- Thus courteously Conscience congeed first the friar *dismissed*
- 200 And since softly he said in Clergy’s ear,  
 “Me were liefer, by Our Lord, and I live should,  
 Have patience perfectly than half thy pack of books!”  
 Clergy of Conscience no congee would take, *dismissal*  
 But said full soberly, “Thou shalt see the time
- 205 When thou art weary for-walked, will me to counsel.”  
 “That is sooth,” said Conscience, “so me God help!  
 If Patience be our parting fellow and privy with us both,  
 There nys woe in this world that we ne should amend, *is not*

24. The half of my goods I give to the poor. *Luke* 19:8

25. The treasury. (see *Luke* 21:1)

- And conform kings to peace, and all kinds lands —  
 210 Saracens and Syrians, and so forth all the Jews —  
 Turn into the true faith and unto one belief.”  
 “That is sooth,” quoth Clergy, “I see what thou meanest.  
 I shall dwell as I do, my *devoir* to shew, *duty*  
 And confirm fauntekins other folk y-learned *children*  
 215 Till Patience have proved thee and perfect thee made.”  
 Conscience then with Patience passed, pilgrims as it were.  
 Then had Patience, as pilgrims have, in his poke victuals: *bag*  
 Sobriety and simple speech and soothfast belief,  
 To comfort him and Conscience if they come in place  
 220 Where unkindness and covetousness is, hungry countries both.  
 And as they went by the way, and of Do-well they carped;  
 They met with a minstrel, as me then thought.  
 Patience apposed him first and prayed he should tell *questioned*  
 To Conscience what craft he couth, and to what country he would.  
 225 “I am a minstrel,” quoth that man, “my name is *Activa Vita*.<sup>26</sup>  
 All idle I hate, for of Active is my name,  
 A waferer, will ye wit, and serve many lords — *wafer-seller*  
 And few robes I fonge or furred gowns. *obtained*  
 Couth I lie and do men laugh, then latch I should *get*  
 230 Other mantle or money amongst lord’s minstrels.  
 As for I can neither tabour nor trump nor tell no jests,  
 Fart nor fiddle at feasts, nor harp,  
 Jape nor juggle nor gently pipe,  
 Nor neither sail nor saultry nor sing with the chitarrone, *dance, tumble*  
 235 I have no good gifts of these great lords  
 For no bread that I bring forth — save a benyson on the Sunday,  
 When the priest prayeth the people their *Paternoster* to bid  
 For Piers the Plowman and that his profit wait — *attend*  
 And that am I, Active, that idleness hate;  
 240 For all true travaillers and tillers of the earth,  
 From Michaelmas to Michaelmas I find them with wafers.  
 Beggars and bidders of my bread crave,  
 Faitours and friars and folk with broad crowns.  
 “I find payn for the Pope and provender for his palfrey, *bread; fodder*



- 245 And I had never of him, have God my truth,  
 Neither provender nor parsonage yet of the Pope's gift,  
 Save a pardon with a poise of lead and two polls amidst! *weight; heads*  
 Had I a clerk that could write, I would cast him a bill  
 That he sent me under his seal a salve for the pestilence,
- 250 And that his blessing and his bulls botches might destroy: *boils*  
*In nomine meo daemonia eicient; et super aegrotos manus imponent et bene*  
*habebunt.*<sup>27</sup>  
 And then would I be priest to the people, pastry for to make,  
 And buxom and busy about bread and drink  
 For him and for all his, found I that his pardon  
 Might leech a man — as I believe it should. *heal*
- 255 For since he hath the power that Peter himself had, he hath the pot  
 with the salve:  
*Argentum et aurum non est mihi: quod autem habeo, tibi do:*  
*In nomine Domini surge et ambula.*<sup>28</sup>  
 “As if might of miracle him fail, it is for men be not worthy  
 To have the grace of God, and no guilt of the Pope.  
 For may no blessing do us boot but if we will amend,  
 Nor man's mass make peace among Christen people,
- 260 Till pride be purely for-done, and that through payn default. *bread lack*  
 For ere I have bread of meal, oft must I sweat,  
 And ere the commons have corn enough many a cold morning; *people*  
 So, ere my wafers be y-wrought, much woe I thole. *suffer*  
 “All London, I lieve, liketh well my wafers,
- 265 And lour when they lack them; it is not long y-passed *scowl*  
 There was a careful commons when no cart came to town *woeful people*  
 With baked bread from Stratford; then gan beggers weep,  
 And workmen were aghast a little — this will be thought long;  
 In the date of Our Dright, in a dry April, *Lord*
- 270 A thousand and three hundred, twice thirty and ten, *1370*  
 My wafers there were gesene, when Chichester was mayor.” *scarce*

27. In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.  
*Mark 16:17-18*

28. Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: in the name of the Lord, rise up  
 and walk. *Acts 3:6*

- I took great keep, by Christ, and Conscience both,  
 Of Haukyn the Active Man, and how he was y-clothed.  
 He had a coat of Christendom as Holy Church believeth;
- 275 As it was moled in many places with many sundry plots — *stained*  
 Of pride here a plot, and there a plot of unbuxom speech,  
 Of scorning and of scoffing and of unskilful bearing;  
 As in apparel and in port proud amongst the people; *deportment*  
 Otherwise than he hath with heart or sight shewing;
- 280 Him willing that all men ween he were that he is not, *suppose*  
 Forwhy he boasteth and braggeth with many bold oaths;  
 And in-obedient to be under-nome of any life living; *criticized*  
 And so singular by himself as to sight of the people  
 Was none such as himself, nor none so pope holy;
- 285 Y-habited as an hermit, an order by himself —  
 Religion sans rule and reasonable obedience; *without*  
 Lacking lettered men and lewed men both; *Blaming*  
 In liking of leal life and a liar in soul;  
 With in-wit and with out-wit imagine and study *intelligence; sense*
- 290 As best for his body be to have a bold name;  
 And entermete him over all where he hath naught to do; *interfere*  
 Willing that men wend his wit were the best,  
 Or for his crafty cunning or of clerks the wisest,  
 Or strongest on steed, or stiffest under girdle,
- 295 And loveliest to look on and lealest of works, *truest*  
 And none so holy as he, nor of life cleaner,  
 Or fairest of features, of form and of shaft, *shape*  
 And most subtle of song, other slyest of hands,  
 And large to lene, loos thereby to catch; *give; reputation*
- 300 And if he giveth aught to poor gomes, go tell what he dealeth;  
 Poor of possession in purse and in coffer,"  
 And as a lion on to look and lordly of speech;  
 Boldest of beggers, a boaster that naught hath,  
 In town and in taverns tales to tell
- 305 And say thing that he never saw and for sooth swear it,  
 Of deeds that he never did deem and boast,  
 And of works that he well did witness and say,

- “Lo! if ye lieve me not, or that I lie ween, believe; suppose  
 Asketh at him or at him, and he you can tell  
 310 What I suffered and saw and sometimes had,  
 And what I couth and knew, and what kin I come of.”  
 All he would that men wist of works and of words — knew  
 Which might please the people and praise himself:  
*Si hominibus placerem, Christi servus non essem.*  
*Et alibi: Nemo potest duobus dominis servire.<sup>29</sup>*  
 “By Christ!” quoth Conscience then, “thy best coat, Haukyn,  
 315 Hath many moles and spots — it must be y-washed!”  
 “Yea, whoso took heed,” quoth Haukyn, “behind and before,  
 What on back and what on body half and by the two sides —  
 Men should find many frounces and many foul plots.” creases  
 And he turned him as tid, and then took I heed; quickly  
 320 It was fouler by fele-fold than it first seemed. many times  
 It was be-dropped with wrath and wicked will,  
 With envy and evil speech enticing to fight,  
 Lying and lacking and lief tongue to chide;  
 All that he wist wicked by any wight, tell it,  
 325 And blame men behind their back and bid them mischance;  
 And that he wist by Will, to Wat tell it,  
 And that Wat wist, Will wist it after,  
 And made of friends foes through a false tongue:  
 “Or with might of mouth or through man’s strength  
 330 Avenged me fele times, other fret myself within many; devoured  
 As a shepsters shears, y-shrewed men and cursed them.” shepherds  
*Cuius maledictione os plenum est et amaritudine; sub lingua eius labor et*  
*dolor. Et alibi: Filii hominum dentes eorum arma et sagitte et lingua*  
*eorum gladius acutus.<sup>30</sup>*  
 “There is no life that I love lasting any while;  
 For tales that I tell no man trusteth to me.

29. For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. (*Galatians* 1:10); And elsewhere: No man can serve two masters. *Matthew* 6:24

30. His mouth is full of cursing, deceit and fraud; under his tongue is ungodliness and vanity. (*Psalms* 10:7); And elsewhere: The children of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword. *Psalms* 57:5

- And when I may not have the mastery, such melancholy I take  
 335 That I catch the cramp, the cardiacle some time, *heart-pain*  
 Or an ague in such an anger, and some time a fever  
 That taketh me all a twelve-month, till that I despoise  
 Leechcraft of Our Lord and lieve on a witch, *medicine*  
 And say that no clerk ne ken — nor Christ, as I lieve—  
 340 To the Souter of Southwark, or of Shoreditch Dame Emm, *cobbler*  
 And say that God nor God's word gave me never boot, *succour*  
 But through a charm had I chance and my chief heal."  
 I waited wiseloker, and then was it soiled *more wisely*  
 With liking of lechery as by looking of his eyes.  
 345 For each a maid that he met, he made her a sign  
 Seeming to sin-ward, and sometime he gan taste  
 About the mouth, or beneath beginneth to grope,  
 Till either's will waxeth keen, and to the work went,  
 As well fasting days as Fridays and forbidden nights,  
 350 And as lief in Lent as out of Lent, all times alike: *glad*  
 Such works with them were never out of season,  
 Till they might no more — and then had merry tales,  
 And how that lechers love laugh and jape,  
 And of their harlotry and whoredom in their elde tell. *old age*  
 355 Then Patience perceived, of points his coat  
 Was colomy through covetous and unkind desiring. *filthy*  
 More to goods than to God the gome his love cast,  
 And imagined how he it might have  
 With false measures and met, and mid false witness  
 360 Lent for love of the wed and loathed to do truth, *deposit*  
 And awaited through wits, wyes to beguile, *men*  
 And menged his merchandise and made a good muster: *mixed; show*  
 "The worst within was — a great wit I let it!  
 And if my neighbour had an hind, or any beast else,  
 365 More profitable than mine, many sleights I made  
 How I might have it — all my wit I cast;  
 And but I it had by other way, at the last I stole it,  
 Or privily his purse shook, unpicked his locks;  
 Or by night or by day, about was I ever

- 370 Through guile to gather the good that I have.  
 “If I went to the plough, I pinched so narrow  
 That a foot (*of*) land or a furrow fetch I would  
 Of my next neighbour, nymen of his earth; take  
 And if I reaped, over-reach, or gave them read that reaped advice
- 375 To seize to me with their sickle that I ne sowed never.  
 “And whoso borrowed of me a-bought the time  
 With presents privily, or paid some certain —  
 So would he or not would he, win I would;  
 And both to kith and to kin unkind of that I had.
- 380 “And whoso cheaped my chaffer, chide I would bought; goods  
 But he proffered to pay a penny or twain  
 More than it was worth, and yet would I swear  
 That it cost me much more — swore many oaths.
- 385 “In holy days at holy church, when I heard mass  
 Had I never will, wot God, witterly to beseech  
 Mercy for my misdeeds, that I ne mourned more  
 For loss of goods, lieve me, than for likame’s guilts; body’s  
 As, if I had deadly sin done, I dread not that so sore  
 As when I lent and lied it lost or long ere it were paid.
- 390 So if I kid any kindness mine even-christen to help, showed  
 Upon a cruel covetousness my conscience gan hang.  
 “And if I sent over sea my servants to Bruges,  
 Or into Prussia my prentice my profit to wait,  
 To merchand with money and make here exchanges,
- 395 Might never me comfort in the mean time  
 Neither mass nor matins, nor none manner sights;  
 Nor never penance performed nor *Paternoster* said  
 That my mind ne was more on my goods in a doubt  
 Than in the grace of God and his great helps.”  
*Ubi thesaurus tuus, ibi et cor tuum.*<sup>31</sup>
- 400 Yet that glutton with great oaths his garment had soiled  
 And foul be-flobbered it, as with false sþeech,  
 As, where no need ne was, God’s name an idol —  
 Swore thereby swithe oft and all be-sweated his coat; greatly

31. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. *Matthew* 6:21

- And more meat ate and drank than kind might defy: *nature; digest*  
 405 “And caught sickness sometime for my surfeits oft;  
 And then I dreaded to die in deadly sin,”  
 That into wanhope he worth and weened not to be saved, *despair*  
 The which is sloth, so slow that may no sleights help it,  
 Nor no mercy amend the man that so dieth.
- 410 As which be the branches that bring a man to sloth?  
 Is when a man mourneth not for his misdeeds, nor maketh no sorrow,  
 As penance that the priest enjoineth performeth evil,  
 Doeth none alms-deeds, dread him of no sin,  
 Liveth against the belief and no law holdeth.
- 415 Each day is holiday with him or an high fery, *wonder*  
 And if he aught will here, it is an harlot’s tongue.  
 When men carp of Christ, or of cleanness of soul,  
 He waxeth wrath and will not hear but words of mirth.  
 Penance and poor men and the passion of saints —
- 420 He hateth to hear thereof and all that it telleth.  
 These be the branches, be ware! that bring a man to wanhope. *despair*  
 Ye lords and ladies, and legates of Holy Church  
 That feedeth fool-sages, flatterers and liars,  
 And have liking to lithe them, in hope to do you laugh — *listen to*  
*Vae vobis qui ridetis &c.*<sup>32</sup>
- 425 And giveth them meat and meed, and poor men refuse,  
 In your death dying, I dread me sore  
 Lest those three manner men to much sorrow you bring:  
*Consentientes et agentes pari poena punientur.*<sup>33</sup>
- Patriarchs and prophets, preachers of God’s words,  
 Save through their sermon man’s soul from hell;  
 430 Right so flatterers and fools are the fiend’s disciples  
 To entice men through their tales to sin and harlotry.  
 As clerks, that know Holy Writ, should ken lords  
 What David saith of such men, as the Psalter telleth:

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32. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. *Luke* 6:25

33. Those who consent and those who act shall be punished with equal penalty.

34. There shall no deceitful person dwell in my house; he that telleth lies shall not tarry in my sight. *Psalms* 101:10

*Non habitabit in medio domus meae qui facit superbiam;  
qui loquitur iniqua &c.<sup>34</sup>*

Should none harlot have audience in hall nor in chamber  
435 Where wise men were — witnesseth God's words—  
Nor no mis-proud men amongst lords be allowed.

Clerks and knights welcometh king's minstrels,  
And for love of their lord litheth them at feasts;  
Much more, me thinketh, rich men should

440 Have beggars before them, the which be God's minstrels,  
As he saith himself — Saint John beareth witness:

*Qui vos spernit me spernit.<sup>35</sup>*

Forth I read you rich, revels when ye maketh,  
For to solace your souls, such minstrels to have —  
The poor for a fool-sage sitting at thy table,

445 And a learned man to learn thee what Our Lord suffered  
For to save thy soul from Satan thine enemy,  
And fithel thee, without flattering, of Good Friday the story,  
And a blind man for a bourder, or a bedridden woman  
To cry a largesse before Our Lord, your good loos to shew.

*listen to*

*tell  
jester  
reputation*

450 These three manner minstrels maketh a man to laugh,  
And in his death dying they do him great comfort  
That by his life lithed them and loved them to hear.

*listened to*

These solaceth the soul till himself be fallen

In a wellhope, for he wrought so, amongst worthy saints,

455 Where flatterers and fools through their foul words  
Lead those that loved them to Lucifer's feast

With *turpiloquio*,<sup>36</sup> a lay of sorrow, and Lucifer's fiddle.

Thus Haukyn the active man had y-soiled his coat,

Till Conscience a-couped him thereof in a courteous manner,

460 Why he ne had washed it or wiped it with a brush.



35. He that despiseth you despiseth me. *Luke 10:16*

36. foul speech.

# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 14

- “I have but one hater,” quoth Haukyn, “I am the less to blame coat  
Though it be soiled and seldom clean — I sleep therein at nights;  
And also I have an housewife, hewen and children: servants  
*Uxorem duxi, et ideo non possum venire.<sup>1</sup>*  
That will be-molen it many time, maugree my checks. stain; for all  
5 It hath been laved in Lent and out of Lent both washed  
With the soap of sickness, that seeketh wonder deep,  
And with the loss of chattel, that me was loath for to a-guilt offend  
God or any good gome, by aught that I wiſt; man; all; know  
And was shriven of the priest, that for my sins gave me absolved  
10 To penance, patience, and poor men to feed,  
All for covetousness of my Christendom in cleanness to keep it.  
And could I never, by Christ! keep it clean an hour,  
That I ne soiled it with sight or some idle ſpeech,  
Or through work or through word, or will of mine heart,  
15 That I ne flobber it foul from morrow till even.”  
“And I shall ken thee,” quoth Conscience, “of Contrition to make  
That shall claw thy coat of all kinds filth — scrape (clean)  
*Cordis contritio &c.<sup>2</sup>*  
Do-well shall wash it and wring it through a wise confessor —  
*Oris confessio &c.<sup>3</sup>*  
Do-better shall beat it and buck it as bright as any scarlet, steep  
20 And engrain it with good will and God’s grace to amend thee, dye  
And since send thee to Satisfaction for to sun it after: dry  
*Satisfactio<sup>4</sup>* And Do-beſt keepeth clean from unkind works.  
Shall never mite be-molen it, nor moth after bite it, ſpoil  
Nor fiend nor false man defoul it in thy life.  
25 Shall none herald nor harper have a fairer garment  
Than Haukyn the Active man, and thou do by my teaching, if

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1. I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. *Luke 14:20*

2. Contrition of heart

3. Confession of mouth

4. Satisfaction



Nor no minstrel be more worth amongst poor and rich  
Than will Haukyn the waferer, which is *Activa Vita*.<sup>5</sup> wafer-seller

“And I shall purvey thee pastry,” quoth Patience, “though no plough  
erie,

30 And flour to feed folk with as best be for the soul;  
Though never grain grew, nor grape upon vine,  
All that liveth and looketh livelihood would I find,  
And that enough — shall none fail of thing that them needeth.  
We should not be to busy about our livelihood:

*Ne solliciti sitis...; Volucres caeli Deus pascit...; Patientes vincunt &c.*<sup>6</sup>

35 Then laughed Haukyn a little, and lightly gan swear,  
“Whoso leaveth you, by Our Lord, I lieve not he be blessed!”

“No?” quoth Patience patiently, and out of his poke hente bag; took  
Viſtuals of great virtues for all manner beasts,  
And said, “Lo! here livelihood enough, if our belief be true.

40 For lent never was there life but livelihood were shaped,  
Whereof or wherefore or whereby to live.

“First the wild worm under wet earth,  
Fish to live in the flood, and in the fire the cricket,  
The curlew by kind of the air, most cleanest flesh of birds, nature

45 And beasts by grass and by grain and by green roots,  
In meaning that all men might the same  
Live through leal belief and love, as God witnesseth:

*Quodcumque petieritis a patre in nomine meo &c. Et alibi: Non in solo  
pane vivit homo, sed in omni verbo, quod procedit de ore Dei;*<sup>7</sup>

But I looked what livelihood it was that Patience so praised;  
And then was it a piece of the *Paternoſter* — *Fiat voluntas tua*.<sup>8</sup>

50 “Have, Haukyn,” quoth Patience, “and eat this when thee hungereth,  
Or when thou clumseſt for cold or clingest for drought; are numb  
And shall never gyves thee grieve, nor great lords’ wrath, feters

5. Active Life

6. Take no thought for your life; Behold the fowls of the air; your heavenly Father feedeth them.  
(*Matthew* 6:25-26) Those who suffer shall conquer. *Testament of Job*, 27:10

7. Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do. (*John* 14:13) And elsewhere: Man shall not  
live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. (*Matthew* 4:4)

8. Thy will be done.

- Prison nor pain — for *patientes vincunt*.<sup>9</sup>  
 By so that thou be sober of sight and of tongue,  
 55 In eating and in handling and in all thy five wits,  
 Darest thou never care for corn, nor linen cloth, nor woollen,  
 Nor for drink, nor death dread, but die as God liketh,  
 Or through hunger or through heat — at his will be it.  
 For if thou livest after his lore, the shorter life the better:  
*Si quis amat Christum mundum non diligit istum*.<sup>10</sup>  
 60 “For through his breath beasts wax and abroad wander:  
*Dixit et facta sunt, &c.*”<sup>11</sup>  
*Ergo* through his breath must both men and beasts live,  
 As Holy Writ witnesseth when men say their graces:  
*Aperis tu manum tuam, et imples omne animal benedictione*.<sup>12</sup>  
 “It is found that forty winter folk lived without tilling, *Numbers 20:11*  
 And out of the flint sprung the flood that folk and beasts drank;  
 65 And in Elias’ time, heaven was y-closed, *1 Kings 17*  
 That no rain ne ran — thus read men in books,  
 That many winters men lived and no meat ne tilled.  
 “Seven slept, as saith the book, seven hundred winter,  
 And lived without livelihood — and at the last they woke.  
 70 And if men lived as measure would, should never more be default  
 Amongst Christen creatures, if Christ’s words be true.  
 As unkindness *caristiam*<sup>13</sup> maketh amongst Christen people,  
 And over-plenty maketh pride amongst poor and rich;  
 As measure is so much worth it may not be too dear;  
 75 For the mischief and the mischance amongst men of Sodom  
 Waxed through plenty of pain and of pure sloth: *grew*  
*Ociositas et habundancia panis peccatum turpissimum nutritiv*.<sup>14</sup>  
 For they measured not themselves of that they ate and drank,  
 Did deadly sin that the devil liked,  
 So vengeance fell upon them for their vile sins;

9. Those who suffer shall conquer. (*lit.* The patient will be victorious.)

10. If a man cares for Christ, he will not cleave to this world.

11. For he spake, and they were made. *Psalms 148:5*

12. Thou openest thine hand: and filleth all things living with plenteousness. *Psalms 145:16*

13. penury, scarcity

14. Sloth and abundance of bread nourished the basest sin. Peter Cantor

- 80 They sank into hell, the cities each one.  
 “Forth measure we us well and make our faith our shelter;  
 And through faith cometh contrition, conscience wot well,  
 Which driveth away deadly sin and doth it to be venial.  
 And though a man might not speak, contrition might him save,  
 85 And bring his soul to bliss, by so that faith bear witness  
 That while he lived he believed in the lore of Holy Church.  
*Ergo* contrition, faith and conscience is kindly Do-well, *essentially*  
 And *surgiens*<sup>15</sup> for deadly sins when shrift of mouth faileth.  
 As shrift of mouth more worthy is, if man be inly contrite,  
 90 For shrift of mouth slayeth sin, be it never so deadly —  
*Per confessionem* to a priest *peccata occiduntur*:<sup>16</sup>  
 There contrition doth but driveth it down into a venial sin,  
 As David saith in the Psalter, *et quorum tecta sunt peccata*.<sup>17</sup>  
 As satisfaction seeketh out the root, and both slayeth and voideth,  
 95 And as it never had y-been, to naught bringeth deadly sin,  
 That it never eft is seen nor sore, but seemeth a wound y-healed.”  
 “Where woneth Charity?” quoth Haukyn. “I wiſt never in my life  
 Man that with him spake, as wide as I have passed.”  
 “Where perfect truth and poor heart is, and patience of tongue,  
 100 There is Charity the chief, chamberer for God himself.” *confidant*  
 “Whether patient poverty,” quoth Haukyn, “be more pleasant to Our  
 Dright  
 Than riches rightfully won and reasonably despended?”  
 “Yea — *quis est ilie?*” quoth Patience, “quick — *laudabimus eum*!”<sup>18</sup>  
 Though men read of riches right to the world’s end,  
 105 I wiſt never renk that rich was, that when he reckon should,  
 When he drew to his death day, that he ne dreaded him sore,  
 And that at the reckoning in arrearage fell, rather than out of debt.  
 There the poor dare plead, and prove by pure reason  
 To have allowance of his lord; by the law he it claimeth:  
 110 Joy, that never joy had, of rightful judge he asketh,

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15. rising

16. Through confession, sin is slain.

17. ...and whose sin is covered. *Psalm* 32:1

18. Is there such a man? ... we shall praise him!

- And saith, 'Lo! birds and beasts, that no bliss ne knoweth,  
 And wild worms in woods, through winters thou them grieveſt,  
 And makeſt them well nigh meek and mild for default, lack  
 And after thou sendeſt them summer, that is their sovereign joy,  
 115 And bliss to all that be, both wild and tame.  
 "Then may beggers, as beasts, after boot wait, succour  
 That all their life have lived in langour and in default.  
 But God sent them some time some manner joy  
 Other here or elsewhere, kind would it never;  
 120 For to wrotherhele was he wrought that never was joy shaped! bad luck  
 "Angels that in hell now be had joy some time,  
 And *Dives*<sup>19</sup> in dainties lived and in *douce vie*; pleasure; luxury  
 Right so reason sheweth that those men that rich were  
 And their makes also lived their life in mirth. wives  
 125 "As God is of a wonder will, by that kind wit sheweth, common sense  
 To give many men his mercy-money ere he it have deserved. reward  
 Right so fareth God by some rich: ruth me it thinketh —  
 For they have their hire here, and heaven, as it were,  
 And great liking to live without labour of body,  
 130 And when he dieth, be disallowed, as David saith in the Psalter:  
*Dormierunt et nihil invenerunt; et alibi, Velud somnum surgencium,*  
*Domine, in civitate tua, et ad nihilum rediges &c.*<sup>20</sup>  
 Alas, that riches shall reave and rob man's soul plunder  
 From the love of Our Lord at his last end!  
 "Hewen that have their hire afore are evermore needy; servants; wages  
 135 And (*he*) seldom dieth out of debt that dineth ere he deserve it  
 And till he have done his *devoir* and his day's journey. duty  
 For when a workman hath wrought, then may men see the sooth —  
 What he were worth for his work, and what he hath deserved,  
 And not to fonge before, for dread of disallowing. receive  
 140 "So I say by you rich — it seemeth not that ye shall  
 Have heaven in your here-being and heaven hereafter,  
 Right as a servant taketh his salary before, and since would claim more,

19. Rich man (see *Luke* 16:19-31)

20. They have slept... and found nothing. (*Psalms* 76:5); and elsewhere: Even like as a dream when one awaketh, Lord, so in thy city thou shalt bring their image to nothing. (*Psalms* 73:20)

As he that none had, and hath hire at the last.  
It may not be, ye rich men, or Matthew on God lieth:

*De deliciis ad delicias difficile est transire!*<sup>21</sup>

- 145 “As if ye rich have ruth, and reward well the poor, pity  
And live as law teacheth, do loyalty to them all,  
Christ of his courtesy shall comfort you at the last  
And reward all double riches that rueful hearts haveth.  
And as an hine that had his hire ere he begun, servant
- 150 And when he hath done his *devoir* well, men doth him other bounty —  
Giveth him a coat above his covenant — right so Christ giveth heaven  
Both to rich and to not rich that ruefully liveth;  
And all that do their *devoir* well have double hire for their travail —  
Here forgiveness of their sins, and heaven bliss after.
- 155 “As it is but seldom y-seen, as by holy saints books,  
That God rewarded double rest to any rich wight.  
For much mirth is amongst rich, as in meat and clothing,  
And much mirth in May is amongst wild beasts,  
And so forth while summer lasteth their solace dureth.
- 160 As beggars about Midsummer breadless they sup,  
And yet is winter for them worse, for wet-shod they go,  
A-thirst sore and a-hungered, and foul y-rebuked  
And arated of rich men, that ruth is to hear. berated; pity
- 165 Now, Lord, send them summer, and some manner joy,  
Heaven after their hence going, that here have such default!  
For all mightest thou have made none meaner than other,  
And alike witty and wise, if thee well had liked.  
And have ruth on these rich men that reward not thy prisoners;  
Of the goods that thou them givest *ingrati* be many; ungrateful
- 170 As God, of thy goodness, give them grace to amend.  
For may no dearth be them dear, drought nor wet,  
Nor neither heat nor hail, have they their health;  
Of that they will and would wanteth them not here.  
“As poor people, thy prisoners, Lord, in the pit of mischief —
- 175 Comfort those creatures that much care suffer

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21. It is difficult to cross from delight to delight. St. Jerome. *Epistola ad Julianum*

- Through dearth, through drought, all their days here,  
 Woe in winter time for wanting of clothes,  
 And in summer time seldom sup to the full;  
 Comfort thy careful, Christ, in thy riche — kingdom
- 180 For how thou comfortest all creatures, clerks beareth witness:  
*Convertimini ad me et salvi eritis.*<sup>22</sup>  
 “Thus *in genere*<sup>23</sup> of his gentries, Jesu Christ said  
 To robbers and to reavers, to rich and to poor,  
 To whores, to harlots, to all manner people,  
 Thou taughtest them in the Trinity to take baptism
- 185 And be clean through that christening of all kinds sin,  
 And if us fall through folly to fall in sin after,  
 Confession and knowledging and craving thy mercy  
 Should amend us as many sithes as man would desire. times  
 As if the puck would plead hereagain, and punish us in conscience,
- 190 He should take the acquitance as quick and to the queed shew it —  
*Pateat &c: Per passionem Domini.*<sup>24</sup> [wicked  
 And put off so the puck, and prove us under borgh. demon; pledge  
 As the parchment of this patent of poverty be must,  
 And of pure patience and perfect belief.
- 195 Of pomp and of pride the parchment decoreth, decorates  
 And principally of all people; but they be poor of heart.  
 Else is all on idle, all that ever we wrought —  
*Paternosters* and penance and pilgrimage to Rome,  
 But our sþenses and sþending sþring of a true well; expenses  
 Else is all our labour lost — lo, how men writeth
- 200 In fenestres at the friars! — if false be the fundament. windows  
 Forth Christen should be in common rich, none covetous for himself.  
 “For seven sins there be, that assail us ever;  
 The fiend followeth them all and fondeth them to help,  
 As with riches those ribalds ratherest men biguileth. soonest
- 205 For where that riches reigneth, reverences followeth,  
 And that is pleasant to pride, in poor and in rich.

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22. Turn unto me, and be ye saved. *Isaiah* 45:22

23. in the nature

24. Let it be manifest through the passion of our Lord.

- And the rich is revered by reason of his riches  
 Where the poor is put behind, and peradventure ken more *know*  
 Of wit and of wisdom, that far away is better  
 210 Than riches or royalty, and rather y-heard in heaven.  
 For the rich hath much to reckon, and right soft walketh;  
 The high way to heavenward oft riches letteth —  
*Ita impossibile diviti &c.*<sup>25</sup>  
 Where the poor presseth before, with a pack at his rugges: *back*  
*Opera enim illorum sequuntur illos.*<sup>26</sup>  
 Batandly, as beggers do, and boldly he craveth *Hastily*  
 215 For his poverty and his patience a perpetual bliss:  
*Beati pauperes: quoniam ipsorum est regnum caelorum.*<sup>27</sup>  
 “And pride in riches reigneth rather than in poverty:  
 Or in the master or in the man some mansion he haveth.  
 As in poverty where patience is, Pride hath no might,  
 Nor none of the seven sins sit ne must there long,  
 220 Nor have power in poverty, if patience it follow.  
 For the poor is aye prest to please the rich, *always swift*  
 And buxom at his bidding for his broken loaves;  
 And buxomness and boast be evermore at war,  
 And either hateth other in all manner works.  
 225 If Wrath wrestle with the poor, he hath the worse end,  
 For if they both plain, the poor is but feeble, *complain*  
 And if he chide or chatter, him chieveth the worse, *achieves*  
 For lowly he looketh and lovely is his speech  
 That meat or money of other men must ask.  
 230 “And if Gluttony grieve poverty, he gathereth the less.  
 For his rents will not reach no rich meats to buy; *income*  
 And though his gluttony be to good ale, he goeth to cold bedding,  
 And his head unhiled, uneasily awry — *uncovered*  
 For when he straineth him to stretch, the straw is his sheets.  
 235 So for his Gluttony and his great Sloth he hath a grievous penance,  
 That is well-a-woe when he waketh and weepeth for cold —

25. It is impossible for a rich man (to enter the kingdom of heaven.) (see *Matthew* 19:23)

26. Their works do follow them. *Revelation* 14:13

27. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. *Matthew* 5:3

And some time for his sins — so he is never merry  
Without mourning amongst and mischief to boot.

“And though Covetousness would catch the poor, they may not come  
together

240 And by the neck, namely, their none may hent other. *neither; sieze*

For men know well that Covetousness is of a keen will,  
And hath hands and arms of a long length,

And Poverty nys but a petite thing, appeareth not to his navel — *is not*

And lovely laik was it never between the long and the short. *šport*

245 And though Avarice would anger the poor, he hath but little might,

For Poverty hath but pokes to put in his goods, *bags*

Where Avarice hath almaries and iron-bound coffers.

And whether be lighter to break? Less boäst it maketh:

A begger’s bag than an iron-bound coffer!

250 “Lechery loveth him not, for he giveth but little silver,

Nor doth him not dine delicately, nor drink wine oft.

A straw for the stews! It stood not, I trow, *brothels; believe*

Had they none but of poor men — their houses were untiled!

“And though Sloth sue Poverty, and serve not God to pay, *follow*

255 Mischief is his master, and maketh him to think

That God is his greateſt help and no gome else, *gome*

And he his servant, as he saith, and of his suit both. *retinue*

And whether he be or be not, he beareth the sign of poverty,

And in that sect Our Saviour saved all mankind.

260 Forth all poor that patient is, may aske and claim,

After their ending here, heavenly bliss.

“Much hardier may he ask, that here might have his will

In land and in lordship and liking of body, *pleasure*

And for God’s love leaveth all and liveth as a beggar.

265 And as a maid for man’s love her mother forsaketh,

Her father and all her friends, and followeth her make — *mate*

Much is that maid to love of him that such (*a*) one taketh,

More than a maiden is that is married through brokage, *arrangement*

As by assent of sundry parties and silver to boot,

270 More for covetousness of good than kind love of both —

So it fareth by each a person that possession forsaketh



And put him to be patient, and poverty weddeth,  
The which is sib to God himself, and so nigh is poverty.” related

“Have God my troth,” quoth Haukyn, “ye praise fast poverty.

275 What is poverty, Patience,” quoth he, “properly to mean?”

“*Paupertas*,” quoth Patience, “*est odibile bonum*—

*Remotio curarum, possessio sine calumnia, donum Dei, sanitatis mater,  
absque sollicitudine semita, sapientiae temperatrix, negocium sine damno,  
incerta fortuna, absque sollicitudine felicitas.*”<sup>28</sup>

“I can not construe all this,” quoth Haukyn, “ye must ken me this in  
English.”

“In English,” quoth Patience, “it is well hard, well to expound,  
As somedeal I shall say it, by so thou understand.” something

280 Poverty is the first point that Pride most hateth;

Then is it good by good skill — all that aghasteth pride.

Right as contrition is comfortable thing, conscience wot well,

And a sorrow of himself, and a solace to the soul,

So Poverty properly penance is to the body

285 And joy also to the soul, pure spiritual health,

And contrition confort, and *cura animarum*:<sup>29</sup>

*Ergo paupertas est odibile bonum.*<sup>30</sup>

“Seldom sits Poverty the sooth to declare,

Or as justice to judge men enjoined is no poor,

Nor to be mayor above men, nor minister under kings;

290 Seldom is any poor y-put to punish any people;

*Remotio curarum.*<sup>31</sup>

*Ergo* Poverty and poor men perform the commandment:

*Nolite iudicare quemquam.*<sup>32</sup>

“Seldom is poor right rich but of rightful heritage:

Winneth he not with weights false nor with unsealed measures,

28. Poverty is a hateful good — the removal of anxieties; possession without calumny; a gift of God; the mother of health; a path free from worry; mistress of wisdom; business without loss; amidst fortune’s uncertainty; happiness without worry. Vincent of Beauvais

29. guardian of souls

30. Therefore poverty is a hateful good.

31. the removal of anxieties

32. Judge not; lest ye be judged. *Matthew* 7:1

Nor borroweth of his neighbours but that he may well pay:

*Possessio sine calumnia.*<sup>33</sup>

295 “The fourth it is a fortune that flourisheth the soul  
With sobriety from all sin and also yet more;  
It affaiteth the flesh from follies full many — *restrains*  
A collateral comfort, Christ’s own gift:

*Donum Dei.*<sup>34</sup>

300 “The fifth is mother of health, a friend in all fondings, *temptations*  
And for the low ever a leech, a leman of all cleanness: *doctor*

*Sanitatis mater.*<sup>35</sup>

“The sixth is a path of peace — yea, through the pass of Alton  
Poverty might pass without peril of robbing!

For where that Poverty passeth, peace followeth after,  
And ever the less that he beareth, the lighter he is of heart —

*Cantabit paupertas coram latrone viator.*<sup>36</sup>

305 And an hardy man of heart among an heap of thieves;  
Forth saith Seneca: *Paupertas est absque sollicitudine semita.*<sup>37</sup>

“The seventh is well of wisdom and few words sheweth,  
For lords alloweth him little or listeneth to his reason.  
He tempereth the tongue to truthward, that no treasure coveteth:

*Sapientie temperatrix.*<sup>38</sup>

310 “The eighth is a leal labour and loath to take more  
Than he may well deserve, in summer or in winter,  
And if he chaffereth, he chargeth no loss, must he charity win:

*Negocium sine damno.*<sup>39</sup>

“The ninth is sweet to the soul, no sugar is sweeter;

For patience is payn for Poverty himself, *bread*

315 And sobriety sweet drink and good leech in sickness. *cure*

Thus learned me a learned man for Our Lord’s love, Saint Augustine:

A blessed life without business for body and for soul:

*Absque sollicitudine felicitas.*<sup>40</sup>

33. Possession without calumny

34. A gift of God.

35. The mother of health.

36. A poor man will sing when he meets a thief. Juvenal *Satire* x:22

37. Poverty is a path free from worry.

Now God, that all good giveth, grant his soul rest,  
 That thus first wrote to wiss men what Poverty was to mean!" *guide*  
 320 "Alas," quoth Haukyn the Active Man then, "that after my  
     christendom  
 I ne had been dead and dolven for Do-well's sake! *buried*  
 So hard it is," quoth Haukyn, "to live and to do sin.  
 Sin sueth us ever," quoth he, and sorry gan wax,  
 And wept water with his eyes and wailed the time  
 325 That ever he did deed that dear God displeased —  
     Swooned and sobbed and sighed full oft  
 That ever he had land or lordship, less other more,  
 Or mastery over any man more than of himself.  
 "I were not worthy, wot God," quoth Haukyn, "to wear any clothes,  
 330 Nor neither shirt nor shoes, save for shame one  
 To cover my carrion," quoth he, and cried mercy fast,  
 And wept and wailed — and therewith I awaked.




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38. Mistress of wisdom.

39. Business without loss.

40. Happiness without worry.

# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 15

- A**s after my waking it was wonder long  
Ere I could kindly know what was Do-well.  
And so my wit waxed and waned till I a fool were;  
And some lacked my life —allowed it few— *blamed*
- 5 And let me for a lorel, and (*I was*) loath to reverence  
Lords or ladies or any life else —  
As persons in pelure with pendants of silver; *fur*  
To sergeants ne to such said not once,  
“God look you, lords!” — ne louted fair,
- 10 That folk held me a fool; and in that folly I raved,  
Till Reason had ruth on me and rocked me asleep, *pity*  
Till I saw, as it sorcery were, a subtle thing withal.  
One without tongue and teeth told me whither I should  
And whereof I came and of what kind. I conjured him at the last,
- 15 If he were Christ's creature for Christ's love me to tell.  
“I am Christ's creature,” quoth he, “and Christen in many a place,  
In Christ's court y-known well, and of his kin a part.  
Is neither Peter the Porter, nor Paul with the falchion, *sword*  
That will defend me the door, ding I never so late. *forbid; knock*
- 20 At midnight, at midday, my voice is so y-known  
That each a creature of his court welcometh me fair.”  
“What are ye called?” quoth I, “in that court among Christ's people?”  
“The while I quicken the corpse,” quoth he, “called am I *Anima*; *Soul*  
And when I will and would, *Animus* I hatte;
- 25 And for that I ken and know, called am I *Mens*; *Thought*  
And when I make moan to God, *Memoria* is my name; *Memory*  
And when I deem dooms and do as truth teacheth,  
Then is *Ratio* my right name — ‘reason’ in English;  
And when I feel that folk telleth, my first name is *Sensus*: *Sense*
- 30 And that is wit and wisdom, the well of all crafts;  
And when I challenge or challenge not, cheap or refuse,  
Then am I Conscience y-called, God's clerk and his notary;  
And when I love leally Our Lord and all other,

- Then is ‘Leal Love’ my name, and in Latin *Amor*; Love  
 35 And when I flee from the flesh and forsake the carrion,  
 Then am I spirit speechless — and *Spiritus* then I hatte. Spirit  
 Augustine and Isodore, either of them both  
 Named me thus to name — now thou might choose  
 How thou covetest to call me, now thou knowest all my names.  
*Anima pro diversis actionibus diversa nomina sortitur: dum vivificat corpus,*  
*anima est; dum vult, animus est; dum scit, mens est; dum recolit,*  
*memoria est; dum iudicat, ratio est; dum sentit, sensus est;*  
*dum amat, Amor est; dum negat vel consentit, consciencia est;*  
*dum spirat, spiritus est.*<sup>1</sup>
- 40 “Ye be as a bishop,” quoth I, all bawding that time, jesting  
 “For bishops y-blessed, they beareth many names —  
*Praesul* and *Pontifex* and *Metropolitanus*,  
 And other names an heap, *Episcopus* and *Pastor*.”<sup>2</sup>  
 “That is sooth,” said he, “now I see thy will!  
 45 Thou wouldest know and ken the cause of all their names,  
 And of mine, if thou mightest, me thinketh by thy speech!”  
 “Yea, sire,” I said, “by so no man were grieved,  
 All the sciences under sun and all the subtle crafts  
 I would I knew and couth kindly in mine heart!”  
 50 “Then art thou imperfect,” quoth he, “and one of Pride’s knights!  
 For such a lust and liking Lucifer fell from heaven:  
*Ponam pedem meum in aquilone et similis ero Altissimo.*<sup>3</sup>  
 “It were against kind,” quoth he, “and all kinds reason Nature  
 That any creature should ken all, except Christ one.  
 Again such Solomon speaketh, and despiseth their wits,  
 55 And saith, *Sicut qui mel comedit multum non est ei bonum,*  
*Sic qui scrutator est maiestatis opprimetur a gloria.*<sup>4</sup>

1. The Soul selects different names according to its different modes of operation. When it gives life to the body, it is Soul; when it wills, Intention; knows, Mind; reflects, Memory; judges, Reason; perceives sensation, Sense; loves, Love; when it denies or consents, Conscience; breaths, Spirit. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae* xi 13.

2. Prelate; Pontiff; Metropolitan; Bishop; Shepherd.

3. I shall place my foot in the north, and be like the Most High. Augustine.

4. It is not good to eat much honey: so for men to search their own glory is not glory.

*Proverbs* 25:27

- “To English men this is to mean, that must speak and hear,  
 The man that much honey eateth, his maw it englemeth, cloys  
 And the more that a man of good matter heareth,  
 But he do thereafter, it doth him double scathe.  
 60     “*Beatus est*, saith Saint Bernard, ‘*qui scripturas legit*  
       *Et verba vertit in opera*<sup>5</sup> fully to his power.”  
       Covetousness to ken and to know science  
       Put out of Paradise Adam and Eve:  
       *Scientiae appetitus hominem immortalitatis gloriam spoliovit.*<sup>6</sup>  
 “And right as honey is evil to defy and englemeth the maw,  
 65     Right so that through reason would the root know  
       Of God and of his great mights — his graces it letteth.  
       For in the liking lieth a pride and likame’s covetousness body’s  
       Against Christ’s counsel and all clerks teaching —  
       That is *Non plus sapere quam oportet sapere.*<sup>7</sup>  
 70     “Friars and fele other masters that to the lewed men preach,  
       Ye move matters unmeasurable to tell of the Trinity,  
       That ofttimes the lewed people of their belief doubt.  
       Better be-leaved were by many doctors such teaching, abandoned  
       And tell men of the ten commandments, and touch the seven sins,  
 75     And of the branches that burgeoneth of them and bring men to hell,  
       And how that folk in follies mis-spend their five wits —  
       As well friars as other folk, foolishly spent  
       In housing, in hatering, in too high clergy-shewing, clothing; learning  
       More for pomp than for pure charity — the people wot the sooth!  
 80     That I lie not, look! — for lords ye please,  
       And reverence the rich the rather for their silver:  
       *Confundantur omnes qui adorant sculptilia. Et alibi, Ut quid diligitis*  
       *vanitatem, et queritis mendacium.*<sup>8</sup>  
       “Go to the gloss of the verse, ye great clerks;

5. Blessed is he who reads the Scriptures and turns words into works. St Bernard, *Tractatus de ordine vitae*.

6. The appetite for knowledge deprived men of the glory of immortality. St Bernard

7. Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. *Romans* 12:3

8. Confounded be all they that worship carved images. (*Psalms* 97:7); And elsewhere, Why have you such pleasure in vanity, and seek after leasing? *Psalms* 4:2

- If I lie on you to my lewed wit, lead me to burning!  
 For as it seemeth, ye forsaketh no man's alms  
 85 —Of usurers, of whores, of avaricious chapmen—  
 And lout to these lords that must lene you nobles *bow; give; coins*  
 Against your rule and religion. I take record at Jesus,  
 That said to his disciples, '*Ne sitis acceptores personarum*.'<sup>9</sup>  
 Of this matter I might make a long bible;  
 90 As of curates of Christen people, as clerks beareth witness,  
 I shall tell it for truth's sake — take heed whoso liketh!  
 "As holiness and honesty out of Holy Church sþreadeth  
 Through leal living men that God's law teach,  
 Right so out of Holy Church all evils sþreadeth  
 95 Where imperfect priesthood is, preachers and teachers.  
 And see it by example in summer time on trees:  
 There some boughs be leafed and some beareth none,  
 There is a mischief in the more of such manner bows. *root*  
 Right so, parsons and priests and preachers of Holy Church  
 100 Is the root of the right faith to rule the people;  
 As where the root is rotten, reason wot the sooth,  
 Shall never flower nor fruit, nor fair leaf be green.  
 "Forth would ye lettered leave the lechery of clothing,  
 And be kind as befell for clerks and courteous of Christ's goods,  
 105 True of your tongue and of your tail both,  
 And hate to hear harlotry, and aught to under-fong *receive*  
 Tithes of untrue thing y-tilled or chaffered —  
 Loath were lewed men but they your lore followed  
 And amend them that they mis-do, more for your examples  
 110 Than for to preach and to prove it not — hypocrisy it seemeth!  
 For hypocrisy in Latin is likened to a dunghill  
 That were be-snowed with snow, and snakes within,  
 Or to a wall that were white-limed and were foul within.  
 Right so, many priests, preachers and prelates —  
 115 Ye be emblanched with *bele paroles* and with clothes, *fine words*  
 As your works and words thereunder are full wolf-like.  
 "Johannes Crisostomus of clerks sþeaketh and priests:

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9. Do not be respecters of persons. (see *James* 2:9)

*Sicut de templo omne bonum progreditur, sic de templo omne malum procedit. Si sacerdotium integrum fuerit, tota floret ecclesia; si autem corruptum fuerit, omnium fides marcida est. Si sacerdotium fuerit in peccatis, totus populus convertitur ad peccandum. Sicut cum videris arborem pallidam et marcidam intelligis quod viciium habet in radice, ita cum videris populum indisciplinatum et irreligiosum, sine dubio sacerdotium eius non est sanum.*<sup>10</sup>

- “If lewed men wist what this Latin meaneth,  
 120 And who was mine author, much wonder me thinketh  
 But if many priest bear, for their baslards and their broaches, *daggers*  
 A pair of beads in their hand and a book under their arm.  
 Sir John and Sir Geoffrey hath a girdle of silver,  
 A baslard or a bollock-knife with buttons over-gilt.  
 125 As a porthors that should be his plow, *Placebo*<sup>11</sup> to say, *prayerbook*  
 Had he never, his service to have,  
 And save he have silver thereto, saith it with evil will.  
 “Alas, ye lewed men, much lose ye on priests!  
 As thing that wickedly is won, and with false sleights, *tricks*  
 130 Would never the wit of witty God but wicked men it had —  
 The which are priests imperfect and preachers after silver,  
 Executors and sub-deans, summoners and their lemans.  
 This that with guile was got, ungraciously is spent.  
 So harlots and whores are helped with such goods,  
 135 As God’s folk for default thereof for-fare and spill. *fare badly; waste*  
 “Curates of Holy Church, and clerks that be avaricious,  
 Lightly what they leave, losels it haveth,  
 Or dieth intestate, and then entereth the bishop  
 And maketh mirth therewith, and his men both,  
 140 And say, ‘He was a niggard, that no goods might a-*spare* *mean person*  
 To friend nor to fremd — the fiend have his soul!’ *stranger*

10. As all good comes from the temple, so does all evil. If the priesthood has integrity, the whole Church flourishes; but if it is corrupt, the faithful all whither. If the priests live in sin, the whole people turns to sin. Just as when you see a tree, pale and drooping, you know it has a diseased root, so when you see a people undisciplined and irreligious, you can be sure their priests are diseased. pseudo-Chrysostom, *Homily 38 on St Matthew*.

11. I will please God in the land of the living. *Psalms 116:8*



- For a wretched house he held all his life time,  
 And that he spared and bespurred, spend we in mirth! locked up
- “By learned, by lewed, that loath is to spend —
- 145 Thus go their goods, be the ghost far.  
 As for good men, God wot, great dole men make,  
 And bemeaneth good meat-givers, and in mind haveth  
 In prayers and in penances and in perfect charity.”
- “What is charity?” quoth I then. “A childish thing,” he said —  
*“Nisi efficiamini sicut parvuli, non intrabitis in regnum caelorum:”*<sup>12</sup>
- 150 Without fauntlety or folly, a free liberal will.” childishness
- “Where should men find such a friend with so free an heart?  
 I have lived in land,” quoth I, “my name is Long Will<sup>13</sup> —  
 And found I never full charity, before nor behind.  
 Men be merciable to mendicants and to poor,
- 155 And will lend where they lieve leally to be paid.  
 As charity that Paul praiseth best and most pleasant to Our Saviour:  
 As *Non inflatur, non est ambitiosa, non quaerit quae sua sunt:*<sup>14</sup>  
 I saw never such a man, so me God help,  
 That he ne would ask after his, and otherwhile covet
- 160 Thing that needed him not — and nyme it, if he might! sieve
- “Clerks ken me that Christ is in all places;  
 As I saw him never soothly but as myself in a mirror:  
*Hic in enigmate, tunc facie ad faciem.*<sup>15</sup>
- And so I trow truely, by that men telleth of charity, believe  
 It is not champions fight, nor chaffer, as I trow.”
- 165 “Charity,” quoth he, “ne chaffereth not, nor challengeth, nor craveth;  
 As proud of a penny as of a pound of gold,  
 And is as glad of a gown of a gray russet  
 As of a tunicle of Tharsia or of try scarlet. jacket; excellent
- He is glad with all glad and good till all wicked,  
 170 And leneth and loveth all that Our Lord made. gives to  
 Curseth he no creature, nor he can bear no wrath,

12. Except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. *Matthew* 18:3

13. Long Will in Land = William Langland.

14. Is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own. *1 Corinthians* 13:4-5

15. Here in a dark manner, but then face to face. *1 Corinthians* 13:12

- Nor no liking hath to lie nor laugh men to scorn.  
 All that men say, he let it sooth, and in solace taketh, *considers*  
 And all manner mischiefs in mildness he suffereth.
- 175 Coveteth he none earthly good but heavenly bliss.”  
 “Hath he any rents or riches, or any rich friends?”  
 “Of rents nor of riches recketh he never, *cares*  
 For a friend that findeth him, failed him never at need:  
*Fiat voluntas tua*<sup>16</sup> find him evermore,
- 180 And if he supbeth, eateth but a sop of *Spera in Deo*.<sup>17</sup>  
 He can portray well the *Paternoster* and paint it with *Aves*,<sup>18</sup>  
 And otherwhile he is wonted to wend on pilgrimages *accustomed*  
 Where poor men and prisons lieth, their pardon to have;  
 Though he bear them no bread, he beareth them sweeter livelihood,
- 185 Loveth them as Our Lord biddeth and looketh how they fare.  
 “And when he is weary of that work, then will he some time  
 Labour in a laundry well the length of a mile,  
 And yern into youth, and yepely seek *run; eagerly*  
 Pride, with all the appurtenances, and pack them together,
- 190 And bouk them at his breast and beat them clean,  
 And lay on long with *Laboravi in gemitu meo*,<sup>19</sup>  
 And with warm water at his eyes wash them after.  
 Then he singeth when he doth so, and some time saith weeping,  
*Cor contritum et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies.*”<sup>20</sup>
- 195 “By Christ! I would that I knew him,” quoth I, “no creature liefer!”  
 “Without help of Piers Plowman,” quoth he, “his person seest thou  
 never.”  
 “Whether clerks know him,” quoth I, “that keep Holy Church?”  
 “Clerks have no knowing,” quoth he, “but by works and by words.  
 As Piers the Plowman perceiveth more deeper
- 200 What is the will, and wherefore that many wight suffereth:  
*Et vidit Deus cogitationes eorum.*<sup>21</sup>

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16. Thy will be done.

17. Hope in God.

18. Lord's Prayer and *Ave Maria*, i.e. the rosary.

19. I am weary of my groaning. *Psalm* 6:6

20. A broken and contrite heart, O God, shalt thou not despise. *Psalm* 51:17

21. And God saw their thoughts. (see *Luke* 11:17)

- For there are full proud-hearted men, patient of tongue *restrained*  
 And buxom as of bearing to burgesses and to lords,  
 And to poor people have pepper in the nose,  
 And as a lion he looketh where men lack his works.
- 205 “For there are beggars and bidders, be-deem as it were,  
 Look as lambs and seem life-holy —  
 As it is more to have their meat on such an easy manner  
 Than for penance and perfectness, the poverty that such taketh.  
 “Therefore by colour, not by clergy, know shalt thou him never,
- 210 Neither through words nor works, but through will one,  
 And that knoweth no clerk nor creature on earth  
 But Piers the Plowman — *Petrus, id est, Christus*.<sup>22</sup>  
 For he ne is in lollers nor in landleaper’s hermits, *vagabond’s*  
 Nor at anchorites where a box hangeth — all such they fait. *cheat*
- 215 Fie on faitours and *in fautores suos*!<sup>23</sup>  
 For Charity is God’s champion, and as a good child hend, *behaves*  
 And the merriest of mouth at meat where he sitteth.  
 The love that lieth in his heart maketh him light of sþeech,  
 And is companiable and comfortable, as Christ bid himself:  
*Nolite fieri sicut hypocritae tristes &c.*<sup>24</sup>
- 220 For I have seen him in silk and some time in russet,  
 Both in grey, and in gris, and in gilt harness — *grey fur*  
 And as gladly he it gave to gomes that it needed.  
 “Edmund and Edward, either were kings  
 And saints y-set — still Charity them followed.
- 225 “I have y-seen Charity also sing and read,  
 Ride, and run in ragged weeds; *clothes*  
 As bidding as beggars beheld I him never.  
 As in rich robes ratherst he walketh,  
 Y-called and y-crimpled and his crown y-shaved. *capped; hair curled*
- 230 And in a friar’s frock he was y-found once —  
 As it is fern ago, in Saint Francis’s time; *long*  
 In that sect since to seldom hath he been known.

22. Peter, that is, Christ.

23. on their patrons.

24. Be not as the hypocrites, sad... *Matthew* 6:16

“Rich men he recommendeth, and of their robes taketh  
That without wills leadeth their lives:

*Beatus est dives qui, &c.*<sup>25</sup>

235 “In king’s court he cometh oft, where the counsel is true;  
As if covetousness be of the counsel, he will not come therein.  
In court amongst japers he cometh but seldom,  
For brawling and backbiting and bearing of false witness.

“In the consistory before the commissary he cometh not full oft,  
240 For their law dureth overlong but if they lack silver, *endures*  
And matrimony for money make and unmake,  
And that conscience and Christ hath y-knit fast,  
They undo it undignely, those doctors of law. *unworthily*

“Amongst archbishops and other bishops and prelates of Holy Church,  
245 For to wone with them his wont was some time, *dwelt*  
And Christs patrimony to the poor parcel-meal deal.  
As avarice hath the keys now and keepeth for his kinsmen  
And for his executors and his servants, and some for their children.

“As I ne lack no life, but, Lord, amend us all.  
250 And give us grace, good God, charity to follow!  
For whoso might meet with him, such manners him aileth —  
Neither he blameth nor banneth, boasteth nor praiseth,  
Lacketh, nor loseth, nor looketh up stern,  
Craveth, nor coveteth, nor crieth after more:

*In pace in idipsum dormiam &c.*<sup>26</sup>

255 The most livelihood that he liveth by is love in God’s passion;  
Neither he biddeth, nor beggeth, nor borroweth to yield;  
Mis-doeth he no man, nor with his mouth grieveth.

“Amongst Christen men this mildness should last,  
In all manner angers have this at heart —  
260 That though they suffered all this, God suffered for us more  
In example we should do so, and take no vengeance  
Of our foes that doeth us falseness — that is our father’s will.  
For well may every man wit, if God had would himself,  
Should never Judas nor Jew have Jesu done on rood,

25. Blessed is the rich man that is found without sin. *Ecclesiasticus* 31:8

26. I will lay me down in peace. *Psalm* 4:9

- 265 Nor have martyred Peter nor Paul, nor in prison held.  
 As he suffered in example that we should suffer also,  
 And said to such that suffer would that *Patientes vincunt*.<sup>27</sup>  
 “*Verbi gratia*,”<sup>28</sup> quoth he — and very examples many. true  
 “In *Legenda Sanctorum*,”<sup>29</sup> the life of holy saints,  
 270 What penance and poverty and passion they suffered —  
 In hunger, in heat, in all manner angers.  
 “Antony and Ægidius and other holy fathers  
 Woned in wilderness among wild beasts;  
 Monks and mendicants, men by themselves  
 275 In spekes and in spelunks, seldom spoke together. hollows; caves  
 As neither Antony nor Ægidius nor hermit that time  
 Of lions nor of leopards no livelihood ne took,  
 But of fowls that flieth — thus findeth men in books—  
 Except that Ægidius after an hind cried, deer  
 280 And through the milk of that mild beast the man was sustained;  
 And day by day had he hire naught, his hunger for to slake,  
 But seldom and sundry times, as saith the book and teacheth.  
 Antony on a day about noon time  
 Had a bird that brought him bread that he by lived;  
 285 And though the gome had a guest, God found (*for*) them both.  
 “Paul *primus heremita*”<sup>30</sup> had parrocked himself, enclosed  
 That no man might him see for moss and for leaves.  
 Fowls him fed fele winters withal many  
 Till he founded friars of Augustine’s order.  
 290 Paul, after his preaching, paniers he made,  
 And won with his hands that his womb needed.  
 Peter fished for his food, and his fellow Andrew:  
 Some they sold and some they sod, and so they lived both. boiled  
 And also Mary Magdelene by mores lived and dews, roots;  
 295 As moſt through devotion and mind of God Almighty. knowledge  
 I should not these seven days say them all

27. Those who suffer shall conquer. *Testament of Job*, 27:10

28. For example

29. Legends of the Saints.

30. the first hermit.

That lived thus for Our Lord's love many long years.

- “As there ne was lion nor leopard that on lands went,  
 Neither bear, nor boar, nor other beast wild  
 300 That ne fell to their feet and fawned with the tails;  
 And if they could have y-carped, by Christ, as I trow, *believe*  
 They would have y-fed that folk before wild fowls.  
 For all the courtesy that beasts ken, they kidde that folk oft, *showed*  
 In liking and in lowing, where they on lands went.
- 305 As God sent them food by fowls, and by no fierce beasts,  
 In meaning that meek thing mild thing should feed.  
 As who saith religious rightful men should find,  
 And lawful men to life-holy men livelihood bring;  
 And then would lords and ladies be loath to a-guilt, *offend*
- 310 And to take of their tenants more than truth would,  
 Find they that friars would forsake their alms,  
 And bid them bear it where it was y-borrowed.  
 For we be God's fowls and abide alway,  
 Till birds bring us that we should by live.
- 315 For had ye potage and payn enough, and penny ale to drink, *stew; bread*  
 And a mess there-amid of one manner kind, *dish*  
 Ye had right enough ye religious — and so your rule me told.  
*“Numquam,” dicit Job, “rugiet onager cum habuerit herbam? Aut mugiet  
 bos cum ante plenum praesepe steterit?” Brutorum animalium natura  
 te condemnat, quia cum eis pabulum commune sufficiat; ex adipe  
 prodiit iniquitas tua.”<sup>31</sup>*
- “If lewed men knew this Latin, they would look whom they gave,  
 And advise them before a five days or six  
 320 Ere they amortised more to monks or canons their rents.  
 Alas! lords and ladies, lewed counsel have ye  
 To give from your heirs that your ayles you left, *forefathers*  
 And giveth to bid for you to such that be rich,  
 And be founded and feoffed eke to bid for other!
- 325 “Who performeth this prophecy, of the people that now liveth —

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<sup>31</sup> “Doth the wild ass bray,” asks Job, “when he hath grass? Or loweth the ox over his fodder?” (Job 6:5) The nature of brute beasts is a condemnation of you, since with them common food suffices; your evil has originated from excess.

*Dispersit, dedit pauperibus?*<sup>32</sup>

If any people perform that text, it are these poor friars:

For that they beg about, in building they spend,

And on themselves some, and such as be their labourers;

330 And of them that haveth they take, and giveth them that ne haveth!

“As clerks and knights, and commoners that be rich,

Fele of you fareth as if I a forest had

*Many*

That were full of fair trees, and I fonded and cast

*tried*

How I might more therein amongst them set.

335 Right so ye rich — ye robeth (*them*) that be rich,

*robe*

And helpeth them that helpeth you, and giveth where no need is;

As whoso filled a tun full of a fresh river,

*barrel*

And went forth with that water to woke with Thames.

*moisten*

Right so ye rich, ye robeth and feedeth

340 them that have as ye have — them ye make at ease.

“As religious that rich be should rather feast beggars

Than burgesses that rich be, as the book teacheth:

*Quia sacrilegium est res pauperum non pauperibus dare.*

*Item: peccatoribus dare est daemonibus immolare.*

*Item: monace, si indiges et accipis, potius das quam accipis;*

*Si autem non eges et accipis, rapis.*

*Porro non indiget monachus, si habeat quod nature sufficit.*<sup>33</sup>

“Forth I counsel all Christen to comform them to charity —

For charity without challengen unchargeth the soul,

*frees*

345 And many a prisoner from purgatory through his prayers he delivereth.

As there is a default in the folk that the faith keepeth,

Wherefore folk is the feebler, and not firm of belief.

As in lussheburghs is a lither alloy, and yet looketh he like a sterling;

*counterfeit coins; bad*

The mark of that money is good, as the metal is feeble.

350 And so it fareth by some folk now: they have a fair speech,

32. He hath dispersed abroad, and given to the poor. *Psalm* 112:9

33. For it is sacrilege not to give to the poor what is theirs. Also, to give to sinners is to sacrifice to devils. Also, monk, if you are in need and receive, you are giving rather than receiving; but if you do not need and accept, you are stealing. Further, a monk is not in need if he has what suffices for nature. Peter Comestor

- Crown and Christendom, the king's mark of heaven,  
 As the metal, that is man's soul, with many sins is fouled.  
 Both lettered and lewed be alloyed now with sin,  
 That no life loveth other, nor Our Lord, as it seemeth.  
 355 For what through war and wicked works and weathers unreasonable,  
 Weatherwise shipmen and witty clerks also  
 Have no belief to the lift, nor to the lore of philosophers. *sky*  
 "Astronomers all day in their art fail  
 That whilom warned before what should fall after; *formerly*  
 360 Shipmen and shepherds, that with ship and sheep went,  
 Wist by the welkin what should betide, *sky*  
 As of weather and of winds they warned men oft.  
 Tillers that tilled the earth told their masters  
 By the seed that they sow what they sell might,  
 365 And what to leave and to live by, the land was so true;  
 Now failleth the folk of the flood and of the land both —  
 Shepherds and shipmen, and so do these tillers:  
 Neither they kenneth nor knoweth one course before another.  
 "Astronomers also are at their wit's end:  
 370 Of that was calculated of the climate, the contrary they find.  
 Grammar, the ground of all, beguileth now children:  
 For is none of these new clerks —whoso nymeth heed— *takes*  
 That can versify fair nor formally indite,  
 Nor naught one among an hundred that an author can construe,  
 375 Nor read a letter in any language but in Latin or in English.  
 "Go now to any degree, and but if Guile be master,  
 And Flatterer his fellow to form under him, *teach*  
 Much wonder me thinketh amongst us all!  
 Doctors of degrees and of divinity masters,  
 380 That should ken and know all kinds clergy,  
 And answer to arguments and also to a *quodlibet* *debating point*  
 I dare not say it for shame — if such were apposed,  
 They should fail of their Philosophy, and in Physic both.  
 "Wherefore I am a-feared of folk of Holy Church,  
 385 Lest they over-hop, as others do, in Office and in Hours.  
 As if they over-hop — as I hope not— our believe sufficeth;



- As clerks in *Corpus Christi* feast sing and read  
 That *sola fides sufficit*<sup>34</sup> to save with lewed people —  
 And so may Saracens be saved, scribes and Jews.
- 390 “Alas then! but our loresmen live as they learn us,  
 And for their living that lewed men be the loather God a-guilt.  
 For Saracens have somewhat seeming to our belief,  
 For they love and beleve in one Lord Almighty,  
 And we, learned and lewed, believeth in one God—
- 395 Christen and unchristen on one creator believeth.  
 As one Makomet, a man, in misbelief  
 Brought Saracens of Syria — and see in what manner.  
 “This Makomet was a Christen man, and for he most not be a pope,  
 Into Syria he sought, and through his subtile wits
- 400 Daunted a dove, and day and night her fed. *Tamed*  
 The corn that she cropped, he cast it in his ear;  
 And if he among the people preached, or in places come,  
 Then would the culver come to the clerk’s ear *dove*  
 Mening as after meat — thus Makomet her enchanted, *seeking*
- 405 And did folk then fall on knees, for he swore in his preaching  
 That the culver that came so came from God of heaven  
 As messenger to Makomet, men for to teach.  
 And thus through wiles of his wit and a white dove  
 Makomet in misbelief men and women brought,
- 410 That learned there and lewed yet lieve on his laws.  
 “And since Our Saviour suffered the Saracens so beguiled  
 Through a Christen clerk accursed in his soul —  
 As for dread of the death I dare not tell truth,  
 How English clerks a culver fed that Covetousness hight,
- 415 And be mannered after Makomet, that no man useth truth.  
 “Anchorites and hermits, and monks and friars  
 Peer to Apostles through their perfect living. *are peers*  
 Would never the faithful Father that his ministers should  
 Of tyrants that teeneth true men take any alms, *harm*
- 420 But do as Anthony did, Dominic and Francis,

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33. Faith alone suffices. (from *Pange lingua*)

- Benedict and Bernard both, the which them first taught  
 To live by little and in low houses by leal men's alms.  
 Grace should grow and be green through their good living,  
 And folks should find, that be in diverse sickness, feel  
 425 The better for their biddings in body and in soul. prayers  
 Their prayers and their penances to peace should bring  
 All that be at debate, and beadsmen were true: if  
*Petite et accipietis &c.*<sup>35</sup>  
 "Salt saveth cattle," say these wives;  
*Vos estis sal terrae &c.*<sup>36</sup>  
 The heads of Holy Church —and they holy were—  
 430 Christ calleth them salt for Christen souls,  
*Et si sal evanuerit, in quo salietur*<sup>37</sup>  
 As fresh flesh other fish, when it salt faileth, lacks  
 It is unsavoury, for sooth, y-sodden or y-baked; boiled  
 So is man's soul, soothly, that seeth no good example  
 Of them of Holy Church that the high way should teach  
 435 And be guide, and go before as a good banner, standard-bearer  
 And hardy them that behind be, and give them good evidence.  
 "Eleven holy men all the world turned  
 Into leal believ; the lightloker, me thinketh. more lightly  
 Should all manner men, we have so many masters—  
 440 Priests and preachers, and a pope above,  
 That God's salt should be, to save man's soul.  
 "All was heatheness some time (*in*) England and Wales,  
 Till Gregory gart clerks to go here and preach.  
 Augustine christened the king at Canterbury,  
 445 And through miracles, as men may read, all that march he turned  
 To Christ and to Christendom, and cross to honour, [district  
 And folled folk fast, and the faith taught baptized  
 More through miracles than through much preaching,  
 As well through his works as with his holy words,  
 450 And formed what fulling and faith was to mean. taught; baptism

35. Seek, and ye shall find. *Matthew* 7:73

36. Ye are the salt of the earth. *Matthew* 5:13

37. But if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? *Matthew* 5:13

“Cloth that cometh from the weaving is not comely to wear  
 Till it be fulled under foot or in fulling stocks,  
 Washed well with water and with teasels cratched,  
 Y-tucked and y-tainted and under tailor’s hand;  
 455 And so it fareth by a bairn that born is of womb:  
 Till it be christened in Christ’s name and confirmed of the bishop,  
 It is heathen as to heavenward, and helpless to the soul.  
 ‘Heathen’ is to mean after heath and untilled earth —  
 As in wild wilderness waxeth wild beasts,  
 460 Rude and unreasonable, running without keepers.  
 “Ye mind well how Matthew saith, how a man made a feast:  
 He fed them with no venison, nor pheasants y-baked,  
 But with fowls that from him nolde, but followed his whistling:  
*Ecce altitia mea et omnia parata sunt:*<sup>38</sup>  
 And with calf’s flesh he fed the folk that he loved.  
 465 “The calf betokeneth cleanness in them that keepeth laws;  
 For as the cow through kind milk the calf nourisheth till an ox,  
 So love and loyalty leal men sustaineth;  
 And maidens and mild men mercy desire  
 Right as the cow-calf coveteth sweet milk —  
 470 So must do rightful men mercy and truth.  
 And by the hand-fed fowls is folk understood  
 That loath be to love without learning of examples.  
 Right as capons in a court cometh to men’s whistling: *chickens*  
 In mening after meat followeth men that whistle — *seeking*  
 475 Right so rude men that little reason kenneth  
 Love and believe by lettered men’s doings,  
 And by their words and works ween and trow: *suppose; believe*  
 And as those fowls to find food after whistling,  
 So hope they to have heaven through their wissing. *instruction*  
 480 And the man that made the feast the majesty bemeaneth —  
 That is God, of his grace giveth all men bliss.  
 With weathers and with wonders he warneth us with a whistle  
 Where that his will is, to worship us all,

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38. Behold, my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready. *Matthew 22:4*

- And feed us and feast us for evermore at once.
- 485 “As who be that excuseth them that are parsons and priests  
 (That heads of Holy Church be) that have their will here  
 Without travail the tithe deal that true men be-swink — *work*  
 They will be wrath for I write thus; as to witness I take  
 Both Matthew and Mark and *Memento Domine David*:<sup>39</sup>  
*Ecce audivimus eam in Efrata &c.*<sup>39</sup>
- 490 What pope or prelate now performeth that Christ hight— *bids*  
*Ite in universum mundum et predicate &c.*<sup>40</sup>  
 “Alas, that men so long on Makomet should believe!  
 So many prelates to preach as the Pope maketh —  
 Of Nazareth, of Ninevah, of Naphtali and Damask.  
 That they ne went as Christ wisseth — since they will a name—
- 495 To be pastors and preach the passion of Jesus,  
 And as himself said, so to live and die:  
*Bonus pastor animam suam ponit &c.*<sup>41</sup>  
 And said it in salvation of Saracens and other —  
 For Christen and unchristen, Christ said to preachers,  
*Ite vos in vineam meam &c.*<sup>42</sup>
- 500 “And since that these Saracens, scribes and Jews  
 Have a lap of our belief, the lightloker, me thinketh, *more lightly*  
 They should turn, whoso travail would and teach them of the Trinity:  
*Quaerite et invenietis &c.*<sup>43</sup>  
 For all pagans prayeth and perfectly believeth  
 In the great holy God, and his grace ask,
- 505 And make their moan to Makomet, their message to shew.  
 Thus in a faith lieveth that folk, and in a false mean, *mediator*  
 And that is ruth for rightful men that in the realm wone, *pity; dwell*  
 And a peril to the Pope and prelates that he maketh, *shame*  
 That bear bishop’s names of Bethlem and Babylon.
- 510 “When the high king of heaven sent his son to earth,

39. *Psalm* 132. O Lord, remember David. verse 1; Lo, we heard of the same at Ephrata. verse 6.

40. Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. *Mark* 16:15; *Matthew* 28:19

41. The good shepherd giveth his life. *John* 10:11

42. Go ye also into my vineyard. *Matthew* 20:4

43. Seek, and ye shall find. *Matthew* 7:7

- Many miracles he wrought man for to turn,  
 In example that men should see by sad reason  
 Men might not be saved but through mercy and grace,  
 And through penance, and passion, and perfect belief;  
 515 And became man of a maid, and *metropolitanus*, arch-bishop  
 And baptised and be-shined with the blood of his heart  
 All that willed and would with in-wit believe it. conscience  
 Many a saint since hath suffered to die,  
 All for to inform the faith in fele countries died — many  
 520 In India, and in Alexandria, in Armenia, and in Spain,  
 In doleful death died for their faith's sake.  
 In salvation of the faith Saint Thomas was y-martyred:  
 Amongst unkind Christen for Christ's love he died,  
 And for the right of all this realm and all realms Christen.  
 525 Holy Church is honoured highly through his dying;  
 He is a forbisen to all bishops and a bright mirror, example  
 And sovereignly to such that of Syria beareth the name,  
 And not to hop about in England to hallow men's altars,  
 And creep in amongst curates and confess against the law:  
*Nolite mittere falsem in messem alienam &c.*<sup>44</sup>  
 530 Many man for Christ's love was martyred among Romans  
 Ere Christendom were known there or any cross honoured.  
 "It is ruth to read how rightwise men lived —  
 How they defouled their flesh, forsook their own will,  
 Far from kith and from kin evil y-clothed yeden, went  
 535 Badly y-bedded, no book but conscience,  
 Nor no riches but the rood to rejoice them in:  
*Absit nobis gloriari nisi in cruce Domini nostri &c.*<sup>45</sup>  
 "And then was plenty and peace amongst poor and rich;  
 And now is ruth to read how the red noble coin  
 Is reverenced ere the rood, received for the worthier  
 540 Than Christ's cross that overcame death and deadly sin.  
 And now is war and woe, and whoso why asketh —  
 For covetousness after cross; the crown stamped in gold.

44. Thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbour's standing corn. *Deuteronomy* 23:25

45. But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord. *Galatians* 6:14

- Both rich and religious, that rood they honour  
 That in groats is y-graven and in gold nobles.
- 545 For covetousness of that cross, clerks of Holy Church  
 Shall turn as Templars did — the time approacheth fast.  
 “Mynne ye not, wise men, how those men honoured *Forget*  
 More treasure than truth? I dare not tell the sooth;  
 Reason and rightful doom those religious deemed.
- 550 Right so, ye clerks, for your covetousness, ere come aught long,  
 Shall they deem *dos ecclesiae*,<sup>46</sup> and depose your pride:  
*Deposuit potentes de sede &c.*<sup>47</sup>  
 “If knighthood and kind wit, and the commons and conscience  
 Together love leally, lieveth it well, ye bishops —  
 The lordship of lands lose ye shall for ever,
- 555 And live as *Levitici*, as Our Lord you teacheth: *Levites*  
*Per primitias et decimas &c.*<sup>48</sup>  
 “When Constantine of courtesy Holy Church endowed  
 With lands and ledes, lordships and rents, *subjects*  
 An angel men heard an high at Rome cry,  
 “*Dos ecclesiae* this day hath y-drunk venom,  
 560 And those that have Peter’s power are a-poisoned all!”  
 A medicine must thereto that may amend prelates,  
 That should pray for the peace; possession them letteth. *binders*  
 Taketh their lands, ye lords, and letteth them live by dimes; *tithes*  
 If possession be poison, and imperfect them make,
- 565 Good were to discharge them for Holy Church’s sake,  
 And purge them of poison, ere more peril fall.  
 If priesthood were perfect, the people should amend,  
 That contrary Christ’s law, and Christendom despise.  
 “Every bishop that beareth cross, by that he is held
- 570 Through his province to pass, and to his people to shew him,  
 Tell them and teach them on the Trinity to believe,  
 And feed them with ghostly food, and needy folk to find. *spiritual*  
 As Isaiah of you sþeaketh and Hosea both,

46.

47. He hath put down the mighty from their seat. *Luke* 1:5248. By first-fruits and tithes. (see *Deuteronomy* 12:6)

- That no man should be bishop but if he had both  
 575 Bodily food and ghostly food to give where it needeth:  
*In domo mea non est panis neque vestimentum, et ideo nolite  
 constituere me regem.*<sup>49</sup>  
 Hosea saith for such that sick be and feeble,  
*Inferte omnes decimas in orreum meum, ut sit cibus in domo mea.*<sup>50</sup>  
 “As we Christen creatures, that on the cross believe,  
 Are firm as in the faith — God forbid else! —  
 580 And have clerks to keep us therein, and them that shall come after us.  
 And Jews live in leal law — Our Lord wrote it himself  
 In stone, for it steadfast was, and stand should ever —  
*Dilige Deum et proximum,*<sup>51</sup> is perfect Jewish law —  
 And took it Moses to teach men, till Messiah come.  
 585 And on that law they lieve, and let it for the best.  
 And yet knew they Christ, that Christendom taught,  
 And for a perfect prophet that much people saved  
 Of selcouth sores; they saw it oft — wondrous  
 Both of miracles and marvels, and how he men feasted,  
 590 With two fishes and five loaves five thousand people —  
 And by that mangery they might well see that Messiah he seemed; feast  
 And when he lifted up Lazarus, that laid was in grave,  
 And under stone dead and stank, with stiff voice him called,  
*Lazare, veni foras,*<sup>52</sup>  
 Did him rise and roam right before the Jews.  
 595 As they said and swore, with sorcery he wrought,  
 And studied to stroy him — and stroyed themselves, destroy  
 And through his patience their power to pure naught he brought:  
*Patientes vincunt.*<sup>53</sup>  
 “Daniel of their undoing divined and said,  
*Cum sanctus sanctorum veniat cessabit unxio vestra.*<sup>54</sup>

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49. In my house is neither bread nor clothing: make me not a ruler of the people. *Isaiah* 3:7

50. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house. *Malachi* 3:10

51. Love God and your neighbour. *Deuteronomy* 6:5 (see *Matthew* 22:37-40)

52. Lazarus, come forth. *John* 11:43

53. Those who suffer, conquer.

54. When the Holy of Holies shall come, your anointing shall cease.

- 600 And yet weened those wretches that he were *pseudo-propheta*<sup>55</sup>  
 And that his lore be leasings, and lack it all, lies; blame  
 And hope that he be to come that shall them relieve —  
 Moses eft or Messiah their masters divineth. again  
 “As pharisees and saracens, scribes and Jews  
 605 Are folk of one faith — the father God they honour.  
 And since that the Saracens and also the Jews  
 Ken the first clause of our belief, *Credo in Deum patrem omnipotentem*,<sup>56</sup>  
 Prelates of Christen provinces should prove, if they might, try  
 Learn them little and little *Et in Jesum Christum filium*,<sup>57</sup>  
 610 Till they could sþeak and sþell *Et in Spiritum santum*,<sup>58</sup>  
 And render it and record it with *remissionem peccatorum*,  
*Carnis resurrectionem et vitam aeternam. Amen.*”<sup>59</sup>



55. false prophet

56. I believe in God, the Father Almighty. (start of the Apostle's Creed)

57. And in Jesus Christ his only son, our Lord.

58. And I believe in the Holy Ghost

59. The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen. (End of the Apostle's Creed)



## William's Vision of Piers Plowman

### Passus 16

“Now fair fall you,” quoth I then, “for your fair shewing!  
For Haukyn’s love, the Active Man, ever I shall you love.  
As yet am I in a weer what charity is to mean.” *doubt*

5 “It is a full try tree,” quoth he, “truly to tell. *excellent*  
Mercy is the more thereof; the middle stock is ruth; *root; trunk*  
The leaves be leal words, the law of Holy Church;  
The blossoms be buxom sþeech and benign looking;  
Patience hatte the pure tree, and poor simple of heart, *is named*

10 And so through God and good men groweth the fruit Charity.”  
“I would travel,” quoth I, “this tree to see, twenty hundred mile,  
And to have my fill of that fruit forsake all other saulee. *food*  
“Lord!” quoth I, “if any wight wit whither-out it groweth?”  
“It groweth in a garden,” quoth he, “that God made himself;

15 Amidst man’s body the more is of that stock. *root; trunk*  
Heart hight the herber that it in groweth, *is called; arbour*  
And *Liberum Arbitrium*<sup>1</sup> hath the land to farm,  
Under Piers the Plowman to pike it and to weed it.” *hoe*

20 “Piers the Plowman!” quoth I then, and all for pure joy  
That I heard name his name anon I swooned after,  
And lay long in a love-dream; and at the last me thought  
That Piers the Plowman all the place me shewed,  
And bade me tote on the tree, on top and on root. *gaze*  
With three piles was it under-pight — I perceived it soon. *props; supported*

25 “Piers,” quoth I, “I pray thee — why stand these piles here?”  
“For winds, wilt thou wit,” quoth he, “to wit it from falling; *keep*  
*Dum ceciderit iustus non collidetur quia Dominus supponit manum suam:*<sup>2</sup>  
And in blowing time a-bite the flowers, but if these piles help.  
The World is a wicked wind to them that would truth:  
Covetousness cometh of that wind and creepeth among the leaves  
And for-fretteth nigh the fruit through many fair sights. *eats away*

1. Free Will

2. Though he fall, he shall not be cast away; for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand. *Psalm 37:24*

- 30 Then with the first pile I pull him down — that is *Potentia Dei Patris*.<sup>3</sup>  
 “The flesh is a fell wind, and in flowering time, cruel  
 Through liking and lusts so loud he ginneth blow  
 That it nourisheth nice sights and some time words, foolish  
 And wicked works thereof, worms of sin,
- 35 And for-biteth the blossoms right to the bare leaves.  
 “Then set I to the second pile, *Sapientia Dei Patris*:<sup>4</sup>  
 That is the passion and the power of our prince Jesu.  
 Through prayers and through penances and God’s passion in mind,  
 I save it till I see it ripen and somedeal y-fruited. somewhat
- 40 “And then fondeth the fiend my fruit to destroy tries  
 With all the wiles that he ken, and waggeth the root, knows  
 And casteth up to the crop unkind neighbours, tree-top  
 Backbiters brew-chest, brawlers and chiders, strife-starters  
 And layeth a ladder thereto — of leasings are the rungs— lies
- 45 And fetcheth away my flowers sometime before both mine eyes.  
 As *Liberum Arbitrium* letteth him some time,  
 That is lieutenant to look it well, by leave of myself: guard  
*Videatis qui peccat in Spiritum Sanctum numquam remittetur &c,*  
*Hoc est idem, qui peccat per liberum arbitrium non repugnat.*<sup>5</sup>  
 “As when the fiend and the flesh forth with the world  
 Menace behind me, my fruit for to fetch,
- 50 Then *Liberum Arbitrium* latheth the third plank  
 And pulleth a-down the puck purely, through grace  
 And help of the Holy Ghost — and thus have I the mastery.”  
 “Now fair fall you, Piers!” quoth I, “so fair ye describe  
 The power of these posts and their proper might.
- 55 As I have thoughts a thrave of these three piles — bunch  
 In what wood they waxed, and where that they grew,  
 For all are they alike long, none less than other,  
 And to my mind, as me thinketh, on one more they grew;  
 And of one greatness and green of grain they seem.” colour

3. the Power of God the Father.

4. the Wisdom of God the Father.

5. You may see that he who sins against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him. This is the same as ‘he who sins through free will does not resist’.

- 60 "That is sooth," said Piers, "so it may befall.  
 I shall tell thee as tid what this tree hight. *quickly; is called*  
 The ground where it groweth, goodness it hatte; *is called*  
 And I have told thee what hight the tree: the Trinity it meaneth."  
 And eagerly he looked on me, and therefore I spared  
 65 To ask him any more thereof, and bade him full fair  
 To describe the fruit that so fair hangeth.  
 "Here now beneath," quoth he then, "if I need had,  
 Matrimony I may nyme, a moist fruit withal. *take*  
 Then Continance is near the crop as Cailloux bastard. *tree-top; pear*  
 70 Then beareth the crop kind fruit and cleanest of all —  
 Maidenhood, angel's peers, and rathest will be ripe, *soonest*  
 And sweet without swelling — sour worth it never." *become*  
 I prayed Piers to pull a-down an apple, and he would, *if*  
 And suffer me to assay what savour it had. *try*  
 75 And Piers cast to the crop, and then comsed it to cry;  
 And wagged widowhood, and it wept after;  
 And when he moved matrimony, it made a foul noise,  
 That I had ruth when Piers rogged, it gradde so ruefully. *shook; cried*  
 For ever as they dropped a-down the devil was ready,  
 80 And gathered them all together, both great and small:  
 Adam, and Abraham, and Isaiah the prophet,  
 Sampson and Samuel, and Saint John the Baptist;  
 Bore them forth boldly —no body him letted— *hindered*  
 And made of holy men his hoard *in Limbo Inferni*,<sup>6</sup>  
 85 Where is darkness and dread and the devil master.  
 And Piers, for pure teen, that a pile he laught, *anger; siezed*  
 And hit after him, hap how it might,  
*Filius*<sup>7</sup> by the Father's will and freeness of *Spiritus Sancti*,<sup>8</sup>  
 To go rob that ragman and reave the fruit from him. *devil*  
 90 And then spake *Spiritus Sanctus* in Gabriel's mouth  
 To a maid that hight Mary, a meek thing withal,  
 That one Jesus, a justice's son, must juke in her chamber *rest*

---

6. in the verge of Hell.

7. Son

8. Holy Spirit

- Till *plenitudo temporis*<sup>9</sup> time come were  
 That Piers fruit flowered and fell to be ripe.
- 95 And then should Jesus joust therefore, by judgment of arms,  
 Whether should fonge the fruit — the fiend or himself. *take*  
 The maid mildly then the messenger granted,  
 And said hendily to him, “Lo, me his handmaiden *courteously*  
 For to work his will without any sin:  
*Ecce ancilla Domini, fiat mihi &c.*”<sup>10</sup>
- 100 And in the womb of that wench was he forty weeks,  
 Till he waxed a faunt through her flesh, and of fighting couth, *child*  
 To have y-fought with the fiend ere full time come.  
 And Piers the Plowman perceived plener time, *full*  
 And learned him leechcraft, his life for to save,
- 105 That though he were wounded with his enemy, to warnish himself;  
 And did him assay his surgery on them that sick were, *try*  
 Till he was perfect practiser, if any peril fell;  
 And sought out the sick and sinful both,  
 And salved sick and sinful, both blind and crooked,
- 110 And common women converted and turned to good:  
*Non est sanis opus medicus, sed male habentibus.*<sup>11</sup>  
 Both measles and mute, and in the menison bloody: *lepers; dysentery*  
 Oft he healed such, he ne held it for no mastery,  
 Save when he leeched Lazarus, that had y-lain in grave *healed*
- 115 *Quatriduanus*<sup>12</sup> quelt — quick did him walk. *dead; alive*  
 As he made that mastery, *moestus coepit esse*,<sup>13</sup>  
 And wept water with his eyes — there saw it many.  
 Some that the sight saw said that time  
 That he was leech of life, and lord of high heaven. *doctor*
- 120 Jews jangled thereagainst that judged laws,  
 And said he wrought through witchcraft and with the devil’s might:  
*Daemonium habes &c.*<sup>14</sup>

9. the fullness of time

10. Behold the handmaiden of the Lord; be it unto me... *Luke* 1:38

11. They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. *Matthew* 9:12

12. four days. See *John* 11:39

13. Jesus wept. *Matthew* 26:37; *John* 11:35

14. He hath a devil. *John* 7:20, 8:48

“Then are ye churls,” quoth Jesus, “and your children both, *ill-bred*  
 And Satan your Saviour — yourselves now ye witness:  
 For I have saved yourselves, and your sons after;  
 125 Your bodies, your beasts, and blind men holpen, *helped*  
 And fed you with fishes and with five loaves,  
 And left baskets full of broken meat — bear away whoso would.”  
 And mis-said the Jews manly, and menaced them to beat, *boldly*  
 And knocked on them with a cord, and cast adown their stalls  
 130 That in church chaffered or changed any money, *traded*  
 And said it in sight of them all, so that all heard,  
 “I shall overturn this temple and a-down throw,  
 And in three days after edify it new, *built*  
 And make it as much other more in all manner points  
 135 As ever it was, and as wide — wherefore I hote you, *bid*  
 Of prayers and of perfectness this place that ye call:  
*Domus mea domus orationis vocabitur.*<sup>15</sup>  
 Envy and evil will arne in the Jews: *well up*  
 They casted and contrived to kill him when they might;  
 Each day after other their time they awaited,  
 140 Til it befell on a Friday, a little before Pasque. *Easter (Passover)*  
 The Thursday before, there he made his cene, *supper*  
 Sitting at the supper he said these words:  
 “I am sold through some of you — he shall the time rue  
 That ever he his Saviour sold for silver or else.”  
 145 Judas jangled thereagainst, as Jesus him told  
 It was himself soothly, and said, “*Tu dicis.*”<sup>16</sup>  
 Then went forth that wicked man and with the Jews met,  
 And told them a token how to know with Jesus,  
 The which token to this day to much is y-used —  
 150 That is, kissing and fair countenance and unkind will.  
 And so was with Judas then, that Jesus betrayed:  
 “Ave, rabbi,” quoth that ribald, and right to him he went,  
 And kissed him, to be caught thereby and killed of the Jews.  
 Then Jesus to Judas and to the Jews said,

15. My house shall be called an house of prayer. *Matthew* 21:13

16. Thou hast said it. *Matthew* 26:25

- 155 “Falseness I find in thy fair speech,  
 And guile in thy glad cheer, and gall is in thy laughing.  
 Thou shalt be mirror to many, men to deceive,  
 As the worse, and thy wickedness shall worth upon thyself:  
*Necesse est ut veniant scandala: vae homini illi, per quem scandalum venit.*<sup>17</sup>  
 Though I by treason be taken, and at your own will,  
 Suffereth mine apostles in peace, and in peace gang.” go
- 160 On a Thursday in the sternness thus was he taken. darkness  
 Through Judas and Jews — Jesus was his name  
 That on the Friday following for mankind’s sake  
 Jousted in Jerusalem, a joy to us all.  
 On cross upon Calvary Christ took the battle
- 165 Against death and the devil, destroyed their both mights —  
 Died, and death for-did, and day of night made. destroyed  
 And I awaked therewith, and wiped mine eyes,  
 And after Piers the Plowman pried and stared,  
 Eastward and westward I waited after fast,
- 170 And went forth as an idiot, in country to espy  
 After Piers the Plowman — many a place I sought.  
 And then met I with a man, a mid-Lenten Sunday,  
 As hoar as an hawthorn, and Abraham he hight. was called  
 I frayned him first from whence he came, asked  
 175 And of whence he were, and whither that he thought. intended  
 “I am Faith,” quoth that freke, “it falleth not me to lie,  
 And of Abraham’s house an herald of arms.  
 I seek after a segge that I saw once, man  
 A full bold bachelor — I knew him by his blazon.”
- 180 “What beareth that berne,” quoth I then, “so bliss thee betide?” man  
 “Three leodes in one lyth, none longer than other, persons; body  
 Of one muchel and might in measure and in length. size  
 That one doeth, all doeth, and each doeth by his one.  
 The first hath might and majesty, maker of all things:
- 185 *Pater* is his proper name, a person by himself. Father  
 The second of that sire is Soothfastness *Filius*,

17. For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!  
*Matthew 18:7*

Warden of what wit hath, was ever without ginning.  
 The third hight the Holy Ghost, a person by himself,  
 The light of all that life hath a land and a water,  
 190 Comforter of creatures — of him cometh all bliss.  
 “So three belongeth for a lord that lordship claimeth:  
 Might, and a means his own might to know,  
 Of himself and of his servant, and what suffereth them both.  
 So God, that ginning had never, but though him good thought,  
 195 Sent forth his son as for servant that time,  
 To occupy him here till issue were sprung —  
 That is, children of charity, and Holy Church the mother.  
 Patriarchs and prophets and apostles were the children,  
 And Christ and Christendom and all Christen Holy Church  
 200 In meaning that man must on one God believe,  
 And there him liked and loved, in three leodes him shewed.  
 And that it may be so and sooth sheweth it manhood:  
 Wedlock and widowhood with virginity y-named,  
 In tokening of the Trinity was taken out of one man —  
 205 Adam, our all father; Eve was of himself,  
 And the issue that they had, it was of them both,  
 And either is other’s joy in three sundry persons,  
 And in heaven and here one singular name.  
 And thus is mankind and manhead of matrimony y-sprung,  
 210 And betokeneth the Trinity and true belief.  
 “Might is it in matrimony, that multiplieth the earth,  
 And betokeneth truly, tell if I durst, dare  
 Him that first formed all, the Father of heaven.  
 The Son, if I it durst say, resembleth well the widow:  
 215 *Deus meus, Deus meus, ut quid dereliquisti me?*<sup>28</sup>  
 That is, creator waxed creature to know what was both.  
 As widow without wedlock was never yet y-seen,  
 No more might God be man but if he mother had.  
 So widow without wedlock may not well stand,  
 Nor matrimony without mulier is not much to prize: wife

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19. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? *Psalm 22:2, Matthew 27:46*

220 *Maledictus homo qui non reliquit semen in Israel.*<sup>19</sup>

“Thus in three persons is perfectly pure manhood —  
That is, man and his make and mulier their children. *mate; in wedlock*  
And is not but gender of a generation, before Jesu Christ in heaven;  
So is the father forth with the Son and Free Will of both:  
*Spiritus procedens a Patre et Filio &c.*<sup>20</sup>  
Which is the Holy Ghost of all, and all is but one God.

225 “Thus in a summer I him saw as I sat in my porch.  
I rose up and reverenced him, and right fair him greeted.  
Three men, to my sight, I made well at ease,  
Washed their feet and wiped them, and afterward they ate  
Calves’ flesh and cakebread, and knew what I thought.

230 Full true tokens between us is, to tell when me liketh.

“First he fonded me, if I loved better *tested*  
Him or Isaac mine heir, the which he hight me kill. *bid*  
He wiſt my will by him; he will me it allow; *Genesis ch.22*  
I am full secure in my soul thereof, and my son both.

235 “I circumcised my son since for his sake —  
Myself and my meynee and all that male were  
Bled blood for that Lord’s love, and hope to bliss the time.  
Mine affiance and my faith is firm in this belief,  
For himself behight to me and to mine issue both *promised*

240 Land and lordship and life without end.  
To me and to mine issue more yet he me granted —  
Mercy for our misdeeds as many times as we ask:  
*Quam olim Abraham promisiſti et semini eius.*<sup>21</sup>

“And since he sent me, to see I should do sacrifice,  
And do him worship with bread and with wine both,  
245 And called me the foot of his faith, his folk for to save,  
And defend them from the fiend, folk that on me leaned.

“Thus have I been his herald here and in hell,  
And comforted many a careful that after his coming wait;  
And thus I seek him,” he said, “for I heard say late

19. Cursed is the man who has not left offspring in Israel.

20. The Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son.

21. As he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever. *Luke 1:55*



- 250 Of a berne that baptised him — John Baptist was his name—  
 That to patriarchs and to prophets and to other people in darkness  
 Said that he saw here (*he*) that should save us all:  
*Ecce Agnus Dei &c.*<sup>22</sup>  
 I had wonder of his words, and of his wide clothes;  
 For in his bosom he bore a thing, and that he blessed ever.
- 255 And I looked in his lap: a lazar lay therein *leper*  
 Amongst patriarchs and prophets playing together.  
 “What awaiteſt thou?” quoth he, “and what wouldſt thou have?”  
 “I would wit,” quoth I then, “what is in your lap.”  
 “Lo!” quoth he — and let me see. “Lord, mercy!” I said.
- 260 “This is a present of much price; what prince shall it have?”  
 “It is a precious present,” quoth he, “as the puck it hath attacked, *devil*  
 And me therewith,” quoth that wight, “may no wed us quit, *bet; repay*  
 Nor no berne be our borgh, nor bring us from his danger; *man; surety*  
 Out of the puck’s poundfold no mainprise may us fetch *prison; bail*
- 265 Till he come that I carp of: Christ is his name  
 That shall deliver us some day out of the devil’s power,  
 And better wed for us lay than we be all worthy — *pledge*  
 That is, life for life — or lie thus ever  
 Lolling in my lap, till such a lord us fetch.”
- 270 “Alas!” I said, “that sin so long shall let  
 The might of God’s mercy, that might us all amend!”  
 I wept for his words. With that, saw I another  
 Raply run forth the right way he went. *Quicky*  
 I a-frayned him first from whence he came, *asked*
- 275 What he hight and whither he would — and wightly he told. *swiftly*




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22. Behold the Lamb of God. *John* 1:29

## William's Vision of Piers Plowman

### Passus 17

- “**I** am Spes<sup>1</sup>, a sþy,” quoth he, “and sþeer after a knight enquire  
That took me a mandment upon the mount of Sinai  
To rule all realms therewith — I bear the writ here.”
- 5 “Is it a-sealed?” I said. “May men see thy letters?”  
“Nay,” he said, “I seek him that hath the seal to keep —  
And that is cross and Christendom, and Christ thereon to hang.  
And when it is a-sealed so, I wot well the sooth —  
That Lucifer’s lordship last shall no longer!”
- 10 “Let see thy letters,” quoth I, “we might the law know.”  
He plucked forth a patent, a piece of an hard rock, rock  
Whereon was written two words on this wise y-glossed;  
*Dilige Deum et proximum tuum:*<sup>2</sup>  
This was the text truly — I took full good yeme. heed  
The gloss was gloriously written with a gilt pen:  
*In hiis duobus mandatis tota lex pendet et prophete.*<sup>3</sup>
- 15 “Is here all thy lord’s laws?” quoth I. “Yea, lieve me,” he said.  
“And whoso worketh after this writ, I will undertake,  
Shall never devil him dere, nor death in soul grieve. harm  
For though I say it myself, I have saved with this charm  
Of men and of women many score thousand.”
- 20 “He saith sooth,” said this herald, “I have y-found it oft.  
Lo! here in my lap that lied on that charm —  
Joshua and Judith and Judas Maccabeus,  
Yea, and sixty thousand beside forth that be not seen here!”  
“Your words are wonderful,” quoth I then. “Which of you is truest,  
25 And lealest to lieve on for life and for soul?  
Abraham saith that he saw wholly the Trinity,  
Three persons in parcels departable from other,  
And all three but one God —thus Abraham me taught—  
And hath saved that believed so and sorry for their sins,

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1. Hope

2. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God... and thy neighbour. *Matthew* 22:37, 39

3. On these two hang all the law and the prophets. *Matthew* 22:40

30 He can not say the sum, and some are in his lap.  
 What needed it then a new law to bring,  
 Since the first sufficeth to salvation and to bliss?  
 And now cometh *Spes* and *speaketh*, that hath espied the law,  
 And telleth not of the Trinity that took him his letters —  
 35 To believe and love in one Lord Almighty,  
 And since right as myself so love all people.  
 “The gome that goeth with one staff — he seemeth in greater health  
 Than he that goeth with two staves, to sight of us all.  
 And right so, by the rood, reason me sheweth  
 40 It is lighte to lewed men one lesson to know  
 Than for to teach them two, and too hard to learn the least!  
 It is full hard for any man on Abraham believe,  
 And well away worse yet for to love a shrew.  
 It is lighte to lieve in three lovely persons  
 45 Than for to love and lene as well lorels as leal. *give to; wastrels; true*  
 “Go thy gate,” quoth I to *Spes*; “so me God help, *way*  
 Those that learn thy law will little while use it!”  
 And as we went thus in the way, wording together,  
 Then saw we a Samaritan sitting on a mule,  
 50 Riding full raply the right way we went, *quickly; same*  
 Coming from a country that men called Jericho —  
 To a joust in Jerusalem he chased away fast.  
 Both the herald and Hope and he met at once  
 Where a man was, wounded, and with thieves taken.  
 55 He might neither step nor stand, nor stir foot nor hand,  
 Nor help himself soothly, for *semi-vif* he seemed, *half-live*  
 And as naked as a needle, and none help about.  
 Faith had first sight of him, as he fled aside,  
 And nolde not nigh him by nine land’s length. *would not*  
 60 Hope came hopping after, that had so y-boasted  
 How he with Moses’ mandment had many men y-helped;  
 As when he had sight of that segge, aside he gan him draw  
 Dreadfully, by this day, as duck doth from the falcon!  
 As so soon so the Samaritan had sight of this leode, *man*  
 65 He light a-down of liard and laid him in his hands, *grey horse*

- And to the wight he went his wounds to behold,  
 And perceived by his pulse he was in peril to die,  
 And but if he had recoverer the rather, that rise should he never;      *soon*  
 And braid to his bottles, and both he attamed.      *hastened; cut*  
 70 With wine and with oil his wounds he washed,  
 Embalmed him and bound his head, and in his lap him laid,      *annointed*  
 And laid him so forth on liard to *Lex Christi*,<sup>4</sup> a grange      *grey horse*  
 Well six mile or seven beside the new market;  
 Harboured him at an hostry and to the hosteller called,      *inn*  
 75 And said, "Have, keep this man, till I come from the jousts,  
 And lo, here silver," he said, "for salve to his wounds."  
 And he took him two pence to livelihood as it were,  
 And said, "What he more sþendeth I make thee good hereafter,  
 For I may not let," quoth that leode — and liard he bestrideth,  
 80 And rapped him to Jerusalem-ward the right way to ride.  
     Faith followed after fast, and fonded to meet him,      *tried*  
 And *Spes* sþrackly him sþed, sþeed if he might      *swiftly*  
 To overtake him and talk to him ere they to town came.  
     And when I saw this, I sojourned not, but shaped me to run,  
 85 And sued that Samaritan that was so full of pity,  
 And granted him to be his groom. "Grant mercy," he said,  
 "As thy friend and thy fellow," quoth he, "thou findeþ me at need."  
     And I thanked him then and since I him told  
 How that Faith fled away and *Spes* his fellow both  
 90 For sight of the sorrowful segge that robbed was with thieves.  
     "Have them excused," quoth he, "their help may little avail:  
 May no medicine under molde the man to health bring —      *earth*  
 Neither Faith nor fine Hope, so festered be his wounds,  
 Without the blood of a bairn born of a maid.  
 95 And be he bathed in that blood, baptised as it were,  
 And then plastered with penance and passion of that baby,  
 He should stand and step — as stalwart worth he never      *will be*  
 Till he have eaten all the barn and his blood y-drunk.  
 For went never wye in this world through that wilderness  
 100 That he ne was robbed or rifled, rode he there or yede,      *walked*

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4. the Law of Christ.

Save Faith and his fellow *Spes* and myself,  
And thyself now and such as sue our works.

*follow*

“For Outlaw is in the wood and under bank loteth,  
And may each man see and good mark take

*lurks*

105 Who is behind and who before and who be on horse —

For he halt him hardier on horse than he that is a-foot.

*holds*

For he saw me that am Samaritan sue Faith and his fellow

On my caple that hight *Caro* — of mankind I took it—

*horse; Flesh*

He was unhardy, that harlot, and hid him *in Inferno*.

*Hell*

110 Ac ere this day three days, I dare undertake

That he worth fettered, that fellow, fast with chains,

*will be*

And never eft grieve gome that goeth this ilk gate:

*again; same way*

*O Mors ero mors tua &c.*<sup>5</sup>

“And then shall Faith be forester here and in this frith walk,

*forest*

And ken out common men that know not the country,

115 Which is the way I went, and where forth to Jerusalem;

And Hope, the hosteller’s man, shall be there a-healing the man lieth,

And all that feeble and faint be, that Faith may not teach,

Hope shall lead them forth with love, as his letter telleth,

And hostel them and heal through Holy Church’s believe

120 Till I have salve for all sick — and then shall I return,

And come again by this country and comfort all sick

That craveth it or coveteth it and crieth thereafter.

For the bairn was born in Bethlem that with his blood shall save

All that live in Faith and follow his fellow’s teaching.”

125 “Ah, sweet sire!” I said then, “where I shall believe —

As Faith and his fellow informed me both —

In three persons departable that perpetual were ever,

And all three but one God? Thus Abraham me taught;

And Hope afterward he bade me to love

130 O God with all my good, and all gomes after,

Love them like myself — as Our Lord above all.”

“After Abraham,” quoth he, “that herald of arms,

Set fast thy faith and firm belief;

And as Hope hight thee, I hote that thou love

*bade; bid*

5. O Death, I will be thy death. *Hosea* 13:14

- 135 Thine even-christen evermore evenforth with thyself.  
 And if conscience carp thereagain, or kind wit either,  
 Or heretics with arguments — thine hand thou them shew:  
 For God is after an hand — hear now and know it. like
- “The Father was first as a fist with one finger folded,  
 140 Till him loved and list to unlose his finger  
 And proffered it forth as with a palm to what place it should.  
 The palm is purely the hand, and proffereth forth the fingers,  
 To minister and to make that might of hand knoweth;  
 And betokeneth truly, tell whoso liketh,  
 145 The Holy Ghost of heaven — he is as the palm.  
 The fingers that free be to fold and to serve  
 Betoken soothly the Son, that sent was to earth,  
 That touched and tasted at teaching of the palm  
 Saint Mary, a maid, and mankind laught: took  
*Qui conceptus est de spiritu sancto &c.*<sup>6</sup>
- 150 “The Father is then as a fist with finger to touch  
*(Quia ‘Omnia traham ad me ipsum &c.’)*<sup>7</sup>  
 All that the palm perceiveth profitable to feel.  
 Thus are they all but one, as it an hand were,  
 And three sundry sights in one shewing.  
 The palm, for he put forth fingers and the fist both,  
 155 Right so, readily, reason it sheweth,  
 How he that is Holy Ghost Sire and Son proveth.  
 And as the hand halt hard and all thing fast holds  
 Through four fingers and a thumb forth with the palm,  
 Right so the Father and the Son and Saint Spirit the third  
 160 Halt all the wide world within them three — Holds  
 Both welkin and the wind, water and earth, sky  
 Heaven and hell and all that there is in.  
 Thus it is — needeth no man to trow none other—  
 That three things belongeth in Our Lord of heaven,  
 165 And are serelepes by themselves, asunder were they never, separately  
 No more than may an hand move without fingers.

6. Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost. *Creed*

7. For, ‘I will draw all men unto me.’ *John* 12:32

“And as my fist is full hand y-folded together,  
So is the Father a full God, former and shaper:

*Tu fabricator omnium &c.*<sup>8</sup>

And all the might mid him is in making of things.

170 “The fingers form a full hand to portray or paint;

Carving and compassing is craft of the fingers.

*designing*

Right so is the Son the science of the Father

And full God as is the Father, no feebler nor no better.

“The palm is purely the hand, hath power by himself

175 Otherwise than the writhen fist, or workmanship of fingers;

*clenched*

For the palm hath power to put out the joints

And to unfold the fist, for him it belongeth,

And receive that the fingers reacheth and refuse both

When he feeleth the fist and the fingers’ will.

180 “So is the Holy Ghost God, neither greater nor less

Than is the Sire or the Son, and in the same might,

And all are they but one God, as is mine hand and my fingers,

Unfolded or folded, my fist and my palm —

All is but an hand, howso I turn it.

185 “As who is hurt in the hand, even in the midst,

He may receive right naught — reason it sheweth;

*hold*

For the fingers that fold should and the fist make,

For pain of the palm, power them faileth

To clutch or to claw, to clip or to hold.

190 “Were the middle of mine hand y-maimed or y-perished,

I should receive right naught of that I reach might;

As though my thumb and my fingers both were to-shullen

*peeled*

And the middle of mine hand without mal-ease,

In many kinds manners I might myself help

195 Both move and amend, though all my fingers ache.

“By this skill,” he said, I see an evidence

That whoso sinneth in the Saint Spirit, absolved worth he never, *will be*

Neither here nor elsewhere, as I heard tell —

*Qui peccat in Spiritum Sanctum &c.*<sup>9</sup>

8. Thou art the creator of all things.

9. But he that shall sin against the Holy Spirit (shall never have forgiveness.) *Mark* 3:29

- For he pricketh God as in the palm, that *peccat in Spiritum Sanctum*.
- 200 For God the Father is as a fist; the Son is as a finger;  
The Holy Ghost of heaven is as it were the palm.  
So whoso sinneth against the Saint Spirit, it seemeth that he grieveth  
God that he gripeth with, and would his grace quench.  
“For to a torch or a taper the Trinity is likened —
- 205 As wax and a wick were twined together,  
And then a fire flaming forth out of both.  
And as wax and wick and warm fire together  
Foster forth a flame and a fair leye *light*
- 208a That serveth these swinkers to see by a-nights, *workers*  
So doth the Sire and the Son and also *Spiritus Sanctus* *Holy Spirit*
- 210 Foster forth amongst folk love and belief,  
That all kind Christen cleanseth of sins.  
And as thou seeest sometime suddenly a torch —  
The blaze thereof y-blown out, yet burneth the wick —  
Without leye or light, that low the match burneth; *flame*
- 215 So is the Holy Ghost God, and grace without mercy  
To all unkind creatures that covet to destroy  
Leal love or life that Our Lord shaped.  
“And as glowing gleeds gladdeneth not these workmen *coals*  
That work and wake in winter’s nights,
- 220 As doth a kex or a candle that caught hath fire and blazeth, *stalk*  
No more doth Sire nor Son nor Saint Spirit together  
Grant no grace nor forgiveness of sins  
Till the Holy Ghost gin to glow and to blaze; *begin*  
So that the Holy Ghost gloweth but as a gleed
- 225 Till that leal love lie on him and blow.  
And then flameth he as fire on Father and on *Filius*  
And melteth their might into mercy — as men may see in winter  
Icicles in eavesings through heat of the sun *eaves*  
Melt in a minute-while to mist and to water.
- 230 “So grace of the Holy Ghost the great might of the Trinity  
Melteth to mercy — to merciable and to none other.  
And as wax without more on a warm gleed  
Will burn and blaze, be they together,



- And solace them that may not see, that sit in darkness,  
 235 So will the Father forgive folk of mild hearts  
 That ruefully repent and restitution make,  
 In as much as they must amend and pay;  
 And if it suffice not for assets, that in such a will dieth,  
 Mercy for his meekness will make good the remnant.  
 240 And as the wick and fire will make a warm flame  
 For to mirth men with that in murk sit, *gladden; darkness*  
 So will Christ of his courtesy, and men cry him mercy,  
 Both forgive and forget, and yet bid for us  
 To the Father of heaven forgiveness to have.  
 245 "As hew fire at a flint four hundred winter — *strike*  
 But thou have tache to take it with, tinder or broches, *touchwood*  
 All thy labour is lost and all thy long travail;  
 For may no fire flame make, fail it his kind.  
 So is the Holy Ghost God and grace without mercy  
 250 To all unkind creatures — Christ himself witnesseth:  
*Amen dico vobis, nescio vos &c.*<sup>10</sup>  
 "Be unkind to thine even-christen, and all that thou canst bid —  
 Deal and do penance day and night ever,  
 And purchase all the pardon of Pamplona and Rome,  
 And indulgences enough, and be *ingratus* to thy kind, *ungrateful*  
 255 The Holy Ghost heareth thee not, nor help may thee by reason;  
 For unkindness quencheth him, that he can not shine,  
 Nor burn nor blaze clear, for blowing of unkindness.  
 Paul the Apostle proveth whether I lie:  
*Si linguis hominum loquar &c.*<sup>11</sup>  
 260 "Forth be ware, ye wise men that with the world dealeth,  
 That rich be and reason knoweth — ruleth well your soul;  
 Be not unkind, I counsel you, to your even-christen;  
 For many of you rich men, by my soul, men telleth,  
 Ye burn, but ye blaze not, and that is a blind beacon! *Matthew 5:14-16*  
*Non omnis qui dicit Domine, Domine, intrabit &c.*<sup>12</sup>

10. Verily, I say unto you, I know you not. *Matthew 25:12*

11. If I speak with the tongues of men. *1 Corinthians 13:1*

12. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.

*Matthew 7:21*

- 265 “*Dives*<sup>13</sup> died damned for his unkindness  
 Of his meat and his money to men that it needed.  
 Each a rich, I read, reward at him take, *advise; heed*  
 And giveth your goods to (*him*) that God that grace of ariseth.  
 For that be unkind to his, hope I none other
- 270 But they dwell where *Dives* is, days without end.  
 “Thus is unkindness the contrary that quencheth, as it were,  
 The grace of the Holy Ghost, God’s own kind.  
 For what kind doeth, unkind for-doeth — as these cursed thieves,  
 Unkind Christen men, for covetousness and envy
- 275 Slayeth a man for his moebles, with mouth or with hands. *belongings*  
 For that the Holy Ghost hath to keep, then harlots destroyeth:  
 The which is life and love, the leye of man’s body. *flame*  
 For every manner good man may be likened to a torch,  
 Or else to a taper, to reverence the Trinity;
- 280 And whoso murdereth a good man, me thinketh, by mine in-wit,  
 He for-doeth the liefest light that Our Lord loveth.  
 “As yet in many more manners men offend the Holy Ghost;  
 As this is the worst wise that any wight might *way; man*  
 Sin against the Saint Spirit — assent to destroy
- 285 For covetousness of any kind thing that Christ dear bought.  
 How might he ask mercy, or any mercy him help  
 That wickedly and wilfully would mercy aniente? *anihilate*  
 “Innocence is next (*to*) God, and night and day it crieth  
 ‘Vengeance! Vengeance!’ Forgive be it never
- 290 That shent us and shed our blood — for-shaped us, as it seemed:  
*Vindica sanguinem iustorum.*”<sup>14</sup>  
 Thus ‘Vengeance, vengeance!’ very charity asketh; *true*  
 And since Holy Church and charity chargeth this so sore,  
 Lieve I never that Our Lord will love that charity lacketh,  
 Nor have pity for any prayer that he plaineth there.”
- 295 “I pose I had sinned so, and should now die, *suppose*  
 And now am sorry that I so the Saint Spirit a-guilted, *offended*  
 Confess me and cry his grace, God that all made,

13. *Luke* 16:19-31

14. Revenge the blood of the just!

And mildly his mercy ask — might I not be saved?”

“Yes,” said the Samaritan, “so thou might repent

300 That righteousness through repentance to ruth might turn.  
As it is but seldom y-seen, where soothness beareth witness,  
Any creature be culpable before a king’s justice,  
Be ransomed for his repentance where all reason him damneth.  
For where that party pursueth, the peal is so huge *accusation*

305 That the king may do no mercy till both men accord  
And either have equity, as holy writ telleth:

*Numquam dimittitur peccatum &c.*<sup>15</sup>

Thus it fareth by such folk that falsely all their lives  
Evil live and let not till life them forsake.

Dread of desperation then driveth away grace,

310 That mercy in their mind may not then fall;  
Good hope, that help should, to wanhope turneth: *despair*  
Not of the non-power of God, that he ne is mightful *impotence*  
To amend all that amiss is, and his mercy greater  
Then all our wicked works, as Holy Writ telleth —

*Misericordia eius super omnia opera eius:*<sup>17</sup>

315 As ere his righteousness to ruth turn, some restitution behoveth:  
His sorrow is satisfaction for such that may not pay.

“Three things there be that do a man by strength  
For to flee his own house, as Holy Writ sheweth.

That one is a wicked wife that will not be chastised:

320 Her fere fleeth her for fear of her tongue. *spouse*  
And if his house be unhiled, and rain on his bed, *uncovered*  
He seeketh and seeketh till he sleep dry.

And when smoke and smoulder smite in his sight,

It doth him worse than his wife or wet to sleep. *wet weather*

325 For smoke and smoulder smarteth his eyes  
Till he be blear-eyed or blind and the burr in the throat,  
Cougheth and curseth that Christ give him sorrow  
That should bring in better wood, or blow it till it burn!

“These three that I tell of thus be to understand:

15. The sin is never forgiven (until what is stolen is returned). St Augustine

16. His mercy is over all his works. *Psalm 145:9*

- 330 The wife is our wicked flesh that will not be chastised,  
 For kind cleaveth on him ever to contrary the soul. *nature*  
 And though it fall, it found skills, that 'Frailty it made,' *excuses*  
 And 'That is lightly forgiven and forgotten both  
 To man that mercy asketh and amend thinketh.'"
- 335 "The rain that raineth where we rest should  
 Be sicknesses and other sorrows that we suffer ought,  
 As Paul the Apostle to the people taught:  
*Virtus in infirmitate perficitur.*<sup>17</sup>
- And though that men make much dole in their anger, *pain*  
 And be impatient in their penance, pure reason knoweth
- 340 That they have cause to contrary, by kind of their sickness; *virtue*  
 And lightly Our Lord at their lives' end  
 Hath mercy on such men, that so evil may suffer.  
 "As the smoke and the smoulder that smite in our eyes,  
 That is covetousness and unkindness, that quencheth God's mercy.
- 345 For unkindness is the contrary of all kinds reason;  
 For there nys sick nor sorry, nor none so much wretch *is not*  
 That he ne may love, and him like, and lene of his heart *grant*  
 Good will, good word — both wish and will  
 All manner men mercy and forgiveness,
- 350 And love them like himself, and his life amend.  
 "I may no longer let!" quoth he, and liard he pricked, *horse; spurred*  
 And went away as wind — and therewith I awaked.




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17. For my strength is made perfect in weakness. 2 *Corinthians* 12:9

# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 18

WOOL-WARD and wetshod went I forth after in wool  
As a reckless renk that of no woe recketh, man; cares  
And went forth like a lorel all my lifetime, wastrel  
Till I waxed weary of the world and willed eft to sleep, again  
5 And leaned me to a Lent — and long time I slept;  
Rested me there and routed fast till *ramis palmarum*.<sup>1</sup> snored  
Of gurlles and of *Gloria, laus*<sup>2</sup> greatly me dreamed children  
And how *Hosanna* by organ old folk sung,  
And of Christ's passion and penance, the people that a-fraught. filled  
10 One semblable to the Samaritan, and something to Piers the Plowman,  
Barefoot on an ass's back bootless came prick(ing), riding fast  
Without spurs other spear; sprackly he looked, lively  
As is the kind of a knight that cometh to be dubbed,  
To get him gilt spurs on galoshes y-couped. shoes slashed  
15 Then was Faith in a fenester, and cried "*A Filii David!*"<sup>3</sup> window  
As doth an herald of arms when adventurous cometh to jousts.  
Old Jews of Jerusalem for joy they sung,  
*Benedictus qui venit in nomine Domini*.<sup>4</sup>  
Then I frayned at Faith what all that fare be-meant, asked  
And who should joust in Jerusalem. "Jesus," he said,  
20 "And fetch that the fiend claimeth — Piers the Plowman's fruit."  
"Is Piers in this place?" quoth I, and he preynte on me. winked  
"This Jesus of his gentrice will joust in Piers' arms, nobility  
In his helm and in his hauberk — *humana natura*.<sup>5</sup>  
That Christ be not beknown here for *consummatus Deus*,<sup>6</sup>  
25 In Piers the Plowman's paltock this pricker shall ride; jacket; horseman  
For no dint shall him dere as *in deitate Patris*.<sup>7</sup> harm

1. Palm Sunday

2. Glory, praise

3. to the Son of David.

4. Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord. *Matthew* 21:9

5. human nature

6. true God

7. in the Godhead of the Father

- “Who shall joust with Jesus?” quoth I, “Jews or scribes?”  
 “Nay,” quoth Faith, “but the fiend and false doom to die.  
 Death saith he shall for-do and a-down bring *destroy*  
 30 All that liveth or looketh in land or in water.  
 Life saith that he lieth, and layeth his life to wed *bet*  
 That, for all that Death can do, within three days to walk  
 And fetch from the fiend Piers the Plowman’s fruit,  
 And lay it where he liketh, and Lucifer bind,  
 35 And forbeat and a-down bring bale-death for ever:  
*O Mors ero mors tua!*<sup>8</sup>  
 Then came *Pilatus* with much people, *sedens pro tribunali*,<sup>9</sup>  
 To see how doughtily Death should do, and deem them both right.  
 The Jews and the justices agaiñst Jesus they were,  
 And all the court on him cried “*Crucifige!*”<sup>10</sup> sharp.  
 40 Then put him forth a pealer before Pilate and said, *accuser*  
 “This Jesus of our Jews’ temple japed and despised,  
 To for-do it on one day, and in three days after *destroy*  
 Edify it eft new —here he stands that said it—  
 And yet make it as much in all manner points  
 45 Both as long and as large aloft and by ground.”  
 “*Crucifige!*” quoth a catchpole, “I warrant him a witch!” *tax-collector*  
 “*Tolle, tolle!*”<sup>10</sup> quoth another, and took of keen thorns,  
 And began of keen thorn a garland to make,  
 And set it sore on his head and said in envy,  
 50 “*Ave, rabbi,*” quoth that ribald — and threw reeds at him,  
 Nailed him with three nails naked on the rood,  
 And poison on a pole they put up to his lips,  
 And bade him drink his death-evil —his days were y-done—  
 And said, “If that thou subtle be, help now thyself;  
 55 If thou be Christ and king’s son, come down off the rood;  
 Then shall we lieve that life thee loveth and will not let thee die!”  
 “*Consummatum est,*”<sup>11</sup> quoth Christ, and comsed for to swoon,

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8. O Death, I will be thy death!

9. sitting before the tribunal

10. Crucify! Away with him! *John* 19:15

11. It is finished. *John* 19:30

- Piteously and pale as a prisoner that dieth;  
 The lord of life and of light then laid his eyes together.  
 60 The day for dread withdrew and dark became the sun.  
 The wall wagged and cleft, and all the world quavered. *shook*  
 Dead men for that din came out of deep graves,  
 And told why that tempest so long time dured.  
 “For a bitter battle,” the dead body said;  
 65 “Life and Death in this darkness, the one for-doeth the other.  
 Shall no wight wit witterly who shall have the mastery  
 Ere Sunday about sun rising” — and sank with that to earth.  
 Some said that he was God’s son, that so fair died:  
*Vere Filius Dei erat iste.*<sup>12</sup>  
 And some said he was a witch — “Good is that we assay *test*  
 70 Whether he be dead or not dead, down ere he be taken.”  
 Two thieves also tholed death that time *suffered*  
 Upon a cross besides Christ — so was the common law.  
 A catchpole came forth and cracked both their legs,  
 And their arms after of either of those thieves.  
 75 As was no boy so bold God’s body to touch;  
 For he was knight and king’s son, Kind forgave that throw *suffering*  
 That no harlot were so hardy to lay hand upon him.  
 As there came forth a knight with a keen spear y-ground,  
 Hight *Longinus*, as the letter telleth, and long had lost his sight.  
 80 Before Pilate and other people in the place he hoved.  
 Maugree his many teeth, he was made that time *in spite of*  
 To joust with Jesus, this blind Jew *Longinus*.  
 For all they were unhardy, that hoved on horse or stood,  
 To touch him or to taste him or take him down off rood,  
 85 But this blind bachelor, that bored him through the heart.  
 The blood sprung down by the spear and un-sparred the knight’s eyes. *unclosed*
- Then fell the knight upon knees and cried Jesu mercy:  
 “Against my will it was, Lord, to wound you so sore!”  
 He sighed and said, “Sore it me a-thinketh!”  
 90 For the deed that I have done I do me in your grace.

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12. Truly this was the Son of God. *Matthew 27:54*

- Have on me ruth, rightful Jesu!" and right with that he wept.  
 Then gan Faith felly the false Jews despise — *cruelly*  
 Called them caitives accursed for ever:  
 "For this foul villainy vengeance to you all!  
 95 To do the blind beat him y-bound, it was a boy's counsel. *make*  
 Cursed caitives! Knighthood was it never  
 To mis-do a dead body by day or by night.  
 The gree yet hath he got, for all his great wound. *prize*  
 "For your champion chevalier, chief knight of you all,  
 100 Yields him recreant running, right at Jesus' will. *traitor*  
 For be this darkness y-done, Death worth y-vanquished;  
*will be*  
 And ye, lurdanes, have y-lost — for Life shall have the mastery. *dullards*  
 And your franchise, that free was, fallen is in thraldom,  
 And ye, churls, and your children, chieve shall ye never, *achieve*  
 105 Nor have lordship in land, nor no land till,  
 But all barren be and usury use,  
 Which is life that Our Lord in all laws accurseth.  
 Now your good days are done, as Daniel prophesied:  
 When Christ came their kingdom the crown should lose —  
*Cum veniat sanctus sanctorum cessabit unctio vestra.*<sup>13</sup>  
 110 What for fear of this ferly and of the false Jews, *marvel*  
 I drew me in that darkness to *descendit ad inferna*,<sup>14</sup>  
 And there I saw soothly, *secundum scripturas*,<sup>14</sup>  
 Out of the west coast, a wench, as me thought,  
 Came walking in the way; to hell-ward she looked.  
 115 Mercy hight that maid, a meek thing withal, *is called*  
 A full benign bird, and buxom of speech. *lady*  
 Her sister, as it seemed, came softly walking  
 Even out of the east, and westward she looked —  
 A full comely creature and a-clean, Truth she hight;  
 120 For the virtue that her followed, a-feared was she never.  
 When these maidens met, Mercy and Truth,  
 Either asked other of this great wonder —

13. When the Holy of Holies comes, your annointed shall come to an end. Pseudo-Augustine, *Sermo contra iudaeos, paganos et arianos*, Ch. 12 (PL 42, 1124)

14. he descended into Hell, according to the Scriptures. (from the Creed)



- Of the din and of the darkness, and how the day rowed,  
 And which a light and a leam lay before hell.
- 125 “I have ferly of this fare, in faith,” said Truth, *gleam*  
 “And am wending to wit what this wonder meaneth.” *wonder; event*  
 “Have no marvel,” quoth Mercy, “mirth it betokeneth.  
 A maiden that hight Mary, and mother without feeling *sex*  
 Of any kind creature, conceived through speech  
 130 And grace of the Holy Ghost; waxed great with child;  
 Without wem into this world she brought him; *stain*  
 And that my tale be true, I take God to witness.  
 “Since this bairn was y-born by thirty winter passed,  
 Which died and death tholed this day about midday  
 135 And that is cause of this clipse that closeth now the sun, *eclipse*  
 In meaning that man shall from murkness be drawn  
 The while this light and this leam shall Lucifer a-blind.  
 For patriarchs and prophets have preached hereof often —  
 That man shall man save through a maiden’s help,  
 140 And that was tynt through tree, tree shall it win, *what; lost*  
 And that Death down brought, death shall relieve.”  
 “That thou tellest,” quoth Truth, “is but a tale of waltrot! *nonsense*  
 For Adam and Eve and Abraham with others  
 Patriarchs and prophets that in pain lie,  
 145 Lieve thou never that yon light them aloft bring, *bring*  
 Nor have them out of hell — hold thy tongue, Mercy!  
 It is but trifle that thou tellest — I, Truth, wot the sooth.  
 For that is once in hell, out cometh it never;  
 Job the prophet patriarch re-proveth thy sayings:  
*Quia in inferno nulla est redemptio.*<sup>15</sup>  
 150 Then Mercy full mildly mouthed these words:  
 “Through experience,” quoth he, “I hope they shall be saved.  
 For venom for-doeth venom — and that I prove by reason.  
 For of all venoms foulest is the scorpion;  
 May no medicine amend the place where he stingeth,  
 155 Till he be dead and do thereto — the evil he destroyeth,  
 The first venom, through virtue of himself.

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15. For in hell there is no salvation.

- So shall this death for-do — I dare my life lay— destroy; wager  
 All that death did first through the devil's enticing;  
 And right as through guiler's guile beguiled was man,  
 160 So shall grace that all began make a good end  
 And beguile the guiler — and that is good sleight:  
*Ars ut artem falleret.*<sup>16</sup>  
 "Now suffer we!" said Truth, "I see, as me thinketh,  
 Out of the nip of the north, not full far hence,  
 Righteousness come running; rest we the while,  
 165 For she wot more than we — she was ere we both."  
 "That is sooth," said Mercy, "and I see here by south  
 Where cometh Peace playing, in patience y-clothed.  
 Love hath coveted her long — lieve I none other  
 But he sent her some letter, what this light bemeaneth  
 170 That overhoveth hell thus; she us shall tell."  
 When Peace in patience y-clothed approached near them twain,  
 Righteousness her revered for her rich clothing,  
 And prayed Peace to tell her to what place she would  
 And in her gay garments whom she greet thought?  
 175 "My will is to wend," quoth she, "and welcome them all  
 That many day might I not see for murkiness of sin —  
 Adam and Eve and other more in hell,  
 Moses and many more have Mercy shall,  
 And I shall dance thereto — do thou so, sister!  
 180 For Jesus jousted well, joy beginneth day:  
*Ad vesperum demorabitur fletus, et ad matutinum laetitia.*<sup>17</sup>  
 "Love, that is my leman, such letters he me sent  
 That Mercy, my sister, and I mankind should save,  
 And that God hath forgiven and granted me, Peace, and Mercy  
 To be man's mainpennor for evermore after. surety  
 185 Lo, here the patent!" quoth Peace, "*In pace in idipsum,*<sup>18</sup>  
 And that this deed shall dure, *dormiam et requiescam.*"<sup>18</sup> endure  
 "What, rave'st thou?" quoth Righteousness; "or thou art right drunk!"

16. Guile by guile shall be brought down. Fortunatus, *Pange lingua*

17. Heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning. *Psalm* 30:5

18. I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest. *Psalm* 4:9

- Lievest thou that yonder light unlock might hell  
 And save man's soul? Sister, ween it never! *suppose*  
 190 At the beginning God gave the doom himself — *judgment*  
 That Adam and Eve and all that them sued  
 Should die downright, and dwell in pain after  
 If that they touched a tree and of the fruit eaten.  
 Adam afterward, against his defence,  
 195 Freet of that fruit, and forsook, as it were, *Ate*  
 The love of Our Lord and his lore both  
 And followed that the fiend taught and his fellow's will  
 Against reason — I, Righteousness, record thus with Truth  
 That their pain be perpetual and no prayer them help.  
 200 Forth let them chew as they chose, and chide we not, sisters,  
 For it is bootless bale, the bite that they ate." *endless torment*  
 "And I shall pray," quoth Peace, "their pain must have end,  
 And woe into well must wend at the last.  
 For had they wist of no woe, well had they not known;  
 205 For no wight wot what well is, that never woe suffered,  
 Nor what is hight hunger, that had never default. *called*  
 If no night ne were, no man, as I lieve,  
 Should wit witterly what day is to mean. *understand truly*  
 Should never right rich man that liveth in rest and ease  
 210 Wit what woe is, ne were the death of kind. *natural death*  
 So God that began all of his good will  
 Became man of a maid mankind to save,  
 And suffered to be sold, to see the sorrow of dying,  
 The which unknitteth all care, and commencing is of rest.  
 215 For till *modicum* mete with us, I may it well avow, *a little; measures*  
 Wot no wight, as I ween, what is enough to mean.  
 "Forth God, of his goodness, the first come Adam,  
 Set him in solace and in sovereign mirth;  
 And since he suffered him sin, sorrow to feel —  
 220 To wit what well was, kindly to know it.  
 And after, God a-ventured himself and took Adam's kind,  
 To wit what he hath suffered in three sundry places,  
 Both in heaven and in earth — and now to hell he thinketh,

- To wit what all woe is, that wot of all joy.
- 225 “So it shall fare by this folk: their folly and their sin  
 Shall learn them what languor is, and liss without end. bliss  
 Wot no wight what war is where that peace reigneth,  
 Nor what is witterly well till I ‘well-away’ him teach.” sorrow
- 230 Then was there a wight with two broad eyes;  
 Book hight that *beau-père*, a bold man of sþeech.  
 “By God’s body!” quoth this Book, “I will bear witness  
 That when this bairn was y-born, there blazed a star  
 That all the wise of this world in one wit accorded —  
 That such a bairn was y-born in Bethlehem the city
- 235 That man’s soul should save and sin destroy.  
 “And all the elements,” quoth the Book, “hereof bear witness.  
 That he was God that all wrought the welkin first shewed: sky  
 Those that were in heaven took *stella cometa* comet  
 And tended her as a torch to reverence his birth;
- 240 The light followed the Lord into the low earth.  
 The water witnesseth that he was God, for he went on it;  
 Peter the Apostle perceived his gate, way  
 And as he went on the water well him knew, and said,  
 ‘*Tube me venire ad te super aquas.*’<sup>19</sup>
- 245 And lo! how the sun gan lock her light in herself  
 When she saw him suffer, that sun and sea made.  
 The earth for heaviness that he would suffer  
 Quaked as (*a*) quick thing and all be-quashed the rock. living
- 250 “Lo! hell might not hold, but open when God tholed, suffered  
 And let out Simeon’s sons to see him hang on rood.  
 And now shall Lucifer lieve it, though him loath think.  
 For Gigas the giant with a gin engined contrivance  
 To break and to beat a-down that be against Jesus.  
 And I, Book, will be burnt, but Jesus rise to life
- 255 In all might of man, and his mother gladly,  
 And comfort all his kin and out of care bring, grief  
 And all the Jews’ joy enjoin and unlock;  
 And but they reverence his rood and his resurrection,

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19. Bid me come unto thee on the water. *Matthew* 14:28

- And believe on a new law, be loſt, life and ſoul!"  
 260 "Suffer we!" ſaid Truth, "I here and ſee both  
 A ſpirit ſpeaketh to hell and bids un-ſpar the gates: *open*  
 'Attolite portas.'<sup>20</sup>  
 A voice loud in that light to Lucifer crieth,  
 "Prince of this place, unpinneth and unlocketh!  
 For here cometh with crown that king is of glory."  
 265 Then ſighed Satan, and ſaid to hell,  
 "Such a light, againſt our leave, Lazarus it fetched;  
 Care and cumbrance is come to us all! *Grief; burden*  
 If this king come in, mankind will he fetch,  
 And lead it where Lazarus is, and lightly me bind. *easily*  
 270 Patriarchs and prophets have parled hereof long — *ſpoken*  
 That ſuch a lord and a light ſhall lead them all hence."  
 "Liſteneth!" quoth Lucifer, "for I this lord know;  
 Both this lord and this light, is long ago I knew him.  
 May no death this lord dere, ne no devil's quantise, *harm; ſkill*  
 275 And where he will, is his way — as ware him of the perils!  
 If he reave me of my right, he robbeth me by maſtery; *robs*  
 For by right and by reaſon the renks that be here,  
 Body and ſoul, be mine, both good and ill.  
 For himſelf ſaid, that ſire is of heaven,  
 280 That if Adam ate the apple, all ſhould die,  
 And dwell in dole with us devils — this threating he made.  
 And ſince he that Soothneſs is ſaid theſe words,  
 And I ſince y-ſaw ſeventy hundred winter,  
 I lieve that law will not let him the leaſt."  
 285 "That is ſooth," ſaid Satan, "but I me ſore dread;  
 For thou got them with guile, and his garden broke,  
 And in ſemblance of a ſerpent ſet on the apple tree,  
 And egged them to eat, Eve by herſelf, *goaded*  
 And toldeſt her a tale — of treaſon were the words;  
 290 And ſo thou haddeſt them out and hither at the laſt.  
 It is not graithly got, where guile is the root!" *readily*  
 "For God will not be beguiled," quoth Goblin, "nor be-japed. *fooled*

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20. Lift up your heads, O ye gates. *Psalm 24:9*

- We have no true title to them, for through treason were they damned.”  
 “Certes, I dread me,” quoth the Devil, “lest Truth will them fetch.  
 295 These thirty winter, as I ween, he went about and preached.  
 I have assailed him with sin, and sometime I asked  
 Whether he were God or God’s son — he gave me short answer;  
 And thus hath he trolled forth these two and thirty winter. *wandered*  
 And when I saw it was so, sleeping I went  
 300 To warn Pilate’s wife what done man was Jesus; *kind of*  
 For Jews hated him and had done him to death.  
 I would have lengthened his life — for I lieved, if he died,  
 That his soul would not suffer no sin in his sight;  
 For the body, while it on bones went, about was ever  
 305 To save men from sin if themselves would.  
 And now I see where a soul cometh sailing hitherward  
 With glory and with great light — God it is, I wot well!  
 I read we flee,” quoth he, “fast all hence — *advise*  
 For us were better not be than bide his sight.  
 310 For thy leasings, Lucifer, loſt is all our prey. *lies*  
 Firſt through thee we fell from heaven so high;  
 For we lieved thy leasings, we leapt out all with thee;  
 And now for thy laſt leasing, y-lorn we have Adam, *loſt*  
 And all our lordship, I lieve, at land and at water:  
*Nunc princeps huius mundi ejicietur foras.*<sup>21</sup>  
 315 Eft the light bade unlock, and Lucifer answered, *Again*  
*“Quis eſt iſte?”*<sup>22</sup>  
 What lord art thou?” quoth Lucifer. The light soon said,  
*“Rex glorie,”*<sup>22</sup>  
 The lord of might and of main and all manner virtues:  
*Dominus virtutum.*<sup>22</sup>  
 320 Dukes of this dim place, anon undo these gates,  
 That Chriſt may come in, the King’s son of Heaven!”  
 And with that breath hell brake, with Belial’s bars —  
 For any wight or ward, wide open the gates.

21. Now shall the prince of this world be cast out. *John* 12:31

22. Who is this? The King of Glory. The Lord of hosts. *Psalms* 24:10

- Patriarchs and prophets, *populus in tenebris*,<sup>23</sup>  
 325 Sang Saint John's song, "*Ecce Agnus Dei*."<sup>24</sup>  
 Lucifer look ne might, so light him a-blinded.  
 And those that Our Lord loved, into his light he laught, took  
 And said to Satan, "Lo! here my soul to amend  
 For all sinful souls, to save those that be worthy.  
 330 Mine they be and of me — I may the best them claim.  
 Although reason record, and right of myself,  
 That if they eat the apple, all should die,  
 I be-hight them not here hell for ever. commanded  
 For the deed that they did, thy deceit it made;  
 335 With guile thou them got, against all reason.  
 For in my palace, Paradise, in person of an adder,  
 Falsely thou fetchest there thing that I loved.  
 "Thus y-like a lizard with a lady's visage,  
 Thieflly thou me robbedst. The Old Law granteth  
 340 That guilers be beguiled — and that is good reason:  
*Dentem pro dente et oculum pro oculo*.<sup>25</sup>  
*Ergo* soul shall soul quit and sin to sin wend, repay  
 And all that man hath mis-done, I, man, will amend it.  
 Member for member was amends by the Old Law,  
 And life for life also — and by that law I claim  
 345 Adam and all his issue at my will hereafter.  
 And that Death in them for-did, my death shall relieve, destroyed  
 And both quick and quit that quenched was through sin; revive; repay  
 And should grace guile destroy, good faith it asketh.  
 So lieve it not, Lucifer, against the law I fetch them,  
 350 But by right and by reason ransom here my lieges:  
*Non veni solvere legem sed adimplere*.<sup>26</sup>  
 "Thou fetchest mine in my place against all reason —  
 Falsely and felonly; good faith me it taught,  
 To recover them through ransom, and by no reason else,

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23. The people that walked in darkness. *Isaiah* 9:2

24. Behold the Lamb of God. *John* 1:36

25. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. *Exodus* 21:24

26. I am not come to destroy the law, but to fulfil it. *Matthew* 5:17

- So that with guile thou got, through grace it is y-won.  
 355 Thou, Lucifer, in likeness of a lither adder *evil*  
 Got by guile those that God loved;  
 And I, in likeness of a leode, that Lord am of heaven, *man*  
 Graciously thy guile have quit — go guile against guile! *repaid*  
 And as Adam and all through a tree died,  
 360 Adam and all through a tree shall turn to life;  
 And guile is beguiled, and in his guile fallen:  
*Et cecidit in foveam quam fecit.*<sup>27</sup>  
 Now beginneth thy guile against thee to turn  
 And my grace to grow aye greater and wider. *ever*  
 The bitterness that thou haſt brewed, now brook it thyself; *enjoy*  
 365 That art doctour of death, drink that thou madeſt!  
 “For I that am lord of life, love is my drink,  
 And for that drink today, I died upon earth.  
 I fought so, me thirſteth yet, for man’s ſoul’s ſake;  
 May no drink me moiſten, nor my thirſt ſlake,  
 370 Till the vintage fall in the vale of Jehosaphat,  
 That I drink right ripe muſt, *resurrectio mortuorum*.<sup>28</sup>  
 And then ſhall I come as a king, crowned, with angels,  
 And have out of hell all men’s ſouls.  
 “Fiends and fiendkins before me ſhall ſtand  
 375 And be at my bidding wheresoever be me liketh.  
 As to be merciablen to man then, my kind it asketh, *nature*  
 For we be brethren of blood, but not in baptiſm all.  
 As all that be mine whole brethren, in blood and in baptiſm,  
 Shall not be damned to the death that is without end:  
*Tibi ſoli peccavi &c.*<sup>29</sup>  
 380 “It is not uſed on earth to hang a felon *cuſtomary*  
 Ofer than once, though he were a traitor.  
 And if the king of that kingdom come in that time  
 There the felon thole ſhould death or other judgment, *Where; ſuffer*  
 Law would he give him life, and he looked on him.

27. He is fallen into the pit which he hath digged. *Psalm* 7:16

28. the reſurrection of the dead.

29. Againſt thee only have I ſinned. *Psalm* 51



- 385 And I that am king of kings shall come such a time  
 Where doom to the death damneth all wicked;  
 And if law will I look on them, it lieth in my grace  
 Whether they die or die not, for that they did ill.  
 Be it any thing a-bought, the boldness of their sins,  
 390 I may do mercy through righteousness, and all my words true.  
 And though Holy Writ will that I be wroke of them that did ill  
*Nullum malum impunitum &c.*<sup>30</sup>  
 They shall be cleansed clearly and clean washed of their sins  
 In my prison Purgatory, till *parce*<sup>31</sup> it hote. bade  
 And my mercy shall be shewed to many of my brethren;  
 395 For blood may suffer blood both hungry and a-cold,  
 As blood may not see blood bleed, but him rue.”  
*Audivi arcana verba que non licet homini loqui.*<sup>32</sup>  
 “As my righteousness and right shall rule all hell,  
 And mercy all mankind before me in heaven.  
 For I were an unkind king but I my kin help  
 400 And namely at such a need where needs help behoveth:  
*Non intres in iudicium cum servo tuo.*<sup>33</sup>  
 “Thus by law,” quoth Our Lord, “lead I will from hence  
 Those leodes that I love and lied in my coming.  
 And for thy leasing, Lucifer, that thou lied to Eve,  
 Thou shalt a-buy it bitter!” — and bound him with chains.  
 405 Astaroth and all the rout hid them in hernes; crowd; corners  
 They durst not look on Our Lord, the least of them all, dared not  
 But let him lead forth what he liked and let what he list. leave  
 Many hundred of angels harped and sang,  
*“Culpat caro, purgat caro, regnat Deus, Dei caro.”*<sup>34</sup>  
 410 Then piped Peace of poesy a note:  
*“Clarior est solito post maxima nebula phoebus;  
 Post inimicitias clarior est et amor.”*<sup>35</sup>

30. No evil shall go unpunished.

31. Spare me, O Lord. *Job* 7:16; used in the Office of the Dead.

32. I heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter. 2 *Corinthians* 12:4

33. Enter not into judgment with thy servant. *Psalms* 143:2

34. Flesh sins, flesh redeems, God reigns, God in flesh. Hymn, *Aeterne rex altissime*

35. Brighter is the sun after heavy clouds; and brighter is Love after enmity. *Liber parabolorum*

- “After sharpest showers,” quoth Peace, “most sheen is the sun;  
 Is no weather warmer than after watery clouds;  
 Nor no love liefer; nor liefer friends dearer  
 Than after war and woe, when love and peace be masters.  
 415 Was never war in this world, nor wickedness so keen,  
 That Love, and him list, to laughing ne brought, if he desires  
 And Peace, through patience, all perils stopped.”  
 “Truce!” quoth Truth; “thou tellest us sooth, by Jesus!  
 Clip we in covenant, and each of us kiss other.” Embrace  
 420 “And let no people,” quoth Peace, “perceive that we chide;  
 For impossible is no thing to Him that is almighty.”  
 “Thou saist sooth,” said Righteousness, and reverently she kissed  
 Peace, and Peace her, *per secula seculorum*. for ever and ever  
*Misericordia et Veritas obviaverunt sibi, Iustitia et Pax osculate sunt.*<sup>36</sup>  
 Truth trumped then and sang *Te Deum laudamus*,<sup>37</sup>  
 425 And then luted Love in a loud note, played the lute  
*“Ecce quam bonum et quam iocundum &c.”*<sup>38</sup>  
 Till the day dawned, these damsels carolled, sang  
 That men rang to the resurrection — and right with that I waked,  
 And called Kitty my wife and Calotte my daughter:  
 “Ariseth and go reverence God’s resurrection,  
 430 And creepeth to the cross on knees, and kisseth it for a jewel!  
 For God’s blessed body it bore for out boot, relief  
 And it a-feareth the fiend — for such is the might,  
 May no grisly ghost glide where it shadoweth!”




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36. Mercy and Truth are met together: Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other.

*Psalm 85:10*

37. We Praise Thee, O God. (A hymn of the Church.)

38. Behold, how good and joyful a thing it is (to live together in unity.) *Psalm 133:1*

# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 19

- HUS I awaked and wrote what I had y-dreamed,  
And dight me dearly, and did me to church,  
To hear wholly the mass and to be housled after. *prepared  
shriven by mass*
- In midst of the mass, when men went to offering,  
5 I fell eftsoons asleep — and suddenly me mette *again; dreamt*  
That Piers the Plowman was painted all bloody,  
And came in with a cross before the common people,  
And right like in all limbs to Our Lord Jesu.
- And then called I Conscience to ken me the sooth:  
10 “Is this Jesus the jouster,” quoth I, “that Jews did to death?  
Or it is Piers the Plowman! Who painted him so red?”  
Quoth Conscience, and kneeled then, “These are Piers’ arms:  
His colours and his coat armour; as he that cometh so bloody  
Is Christ with his cross, conqueror of Christen.”
- 15 “Why call ye him Christ?” quoth I, “since Jews called him Jesus?  
Patriarchs and prophets prophesied before  
That all kind creatures should kneel and bow  
Anon as men named the name of God Jesu.  
*Ergo* is no name to the name of Jesus,
- 20 Nor none so needful to name by night nor by day.  
For all dark devils are a-dread to hear it,  
And sinful are solaced and saved by that name;  
And ye call him Christ; for what cause, telleth me?  
Is Christ more of might and more worthy name
- 25 Than Jesu or Jesus, that all our joy come of?”  
“Thou knowest well,” quoth Conscience, “and thou ken reason,  
That knight, king, conqueror may be one person.  
To be called a knight is fair, for men shall kneel to him;  
To be called a king is fairer, for he may knights make;
- 30 As to be conqueror called, that cometh of special grace,  
And of hardiness of heart and of hendiness — *courtesy*  
To make lords of lads, of land that he winneth,  
And free men foul thralls, that follow not his laws. *slaves*

- “The Jews, that were gentle men, Jesu they despised —  
 35 Both his lore and his law; now are they low churls. *peasants*  
 As wide as the world is, woneth there none *dwells*  
 But under tribute and tallage as ticks and churls; *taxation*  
 And those that become Christen by counsel of the Baptist  
 Are franklins, free men through fulling that they took *baptism*  
 40 And gentle men with Jesu — for Jesus was y-fulled  
 And upon Calvary on cross y-crowned king of Jews.  
 “It becometh to a king to keep and to defend,  
 And conqueror of his conquest his laws and his large. *bounty*  
 And so did Jesus the Jews — he justified and taught them  
 45 The law of life that last shall ever,  
 And fended from foul evils, fevers and fluxes,  
 And from fiends that in them was, and false belief.  
 Then was he Jesus of Jews called, gentle prophet,  
 And king of their kingdom, and crown bore of thorns.  
 50 “And though conquered he on cross as conqueror noble;  
 Might no death him for-do, nor a-down bring, *destroy*  
 That he ne arose and reigned and ravished hell.  
 And then was he conqueror called of quick and of dead. *living*  
 For he gave Adam and Eve and other more bliss  
 55 That long had y-lain before as Lucifer’s churls.  
 And took Lucifer the loathly, that lord was of hell,  
 And bound him as he is bound, with bonds of iron.  
 Who was hardier than he? His heart blood he shed  
 To make all folk free that follow his law.  
 60 And since he gaveth largely all his leal lieges *loyal subjects*  
 Places in Paradise at their parting hence,  
 He may well be called conqueror — and that is ‘Christ’ to mean.  
 “As the cause that he cometh thus with cross of his passion  
 Is to wiss us therewith, that when we be tempted, *guide*  
 65 Therewith to fight and fend us from falling into sin,  
 And see by his sorrow that whoso loveth joy,  
 To penance and to poverty he must put himself,  
 And much woe in this world will and suffer.  
 “As to carp more of Christ, and how he came to that name, *speak*

- 70 Faithly for to sþeak, his first name was Jesu. *Faithfully*  
 Then he was born in Bethlem, as the Book telleth,  
 And came to take mankind, kings and angels  
 Reverenced him right fair with riches of earth.  
 Angels out of heaven came kneeling and sang,  
*Gloria in excelsis Deo &c.*<sup>1</sup>
- 75 “Kings came after, kneeled and offered  
 Incense, myrrh and much gold without mercy asking  
 Or any kinds chattel, but knowledged him sovereign  
 Both of sand, sun and sea, and since they went  
 Into their kingen kith by counsel of angels. *king’s lands*
- 80 And there was that word fulfilled the which thou of sþoke —  
*Omnia celestia, terrestria, flectantur in hoc nomine Iesu.*<sup>2</sup>  
 “For all the angels of heaven at his birth kneeled,  
 And all the wit of the world was in those three kings. *wisdom*  
 Reason and Righteousness and Ruth they offered,  
 Wherefore and why wise men that time
- 85 Masters and lettered men, *Magi* them called.  
 “That one king came with Reason, covered under cense. *incense*  
 The second king since soothly offered  
 Righteousness under red gold, Reason’s fellow.  
 Gold is likened to Loyalty that last shall ever,
- 90 And Reason to richels — to right and to truth. *incense*  
 “The third king then came, and kneeled to Jesu,  
 And presented him with Pity, appearing by myrrh;  
 For myrrh is mercy to mean, and mild sþeech of tongue.  
 Earthly honest things was offered thus at once
- 95 Through three kind kings kneeling to Jesu.  
 “As for all these precious presents Our Lord Prince Jesus  
 Was neither king nor conqueror till he comsed wax *began to*  
 In the manner of a man, and that by much sleight —  
 As it becometh a conqueror to ken many sleights,
- 100 And many wiles and wit, that would be a leader;  
 And so did Jesu in his days, whoso had time to tell it.

1. Glory to God in the highest. *Luke 2:14*

2. That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, all in heaven, and in earth. *Philippians 2:10*

- “Some time he suffered, and some time he hid him,  
 And some time he fought fast, and fled otherwhile,  
 And some time he gave good and granted health both,  
 105 Life and limb — as him list he wrought. *pleased*  
 As kind is of a conqueror, so comsed Jesu *the nature*  
 Till he had all them that he for bled.  
 “In his juventy, this Jesus at Jewen feast *youth*  
 Water into wine turned, as Holy Writ telleth,  
 110 And there began God of his grace to do well.  
 For wine is likened to law and life of holiness;  
 And law lacked then, for men loved not their enemies;  
 And Christ counselleth thus — and commandeth both—  
 Both to learned and to lewed, to love our enemies.  
 115 So at that feast first, as I before told,  
 Began God of his grace and goodness to do well:  
 And then was he cleped and called not only Christ but Jesu: *called*  
 A fauntekin full of wit, *filius Mariae*. *child; son of Mary*  
 For before his mother Mary made he that wonder,  
 120 That she first and foremost should firm believe  
 That he through Grace was gotten, and of no gome else.  
 He wrought that by no wit but through word one, *only*  
 After the kind that he came of; there comsed he Do-well.  
 “And when he was waxen more, in his mother’s absence, *grown*  
 125 He made lame to leap and gave light to blind,  
 And fed with two fishes and with five loaves  
 Sore a-hungred folk, more than five thousand.  
 Thus he comforted careful and caught a greater name, *woeful*  
 The which was Do-better, where that he went.  
 130 For deaf through his doings and dumb spake and heard,  
 And all he healed and helped that him of grace asked.  
 And then was he called in country of the common people,  
 For the deeds that he did, *Fili David, Iesus*.<sup>3</sup>  
 For David was doughtiest of deeds in his time,  
 135 The birds then sang, *Saul interfecit mille et David decem milia*.<sup>4</sup>

3. Jesus, Son of David. *Matthew* 9:27

4. Saul slew thousands and David ten thousands. 1 *Kings* 18:7

- Forth the country where Jesu came called him *Fili David*,  
 And named him of Nazareth — and no man so worthy  
 To be kaiser or king of the kingdom of Judah,  
 Nor over Jews justice, as Jesus was, them thought. judge
- 140 “Whereof had Caiaphas envy, and other of the Jews,  
 And for to do him to death, day and night they cast;  
 And killed him on cross wise at Calvary on Friday,  
 And since buried his body, and bid that men should  
 Keep it from night-comers with knights y-armed,  
 145 For no friend should it fetch; for prophets them told  
 That that blessed body of burials should rise,  
 And go into Galilee and gladden his Apostles  
 And his mother Mary — thus men before deemed.  
 “The knights that kept it beknew themselves admitted
- 150 That angels and archangels, ere the day sprang,  
 Came kneeling to that corpse and sang  
*Christus resurgens*<sup>5</sup> — and it arose after,  
 Very man before them all, and forth with them he went. True
- “The Jews prayed them of peace, and prayed the knights  
 155 Tell the commons that there came a company of his Apostles  
 And bewitched them as they woke, and away stole it. people  
 “As Mary Magdalene met him by the way  
 Going toward Galilee in godhood and manhood,  
 And live and looking — and she aloud cried
- 160 In each a company where she came, ‘*Christus resurgens!*’  
 Thus came it out that Christ overcame, recovered and lived:  
*Sic oportet Christum pati et intrare &c.*<sup>6</sup>  
 For that women witteth may not well be counsel!  
 “Peter perceived all this and pursued after,  
 Both James and John, Jesu for to seek.
- 165 Thaddeus and ten more with Thomas of India.  
 And as all these wise wyes were together men  
 In an house all be-shut and their door y-barred,  
 Christ came in — and all closed, both door and gates—

5. Christ rising. *Romans* 6:9

6. Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, to enter into his glory? *Luke* 24:16

- To Peter and to his Apostles, and said, '*Pax vobis*';<sup>7</sup>  
 170 And took Thomas by the hand and taught him to grope  
 And feel with his fingers his fleshy heart.  
 Thomas touched it, and with his tongue said,  
 "*Dominus meus et Deus meus.*"<sup>8</sup>  
 Thou art my lord, I believe, Good Lord Jesu!  
 175 Thou died and death tholed and deem shalt us all, *suffered; judge*  
 And now art living and looking, and last shalt ever!"  
 "Christ carped then, and courteously said, *spoke*  
 "Thomas, for thou trowest this and truly believest it, *swear*  
 Blessed must thou be, and be shalt for ever.  
 180 And blessed must they be, in body and in soul,  
 That never shall see me in sight as thou seeest now,  
 And leally believe all this, I love them and bless them: *truly*  
*Beati qui non viderunt et crediderunt.*"<sup>9</sup>  
 "And when this deed was done, Do-best he thought,  
 And gave Piers power, and pardon he granted:  
 185 To all manner men, mercy and forgiveness;  
 To him, might, men to assoil of all manner sins. *absolve*  
 In covenant that they come and knowledge to pay *acknowledge*  
 To Piers the Plowman's pardon — *redde quod debes.*<sup>10</sup>  
 "Thus hath Piers power, be his pardon paid,  
 190 To bind and unbind both here and else,  
 And absolve men of all sins save of debt one.  
 "Anon after an high up into heaven  
 He went, and woneth there, and will come at the last, *dwells*  
 And reward him right well that *reddit quod debet* —  
 195 Payeth perfectly, as pure truth would.  
 And what person payeth it naught, punish he thinketh, *intends*  
 And deem them at doomsday, both quick and dead —  
 The good to the Godhead and to great joy,  
 And wicked to wone in woe without end." *dwell*

7. Peace be with you. *John* 20:26

8. My Lord and my God. *John* 20:28

9. Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed. *John* 20:29

10. Pay what thou owest. *Matthew* 18:28



- 200 Thus Conscience of Christ and of the cross carped,  
 And counselled me to kneel thereto; and then came, me thought,  
 One *Spiritus Paraclitus*<sup>11</sup> to Piers and to his fellows.  
 In likeness of a lightning he lit on them all  
 And made them ken and know all kinds languages. *understand*
- 205 I wondered what that was, and wagged Conscience,  
 And was a-feared of the light, for in fire's likeness  
*Spiritus Paraclitus* oversþread them all.  
 Quoth Conscience, and kneeled, "This is Christ's messenger,  
 And cometh from the great God — Grace is his name.
- 210 Kneel now," quoth Conscience, "and if thou canst sing,  
 Welcome him and worship him with *Veni Creator Spiritus!*<sup>12</sup>  
 Then sang I that song, and so did many hundred,  
 And cried with Conscience, "Help us, God of grace!"  
 And then began Grace to go with Piers Plowman,
- 215 And counselled him and Conscience the commons to summon:  
 "For I will deal today and divide grace *share*  
 To all kinds creatures that can his five wits — *uses*  
 Treasure to live by to their lives' end.  
 And weapon to fight with, that will never fail.
- 220 For Anti-christ and his all the world shall grieve,  
 And encumber thee, Conscience, but if Christ thee help.  
 "And false prophets fele, flatterers and glossers, *many*  
 Shall come and be curates over kings and earls.  
 And then shall Pride be Pope and prince of Holy Church,
- 225 Covetousness and Unkindness Cardinals him to lead.  
 "Forth," quoth Grace, "ere I go, I will give you treasure,  
 And weapon to fight with when Anti-christ you assailleth."  
 And gave each man a grace to guide with himself,  
 That Idleness encumber him not, nor Envy nor Pride:  
*Divisiones gratiarum sunt.*<sup>13</sup>
- 230 Some wights he gave wit, with words to shew —  
 Wit to win their livelihood with, as the world asketh,

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11. The Spirit Comforter.

12. Come Holy Ghost, Creator (Pentecost Hymn)

13. Now there are diversities of gifts, (but the same Spirit). 1 *Corinthians* 12:4

- As preachers and priests, and prentices of law — *students*  
 They leally to live by labour of tongue,  
 And by wit to wiss other as grace them would teach. *guide*
- 235 And some he kened craft and cunning of sight,  
 With selling and buying their belief to win.  
 And some he learned to labour on land and on water,  
 And live by that labour — a leal life and a true. *dear*
- 240 And some he taught to till, to dike and to thatch,  
 To win with their livelihood by lore of his teaching.  
 And some to divine and divide, diverse numbers to ken:  
 And some to compass craftily, and colours to make; *devise*  
 And some to see and to say what should befall,  
 Both of well and of woe, tell it well ere it fell — *befell*
- 245 As astronomers through astronomy, and philosophers wise.  
 And some to ride and to recover that unrightfully was won:  
 He wissed them win it again through wightness of hands, *strength*  
 And fetch it from false men with Folville's laws.<sup>14</sup>  
 And some he learned to live in longing to be hence,
- 250 In poverty and in patience to pray for all Christen.  
 And all he learned to be leal, and each a craft love other,  
 And forbade them all debate — that none be among them. *quarrel*  
 "Though some be cleaner than some, ye see well," quoth Grace,  
 "That he that useth the fairest craft, to the foulest I could have put him.
- 255 Thinketh that all crafts," quoth Grace, "cometh of my gift;  
 Look that none lack other, but loveth all as brethren. *reproach*  
 "And who that most masteries ken, be mildest of bearing;  
 And crowneth Conscience king, and maketh Craft your steward,  
 And after Craft's counsel clotheth you and feed.
- 260 For I make Piers the Plowman my procurator and my reeve,  
 And registrar to receive *redde quod debes*.  
 My prowor and my plowman Piers shall be on earth, *purveyor*  
 And for to till truth, a team shall he have."
- Grace gave Piers a team — four great oxen.
- 265 That one was Luke, a large beast and a low cheered, *humble-looking*

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14. A notorious family of criminals in Leicestershire.

And Mark, and Matthew the third — mighty beasts both;  
 And joined to them one John, most gentle of all,  
 The prize neat of Piers' plow, passing all other.

ox

And yet Grace of his goodness gave Piers four stoats:

bullocks

270 All that his oxen eried, they to harrow after.

ploughed

One hight Augustine, and Ambrose another,  
 Gregory the great clerk, and Jerome the good.

These four, the faith to teach, followeth Piers' team,

And harrowed in an handwhile all Holy Scripture

short time

275 With two aithes that they had, an old and a new,

harrows

*Id est, Vetus Testamentum et Novum.*<sup>15</sup>

And Grace gave Piers grains — cardinal virtues—

And sowed it in man's soul, and since he told their names.

*Spiritus Prudentiae*<sup>16</sup> the first seed hight;

was called

And whoso ate that, imagine he should,

280 Ere he did any deed, devise well the end;

consider

And learned men a ladle buy with a long steel

That cast for to keep a crock, and save the fat above.

watch; pot

The second seed hight *Spiritus Temperantiae*.<sup>17</sup>

He that ate of that seed had such a kind,

nature

285 Should never meat nor mischief make him to swell;

Nor should no scorner out of skill him bring;

Nor winning nor wealth of worldly riches,

Waste word of idleness nor wicked speech move;

Should no curious cloth come on his rugge,

back

290 Nor no meat in his mouth that Master John spiced.

The third seed that Piers sowed was *Spiritus Fortitudinis*.<sup>18</sup>

And whoso ate of that seed hardy was ever

To suffer all that God sent, sickness and angers.

Might no leasings, nor liar, nor loss of worldly chattel,

lies

295 Make him, for any mourning, that he ne is merry in soul,

And bold and abiding be-smears to suffer,

reproaches

15. That is, the Old Testament and the New

16. The Spirit of Prudence

17. The Spirit of Temperance

18. The Spirit of Fortitude

And pleaded all with patience and *Parce mihi, Domine*,<sup>19</sup>  
 And covered him under counsel of Cato the wise:  
*Eſto forti animo cum ſis damnatus inique.*<sup>20</sup>

300 The fourth seed that Piers sowed was *Spiritus Iuſtitiae*,<sup>21</sup>  
 And he that ate of that seed should be ever true  
 With God, and naught aghaſt but of guile one.  
 For guile goeth so privily that good faith other while  
 May not be eſpied through *Spiritus Iuſtitiae*.

305 *Spiritus Iuſtitiae* ſpareth not to ſpill them that be guilty, *destroy*  
 And for to correċt the king if he fall in any kind (of) guilt.  
 For counteth he no king's wrath when he in court sitteth  
 To deem as a doomsman — a-dread was he never *judge*  
 Neither of duke, nor of death, that he ne did the law;

310 For present or for prayer or any prince's letters,  
 He did equity to all evenforth his power.

These four seeds Piers sowed, and since he did them harrow  
 With Old Law and New Law, that love might wax *grow*  
 Among these four virtues, and vices destroy.

315 “For commonly in countries, cammocks and weeds  
 Foul the fruit in the field where they grow together;  
 And so do vices virtues — forth,” quoth Piers,  
 “Harroweth all that kenneth kind wit by counsel of these doctors,  
 And tilleth after their teaching the cardinal virtues.”

320 “Against thy grains,” quoth Grace, “beginneth for to ripen, *Before*  
 Ordain thee an house, Piers, to harbour in thy corns.

“By God! Grace,” quoth Piers, “ye muſt give timber,  
 And ordain that house ere ye hence wend.”

325 And Grace gave him the cross, with the crown of thorns,  
 That Chriſt upon Calvary for mankind on pined; *suffered*

And of his baptism and blood that he bled on rood  
 He made a manner mortar, and Mercy it hight. *was called*

And therewith Grace began to make a good fundament,  
 And watted it and walled it with his pains and his passion,

19. Spare me, O Lord. *Job* 7:16

20. Be of ſtrong mind when you are wrongly accused. Cato *Diſtichs* 2:14

21. Spirit of Juſtice

330 And of all Holy Writ he made a roof after,  
 And called that house Unity — Holy Church in English.  
 And when this deed was done, Grace devised  
 A cart hight Christendom, to carry home Piers' sheaves, *called*  
 And gave him caples to his cart, Contrition and Confession; *horses*  
 335 And made Priesthood hayward, the while himself went *overseer*  
 As wide as the world is, with Piers to till truth  
 And the land of belief, the law of Holy Church.  
 Now is Piers to the plow, and Pride it espied  
 And gathered him a great host: grieve he thinketh  
 340 Conscience and all Christen and Cardinal Virtues —  
 Blow them down and break them and bite a-two the mores; *roots*  
 And sent forth Surquidous, his sergeant of arms, *Presumption*  
 And his spy, Spill-Love, one Speak-evil-behind.  
 These two came to Conscience and to Christen people,  
 345 And told them tidings — that tyne they should *lose*  
 The seeds that Sir Piers sowed, the Cardinal Virtues:  
 "And Piers' barn worth y-broke, and they that be in Unity *will be*  
 Shall come out, and Conscience; and your caples two,  
 Confession and Contrition, and your cart the Belief  
 350 Shall be coloured so quaintly and covered under our sophistry,  
 That Conscience shall not know by Contrition  
 Nor by Confession who is Christen or heathen;  
 Nor no manner merchant that with money dealeth  
 Whether he win with right, with wrong or with usury."  
 355 With such colours and quaintise cometh Pride y-armed, *cunning*  
 With the lord that liveth after the lust of his body —  
 "To waste on welfare and on wicked keeping  
 All the world in a while through our wit!" quoth Pride.  
 Quoth Conscience to all Christen then, "My counsel is to wend  
 360 Hastily into Unity and hold we us there,  
 And pray we that a peace were in Piers the Plowman's barn.  
 For witterly, I wot well, we be not of strength *truly; know*  
 To go against Pride, but Grace were with us."  
 And then came Kind Wit, Conscience to teach, *Common Sense*  
 365 And cried, and commanded all Christen people

- For to delve and dike deep about Unity  
 That Holy Church stood in holiness, as it a pyle were. *gatehouse*
- Conscience commanded then all Christen to delve,  
 And make a much moat that might be a strength *great*
- 370 To help Holy Church and them that it keepeth.  
 Then all kind Christen —save common women— *prostitutes*  
 Repented and refused sin, right save they one, *only*  
 And a sisour and a summoner that were for-sworn oft; *perjured*  
 Witing and wilfully with the false they held,
- 375 And for silver were for-sworn — soothly they wist it!  
 There ne was Christen creature that kind wit had *common sense*  
 —Save shrews one such as I spake of— *only*  
 That he ne helped a quantity (*of*) holiness to wax: *grow*  
 Some by bead's bidding and some by pilgrimage *prayer's*
- 380 And other privy penance, and some through pennies' dealing. *alms*  
 And then welled water for wicked works,  
 Eagerly urning out of men's eyes. *running*  
 Cleanness of the commons and clerks' clean living *people*  
 Made Unity Holy Church in holiness stand.
- 385 "I care not," quoth Conscience, "though Pride come now;  
 The lord of lust shall be letted all this Lent, I hope. *hindered*  
 "Cometh," quoth Conscience, "ye Christen, and dineth,  
 That have laboured leally all this Lenten time.  
 Here is bread y-blessed, and God's body thereunder.
- 390 Grace, through God's word, gave Piers power,  
 Might to make it, and men to eat it after  
 In help of their health once in a month,  
 Or as oft as they had need, those that had y-paid  
 To Piers the Plowman's pardon, *redde quod debes.*"
- 395 "How?" quoth all the commons. "Thou counsellest us to yield  
 All that we owe any wight ere we go toousel?" *mass*  
 "That is my counsel," quoth Conscience, "and Cardinal Virtues';  
 That each man forgive other, and that will the *Paternoſter* —  
*Et dimitte nobis debita noſtra &c.*"<sup>22</sup>

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22. And forgive us our trespasses. (Lord's Prayer)

- And so to be assoiled, and since be houseled." *absolved at mass*
- 400 "Yea? Bah!" quoth a brewer, "I will not be ruled,  
By Jesu! for all your jangling, with *Spiritus Iustitiae*,  
Nor after Conscience, by Christ! while I can sell  
Both dregs and draff, and draw at one hole *husks*  
Thick ale and thin ale; for that is my kind, *nature*
- 405 And not hack after holiness — hold thy tongue, Conscience!  
Of *Spiritus Iustitiae* thou speakest much on idle."  
"Caitiff!" quoth Conscience, "cursed wretch!  
Unblessed art thou, brewer, but if thee God help.  
Save thou live by lore of *Spiritus Iustitiae*,
- 410 The chief seed that Piers sowed, y-saved worst thou never. *will be*  
But Conscience be the common food, and Cardinal Virtues,  
Lieve it well, thou be lost, both life and soul."  
"Then is many leode lost!" quoth a lewed vicar. *man*
- 415 "I am a curate of Holy Church, and came never in my time  
Man to me that me could tell of Cardinal Virtues,  
Or that accounted Conscience at a cock's feather or an hen's!  
I knew never Cardinal that he ne came from the Pope:  
And we clerks, when they come, for their commons payeth *people*  
For their pelure, and their palfreys' meat, and pilours that them  
followeth. *robbers*
- 420 The commons *clamat cotidie*,<sup>23</sup> each a man to other,  
"The country is the curseder that cardinals come in, *more cursed*  
And where they lie and linger most lechery there reigneth!"  
"Forth," quoth this vicar, "by very God! I would  
That no cardinal come among the common people,
- 425 But in their holiness hold them still  
At Avignon among Jews — *Cum sancto sanctus eris &c.*—<sup>23</sup>  
Or in Rome, as their rule will, the relics to keep;  
And thou Conscience in king's court, and shouldest never come thence;  
And Grace, that thou gredest so of, gyour of all clerks; *cry; guide*
- 430 And Piers with his new plough and eke with his old — *also*  
Emperor of all the world that all men were Christen.

23. cries out daily

24. With the holy thou shalt be holy. *Psalm 18:25*

- “Imperfect is that Pope, that all people should help,  
 And soudeth them that slayeth such as he should save. pays  
 As well worth Piers the Plowman, that pursueth God in doing,  
 435 *Qui pluit super iustos et iniustos*<sup>25</sup> at once,  
 And sent the sun to save a cursed man’s tilth crops  
 As bright as to the best man or to the best woman.  
 Right so Piers the Plowman paineth him to till  
 As well for a waster and wenches of the stews brothels  
 440 As for himself and his servants, save he is first y-served.  
 So blessed be Piers Plowman, that paineth him to till,  
 And travailleth and tilleth for a traitor also sore as hard  
 As for a true tidy man, all times alike.  
 And worshipped be He that wrought all, both good and weak,  
 445 And suffereth that sinful be, till some time that they repent.  
 And God the Pope amend, that pillet Holy Church, robs  
 And claimeth before the king to be keeper over Christen,  
 And counteth not, though Christen be killed and robbed, cares  
 And finds folk to fight and Christen blood to spill provides for  
 450 Against the Old Law and New Law, as Luke beareth witness:  
*Non occides: mihi vindictam &c.*<sup>26</sup>  
 It seemeth, by so himself had his will,  
 That he ne recketh right naught of all the remnant. cares  
 “And Christ of his courtesy the cardinals save,  
 455 And turn their wit to wisdom and to wealth of soul! minds  
 For the commons,” quoth this curate, “count full little  
 The counsel of Conscience or Cardinal Virtues  
 But if they sowne, as by sight, somewhat to winning.  
 Of guile nor of gabbing give they never tally,  
 460 For *Spiritus Prudentiae* among the people is guile,  
 And all those fair virtues, as vices they seemeth.  
 Each man subtlety a sleight, sin to hide, devises  
 And coloureth it for a cunning and a clean living.”  
 Then laughed there a lord, and “By this light!” said,

25. Who raineth upon the just and unjust. *Matthew* 5:45

26. Thou shalt not kill. *Exodus* 20:13; *Luke* 18:20; Vengeance is mine. *Deuteronomy* 32:35



- 465 “I hold it right and reason of my reeve to take  
 All that mine auditor or else my steward  
 Counselleth me by their account and my clerk’s writing.  
 With *Spiritus Intellectus*<sup>27</sup> they took the reeve’s rolls,  
 And with *Spiritus Fortitudinis* fetched it — willy nilly.”
- 470 And then came there a king and by his crown said,  
 “I am king with crown the commons to rule, people  
 And Holy Church and clergy from cursed men to defend.  
 And if me lacketh to live by the law will I take it  
 Where I may hastilokeſt it have — for I am head of law: most hastily
- 475 For ye be but members and I above all.  
 And since I am your all head, I am your all health,  
 And Holy Church’s chief help and chieftain of the commons.  
 And what I take of you two, I take it at the teaching  
 Of *Spiritus Iuſtitiae* — for I judge you all.
- 480 So I may boldly be housled, for I borgh never, absolved by mass  
 Nor crave of my commons but as my kind asketh.” nature  
 “In condition,” quoth Conscience, “that thou can defend,  
 And rule thy realm in reason, right well and in truth  
 That thou have thine asking, as the law asketh:
- 485 *Omnia sunt tua ad defendendum sed non ad apprehendendum.*<sup>28</sup>  
 The vicar had far home, and fair took his leave —  
 And I awakened therewith, and wrote as me mette. dreamt




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27. The Spirit of Intellect

28. All that is yours is to be defended; but not apprehended.

# William's Vision of Piers Plowman

## Passus 20

**T**HEN as I went by the way, when I was thus awaked,  
Hevy cheered I yede, and elenge in heart; *went; wretched*  
For I ne wist where to eat, nor at what place, *knew*  
And it nighed nigh the noon, and with Need I met, *drew near*  
5 That affronted me foul and faitour me called. *deceiver*  
“Couldest thou not excuse thee, as did the king and other —  
What thou took to thy belief, to clothes and to sustenance,  
Was by teaching and by telling of *Spiritus Temperantiae*,<sup>1</sup>  
And that thou nome no more than need thee taught, *took*  
10 And need ne hath no law, nor never shall fall in debt  
For three things he taketh, his life for to save?  
That is: meat when men him werneth, and he no money wieldeth, *refuse*  
Nor wight none will be his borgh, nor no wed hath to lay; *deposit*  
And he catch in that case and come thereto by sleight, *take*  
15 He sinneth not, soothly, that so winneth his food.  
And though he come so to a cloth, and can no better chevisance, *bargain*  
Need anon right nymeth him under mainprise. *takes; bail*  
And if him list for to lap, the law of kind would *drink*  
That he drank at each ditch, ere he died for thirst.  
20 So Need, at great need, may nyme as for his own, *take*  
Without counsel of Conscience or Cardinal Virtues —  
So that he sue and save *Spiritus Temperantiae*.  
“For is no virtue by far to *Spiritus Temperantiae* —  
Neither *Spiritus Iustitiae* nor *Spiritus Fortitudinis*.<sup>2</sup>  
25 For *Spiritus Fortitudinis* forfeiteth full oft:  
He shall do more than measure many time and oft,  
And beat men over bitter, and some body too little,  
And grieve men greater than good faith it would.  
And *Spiritus Iustitiae* shall judge, willy, nilly,  
30 After the king's counsel and the commons like. *people*

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1. The Spirit of Temperance

2. The Spirit of Justice; The Spirit of Fortitude

And *Spiritus Prudentiae*<sup>3</sup> in many a point shall fail  
 Of that he weeneth would fall if his wit ne were. *supposes*  
 Weening is no wisdom, nor wise imagination: *Supposition*  
*Homo proponit et Deus disponit*:<sup>4</sup>  
 God governeth all good virtues;  
 35 And Need is next (*to*) him, for anon he meeketh, *humbles*  
 And as low as a lamb, for lacking what him needeth;  
 For Need maketh needy fele needs low-hearted. *many; humble*  
 Philosophers forsook wealth, for they would be needy,  
 And woned well elengly and would not be rich. *dwelt; wretchedly*  
 40 "And God all his great joy ghostly he left,  
 And came and took mankind and became needy."  
 So he was needy, as saith the Book, in many sundry places,  
 That he said in his sorrow on the self rood: *cross itself*  
 'Both Fox and fowl may flee to hole and creep,  
 45 And the fish hath fin to fleet with to rest, *swim*  
 Where need hath y-nome me, that I must need abide *taken*  
 And suffer sorrows full sour, that shall to joy turn.'  
 Forth be not abashed to bide and to be needy,  
 Since he that wrought all the world was wilfully needy, *voluntarily*  
 50 Nor never none so needy nor poor died."  
 When Need had under-nome me thus, anon I fell asleep, *reproached*  
 And mette full marvellously that in man's form *dreamt*  
 Anti-christ came then, and all the crop of truth *tree-top*  
 Turned it tid up-so-down, and overtilt the root, *quickly*  
 55 And made False sþring and sþread and sþeed men's needs.  
 In each a country where he came, he cut away truth.  
 And gart guile grow there, as he a god were. *caused*  
 Friars followed that fiend, for he gave them copes,  
 And religious reverenced him and rung their bells,  
 60 And all the convent came to welcome that tyrant,  
 And all his as well as him — save only fools;  
 Which fools were well gladder to die  
 Than to live longer since Loyalty was so rebuked,

3. The Spirit of Prudence

4. Man proposes; and God disposes.

- And a false fiend, Anti-christ, over all folk reigned.  
 65 And that were mild men and holy, that no mischief dreaded,  
 Defied all falseness and folk that it used;  
 And what king that them comforted, knowing their guile,  
 They cursed, and their counsel — were it clerk or lewed.  
 Anti-christ had thus soon hundreds at his banner,  
 70 And Pride it bore boldly about,  
 With a lord that liveth after liking of body, *pleasure*  
 That came against Conscience, that keeper was and gyour *leader*  
 Over kind Christen and Cardinal Virtues.  
 “I counsel,” quoth Conscience then, “cometh with me, ye fools,  
 75 Into Unity Holy Church, and hold we us there.  
 And cry we to Kind that he come and defend us *Nature*  
 Fools from these fiends’ limbs, for Piers the Plowman’s love.  
 And cry we on all the commons that they come to Unity,  
 And there abide and bicker against Belial’s children.” *fight*  
 80 Kind Conscience then heard, and came out of the planets,  
 And sent forth his foragers — fevers and fluxs,  
 Coughs and cardiacles, cramps and toothaches,  
 Rheums and redgoundes and roinous scalls, *scrofula; scurfy scabs*  
 Biles and botches and burning agues,  
 85 Frensies and foul evils — foragers of Kind  
 Had y-pricked and preyed (*on*) polls of people; *heads*  
 Largely a legion lost their life soon.  
 There was “Harrow!” and “Help! Here cometh Kind,  
 With Death that is dreadful, to undo us all!”  
 90 The lord that lived after lust then aloud cried  
 After Comfort, a knight, to come and bear his banner.  
 “Alarm! Alarm!” quoth that lord, “each life keep his own!”  
 Then met these men, ere minstrels might pipe,  
 And ere heralds of arms had described lords,  
 95 Elde the hoar; he was in the vauntward, *forefront*  
 And bore the banner before Death — by right he it claimed.  
 Kind came after him, with many keen sores, *Nature*  
 As pocks and pestilences — and much people shent; *ruined*  
 So Kind through corruptions killed full many,

- 100 Death came driving after and all to dust bashed  
 Kings and knights, kaisers and popes.  
 Learned nor lewed, he left no man stand  
 That he hit even, that ever stirred after.  
 Many a lovely lady and their leman knights
- 105 Swooned and swelted for sorrow of Death's dints. *sweetheart  
died; blows*  
 Conscience of his courtesy to Kind he besought  
 To cease and suffer, and see whether they would  
 Leave Pride privily and be perfect Christen.  
 And Kind ceased then, to see the people amend.
- 110 Fortune gan flatter then those few that were alive,  
 And be-hight them long life — and Lechery he sent *promised*  
 Amongst all manner men, wedded and unwedded,  
 And gathered a great host all against Conscience.  
 This Lechery laid on with laughing cheer
- 115 And with privy speech and painted words,  
 And armed him in idleness and in high bearing.  
 He bore a bow in his hand, and many broad arrows  
 Were feathered with fair behest and many a false truth.  
 With untidy tales he teened full oft *troubled*
- 120 Conscience and his company, of Holy Church the teachers.  
 Then came Covetousness and cast how he might  
 Overcome Conscience and Cardinal Virtues,  
 And armed him in avarice and hungrily lived.  
 His weapon was all wiles, to win and to hide;
- 125 With glossings and with gabblings he guiled the people.  
 Simony him sued to assail Conscience, *followed*  
 And preached to the people, and prelates they made  
 To hold with Anti-christ, their temporalities to save;  
 And came to the king's counsel as a keen baron,
- 130 And kneeled to Conscience in Court afore them all,  
 And gart Good Faith flee and False to abide; *made*  
 And boldly bore a-down with many a bright noble  
 Much of the wit and wisdom of Westminster Hall.  
 He jogged to a justice and jousted in his ear,
- 135 And overtilted all his truth with "Take this up(on) amendment."

- And to the Arches in haſt he yede anon after, *went*  
 And turned Civil into Simony, and ſince he took the Official:  
 For a miniver mantle he made leal matrimony *fur coat; true*  
 Depart ere death came, and a diuorſe ſhaped.  
 140 “Alas!” quoth Conſcience, and cried then, “would Chriſt of his grace  
 That Couetouſneſs were Chriſten, that is ſo keen to fight,  
 And bold and bidding the while his bag laſteth!” *purſe*  
 And then laughed Life, and let dag his clothes, *jag*  
 And armed him in haſte in harlot’s words,  
 145 And held Holineſs a jape and Hendineſs a waſter, *Courteſy*  
 And let Loyalty a churl and Liar a free man; *peaſant*  
 Conſcience and counſel, he counted it folly.  
 Thus rallied Life for a little fortune,  
 And pricked forth with Pride — praiſeth he no virtue, *ſpurred*  
 150 Nor careth naught how Kind ſlew, and ſhall come at the laſt  
 And kill all earthly creature ſave Conſcience one. *only*  
 Life leapt aſide and laugh him a leman. *caught; ſweetheart*  
 “Health and I,” quoth he, “and highneſs of heart  
 Shall do thee naught dread neither death nor elde.  
 155 And to forget ſorrow and give naught of ſin.”  
 This liked Life and his leman Fortune,  
 And got in their glory a gadling at the laſt, *rogue*  
 One that much woe wrought, Sloth was his name.  
 Sloth waxed wonder yerne and ſoon was of age, *quickly*  
 160 And wedded one Wanhope, a wench of the ſtews. *Deſpair; brothels*  
 Their ſire was a ſiſour that never ſwore truth:  
 One Tommy Two-tongue, attainted at each a queſt. *diſproved; queſtion*  
 This Sloth was ware of war, and a ſling made.  
 And threw dread of deſpair a dozen mile about.  
 165 For care, Conſcience then cried upon Elde,  
 And bade him fond to fight and a-fear Wanhope. *try; Deſpair*  
 And Elde hente good hope, and haſtily he ſhifted him, *ſiezed*  
 And waived away Wanhope and with Life he fought.  
 And Life fled for fear to Phyſic after help,  
 170 And beſought him of ſuccour, and of his ſalve had,  
 And gave him gold good woon that gladdened his heart — *plenty*

- And they gave him again a glazen howve. *glass hood*  
 Life lieved that leechcraft let should Elde, *stop*  
 And drove away death with dyas and drugs. *remedies*
- 175 And Elde auntred him on Life — and at the last he hit  
 A physician with a furred hood, that he fell in a palsy,  
 And there died that doctor ere three days after.  
 “Now I see,” said Life, “that surgery nor physick  
 May not a mite avail to meddle against Elde.”
- 180 And in hope of his health good heart he hente *siezed*  
 And rode so to Revel, a rich place and a merry —  
 The company of comfort men cleped it some time — *called*  
 And Elde anon after him, and over mine head went,  
 And made me bald before and bare on the crown:
- 185 So hard he went over mine head it will be seen ever.  
 “Sir evil-y-taught Elde!” quoth I, “un-hende go with thee! *discourtesy*  
 Since when was the way over men’s heads?  
 Haddest thou been hende,” quoth I, “thou wouldest have asked leave!”  
 “Yea, leave, lurdane?” quoth he, and laid on me with age, *dullard*
- 190 And hit me under the ear — unnethe may I hear. *scarcely*  
 He buffeted me about the mouth and beat out my wangteeth, *molars*  
 And gyved me in gouts — I may not go at large. *shackled; fits*  
 And of the woe that I was in, my wife had ruth,  
 And wished well witterly that I were in heaven. *truly*
- 195 For the limb that she loved me fore, and lief was to feel *glad*  
 —On nights, namely, when we naked were—  
 I ne might in no manner make it at her will,  
 So Elde and she had it for-beaten.
- And as I sat in this sorrow, I saw how Kind passed,  
 200 And death drew nigh me — for dread gan I quake,  
 And cried to Kind, “Out of care me bring! *grief*  
 Lo! Elde the hoar hath me beset:  
 A-wreke me if your will be, for I would be hence!” *avenge*
- “If thou wilt be wroken, wend into Unity, *avenged*  
 205 And hold thee there ever, till I send for thee;  
 And look thou ken some craft ere thou come thence.”  
 “Counsel me, Kind,” quoth I, “what craft be best to learn?”

- “Learn to love,” quoth Kind, “and leave all other.”  
 “How shall I come to chattel so, to clothe me and to feed?”  
 210 “And thou love leally, lack shall thee never *truly*  
 Weed nor worldly meat, while thy life lasteth.” *Cloth*  
 And there by counsel of Kind, I comsed to roam *began*  
 Through Contrition and Confession till I came to Unity.  
 And there was Conscience constable, Christen to save,  
 215 And besieged sorely with seven great giants  
 That with Anti-christ held hard against Conscience.  
 Sloth with his sling an hard sault he made. *assault*  
 Proud priests came with him — passing an hundred  
 In paltocks and piked shoes and pissers’ long knives *jackets*  
 220 Came against Conscience — with Covetousness they held.  
 “By the Mary!” quoth a mansed priest, was of the march of Ireland,  
 “I count no more Conscience, by so I catch silver, *esteem*  
 Than I do to drink a draught of good ale!”  
 And so said sixty of the same country,  
 225 And shot again with shot, many a sheaf of oaths,  
 And broad hooked arrows — God’s heart and his nails—  
 And had almost Unity and holiness a-down.  
 Conscience cried, “Help, Clergy, or else I fall  
 Through imperfect priests and prelates of Holy Church!  
 230 Friars heard him cry, and came him to help —  
 As for they couth not well their craft, Conscience forsook them.  
 Need nighed then near, and Conscience he told  
 That they come for covetousness to have cure of souls. *care*  
 “And for they are poor, peradventure, for patrimony them failleth,  
 235 They will flatter, to fare well, folk that be rich.  
 And since they chose chill and caitifty, poverty: *wretchedness*  
 Let them chew as they chose, and charge them with no cure!  
 For lomer he lieth, that livelihood must beg, *the more often*  
 Than he that laboureth for livelihood and leneth it beggars. *gives*  
 240 And since friars forsook the felicity of earth,  
 Let them be as beggars, or live by angel’s food!”  
 Conscience of this counsel then comsed for to laugh, *began*  
 And courteously comforted them and called in all friars,



- And said, "Sires, soothly welcome be ye all  
 245 To Unity and Holy Church — as one thing I you pray:  
 Holdeth you in unity, and haveth none envy  
 To learned nor to lewed, but liveth after your rule.  
 And I will be your borgh, ye shall have bread and clothes *surety*  
 And other necessities enough — you shall no thing lack,  
 250 With that ye leave logic and learneth for to love."  
 For love left they lordship, both land and school —  
 Friar Francis and Dominic — for love to be holy.  
 "And if ye covet cure, Kind will you tell *charge over people*  
 That in measure God made all manner things,  
 255 And set it at a certain and at a secure number,  
 And named them names new, and numbered the stars:  
*Qui numerat multitudinem stellarum et omnibus eis &c.*<sup>5</sup>  
 "Kings and knights, that keep and defend,  
 Have officers under them, and each of them a certain (*number*).  
 And if they wage men to war, they write them in number;  
 260 Will no treasurer take them wages, travail they never so sore,  
 But they be named in the number of them that be y-waged.  
 All other in battle be y-held bribers —  
 Pilours and pike-harneys, in each a parish y-cursed. *robbers; plunderers*  
 "Monks and monials and all men of religion — *nuns*  
 265 Their order and their rule will to have a certain number;  
 Of lewed and of learned the law will and asketh  
 A certain for a certain — save only of friars!"  
 "Forth," quoth Conscience, "by Christ! kind wit me telleth  
 It is wicked to wage you — ye wax out of number!  
 270 Heaven hath even number, and hell is without number;  
 Forth I would witterly that ye were in the register *truly*  
 And your number under notary signed, and neither more nor less!"  
 Envy heard this and hight friars go to school *ordered*  
 And learn logic and law — and eke contemplation — *also*  
 275 And preach men of Plato, and prove it by Seneca  
 That all things under heaven ought to be in common. *communal*

5. He telleth the number of stars, and calleth them all by their names. *Psalms* 147:4

- He lieth, as I lieve, that to the lewed so preacheth:  
 For God made to men a law and Moses it taught:  
*Non concupisces rem proximi tui.*<sup>6</sup>
- 280 And evil is this y-held in parishes of England;  
 For parsons and parish priests, that should the people thrive,  
 Be curates called to know and to heal.  
 All that be their parishioners penances enjoin,  
 And be ashamed in their shrift; as shame maketh them wend
- 285 And flee to the friars — as false folk to Westminster,  
 That borroweth, and beareth it thither, and then biddeth friends  
 Yerne of forgiveness or longer years leave. *Eagerly*  
 As while he is in Westminster, he will be before  
 And make him merry with other men's goods.
- 290 And so it fareth with much folk that to friars shriveth;  
 As sisours and executors — they shall give the friars *jurors*  
 A parcel to pray for them, and play them merry  
 With the residue and remnant that other renks be-swonk, *worked for*  
 And suffer the deed in debt to the day of doom.
- 295 Envy herefore hated Conscience,  
 And friars to philosophy he fond them to school, *hastened*  
 The while Covetousness and Unkindness Conscience assailed.  
 In Unity Holy Church Conscience held him,  
 And made Peace porter to pin the gates *fasten*
- 300 Of all tale-tellers and tittlers in idle.  
 Hypocrisy and he an hard sault they made. *assault*  
 Hypocrisy at the gate hard gan fight,  
 And wounded well wickedly many a wise teacher  
 That with Conscience accorded and Cardinal Virtues.
- 305 Conscience called a leech, that could well shrive, *doctor*  
 To go salve those that sick were and through sin y-wounded. *heal*  
 Shrift shaped sharp salve, and made men do penance  
 For their misdeeds that they wrought had,  
 And that Piers' pardon were y-payed, *redde quod debes.*<sup>7</sup>

6. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods. *Exodus* 20:17

7. Pay that which you owe.

310 Some liked not this leech, and letters they sent,  
 If any surgeon were in the siege that softer could plaster.  
 Sire Lief-to-live-in-lechery lay there and groaned;  
 For fasting of a Friday he feared as he would die:  
 “There is a surgeon in this siege that soft can handle,  
 315 And more of physic by far, and fairer he plastereth —  
 One Friar Flatterer, is physician and surgeon.”

Quoth Contrition to Conscience, “Do him come to Unity;  
 For here is many a man hurt through Hypocrisy.”

“We have no need,” quoth Conscience, “I wot no better leech *know*  
 320 Than parson or parish priest, penitencer or bishop —  
 Save Piers the Plowman, that hath power over all,  
 And indulgence may do, but if debt let it.  
 “I may well suffer,” said Conscience, “since ye desire,  
 That Friar Flatterer be fetched and physic you seek.”

325 The friar hereof heard and hied fast  
 To a lord for a letter, leave to have to cure  
 As a curate he were, and came with his letter  
 Boldly to the bishop, and his brief had,  
 In countries where he came, confessions to hear —  
 330 And came where Conscience was, and knocked at the gate.  
 Peace unpinned it, (*who*) was porter of Unity,  
 And in haste asked what his will were.

“In faith,” quoth this friar, “for profit and for health  
 Carp I would with Contrition, and therefore came I hither,”

335 “He is sick,” said Peace, “and so are many other;  
 Hypocrisy hath hurt them — full hard is if they cover.” *recover*

“I am a surgeon,” said the friar, “and salves can make.  
 Conscience knoweth me well and what I can do both.”

“I pray thee,” quoth Peace then, “ere thou pass further,  
 340 What hattest thou? I pray thee, hile not thy name.” *conceal*

“Certes,” said his fellow, “Sir *Penetrans-domos*.”<sup>8</sup>

“Yea? Go thy gate!” quoth Peace, “by God, for all thy physic,  
 But thou ken any craft, thou comest not herein!

8. Sir Home-Penetrator. See 2 *Timothy* 3:6. Possibly a sexual pun.

- I knew such one once, not eight winter passed,  
 345 Came in thus y-coped at a court where I dwelt,  
 And was my lord's leech — and my lady's both. *doctor*  
 And at the last this limiter, though my lord was out,  
 He salved so our women till some were with child.  
 Hende-Speech hight Peace then, "Open the gates. *commanded*  
 350 Let in the friar and his fellow, and make them fair cheer.  
 He may see and hear here, so may befall,  
 That Life through his lore shall leave Covetousness,  
 And be a-dread of death and withdraw him from Pride,  
 And accord with Conscience and kiss their either other."  
 355 Thus through Hende-Speech entered the friar, *Courteous-Speech*  
 And came in to Conscience and courteously him greeted.  
 "Thou art welcome," quoth Conscience, "canst thou heal sick?  
 Here is Contrition," quoth Conscience, "my cousin, y-wounded.  
 Comfort him," quoth Conscience, "and take keep to his sores.  
 360 The plasters of the parson and powders be too sore,  
 And let them lie over-long and loath is to change them;  
 From Lent to Lent he let his plasters bite."  
 "That is over-long!" quoth this limiter, "I lieve — I shall amend it."  
 And goeth, gropeth Contrition, and gave him a plaster  
 365 Of "A privy payment, and I shall pray for you,  
 And for all them that ye be holden to, all my life time,  
 And make you and my Lady in mass and in matins  
 As friars of our fraternity for a little silver."  
 Thus he goeth and gathereth, and glosseth where he shriveth —  
 370 Till Contrition had clean forgotten to cry and to weep,  
 And wake for his wicked works, as he was wont to do. *keep vigil*  
 For comfort of his confessor, Contrition he left,  
 That is the sovereignest salve for all kinds sins. *most sovereign*  
 Sloth saw that, and so did Pride,  
 375 And came with a keen will Conscience to assail.  
 Conscience cried eft Clergy come help him,  
 And bade Contrition come to keep the gate.  
 "He lieth a-drowned and dreameth," said Peace, "and so do many  
 other;

The friar with his physic this folk hath enchanted,  
 380 And plastered them so easily (*that*) he dread no sin!"  
 "By Christ!" quoth Conscience then, "I will become a pilgrim,  
 And walk as wide as the world lasteth,  
 To seek Piers the Plowman, that Pride might destroy,  
 And that friars had a finding, that for need flatter  
 385 And counter-pleadeth me, Conscience. Now Kind me avenge, *contradict*  
 And send me hap and health, till I have Piers the Plowman!" *luck*  
 And since he gradde after Grace, till I gan awake. *cried out*





## Glossary

- a-buy: (*v.*) pay for  
a-fraught: (*v.*) filled  
a-guilt: (*v.*) offend  
a-low: (*adj.*) low down  
a-pay: (*v.*) please, satisfy  
a-start: (*v.*) escape  
a-wreck: (*v.*) avenge  
abave: (*v.*) confound  
accidie: (*n.*) sloth  
affait: (*v.*) train, prepare, tame, subdue  
aith: (*n.*) harrow  
aliry: (*adv.*) across  
amerce: (*v.*) fine, punish  
anchorite: (*n.*) hermit  
anger: (*n.*) afflictions; inflammation  
aniente: (*v.*) annihilate  
anon: (*adv.*) soon, sometime, now and then  
apertly: (*adv.*) openly  
apeward: (*n.*) bee-keeper  
appair: (*v.*) harm  
append: (*v.*) belong  
appose: (*v.*) question  
arate: (*v.*) blame, berate  
arne: (*v.*) well up  
array: (*v.*) prepare; adorn  
arrearage: (*n.*) debt  
as: (*conj.*) and  
assay: (*v.*) try, prove  
assoil: (*v.*) absolve, answer  
attaint: (*v.*) to be found false, disgrace  
attame: (*v.*) pierce, cut into  
attre: (*n.*) poison  
aught: (*n.*) anything, something  
auncel: (*n.*) balance, scales  
auntre: (*v.*) venture  
aventure: (*n.*) chance  
away: *absent*  
aye: (*adv.*) always  
ayle: (*n.*) fore-father  
bache: (*n.*) valley  
bale: (*n.*) sorrow  
baleys: (*n.*) rod  
baleys: (*v.*) beat  
balk: (*n.*) strip of unploughed land; ridges  
ban: (*v.*) curse  
banner: (*n.*) standard-bearer  
baslard: (*n.*) dagger  
barandly: (*adv.*) hastily  
bawd: (*n.*) harlot  
bawding: (*n.*) jesting  
bayard: (*n.*) horse  
be-dravel: (*v.*) slobber  
be-hight: (*v.*) promise  
be-jape: (*v.*) fool  
be-low: (*v.*) falsely accuse  
be-nim: (*v.*) take away  
(*pp.* be-nomen)  
be-smear: (*n.*) scorn; soil  
be-spar: (*v.*) lock up  
beads: (*n.*) prayers  
beadsman: (*n.*) one who prays for another  
behave: (*v.*) need  
beigh, bee: (*n.*) collar, necklace, ring  
belly-joy: (*n.*) appetite  
belsire: (*n.*) forefather  
berg: (*n.*) hill  
berne: (*n.*) man

- bicker: (*v.*) fight  
 bird: (*n.*) lady, maiden, virgin  
 blench: (*v.*) flinch, turn aside  
 bolck: (*n.*) belch  
 boll: (*v.*) swell  
 bolling: (*n.*) swelling  
 bondsman: (*n.*) tiller of soil, tied  
     worker  
 boon: (*n.*) favour, request  
 boot: (*n.*) succour, remedy, amends,  
     advantage  
 boot: (*v.*) heal, amend, benefit  
 bootless: (*adj.*) without relief  
 borgh, borrow: (*v.*) pledge  
 borgh, borwe, borrow: (*n.*) bail, surety,  
     pledge  
 borrel: (*adj.*) ill-educated  
 bosard: (*n.*) oaf, idiot  
 botch: (*n.*) boil, tumour  
 bouk: (*v.*) ??????  
 boun: (*adj.*) ready  
 bourder: (*n.*) jester  
 bourne: *stream*  
 bow: (*v.*) direct one's course  
 braid: (*v.*) hasten, draw, pull up, twist  
 brawl: (*n.*) brat  
 brawn: (*n.*) flesh, pickled pork  
 breme: (*adj.*) fierce  
 brevet: (*n.*) indulgence (brevetum)  
 brew-chest: (*n.*) strife-starter  
 brigirdle: (*n.*) breech-girdle  
 brokage: (*n.*) deal, arrangement  
 brook: (*v.*) enjoy, digest, tolerate  
 buck: (*v.*) steep cloth in lye, bleach  
 bummen: (*v.*) taste  
 bunch: (*v.*) hit
- burden: (*n.*) staff  
 burgage: (*n.*) estate  
 busk: (*v.*) prepare; go  
 buxom: (*adj.*) obedient  
 Cailloux pear: (*n.*) type of pear  
 cair: (*v.*) move to & fro  
 caitiff: (*n.*) wretch, villain  
 caitifty: (*n.*) wretchedness, vileness  
 cammock: (*n.*) spiny reſtharrow,  
     *Ononis spinosa*  
 caple: (*n.*) horse, nag  
 capon: (*n.*) a gelded chicken  
 card: (*v.*) comb  
 cardiacle: (*n.*) heart-pain  
 care: (*n.*) grief  
 careful: (*adj.*) woeful  
 carol: (*v.*) sing  
 carp: (*v.*) speak  
 caſt: (*n.*) plan, intention, plot  
 catchpole: (*n.*) tax-collector  
 catecumeling: (*n.*) catechumens; those  
     preparing their Catechism  
 caulck: (*v.*) to tread, as birds  
 caury-maury: (*n.*) course material  
 cawdel: (*n.*) mess  
 cendal: (*n.*) type of woven silk  
 cene: (*n.*) supper, the Laſt Supper  
 certes: (*adv.*) certainly  
 chaffer: (*n.*) business, commerce  
 chaffer: (*v.*) trade, bargain  
 chamberer: (*n.*) confidant  
 chapman: (*n.*) merchant  
 charnel: (*n.*) grave, church-vault  
 chatelet: (*n.*) small caſtle  
 chattel: (*n.*) property, wealth (*orig.*  
     catel)



- cheap: (*v.*) trade, buy or sell  
 cheaping: (*n.*) market  
 cheat: (*n.*) forfeiture, escheat  
 check: (*n.*) reprimand, rebuke; rebuff, repulse  
 chervil: (*n.*) cow-weed  
 chest: (*n.*) strife  
 chevisance: (*n.*) agreement, bargain, profit  
 chibol: (*n.*) onion  
 chieve: (*v.*) achieve, succeed  
 chivel (*v.*) shiver  
 chop: (*v.*) snap, bite at  
 christen: (*n, adj.*) christian  
 churl: (*n.*) peasant, ill-bred, rough  
 clause-meal: (*adv.*) line by line  
 clepe: (*v.*) call  
 cler-matin: (*n.*) corn for grinding  
 clergially: (*adv.*) learnedly  
 clergy: (*n.*) learning  
 clicket: (*n.*) latch  
 clip: (*v.*) embrace  
 clock: (*v.*) limp, hobble  
 clout: (*n.*) piece of cloth, fragment, rag  
 clout: (*v.*) patch, mend  
 clumse: (*v.*) be numb with cold  
 cockers: (*n.*) gaiters  
 cocket: (*n.*) bread of a particular quality  
 cockney: (*n.*) cook's assistant, scullion, underchef  
 cole: (*n.*) cabbage  
 coll: (*v.*) embrace  
 collop: (*n.*) slice of meat, (scallop)  
 colomy: (*adj.*) filthy, grimy  
 colter: (*n.*) plough-blade  
 comers: (*n.*) strangers  
 commons: (*n.*) the people, community  
 compass: (*v.*) devise, design  
 comse: (*v.*) commence, begin  
 congee: (*n.*) dismissal  
 congee: (*v.*) dismiss  
 consistory: (*n.*) ecclesiastical court  
 contrary: (*v.*) oppose  
 cony: (*n.*) rabbit  
 cope: (*n.*) ceremonial cloak of a priest  
 cope: (*v.*) clothe someone in a cope  
 corsaint: (*n.*) body of a saint, relic  
 corse: (*n.*) body  
 cote: (*n.*) cottage  
 counter-plead: (*v.*) argue against, contradict  
 coupe: (*n.*) fault  
 courtepy: (*n.*) short coat  
 couth: (*v.*) know (how to)  
 crabbed: (*adj.*) bitter  
 cratch: (*v.*) scratch  
 creant: (*adj.*) vanquished  
 crop: (*n.*) top of a tree  
 crowning: (*n.*) the tonsure  
 culorum: (*n.*) conclusion  
 culver: (*n.*) dove  
 cunning: (*n.*) knowledge, skill, science  
 cup-meal: (*n.*) cupsful  
 curb: (*v.*) bend  
 cure: (*n.*) care, charge  
 daff: (*n.*) fool, simpleton, a daft  
 dainty: (*n.*) pleasure  
 daunt: (*v.*) tame, subdue, overcome  
 de-part: (*v.*) divide  
 dearworth: (*adj.*) precious  
 decore: (*v.*) decorate, embellish

- default: (*n.*) fault, defect, lack, need  
 defend: (*v.*) forbid  
 defy: (*v.*) digest  
 delvers: (*n.*) diggers  
 deprave: (*v.*) defame, slander  
 dere: (*n.*) harm  
 dere: (*v.*) harm  
 dern: (*adj.*) secret, dark  
 despend: (*v.*) spend  
 devoir: (*n.*) duty  
 devoutry: (*n.*) adultery  
 diadem: (*v.*) crown  
 dido: (*n.*) old tale  
 dight: (*v.*) prepare; order  
 dignely: (*adv.*) worthily, with dignity  
 dikers: (*n.*) ditch-diggers  
 dime: (*n.*) tithe  
 ding: (*v.*) strike, beat, thresh  
 disdainous: (*adj.*) full of disdain  
 disour: (*n.*) minstrel, professional  
     story-teller  
 dolven: (*adj.*) buried  
 Donet: (*n.*) grammar  
 doom: (*n.*) judgment  
 doubler: (*n.*) platter  
 doughty: (*adj.*) brave  
 draff: (*n.*) husks  
 dright: (*n.*) Lord (God)  
 drunkelew: (*adj.*) given to drinking  
 drury: (*n.*) object of affection  
 durst: (*v.*) would dare  
 dyas: (*n.*) remedies  
 edwite: (*v.*) blame, taunt, reproach  
 eft: (*adv.*) soon, again, afterwards  
 eke: (*conj.*) also  
 elenge: (*adj.*) wretched  
 elengly: (*adv.*) wretchedly  
 emblanch: (*v.*) whiten  
 englyem: (*v.*) cloy, clog, surfeit  
 engrain: (*v.*) dye  
 entermete: (*v.*) interfere  
 entermeting: (*n.*) interfering  
 envenom: (*n.*) poison  
 erd: (*n.*) native land, home  
 ere: (*prep.*) before (in time)  
 erien: (*v.*) plough  
 ern: (*v.*) to run  
 erning: (*v.*) running  
 even-christen: (*n.*) fellow Christian  
 evenforth: (*adv.*) equally  
 ewage: (*n.*) beryl  
 fain: (*adj.*) desirous  
 faintise: (*n.*) feebleness, deceit  
 fait: (*v.*) cheat; beg falsely  
 fairer: (*n.*) deceit  
 faitour: (*n.*) pretender, deceiver,  
     impostor  
 falchion: (*n.*) curved broad sword  
 fang: (*v.*) receive  
 farthing: (*n.*) coin  
 fault: (*v.*) lack, fail  
 faunt: (*n.*) child, infant  
 fauntekin: (*n.*) child  
 fauntlety: (*n.*) childishness  
 favel: (*n.*) flattery, deceit  
 featously: (*adv.*) beautifully, elegantly  
 feer: (*n.*) business dealings  
 fele: (*adj.*) much, many  
 fell: (*adj.*) cruel, wicked, savage  
 fell: (*n.*) skin  
 felly: (*adv.*) cruelly  
 fenester: (*n.*) window

- feoff: (*v.*) endow  
 feoffment: (*n.*) deed of possession  
 fere: (*n.*) companion, spouse  
 ferly: (*n.*) wonder  
 fern-years: (*n.*) past years  
 festu: (*n.*) splinter  
 fey: (*adj.*) doomed, feeble  
 fibicche: (*n.*) trick  
 find: (*v.*) provide; feel  
 fithel: (*v.*) relate, story-tell  
 flame: (*v.*) flame, smell  
 flap: (*n.*) strike, blow  
 flap: (*v.*) thresh  
 flatte: (*v.*) throw, cast  
 flux: (*n.*) discharge  
 fobber: (*n.*) trickster  
 fold: (*n.*) earth  
 fond: (*v.*) try, test, prove, attempt,  
     hasten  
 foning: (*n.*) temptation  
 for-do: (*v.*) destroy, undo, ruin  
 for-fare: (*v.*) come to grief, perish  
 for-fret: (*v.*) eat away  
 for-glutton: (*v.*) gorge  
 for-grint: (*v.*) destroyed  
 for-pined: (*adj.*) wretched, tormented  
 for-yield: (*v.*) reward, repay  
 forbisen: (*n.*) example  
 forcer: (*n.*) box  
 fore-wit: (*n.*) forethought  
 forel: (*n.*) box  
 forward: (*n.*) agreement  
 form: (*v.*) teach, inform  
 forth: (*adv.*) therefore  
 forth: (*n.*) passage, course  
 forwanye: (*v.*) spoil by indulgence  
 frater: (*n.*) refectory  
 frayn: (*v.*) ask  
 freke: (*n.*) bold man, warrior  
 fremd: (*n.*) stranger  
 fret: (*v.*) eat, devour  
 frith: (*n.*) wood, forest  
 frith: (*v.*) defend, protect  
 frounce: (*n.*) fold, crease  
 fulling: (*n.*) baptism  
 furze: (*n.*) thornbush, gorse  
 fyle: (*n.*) woman, mistress  
 gab: (*v.*) lie  
 gadling: (*n.*) vagabond  
 galoshes: (*n.*) wooden shoes, clogs  
 galp: (*v.*) yawn  
 gan: (*v.*) began pp. of ginnen  
 gar: (*v.*) cause  
 garrison: (*n.*) deliverance  
 gart: (*v.*) see gar  
 gate: (*n.*) way, path, street  
 gateway: (*n.*) porter, gatekeeper  
 gentrice: (*n.*) nobility  
 gesene: (*adj.*) scarce  
 gest: (*n.*) story, exploit  
 gin: (*n.*) contrivance  
 ginful: (*adj.*) guileful  
 ginning: (*n.*) beginning  
 girt: (*v.*) vomit  
 glee-man: (*n.*) minstrel  
 glead: (*n.*) glowing coal, ember  
 gloss: (*v.*) expound, explain; also  
     superficially so.  
 glub: (*v.*) gulp  
 glubber: (*n.*) gulper  
 goky: (*n.*) fool, gowk  
 goliard: (*n.*) jester

- gome: (*n.*) man  
 gorge: (*n.*) throat  
 gothele: (*v.*) growl  
 gout: (*n.*) fit, attack of disease, gout  
 gradde: (*v.*) cried out  
 grain: (*n.*) colour, dye  
 graithly: (*adv.*) readily  
 grange: (*n.*) farm-house  
 grass: (*n.*) herb  
 grede: (*v.*) cry out  
 gree: (*n.*) prize, pre-eminence  
 greet: (*v.*) cry  
 grice: (*n.*) a young pig  
 gris: (*n.*) grey fur  
 gurl (*n.*) child  
 gyour: (*n.*) guide  
 gyves: (*n.*) fetters, shackles  
 hackneyman: (*n.*) horse-dealer  
 halidom: (*n.*) holiness, holy relic  
 halse: (*n.*) neck  
 halse: (*v.*) beseech; embrace  
 handwhile: (*n.*) short time  
 handy-dandy: (*n.*) forfeit  
 hansel: (*v.*) try for the first time  
 hap: (*n.*) chance, fortune  
 harlotry: (*n.*) bawdy story, dirty joke  
 hastilokest: (*adv.*) most hastily  
 hater: (*n.*) coat  
 havylon: (*n.*) trick  
 haw: (*n.*) hawthorn  
 hayward: (*n.*) overseer (ward of hay)  
 heaven-rich: *kingdom* of heaven  
 heel: (*n.*) crust  
 hende: (*adj.*) courteous  
 hendily: (*adv.*) courteously  
 hendinous: (*n.*) courtesy  
 hent: (*v.*) sieze  
 herber: (*n.*) garden, arbour  
 herne: (*n.*) corner  
 heſt: (*n.*) commandment  
 hewe: (*n.*) servant  
 hight: (*v.*) call, bid, promise; also to be called  
 hile: (*v.*) cover, protect, conceal  
 hine, hind: (*n.*) servant  
 homely: (*adv.*) meekly  
 hoop: (*v.*) shout  
 hopper: (*n.*) seed-basket  
 hoſtry: (*n.*) inn  
 hote: (*v.*) bid (pp. of *haten*)  
 housel: (*n.*) eucharist  
 housel: (*v.*) receive eucharist  
 howve: (*n.*) hood  
 huckery: (*n.*) business dealing  
 hutch: (*n.*) chest, clothes-box  
 ilk: (*adj.*) the same  
 imp: (*n.*) offspring  
 imp: (*v.*) graft, implaft  
 in-going: (*n.*) entrance  
 in-wit: (*n.*) conscience, understanding, inward sense, mental faculties  
 jangle: (*v.*) chatter, argue  
 jordan: (*n.*) alchemist's vessel  
 joute: (*n.*) soup  
 juke: (*v.*) rest  
 jutte: (*n.*) nobody  
 juenty: (*n.*) youth  
 keep: (*v.*) guard, watch over  
 ken: (*v.*) know, make known, teach  
 kex: (*n.*) dry stalk (of an *umbelliferae*)  
 kidde: (*v.*) make known, show  
 Kind Wit: (*n.*) common sense; natural

- understanding  
 kind: (*adj.*) natural  
 kind: (*n.*) nature  
 kindly: (*adv.*) naturally  
 king-rich (*n.*) kingdom  
 kirtle: (*n.*) tunic  
 kith: (*n.*) country  
 knap: (*n.*) knob, button  
 knock: (*n.*) blow  
 knowledge: (*v.*) acknowledge  
 laches: (*n.*) fault  
 lack: (*n.*) fault  
 lack: (*v.*) blame, scold, find fault  
 lackless: (*v.*) blameless  
 laik: (*v.*) play sport  
 landleaper: (*n.*) vagabond, vagrant  
 lap: (*n.*) portion  
 large: (*n.*) bounty, largess  
 latch: (*v.*) catch, get  
 laugh: (*v.*) take, seize  
 lave: (*v.*) wash  
 lazar: (*n.*) leper  
 lea: (*n.*) unploughed land, meadow  
 leal: (*adj.*) true, loyal, honest  
 leally: (*adv.*) truly, loyally  
 leam: (*n.*) gleam  
 leasing: (*n.*) lie  
 leave: (*v.*) leave, dismiss, remain, allow  
 leden: (*n.*) voice, language  
 ledes: (*n.*) subjects, vassals, serfs  
 leech: (*n.*) healer, doctor  
 leechcraft: (*n.*) medicine  
 leer: (*n.*) face  
 legister: (*n.*) legislator  
 leman: (*n.*) sweetheart  
 lene: (*v.*) grant, lend  
 leode: (*n.*) man  
 lese: (*v.*) redeem  
 let: (*v.*) delay, hinder  
 lethi: (*adj.*) empty  
 letterure: (*n.*) writings, scripture  
 letting: (*n.*) delay  
 lewed: (*adj.*) ignorant, unlearned,  
     worthless  
 leye: (*n.*) flame, light  
 liard: (*n.*) grey, grey horse  
 lich: (*n.*) body  
 lief: (*adj.*) dear, glad, acceptable  
 liefer: (*adj.*) dearer, glad, rather  
 liefest: (*adj.*) dearest  
 lieve: (*v.*) believe  
 lift: (*n.*) sky  
 light: (*adj.*) trivial, of low worth  
 light: (*v.*) bring, place, come to  
 lightloker: (*adv.*) more nimbly  
 likame: (*n.*) body  
 likerous: (*adj.*) lecherous, greedy  
 liking: (*n.*) pleasure  
 lime-yard: (*n.*) snare for catching  
     birds  
 liser: (*n.*) edge of cloth  
 liss: (*n.*) joy, happiness, relief  
 list: (*n.*) edge of cloth  
 list: (*v.*) desire, choose, want  
 lithe: (*v.*) listen to  
 lither: (*adj.*) treacherous, evil, bad  
 lobbies: (*n.*) lubber, clumsy fellow  
 loll: (*v.*) lounge  
 loller: (*n.*) one who lounges, vagabond  
 lomer: (*adv.*) more often  
 long: (*v.*) belong  
 look: (*v.*) govern

- loos: (*n.*) reputation  
 lorel: (*n.*) abandoned man, lost soul,  
     waſtrel  
 loresman: (*n.*) teacher  
 losel: (*n.*) lost, waſtrel  
 losengery: (*n.*) flattery, lying  
 lote: (*v.*) lurk  
 loteby: (*n.*) lover, paramour  
 lour: (*v.*) scowl  
 lout: (*v.*) bow, stoop  
 love-day: (*n.*) a day for settling  
     diſputes  
 luft: (*n.*) worthless fellow  
 lurdane: (*n.*) stupid person, dullard  
 lussheburgh: (*n.*) counterfeit English  
     coin, made abroad  
 macer: (*n.*) mace-bearer  
 Mahoun: (*n.*) the devil  
 mail: (*n.*) bag  
 mainpernor: (*n.*) surety  
 mainprise: (*n.*) bail, security  
 maison-dieux: (*n.*) hoſpital  
 make: (*n.*) mate  
 mamel: (*v.*) prattled, var. of mamble  
 mandment: (*n.*) commandment  
 mange: (*v.*) eat  
 mangery: (*n.*) feast  
 manly: (*adj.*, *adv.*) courteous, humane,  
     humanely, boldly  
 mansed: (*adj.*) cursed  
 march: (*n.*) borderland; diſtrict  
 margery-pearl: (*n.*) pearl  
 maugre: (*n.*) illwill  
 maugree: (*prep.*) in spite of  
 maw: (*n.*) ſtomach  
 meal: (*adv.*) one-at-a-time  
 mean: (*n.*) mediator  
 mean: (*v.*) remember, complain,  
     lament, bemoan  
 measle: (*n.*) leper  
 meddle: (*v.*) mix  
 meed: (*n.*) reward, payment made in  
     consideration of merit  
 meek: (*v.*) humble (oneself)  
 mele: (*v.*) ſpeak  
 mendicant: (*n.*) vagrant  
 meng: (*v.*) commemorate  
 meng: (*v.*) mix  
 mening: *seeking*  
 menison: (*n.*) dysentery  
 mensk: (*v.*) honour, dignity,  
     graciousness  
 mercy-money: (*n.*) reward, thanks  
 mercy: (*v.*) thank  
 meritory: (*adj.*) meritorious  
 meſter: (*n.*) occupation  
 mete: (*v.*) dream  
 mete: (*v.*) measure  
 metel: (*n.*) dream  
 mette: (*n.*) companion  
 meynee: (*n.*) household, company  
 mind: (*v.*) remember  
 miniver: (*n.*, *adj.*) fur  
 mnam, mina: (*n.*) coin  
 moeble: (*n.*) movable property,  
     belongings  
 mold: (*n.*) earth  
 mole: (*v.*) ſtain  
 monial: (*n.*) nun  
 moody: (*adj.*) proud  
 more: (*n.*) root  
 mortrew: (*n.*) ſtew

- mote: (*n.*) speck of dust  
 move: (*v.*) move, suggest  
 mow: (*v.*) to be able  
 much: (*adj.*) tall, great  
 muchel: (*n.*) size  
 mulier: (*n.*) woman; lady; child born  
     in wedlock  
 muson: (*n.*) measure  
 muſter: (*n.*) show  
 mutton: (*n.*) gold coin  
 namely: (*adv.*) especially  
 naught: (*n.*) nothing  
 nearhand: (*adv.*) nearly  
 neat: (*n.*) ox  
 nelle: (*v.*) will not (*ne + will*)  
 nere: (*v.*) were not (*ne + were*)  
 neveling: (*v.*) snivelling  
 nice: (*adj.*) foolish  
 niggard: (*n.*) mean, stingy person  
 nim: (*v.*) take  
 noble: (*n.*) coin  
 nolde: (*v.*) would not  
 non-power: (*n.*) impotence  
 nouthe: (*n.*) nothing  
 noy: (*v.*) annoy  
 nys: (*v.*) is not (*ne + is*)  
 nyſte: (*v.*) knew not (*ne + wiſt*)  
 of-ſend: (*v.*) send for  
 ought: (*v.*) possess  
 out-wit: (*n.*) acquired wisdom,  
     learning through experience  
 pair: (*v.*) injure, impair  
 paltock: (*n.*) jacket  
 pan: (*n.*) head, skull  
 parcel-meal: (*adv.*) piecemeal  
 parl: (*v.*) speak  
 parrock: (*v.*) enclose  
 patent: (*n.*) rock  
 payn: (*n.*) bread  
 peal: (*n.*) accusation  
 pealer: (*n.*) accuser  
 peer: (*v.*) be peers, equal  
 pen: (*n.*) feather  
 peradventure: (*adv.*) perchance;  
     perhaps  
 permutation: (*n.*) exchange  
 perrie: (*n.*) jewels  
 pertly: (*adv.*) plainly  
 pike-harney: (*n.*) plunderer of dead  
     men's armour  
 pike: (*v.*) hoe  
 pill: (*v.*) rob  
 pilour: (*n.*) robber, plunderer  
 pine : (*v.*) suffer  
 pine: (*n.*) torment, pain  
 pinfold: (*n.*) enclosure  
 pining: (*n.*) torture  
 plain: (*v.*) complain  
 platte: (*v.*) to prostrate oneself; throw  
     oneself flat  
 plener: (*adj.*) full  
 plight: (*v.*) pledge  
 point: (*adj.*) in point: ready  
 poise: (*n.*) weight  
 poise: (*v.*) weigh  
 poke: (*n.*) bag  
 poll: (*n.*) head  
 pondfold: (*n.*) pound, prison  
 porret: (*n.*) leek  
 port: (*n.*) deportment, bearing  
 porthors: (*n.*) prayer-book  
 potence: (*n.*) staff

- pottager: (*n.*) stew-maker  
 pound-meal: (*adv.*) a pound a time  
 poustee: (*n.*) power  
 prest: (*adj.*) quick, prompt, swift  
 preynte: (*v.*) winked  
 prick: (*v.*) spur, ride fast  
 pricker: (*n.*) horseman  
 pricker: (*n.*) rider  
 provender: (*n.*) fodder  
 provender: (*v.*) provide with prebends  
 provisor: (*n.*) one the pope names as  
     successor to a post  
 prowor: (*n.*) purveyor  
 puck: (*n.*) demon; mischievous spirit  
 puff: (*v.*) belch  
 purfle: (*n.*) fur trim on a dress  
 putte: (*n.*) prison  
 pye: (*n.*) magpie  
 pyle: (*n.*) gate, gatehouse  
 quaintise: (*n.*) skill, cunning  
 quaintly: (*adv.*) artfully, cunningly  
 queed: (*n.*) wicked  
 quelt: (*v.*) pp. dead  
 quick: (*adj.*) alive  
 quick: (*v.*) revive, bring to life  
 quit: (*v.*) relieve, repay, acquit  
 quoth: (*v.*) speak, say  
 ragman: (*n.*) papal bull; devil; coward,  
     madman  
 rakiere: (*n.*) messenger  
 rap: (*n.*) haste  
 rap: (*v.*) hasten, hurry  
 rathe: (*adv.*) early  
 ratoner: (*n.*) rat-catcher  
 raught: (*v.*) reached, stretched  
 rax: (*v.*) stretch  
 ray: (*n.*) striped cloth  
 read: (*v.*) advise  
 rearages: (*n.*) arrears  
 reave: (*v.*) rob, plunder  
 reck: (*v.*) care  
 redgoundes: (*n.*) scrofula  
 regrate: (*v.*) retail  
 regratery: (*n.*) retail  
 regratiers: (*n.*) retailer  
 release: (*v.*) forgiven  
 religious: (*n.*) clergy  
 renable: (*adj.*) eloquent, reasonable  
 renege: (*v.*) deny, renounce  
 renk: (*n.*) man  
 resemble: (*v.*) liken  
 ribibour: (*n.*) fiddler  
 riche: (*n.*) kingdom  
 rogged: (*v.*) shook (pp)  
 roil: (*v.*) rove about  
 roinous: (*adj.*) scurfy  
 roll: (*v.*) enrol  
 rood: (*n.*) cross, gallows  
 rotey: (*n.*) rotey-time: mating season  
 rought: (*v.*) care  
 rounen: (*v.*) whisper, talk secretly  
 rout: (*n.*) throng, mob  
 rout: (*v.*) snore  
 row: (*v.*) dawn  
 rugge: (*n.*) back  
 ruggebones: (*n.*) backbones  
 rush: (*n.*) worthless amount  
 ruth: (*n.*) pity, care  
 ruwet: (*n.*) trumpet  
 sad: (*adj.*) sated, weary, serious, sober  
 sadness: (*n.*) soberness  
 sail: (*v.*) dance



- salve: (*v.*) heal  
 samplary: (*n.*) example  
 sans: (*prep.*) without  
 saught: (*v.*) reconcile  
 saulee: (*n.*) food  
 sault: (*n.*) assault  
 saultry: (*n.*) tumbling  
 savour: (*n.*) pleasure  
 scall: (*n.*) scab  
 scathe: (*n.*) harm, wound  
 scleyre: (*n.*) veil  
 scrip: (*n.*) bag  
 secular: (*n.*) layman  
 secutor: (*n.*) executor  
 seem: (*n.*) horse-load  
 segge: (*n.*) man  
 selcouth: (*n.*) wonder  
 semblable: (*adj.*) alike, resembling  
 serelepes: (*adv.*) separately  
 serk: (*n.*) shirt  
 shaft: (*n.*) form  
 shend: (*v.*) disgrace, ruin, reproach,  
     injure  
 shep: (*n.*) shepherd  
 shepster: (*n.*) shepherd  
 shide: (*n.*) splinter  
 shrive: (*v.*) give absolution (to)  
 sib: (*adj.*) related  
 sickerer: (*adv.*) more surely  
 sidder: (*adj.*) lower  
 sisour: (*n.*) juror (assizer)  
 sithe: (*n.*) time, number  
 sithen: *afterwards*, since  
 skill: (*n.*) reason, argument  
 sleight: (*n.*) cunning, skill, trickery  
 sod: (*v.*) boil  
 sokene: (*n.*) shire  
 soleyne: (*adj.*) alone  
 somedeal: (*n.*) something  
 sonde: (*n.*) message  
 songe-warie: (*n.*) dream interpretation  
 soothfast: (*adj.*) true  
 soude: (*n.*) payment  
 souter: (*n.*) cobbler  
 souteress: (*n.*) shoe-seller  
 sowne: (*v.*) tend to  
 spakly: (*adv.*) gently, prudently  
 sp̄ar: (*v.*) close  
 sp̄are: (*v.*) save  
 sp̄eed: (*n.*) success  
 sp̄eer: (*v.*) enquire, question  
 sp̄eke: (*n.*) hollow  
 sp̄elunk: (*n.*) cave  
 sp̄enses: (*n.*) expenses  
 sp̄ill: (*v.*) destroy, waste  
 sp̄ire: (*n.*) offshoot, scion, tall grass  
 sp̄rackly: (*adv.*) energetically, lively  
 st̄ew: (*n.*) brothel  
 st̄ewed: (*v.*) established, ordered  
 st̄int: (*v.*) stop  
 st̄oat: (*n.*) bullock  
 st̄ock: (*n.*) trunk  
 st̄ounde: (*n.*) time  
 st̄roy: (*v.*) destroy  
 subtle: (*v.*) reason craftily  
 sue: (*v.*) follow  
 suit: (*n.*) retinue  
 swelt: (*v.*) die  
 sweven: (*n.*) dream  
 sweye: (*v.*) sound  
 swink: (*v.*) pp. swonk: work, labour,  
     toil

- swithe: (*adv.*) greatly, quickly  
 swonk: (*v.*) see swink  
 tache: (*n.*) mark, stain, blemish; tinder  
 tale-wise: (*adj.*) slanderous  
 tallage: (*n.*) taxation  
 tally: (*n.*) reckoning, accounting  
 teen: (*n.*) vexation  
 teen: (*v.*) vex, trouble, grieve  
 teenful: (*adj.*) troublesome, vexacious  
 thesterness: (*n.*) darkness  
 think: (*v.*) think, intend  
 thole: (*v.*) suffer, endure  
 thrall: (*n.*) slave  
 thrive: (*n.*) bunch - also 24 things.  
 throe: (*n.*) suffering  
 tickle: (*adj.*) loose, unstable, fickle  
 tid: (*adv.*) quickly  
 tidy: (*n.*) respectable  
 tilde: (*v.*) dwell  
 till: (*v.*) gain, earn, till (soil)  
 tilth: (*n.*) crops, tilled land  
 timber: (*v.*) build  
 tithe: (*n.*) a tenth part; 10% allotted to  
     the church  
 to-boll: (*v.*) swollen  
 to-drew (*v.*) mutilated, torn apart pp.  
     of to-draw  
 to-fore: (*adv.*) before  
 to-lugged: (*v.*) dragged about  
 to-rend: (*v.*) be torn  
 to-shullen: (*v.*) peel  
 toller: (*n.*) enticer  
 top: (*n.*) hair  
 tote: (*v.*) gaze  
 treacle, triacle: (*n.*) remedy, medicine  
 troden: (*v.*) copulate with  
 trolly-lolly: (*adj.*) coarse lace, but also  
     the title of a song, "Hey trolly lolly  
     lo".  
 troth: (*n.*) truth, oath  
 trow: (*v.*) think, believe, swear  
 truss: (*n.*) bundle  
 try: (*adj.*) excellent  
 tryly: *excellently*  
 tuft: *hillock*  
 tun: (*n.*) barrel  
 tyne: (*v.*) enclose  
 tyne: (*v.*) lose  
 un-dignely: (*adv.*) unworthily  
 un-ſpar: (*v.*) uncloze, open  
 un-thende: (*adj.*) out-of-season  
 un-time: *inappropriate* time  
 under-fangen: (*v.*) receive  
 under-nyme: (*v.*) reprove, criticized  
 under-pight: (*v.*) support  
 underfeng: (*v.*) received (pp. of under-  
     fangen)  
 unhardy: (*adj.*) unconfident, un-bold  
 unnethe: (*adv.*) scarcely  
 upholder: (*n.*) broker, tradesman  
 vauntward: (*adj.*) vanguard, forefront  
 veille: (*n.*) watcher, watchman  
 vernicle: (*n.*) image of Christ's face  
 very: (*adj.*) true  
 vokette: (*n.*) advocate  
 waferer: (*n.*) wafer-seller, cake-maker  
 wage: (*v.*) pledge, go bail  
 waltrot: (*n.*) nonsense, an idle tale  
 walwen: (*v.*) roll  
 wanhope: (*n.*) despair  
 wardmotes: (*n.*) the court of a ward  
 warie: (*v.*) curse

- warnish: (*v.*) protect  
warp: (*v.*) utter, throw  
warroke: (*v.*) fasten, girth  
wastel: (*n.*) cake  
wayve: (*v.*) send away, open  
weal: (*n.*) prosperity; public interest  
web: (*n.*) cloth  
webber: (*n.*) weaver  
wed: (*n.*) pledge, deposit  
wed: (*v.*) bet  
weeds: (*n.*) clothes  
ween: (*v.*) suppose, hope, think  
weening: (*n.*) hope  
weer: (*n.*) doubt  
welkin: (*n.*) sky  
well-away: (*interj.*) exclamation of sorrow  
welsh: (*n.*) Welsh cloth  
wem: (*n.*) stain  
wernard: (*n.*) liar  
wet: (*n.*) wet weather  
whilom: (*adv.*) sometimes, formerly, of old  
wickedlokeſt: (*adj.*) most wickedly  
wicket: (*n.*) small gate  
wide-where: (*adj.*) far and wide  
wight: (*n.*) person  
wightly: (*adv.*) ſprightly, ſwiftly  
wightneſs: (*n.*) ſtrength  
will: (*v.*) deſire  
win: (*adj.*) pleaſant, charming  
wis: (*adv.*) truly  
wiſs: (*v.*) guide, adviſe  
wit: (*n.*) knowledge  
wit: (*v.*) know, guard, keep  
withal: (*adv.*) alſo, likewiſe  
witterly: (*adv.*) truly  
wone: (*n.*) dwelling  
wone: (*v.*) dwell  
wont: (*v.*) be accuſtomed  
wool-ward: (*adj.*) wearing wool  
woon: (*n.*) plenty  
wort: (*n.*) vegetable  
worth: (*v.*) become, be; dwell; mount  
wot: (*v.*) know  
writhen: (*adj.*) clenched  
wroken: (*v.*) avenged (pp. of wreak)  
wye: (*n.*) man  
y-called: (*v.*) capped  
y-couped: (*v.*) cut, ſlaſhed  
y-crimpled: (*v.*) hair curled  
y-wis: (*adv.*) truly  
yarken: (*v.*) prepare  
yarnen: (*v.*) run  
yearſgifts: (*n.*) annual preſents, bribes  
yede: (*v.*) went, walked  
yeme: (*n.*) heed  
yemen: (*v.*) care for, heed, govern  
yemere: (*v.*) guardian  
yepe: (*adj.*) nimble, eager, wily  
yepely: (*adv.*) eagerly, nimbly, cunningly  
yern: (*v.*) run  
yerne: (*adv.*) quickly, eagerly

