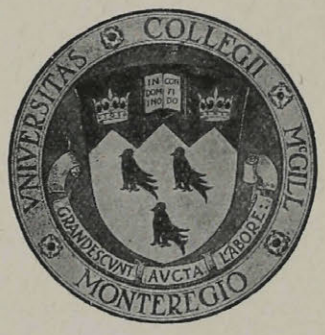
PIERS PLOWMAN AS AN INTERPRETATION OF FOURTEENTH CENTURY LIFE, ETC.



"PIERS PLOWMAN AS AN INTERPRETATION OF FOURTEENTH CENTURY LIFE, THOUGHT AND LITERATURE."

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Piers Plowman as an Interpretation of Fourteenth Century Life, Thought and Literature.

Contents.

Chapter I.

INTRODUCTION.

When Chaucer had the privilege of entering the Hall of Fame and observing the ways of the goddess of that place, it is most unfortunate that he did not happen on the moment when the fame of Langland was approaching the noble Queen. It is not difficult, however, to imagine the scene when Chaucer has given us a suggestion. A tall solitary figure - or are there five of them?-approaches the throne and ~~suggests~~ requests that his fame may go forth as one who loved his fellow men, and would fain teach them to love. The inexorable goddess pays no heed to his prayer, but bids Eolus sound, and a strange blast he blows, a blast neither from "Sclaundre" nor "Laude", but a trumpet of Confusion, which shrills forth a fame which may, in sooth, be good, but which partakes of no such character as the aspirant had desired. In varying notes and with varying intensity this blast has been ringing down through the ages, but rarely I fear has the music been such as that Langland might be expected to be able to recognize, or approve the fame of his own poem.

The Book concerning Piers the Plowman was valued in its own age, valued to the extent of 47 still existing MSS., but instead of inspiring the nation to a pilgrimage to St.Truth, it encouraged them in an assault upon London; instead of winning approval as an instructor in love and righteousness, it obtained notoriety as a pamphlet assailing existing society, so that the poem written to restore the integrity of existing institutions was used by John Ball to stir up the peasants to revolt against the principles of

feudalism. His next position was probably more agreeable to Langland for it was his moral and hortative character as a "very pithy wryter"* which won him recognition in the 16th Century, but the satisfaction of passing through 3 editions in the reign of Edward VI must have been marred for this faithful son of the Church by his being thus made to appear as a spokesman of Protestantism. Morals not being at a premium under the ~~Stewarts~~ Stuarts, and 14th Century literature being decidedly at a discount in the 18th century, Piers the Plowman sank into obscurity and was not even honored by being rewritten by Dryden, though D'Israeli is sure that he had "carefully conned our Piers the Plowman." *1 In 1813 Langland was resurrected by Whitaker's edition of the C text, though he only became really accessible to the public in 1842 when Mr. Wright published his first excellent edition of the B text. The poet finally came into his own when Prof. Skeat produced his incomparable edition of the 3 texts, with notes and indices, for the E.E.T.S., in the last quarter of the century. It was not for its moral influence that Piers the Plowman was resurrected nor yet for its poetic value but, as was inevitable in an age of scholarship, for its philological importance. This is clearly testified in a letter*2 of Nov. 12, 1787, signed T.H.W., No doubt its editor Whitaker, who urges that, "Though Langelande

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* W. Webbe "A Discourse of English Poetrie."

*1 "Amenities of Literature" Langland 188

*2 Gent. Mag. 1787, II. p. 945.

a clean boy)

will by no means bear a comparison with Chaucer for wit, pleasantry, or discrimination of character, yet the enquirer into the origin of our language will find in him a greater fund of materials to elucidate the progress of the Saxon tongue." The writer then goes on to apologize for his interest in so obscure a bard by dubbing him the Ennius of Virgil, and "the father of English blank verse." The 19th century discovered also"a fund of materials to elucidate the progress" of 14th century politics and society, and as perhaps no two centuries can be brought more closely together in social, industrial and literary development than the 14th and the 19th centuries of English history, a vital connection was at once established. In the 20th century we are confronted with another change in Langland's position. In 1906 Piers the Plowman leapt into prominence in certain circles by Mr. Manly's contention that it was the work of 5 authors rather than of one, and the volume and scope of the discussion have been growing ever since. Perhaps beginning with M.Jusserand's "Piers the Plowman - a contribution to the History of English Mysticism," of 1894 and emphasized by the problems brought up in the controversy, the poem is now receiving the fairer attention of interest in it as a work of art, and interest in its author as a great poet. Thus, after passing through the stages of political, moral, philological, historical and controversial importance, Piers the Plowman has at last, we may hope, reached the time when critics will realize of it, as of Chaucer, Spenser and Milton, that"the life in poetry, the appreciation of poetry in its vital quality, is the object of study." *

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* Springs of Helicon, Intr. X.

Though there is an element of tragedy in this misconception of a poem into which its author put all that was best in mind and soul to accomplish the definite purpose of reformation, yet the very triumph of the poem is that it has proved human enough and great enough for every one to find in it that which his soul requires. That which was transitory, his attacks on abuses in Church, State and Society, now possess only an antiquarian value, but the excellences of poetry and the principles of truth and love remain as vital as ever. Langland intended to write a moral tract, and it came forth a mighty poem. His feelings must be much as if Mother Cary set to work to shape some useful domestic fowl, and then found that involuntarily her hands had formed an eagle, wondrous in beauty and strength.

The present thesis is to a certain extent a retrogression to the didacticism of the 19th century, in so much as it studies the poem for its extra-literary value, as an interpretation of 14th century Life, Thought and Literature. Yet I think it may claim a share in 20th century tendencies, in so much as the personality of the poet and the intrinsic value of Piers the Plowman as a poem have been ever in my mind. By an examination of the poem in comparison with other information about the period, I have attempted to establish in how far it furnished the material for a picture of the religious, political, and social life of the second half of the 14th century, and to discover what is the peculiar gift which Piers the Plowman brings to our reconstruction of the life of that period. What seemed of more importance than a record of the doings of men, was an examination of the thought of the period,

not as a whole, for Langland is an introspective writer and had no intention of recording the current opinions of his time, but as it is represented in this individual; and so frank and sincere is he that we could not desire a better revelation of the struggles of the finest souls in the age of Wiclif. I have, therefore,devoted what may seem almost excessive attention to his attitude towards the various institutions, and to that elaborate record which he has left us of the growth of his soul. In taking Piers the Plowman as an interpretation of the literature of the period, our attention is rather shifted from the content to the form, but my object has still been to see in how far Piers the Plowman is representative of its age, by comparison with the general tendencies of 14th century literature, by tracing some of its sources and its influence, and then by turning to the poem itself, as a poem, to see what the 14th century could produce in the way of literary art.

Such are the objects which I have endeavored to keep before me in writing this thesis, if I sometimes discuss questions and introduce matter which does not seem quite pertinent to my theme, I can only plead in excuse with M.Jusserand and M. Jusserand's cabman, "I did this because I could not help it; I loved it so."*

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* Lit. Hist. of the English People, Pref. p. Xll.

II. The Controversy.

Into every question connected with Piers the Plowman an infimite complexity has been introduced by the problem about the authorship. We cannot advance one step on our journey before we find ourselves in the fearsome quagmire of the Piers the Plowman controversy, and as one's convictions on that question must colour all one says and the way in which one says it, it behooves me to give some account of the questions involved. Are we responsible for one man or 5? The arguments on either side, up to the present time (March 1917) are as follows:

The 1st reference to multiple authorship of the poem of Piers the Plowman is found in 1834 in an article by Wright.* This view he repeated in greaterdetail in the introduction to his edition of the B text of the poem, published in 1842, where he stated that he was led to believe in a difference of authorship between B and C(the only texts of whose existence he was aware) by the difference in sentiment revealed in the alterations, and he quotes*1 as an example the softening of the"Statement of popular opinion of the origin and purpose of kingly government" expressed in B. pr. 112-122, as compared with C I, 139-146 (Skeat's numbering). In 1859 and 1860 Prof. G.P.Marsh*2 stated in his "Lectures on the English Language" and again in his "Origins and History of the English Language" that difference in vocabulary and the different

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* Gent's Mag. 1834. I. page 385.

*1 Wright, 1842 edition, intr. XLI.

*2 quoted Mod.Phil. XIV. Sept. 1916, p 123.

tone of the sentiment led him to the conclusion that more than one man worked on the poem of Piers the Plowman.

With these two exceptions, unity of authorship is accepted in all the 79 notices of Piers the Plowman collected by Prof. Skeat.* In one way, these 79 gentlemen labored under a disadvantage, for until the appearance of the E.E.T.S. edition there was no printed copy of the A text, and its existence ~~is~~ was unknown, or, at any rate, ignored except in one brief reference by Price,*1 who states that "It is evident that another and a 3rd version was once in circulation; and if the first draught of the poem be still in existence, it is here perhaps that we must look for it." In 1867 appeared the first volume (the A text) of the E.E.T.S. edition, and here Skeat, the great authority on the poem, distinctly stated*2 "that most of the additional matter in both the later forms of the poem was by Langland himself I have little doubt; his style is very peculiar, and many of the subsequently interpolated passages are the very best of the whole. It is easy to say that others may have added to it; but the question is, who could have done so? There were not two Langland's, surely." This opinion he reiterates in every succeeding volume.*3 In the accounts of Langland in text-books of English literature, whether they be fairly adequate, as in Jusserand, Morley and Ten Brink, or very sketchy, Prof. Skeat's explanation of the changes as due to the natural development of the man's sympathies

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* Vol. IV. Index IX.

*1 Warton II. 1840 edition, p. 63.

*2 Pref. I. Text A, p. XXXIII.

*3 e.g. Pref. III, Text C p.LXXIX.

and the characteristics of increasing age, is universally accepted.

Into this peaceful situation Prof. Manly dropped an apple of discord in the form of a short article published in Jan. 1906, entitled "The Lost Leaf of Piers the Ploughman."*
Here he declared that he had been led by differences in diction, versification, constructive qualities; kind and use of figurative language, and especially by striking contrasts in character and mental attitude, to formulate a theory of multiple authorship. His contention is that there are 5 authors: I. A, the original author who compossed passus I-V11; 2. A2, who added V111 to X11; 3. John But, responsible for about one-half of A X11; 4. B, a 1st reviser; 5. C, a second reviser. He also brings forward a side issue by expressing his agreement with Prof. Jack*1 in denying the autobiographical element in the poem. All these opinions he promised to support in a forthcoming volume, ~~and~~ This volume has not yet appeared, but in the meantime discussion has waged hotly round the subject, and shows as yet no sign of lessening.
This controversy offers matter of absorbing interest to all who love the dreamer of Malvern, and it has been rendered most pleasant to follow, not only by the scholarly nature of their discussion, but also by the courtesy which the scholars have displayed in dealing with the views of their opponents. The leaders on either side are Mr. Manly, and Mr. Jusserand, and roughly speaking, the American

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* Mod. Phil. 111, Jan. 1906.

*1 J.G. Phil. 111, p. 393.

School follows the multiple theory, while the European School for the most part reserves its judgment, but inclines to the conservative view. A notable exception is Professor Bradley's tendency to multiple authorship and Dr. Furnivall's ardent championship of it. Mr. Manly further developed his views, though still with tantalizing brevity, in the Cambridge History of Literature*, and throughout 1909 and 1910 he and Mr. Jusserand kept up a lively series of articles. Since 1910 the main disputants have refrained from discussion, but a brief notice last September, where Mr. Manly quotes the views of Marsh, proves that this disturber of the peace is not yet convinced.*1

These replies and counter replies which form the foundation of the controversy deal with the following questions:

I. Additions, Omissions and Structural Changes:-

The first great crux which Prof. Manly brought forward *2 was the awkward position of the Robert the Robber passage, *3 and the incongruity of the 6 lines preceding it. Manly would explain this as due to the loss of a double page, one-half of which would give room for a transition from the confession of Sloth to that of Robert the Robber, while the other half would provide an end for Covetise and supply the confession of Wrath, which is curiously omitted. Jusserand heartily agrees with

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* Vol. II, Ch. I.

*1 Mod. Phil. XIV.

*2 Mod. Phil. III, Jan. 1906.

*3 B.v. 469-484

*4 Mod. Phil. VI. p. 281.

the need for a change, but, with Bradley*, claims that the trouble arises from a misplaced leaf, i.e. the leaf on which Robert the Robber is written should be transferred back to the end of Covetise, where it is found in C, though he does not consider it necessary to postulate, as does Bradley, that another leaf has been lost, on which was Wrath's Confession. Brown*1 and Hall*2 claim that it is only a case of the misplacement of the 6 lines, while Chambers*3 supported by Coulton*4 argues with considerable plausibility that it is unnecessary to make any change at all.

Other passages which have proved bones of contention are the 4 lines describing Piers' family, the gander of the "Lemman" of Holy Church, the changes in the leading characters taking part in Meed's marriage, the deseription of the enfeoffment of Meed, and the meaning of "Segges" in London.

II. Technical Differences:-

Manly offered no statistics as to differences in composition and style, but a certain amount of work has been done by other students on the subjects of dialect*5, alliteration*6, vocabulary*7, and the use of allegory*8. The responsibility for the orthography

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* Athenaeum, April 1906, p. 481.

*1 Nation 88 p.298.

*2 Mod.Phil.V11. p.327.

*3 M.L.R. V pp 1-32

*4 M.L.R. V11, pp 102-104

*5 M.L.R. V. 1910

*6 M.L.R. III, 1908

*7 Anglia XXX111 July 1910

*8 P.P. D. Owen.

and grammer, which led Marsh to a belief in dual authorship, can only belong to the Scribes. All these technical examinations showed results which, though not final, favored unity of authorship, but too much weight must not be laid on them, for no examination of diction and versification can be satisfactory till we have a thoroughly critical text, such as Messrs. Chambers and Grattan, and Mr. Knott are now engaged upon.

III. Differences in Outlook and Personality.

This is perhaps the weakest point in the argument of the American School. They tend to direct attention to details, and though their arguments sound convincing individually, they do not seem large enough to shake the impression of unity of personality. Manly argues strongly for the greater coherency and dramatic force of A passus 1-VIII, but when all is said and done, his analysis of B's characteristics could, I think, be illustrated point by point from A1. Certainly Mr. Jusserand excels in his arguments for unity of personality, and his essay in Mod.Phil. VI, is a most helpful piece of criticism. Another argument which Jusserand brings forward his opponents have made no attempt to answer, and that is, the parallels we find in other authors, whom we know are indivisible, to the very questions which are being urged against unity in Piers the Plowman. Especially interesting are the comparisons with Lamartine and Cervantes.

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* C Hist. II. 29.

IV. External Evidence:

All the statements in the rubrics of the MSS have reference to but one author, Wm. Langland. We have no contemporary reference to the author, but those notices of him which are nearest in point of time do not contemplate for a moment that more than one man composed Piers the Plowman. Yet, as Moore * pointed out, the confusion between William and Robert in recording his name might be due to at least dual authorship.

As the controversy advances, naturally new questions occupy the centre of interest. The name of the author has come up for discussion and the question of how much autobiographical element there is in the poem. How much can we trust to his assertions that his name is William? This takes us back to Pearson's *1 discussion, which is quite ancient history and to Prof. Jack's *2 article. The whole matter is thoroughly gone over by Moore *3 and he decides there were two men, Langland and the son of Rokayle. Though Manly insists that the dreamer is a mythical personage, no one can quite deny that there are some of the author's own ideas here expressed. Jusserand and Mensendieck come out very strongly in defence of the autobiographical element.

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* Mod. Phil. XII.

*1 N.Brit. Rev., April, 1870.

*2 J.G.P. III, p. 393.

*3 Mod. Phil. XII.

Another storm-centre has proved to be that John But whom Jusserand brushed scornfully aside. He has provided emphatic proof for both sides, according as he is dealt with by Chambers or Miss Rickert.* But most interesting is the suggested identification of John Butt*1 with the King's Messenger of that name who died in 1387. This was suggested by Bradley and worked out by Miss Rickert. If this could be proved it would*2 furnish rather strong evidence against A having completed C, unless we adopt Manly's suggestion that C might have been completed by 1386,*3 or that of Davis, that it could have been produced not later than the reign of Edward V1.*4

In the last couple of years there has been a tendency to specialize more, and settle down to systematic examination instead of jumping vaguely on isolated passages which can be twisted either way, or giving unsupported statements about tendencies and characteristics. Very important work is being done on the MSS, and it is interesting to find that the results demonstrate that the A text much more closely resembles B than it was generally supposed. Again, Mr. Moore has attempted to apportion the burden of proof,*5 and though I feel unable to agree either with his methods or his conclusions, the intention is surely a step in the right direction. His conclusions are interesting, in that he finds a connection between A2 and B(as had Mensendieck) but nothing for or

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* M.L.R. V1. July 1911.

*1 Mod. Phil. X1, July 1913.

*2 M.L.R. V111, Jan. 1913.

*3 Cbg. Hist. II, 30.

*4 Univ. Tut. 1.Series. Intr.

*5 M.P. X1 and X11.

against unity of authorship anywhere else. In view of the present situation a student can hardly take any other position than that of neutrality. The plausibility of multiple authorship cannot be denied when one fairly examines Mr. Manly's arguments, and perhaps even more weight is given to the theory from its being supported by such men as Dr. Furnivall, and Prof. Manly. Yet one feels that it is hardly justifiable to take the stand which Dr. Furnivall suggests*: "If then the student will start with this sure fact in his mind, that the B and C men couldn't possibly have been the A one, he will find no difficulty in giving their due value to Prof. Manly's arguments and accepting them." A foregone conclusion is surely a peculiar starting point for the study of a controversy!

On the other hand, the arguments brought forward by Mr. Jusserand and Mr. Chambers, as well as the technical work done on the alliteration, etc., in my estimation, outweigh the arguments supporting the other side. Especially forcible are the parallels which Mr. Jusserand draws between the developments and changes in Piers the Plowman and those in the works of authors whom we are assured are one and indivisible. The examples of variety in workmanship in the same man are so innumerable that even a very striking difference - and such differences have not been found in Piers the Plowman - offers but feeble support to a theory of multiple authorship. Even in the best known books we

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* E.E.T.S. 135 b Intr.

find them, e.g., the Pickwick Papers might very well have had different authors for its beginning and its end; there is very little resemblance between the irresponsible comedy and the ghastly horrors of the beginning and end of Tom Sawyer; while if we compare different works of the same author the list would be endless. Who would imagine for a moment that the author of "Alice in Wonderland" was responsible for Mathematical treatises? and we do not feel it necessary to cleave in twain the author of "Nonsense Novels" and "Further Foolishness" because he has strayed into the field of economics and produced an "Elements of Political Science." If one refers to a question of authority one feels that the side which is supported by Skeat is assuredly the most likely to be right. The last words which we have from Skeat on this subject are in his edition of the 1st 7 passus of the B text, which he revised and enlarged in the 9th edition of 1906. In this we find the statement: "It is clear that 3 of the shapes are due to the author himself"*, and again, in referring to the additions and revisions of the C text*1, "Throughout these the working of the same mind is clearly discernible. This of course was before the controversy began, but he had already contemplated and rejected the possibility of multiple authorship*2. Again, unity of authorship is supported by all the dignity of tradition. And here I must beg to differ from Mr. Moore*3, who denies any weight of tradition to

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* Intro. lX.

*1 Intr. Xl.

*2 A. Intr.

*3 Mod. Phil. Xl.

unity of authorship. The definition of "tradition" according to the Oxford Dictionary is "the body(or any one) of the expressions and usages of any branch or school of art or literature handed down by predecessors and generally followed." Surely when we contemplate the long line of historians of Literature, Society and Politics, from before Warton right up to the Cbg. Hist, who have referred to William Langland as one, and one only, we may say that the tradition is one of single authorship.

Therefore, resting upon the authority of Prof. Skeat, upon the weight of tradition, upon the persuasiveness of Mr. Jusserand, and upon that strong andoutstanding personality which seems to me to pervade the whole poem, I have assumed in the following pages that we are dealing with but one author throughout. On the same premises I rest my conclusion that the poem is autobiographical in character, that we may accept the facts which the author gives us about himself, and that we may read in his poem the workings of the poet's mind. Working on this principle, Prof. Skeat, Mr. Jusserand and Herr Mensendieck, have given fairly detailed sketches of the Poet's life. Opposed to this view is an article by Prof. Jack, * claiming that "Will" is as much of a mythical character as any other figure in the poem, therefore any information about his life is purely spun out of air. He concludes, however, with the admission that "The opinions, hopes and fears of the author are surely here"*1 and that "between the lines. . . .valuable hints for drawing a rough sketch of his life"may be found. Of course all

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* Jour. of German Phil. III.

*1 Quoted, Mod. Phil. Vl.

those holding the theory of multiple authorship must deny all genuineness to the biographical information given in the poem. But once again the force of the personality proves irresistible. Whether you like it or not, your attention must be arrested by this mind that is speaking to you, so clearly and so personally. You cannot read 100 lines of his poem without feeling that the poet is no abstract producer; he is a living, intensely feeling man, who speaks, not from the love of sweet phrases, or pride in abstract theories, but from red-hot conviction that he has a message. His very inconsistencies and illusiveness make him all the more attractive and human, and while one falls upon a piece of direct information, such as that he lived in Cornhill, or that he would not greet sergeants with "God loke you, lordes," as upon a diamond, one lingers with no less interest upon the illusive figure that hovers, like the shadows of clouds on mountains, over almost every page of his poem.

Finally, I would say that my examination of Langland's interpretation of the 14th Century has confirmed me in my belief in the conservative view. The life described in all three texts is essentially the same; the additions made in B and C shew greater knowledge of London, more detailed information about law courts, an acquaintance with great men's halls, seen from the position of a client, and, generally, a broader and deeper knowledge of life, such as we would expect from a man of advancing years. There is nothing that would demand plurality of authorship. This study also strengthens my belief in the autobiographical

elements, for the phases of life with which he deals are exactly those which would come under the observation of a man with a life such as he suggests, and his opinions are such as we should expect from a middle-class Englishman, well-educated, a member of the Church, and with idealistic though conservative tendencies.

III Langland's Position.

Langland's interpretation of the 14th century is conditioned by 3 things: his character, his opportunities and his object, all three of which are of course but the component parts of his biography. Unfortunately Langland's biography is like Hamlet's cloud, in which every fresh student finds a different shape, and some would deny that there is any shape at all. However, without going into a ny discussion of names and dates and drawing freely upon every hint in the poem, helped out with a little imagination, I think we may pretty confidently accept the following outline, for the statements of which I offer no proof here, as they most of them come up for discussion in the course of my thesis.

William Langland was born in the year 1332 at Cleobury Mortimer; he came of gentle blood("generosus"*) of a family in comfortable, though not affluent circumstances. His boyhood was spent on his father's estate, helping him oversee his peasants, and studying nature and mankind with quiet, observant eyes. He loved the peasants and was doubtless loved in return, but when he tried to uplift them he was ever being rebuffed by their selfishness, stupidity and care

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* Note to Dublin Ms. of the 15th Century.

for the moment only. At some time in his boyhood he was put to school, probably at Malvern Priory, by his father and friends, and thence he passed to Oxford, perhaps to Oriel College. These school and college days were the happiest in his life, but they were also marked by great stress of soul, which induced him to take orders, though he never rose to any position of importance in the church. Of the course of his middle life we are very uncertain. I think it is probable that over-ridden by his conscience he tore himself away from college before completing his course, to carry out his boyish resolution

"To be a pilgrim atte plow-for pore mennes sakes."

And then he would give us the impression that carried away by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, he let all his high ambitions go, and probably accepted some secular position; perhaps it was at this time that he was employed at Westminster. His character remains so pure and his ideals so exalted to the very end, that I do not think we need believe he ran into any very grevious sin at this time; his vision of fortune, in which he expresses remorse for great sin is probably, like Bunyan's "Grace Abounding", a much blacker picture of the author than any outsider would have drawn. We know that in 1362, about the middle of this period, he produced the first instalment of his * poem, and then he comes into the light again with his 2nd instalment in 1377. We meet him again as a man of 45, his ambitions gone,

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* Cp. B XI. 86.

his friends dead, his fortune lost, but still loving truth and his fellowmen as earnestly as ever. During the interval, he had married, and was then living in a humble way in Cornhill with his wife Kittie and his daughter Calote, earning a rather scanty living by singing masses as a chantry-priest, and glad of a free meal from one of his patrons. His troubles produced in him a suspicious attitude towards the rich, so that he refused to pay them homage in the streets; but also he had become acquainted with their lives, and decided that they needed his attention as much as the poor, so we find in the C text that he has changed his object in life, and now wishes

"To be a pilgrim atte plow -for profyte of pore and rich."

He was still deeply interested in politics, and especially he loved almost with a fatherly affection, the little boy king. The last we know of him he had moved to Bristol, where in 1399 he composed a poem of affectionate though frank rebuke for his sovereign.

In this sketch I have differed from the more or less widely accepted view, represented by M. Jusserand that Langland was distinctly of the people. probably of the peasant class. In this position I have the authority of Skeat, who believed that he belonged to the Franklin class, and also of Prof. Kittridge, who states* "We are convinced that M. Jusserand's account of William's station, and of the 'false position' in which the poet found himself, is utterly mistaken," while M. Jusserand himself admits that

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* The Nation 59, p. 86

there is an "aristocratic sentiment which has not been sufficiently remarked in him."* It seems to me that the whole tone of the poem is against this assumption of peasant origin. The moral principles seem to emanate from a man stooping not patronizingly, but lovingly, to those in humbler circumstances. I do not think we can say that the very soul of a peasant is here. The soul of the peasant at the time of the Peasant Revolt was occupied with being allowed to rent his farm at 4 pence an acre, instead of giving payment in labor and kind. There is not a reference, so far as I can discover, to these villainage dues. Again, this explains the total omission of the Peasant Revolt. The aristocrat must have one of two views: either he would be so ashamed of the broken promises and cruel vengeance of his own class that he would not have the face to mention it; or, if he approved of their action, he would be too much annoyed with his protegés to wish to refer to their stupid and wicked act just when he had made out a good case for them. The latter of these, I think, is the more probable. The views with which Langland does show sympathy - a point on which M. Jusserand lays special stress - are those of the House of Commons, and to the rank of these Knights of the Shire I believe he belonged. Finally, though his ideal character is a plowman, he is a plowman in a very special position, inasmuch as we never find him actually plowing, but we do find him running all the affairs of the farm; and of Langland's other ideal characters, Conscience, who takes a very

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* E.W. Life, p. 141.

prominent part, is one of the king's knights..

The life thus outlined would, therefore, provide Langland with knowledge of both city and country life, but apparently his presentation of the country is the more evident in his poem, for not only MacKail*, who seems to quote only from Wright's edition of the B Text, but D'Israeli*1 who had access only to Whitaker's edition, i.e., to the C text which has by far the clearest references to London, and Prof. Jack*2, who must have known all three texts, all think of Langland as possessed of no wider experience than that of a country priest. Certainly Langland was thoroughly acquainted with all the life of a country manor house and with the management of a farm, and more important for the poet, he loved and studied nature, he rejoiced in the sunny meadows and watched how and where the pye builds her nest. A delightful country background MacKail has built up from the poem, the country side full of villages, surrounded with the common ploughed land, divided by strips of turf among the peasants of the estate; beyond that we see the stretches of meadows and waste land, bright with flowers and bounded by forests haunted by deer, wild boars and wolves. It is a lovely, sunny, prosperous earth that Langland sees*3, full of color and life, of the singing of birds and the rippling of brooks, and in the midst of all this dwells man, less happy than the creation around him, for

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* Cornhill Mag.

*1 Amenities of Literature, p. 186.

*2 Journal of Germanic Phil. III.

*3 C XIV. 135.

"Mocke murthe in Maye is - amonges wilde bestes,

And so forth whil somer lasteth - her solace dureth" *

but when does a summer come for mankind?

For a student of 14th Century History Langland's opinions upon every subject are rendered far more valuable by the fact that they are the views of a city man. This characteristic seems to have been first noticed by Ritson and on it Skeat lays great stress, for thus more than by any study of rural life, Piers the Plowman answers to the spirit of the age, for the 14th century was the age for great cities both on the continent and in England, as the growth of industry and the change from tillage to pasturage collected the people in the cities.*1 But if this were true of towns in general, it would apply infinitely more to London; in 1397 London was assessed at £6,666, 13S, 4d,*2 and after it there was the enormous drop to Bristol with only £800. Hand in hand with this increase in wealth, as a result of her thriving trade, went increase in luxury and the open appearance of those sins against which Langland raised his voice. Not only did wealth increase but also political power, so that Froissart accuses the English of being "the worst people in the world, the most obstinate and the most presumptuous, and of all English the Londoners are the leaders." It has been held that the A text was written before Langland came up to London, but though, at the time of its composition, he was

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* B XIV, 158.

*1 Traill II. 172

*2 Besant 147 .

apparently in Malvern,* I should think he was already acquainted with life in the city. Of course the second part of the A text, if we may accept that it touches actual life, deals with life and thought at Oxford; the first part is divided between Malvern and London, and the knowledge which Langland shows of lawcourts would lead one to think that he spoke from personal knowledge. However, knowledge of the law was essential in guiding a country manor, as we know from the Paston Letters: "Lerne the lawe, for he seyde manie tymes that ho so ever schuld dwelle at Paston, schulde have nede to conne defende hym selfe"*1 said Agnes Paston, advising her son about his education. But the confessions of the second vision certainly sound as if they could be nothing but the doings of ten London rogues. In the other texts the knowledge displayed of London is detailed, both of localities, and of the life peculiar to a great city.

Langland came into this great city, like the friars, to dwell among the poor pariahs hurded in little 2-roomed dwellings. Whatever may have been his original station in life, he now speaks from the position of a poor man, acquainted with the rowdy life in the taverns, the wretchedness of badly built houses, the petty sins of tradesmen, on the life of the great he looks from a distance,*2 observing it in the streets, dining at a side table or on the floor of some of the great halls which dispensed free meals, judging character

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* A. pr. 5 A V111. 130 A 1X. 1

*1 p. 58, Feb. 4, 1445.

*2 C V1. 1-60.

largely from generosity. While his private life was among the poor of the city, he was well acquainted with all the interests of public life. He can rehearse the duties of a mayor*, as intermediary between king and people, and lay down the conditions for making free men of the city. Not only in civic politics does Langland take interest; in his position as clerk at Westminster he has learned the workings of the central government, while as a chanter of Pauls he has first hand information of the practices of the Church. In crystallizing the results of these opportunities in his poem, Langland shews penetrating observation and a keen intellect, by presenting not only the lives of men as individuals, but of men as classes, and the principles of the great institutions which were so important in his day. The Church and the Schools, King and Parliament, Civil and Ecclesiastical law are fully and clearly outlined. The other great institutions of the period, one just passing away and the other arising, Feudalism and the Trading Guilds, are not presented with any such broadness and precision of outline: we hear about the relations between lords and peasants, about the doings of individual merchants and craftsmen, but not in such a way as to have on our minds an idea of the comprehensiveness and power of the systems of which they form a part. One is inclined to think that the explanation of this is that he was too well acquainted with the ways of feudalism; brought up in a manor, thinking in the terms of it all his life, he would not, if I may so speak,

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* C IV. 108.

see the wood for the trees. It was after he had become aware of himself, and was on the alert to know how, and why, that he came in contact with the workings of the wonderful organisms of Ecclesiastical and Civil government, so he could study them with the perspective of an outsider, and the knowledge of an insider. Of trade-guilds he had probably no knowledge beyond that of an ordinary purchaser; so that while we hear of the evils of regratours - our retail merchants - there is hardly a reference to those great merchant princes, their problems with the staple, and their quarrels with Lombards and other foreigners.

What must be insisted upon is that neither in expressing his own opinions, nor in attacking the ways of the world, does Langland bring a railing accusation against the great institutions in the abstract. He would not lay a finger upon the main building: he would be the first to tear down the tinsel and carry away the dirt which had accumulated in the process of time. However fiercely he may accuse the individuals composing the different classes, he would not for a moment suggest that these classes should be done away.

Though Langland's acquaintance with life was wide it was also, perforce, limited both in place and persons. The setting which he gives his characters is very definitely English, and the southern part of England at that, London, Dover, Winchester, Malvern, for though he will not go into details lest he should hurt the feelings of northern men, he has the feeling that the North is especially the realm of the devil. He mentions foreign places of pilgrimage

Rome, Jerusalem, Rocamador, etc., but he looks upon these pilgrimages as of very doubtful merit; the people would be much better at home seeking St.Truth. His repentant sinners all vow to go to English shrines, Walsingham and Chester. Of France he has a very poor opinion; in France is the wicked city of Avignon, peopled by vicious cardinals and greedy Jews, and when the devil is personified, it is as a "prout prikyere of France."[1] On the other hand, that his vision was not entirely limited to England is shown by his interest in missions,[2] his longing for the conversion of the Mahometans and heathen,[3] since Christ has cleped us all, and even the Jews, who were then in such high disfavor, are included in his all-embracing charity.[4] Yet one feels that his anxiety for the care of those in Bethlehem and Nazareth and Syria is partly due to his anxiety to turn out of England the rapacious absentee Bishops who were responsible for these realms. This national and even insular feeling is quite representative of his time, a time of great difficulties of communication, and especially strong in England owing to its war with France and to a rapidly increasing realization of itself as a nation, sufficient unto itself, and with domestic questions of absorbing interest.

His list of characters, again, is not universal. His "feld ful of folke," which contains, as it were, the table of contents for the whole poem, does not aim at including types of all the world, nor even all Englishmen; soldiers, e.g., are conspicuous by their absence. Langland wished to speak the truth to certain classes of men whom he knew personally, in the hands of a small man the production would have been of very local and temporary interest;

*1.C xi 134. [2] C xviii 186 [3] C xiii. 53 [4] C xviii. 320

as it is, Langland, like Dante, belongs so intensely to his own time and place that he goes down to the bed-rock of all ages and all men, and we have here a veritable microcosmographia. "See deep enough" says Carlyle, "and you see musically". Langland sees deep, and he reproduces "the still sad music of humanity."

Such were the external influences which were at work, conditioning his interpretation of the life around him. Far more important is his own character, defining what should be his attitude towards that life, and the object which he set before him as definitely limiting his subject - a limit to which he did not always keep. The vision of Piers the Plowman is exactly what we would expect from a man of the character of William Langland. In the first place, he was a moralist and in the second place, a poet. Had he been only a moralist, his activities would have been directed to some work of reform, and we should have had another Wiclif or John Ball. Had he been only a poet, we might have had another Chaucer, another "Gawayne and the Grene Knight", who can say? Fortunately he was both, he could truthfully say

"Ich singe wie der Vogel singt
Der in den Zweigen wohnet"

but then Conscience and Love stepped in and turned his song to the good of his fellowmen, and we have "Piers the Plowman." So we find a combination of personal and didactic elements in the poem; side by side with invective or passionate pleading, we find general painting of the most vigorous type, passages of lyric tenderness, self-revelations and musings, and also passages such as the

Passion of our Lord and the Harrowing of Hell which are of epic strength and dignity. But generally the moralist has the best of it, and the poetry may suffer in consequence. Yet I would not for a moment allow that his "righteous animosity shuts out the picturesqueness and humor,"* for he shows plenty of both. We may rather say that he has the attributes of a popular poet, "preferring the downright to the gracious;"*1 these are the characteristics that we admire in him, his sincerity, his intensity, not the slightest suggestion of compromise, his common sense and moral vigor, and with this he has a conscience strong enough to have been the death of him had it not been for his humor. Saintsbury accuses him of being narrow, "pious, but a little Philistine,"*2 and Manly would describe the ~~century~~ emendator as an "unimaginative, cautious, pronounced pedant,"*3 a thoroughly detestable and worthy individual, in fact! I find no such characteristics in him; in fact, I may as well confess that I find no evil in him at all. I like the comparison of him with Carlyle, in their social passion and contempt for hypocrisy,*4 and also the stress both laid on the "Gospel of Work". But there is the other side of his character as well: Jusserand finds in him the complete Englishman, showing the practical ability of the Norman combined with the dreams and mysticism of the Saxon.*5 In contrast with Manly, Morley *6

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* Minto, p. 64

*1 Lowell.

*2 Hist of Eng. Literature.

*3 Cbg. II.

*4 Stubbs, p. 75

*5 Piers the Plowman, p. 177.

*6 Eng. writers, Vol. IV.

finds in him "imaginative subtlety and the purest aspirations". With this there is a certain element of vagueness and a lack of practical comprehension, kept in check by his good sense, but leading him to fear inmovations. To this also we might refer those inconsistencies and weakness of will, which Jusserand* finds in him, though I think Jusserand* very much exaggerates; I find no more than the very natural shrinking from the awful task of making up one's mind. Most important of all are his moral qualities, his purity and uprightness, his tender-heartedness and his love. He had theught deep down into the eternal issues of life, like Father Odin gazing into the abyss, and from the agony of that experience was produced the wisdom of which Piers the Plowman was born. But one who has thus learned wisdom can never thereafter be petty or narrowminded; he sees all round every question, and in consequence, his opinions seem to vary till you say in despair

"Thou myght bet mete the myst - on maluerne hulles" *

than measure the thoughts of this dreamer. The trouble is that when he is thinking of one thing, he thinks of it so intensely that all else is excluded, and all that modifying fringe which must surround our every statement is utterly disregarded. Yet this does not entail the consequence that he is really more inconsistent than most people; it is only in appearance, the true diamond of his thought is always there, but we are sometimes bewildered by the varying lights flashed forth by the different facets. Another reason why it is difficult to follow his thought through all its intricacies

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* Piers the Plowman, 84. * C I, 163.

is that he always writes with his audience in mind. When he is addressing the rich, he is thinking only of the duties and temptations of the rich and he speaks them forth with the greatest frankness. The same holds true when he is speaking to the poor; he is especially careful not to give the poor a false impression and make them think that they are a class of martyrs, suffering from a depraved set of nobles and clergy; therefore anything which he thinks they might use as a handle he is careful to leave in Latin, though most of his moral precepts he translates, especially for their benefit.* This consideration, concealing the faults from all but the guilty party, is a part of his emphasis on love; his whole poem preaches love, and he practises it himself. Even of the friars, the class whom he lashes most vigorously, he says

"Ac me is loth, thow ich Latyn knowe - to lacky eny secte,
For alle we ben brethren - thank we be diuersliche clothede."*1

His motto was

"Ne under-nym noughte foule - for is none with-oute faute." *2

To discover Langland's object is not the easiest thing in the world, because he is so often carried away from his main theme by a chance reference, but from the carefully constructed prologue of A, and the outstanding features of the first 8 passus, the scheme of which gives the impression of being formed whole in the author's mind before he began to write. I would say that he entered on his

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* B pr. 129 B XIII, 70. *1 C XVI. 78

*2 B XI, 209

task with the object of setting up a standard by which he would measure all men, of all classes in England, that he might show how far rich and poor, cleric and laymen had departed from truth, and then to show them that the means of return to that standard was to lead a life of the dilligent performance of duty, guided by love. With this aim in view, and using the weapon of satire, naturally his picture is painted in the blackest colors that he could find in his age, therefore, while in Chaucer it is hard to find the shadows on this gay medieval life, in Langland it is hard to find the lights.* This modification, therefore, of his despairing portraits, must ever be kept in mind. These first visions are concerned not with a celestial pilgrimage like Bunyan's but with bettering man's life on earth,*1 and they present pictures of life which are of more or less local and temperal a character. The Vita de Dowel has a subject of eternal interest, the search in which we are all engaged, to find that which is most worth while in life; Dobet & Dobest go on to describe the possibility of the final attainment of perfection and salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, even though, while this life lasts the struggle must still continue. As Skeat*2 has pointed out, Langland has himself given the best description of this part of his poem in an indirect reference in Richard the Redeless

"The story is of no <u>estate - that strive against their lusts</u>"

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* Minto 62

*1 Dowden p. 269

*2 Preface IV. p. CX.

As descriptive of the whole poem, we might take Skeat's * definition, that its object is to "obtain opportunities of attack." We must recognize here what exceeding boldness he displayed in daring to speak forth the suppressed feelings of his age against men holding all forms of temporal and spiritual authority.*1 But he used prudence in his boldness, and it has been suggested that he deliberately avoided making his allegory too definite, rounding off his pictures and driving home the meaning.*2 In several lines he shews that he was quite aware of the dangers:*3

"For so ys the worlde went - with hem that han the power,
That he that seeth most sothest - sonnest ys y-blamed". *4

All these lines first appear in the B text, so it is quite probable that the poet suffered some persecution after the appearance of his 1st version, possible this was the cause of the loss of his fortune, but it made no difference, he went straight on with his purpose,

"I shal tellem it for truthe sake - take hede who so lyketh!" *5

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* Encycl. Brittanica.

*1 C IV. 214

*2 D'Israeli

*3 Saintsbury's and Ten Brink ; Hist of Eng. Lit.

*4 C IV. 438 cp. C I, 217 & B XV. 81

*5 B XV. 89.

IV. The Historical Background

As in Literature, so in History, the even tenor of our way is at times startled and exalted by "purple patches." In the history of England since the Norman Conquest, have occurred three such purple patches which shine forth with such brilliance that one is a little apt to look with contempt on the excellent and indispensable grey background. I refer, of course, to the 14th Century, the Elizabethan era, and the 19th Century. If we come to analyze the splendor of these mountain peaks in our history we find that they are remarkable in a greater or less degree for social restlessness, govermental development, foreign aggressiveness and intellectual activity.

Our special concern is with the first of these periods, and we are concerned therewith because it serves at once as the background and the subject matter of that obscure figure whom we believe should be called William Langland. Langland's Book of Piers the Plowman holds up a "mirror of longing" to this medieval earth, and in it we see, besides the fair country side which Langland saw, the lives and thoughts of the men who inhabit that country. As MacKail has pointed out, Langland, with Hesiod, * serves the true and high aim of poetry, in so far as we accept for a definition of poetry that it is the interpretation of Life, the life of the individual, of the nation and language, and of mankind. Before we can intelligently criticize this interpretation of life

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* Lectures on Poetry "Poetry & Life"

we must know what is that life which he interprets. What are those great fo rces which make the 14th century one of the purple patches in our history?

The 14th century is the end of the Middle Ages, and as such it is characterized by a series of contrasts and contradictions, due to the struggle between the old and the new. The medieval period was one of confusion and turmoil, and so it was by a natural impulse that the minds of men had a passion for authority. In the every day life of man this authority was exercised by the Church, and by the Government in its three divisions of King, Parliament and Feudalism. This authority still held in the 14th century but there was a change; the giant of individualism was awaking and shaking this mountain. The King protested against the extortions and overweening influence of the Pope, while the Commons did not hesitate to scoff at the lewd officers of the Church. The Commons deposed two kings, and began the great cry of "No redress, no funds"; the villains struck the first blow in the long struggle between capital and labor. The giant was crushed down under added pressure in the 15th century only to break forth in the grandeur and terror of the Reformation and the Civil War, and with few periods of inertia he has kept up the fight ever since.

In 1347 Edward III ascended the English throne, and we realize that he is ruling a distinct nation of Englishmen. Silently the union of Norman and Saxon has been going on, but under this warrior king, the nation becomes aware of itself. One influence which was working towards this end was Edward's claim

to the Crown of France, which began the Hundred Years War, so disastrous and so glorious for France, but in England, what cannot fail to impress one writing in the midst of the present struggle is how little influence this war had on the ordinary life of the period. There are but the most casual references to it in contemporary literature. The people carried on their ordinary life unconcerned and Parliament devoted itself to domestic troubles. Indeed Parliament declared clearly and emphatically that this war was the King's war, not the people's, and they would offer him no advice as to its conduct, nor money for its support.

But though the direct effects of the war seem slight, the indirect consequences are farreaching. In the first place England became conscious of her national life. The condition imposed on the king in waging this war was that he should never rule England under the title of King of France. French ceased to be the popular language. English pride was fostered by the victories over the French. After the naval battle at Sluys, the nation proudly styled its sovereign King of the Sea and the claim was supported by the hardy little fleet of armed merchant vessels. Sluys was followed by Crecy and Poitiers, and flushed with their success, the nation refused the tax which the Pope - a Pope dwelling at Avignon and under the thumb of the French - would fain have them pay.

Another consequence of their successes was the personal popularity they brought to Edward. The gallant, chivalrous Plantagents had ever been dear to the English, but Edward III. was the darling of his people, and they were blind to his faults, loving

him still, though with a protest, even in the sad decline of his later years; while in the two poems of William Langland we can see that the personal devotion to Richard was hardly less. Personal devotion to their sovereign was most desirable, but when there was no longer one man for them to resist, the union which had been forced upon the people of England fell apart, and struggles against the king were replaced by struggles between the various classes.

And so we come to what is of more importance than foreign aggression, and that is Parliamentary development. At a time when the world was so cosmopolitan, when the nations, though more widely separated in point of time and distance than they are now, were united into a common whole by a universal Church, and a universal Literature, in face of such influences it was remarkable and may give us just cause for pride, that the English Government developed with a smoothness and rapidity which was equalled in no other European country. Parliament forged her weapons under the weakness of Henry III, She dropped them under the capable paternal management of the Tudors, but under Edward III and Richard II, she was busy using them. Perhaps nowhere outside of the Rolls of Parliament themselves do we realize the "might of the Commons" so forcibly as in "Piers the Plowman."

Four classes of men composed the Parliament: The Clergy, the great barons, the Knights of the Shire and the burgesses. Under Edward III the custom was established which was to crystallize into the Houses of Lords & Commons. The Clergy and the great barons met together* "pour traiter des affaires de l'Etat et donner au

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* Histoire Générale. p. 380

roi leurs consails," and the Knights and burgesses "pour consentir et pour éxécuter." Such definitions hardly give a fair idea of the power of the Commons. At first at any rate, the Commons were very humble; they sent in petitions very meekly, saying "please," not "must." The King and his lords did not realize what they were up against; the King needed money and more money, and money again for his French Wars. The Commons grew stern; they would only grant the subsidies at the end of the session when their grievances had been settled and their grievances and petitions increased in number and importance, till the full might of the poeple, i.e., of the knights and burgesses in Country and City, is seen in the Good Parliament of 1376. They impeached two of the King's ministers, supporters of John of Gaunt. They drove away Alice Perrers; and they presented 140 petitions containing requests with so modern a ring to them as Annual Parliaments and justice in elections. All honor to the Good Parliament and Peter de la Mare! They made a bold stand and they received fair promises, but next year, John of Gaunt had his packed Parliament and all the good was undone. With the death of the Black Prince, and the speedy succession of his little son to the throne in 1377 gloom fell upon the Commons. From above, John of Gaunt oppressed pretty much at will. Beneath, the peasants were protesting against the Statute of Laborers which had crushed their opportunities of freedom after the Black Death, and finally marched upon London in the great rising of June 1381. Marvellously little damage was done, considering their numbers and organization, and the evils

they had suffered. The hated Sheriff's rolls were burnt, some of the detested class of lawyers were put to death - no great loss! The Archbishop of Canterbury was beheaded, but John of Gaunt, well for him! was in the north, so their arch enemy escaped, with only the loss of his palace of the Savoy. Thanks to the King's popularity and his courage, the people were dispatched with fair promises, and then the Commons meted out the same treatment as they had received after the Good Parliament. The charters of freedom and pardon were regarded as only so much waste paper, and on all sides executions and double-fold oppression were the order of the day. But bickering continued between King and Parliament. In 1389 Richard took the reins of government into his own hands and for a time ruled well and wisely. But his character was not suited to the royal power. He was too petulant and changeable, with good impulses, but passionate and easily roused, and when roused he proved unreasonable and cruel. His people, while they never altogether lost love for him, grew suspicious and menacing, till the last sad episode, when the hero of Smithfield and Mile-end in 1381 was deposed, imprisoned and murdered in 1399.

Such in outline are the events of the 14th century and the mighty strivings of the Parliament. But our political creed has been made "the State for the individual," not "the individual for the State," so that the doings of kings, or even of Parliament pale into insignificance beside the people for whom these things are by way of being done. Yet even when we leave these upper regions,

it is hard to get away from institutions to men.

The two great controlling forces in medieval life were the Church and Feudalism. Both were now pretty well at the end of their tether, but they still were forces to be reckoned with. Of the two, the Church had the greater influence and was also the less capable and the more corrupt. To begin at the top, we must remember that this was the period of the 70 years Captivity. There was a Pope at Rome, and a counter Pope at Avignon, where he kept up a corrupt court and exercised his fatherly and apostolic powers in England by extracting money and sending in a host of detested foreign Cardinals and Bishops. In England itself, abuses were rampant. The tone of the secular clergy had been greatly lowered by the ravages of the plague which had carried off one-third or perhaps even one-half of their number. Parishes were impoverished so that many of them were left without a priest, while there was a crowd of idle clerks in London ready to fall into mischief. The Monastries had developed into pleasant little Societies like a well-ordered Club, doing no good to their own souls or any body else's. Both secular and regular clergy were sunk in ignorance, luxury and vice. This path they pursued unrebuked by their Superiors, for not only would it have been a case of the pot calling the kettle black, but the Bishops were either absentees of the Pope, or if they were good and patriotic Englishmen like William of Wykeham, they were busy governing the country. This abuse was put an end to in the last quarter of the 14th century, but the conditions of the clergy did not improve.

The people were not wholly dependent for their spiritual nurture on parish priests or the monks. A little over a century before our period England had been invaded by the friars, the Franciscans and the Dominicans. The Dominicans had settled in Oxford in 1221 and their activities were directed chiefly to the instruction and preservation of theological orthodoxy. The Franciscans according to the teachings of their founder should have eschewed scholasticism, and indeed they were a great popular force. They travelled by twos far into the country, preaching and teaching, but their greatest influence was in the towns. The individual freedom which was allowed to a man in a town, as well as the industries which were beginning to grow up had led to terrible overcrowding in the poorer districts. The parish system of the clergy was quite incapable of dealing with this, and there were few priests willing to sacrifice themselves enough to dwell in the dens of filth and misery reeking with disease, in which the town poor were hurded. Hither came the Franciscans as angels of mercy, and whatever their decline afterwards, the towns, especially The Town of London owes them all thanks. In addition to these charitable exertions which were exactly in accordance with their vows and their Master's teaching, the Franciscans followed the Dominicans to Oxford in 1224. Thereafter the Franciscans can number in their ranks practically all the great scholars - ~~Alex~~ Alexander of Hales, Roger Bacon, Duns Scotus, William of Ockham. After this fair picture how sad is the fall of the friars in the 14th century! We must remember their early greatness to appreciate their influence and this

influence we find all turned to their own, or their orders' aggrandizement. They do not seem to have been quite so luxurious as the other clergy, but they were more vicious. They were ubiquitous, so that the summoner quotes as a current proverb * "A fly and a friar fall into every dish." And they were hated by the clergy with a deadly hatred.

Below the friars swarmed a mass of ecclesiastics, genuine and the reverse. There were the unbenificed clerks whose name was legion. In one small village Jessop found record of 12 of them acting as Chaplain, tutor, etc. London was their stronghold and there they found almost boundless employment as clerks of Parliament and Court and in minor positions in the Cathedrals. A peculiar breed at this time was that of the hermits; some few were fervent and devoted recluses, such as Richard Rolle of Hampole, but the majority dwelt in towns or by the highway. They were always travelling and so disreputable were they that the King required of them certificates from their Bishop, or they must submit to the same restrictions as common beggars, for many of them had no vestige of a right to the odor of sancity. Even more despicable than the Hermits were the Pardoners, most of them fakes, who travelled round the country, boastful and immoral, yet always finding a sale for their pardons.

When such were their spiritual guides it is little wonder that pious souls bewailed the lack of faith among the laity.

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* Prolog. to the Wyf of Bathe's Tale.

We feel that the house is strewn for a reformer, and the age demanded that Wiclif should appear. John Wiclif had won eminence as a scholastic and a politician before he took his place as a reformer. In both these capacities he protested against the abuses of the Church and especially against the domination of the Pope, and this all under the patronage of the Government. Then he went further, and though for a time supported by John of Gaunt and the authorities of the Universities, the anathemas of the Pope finally proved too strong and he was forced to retire to his parish. This retirement, however, involved no lessening of his influence, for far and wide through the land went his poor priests teaching his doctrines, while he himself was thus given time to accomplish his translation of the Bible. Wiclif attacked the Papacy, and we remember him as a reformer, but it must not be forgotten that his influence was also strong in the disturbance of social conditions. The peasant revolt was in part due to him, and his teachings had a share in the upheaval which was to put an end to feudalism.

Feudalism was really dead now in England, but its form still survived. It was the old bottle into which was poured the new wine of individual development and it constantly burst into such great rents as are typified in the Peasant Revolt. As a matter of fact, the fall of feudalism and the rise of commerce were closely intertwined, for in the 14th century, the change proceeded on the lines of payment in cash in place of services and payment in kind. We see therefore the significance of the appearance of gold coins in this age. The King still gathered his army on a feudal principle,

but in actual fact many of the great lords paid into the treasury a certain sum and were excused from service. It was for this same arrangement the peasants were clamoring. With increase in prosperity the knight wished more luxuries, and to obtain these he must have ready money; to the peasant it was most irksome to have to give up seven days labor in the busiest seasons of the year, so often an amicable settlement was reached, by which the peasant paid a rent, generally of 4d an acre, in place of performing services. Quite smoothly and peaceably this revolution was advancing, and in the country of Kent the transformation was complete when a great crisis swept over England.

In 1349 the black death which had been ravaging all Europe reached England and in six months had carried off something between one-half and one-third of the population. It attacked rich and poor, clergy and laity with equal force. Morally, it has been accused of causing great lowering of standards but modern authorities hold that its social influence has been exaggerated. It cannot be denied, however, that it was as a result of plague conditions that the Statute of Laborers was enacted. Owing to the death of the villeins, labor was at a premium and farm hands demanded and received higher wages. Hand in hand with this, prices went up. The landowners, with fewer tenants, larger lands to be cultivated owing to escheated estates, and fewer men to cultivate them, were in a tight place. It was but natural that since they held the sword in their hands, they cut the knot. By the Statute of Laborers of 1350 every peasant must go back to the system of rent in kind, and according to the conditions before 1347.

More bitter still, any serf who had been practically a free man, and master of his own movements, was once more bound down to the soil. As a matter of fact, the difficulty of the landlords was not solved in this way, but by turning much of the extra land into sheep farms. For the peasants the result was the more disappointing because their approach to freedom had been proceeding surely though slowly in the first ~~one~~ half of the century. Many escaped and added to the already numerous class of professional beggars and highwaymen. The others chafed under the yoke till the rising of '81. This was put down, as I have said, but in point of fact the chains once broken were never firmly riveted, and serfdom gradually disappeared.

The great constructive movement running counter to the decay of feudalism was the rise of commerce. England had been an agricultural country and since the famine of 1315-16 it had been a prosperous country, and that prosperity it owed to the tiller of the soil. Politically, apart from all didactic purpose, Langland was right in choosing a ploughman as leader of the people. Under the wise legislation of Edward III arose another power in English life: the English spirit of commerce was set free. For long the Lombards of the Hanseatic League had been carrying on foreign trade with England. English domestic trade was now thrown open to them and great bands settled in England. From them the English learned various industries especially the cloth industry, and English wool could be woven in England instead of being transported to the Continent. Further encouragement was given in the

regulation of customs duties and the establishments of markets and staples. Out of this development of industry arose a number of far reaching movements. In the first place, there appeared the great middle class, the nation of shop-keepers, the aristocracy of wealth, who sat in the House of Commons with the Knights of the Shire. Hand in hand with growth of industry, then, as ever, went the growth of towns, and this was of particular significance because towns were free from the trammels of feudal tradition. Here again we see the excellent national feeling then existent. On the Continent as the great towns grew up, in Lombardy or in Italy, they grew independent and sufficient unto themselves, while in England this separation never took place, for a merchant prince or a humble craftsman was ever an Englishman first, and a Londoner or Bristolite, or whatever it might be, afterwards. A very beautiful and elaborate system of government grew up for the towns, developed out of the organizations of the Trade guilds. The thoroughness and sufficiency of this system may be judged from the Liber Albus of the City of London, drawn up by the famous Dick Whittington, with his three fold experience as Mayor. The organization of the guilds can hardly be too highly praised for its uprightness and careful attention to the rights of both purchaser and producer. The lessons (learned by all members of such bodies (in corporate government) must have been inestimable. Yet another result of the industrial revolution was a rapid increase in luxury, and the tendency to trade in coin instead of in kind. And this again was as we have seen an indirect cause of the agricultural revolution.

So we have Society before us: the King, waging foreign wars on his own initiative and guiding his people by personal force of character. The Parliament, restraining the King and testing its own powers; the great nobles in their palaces along the Thames, or their Castles in the country, leading luxurious lives; the great merchants trading in Bruges or Italy and developing home resources; the Bishops, guiding the affairs of State, while their own ship of the Church is narrowly missing the rocks, the manorial gentry, quarreling with each other and managing their farms; The regular clergy, living lives of selfish pleasure and idleness; the secular clergy growing rich and assuming the position of a lord of the manor, or growing poorr and running off to London; The Friars, wielding great influence over the commonality and spreading revolutionary doctrines; the scholar, often a friar too, struggling with spiritual weapons in the somewhat barren waste of medieval scholasticism. All the above may be said to constitute the upper classes of Society, and they are the most prominent in the historical picture. But if we wish to know the whole nation, we must descend, with Langland, lower again, and we find the bands of craftsmen in the cities and the peasant on the country estates the true backbone of society and beneath these again we find the parasites - the wandering minstrel, the hangers on of the great lords, the professional beggars, and the highway robber. Such are the dramatis personae of Langland's drama which he staged in that "grete feld ful of Folk," below Malvern Hills.

Chapter II.

RELIGIOUS LIFE

When Dr. Poole* begins his study of Medieval thought, he tells us that "Theology is no doubt the mode of medieval thought; the history of the middle ages is a history of the Latin Church. The overmastering strength of theology, of a clergy who as a rule absorbed all the functions of a literary class, gave its shape to every thing with which it came into contact." It is exactly this aspect of medieval life which finds its most eminent illustration in "Piers the Plowman." Whatever else we may draw from the poem is subsidiary to the consideration of the ways of the clergy and the problems of theology, and though he harps so constantly on the one theme, and though he shares this attribute with I know not how many other authors, yet to the very end his discussions are fresh and vigorous, and we can never lose interest in the revelation of his own developing religious life.

Langland's Religious Beliefs.

In examining Langland's religious beliefs I have acted upon the suggestion of Mensendieck, and have accepted his contention that "Der Verfasser uns in diesen Visionen seine eigene sittliche und religiöse Entwicklung seit seiner frühesten Zugend durch das Jünglings bis zum mannesalter hin beschreibt, dass daher die allegorischen

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* Illustrations of the History of Medieval Thought, p. 2.

Figuren von Thought, Wit, Dam Study, Clergy, Scripture, etc., verschiedene abschnitte seiner eigenen intellektuellen und wissenschaftliche Ausbildung bezeichnen." *

Throughout the Vita de Dowel I have followed his example in almost every thing except the connection between Wit and Studie. His explanations of Dobet & Dobest and especially his final conclusion that Langland was a Wicliffite, I have been quite unable to accept. While we are justified in asserting that Langland is never a reprobate from the Church, his attitude towards it varies exceedingly, so that it is impossible to give any neat summary of his religious beliefs. At times Langland may have had doubts about the authority and efficacy of the Church, but it was not while he was in the midst of these doubts that he wrote. I think we may be assured that the fragment of Dowel in the A text and the complete Dowel, Dobet and Dobest in B and C are records of his own inner life, but it is "emotion recollected in tranquility." He had come to a time of decision, he had entered the Church, and then he wrote his poem; this is clear from the fact that it is Holy Church who acts as his guide in explaining the "Feld ful of Folke." His development was therefore from the Church, to the Church and I think the course of it was as follows:

He begins life like any other 14th century man as a true son of the Church who accepted without question the authority of the Pope, salvation in the Church alone, the superiority of the

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* Mensendieck, p 8.

contemplative life, the infallibility of all the Church doctrines, and the virtue in all its sacrements. This attitude of orthodox reverence is implied in the disturbance which came to him when his mind began to wake up, with the appearance of Thought. He has disagreed with the teaching of two friars,* and this first rejection of authority demands that he shall carve out a creed for himself. With the timidity of a mind which is essentially conservative he clings to orthodoxy in his first encounter with Thought*1 but he is roused to seek the ideal of life in the three forms, Dowel, Dobet and Dobest. As I understand it, Dowel is the ideal of life for the ordinary layman; Dobet is the higher standard for the clergy;*2 while Dobest,*4 who is represented as a Bishop's Peer, though not, it is to be noticed, as a Bishop, is a sort of Counsel of perfection for both, a perfection whose essential quality is the actual practice of the good theories of the first two.

Following the guidance of his own mind as it develops, Langland records a second crisis, and the first step away from the Church, when under the teaching of Wit he lays stress upon individual responsibility

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* A. 1X 16

*1 A. 1X, 69

*2 A 1X, 69-75

*3 A 1X. 82.

"Bote uche wight in this world-that hath wys understondinge,
Is chief sovereyn of himself-his soule for to yeme,
And cheuesschen him from charge - when he childhode passeth." ‡

He will not blindly follow the teachings of the Church, he must live

"Bi counseil of Conscience - a cordynge with holy churche" *1 directed by God's word. *2

Now following Conscience under the direction of God's word is exactly what led to the Reformation, and that Langland realized he was walking on dangerous ground is shown by his encounter with the shrewish Dame Studie. I should imagine this represented the time of his training at *3 the School of Malvern Priory, preparatory to his going up to the University. Here he learns the evils there are in the world, the scepticism and the lack of love, and the conclusion of such a training is just what we might expect; he bows absolutely to authority,

"Al was a he wolde - lord, i-heried be thou!
And al worth as thou wolt - what so we tellen!"*4

he gives up the conclusions he had worked out for himself, and promises allegiance for life to Dame Studie. *5

Now he is sent to Clergye and his wife *6 Scripture, who"is sib to the seuen ars", in other words,he enters the University, and we have the *7 description of the Trivium, the Quodrivium and *8

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‡ A X 71.
*1 A X 89 *2 A X 93 *3 A X1 1.
*4 A X1 84 *5 A X1 92 *6 A X1 100
*7 A X1 106 *8 A X1 127, 136, 152.

Theology. He is taught the orthodox creed with which he began * that Dowel is the upright life of the laymen, Dobet is the contemplative life, and Dobest is a Bishop's peer. But University life is apt to be a time of disillusionment and Langland sighs in the bitterness of his heart

"Yet am I nettere the ner - for nought I hame walked
To wyte what is Dowel - witterly in herte" *1

He decides that study and knowledge are of no avail for he is haunted by the problem of predestination *2 by which the poorest working man, sooner than a great clerk may "percen with a paternoster the paleis of heuene" *3 Of the next step we cannot be quite sure because of our uncertainty about the authorship of A X11. It seems probable *4 that the original ending was with A X1, to which certainly something was to be added, and has been added in B. Yet the first 54 lines which Manly would assign to Langland, or rather to the A2 man, do follow quite naturally, for we can but expect that Langland's onslaught on learning would lead to a quarrel with Clergie; but I do not see why Scripture should send Langland to Kynde Wit for instruction when it was Wit who led him astray in the first place from the teachings of Studie, Scripture's sister. If we take any of the passus, Chambers *4 holds on the authority of the Ingilby MS., that we should end with 89,

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* X1 179 *1 A X1 250 *2 A X1 253

*3 X1 302

*4 Chambers M.L.R. V1. *5 A X11 35.

but in any case I think we must exclude line 94 which Mesendieck takes as the conclusion of the whole matter. There is therefore a gap in the history of his soul's development which is only filled in by the B Text, but of his conclusions in 1362 I think we need be in no doubt. They are preserved in the first two visions which are not of a controversial or introspective character, but aim at teaching to mankind at large what he himself had discovered. This conclusion is contained in the Pardon of Piers the Plowman

"Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam eternam,
Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum."[1]

As I said, he still holds to Holy Church as his guide in life, but there are the seeds of trouble contained in this, for

"Thauh thou be founden in fraternite - a-mong the foure orders,
And habbe indulgence i-doubled-bote Dowel the helpe,
I nolde gete for the pardoun - one pye-hele! "[2]

The discussions added in B, therefore, may either be taken as a completion of his experience before 1362, or as the exercise of soul through which he had since passed. Probably it is both. He begins by changing almost all that he had said in his meeting with Wit. Inwitte is still held up as the guide of man's life,[3] but stress is laid rather upon man's responsibility to his neighbour than to himself. This is witness of the increasing emphasis he puts upon love of which he had said in the beginning

"That loue is the leuest thing that ur lord asketh."[4]

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1 A. V111 95 2 A V111 179

3. B 1X 56 4. A I, 136.

The older man has more knowledge of life and a greater interest in practical questions so we find that the additions are in the form of laments for the evils of the time, especially of the rich. The changes in his creed are most apparent in the conversation with Clergie, and the fact that he makes this change shows, I think, that it is his own opinions, not that of clerics as a whole, that he thus expresses. Emphasis is now laid not upon action, but upon belief,[1] belief in Holy Church and more especially belief in the Trinity, and then he brings out the grand principle of his Creed, the principle of sincerity

"Loke thow worche it in werke - that the worde sheweth
Suche as thow seemest in syghte - be in assay y-founde."[2]

He records no change in his attitude towards the uselessness of clergie.

So much for the changes made in 1377. Now we come to the new work of B, which seems to fit on to Langland's quarrel with Clergie at the end of A XI. We have here the continuation of his allegorical biography in the vision and temptation of Fortune,[3] where he confesses that he deserted his high resolves, for worldly glory, and when these honors failed him,[4] his conscience roused once more. Mensendieck[5] thinks that at this time he was enrolled among the friars, but it seems probable that he was already in minor orders before this. What is of much more interest is that it seems to have been just at this juncture of his spiritual awakening,

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1. B X 230. 2. B X 252. 3. B XI, 6.
4. B XI, 60. 5. p. 43.

after a struggle for successes in the world, that he resolved to write his poem

"'Yif I durste', quod I 'amonges men - this meteles auowe'".[1]

The contradictions and sorrows of this next vision show through what agitation of soul he is passing. He is still troubled by the problem of predestination[2] and when he strengthens himself on his fundamental belief[3] that man will be saved by repentance and the mercy of God granted on account of the death of Christ, he is constantly baffled by the salvation of Trajan,[4] who had no knowledge of Christianity, and so it would seem that salvation depends upon good works.[5] The good works on which he lays most value[6] are love, kindness to the poor, and poverty; but he is too well acquainted with his Bible not to know that belief is an essential to salvation.[7] His mind is still busy with the subtleties of Philosophy and he studies nature andmankind for the solution of his problems. The result is most discouraging, as it seems to him

"That Resoun rewarded - and reuled alle bestes,
Saue man and his make".[8]

Yet there is no remedy for this but patient submission. With this the vision closes, and he has reached another step in his creed with the despairing decision that Dowel, i.e. the highest aim for man's life, is to see much and suffer more.[9] This sad decision

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1. B XI, 86. 2. Ibid 112. 3. ibid 81 & 130.
4. ibid 119. 5. ibid 150. 6. ibid 165,176,248.
7. ibid 213. 8. B XI 361. 9. ibid 402.

and his attack of shame,[1] show that he was coming to a change of opinion, and was less ready to rely upon himself. We need not be surprised to find, therefore, that he now passes through a period of the greatest trust in Clergie.[2] Once again, however, he is stumbled by the problem of how could Trajan be saved who was altogether out of Cristendome, the sudden vanishing of Imaginatif[3] would seem to show that the explanation of his being saved by true works is not altogether satisfying to the poet.

In the last two passus of Dowel Langland seems to be preparing to give us his final conclusions on this matter. He collects Conscience and Clergie, Patience, Scripture, a friar, and himself, at a banquet where they feed upon meets "of Austyn, of Ambrose - of alle the foure euangelistes,"[4] who are the authorities to whom Langland will trust. As distinguished from his previous ponderings on faith and good works, the keynote to it all here is love. As authority for this Piers is quoted,[5] and though Patience leads up to "dilige" by "disce", which are the special requirements for layman and cleric respectively, all the weight of his sermon is on the "Dilige". The side issue about Clergie seems to be settled here also. Clergye[6] has his own place, where he deserves all honor, but for practical living, Conscience and Patience are the better guides. This is proved by their setting out to convert the world,

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1. ibid, 395.
2. B X11, 72.
3. ibid, 280.
4. B X111, 39.
5. B X111, 124,137.
6. ibid, 212.

with which they deal in the person of Haukyn Activa Vita. Now active life is most admirable, is the support of the country, in fact, but living in the world, he cannot avoid its evil, so his coat is stained with all the deadly sins.[7] Contrition, Confession and Satisfaction[1] therefore are essentials to man's salvation besides the all important Charity.[2]

We have, therefore, Langland's standard for Dowel, the active life, in definition of which we might quote Wiclif, as he probably understood the same by it as did Langland: "That is cleped actif lif whanne men travailen for worldli goodis and kepen hem in right-wisnesse.[3] This standard is a life controlled by faith and love[4] and purified from its sins by contrition, confession and satisfaction; the rule of this life is to be found in the Paternoster and it may best be carried out in a state of patient poverty. As for the development of his mind and soul, he seems to be almost in a "Bishop Blougram" condition:

"A life of faith diversified by doubt,"

for he admits that we can prove nothing absolutely,[5] with St.Bernard he would wait for the Heavenly country where

"Solvet enigmata, veraque sabbata continuabit."

The text, therefore, to which he returns most constantly in these last passus is "Pacientes vincunt."

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1. B XIV 17,18,21. 2. ibid, 97.

3. Works I 384, quoted by Skeat, Notes, p.313.

4. B XIV 46. 5. B XIII, 132.

I hardly think we can agree with Mensendieck[1] that Dobet and Dobest do not undertake to formulate any higher ideal, but only to explain what he has resolved, and show how it may be put into practice. The introduction of Activa Vita at the end of Dowel seems to mean that this is his solution of a working creed, by which man may live from day to day. Dobet I think applies to the Contemplative life. At the beginning we have seen[2] that Dobet was the life of a cleric, and at Conscience banquet Piers defines Dobet as "Disce",[3] which is the special attribute of the Church as distinguished from the layman.

Clergye warns Conscience that the time will come when she will have to come back to him, to resolve all difficulties. He "seide ful sobreliche - 'Thow shalt se the tyme,

Whan thow art wery for-walked - wilne me to conseille',

'That is soth', seyde Conscience - 'so me God helpe'".[4]

In Dobet we have this return, which involves a discussion of the more abstract principles. This is at once clear from the appearance of Anima, which includes all man's mental faculties, and who becomes Langland's guide in the place of the more practical Conscience and Patience. Langland looks for instruction in these principles in the Church, so in the long prologue to Dobet, we have a discussion of the nature of the Church,[5] and of Charity - for Charity is still the most important-in its special relation to the Church,[6] to the friars, the consistory court, the bishops,

1. p. 57. 2. Supra, p. 50 3. B XIII, 137.

4. B XIII, 203. 5. B XV. 88

6. ibid 225, 234, 239, 263.

and finally, since it is seen to fail in all these, in the lives of the Saints. From this examination he concludes that in the contemplative life, as in the active life, poverty is most essential to virtue.[1] This passus concludes with the duties of clerics, as illustrated in the lives of Christ and of St.Thomas.

So far, all is plain sailing; Langland has been formulating his ideal - an ideal of love and virtuous poverty - for the Church. But he is not only dealing with the contemplative life here in the restricted sense in which we apply it to priests and monks, but in the broader sense, which I don't think is any forcing of terms, ~~to~~ he finds in it the fundamentals of theology. Perhaps I am going too far, but it seems as if the mysterious tree of charity,[2] with its three props of the three persons of the Trinity, its three enemies, the world, the flesh and the devil, and its strange fruits of matrimony, continence and maidenhood, is a personification of this theology; we may note in confirmation of this that love was the only part of theology for which Langland found any use:

"A ful lethy things it were - yif that loue nere
Ac for it let best by loue - I loue it the bettre."[3]

The problem of theology, therefore, resolves itself into the salvation of man, since the devil gathered all the fruits of this tree as soon as they fell

"And made of holy men his horde - in lymbo inferni."[4]

For the solution of this problem then, says Langland, nothing

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1. ibid 312 & 415.
2. B XVl, 4.
3. B X, 184.
4. B XVl, 84.

and no one can avail but Christ and the pardon through His death. When He - "for mankynde sake

Iusted in ierusalem - a ioye to us alle.

On Crosse upon caluarye - Cryst toke the bataille,

Ageines deth and the deuel - destruyed her botheres myghtes

Deyde, and deth fordid - and daye of nyghte made."[1]

This part is again emphasized, and the full significance of belief in Christ is brought out, by the introduction of Faith,[2] who teaches belief in the Trinity, and Hope[3] who insists upon the keeping of the law. Finally comes the greatest of these, Charity[4] in the person of the Samaritan. Though Langland has found Abraham and Spes, or, we should rather say, Faith and Law insufficient, they are both essential to man's salvation, when they are united with Christ's work

"For the barne was born in Bethleem - that with his

blode shal saue

Alle that lyueth in faith,-and folweth his felawes techynge."[2]

The blood of Christ, faith in the Trinity, and love to your fellowmen,[3] to which must be added repentance for sin,[4] are the articles of Langland's Creed, as discovered to us in Dobet. The triumph which is possible to so fair a belief is then unfolded to us in the beautiful description of Christ's conquest over death, and deliverance of the patriarchs from the power of the devil, and this division ends with joy and triumph

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1. B XVI, 162-6.
2. B XVII, 122.
3. B XVII, 132.
4. ibid, 297.

"Tyl the daye dawed - this damaiseles daunced,
That men rongen to the resurexioun - and right
with that I waked,
And called Kitte my wyf - and Kalote my daughtes-
"Ariseth and reuerenceth - Goddes resurrexioun
And crepeth to the crosse on knees - and kisseth it for a Iuwel
For Goddes blessed body - it bar for owre bote,
And it afereth the fende - for such is the myghte,
May no grysly gost - glyde thereit shadweth".[1]

Suhh is Langland's theology, as we find it worked out in B. Though it was hardly a part of his theology, it was a very essential part of his moral opinion, that even more important than our beliefs was our application of them to life. This is the teaching of almost every definition of Dobest, besides innumerable other passages in which he insists upon sincerity, practising what you preach, Truth, in fact, which is the object of the pilgrimage in the first two visions. So the poem ends with Dobest. This begins with the glory of Christ's conquest and a description of how the fruits of His death and resurrection were to be applied to man, in the Church militant. We have,therefore, in the second allegory of Pier' ploughing, Langland's ideal Holy Church, which he found in the principles of the Roman Catholic Church. Here we have the four Gospels and the four Fathers as the implements,and the cardinal virtues as the products. To Piers, who here represents the ministers of the Church, is given all power.[1] This is the

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I. B V 1X, 178.

Church as it ought to be, if men practised their creed. Langland says not one word against the Church in itself, nor gives a suggestion that he wants to leave it. However evil the individual clergy may be, he still believs that clerks hold the keys of Christendom.[1] He does go on sternly to rebuke even the Pope, but not for a moment does he suggest that the office of pope should be done away. At the end of his poem therefore, we find the same loyalty to the Church as he had begun with, where the first instructions in his poem are given by Holy Church, the proper guide of mankind, the teacher of love and truth.

"Loue is the leuest thinge - that our lord askith"[2] and

"When alle tresouris arn triyede - treuthe is the beste."

One would expect little change in religious opinions in the revision of a poem which was written, we may believe, when the author was 45. In the C text, therefore, we are not surprised to find the main tenets of his belief are unaltered, yet there is an increased love for theological subtleties[3] and a certain development of those ideas which he already held. At the same time, there seems to be a firmer belief in the Church which he now idettifies with Charity[4] and this leads him to omit some of the attacks on the Church, and we find the definite statement that the contemplative life is better than the active[5] and an insistence on salvation by means of the Church.[6] The clearest sign of revision by an old man is his assignation to Rechelesnesse[7] of his youthful heresies, especially the attack upon Clergie. The same spirit of

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1. B X11, 111. 2. AI, 180,183. 3. Skeat.
4. C XV111, 125. 5. C X1X, 78. 6. C XV.71
7. C X1V, 130.

indifference to his youthful ardours would account for some of the omissions and transpositions, such as the transposition of Haukyn's confession out of Dowel altogether, and the change in the position of the beginning of Dobet, which makes much less apparent the order of development in his mind.

In spite of his loyalty to the Church, Langland's beliefs, as we thus see, are such that he might easily have passed for a Protestant, and has been so regarded. In the 16th Century, Bale devotes almost one-half of his precious little biography to the statement "Illud veruntamen liquido constat, eum fuisse ex primis Joannis Wiclevi discipulis unum, atque in spiritus fervore, contra apertus papistarum blasphemias adversus Deum et ~~Cui~~ ejus Christum, sub amoenis coloribus et typis edidisse in sermone Anglico pium opus, ac bonorum virorum lectione dignum." He ~~Reformation~~ was reprinted four times in the same Reformation century. In the next century Fuller hails him as the morning star of the reformation,[1] and in our own age Mensendieck has demonstrated with infinite elaboration and care that Langland was a Wiclifite especially adhering to teaching of Wm. Swinderly and William Thorpe

"Es Kann ... nicht zweifelhaft sein dasz wir ihn entschieden zu den Anhängern Wiclif's zahlen."[2]

Though we may not agree with these sweeping statements, we may see in Langland, if not the morning star of the reformation, at least a faint glimmering of its dawn. Ullman says,[3] "The principle

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1. Jusserand P.P. 190. 2. p. 77.

3. Reformers before the Reformation I p. 10.

that salvation flows not from man but from God may be considered as the ultimate and comprehensive basis of the Reformation," and this basis is an integral part of Langland's creed, seeing he holds that

"Nit. suffice for oure sauacion - sothfast byleyue."[1]

Ullman goes on to say that the less trained eye looks to the outer aspects of Church life and opposition begins with externals. This is exactly where Langland fell short of being a reformer; he did not probe to the depths and find that the evils he denounced were due to canker at the heart of the papacy.

To the movement of Wiclif and the Lollards there is, strange to say, no direct reference in the poem, yet a comparison between the two is of peculiar interest, as showing the different directions taken by ardent religionists. While there is a close sympathy between them, that Langland was not a Wicliffite is evident not only from his general tone of reverence for the Church, but also in definite articles of his creed such as his belief in Transubstantiation,[2] which Wiclif had changed into Consubstantiation so early as 1380, and utterly denied in his appeal to Parliament in 1395, and in his insistence on confession[3] which Wiclif thought unnecessary. I believe Langland may have had Wiclif in mind when he declared that

"alle manere men - wommen, and children
Sholde conformye to on kynde - on holy kirke to by - leyue."[4]

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1. C XVIII, 119.
2. B XII, 87.
3. C XVII, 32.
4. C IV. 400

This is found in the C text only and by 1392 the schismatic character of Wiclif's teaching must have been recognized. Perhaps too he refers to him by the apostles unauthorized by the Bishop; if so, he asserts his disapproval plainly

"For it is an unreasonable religion - that hath right noughte of certeyne." [2]

I think that these references are as probable as that the "prestes - that have no spendyng-syluer"[3] are Wiclif's poor priests which Skeat[4] suggests is "an obvious and interesting allusion to Wyclif's so-called "Poor Priests."

Where Langland draws nearest to Wiclif is in his setting up--perhaps unconsciously - an authority above the Church. To Langland the Scriptures are always the final appeal. It is interesting to find even in the A text of 1362 that one of the works of Dobet is to translate the Bible.[5] Perhaps even more revolutionary, had he but realized it, is the importance assigned to the individual and the installation of Reason and Conscience as guides of the soul. Other matters over which the two might join hands are the uselessness of forms without spirit;[6] the advantages of poverty for the clergy,[7] the advisability of disendowing the Church,[8] the unsuitability of Bishop's holding officials positions,[9] scathing denunciation of the Friars,[10] indeed on social and clerical abuses in general their

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1. ~~C IV, 400-1~~. 2. B V1, 151,153. 3. C X1V, 101.

4. Notes to P.P., p. 276. 5. A 1X, 82.

6. B X11, 181. 7. C XV111, 227 8. B XV, 526.

9. B pr. 93 10. Piers the Plowman passim.

views are the same. In one passage[1] beseeching for mercy from landlords, Skeat[2] believes that Langland is borrowing from Wiclif. On one social question they differ: Wiclif[3] would have a general political equality of men, which is an idea that Langland entertains not for an instant: we are all equal in the eyes of God,[4] but the existing order of rank is not to be altered.[5]

But when all is said, the connection in spirit between Langland and Wiclif is a true one, for both were formed under the influence of the Bible. So important is this in a study of Langland's mind and character, so emphatically the strongest influence at work was the Bible, that it demands detailed examination.

Of the 502 quotations in his poem,[6] 367, i.e., over 74% are from the Bible; and besides these direct quotations a very large proportion of the material of the poem is formed of paraphrases of Biblical stories. He gives evidence of knowledge of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, for though he quotes from only 40 of the 66 books these quotations are so scattered that we may rest assured he had studied the whole Bible, even though, as with almost every other writer on religious subjects, he does not often quote from the Minor Prophets. His quotations are from the Vulgate, and apparently he made use of an annotated edition, or at any rate, a Psalter with glosses.[7] His knowledge of the Bible is shewn by his very mistakes,

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1. C. IX, 36-41.
2. Notes to P.P., 158.
3. Traill. II, 221.
4. C IX, 45.
5. B XX, 274-6.
6. Skeat, Index III.
7. Skeat, Index IV.

for such slips as mentioning bread and wine in connection with Abraham, instead of Melchizedek,[1] of referring a text to the Gospels which belongs to Ezekiel,[2] or some verbal error such as substituting "in die" for "enim",[3] prove that he made his quotations from memory, while the fewness of such mistakes, proves how exact as well as how broad was his knowledge.

It is rather difficult to determine exactly the place held by the Bible at this period. Some authorities[4] assert that there was almost total neglect of it, and that both clergy and laity were ignorant of scriptural knowledge. Rashdall[5] asserts that the Bible was no part of the theological training of the Universities; not that it was forbidden; but it was simply neglected, there was no place for it in the curriculum. Though this may be generally true for the Continental Universities, we must make an exception in the case of Oxford. At the time when Langland was probably a student, there was in force a regulation made by Grosseteste that the first hour every morning should be devoted to the study of the Scriptures,[6] so that at College, if not earlier, Langland would become acquainted with the Bible, and into his hands was put the very weapon which he used against the subtleties of theology which he was studying. Probably, however, the foundations of Langland's training in the Scriptures was laid in his first school of Malvern Priory,[7] for it

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1. B XVI. 244. 2. B. IX. 144. 3. B VIII, 21.
4. Life & Times of Wiclif, p. 30 5. Med. Univ. 111.
6. Cbg. 11. 7. Jusserand P.P., p. 75.

is to this rather than to the University that he is referring in the lines:

"My fader and my frendes - founden me to scole,
Tyl ich wiste wyterliche - what holy wryte menede."[1]

We know that many monastries had special translations of the Bible made for them, such as the annotated translation of the Psalms made for the Nuns of Ainderby by Richard Rolle.[2] Or we may go a step further back, and say that a boy of Langland's earnest, half-mystic type of mind, would very probably know something of the Scriptures without special instruction. There was constant reference to the Bible in the sermons of the time, and we can be pretty sure little William Langland would not be absent, when a friar came to his village and preached to the villagers collected round the Cross in the village green. One can picture the somewhat lanky boy near the foot of the Cross with his solemn eyes riveted on the speaker as he drew strange interpretations out of the Bible stories, as he enlarged upon the seven deadly sins, or discussed the mysteries of the Trinity. And the active mind stored up these materials, and the observant eyes saw the seven sins living around him, and when he had pondered and criticized and made it his own, his creative power formed a great poem. The general knowledge which the laity possessed of the scriptures is evidenced by the confidence with which Langland appeals to them. Had he not known that he would be answered by a feeling of familiarity, he would hardly have used

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1. C VI, 36. 2. Cbg. II.

Biblical quotations and illustrations so largely in a poem intended to reach the mind and heart and conscience of the "man in the street." The appeal to Biblical authority which was so cardinal a part of Wiclif's creed, finds abundant illustration in Langland. Langland's 367 quotations are not merely introduced as embellishments of his style or proof of his knowledge. They are there either to clinch an argument or to test and refute some proposition. All through the turmoil of mind which we find in Vita de Dowel, all the questionings of Theological authority, of the advantages of study, of the ways and words of the clergy, not once do we find question raised as to the validity of the Scripture. If he had a period or periods of doubt we find no trace of it for he wrote when that stage was passed; when the scriptures were to him the only solid foundation and not even in retrospect would he cast any doubts upon them or allow others to do so or even to exercise their reasoning powers on them:

"For alle that wilneth to wyte-the weyes of God almighty,
I wolde his eye were in his ers and his fynger after,
That euere wilneth to wite - whi that God wolde
Suffre Sathan - his sede to bigile,
Or Judas to the Iuwes - Iesu bytraye.
Al was as thow wollde - lorde, yworschiped be thow
And al worth as thow wolte - what so we dispute! I

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1. B X, 122.

Yet sometimes one feels that the very passion of his declaration of faith is because he feels "mysbileue" creeping upon him,

"Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe."

His attitude is much the same as Tennyson's, who refused to contemplate the

"ever-breaking shore
That tumbled on the godless deep."[1]

With Tennyson he would conclude

"We have but faith: we cannot know."

Piers' Pardon is a direct quotation,[2] and this we feel is the central point in Langland's creed. Even the powers of the Pope must stand or fall by right of Scriptural authority[3] and every conclusion which he himself draws stands only when it can be shewn to be in accord with some verse. So long as it had this stamp of authority he cared not what man might say.[4] Here then we may recognize the very spirit of the Reformers, the very spirit of Luther, who, standing firm on "The Just shall live by faith",[5] proceeded to undermine the whole edifice of the Papacy. In Langland, however, this appeal to authority remained in harmony with his belief in the Church, perhaps because the training in dialectic of those days tended to produce a series of "water-tight compartments" in the brain.

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1. In Memoriam C XXIV. 2. Matthew XXV, 46.
3. C X, 326. 4. A X, 94.
5. Rom. I, 17.

Though beyond his age in his knowledge of the Bible and his reverence for it, his use of it is that of his contemporaries. We meet the same elaborate interpretations and applications of types, such for example as the Ark and its carpenters,[1] as we might find in any of the Old English homilies. Any story in the Bible might be made a parallel with any condition of the present time. Perhaps the most striking example of the discovery of meanings, is that read into the verse "Si justus vix saluabitur,"[2] where instead of taking it in its obvious meaning as a rather discouraging verse, they made it into a Gospel sermon by taking the word V I X to stand for the V wounds of Iesus Xrist.

When such were his feelings towards the Bible, we do not wonder that it was the moulding influence in his life. His love for the poor and his reverence for authorities may well have been drawn from this source, or at any rate have been established by it. What Langland studied with most diligence and love were the Gospels and the Psalms. Over 50% of his quotations are from the Gospels and over 25% from the Psalms and whole passages are devoted to what is really a paraphrase of the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The highest point in his allegory is formed by the parable of the good Samaritan, and the Passion of our Lord, and the beauty and majesty of the poetry in these passages is proof of how deeply he was affected by them. The man who found the solutions of his life's problems in the person and the atonement of Christ will show in

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1. C XII, 246. 2. C XVI, 22.

himself some of the characteristics of that perfect life. Hence we see in Langland a tenderness of love, a strength of self-abnegation and a loftiness of principle which should be the characteristics of each one who would take the name of "Christian." Langland was so sincere, so insistent on practice answering to belief, that his life was but an outward expression of his belief, and as his character was formed by living close to the person of Christ, so his beliefs answer to the teachings of the Bible. Thus in setting forth the points of his creed, one constantly feels that it is best expressed in Biblical language. His religious beliefs might well be summed up in the words of the Prophet Micah:[1] "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"-while his social ideals correspond well with those of the Apostle Paul:[2] "That ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you." The general tone of his writings one feels is very close to that of Scriptural authors:in its heat of righteous indignation, mingled with tender pity, one feels the voice of the prophet Isaiah; in some of its concise utterances and vivid sayings there appears a likeness to the Book of Proverbs, and his insistence on love is equal to the thirteenth of Corinthians; but in its general teachings I think it resembles nothing so closely as the Book of James. It is true that in his insistence on love he draws close to the

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1. Micah V1, 8. 2. 1st Thess. 1V. 11th.

epistle of St. John, and it is significant, I think, of Langland's simple devotion to the Lord Jesus that his mind should be so closely attuned to the Apostles, one of whom is the Lord's brother, and the other "the disciple whom Jesus loved." I think Langland must have been quite like the Apostle John, the man whom Christ could call Boanerges, and of whom in his old age is told the story that when too feeble to walk he was carried into the assembly of Saints, to say "Little children, love one another."

The central teaching of St. James is the necessity of both faith and works "Faith without works is dead."[1] This Langland quotes with approval. You must believe in God, no salvation is possible without belief, but this belief is proved genuine by your works. "I will shew thee my faith by my works"[2] says James. "Ac thorw workes thou myght wite - wher forth he walketh; O peribus credite"[4] says Langland, speaking of Piers. Or again we might take James' teaching about the poor:[3] "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which He hath promised to them that love Him?" Turn to Langland and we find

"And lewede leele laborers - and land-tylyng peuple
Persen with a pater-noster - paradys other heuene,
Passinge purgatorie penaunceles - for here parfit by-leyue."[5]

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1. James II, 20. AI, 160.
2. James II, 18th C XVll 339.
3. James II, 5th.
4. ~~James V, 1-6.~~
5. C Xll, 294.

Again in the last chapter[1] we find condemnation of the rich, for their luxury and their oppression which is one of Langland's prominent topics.

Finally we must not leave unnoticed the influence which his familiarity with the Scriptures had upon his style as a writer. Not only did it provide him with matter & illustration, but his fluency and suppleness of diction, is due, especially where he is discussing philosophical matters, to the training provided by his study of the Vulgate. Quiller Couch[2] points out that when, at the time of the New Learning, Literature wished to "philosophize good and evil, life, love or death" a new vocabulary had to be formed, and ~~from~~ for prose this was the result of the miracle of the Authorized version of the Bible.[3] Now, of course Langland lived before the New Learning directly touched England, and long before the Authorized Version, but Langland was seeking after "whyes"[4] which I take to be the ultimate subject matter of philosophy, and his ability in dealing with such a subject in an ~~infidel~~ unphilosophical age, may well be due to his study of the Latin Scriptures.

II. The Church.

When we turn from introspective religion to an examination of Piers the Plowman as an interpretation of the state of the Church in Langland's time, once again we are embarrassed with excess of material. Yet this very abundance of attention to it is representative of the state of the age. The Church was much more

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1. James V, 1-6.
2. Lec. VI, p. 114.
3. ibid, p. 122.
4. B XII, 217.

closely interwoven with men's lives at that period than now. As we have seen in the case of Langland himself, it was believed that the offices of the Church were essential to secure the soul's salvation and the question of death was ever present before men's eyes in those days of constant murder and easy hanging, warfare, total ignorance of medicine or of hygiene, and constant visitation of a plague which could sweep away half the population of England in a few months. Into every department of man's life the Church penetrated, and religion was spoken of more frankly and was looked upon as a more integral part of man's life. Langland believed that fire and flood were caused by wickedness,[1] and at the present time we might well return to this faith, and substituting "wars" for pestilences. we might say with him

"Folk is nouht firm in the feith - ne free of here goodes,
Ne sory for here symnes - so is pruyde en-hansed
In religion and al the reame - among syche and poure,
That preyeres han no power - these pestilences to lette
For God is def now a dayes - and deyneth nouht ous to huyre,
And good men for oure gultes - he al to-grynt to dethe."[2]

The trouble was that this attitude led very readily to superstition, and a credulous belief in the most unreasonable and cruel things. This was the great field which the Pardoners and false pilgrims and hermits worked with such success that they were constantly increasing in number. Langland says very little of this and that

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1. C 1V. 90-2.
2. C X11. 5-7.

only of its commonest forms: love potions,[1] for it was by sorcery that Lecherie attracted his followers, and the use of charms and precious stones to cure diseases.[2] One of the witches he mentions by name, the souter of South-werk,[3] who could cure the cramps and the cardiacle, the ague and the fever produced in Wrath by his disappointment in some evil scheme. But this is all very tame when we compare it with other records telling us of magic dances at death watches, public prayers to protect the king from magicians,[4] etc., etc.

This readiness with religion was not altogether acceptable to the authorities of the Church. A Canon of Leicester said with disapproval that Scripture[5] "became a vulgar thing and more open to lay folk and women that knew now to read than it is wont to be to the clerk's themselves". This was hardly Langland's attitude, for he was in favor of anything which would bring holy things, and especially the life of Christ, before men's minds. Thus he urged that the great men should have at their table minstrels singing of such matters, rather than of ribaldry. But he cannot rebuke too severely those clerks and knights who "carpen of God ofte"[6] in a tone of scepticism and profanity. They carelessly discuss such problems as man's responsibility for Adam's fall,[7] or the mysteries of the Trinity, in the pauses of the meal.

"And guawen God with gorge - when here guttes fullen."[8]

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1. C VII. 191. 2. B II, 14. 3. C VII, 83.
4. E.W.Life, 333. 5. Quoted by Greene, p 259.
6. C XII, 52. 7. B X, 101. 8. C XII, 41.

As a result, men are not firm in the faith nor free with their goods, pride is increased and they have no sorrow for sin. Besides being over free with theological questions, the laity are ready to make attack on the Church. Jessop[1] points out that by excommunication and interdict people were accustomed to doing without the Sacraments. This would have its share in the lack of reverence for ecclesiastics which was shown, e.g., in the Peasant's Revolt. But the explanation which Langland gives,[2] that the ill-ways of the clergie cause the evil in their flocks is quite sufficient. When the clergy were such as Langland describes, no wonder if Pride[3] found their evil works an inexhaustible subject on which to prove his wit, and if "borel clerkes"[4] blame them and call them "doumbe houndes".

Firm as was Langland's belief in the Church, and though an ecclesiastic himself, his tones are as stern as those of the Puritan poet in describing

> "Such as, for thir[e] bellies sake,
> Creep, and intrude, and climb into the fold."[5]

Skeat[6] says that Langland might take as his mottos

"I shall tellen it for treuth sake - take hede who so lyketh"[7]

and the line before we find refers to the "curatoures of crystene peple." We must, therefore, take the plunge into the "fog and filthy air" of clerical abuses in the 14th century for Langland

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1. Coming of the Friars, 8.
2. C XVII 240-63.
3. C VII, 20.
4. B X, 286.
5. Cp. C X, 259-273.
6. Notes, p. 340.
7. B XV, 89.

ranges over the whole field, from Pope to pardoner.

Of the office of Pope Langland[1] speaks with the reverence due from a devout Roman Catholic, admitting his power to grant pardons, though the admission has rather a perfunctory sound to it. He speaks with respect too of the great Popes of the past, but in reference to the actual present condition of the Papal See he gives us a good deal of incriminating information. The besetting sin of the Church now is avarice,[2] even as in days past their chief virtue was charity.[3] And here the Pope can hold his own with the rest. Meed dwells in the Pope's palace,[4] and a more concrete accusation, "The Jews are quite at home at Avignon."[5] But his greed does not rest at home: he "pileth holy kirke,

And cleymeth bifor the kynge - to be keper over Crystine,

And counteth nought though Crystine - ben culled and robbed."[6]

Even more explicitly he speaks of money being carried from England to the Pope[7] as loan or taxation.[8] Another abuse was the appointment of provisors, of whom Langland speaks slightingly,[9] and the holding of pluralites.[10] Much stronger language we might expect, seeing that one-third of the Church officials in England were aliens.[11] On the abundance of Papal bulls, and their little practical advantage

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1. CX, 324. 2. B XV, 242. 3. B XV, 239-40.
4. C 111. 20 5. B X1X, 420. 6. B X1X, 434-41.
7. C V, 125. B V, 251. 8. B X111, 243. 9. C 111, 182.
10. C 1V, 33. 11. Trevelyan, p 119.

Langland permits himself a little satire.[1] Perhaps most light is cast on the attitude of the time to the Pope by the use of the expression "pope-holy"[2] with the meaning of hypocritical. The great sin was that the Pope encouraged war, which he might bring to an end by his prayers.[4] Of course, the cause of all this was the disgrace of the Papal schism and the 70 years captivity. Langland does not mention this in so many words but he speaks of the papal court as the Robbers of France,[3] and of its situation at Avignon,[5] and quite definitely states that the cardinals "presumen in himself - a pope to make".[6] Of the cardinals he uses very little language for they came to England itself and flaunted their luxury bought with English money, before the people.[7] The cardinals are the last to practice the cardinal virtues, and

"The contre is the cursedor - that cardynales come inne."[8]

The duties of the Bishops as outlined in Piers the Plowman are very great. They are responsible at the last judgment for the souls of all their parishioners,[9] and during their life, they must provide food both for Clergy[10] and laity.[11] Another temporal duty was to take charge of any theft that the repentant thief did not know what to do with.[12] The Bishop's life should be spent travelling through his province giving his people ghostly food, by teaching

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1. B XIII, 244-9. 2. C VII, 37. 3. C V, 125.
4. C XVIII, 234-49. 5. B XIX, 440. 6. C I, 135.
7. B XIX, 412. 8. B XIX, 415. 9. C VII, 347.
10. C XIV, 107. 11. B XV, 567. 12. C VII, 345.

them to believe in the Trinity, and on "holy church".[2] He should be so earnest that he would be ready to die in the performance of his duties.[3] These duties are: to appoint the Clergie;[4] to teach the Clergie;[5] to amend the sinful;[6] be leel, loving and merciful to the poor;[7] fierce to the evil; fearless in rebuking lecherie among lords; to pronounce blessing; to know, to teach, and to administer the laws. Most important of all, they should practice what they preach and then they will be equal to the Apostles. What they should not do is to meddle with knights in the management of lands.[8] After this fair picture, what do we find the Bishops doing? In the first place, they are all up in London, away from their provinces, very busy serving the King

"In the chekkere and the chauncelrie - chalengynge hus dettes,
Of wardes and of wardemotes - wayues and strayues
Somme aren as senschals-and seruen other lordes
And ben in stede of stywardes - and sitten and demen."[9]

On account of these Bishop's neglect, idolatry, superstition and unbelief are appearing.[10] Their neglect too is responsible for the evil ways of friars[11] and pardoners,[12] and the flocks are in a sad way, on account of these wolves.[12] Another charge brought against them is that of holding Bishoprics in absentee in all quarters of the earth.[13]

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1. B XV, 561-67. 2. C XVIII, 288 3. C XVIII, 293.
4. C XIV, 106. 5. A VIII 16,13. 6. B VII, 15,13.
7. C X, 14-17. 8. B XV, 516. 9. C I, 89-93.
10. C I, 96-102. 11. C X, 255. 12. C I, 76.
12. C X, 259-273. 13. B XV, 538.

Langland would be very glad to pack off to Syria a few of these idlers who are running round England, hallowing altars and confessing against the law.[1] Their answer to any complaint is a writ of supersedeas, or the visit of a summoner.[2] Their private life is as far from admirable as their public career. Of course, they are greedy for money won in the most ~~respectable~~ reprehensible manner,[3] and they spend it in luxury. If any of the clergy die intestate, the Bishop seizes his wealth and spends it on mirth, while abusing the previous owner.[4] They travel round, it is true, but it is to seize lands, and hold love days[5] like any worldly lord. Their horses are famous,[6] for the money that should go to the poor is spent on them, and on their fine clothes. They go hunting,[7] they carry weapons,[8] and they are ever ready with an oath.[9] Langland does not say much of the rest of the Church hierarchy, but what he does say is significant.[10] Priests and provisors, deans, and sub-deans, rector and archdeacons, serve as horses to the unholy procession who would accompany Meed to London.

When we come to the parsons and parish priests, Langland does not fail in subject matter. The ideal for the ordinary priest is much the same as for the Bishop. By perfect priesthood, they should inspire the people to holyness and honesty.[12] The object of their endowment is that they may care for poor men in misfortune.[13]

1. B XV, 557. 2. C X, 263. 3. C I, 101.

4. B XV, 134. 5. A XI, 208-9. 6. C V, 115.

7. A XI, 211. 8. A XI, 212. ~~9. C XI, 92.~~

~~10. C XVII, 204-5.~~ 11. C IV, 184-7. B II, 172-3 12. C XVII, 243-4

13. A XI, 196-8.

and all those who cannot be held responsible for themselves, such as those who have gone astray, fatherless children, widows without support, madmen, and helpless maidens[1] - a flattering combination, truly! Nay more! if prelates did their duty there would never a beggar lack food[2] - no small task in itself. In return, none of the clergy should ever lack money.[3] Langland also mentions his negative duties: he should not work, nor swear at inquests, nor fight."[4] We may hope that by some men this ideal was attained, men such as Chaucer's poor Parson; by those to whom Langland introduces us, it certainly was not. Langland was constantly referring to evils that have arisen since the pestilence time, and in considering the clergy we should pay heed to this, though Langland does not discuss it, Jessop[5] points out that in East Anglia in the year 1849, 800 parishes lost their parsons; 83 of these lost 2 in the year, and 10 lost 3. Counting the unbeneficed clerks, probably 2000 ecclesoastics died. This 2000 would mean that a number equal to all the clergy who had been ordained in the last six years was swept away. With this great strain on their reserve force naturally there must be a deterioration in character, and yet he says "I believe that the parochial clergy of the 14th Century before and after the plague, were decidedly a better set than the clergy of the 13th."[6] As we look at Langland's picture we exclaim "What, then, must the 13th century have been!"

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1. B 1X, 67-70
2. B 1X, 79-80.
3. C X1V, 107.
4. C V1, 57-8
5. Coming of the Friars, p 205.
6. Coming of Friars, p.222.

In each parish, there was not just one priest, but a parson, and a parish priest,[1] besides a number of unbeneficed clerks. But all villages were not so well supplied, for an avaricious parson could make money by holding pluralities,[2] and where the parished were poor as many were "sitthe the pestilence tyme", it paid better to go to London "And synge ther for symonye - for seluer ys swete."[3] This is what Langland was doing himself,[4] but he does not hesitate to frown upon the custom. Like their superiors, these men were endowed with avarice. In various ways they won their wealth. Before they would officiate they demanded mede and massepens and mete.[5] Even the regular Church services they were loath to perform unless there was something extra for which they might get a little pay.[6] They went further and connived with the Pardoner,[7] and even accepted bribes to overlook adultery and secret usury.[8] Hand in hand with avarice went luxury. Their time was spent managing their estates, holding love days and examining reeves' accounts,[9] or else in hunting which Langland would forbid on pain of death.[10] Their money was spent on horses and furs,[11] clothes of the latest fashion[12] and jewelry.[13] Also they wore swords[14] and long knives.[15] Small wonder that Langland felt poison was poured into the Church when Constantine endowed it,[16] and now he cries "Taketh here landes, ye lordes - and leet hem lyue by dymes."[17]

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1. B X11, 184.
2. C 1V, 33.
3. C I, 84.
4. C V1, 45-6.
5. C 1V, 280.
6. B XV, 123.
7. C I, 79.
8. B II, 172.
9. C V111, 33.
10. C 1V, 469
11. C V, 115.
12. B XX. 218.
13. B XV, 118
14. B XV, 120
15. B XX, 218.
16. C XV111, 220.
17. C XV111,227.

This is not the total of their sins. Lecherie was rampant amongst them,[1] and instead of doing their duties they ran round shriving ladies.[2] Yet Langland would allow the marriage of the secular clergy,[3] and we know that he himself had a wife and daughter.[4] It is surely very significant that the Confession of Sloth is put into the mouth of a priest,[5] and there we have a detailed picture of what the clergy might sink to. One result naturally was ignorance, to which Langland refers more than once.[6] Worst of all they show a lack of charity and ill will to the poor.[7]

Monks and monastries are handled by Langland more gently than any other division of society. This, we feel, is due to a personal respect, more than the virtue of the regular clergy, and thus we are led to believe that Langland was educated in a cloister ~~set~~, school perhaps was entirely brought up in the Priory at Malvern, as Miss Converse imagines,[8] and received great kindness from the monks gathered there. At any rate we know that he looks back upon his days in the cloister set as the nearest approach to heaven on earth.[9] Of the value of the contemplative life, his opinions vary. Once he definitely states.

"Preyers of a parfyt man - and penaunce discret
Ys the leueste labour - that oure lord pleseth."[10]

Again he vows that could he but find out about Dowel he would devote

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1. B XV, 129. 2. A X1, 200. 3. B 1X, 177.
4. C XX1, 473. 5. C V111, 1-69 1V, 22 6. B XII 184 XV 365
7. C II, 187-95. 8. "Long Will" Chaps. II & III.
9. B X, 300. 10. C V1, 84-5.

himself to prayer.[1] Haukyn Activa Vita is weighted with many sins, but on the other hand Piers the Plowman is a layman. Yet evidence from Piers does not all go against the contemplative life. Piers suggests that he will become a pilgrim[2] but Truth commands him to continue his tilling of the earth.[3] Yet what we last hear of Piers, i.e., Piers in his purely human character is

"Of preyers and of penaunce - my plow shal ben hereafter,
And wepen whan I shulde slepe - though whete-bred me faille."[4]

Once he puts them on a level: King Wit would have men work

"Or in dykynge or in deluynge - or trauillynge in preyeres,
Contemplatyf lyf or actyf lyf - Cryst wolde men wroughte."[5]

In C. praise is given only to "swynkers with handes".[6] Knights, Langland distinctly declares "shoulde nat faste - ne forbere shirte."[7]

Besides the intimate acquaintance which we may assume Langland had with Malvern Priory in his boyhood he tells us that he had seen many cellis,[8] where he may have stayed when he went on those wanderings to which he refers in his vision. Such extensive knowledge makes it the more remarkable that he finds so few flaws in them. In the Vision of the Field full of folk, almost the only folk to whom he attaches no blame are the "ancres and eremites" - that holden hem in hure cellys."[10] He is very insistent on this last point, that monks should be shut in cloister,[11] a practice which we

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1. B XII, 29. 2. B VI, 86. 3. B XII, 219-20.
4. C X, 1. 5. B VI, 249-51 6. C IX, 260.
7. C II, 99. 8. C I, 5. ~~9. Coming of Friars, 136.~~
10. C II, 30. 11. C V, 116.

know Chaucer's monk did not approve of at all. The monks were kept in order by a Prior, the subprior and the "pater abbas",[1] who did their work so well that Wrath found it no comfortable abode for him.[2] Also we are told that if they did not pay heed to their rules King and Commons wouldbe down upon them.[3] The monks seem, also, to have avoided luxury, for their ale was so feeble and they had so much fish that it made Wrath quite ill.[4] Yet Langland disapproves of their being bequeathed great quantities of land from the nobles,[5] for they will not spend it on the upkeep of the Church. Some day, he prophesies they will be disendowed[6] for breaking this rule.[7] For "men telleth" that monks and canons ride out purchasing manors, holding love days and hunting on fine horses, while at home he treats his knaves with haughtiness and must be called "lordein". From Chaucer's ecclesiastics one would be apt to believe that this worldliness was the most striking feature, which Langland might well have observed for himself, instead of reporting on hearsay. Jessop,[8] too, brings out that it was no part of the duty of the monk to reform the world, the monastery was no benevolent institution. This accounts for Langland's omission of reproof for neglect of the poor. We do learn from him though that they played the important part of School-teachers of the time.[9] On Nuns, Langland is not so lenient: Wrath finds ready entrance into their community, where

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1. C V11, 153. 2. C V11, 151 3. C V1, 144.

4. C V11, 158. 5. C V1, 164. 6. C V1, 169-172

7. C V1, 157-62 8. Coming of the Friars, 120.

9. B X, 300.

he stirs them up to fight literally "tooth and nail",[1] as a result of this malicious gossip. Luxury too was amongst them.[2] Probably Langland did not know as much of Nuns as he did of monks, but this is the state of affairs one might expect under such an "abbodesse" as "Lady Eglantyne".

Langland's satire is at its best in dealing with these hangers-on of the Church, Friars, Hermits and Pardoners. He describes them at length, he returns to them, he drags in their vices and foibles on all occasions, he sneers, he laughs, he rages, he mourns, but always with such sincerity and vigor that his hearers are never raised in opposition to pity them as victims of malice. Perhaps the neatest thrust that Langland gives is in his dispersal of the evil followers of Meed. Falseness is at once sure that he will be welcome to the Friars,[3] and though he does not succeed in reaching them, we feel that the friars were comforted by being able to dress up Liar in a friar's cope.[4] It is particularly sad that Langland must take up such an attitude, for at first the Franciscans taught just what was Langland's ideal: Goodness, meekness, simplicity, truth, and that the love of money is the root of all evil. Jessop[5] described how they became a part of the great unwashed, went to the people to interpret their cry, working for morality, not theology, like St. Paul, determined to know nothing but Christ. Elsewhere he says,[6] quoting Wadding, that the decline

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1. C VII, 140. 2. C VII, 129 3. C II, 220.
4. C II, 240 5. Coming of the Friars, 16-23.
6. ibid, 217.

in the Friars, as well as the Parish Priests, was due to the Black Death. Langland, the child of London[1] owed them special gratitude, for it was especially in the cities, the Minorites did their good work. Their past virtue Langland recognizes, and it makes their present state all the worse. Speaking of Charity. he says

"And in a freres frokke - he was y-founde ones
Ac it is ferre agoo - in seynt Fraunceys tyme."[2]

They had come at that time to help against the evils of the prelates of holychurch. The one virtue he allows them is that of generosity:

"Of him that habbeth ther taken - and gyue him that ne habbeth."[4] Even here Langland utters mysterious hints as to what may be happening in their infirmaries.[3] Yet it is the love of money which gives rise to many of their other evils. That they may have a share in the patrimony they are eager to bury in their church,[5] and they pay tribute to the rich lords[6] and join them to their fraternity,[7] thus promising salvation of their souls[8] - a claim Langland indignantly rejects; they would even, for some service, take women as "sustre of the order."[9] The poor they were not eager to have in their church-yard.[10] But friars were not only concerned with the dead. Though they did not take interest in Baptism[11] they were very eager to confess and preach to men and women. The quarrels between prelates

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1. Besant, London, 97
2. B XV, 225.
3. ~~B XX, 229.~~ B XIII, 108
4. B XV, 321-4.
5. B X1, 74.
6. B XV, 84.
7. C X111, 9
8. C X, 343
9. C 1V, 67.
10. C X1V, 11.
11. B X1, 77.

and friars were generally due to too great zeal of the latter in shriving.[1] Here the prelates were in the right, for the freres had a name for easy absolution,[2] especially if there were any money in it. The confessor who hurries in to Meed is "coped as a frere".[3] These friars who heard confession were generally limitors and lectors and Langland describes[4] them telling easy lies and toadying to the rich. Not only did they receive money for their services, but they seized the opportunity of carrying on trade. By this means as Chaucer says, they won favor with ladies, and so earned themselves a bad reputation.[5] Another reason for their welcome into the houses of the nobility was their knowledge of all kinds of places, good and bad, cottages and palaces they visited indifferently in their wide travels.[6] As Jusserand[8] aptly tarms it, they acted as the "microbes" of medieval society. Their great means of spreading information and opinions was by their sermons. These must have been a great boon in some out of the way places, but Langland says nought but evil of them. He gives us one sermon which a friar preached to him,[9] but at the end he says he does not understand at all; and sometimes they taught bad doctrine.[10] Their most famous place for preaching was St. Paul's and there they had been a very disturbing element since the pestilence time.[12] They meddled in politics as well as theology, and the only use to which they could put their

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1. C V11, 120. 2. C X111, 7 3. C 1V, 38.
4. B V, 138. 5. A III, 42. ~~6. B XV11, 108~~
7. C II, 14. 8. Eng. Wayfaring Life, ~~908~~.
9. B V111, 27-56 10. C I, 58. ~~11. B XV, 68-74.~~

learning was to teach men that all should be in common. But

"He lyeth, as ich leyue - that to the lewede so precheth."[1]

Langland also describes their manner of life. They travel round the country in pairs,[2] collecting their meat from house to house.[3] An ideal friar would not accept food from the evil,[4] while on the other hand Wiclif said "The man who gives alms to a begging friar is ipso facto excommunicate."[5] Very successful their begging expeditions seem to have been. On account of their "fatte chekees" many faitours assumed the cope and cast further disfavor on the profession.[6] "Goddes gloton"[7] Langland calls one of them scornfully, and he gives a delicious description[8] of a greedy doctor who found his way to an allegorical banquet; such dishes were too light to suit his fancy, and he gobbled down puddings and blanc mange till he was quite ill. It is remarkable that while Langland speaks of the four orders at first,[10] later he speaks of 5 orders.[11] Skeat[12] thinks this 5th order was that of the Crutched Friars. Elsewhere[13] Langland enumerates St. Bernard, when speaking of Benedict, Dominic and Francis, so possibly the fifth order might be the reformed order of the Cistercians; but it probably is the Crutched Friars as he speaks of the Paulines,[15] who are thus referred to in the Chronicle of London

"In the same yere(1310) began the ordre of Paulyns, that is to say, Crowched Freres".[16]

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1. C XXIII, 217. 2. B XII, 19. 3. C VII, 289.
4. C VII, 287. 5. Quoted in Greene, 238.
6. C X, 208. 7. B XIII, 77. 8. C XVI, 30.
9. ~~C XI, 9~~. 10. A pr. 55. 11. C XI, 191, X, 343.
12. Notes to P.P.168. 13. B IV, 121. ~~14~~. C V, 117.
15. C III, 110. 16. Skeat, Notes, 49.

There is little reference to pardoners in Piers the Plowman but that little says a great deal. When the gentleman is introduced in the Field of Folk,[1] we find him preaching. We think of Chaucer's pardoner, and realize that they were famous, or should we say, notorious for their preaching. The subject is always the same: he could "grant pardon for pans",[2] he has his bull with the bishop's seals on it and will pardon every sin, and people accept him, blinded by his brevets and give him their good gold, or rings and brooches. The Bishops and clergy proper should be foremost to put down this abuse, but alas! the bishop is powerless and the parish priest is to have a share in the profits. With an excellent suitability, Liar makes his home with the pardoners, who could probably out-lie Liar himself. The last reference to them is one of the neatest bits of satire in the book "A drama 4 lines long" Jusserand[3] calls it. Piers has been describing the dwelling of Truth:

"By seynt Poule, quod a pardonere - perauenture I be
noughte knowe there,
I will go fecche my box with my brevettes - and a
bulle with bishop's lettres,
'By Cryst', quod a commune womman - thi companye with I folowe,
Thou shalt say I am thi sustre - I ne wot where thi bitome."[4]

Perhaps Langland thought they were too common & too bad to waste space in his poem on them.

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1. C I, 66-60
2. C III, 229.
3. Piers the Plowman.
4. B V, 648-51.

His neglect of pardoners is quite made up by the attention he paid the hermits. They had every characteristic which he particularly detested. In the first place, many of them had no right to the name of Clerks, nor to wear a cope.[1] Amy workman weary of work may have taken up the garb[11] and so be provided for at rich men's tables.[2] Again, one thing on which Langland insists is "He that will not work, neither shall he eat." The hermit never thinks of working,[3] Dollars and hermits are synonymous. "An hep of eremites[4] are among those who refuse to work for Piers and they will not even go to Church service except at the very end.[5] These men were found everywhere, in London[6] and in "borwes among brewesters"[9] and by the highways,[7] and they are always travelling[8] - "land leperes hermytes". They are idlers, thieves and drunkards, yet they have riches and reverence,[10] their "grete lobies and longe - that loth were to Swyuke",[11] running round to the various shrines with their urnches and hooked staves.

But Langland recognizes that the genuine article does exist. Piers pardon, "a pena et a culpa" is to be given to all holy hermits.[12] With Ancorites, monks and friars they should minister to the bodies and souls of the people,[13] for the hermits were genuine ecclesiastics,

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1. C X, 247. 2. C X, 250 3. C X, 140. X,240.
4. C 1X, 183. 5. C X, 242. 6. C V1, 4.
7. C X, 203. 8. B XX, 207 9. C X, 189.
10. C X 191-3. 11. C I, 54 12. C X, 187.
13. B XV, 409-20.

though Langland calls them "an ordre by hym-selve, Religioun sanz reule - and resonable obedience."[1] It is interesting to remember that there was even then living a hermit. Richard Rolle of Hampole,[3] who like the old hermits whom Langland celebrates,[2] despised riches and rich men's alms; a man of "lynage" and "of lettrure" who

"wonede whelom in wodes - with beres and lyones".

But is equally interesting to find that so notorious were their lives, that they were bracketted by the law with beggars and other vagabonds.[5] There is no exaggeration apparently in Langland's description of th hermit, begging all day with bags and bottles under his cloaks and in the evening spreading out his legs by the hot coals, turning round to warm his back, drinking deep and sleeping late.[4] We who are not plagued by them may give them thanks for providing such a picture for Langland to describe.

While Langland writes with intent of the officials of the Church, he gives us by the way, much information about other matters related ~~with~~ to the Church and religion.

To the Church buildings themselves there is very little reference. Twice reference is made to windows[6] being given to the Churches of friars, with the name of the donor inscribed; so a path might be opened to heaven. Also virtue was won by mending and painting the walls.[7] While friars were so eager for the preservation of their churches, the monks were apt to let theirs fall into

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1. B XIII, 285
2. C X, 190-6
3. Cutt's "Scenes & Chars. of the Middle Ages.
4. C X, 139-46
5. E.W. Life
6. C IV, 51 B XIV, 198.
7. C IV, 65.

disrepair.[1] Langland refers to burial in the charnel of the church[2] and tells us it was in his own parish church a man should be buried.[3] The last item of information is important for it is in Piers the Plowman, we have the first[4] reference to pews[5] and they seem to be reserved altogether for ladies.

Of Church services and duties we have abundant and somewhat detailed mention. Naturally more heed was paid to them when it was believed that salvation was impossible without them,[6] therefore before or after any important business King and Knights went to matins and masse as a matter of course.[7] The priests, however, among their other sins, were growing careless of the service, and Langland suspects that they "overhuppen"[8] in offices and in hours. In one passage, we learn just what is expected from the ordinary individual. On Sundays all should go to matins, mass and even song after meat. On holy days "lord, lered and lewede"[9] should hear service, and they should not do any work.[10] All except the infirm should keep vigils and fastings - fasting consisted of eating nothing till noon,[11] and eating no delicate food, or fish,[12] nor drink with spicerie.[13]" Of course on holy days there were special services. Langland quotes fragments from the service for Palm-Sunday,

"Of gerlis and of gloria laus - gretly me dremed,
And how osanna by organye - olde folke songen."[14]

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1. C VI, 165. 2. C IX, 45. IX, 100 3. B XI,66.
4. Skeat,Notes to P.P., p.114. 5. C VII, 144.
6. C X, 236. 7. A V, 2. 8. B XV, 379. 9. C X 228-235
10. A VII, 12. 11. C VII, 434. 12. BV, 380. 13. C III,100.
14. B XVIII, 8-9.

Shortly after in the same passus, he refers to the darkness,[1] in which the services were held immediately before Easter.

The sermon was not an essential part of the service, in fact they were very rare till the coming of the friars. Of them and their sermons at St. Paul's[2] I have already spoken. Some of Langland's remarks are suggestive as to the subject-matter of the sermons. Theological discussions which might affect men's belief e.g., the question of the Trinity, should not be touched.[3] They should rather be of a moral character, dealing with the ten commandments and the ssven deadly sins.[4] Parables with elaborate interpretations and applications to the state of man were the favorite theme, such as the "waggynge boat,"[5] and the compariosn of the Trinity to a man's hand. There was constant appeal to authority, either the Church fathers[7] or Plato or Seneca.[8] Another habit he refers to is that of making hat is similes, such as likening hypocrisy to a dungheap.[10] He quotes various sermons to us but probably these sermons delivered by allegorical figures were rather more abstract and theological than he would wish set before the laity. One of them is very practical, and we get an example of the great love for interference with individuals in the personal attacks made by Pride upon the sins of his audience.[11]

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1. B XVIII, 111.
2. B XVII, 65.
3. B XV, 69
4. B XV, 68-74
5. B VIII, 27-56
6. ~~Skeat, Notes to P.P., 300.~~
7. C VI, 147.
8. B XX, 272.
9. ~~Eng. in the age of Wiclif, 128.~~
10. C XVII, 265.
11. C VI, 129-135.

Of the seven sacraments, there is reference to 5 in Piers the Plowman. On Baptism he lays great stress. By it the "litel barne" was received into the Church and made free,[1] and its godparents were responsible to train it;[7] and by the way, he tells us incidentally that 14th century babies cried during the ceremony,[2] just like 20th century babies. At baptism, all sins are cleansed,[3] without it, salvation is impossible,[4] but with it in extremis, a pagan would go to heaven, even if the rite were administered by an "uncristine".[5] For a Christian, on the other hand, belief is necessary as well.[6] To Confirmation there is no reference. The Eucharist should be taken once a month.[8] Penance, with its accompanying rite, Confession, is referred to constantly. True Confession, i.e., when accompanied by contrition and satisfaction will altogether purge from sin.[9] Without restitution absolution cannot be granted.[10] The form without the spirit is useless.[11] Such being the case, we are not surprised to hear Langland's opinion of pardons and provencial letters:

"Ich sette by pardon nat a peese - nother a pye-hele!"[12]

unless Dowel is to help. True, a full pardon, "a pena et a culpa" is purchased for Piers by Truth,[13] and by him it is given to all the right-living. But the pardon reads:

"Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam eternam

Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum."

which is a pardon such as the priest had never before seen.[14] Amongst the poor Confession was made once a year, in Lent, and then they were so ignorant that they must be continually prompted by the priest[15]

1. C II, 73. 2. B I, 178. 3. B XIV, 184. 4. B XI,82.
5. B X,350. 6. BX,353. 7. B IX,74. 8. B XIX,386.
9. B XIX, 89. 10. C VII,257. 11. B XII,181. 12. C X,345.
13. C X,1-8 14. B VII,112. 15. C XV, 120-4.

Of the methods of Confession we have abundant example in the Confessions of the 7 deadly sins.[1] We learn various forms of medieval penance, but Langland does not forget to warn us that prayers, penance and pilgrimage are useless without contrition, confession and satisfaction.[2] To do penance they might wear a hair shirt,[3] leave off their shirt,[4] or else all their clothes but their shirt,[4] creep to the cross on their knees,[5] fast on Friday, or receive corporal punishment - this a monk - before the whole chapter.[6]

Holy Orders was conferred on the lower clergy by the Bishops' anointing.[7]

Matrimony is constantly mentioned, but the object is always the same; the reproof of evil and encouragement to virtue.

Last Unction is never mentioned, and I have already discussed all that is said about burial;[8]

On the tithe, moral stress is laid. From evil men no tithe should be received[9] - an arrangement which was probably more satisfactory to the evil men than to the priest. But when the priest has received the tithe, he is responsible to help pay for the sins of the donor in purgatory.[10]

Prayer is represented as a very empty ceremony. They should kneel before the Cross and pay for pilgrims, palmers and all the people,[11] but generally in telling their beads, their thoughts were

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1. C V11 & V111.
2. C XV11, 39.
3. C V11, 6.
4. C II, 99.
5. B XV111,428
6. C V11, 155.
7. C X1V, 106.
8. Supra, p,94.
9. C 1X, 78.
10. C V11, 300.
11. xxxx, B V, 106.

10 miles away[1] or else they went to sleep[2] - a sin of which Langland himself was guilty on Easter morning in the midst of mass.[3] One form of prayer was that for the dead. To have prayer offered for him after death a man would leave money to found a chantry where masses could be sung for his soul. This custom Langland strongly reprehends[4] as well as all other singing for simony.[5] Yet it was by this means he gained his living.

"The lomes that ich laboure with - and lyflode deserue
Ys paternoster and my prymes - placebo and dirige,
And my sauter som tyme - and my seuene psalmes.
Thus ich synge for hure soules - of suche as me helpen."[6]

In the candid condemnation of it, we see how strong was his conscience, though his will was too feeble to break with the circumstances in which he found himself. These masses were sung either in byennals or tryennals.[7] A trental of masses cost 10 shillings.

Besides ceremonies immediately connected with the Church, one's soul could be benefitted by good deeds and pilgrimages. Langland enumerates a list of good deeds which would win you heaven: mind hospitals, bridges & wicked ways; help maidens, the bedridden, and prisoners in stocks, send children to school, endow the church.[10] Langland advises the making of "meson-deux meseyse to helpe, and wikkede wones - wihtly to amende." ".

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1. C V111, 17. 2. A V, ~~V111~~[9]. 3. C XX11, 5.
4. B XV, 316-19 5. C I, 84. 6. C V1, 45-8.
7. C X, 320. ~~8. C X, 330~~ ~~9. Skeat Notes to P.P., p. 199.~~
10. C X, 30-6. 11. A V111, 28.

The popularity of this form of charity may be judged by the fact that seven were founded in London in the 14th century, besides all the monastries acting as hospitals and asylums on emergency.[1] There were in addition the tamer charities of New Year gifts[2] and Almsboxes.[3]

The favorite form of religious amusement was a pilgrimage. This subject seems almost sacred to Chaucer but Langland is able to give us his share of information on the subjet. We can conjure up before us the Palmer, the professional pilgrim dressed like a paynym,[4] in one hand his spiked staff,[5] the bordon[6] wound with list,[7] in the other his begging bowl.[8] Over his shoulder hangs a poke for carrying victuals,[9] and also a scrip for his few possessions. His hat and cloke are covered with ampullae from Canterbury,[10] and souvenirs from the other shrines he has visited.[11] These might include Assisi, Galycia, Rome, Rochemadore[12] and St. James,[14] outside of England; he must reach them therefore, by embarking from Dover,[13] the only port by which pilgrims might leave the realm. In England, the less ambitious pilgrim might visit Walsingham, and the rood of Bromholme.[15] on the way thither, and of course Canterbury, famous for the wealth of Becket's Shrine, ~~and~~ or the rood of Chester.

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1. Besant, London, p.170. 2. B V111, 52. 3. B XV, 208.
4. C V111, 161. 5. C V11, 329 6. C V111, 162.
7. C V111, 163. 8. C V111, 180 9. C XV111, 186.
10. C V111, 168 11. C V111, 165-7. 12. B X11, 37.
13. B 1V, 131. 14. C I, 48 15. B V, 230.
16. C V111, 201. 17. B V, 467.

The object of the pilgrimage was ostensibly to obtain grace from the "cor-seynt,"[1] but an increase in holiness was not always perceptible.[2] What these "landlepers" were chiefly famous for, was the tall tales which they could tell,[3] by means of which indeed they might make their living.[4] No doubt, it is partly for this reason Langland discourages pilgrimage: it is far better to stay at home in obedience to the rule of the cloister[5] and look after the poor.[6] We know that the law, too, looked askance on them, and within a century pilgrims must carry letters to prove their good faith,[7] just as hermits, pardoners and students were obliged to do.

"The finest result of the religious spirit in the Middle Ages was to produce that disinterested enthusiasm which, as soon as some distress of humanity became flagrant, immediately created societies for help and rendered self-denial popular."[8] So Jusserand characterizes the age, and the abundance of charities justifies the description.

Another result of this religious zeal was the formation of a missionary spirit, which is looked upon as so very modern a production. Langland never doubted for a moment that all men might be saved

"For Crist clepide ous alle - come yf we wolde,
Sarrasyns and scismatikes - and so he dude the Iewes."[9]

He is troubled about the fate of the heathen, especially

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1. C V111, 177. 2. A V, 258 3. B X111, 309
4. C I, 47. 5. B X11, 36 6. C V, 122.
7. Jusserand, Eng. Wayfaring Life, 361. 8. Jusserand Eng. Way. Life 38.
9 C X111, 53-4.

Socrates and Solomon,

"Ac God is so good, I hope - that sith he gaf him wittis[1]
That God for his grace - gyne her soules reste."

"In extremis" a Saracen might be saved by baptism,[2] but they should be taught: there are Bishops appointed to Nazareth, Nineveh,[3] Damascus, Bethlehem and Babylon[4] but they have made no converts from the followers of Mahomet. The clergy should go forth, regardless of their lives, to all parts of the world, teaching men to love,[5] and in particluar they should go to those who already believe the first half of our creed, and teach them the rest, to believe "et in Iesum Christum filium."[7] It would be easy to do with the help of Conscience, Clergie & Patience.[8]

111. The Schools.

Though we have no defnites assertions to go upon, even a cursory reading of Piers the Plowman leaves the impression that its author was a University man, while a more detailed examination of the poem cannot leave a doubt on the question in the minds of any. Whatever we may have to reject in Mensendieck's argument, I think he has fully justified his contention that Langland leaves record of his course at Oxford. Of external evidence to this effect we are told in 1619 "Joannes Maluernaeus, Milletenaeum, alii vocant, natione Anglus, Oxonii studiis aliquando bonarum litterarum operam dedit, eratque ibi Orialensis alumnus Collegii. Postea factus est

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1. B X11, 270. 2. B X, 348 3. B XV, 486
4. B XV, 538. 5. C X1, 196. 7. B XV, 594-99.
8. B X111, 209.

ordinis S. Benedicti Monachus Wigorniensis. Scripsit magnum quoddam opus visionum Anglice, quod absolusse perhibetur anno Domini 1342, cui operi titulum fecit Pierce Plowman."[1] This same view, that he was known as John Malverne, a fellow of Oriel College, was given in 1613 by Selden,[2] and it is accepted by Warton, in the 1840 edition, and by Dean Milman.[3] Skeat[4] however assigns this to a confusion of character, so we must relinquish the pleasant fallacy, and trust to internal evidence and inherent probability.

We know that Langland's father and friends sent him to school to learn Holywrit and the use of his wits. This Jusserand conjectures would be to the school at Malvern Priory, and thence he would have proceeded to the University. It is possible that these friends may have died at this juncture, and that the boy was at once thrown on his own resources. But even supposing they did, and supposing Langland's father was too poor to assist him, of which we are not at all sure, it is still possible that Langland may have attended Oxford. At that period it was as natural for a clever boy to go the University as it is now for him to go to the high school, and if he were poor he would beg. The expenses were practically the same as now. For example, in the Memorials of London[5] we find the report of the 13 years wardship of a certain Thomas atte Boure, given by Robert of Brynkelge, Mercer, of London, which lists his expenses at Oxford. As Thomas came into a heritage of £1080 it is not likely that he exercised particular economy at college.

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1. J. Pits Relationum Historicarum de Rebus Anglicis Tomus Primus, p, 878. Parisiis, 1619. Quoted Skeat. Index IX, No. 41.
2. Note to Drayton's Polyolbion. Quoted Skeat Index IX, No. 39.
3. Hist of Lat. Christianity.
5. ed. Riley p. 379, 48 Ed. III A.D. 1374.

"For the board of the said Thomas, during the said 13 years, 2 shillings per week being paid by the same Robert while he was at the schools at Oxford, for his board there, and the same throughout the said time, making 104 shillings yearly, and in the whole £67½, 12S.

"For the clothes, linen and woolen, and shoes, of the same Thomas for the said 13 years, at 40 shillings yearly, expended by the said Robert -£26 ½.

"For the teaching of the same Thomas for ten years out of the said thirteen, at 2 marks yearly, by the same Robert paid, making 20 marks.

"For sundry expenses, namely his riding at Oxford and elsewhere, and for moneys laid out upon a master for the said Thomas, at the rate of 20 shillings yearly, making in the whole -£13 ½."

For 13 years education, therefore, including board and clothing, sundries, and the luxuries of a horse and a tutor, the 14th century student paid £119 - 18S - 8d. Since T. Rogers counts 12 a safe general multiplier to find the modern equivalent, the cost of education for a term of twelve months came to a little over £100 a year, while at McGill, the approximate cost of living, without any personal expenses, is rated at $328 for a session of 7 months.[2] The cost of Wm. Paston's education was £12, 10S, 11½d for a year, which Fenn makes correspond to £100 of present money though the multiplying by 12 would bring it to £150. But it could be done more cheaply, for according to Traill,[3] the ordinary University career of 10 years came to a total ranging from £180 down to £35, or $200 per year in present money.

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1. Furnival intr. to Jabus Book, XXXl. 2. McGill Cal, p.88.
3. Traill II, 85.

Langland holds[1] that since "wit" is given us of God's grace, it should be as free as water, wind and fire, which is a doctrine which would come rather hard upon Professors and teachers, but which is not altogether gone out of date yet, I am afraid. Furnivall[2] says that "in early days Cambridge and Oxford must be looked on, I suppose, as mainly the great schools for boys, and the generality of scholars as poor men's children, like Chaucer's 'poore scolars two that dwelten in the soler-halle of Cantebregge'". There were various ways of obtaining money, chiefly it seems, by begging, as Sir Thomas Moore records "Then may we yet, like poor scholars of Oxford, go a begging with our baggs and wallets and sing salve Regina at rich men's dores."[3] How common was the practice is seen from the fact that in making legislation for beggars, it was ordained in 1388 that students must have letters from their Chancellor authorizing them to beg. In all his imprecations on beggars, there is in "Piers the Plowman" no reference, good or bad, to students begging. We do hear,[5] however, that it was a pious duty to help poor scholars, one of the ways by which merchants might win heaven, so that is probably how Langland got to College, as had been done before him by such famous men as William of Wykeham.[6] He might have been helped by the University which in 1314 had set aside 52 shillings yearly for the use of poor scholars,[7] or he might have entered one of the colleges, such as Merton which was endowed

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1. C X, 56.
2. Intr. to Babees Bk, XXV1.
3. Intr. to Babees' Bk, XXV111.
4. E.W.Life, 270.
5. C X, 35.
6. Trevelyn.
7. Intr. to Babees' Bk, XXV111.

in 1274 for the use of students who were "humiles, indigentes, ad studium habiles ac proficere volentes."[1] Whatever may have been the means, we may be assured that Langland got there, as Mensendieck points out, from the easy familiarity with which he discusses[2] the courses of study, not giving them their formal names, but those by which they would be known in the College; from the pleasure which he expresses on his arrival at Clergye,

"Was neuer gome uppon grounde - seththen
God made heuene,
Feirore underfonge - ne frendloker maad at ege,
Then I my-self soth li - so sone as heo wuste
That I was of Wittes haus - and with his wif dam Studie;[3]

from his vows to Clergy[4] and to Scripture[5]

"To be hure man, yif I most - for euere - more after",

from his knowledges of sciences which he could only have gained at College,[6] from his references to dialectic, and his use in several places of the form of argueing of the schools; and finally from the spirit of unbiassed self-control, the intelligent perception, and the ability to stand off and look at things in their due perspective which appears in his work and which we believe are the marks of a University-trained man, while he speaks in a tone of gentle contempt of popular knowledge.[7] I think we may be pretty sure that this University was Oxford; it is highly improbable that he would have

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1. ~~Ibid~~. Intr to Babees Bk xxviii 2. A X1, 127, etc.
3. A X1, 170. 4. A X1, 100. 5. A X11, 39.
6. Jusserand P.P. 81. 7. C XV, 72-80.

gone to the Continent, and though there had been six Colleges founded at Cambridge before the middle of the 14th century, this town was then chiefly famous for its eels,[1] while in the same list we find that Oxford is noted for its Schools. There seems to be a trace of Oxford rivalry between North and South in the way this Malvern man speaks of the North as the dwelling of Lucifer.

Langland's attendance at the University argues strongly against Jusserand's conjecture that he was born a bondman.[3] Froude says[4] that the universities were "filled by the sons of yeoman chiefly," and it was ordained in 1381[5] "that no bondman or bondwoman shall place their children at school as has been done so as to advance their children in the world by thus going into the Church." That this law was made in 1381 might of course be proof that there had been such a practice just before, which is the time Langland would have been at College, but that it did not apply to his own case is shown by his emphatic protest against any departure from your natural position in life and especially "Shold no clerk be crouned - bote yf he were of frank lens and free men-and of folke yweddede.[6] We have no hint as to the age of Langland when he went up. In 1612,[7] no one was admitted under 15, but in 1430 we are told

"Quod resoun, in age of XX yeer,
Goo to oxenford, or lerne lawe"

and at the age of 19 the Paston boys were still at Eton, falling

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1. T.Rogers "Six Centuries of Work & Wages" I.

2. C II, 113. 3. P.P.66. 4. Hist.of Eng.I, 37.
5. Greene, 258. 6. C VI, 63,etc. 7. Intr.to Babees Bk,XXXIX.
~~8. A XII, 35.~~ ~~9. B XI, 105.~~ ~~10. A XI, 170.~~
~~11. A XI, 302.~~ ~~12. B XI, 213.~~

in love, and eating figs and raisons. Yet, as Furnivall points out, "when Oxford students were forbidden to play marbles they could not have been very old." The usual course of study extended over 10 years but Langland's quarrel with Clergy,[1] and his rude impatience with Reason,[2] which left him to follow his own Imaginatyf, seems to indicate that he broke off his course rather abruptly. The testimony of the poem leads us to believe that he did this from conscientious scruples. He entered College as a young enthusiast,[3] and then passed through a period of bitter disillusionment which ~~Langland~~ he records in the end of A XI. The learned have no more chance of heaven than the ignorant,[4] for belief is of much more help than logic.[5] Not only so, knowledge might prove a positive evil,

"Yee men knowe clerkes - that have cursed the tyme,
That euere thei couth or knewe more - than credo in deum patrem;
Right so lewed men - and of litel knowynge,
Selden falle thei so foule - and so fer in synne,
As clerkes of holi kirke - that kepen Crystes tresore."[6]

How low was his opinion of theology is seen by the fact that it is Theologie who supports Lady Mede, and the subtleties and unreasonableness of it were very repellent to one who held so simple a a creed as we have found in Langland. Thus we find that it is by

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1. A XII, 35. 2. B XI, 405. 3. A XI, 170.
4. A XI, 302. 5. B XI, 213. 6. B X, 464.

"pure Reason"[1] that the Priest attacks Pier's pardon. ~~In B~~, Learning was also discredited by the corruptions in the learned professions, all of which must be practised by clerks. This seems to account for the rather disreputable role[2] played by Waryn Wisdom the lawyer, defender of Wronge, and for the union of clergye and coueitise.[3] At the end of the poem, Langland attacks the clerks impartially for their ignorance at one time,[4] and for their eagerness after knowledge,[5] only to use it to plot evil. To the very end Conscience, Langland's own conscience it would seem, remains the firm opponent of clergye. At the end of Dobet he says

"Me were leuer, by owre lorde - and I lyue shulde.
Haue pacience perfit-lich - than half thy pakke of bokes";[6]

And at the end of Dobest, she will defend the friars in Unity and holy church on condition

"That ye leue logyk - and lerneth for to louye"[7].

Imaginatyf, who came to Langland after he had broken with Resoun, presents the opposite view, and the whole of the 12th passus of B (C. XV) is devoted to an ardent defence of clergye, chiefly learning of a religious character.

"Ac yit is clergye to comende - and kynde Witte bothe
And namely clergye, for Crystes loue - that of ~~bothe~~.
clergye is rote."[8]

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1. A V111, 55. 2. B 1V, 26-76. 3. B III, 164.
4. B XV, 365. 5. C X11, 76. 6. B X111,200.
7. C XX111, 250. 8. B X11, 72.

Since it is perfectly evident that Langland was devoted to study, it must have been with great pleasure that he argued

"Forthi lakke thow neuere logyke - lawe, ne his custumes
Ne countre-plede clerkes - I conseille the for eure
For as a man may nought se - that mysseth his eyghen
Namore can no klerke - but if he caught it first through bokes
Although men made bokes - God was the maistre,
And seynt spirit the saumplarye - and seide what men sholde write."[1]

Learning, knowledge for its own sake, has the greatest fascination for him.

"Alle the Sciences under sonne - and alle the sotyle craftes
I wolde I knewe and couth - kyndely in myne herte"[2]

a sentiment for which he is instantly reproved, for he has the inconvenient kind of conscience, that delights in reproving you for anything you find particularly pleasant, just because it is pleasant. It is something the same feeling as Milton,[3] feeling obliged to put the praise of learning into the mouth of Satan. In the same way, it is only with great apologies, and with a little backing up from Cato, that he ventures to write his poem. Yet he is not very fond of strict application to study. Dame Studie[4] is a very stern, holy, forbidding individual, not nearly so attractive as her husband Wit[5] from whom Langland had already, to Studie's great wrath, learnt much.[6]

1. B XII, 99. 2. B XV, 43 3. Paradise Regained, Bk
4. C XII, 4. 5. B X, 3.
6. Jusserand P.P. Note p 83.

All through his life, he had a leaning to Wit, kynde Witte that cometh"of sighte of dyuerse peple,"and this is why he is accused of being "lef to lerne but lothe for to studie."[1][2]

But these accusations of himself are rather groundless. As a matter of fact there is no poet to my knowledge who makes stronger appeal to a student,as a college student,or recognized more clearly or delicately their ambitions and difficulties. For instance, take Wordsworth; there is no poet to whom one can better go for sympathy in "the burden of the mystery", which weighs upon the student as he enters, as every student must enter, that "chamber of maiden thought"[3], and gazes into the dark passages leading out of it. Again Wordsworth felt to the full the joy of books,[4] so that it is quite fair to compare the two; yet when Wordsworth goes up to the University, and the enthusiastic young undergraduate is expecting something really thrilling, what do we find him talking about but his "~~noble~~ lordly dressing gown" and his sprouting moustache. Of course, a dressing gown is very useful, and I daresay a young moustache is very interesting, but you would expect something a little more spiritual, now wouldn't you really! Now Langland has never lost his remembrance and sympathy with that youthful college enthusiasm for which perhaps one should cultivate a contempt, and so, besides tracing for us all the doubts and disillusionments and his weary search for truth,and for the main object of life,which is the subject of the Vita de Dowel, he can describe

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1. B XII, 69 2. B X 142. 3. Keats to Reynolds, 1818.

4. Prelude.

the high ideals with which he came up to College:

"Thenne was I as fayn - as foul on feir morwen,
Gladdore then the gadomon is - of his grete giftes."[1]

He is ready to endure suffering, to keep himself from riches and sin, to observe temperance in speech and food, and as he remembers it all, he breaks out,

"For if heuene be on this erthe - and ese to any soule,
It is in cloistere or in scole - be many skilles I fynde,
For in cloistre cometh no man - to chide me to fighte,
But alle is buxemnesse there and bokes - to rede and to lerne
In scole there is scorne - but if a clerke wil lerne,
And grete loue and lykynge for eche of hem loueth ~~the~~ other."[2]

I picture him therefore as much like Chaucer's clerk of Oxenford - for it seems natural to look in Chaucer for a picture of Langland, though there is not a figure in Langland whom one could ascribe to Chaucer,

"He was nat right fat, I undertake;
But loked holwe, and ther-to soberly,
Ful thred bar was his overest courtepy;
Of studie took he most cure and most hede,
Nought O word spak he more than was nede,
And that was seyd in forme and reverence,
And short and quik, and ful of hy sentence,
Souninge in moral vertu was his speche,
And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche."

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1. A XI, 109.
2. B X, 300.

When Langland reached Oxford, he would find himself in the midst of a busy intellectual life. English national independence is found not only in martial and Parliamentary spheres, but also in the realm of mind. Since its rise in the last thirty years of the 12th Century the University of Paris had attracted to itself Students from all over the continent, including England. In 1167, probably owing to the quarrel with ~~Theophilus~~ Thomas a Becket there was a general emigration from Paris of English students,[1] and these students settled at Oxford. This is recognized as the beginning of our greatest University, but we have good evidence to show that so early as the 1st decade of the 12th century there had been famous schools at Oxford.[2] Legend, with authority of Asser, assigns the first school at Oxford to King Alfred,[3] and Ingulfus, at the time of ~~Wm.~~ William the Conqueror claims to have studied Aristotle and Tully's Rhetoric at Oxford. Unfortunately we must take this with the grain of salt that there were then no books of Aristotle accessible to students. However, Furnivall allows us to believe that in 1201 Oxford was called a University, and was said to contain 3000 scholars.

The importance of Oxford in medieval England was not as a corporation interfering with the government,[4] although she did send "quatuor vel quinque de discretioribus et in jure scripto magis expertes Universitatis predictae," to Parliament, one of which discreet young men was probably Wiclif. Her influence was rather

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1. Rashdall III, 329. 2. Rashdall III, 333.

3. Intr. to Babees Bk XXVII. 4. Rashedall III, 519.

as a center of intellectual and religious life, and how widespread was this influence may be judged from her large attendance, (large even if we do not accept Wood's exaggerated estimate of 30,000,) of men drawn from all ranks of life; as they were practically all trained for the Church, they went forth armed with authority over the minds and souls of all mere laymen, to fill all the learned professions[2] - the civil servants of the crown, the diplomats, the secretaries of the great lords, the physicians, architects, and both civil and ecclesiastical lawyers. Practically, the only class which had not a college training were the parochial clergy; many of these knew nought but their breviary, and well merited the scorn that Langland piled upon their ignorance.[3] This is where the importance of the friars came in, for as we have seen, both Franciscans and Dominicans were firmly established at Oxford, and all members of their order were given scholastic training. Thus when Langland introduces his pair of minorite friars,[4] they are masters of divinity, and the friar at the banquest of conscience is a Doctor.[5] The friars were the great preachers of the period, and through their sermons Oxford modes of thought were scattered broadcast over England--in fact, as some one has suggested, they served as the Clarendon Press of the 14th century.

The grand subject of medieval instruction was scholastic theology, which may be defined as having grown "out of the concentration upon theological study of minds whose only, or chief

1. Intr. to Babees Bk, 27.
2. Rashdall III,696.
3. e g., B XV,365.
4. C XI, 1
5. C XVI, 65.

secular culture was supplied by dialectic."[1] Dialectic, or logic, was occupied with the problem of Universals, started by Porphyry, the Neo Platonist, in his "Isagoge".[2] "Now concerning genera and species, whether they be substances or mere concepts of the mind; and if substances, whether they be corporeal or incorporeal, and whether they exist apart from sensible things or in and about sensible things, all this I will decline to say." Since he had declined to say for the next 3 or 4 centuries all scholars were busy with the burning question of Universals, either asserting with the Nominalists, that these genera were mere concepts of the mind, or with the realists holding that there was something objective outside our minds corresponding to the universal ideas. In discussing this question down to the most minute and, to us, absurd details, men's reasoning powers were trained to a very high degree, and naturally they applied them to the subject of theology which was their chief subject of study.[3] This union had been first made by Abelard,[4] who endeavoured to base on grounds of reason certain mysteries of faith which were commonly thought to be established by revelation alone. The mystic Bernard succeeded in having Abelard condemned for his heresy, at Sens in 1141. How little his judges' minds were governed by reason is shewn by the tale of the sleepy doctors who murmured "'namus, 'namus" at every pause in the proceeding? In the next generation, however, reason triumphed, Philosophy and Theology were united,and the favorite text book in

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1. Rashdall I, 40.
2. Rickaby, 2.
3. Rashdall I, 45
4. Rickaby 6.

the schools was the "Sentences of Peter the Lombard, pupil of Abelard. The result of this was evil not to theology but to humanism, for in their zeal for logic, especially after the discovery of the New Aristotle in the 13th Century, the humanities were practically crowded out of the curriculum, even as they are in danger of being crowded out today by a super-abundance of Science.

As in all other matters intellectual, England was the child of France, and so we find the studies of Oxford practically identical with those of Paris in the acceptance of Abelard's theories and the growing importance of logic. What distinguished England in her development after the rupture with Paris was a certain freedom and originality, and a greater elasticity of curriculum, so that she strove to preserve some trace of humanism. and we even find a choice offered between Aristotle, and Ovid, Cicero or Virgil, in the study of Rhetoric. This broadness of outlook is represented by her early scholars; the Grossetête was the great pioneer Aristotelian, his mighty mind devoted itself also to physical science, and to a theology based on the study of the Bible and the Fathers, while in his hours of ease he could compose a "Chateau d'amour". A still further departure was made from formal scholasticism by Roger Bacon, the inductive philosopher, who would base his education on study of the ancient languages and of mathematics as the true foundations for Philosophy and Theology, Medicine and Science, and who also showed an almost unique interest in history. Now these men flourished in the 13th Century, the great age of Scholasticism,[2] but during all that period a certain moderate

1. Rashdall 111, 521. 2. Rickaby 7.

Realism was triumphant, and a scholastic mind had leisure to be occupied with matter other than the nature of genera and species. With the lessening of the pressure of discussion, Philosophy and Theology once more sprang apart, and so we find Bacon declaring that "Philosophy taken by itself is no use"[1]; it must be eked out be revelation which is recorded in the writings of the ancient sages. This is the difference between early scholasticism, and the scholasticism which Langland would find at Oxford in the 14th Century. The early schoolman was an optimist,[2] holding a creed composed of the two cheerful articles that the human mind is competent to attain to the truth with certitude, and that there is a general goodness in Being and in the tendencies of things. With the decay of Scholasticism, the number of truths which were philosophically demonstrable decreased. We can distinctly see this development acting upon Langland 's mind. By putting his allegory in the form of a search for Truth, and in the multiplicity of his arguments about it, we see his struggle after absolute truth to be attained by reason,and as we have noted above, he found his search in vain. In his submission to the authority of the Bible and the Church fathers, in that demand for authority which he feels, and which makes him assert in good round numbers that he has 11,000 authorities for the excellence of poverty, we can see the 14th century influence. This growing dependence on

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1. Rickaby, 33.

2. Rickaby, 45.

authorities, naturally is accompanied by an increased study of the ancient authors, and a growth of humanism, and this is really the foundation of that intellectual lead which England possessed in the 14th century, a superiority which we are pleased to put down to British independence of the supremacy of Paris. The very greatest schoolmen of the 14th century were Oxonians, and in the second rank also the most important either were at Oxford or belonged to the English "nation" of Paris. The development did not proceed exactly on the lines suggested by the 13th century master minds. 14th Century thought was not occupied with the versatile abundance of Grossetête nor the natural philosophy of Bacon, but was concentrated upon Scholastic Theology and a reopening of the question of Universals. In this theology, instead of bowing down to the Aristotelian doctrines of Thomas Aquinas which were supreme at Paris the openminded Franciscans who were fortunately supreme at Oxford devoted themselves to a Conservative Augustinianism. This attitude is of the utmost importance, and we realize how easily Wiclif's doctrines found a home in Oxford and how true Langland's attitude to the Church and the Bible was to his college training when we find in the condemnation of Thomism 1288, such a statement as "In such matters one is not bound to adhere to the authority of the Pope, or of Gregory, or of Augustine, or of any other Master whatever; but solely to the authority of the Bible and of necessary reason."

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1. Rashall III, 528.

When Langland came up to the University about 1350 he enjoyed the highest educational advantages possible in his day, and what we know of his mind shews that he responded heartily to them. He could not have come under the teaching of the supreme scholars of the age, for Ockham had died in 1347, and Wiclif had hardly yet begun to lecture. We have already seen how closely his views approximated those of Wiclif and we have also good reason to suppose that he was influenced by the teaching of Ockham. Ockham arose in opposition to the first great master of the 14th century, Duns Scotus(died 1308). Scotus was the apostle of the most exaggerated realism, and in return got his three subtle distinctions, his technicalities and syllogisms, he was looked upon by the 16th century humanists as the fitting representative of scholasticism on whom to vent their hate. His rationalizing tendencies did not go so far in Theology,and Scotus is an ardent upholder of Church and Pope. Both for hope of the resurrection and belief in the omnipotence of God he felt that we must fall back upon faith,* and in this distrust of reason and dependence on revelation, we see the 14th century tendency which was to end in the fall of scolasticism and the rise of the reformation. In Philosophy Ockham was that modified form of Nominalist who is to be called a conceptualist,[2] or terminist. But we need not discuss his philosophy for I find no trace of the question of.Universal Ideas in Piers the Plowman. The importance which it had for the influence on Langland was that it distinguished (integrated) the intricate realism of Scotus and at the

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* Rickaby, 29.

2. Rickaby, 51.

same time stirred a safe passage past the subtleties of its own theories so that to a modern mind Ockham appears as the perfection of common sense.[1] Common sense is a very strong attribute of Langland. The other theories of this theologist, logician, and politician seem to find a ready response in Langland. If Duns checked his reasoning powers in approaching theology, Ockham dismounted altogether, and approached religion and morality upon his knees. The union which Abelard had effected between dialectic and theology is entirely broken, and the Philosopher's mind is divided into "water-tight compartments", ready to accept two mutually contradictory kinds of truth, so tending[2] to the doctrine of the Averroists that a thing may be true in theology but false in philosophy. With Sir Thomas Browne, Ockham would say "Credo quia impossibile est." The state of mind is not altogether undesirable, for anything is preferable to the horrors of consistency, but it is untenable, and so Scholasticism forged the sword with which she was slain.

Just the same attitude of mind we find in Langland, expressed[3] in his Wrath at those clerks who dared discuss by mere reason the mysteries of the Trinity and man's responsibility to God. Ockham rejected all arguments proving the divine existence,[4] and says that in all such questions as the Trinity we must trust to the statements of Scripture and of Church Tradition. I have already pointed out what stress Langland laid upon the authority

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1. Rashdall III, 535.
2. Rickaby, 55
3. A XI, 62,66.
4. Townsend, 279.

of Scripture, and this is quite in harmony with this form of scholasticism. Ockham held[1] that no doctrine could be proved by reason, but was to be held purely as a matter of faith. Again he makes moral distinctions dependent on the will of God,[2] a view which Langland seems to support when he says:

"Al was as thow wolde - lorde yworschiped be thow
And al worth as thou wolte - what so we dispute."[3]

Over and over again in the poem one feels that Langland is believing in spite of his reason, as e.g., where he tries to get round the difficulties of the salvation of Trajan the heathen,[4] and the condemnation of Solomon. This is just the difficulty which he finds in Theologie, namely that

"Hit is no science soth-lice - bote a soth fast ileyue."[5]

If we accept for him the idea of water-tight compartments in his brain it might explain the many inconsistencies which Jusserand finds in his character; it would explain how this sincere reformer could go on with his employment of chantry-singing, even while condemning it as an abuse, and the same characteristic would explain how he continued a true son of the Church while supporting the revolutionary ideas as to the right of the individual to be ruled by conscience guided by the Bible.

Of the doctrines of the faith Ockham says little,[6] but he does argue for transubstantiation on philosophical principles, and it

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1. Townsend, 280. 2. Rickaby, 55. 3. B X, 127.
4. B X11, 280. 5. C X11, 132. 6. Townsend, 281.

may well have been this argument which Langland had in mind when he brought forward in favor of clergye that it supported this particular doctrine.[1] Langland's interest in predestination[2] he does not seem to have derived from Ockham, but it was one of the chief topics to all serious minded men of the age, and was due to Bradwardine's "De Causa Dei."[3] Similarly, another question in which Langland took great interest, namely free will and personal responsibility,[4] which really is a part of the problem of predestination, was widely discussed, because the Science of the "Romaunt de la Rose" is really an attempt to reconcile free will with the justice and omnipotence of God.[5]

In psychology again we find Langland and Ockham drawing together. Ockham refuses to find any difference between the various faculties of the mind,[6] and in the beginning of Dobet, Langland meets a strange creature, without tongue or teeth, who introduces himself as Anima,[7] or Liberum-arbitrium in the C text, and then proceeds to include in his single person, Animus, mens, memoria, racio, sensus, Conscience, amor and spiritus. In regard to the senses Ockham is supposed to be the auther of the famous maxim "There is nothing in the understanding that was not previously in the senses." Langland is merely transcribing this when he says of Sensus "And that is wythe and wisdome - the welle of alle craftes."[8] and the five senses again he makes the guardians of Lady Anima.[9]

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1. B XII, 87.
2. A XI, 253.
3. Cbg. II, 18.
4. A X, 71.
5. Courthope I, 183.
6. Townsend, 276.
7. B XV, 23.
8. B XV, 30.
9. C XI, 148.

Outside the realm of Philosophy and Theology, Lamgland followed the Invincible Doctor in his courage for reform.[I] In all his most daring attacks on the temporal power of the Church and Pope, on the pride and corruption of the Clergy, on the evils at Avignon and the increasing wealth of the mendicant orders, Langland joins with Ockham in pouring forth reproof and urging reform. Ockham's positive work, also, "The Defence of Poverty" finds ready echo throughout Piers the Plowman though Langland by repressing personal and local matters avoided the attacks that fell upon his master. We may, therefore, I think conclude not only that Langland was at Oxford, but that he was a conceptualist and an Ockhamite.

These reforms of Ockham bring to our notice a phase of scholasticism which was even more noticeable in Wiclif, the last of the Schoolmen. This is its intimate connection with real life. All these high flights sound metaphysical and unpractical to 20th century ideas, but out of the cloud of metaphysics there consolidated such practical questions as rights of property and the respective rights of Pope, King and people. In discussing the general principles, which formed the atmosphere of Medieval intellectual life and of which we find a general impression in"Piers the Plowman," we have rather neglected the definite courses of study which were pursued at a Medieval University, and of which we find quite definite records in Langland. The three passus which are known as A2, i.e. passus X, X1, and X11 of the A text, describe the

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1. Townsend, 272.

poet's education,[1] his attitude towards the matter, and his disgust with the evil engendered in theological discussion.

It would seem that these passus begin with the period when he has just passed out of childhood and feels the responsibility of life closing round him.[2] Mensendieck[3] claims that the knowledge which he here shows of anthropology -caro & anima[4] corresponding to substance and accidents - is just at the stage which would have been reached by a student who had finished his grammatik; that Langland had finished his grammar, finished it under the rod of a strict monastry school we may infer from the place Dame Studie puts it in, before the Trivium.

"Gramer for gurles - I gon furste to write,
And beot hem with a baleys - but yif thei wolde lernen."[5]

The argument hardly seems very well substantiated but we may accept the result, for since we are assured Langland did not go to the University, we may presume that he was prepared in all the "gramer" that was needed. Probably he mastered Latin in his school days and the mysteries of Latin prosody, for he introduces a number of Latin verses which Skeat believes are his own composition. The monastery school too would be just the place to learn lettering, of which he afterwards made good use as a Clerk at Westminster, and he may have studied French; he makes several French quotations and it seems probable that he was acquainted with some of the French allegories,

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1. Mensendeick. 2. A X, 73.
3. Mensendieck, p 13. 4. A X. 7 & 38
5. A X1, 131

though on this point Miss Owen has been able to find nothing absolutely conclusive. It was just because these were the subjects of elementary education that he was so disgusted with the clerks who neglected "gramer the grounde of al" while none of them

"can versifye faire - ne formalich enditen,
ne nought on amonge an hundreth - that an auctour
can construe
Ne rede a lettre in any langage - but in Latyn
or in English."[1]

At thes time French was much more widely known than at a later period when the nation was more firmly "Englished" even though the French were

"After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,"

That French was the language used in education we know from Trevisa's translation of the Polychronicon where we find:[2] "For chyldern in scole, ayenes the usage and manere of al other nacions, buth compelled for to leue here oune longage, and for to construe here lessons and here thinges in Freynsch." In 1385, this state of affairs was changed, as Trevisa goes on to say: "Now, the yer of oure Lord a thousand thre hondred foure score and fyue, of the secunde kyng Richard after the conquest nyne, in al the gramer scoles of England children leueth Frensch & construeth & lurneth an Englysch . . .Disavauntage ys, that now children of gramer scole conneth no more Frensch than can here lift heele."

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1. B XV, 367.

2. De incolarum linguis, cap. 59.

We find confirmation in Langland of Trevisa's further statement that "gentil men children beth y-taught for to speke Freynsch from tyme that a buth yrokked in here cradel, and conneth speke and playe with a child hys brouch; and oplondysch men wol lykne hamsylf to gentel men, and fondeth with gret bysynes for to speke Freynsch, for to be more ytold of." So in "Piers the Plowman" of 1377[1] we find that free men taught their children morals in the form of French proverbs, while in the C text of 1392 or 1398 the passage is altered so as to refer it to Frenchmen only. The poor are represented singing French songs, but the mistakes which "oplondysch" men might make in their efforts after gentility are illustrated by the naïve remark of Covetous, that he "wende ryflynge were restitucioun"[2] because he knew no French but of the furthest end of Norfolk.

Of course Latin was the common language of clerks, monkish Latin, and was sufficiently widely known for Langland to make frequent use of it. To the poor it was unfamiliar, so anything which he especially wishes them to know he is careful to translate, as in the long quotation from Vincent of Beauvais which Activa Vita is unable to construe,[3] while if he thinks it would be better for lewd men not to know it, he leaves it in the original.[4]

It was not only the ordinary clergy who were lacking in the elements of knowledge but Langland complained that even the

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1. B XI, 375. 2. B V, 238. 3. C XVII, 117.
4. B pr. 129.

Doctors and Masters of Divinity

"That shoulde the seuene ars conne - and a-soile ad quodlibet
Bote their faille in fylosophye - and filosophers lyueden
And wolde wel examine hem - wonder me thynketh!"[1]

These seven arts and Philosophy were exactly the course at the University which would prepare the student for his Masters or Doctorate degree. The whole course consisted of larger or smaller doses of the Trivium, consisting of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic, a smattering of the Quadrivium, including Arithmetic, music, geometry and astronomy, and the three philosophies, natural, moral and metaphysical, which had only been added after the discovery of the New Aristotle in the 13th Century. Both Trivium and Philosophies were simply Aristotle, in a more or less unadulterated form; the Quadrivium was largely drawn from Boethius. The most important subject was the logic, or dialectic, of which I have spoken, taught from extracts of the Organon and Porphyry.[2] This subject which seems so remote to us aroused in 14th century students a passion of enthusiasm which can hardly be parallelled now. I suspect that some of this enthusiasm was due to the love for controversy inherent in the human youth, and zest would be added to this championship of their beliefs, when they might be supported in bloody combat under the banners of Realism and Nominalism;[3] a spirit which lingers on in our day in the bickerings between Science and Arts.

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1. C XVIII, 113.
2. Rashdall I, 36.
3. Rashdall III, 538.

Langland gives a fairly complete description of his course. He was to begin his studies under Clergye and his wife Scripture who was "sib to the seven ars."[1] When he speaks of the Trivium[2] it is not by the ordinary classification, but mentions all those subjects which were in reality included.[3] Grammar he had already studied; the law refers to Rhetoric and it included Plato, what they had of him; although music was part of the Quadrivium, it was studied, as Langland here implies, all through the course; as we would expect most stress is laid upon logic, Aristotle and the art of argueing. As was practically inevitable, he shows the greatest veneration for Aristotle, always ranks him with Solomon, and it is one of his chief puzzles why he is not in Heaven.[4] The controversial form of the whole second part of the poem would seem to take its origin in this training, but we have more definite example of it in the disputes which he records in his waking hours,

"Contra quod as a clerke - and comssed to dispute."[5] It is with a sort of air of joyful enthusiasm he rushes into a discussion. Their subtle methods of discussion, discrimination and illustration seem to be represented by the comparisons drawn from the relation of substantive and adjective,[6] or by the explanation of the Trinity by comparison with a man's hand.[7] Langland is constantly coming back to this mystery of the Trinity, and this again may be a relic of his scholastic training. One of Abelard's sins had been the expounding of the Trinity and there were apt to be attacks made upon

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1. A X1, 106. 2. A X1, 127-132. 3. Mensendieck, 22.
4. e.g., C X11, 216. 5. B V111, 20. 6. C 1V, 338.
7. C xx, 142-167

it by the Nominalists,[1] the school which as we have seen was the power at Oxford during Langland's student days.

Of the Quadrivium, Langland says nothing but evil.[2] Astronomy, Geometry and Geomany were not only difficult but thoroughly immoral; a kind of black magic he considers them. Later he seems to have changed his opinions for besides omitting this passage in the C text, he introduces a statement[3] which shows belief in astrology. Of course this was a most natural belief for the age,[4] when astrology was the foundation of medicine; Possibly Langland had dipped into the study of medicine, for his discussion of the body, and its relation to the soul, are those of Galen.[5] There was, at, and before, this time, a growing interest in Natural Science,[6] which had had so able an exponent in Bacon. Langland's natural science is a mixture of his actual observation, as a country bred lad, of the ways of beasts and birds[7] and of the traditional notions that crikets lived[c] in the fire,[8] that stones grow,[9] and that fowls, fishes and beasts have wit and free will in only a lesser degree than man;[10] with this last I would heartily agree and also with his plea that beasts are more controlled by Reason than are men, but I believe it is rejected by modern psychology. If we may judge from Richard and Redless,[e] we have evidence that he went to some Latin Bestiarium for authority."[11] The

Of Philosophy, moral and metaphysical, Langland would accept the definition of I know not what authority, that it is like a blind man

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1. Rashdall I, 55. 2. A X1, 152-159. 3. C XV, 30.
4. Traill 11, 120. 5. B 1X, 55. Skeat, Notes, 221.
6. Traill 11, 103. 7. B X1, 338. 8. C XV1, 243. 9. A X1, 12.
10. B V111, 53. 11. Skeat, Index 1V. Richard, 111. 15, 37.

in a dark room, looking for a black hat which is not there.

"The more I muse thereon - the mistlokes hit semeth"[1] sighs Langland. Theology is subtle and elusive, "no science", which he can grasp; yet he finds it endurable because in it alone of the sciences he finds love, love which is the true source of Dowel, Dobet and Dobest. Therefore, because of its difficulty and its love he devotes himself to theology. He is disgusted by the careless attitude of his fellow clerks, he is repelled by its difficulties, he is doubtful of its advantages, but, as I have already traced out, he works his way through at last to a "sothfast by-leyue." It is just these struggles and the sincerity of his search after truth which make Langland so appealing a character, for his difficulties never breed in him a careless agnosticism, whatever evils there may be in learning, at least lettered men know better that lewed.

"That treuthe is tresour-triedest on earthe".[2] To Langland the saying would not appeal, that if we had truth in our hand as a bird, we would but let it fly again.

Langland's education did not end with his college days. He evidently studied Westminster law with care, as he tells us himself,[3] and as we might conclude from his numerous references to it;[4] also he was skilled in the drawing up of a charter.[5] These he probably learned not in theory, but by direct practice as he earned his daily bread by their help. But we may believe his desire to learn, to have

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1. A X1, 137. 2. A I, 126.
3. C X1, 239. 4. Skeat, Index 1V. 5. B X, 296.

all knowledge, never left him; his mind, as Imaginatif says, was never idle.[1] From the multitude of quotations we may judge how wide was his reading, and Skeat has drawn up a list of 22 books[2] he believes may have framed the poet's library, while he mentions a number of others with which he may have been acquainted. Many of his quotations are second hand, and are just wildly inserted to give a semblance of authority, like the 1100 poets who have praised patient poverty as the best of all virtues.[3] The book which was infinitely the most studied, and had the most influence was the Bible, as I have shown already. Next in his affections would come Cato; no authority short of the inspired Word, not even Aristotle, had so strong an influence upon him. Of books which he probably studied at school he refers to the primer of Donatus, Aristotle and Boethius. It seems a pity that he makes no reference to perhaps the most famous school book of the middle ages: Martianus Capella "On the Nuptials of Mercury and Philology." On the whole, I think the library is very characteristic. The books are chiefly of a religious character, and of them, after Cato, I should think he would turn most often to St. Augustine and the Legenda Aurea, but there is also an element of love for pure literature and of romance, for I would not exclude from the list the Alexander Romances and Guy of Warwick, nor stigmatise them, as Skeat does, as works for which Langland had no great relish. His mund carried the ballast of a sense of humor, and therefore even for the ballads of Robin Hood and Randal, Earl of Chester, I think he had a lingering sympathy, and only accused them of being idle tales because of his sense of moral responsibility.

1. B XII, 1. 2. Index IV.

3. C XIII, 176.

CHAPTER III.

SECULAR LIFE.

1. Political Opinions and Parliament.

While Langland's political opinions are by no means so all pervading as are his religious principles, we have quite enough to show us that his interest in the public affairs of his country was great, and that his ideas were clearly defined. As in religion and learning, we can trace a regular development of opinion. In the A text there is very little of political theory; in the B text there appears a carefully thought out principle of the duties and inter-relations of King, nobles and people, which is marked by a strong feeling of loyalty. In the C text this principle is still preserved, but in practice, Langland introduces modifications which are clearly referrable to the unwise behavior of the king. Finally, we must, in this connection consider Richard the Redless, where we still find that personal loyalty which was so marked throughout, combined with a spirit of stern rebuke.

For the gist of the whole matter we need only turn to the prologue of the B text. Here we find two passages inserted, one of which gives Langland's ideal of a kingdom, and the other gives his view of the conditions of the country as it then was.

Langland's ideal for the guidance of the country as for the guidance of the individual life, was a rule of love. In actual form, it would be the same as was then in force in England.[1] Supreme

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1. B pr. 112.

power was vested in the King, and he was supported in this position by the knights, but he owed the power to the Commons, and was to exercise it on the advice of his Parliament for the protection of the Commons. In return, the Commons were to support the king, the nobility and the Church. Such is the analysis of government which Langland gives us at the beginning of his poem in the famous passage

"Thanne came there a kyng - knyghthod hym ladde,
Might of the comunes - made hym to regne."

Into this scheme may be fitted both his ideal of government and the course which he thought best to pursue under King Richard, which is proof of how practical was his mind. In the ideal state, as I said, the principles which would bind the classes together is love;[1] Reason's advice to the king is to love his commons, as the king's treasure; and law, love and loyalty the commons claim from him.[2] The practical working out of this would be for the king to rule his realm with the assistance of Reason and Conscience,[3] wrong would be put down all through the realm,[4] corruption would be done away with, no evil would go unpunished and no good unrewarded.[5] If the king's regard for his country introduced so desirable a condition of justice and peace, then he would in return find love ruling in the land, so that there would be no need for law,[6] and the Commons out of Love would provide the king with money better than

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1. C VI, 181. 2. C VI, 382. 3. C V, 9.
4. A I, 92. 5. C V, 140. 6. C V, 144.

loans from merchants and bishops, Lombard bankers, or Jewish usurers.[1]

Such a state is rather a counsel of perfection but in the fable of the Rats Parliament, the same theory of the relation between king and commons is adapted to the actual state of affairs under King Richard - or rather just before the death of King Edward, as it seems practically certain that the B text was written in the early part of the year 1377.[2] This fable shows how important in Langland's eyes was the preservation of the balance of power. No matter what the stress he may lay upon the Parliament, it is essential that the Parliament itself should be kept in order by the king who is to stand impartial to keep either party from carrying out selfish aims.[3] Therefore, while recognizing abuses, he would not for a moment urge change in the existing conditions. M. Jusserand has laid such stress upon Langland's recognition of the importance of the commons that one is inclined to forget what vast power he would grant to the king. The king can command the services of the people at any time;[4] and how frequently the king exercised this right is illustrated on practically every page of the Calendar of Patent Rolls, where we read that such and such a man shall take what men he pleases to build, repair, or accomplish some work. Langland goes on to say that it is the duty of the commons to follow their king in war,[5] and to provide food for him. He had supreme power over the Church.[6]

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1. C V, 191.
2. Jusserand "Observations sur la Vision de Piers Plowman à propos des Notes to Texts A,B and C du Rev. W.W. Skeat," Paris, 1879.
3. C IV, 383.
4. C IV, 377.
5. C IV, 379.
6. C III, 246 & C VI, 169.

At the end of the poem we have his powers summed up once more, his duties of protecting the commons and Holy Church, and his right to take what he pleases - which was the hated right of purveyance[1] - because he was head of law. This daring claim which caused trouble for later rulers was allowed by Conscience[2] only on the condition that he could defend his realm and rule it well. In C there is the significant change from the king's being able to take, to his having his asking "as the lawe asketh".[3] Not that there is any contradiction of the king's authority in the C text; on the contrary it is only in this text thst Piers gives the exhortation that the Commons should not displease the King,[4] and that all commands of those in authority, given in the king's name, are to be obeyed. This is emphatic proof, coming where it does in Piers last speech, that Langland accepted the idea of divine right of kings. There is the same feeling of personal loyalty as in 1381 inspired the peasants with their watchword "With King Richard and the True Commons".[5] The remarkable part is that Langland could insist upon this even while into this same text he introduces the threatening address to the king that on account of Mede

"No loud loueth the - and yet leest thyn owene."[6]

It seems as if he still fondly hoped that this boy king - for in truth Richard always preserved the impulsiveness and waywardness of a child - might pay heed to the counsel of the Angel,[7] or Conscience,[8]

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1. Traill II, 201. 2. B XIX, 474. 3. C XXII, 481.
4. C IX, 84 & 88. 5. Trevelyn, 220. 6. C IV, 210.
7. B pr, 128. 8. C I, 151.

and take Reason as his chancellor and Conscience as king's Justice.[1]

On the authority of Prof. Skeat, corroborated by Mr. Bradley,[2] we must believe that Richard the Redeless is the work of this same author, composed in 1399 while Richard was in prison. In this poem is brought out the tragedy of Richard's reign and the grief which his fall brought to the Commons of England.

"Alle myn hoole herte was his - while he in helthe regnid",[3] mourns the poet, and in the whole realm there was not a man who did not love him,[4] till by his pillaging of the people,[5] through taxes, through personal assaults[6] such as Peace had suffered from Wrong, through unjust courts and most of all, his evil favorites[7] and multitudes of retainers, he had lost the love of his people, and driven wisdom far from him.

In view of such a theory we must not lay too much stress on Langland's democratic ideas. He never denies that the king is head of lawe, and above all the Commons. The place which the Commons holds is that of advisers to the king and the means of carrying out his laws. When the king insists that his law shall be carried out by the loyal and virtuous, Conscience objects

"With-oute the Commune help
Hit is ful hard by myn hefd - ther-to hit to brynge."[8]

This passage, and the passage in B prologue already referred to, shews that Langland understood and probably sympathized with the

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1. C V, 184 & 100. 2. Academy 769, p 70.
3. R.R. pr. 26. 4. R.R, II, 47. 5. RR I, 11-19.
6. C IV, 45. 7. R.R II, 2. 8. C V, 176.

development of government by representatives of the people. The Rats Parliament seems to show that he disapproved of the overweening power of the Good Parliament of 1377, as much as does the powerful description in Richard the Redeless show his disapproval of the Packed Parliament of the following year. It seems probable that Langland is representative of the feelings of the more conservative burgesses, with strong faith in their Parliament, which was becoming so mighty a power, but with the traditional belief in the king's individual power, which hadbeen heightened in this age by personal devotion to the Plantagenets. It is a part of the contradictions of this age of development that it is from a man with such firm belief in divine right as Langland that we gther the clearest idea of the power of Commons, and of the necessity of the King's doing his part before his people will grant him funds. We feel too the importance being laid on national representation in the interest which Langland takes in the ways of Parliament.[1] We are told of its formation of clerks and earls,[2] of its instruments of government, the Bishops to manage high offices,[3] and the mayors who were the go-betweens between king and commons,[4] and who must also preserve the laws and punish offenders; we see acted before us the procedure of Parliament - how a case is brought up before Parliament, the famous case of Conscience versus Mede, and how an appeal is presented, once again a famous case, that of Peace vs. Wrong; and incidentally we see how strongly intrenched was Mede in the Court, what power"pull"[5]

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1. B IV, 189. 2. C I, 90. 3. C II, 157.

4. C IV, 77. 5. C IV, 37.

had even in those days, and the readiness of his counsellors to toady to the king.[1] Langland's most vivid picture of Parliament is unfortunately a bad one,[2] the packed parliament where knights and citizens are chosen who will do what they are told, and some sit like ciphers, or else they talk nonsense, and so from selfishness or fear, all give in. No wonder Langland broke off in the midst of so ugly a picture!

It seems as if Langland's democracy were a unique ~~art~~ article in the 14th century. The Parliament represented only the upper classes, it was distinctly the rule of the aristocarcy, and Langland quite approved of this rule. But there was also the other extreme, a sort of general theoretical belief in the equality of man[3] ~~and~~; at this time, or a little later, Wiclif's poor priests were preaching socialism all over the country,[4] and John Ball, trying to break down all distinctions of rank, was saying "good people, things will never be ~~the same~~ well in England as long as goods be not in common." Langland's position is about ~~one~~ half way between these two, for though this doctrine of communism has even been thrust upon "Piers the Plowman," it cannot be supported for a moment! Langland denies it clearly and emphatically at the end of B,[5] and that he experienced no change of opinion is shown by the preservation of the passage word for word in the C text. This text of 1377 is perhaps rather early to refer to Wiclif or John Ball, but apparently Langland felt that the friars were shewing a dangerous tendency

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1. B IV, 150. 2. R. the R. IV. 3. E.W.Life, 208.
4. Traill II, 208. 5. B XX, 275.

towards socialism. What Langland does teach is the teaching of the Bible, "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus,"[1] and even as we cannot say that the Bible is of socialistic tendencies, even so we can draw no such meaning from Langland's statement:

"For alle are we Crystes creatures - and of his coffres riche,
And bretheren as of O blode - as wel beggares as erles."[2]

In the C text even this statement is omitted, which is assuredly a great loss, leaving the line that by Christ's death

"Blod-brethrene by-cam we ther - of on body wonne,"[3]

which is exactly St. Paul's teaching, "Now are they many members yet but one body."[4] One of Langland's most carefully worked out theories is this idea of the special place which each one holds in the body, and this is the foundation of his whole social structure. It is true that in the ideal state, that millenium where love shall rule the world,[5] each man will engage in manual labor, except the Priests who are praying for the sinful; and again kynde Witt teaches that all should be employed

"Or in dykynge or in deluynge - or trauaillynge
in preyeres,"[6]

but we must put restrictions on this, for in Piers' address to the pilgrims he insists upon each man minding his own business, and no one else's;[7] the ladies are to sew, the knight is to keep down evil men and wild beasts, and common folk are to labor with their hands.[8]

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1. Gal. 111, 28. 2. B X1, 192. 3. C X111, 109
4. 1 Cor. X11, 20. 5. C 1V, 465. 6. B V1, 250
7. C 1X, 8. 8. C 1X, 27 & 28.

The same idea is brought up again where Piers' pardon is granted to all those who have labored faithfully in their own vocation, and to lay still greater emphasis upon it, he declares that holy church[1] commands the three divisions of the State, the religious to keep under their rule, igmorant men to labor, and lords to hunt, and the Holy Ghost in giving weapons against Antichrist mentions almost every honest trade, including alchemy and astrology.[2] Langland's democracy therefore is one in which all work at something, their rightful task, and each has consideration for his brother.

Minto,[3] after comparing Langland with the Puritans, says that he "was an apostle of purification, not of reconstruction." This criticism I think is quite unjust. I have already attempted to outline the ideal which he sets forth for the Church and the ecclesiastics, and in less detail, he constructs in outline and by suggestion a conceivable, and a more or less practicable, ideal state for England. To grasp the nature of this dream, and so, incidentally, to cast light on the nature of the dreamer, it is interesting to compare it with the ideal countries that have been planned by other men dissatisfied with their surroundings. Of all such states the two which suggest themselves most readily for comparison are the products of very different ages, Plato's "Republic" and Wm. Morris's "News from Nowhere". Langland draws near to Plato and to Morris because all theree are poets, or at least we may say of Plato, with Sydney,[4] that "of all Philosophers he is the most poeticall," and of all three we may say "Though the inside and strength were Philosophy, the skinne as it were and beautie depended most of Poetrie."[5]

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1. C X, 219. 2. C X XII, 229. 3. Minto, p 66.
4. Apology, p 44. 5. ibid, p 4.

Prof. Ker[1] points out that the "Great part of the educational furniture of the Middle Ages, the favorite views, opinions, and classifications, may be found already in the "Republic" of Plato." We must not believe that every similarity is due to direct or indirect imitation, and the only mention[4] that Langland makes of Plato is so vague that we cannot think he had any personal acquaintance with him; yet through other philosophers, especially Boethius, Plato was indirectly responsible for some elements of the texture of the medieval mind. The most striking resemblance between the two is in the formation of the State, as outlined in books II and III of the Republic. The guardians really correspond to a combination of Langland's Parliament and Clergy, the warriors very definitely to his knights, while below these again are those workmen, a class including craftsmen, husbandmen, traders and hirelings, and who are recognized by both as the basis of the State. We might notice also that Plato's aversion to poets is quite equalled by Langland's hatred of Minstrels, and both on the same ground, that they are suggestive of evil.. The great point of difference between the two is Plato's belief in Communism. As I have already pointed out, Langland has no belief in communism of any kind, and the holding of women in common would be to him utterly revolting. In this respect the Laws draws closer to "Piers the Plowman" than does the Republic, and a further similiarity between the two may be found in the denunciation of licentious love,[2] and his attack on the dishonesty of the retail trade.[3] The "Laws" bears much the same relation to the

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1. The Dark Ages, p 27.

2. Laws VIII, 835.

3. Ibid, XI, 918.

4 C XII. 121; XIII, 173, XV. 190

Republic as does the C text to the A text, for it shews "the severity and knowledge of life which are characteristic of old age."[1] I and has in it more of the nature of a sermon. In spite of these resemblances in form, the similarity is stronger, I think, between "Piers the Plowman" and Plato's Second State, in the latter ~~one~~-half of the Republic. In the first state, as in Langland's discussion of the best way to put up with a bad job, e.g., in the Rats Parliament, the poets reined in their airy steeds to suggest something which might really be applied to the very imperfect surroundings in which they live, but where we find both at their best is when they soar far into the clouds, without being trammelled by the possible or probable, to bring down to the dazzled eyes of mankind an image of perfection. The ideals of the two are alike in their exalted nature, and in their fundamental conception, but in their expression they are essentially typical of the age in which they are produced: a city ruled by Philosophers on the principle of justice and knowledge, says the Greek Philosopher; a State ruled by Reason and Conscience, on the principle of Truth and Love, says the Christian moralist. Both poets found that an image of perfection is inexpressible in ordinary human terms; especially was this difficult for Langland writing in an age when language and the art of expression was not yet fully developed, and so his whole poem takes the form of a vision. Plato, using the most perfect instrument

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1. Jowett, Introduction, p LXXVIII.

that this world has known, succeeded in describing his State in sober language, but for its fullest expression he too must rise to allegory. The myth of the Den, is not paallelled by anything in Langland, but its idea, the unreality of the temporal as compared with the spiritual does appear in "Piers the Plowman," though expressed with no such beauty and power. The vision of Ur, the Pamphylian at once finds a point of contact, because it, through Cicero's "Somnium Scipions"[I], is supposed to be the source of the medieval belief in Hell, Purgatory and Heaven, and so we might compare it with Langland's 21st Passus. Yet this is rather a contrast than a comparison, for we cannot draw a parallel between the Christian idea of the triumph of Christ over death, and the consequent entire deliverance of His servants from the bondage of Satan, with the Greek Philosophy of ceaseless struggle to choose the good and so win life for one's self. Yet once again, this idea of man's war with evil, especially the evil in himself, is more or less the subject of the whole of the Vita de Dowel, Dobet and especially Dobest.

When we turn to Morris' "News from Nowhere" we are straight back on earth again, and we remain distinctly in England throughout. It is not with Langland's dreams that we are going to find any connection here, but with his most definite arrangements for running this earth. Though Morris is marked throughout by a cheerful, moderate attitude, he is at once linked with Langland's period by his sympathy with the peasant's Revolt as expressed in "The Dream

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1. Ker, The Dark Ages, p. 27.

of John Ball", and also because the scenery which he provides for his ideal state is definitely that of the 14th Century. More important than 14th century country and buildings, which I think Langland would have been quite satisfied to retain, is their common belief in the excellence of work. Morris advocates a "back to the land" movement, and frankly puts agriculture as the most desirable form of labor. There is no definite protest against cities in "Piers the Plowman," though Langland does not love them, but he too exalts agricultural labor, and like Morris, he has but little use for cities; in Conscience's description[1] of the Golden Age, farming is the employment for all but priests. But though Morris's Professors and Intellectuals go haymaking as a holiday, he is careful to have every man do the work for which he is suited, and this is the belief much more often found in "Piers the Plowman," than reducing all men to one employment. In the management of the State there is a difference, for while Morris excludes politics entirely, Langland, speaking through the mouth of Conscience, and again through that of Reason,[2] allows for the existence of King and counsellors, but justice will be so perfectly performed that law will be able to turn farmer and leave love to rule the land. Both are agreed in the abolishing of war but Morris does not follow Langland in his dreams that as a result of this perfect peace among Christian nations, the whole world will be converted to Christianity. The same differences exist between Langland and Morris as between Langland and Plato. Langland will not receive the idea of Communism, and he shrinks with horror from all loose ideas about marriage.

1. C IV, 440-485. 2. C V, 108-145.

What distinguishes Langland from both of these is that he is thinking of reform in the individual; as I have already said, he leaves standing the institutions, the foundations and framework of the structure, and wishes to redecorate it. Plato and Morris, who deliberately set out to build a new State, begin by pulling down or neglecting the old erection, and begin afresh from the bottom. But in all three, or at any rate in Morris and Langland, the plan upon which they work is the same, for the principle of relationship between man and man is each time to be love:

"Lere men to be leel - eche man to louen other." I

II. The Manor.

In the 14th century in England, feudalism was dead but the body was still there.[2] The two powers which put it to death were the people below striving for certain liberties, ownerships and rights, while above royalty was striving to become head of a nation and recover its public character.[3] In the central government which we have just been discussing, feudalism has been swept away, and royalty is firmly established; the country can no longer be described - if indeed England could ever be so described - as "a collection of petty despotisms, exercised by isolated aristocrats, each of whom, being sovereign in his own domains, had to give no account to another."[4]

If we turn, however , from the central government to the direction of local affairs we find feudalism in a much more healthy

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1. C XX1, 341. 2. Batison, 307. 3. Guizot, "France" I p 234.
4. Ibid, 232.

condition. The force attacking it from below had not yet worked its way through to victory. Yet in one sense they had; one "layer" of the people, if we may so speak, have emancipated themselves from feudalism, and the Knights of the Shire and the burgesses of the cities, which formed the house of commons, were as conscious of their position as part of the whole nation as was the king. The same is true of the great cities and practically all their inhabitants. But these classes, and this corporate life are an anomaly in feudalism, which knows no general society.[1] The other layer of society the great mass of peasants who were without representation in Parliament, were still in the bonds of feudalism, more or less, and the revolt of 1381, was their great struggle to be free of it.

To the conservative eyes of Langland, the feudal system was still in existence, even while, in another part of his brain, divided off by a "water-tight compartment", he perfectly comprehended and sympathized with the new powers of King and Parliament. If we take his division of classes,[2] we find that they are ecclesiastics, knights, and laborers, which are exactly the three classes recognized in the feudal age. Clearer evidence is afforded by his views on the relation between the knights and the laborers, a relation of protection and service, which, I take it, is the essence of feudalism. The place of the laborer is to cultivate the soil and support the knights and clergy,[3] and this sphere of life is afterwards emphasized by the concrete examples of Piers the Plowman,[4] who will find food for all.

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1. Guizot, Histoire de la Civilisation. 2. C X, 221.

3. B pr. 116. 4. B VI, 17.

and Haukyn Activa Vita, who, by the way, is Piers' servant, who supports[1] both poor and rich. Langland was in full sympathy with the poor, as we shall see in a minute, but he held that their place was to "suffren and seruen,"[2] which is the same attitude as he advises for the whole people towards the King "Bote soffren and sigge nouht - and so is the beste."[3] Therefore we need not imagine for a moment that Langland sympathized with the peasant revolt. We know, in fact, that he upheld the Statute of Laborers, and disapproved of the rebellion of the peasants against it.[4] Reason's exhortation to the Rich to accord with the Commons, which appears only in C.,[5] may have reference to the troubles that must be put down and legislated for after 1381.

On the other hand, the rich had distinct duties towards the poor. Most important and most constantly asserted is their office of defending the Church,[6] and being ready to meet death in defence of the Commons.[7] Im addition they must arrest evil doers,[8] and hunt bravely to keep down the wild beasts that might injure the land of the labourer.[9] These are the duties which Piers assigns to the very courteous though incapable knight[10] who is seeking St. Truth, and to perfect his character he must add mercy, justice and uprightness

"Trewly to take - and trewweliche to fyghte,
Ys the profession and the pure ordre - that apendeth to knyghtes".

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1. C XV1, 201. 2. B. pr. 131. 3. C I, 210.
4. C 1X, 341. 5. C V1, 184. 6. C X, 10.
7. C XV111, 289. 8. C II, 292. 9. C X, 224.
10, C 1X, 19-53. 11. C II, 96.

He should also add the worldly advantages of "land and rich lynage." Such is the ideal feudal knight, and though on a rather lower and more livéable plane, he is much like the traditional Tennysonian knight, if we lay more stress upon the riding abroad redressing human wrongs, than upon the reverence for their conscience, and the love for one maid. To this manly ideal is added the duty of hospitality, hospitality to minstrels,[2] to beggars[3] who cannot work, owing to some physical or mental deficiency, and also they should maintain as large a retinue as possible,[4] as well as a clientage, quite in the Roman style, of men who could support them on occasions of ceremony,[5] and in return would get their meals in the great lord's hall. The poet himself was in the position of such a client,[6] and I suppose found it no more humiliating than did the poet Martial before him.

While one may gather that the basis of the society which Langland is describing is feudal, no elaborate system can be built up, and as we have seen, his conception of the central government is contrary to the spirit of pure feudalism., Yet we hear of lands bestowed by king, kaiser or pope,[7] and the right of the donor to take them back again, a right which the king had in name, though very rarely in practice. The principle on which many lands did come into the king's hand was that of "escheyte", and from this Mede had many a time hindered him.[8] It was essential that some estates should fall to the king, for Langland tells us he never made a knight without giving him land.[9]

1 C XIX, 110. 2. C XI1, 42. 3. C X,128.

4. B X, 91. 5. A II, 50. 6. C V1, 49.
7. C 1V, 317. 8. C V, 169. 9. C X1V,108.

We have much more detail when we come down to the relationships between the landlord and his tenants, and here we find an establishment which corresponds with Guizot's sketch of the little society forming round the possessor of a fief.[1] In the centre would be the manor house, some such building as the Castle of Truth,[2] a place with moat, walls and buttresses, well able to defend itself, and those dependent on it, from attacks of hostile lords. There was a strongly barred gate to the front and behind a postern, leading into the fields.[3] These entrances, Langland tells us are both guarded. Inside is a court in which might stand more than one house, roofed with lead. Inside the dwelling there was the great hall, and the ladies bower.[4] Langland makes no mention of the "Solar",[5] the room over the great hall which was the safest part, in case of seige, and finally may have become the general living room. He does tell us with great disapprobation that the families of the knights were in the habit of withdrawing from the great hall to a chamber with a chimney.[6] In this way the hospitality of the family was impaired and "that jovial intimacy which was made possible by the very emphasis laid upon class distinction, and which was one of its compensations, was done away with."[7] But Langland seems to object also on the ground of the luxury of it, by which we may infer, what we know from other sources,[8] that these chambers were hung with tapestries, sometimes had carpets, and as

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1. Histoire de la Civilisation, 102.
2. C VIII, 232.
3. Wright, 117.
4. C IV, 11.
5. Wright, 148.
6. B X, 94.
7. E.W.Life, 349.
8. Wright.258.

he especially mentions, had chimneys, which must have been a great advantage over the great open fire in the midst of the hall round which crowded servants and wandering beggars. Of furniture, Langland mentions none except the great board in the hall, and the iron bound boxes in which were stored the family possessions.[1] Such a dwelling hardly seems to merit the abuse that Langland pours out so often upon the luxury of the lords. As a matter of fact this luxury was rather in apparel and food than anything else - gayness and gluttony.[2] Whatever other virtues our ancestors possessed, temperance was not amongst them, either in food or drink. I think that probably this was due to two reasons: in the first place they must have been wretchedly cold all winter - English people still are - and so they had to eat more to keep themselves warm; and of course the habit they got in the winter would not leave them in the summer. That, by the way, is probably the reason why the English still are so generous with their food; most certainly I never in my life was faced with so many and such substantial meals as in England, especially Devonshire. The other reason was that they had nothing to do; the occupation of the ladies was to prepare or to superintend the preparation of more and more spiced and elaborate dishes and "subtleties"; the occupation of the men was to hunt game to be transformed into these delicacies, and the rest of the time must be spent eating - which after all is found a very pleasant

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C XVII, 87 2. C XII, 66.

occupation even when it is rivalled by books and movies.

At the banquet of Conscience[1] we find what would be the provision for a baronial feast: mortrews, poddynges, the braun and blod of the goos, bacon and colhoppes, womb-cloutes, wilde braune, eggs fried in grece, and blammanger. This would be quite a representative order, also, for they had a grand mixture of meats and sweets in all their courses. Some of their dishes appear strange and repellent to us; it seems positively sinful when they come to eating larks, which are approved as being fatter and sweeter than the Peacock.[2] There are no such outrageous things mentioned in Langland as in some of the bills of fare, things such as whales, porpoises, minnows, hedgehogs and squirrels,[3] so these were probably used in the houses of the very great with which he had no acquaintance. The most important element was spices. Langland refers to the spicerie chiefly in their drink;[4] the tavern keeper could offer glutton pepper, pionys, garlek and fynkelseed.[5] But from old cook books it appears that spices went into all things, thus we are told[6] that the Percy household spent £26 on spices alone in one year; this would be over $1,500 in modern money, a sum that seems almost incredible. Langland has great horror of over eating, which is quite in accordance with his belief in poverty and mortification of the flesh; his most repellent picture is that of Glutton, and the most elaborately drawn.

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1. C XVI, 65. 2. B XII, 264. 3. Traill, II 169.
4. C III, 101. 5. C VII, 358. 6. Traill II, 169.

In his rather paradoxical argument,[10] by which he proves that necessity ~~is the greatest virtue~~ has no law, he ~~places~~ makes temperance ~~second on the list~~ the first of the cardinal virtues. Especially in the Clergy, Langland demanded temperance. Anchorites and hermits should have but one meal a day, at Nones,[1] which Skeat would put at 12 o'clock, and then all they should have is potage and payn and peny ale.[2] Similarly in the Convent all that Wrath could get was fish, bad wine and feeble ale.[3] One is reminded that at St. Albans the tithes of Eglingham were handed over to the monks "Taking compassion upon the weakness of the convent's drink."[4]

But to return to the meals of the rich! Langland gives us a great deal of information about them. Though eating was so important, they seem only to have had two meals a day, at noon and at even.[5] Their days were ruled according to the old proverb

"Lever à cinq, diner à neuf,
Soupper à cinq, coucher à neuf,
Fait vivre d'ans nonante et neuf."[6]

They began with the important ceremony of washing their hands,[7] important in the days before forks, and when trenchers were slices of bread. The only dishes Langland mentions are cups, which among the rich were of gold and silver.[8] The meal began with an elaborate Latin grace, such as are preserved in the Babees Book, from one or two of which Langland quotes,[9] and then proceeded on an elaborate

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1. A V11, 136. 2. C XV, 310. 3. C V11, 159.
4. Jessop, 156. 5. C X, 87, cp. C V11,429. 6. Wright,173.
7. B X111, 28. 8. C 1V,23. 9. C 1V,342.

10 C XXIII, 10

scale such as is hard to imagine now. If we take the banquet of Conscience as an example, and it is so vivid that we feel we are hearing of something that the author has seen, we find four distinct sets of people to be looked after at once. There are the most important guests at the high dais, the ordinary people at the table, the poet himself, who was a kind of hanger-on, at a side table, and Patience, who was a beggar, and who here sat with the poet at the side table. All was managed by the steward of the hall with a train of servants under him. Sometimes further confusion would be added by the retainers being set to eat on the floor,[1] while the beggars were clamoring at the gate. One detail of the picture which Langland does not mention are the dogs who ate and fought under the table; and I have no doubt there were cats. I should like to put in a word for cats, for I found a statement that the cat was "then a creature of some value and rarity."[2] Of course we know that cats were of value and rarity on Dick Whittington's voyage, but we learn from Langland that then, even as often now, alas! poor pussy was only valued for the price of her skin.[3] As to their rarity, we know that in the Ancren Riwle, a single cat was the only beast allowed, as was but right, to this assembly of spinsters, and their presence in the dining halls is proved by the instructions in the Boke of Curtasye:

"Whereas thou sitt at mete in borde
Avoide the cat at on bare worde,
For yf thou stroke cat other dogge
Thou are lyke an ape tyghed with a clogge."

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1. B XII, 198. 2. Besant. 3. B V, 259.

That they are not more frequently mentioned is easily explained by their unobtrusive character.

As the meal progressed, or during the long drinking of ale after mete,[1] they had the two amusements of talking religion, and scoffing at its mysteries, and listening to the minstrels.[2] Langland is very discouraged at the condition of affairs at table. All he sees there is gluttony and oaths and lewd stories. He was in a very bitter position, dependent on these men,[3] the patrons of his chantry, and indebted to them for a meal, he could not protest, but it was with perfect torture he listened[9] to these jesting disputes on the subjects most sacred to him. He probably is thinking longingly of those happy days in Malvern Priory, when he urges that meal times should be devoted to instruction in the gospel.[4] The singing and minstreley Langlad found no better than the conversation; His views on the minstrels singing in hall, the institution which to modern ideas adds so substantially to the romance of the old baronial castles, are interesting inasmuch as they tear ruthlessly away this glamor and shew the mischievous influence which might be thus exerted. Songs of love and peace he would fain hear sung to the harp when he was merry at his meat,[5] but he also thought it suitable to hear tales of truth, bounty and battles.[6] He recognizes the minstrel as a regular institution, and that it is the duty of the rich man to receive him.[7] Especially welcome, Langland tells us, were the king's minstrels[8] but these are not of the class that

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1. ~~RxVxx252~~ C V111, 68. 2. C X11, 35. 3. C V1, 51.
4. C V111, 105. 5. A I, 137. 6. C 1X, 49.
7. C X. 129. 8. C V111, 97. 9. B X. 101

Langland usually discusses, for we know that the king's minstrels received a wage of 6 d to 7½ d a day,[1] while the men whom Langland describes receive no regular wages, but large gifts in money or clothes.[2] Fiddlers are ranked as equal to friars in their search for feasts.[3] If they were famous for this in Langland's time, they must have been intolerable before, for in the time of Edward II, a restraining hand had been put on them by the decree that no minstrel might demand board if the knight were already supporting one or two.[4] Wright[5] says that "After the possession of personal strength and courage, the quality which the feudal baron admired most was generosity; a generous expenditure which gave rise to the class of 'ribalds and lechers'(dish lickers)." This is exactly the problem which distressed Langland for he would fain have seen this generosity turned to the poor, whom, in imitation of St.Francis' "Joculatores Dei",[6] he styles God's Minstrels."[7] Instead of this, the generosity gave rise to the most mischevious class, with entrance everywhere, privileged to say what they liked, and spreading ideas of revolt broadcast through the land. Their popularity was immense, for they took the place of Literature,[8] and the jesters and mountebanks the place of the drama. Langland recognizes their importance and inveighs against their baneful influence; he tells us that jesters were employed by the king, by knights and by the Canon of Saint Paul's;[9] Lords and ladies and Church Legates supported fools with mede and mite to be amused by them,[10] and idle tales of

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1. Wright, 199.
2. B X, 47.
3. B X, 92.
4. Batisan, 303
5. Wright, 116
6. Jusserand P.P. 117. note.
7. C VIII, 100.
8. Traill II,367.
9. B X, 46.
10. C VIII, 83.

Robin Hood and Randolf, earl of Chester, even occupy the mind of the parson in Church.[1] At first, in the A text,[2] he looked upon the minstrels as "giltless;" in the B[3] text minstrels are still esteemed sinless, but japers and jangelers are "Judas chylderen"; while in the C[4] text he cannot find a good word for any of them. They transgress the first principle of his social creed, inasmuch as they will "neyther swynke ne swete," although they

"Hauen witte at wylle - to worche yf they wolde."[4]

So we find that Haukyn Activa Vita, who is a minstrel, and who in the beginning, Langland did not seem to intend to make so very bad, supports himself by selling cakes and wafers.[5] Langland can hardly find terms bad enough in which to describe this class; they are the entertainers of "Lyere";[6] their subjects are loose and lecherous, and if anything could be worse than the minstrels, they are the professional fools.[7] The description which Haukyn gives of what he could <u>not</u> do, shews how wide a field of entertainment the minstrel might cover.

Besides eating and listening to the minstrels, the medieval knight might go hunting. Langland mentions several kinds, especially snaring birds,[8] and hawking.[9] The hunting of the larger animals was a duty which was of great service to their poorer neighbors, for not only were there hares and foxes, bucks, and boars[10] which ruined the crops but there were wolves which worried women and children in

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1. C VIII, 12 & 18. 2. A pr. 33. 3. B pr. 34.
4. C I 38. 5. C XVII, 194. 6. C III, 237.
7. B X 38-44. 8. C VII,406. 9. C VIII,45.
10. C IX, 28.

waste places.[1] There is no suggestion that the peasants found the lord's hunts ruinous to his fields, as was the great complaint in France.

Guizot[2] points out that owing to the isolated position of the manors, the domestic duties became very prominent, and the possessor of the fief was a person of great importance as the centre of the whole life of the community. It is the passing of this condition that Langland bewails in the departure of the knight from the hall. Guizot goes on to say "C'est dans la prépondérance des moeurs domestiques que l'importance des femmes en Europe a pris sa source." Of this importance of women we have surprisingly little example in Langland, and yet we know that women did hold a place of honour in the 14th century. Of the elaborate chivalry of the Courts of love there is not a suggestion, but then we must not judge the life of the very great noble from Langland; he is concerned only with the country knight. Langland has very little of any kind to say about women, and what he does say is not of a very complimentary character. He hardly seems to speak from personal observation, for the evils which he assigns to them are those of the traditional character of extravagance in dress and inability to keep any matter secret.[4] Probaly he had very little acquaintance with women in a youth passed in the Priory school and at Oxford, of his married life we know nothing beyond the name of his wife; but if we might judge from the example of married life he gives in Witt and Dame Studie

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1. C X, 225.
2. Hist. de la Civilisation, p 106.
3. B X, 92
4. B XIX, 159.

it was Kitte who held the reins of government.[1] Women of gentle birth he shows us as entirely dependent on their men-folk for protection and the only prospect open to them was to marry or become nuns.[2] It was one of the duties of the Church to look after helpless or portionless maidens, and widows, both of which classes Langland accuses of being lacking in "inwittes".[3] The duties which Piers assigns to these lovely ladies with their long fingers is to spin, sew, and embroider; feed and clothe the poor, and teach their daughters to sew.[4] This was the popular idea. The whole duty of women in those days, if we may judge from what the good wife taught her daughter, was to get married and guide her household. Preparations for marriage began

"Fro that ilke tyme that thei be of thee born"[5]

and then

"Give hem to spowsynge as soone as thei
ben ablee".[6]

For old maids they had little use:

"Maydonys be louely, but to kep they be untrusty."[6]

The importance of getting married and the careful commercial value that a man set upon his daughter, is one of the many lessons to be learned in the Paston Letters. Furnivall[7] holds that this poem of the good wife bears out Langland in his tavern scenes in giving evidence of the greater freedom allowed to women in the 14th century than now. He also adds the example of the wife of Bathe, and women's

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1. B X, 5-8. 2. A VIII, 31. 3. B IX,70.
4. C IX, 7. 5. line 196. 6. line 200 alternative reading
7. Intr. to Babees Bk LXIX

membership in gbIds. Yet one would hardly reckon it an advantage for a woman of the present day to be allowed the freedom of the taverns and to take as standard, that

"If thou be ofte drunke, it falle thee to schame."[1]

On this all-important matter of marriage, Langland had very decided opinions, and in his stern rebukes he gives us glimpses of a very corrupt social life. His attitude is much the same as that of St. Paul; virginity is the best and fairest life,[2] but pure marriage is the first virtue of Dowel and he would forbid marriage to none:

"Every manere seculer man should marry,"[4]

and so Langland himself, though a secular priest, did marry, and he holds that God approves of wedded people[5] if they marry with love and the grace of God and enough to live on.[6] Of course this was contrary to canonical law, but there is evidence that many clerics ~~ladies~~ did marry and were thought none the worse for it.[7] It was certainly better than the dissolute behavior which Langland charges against many of the clergy,[8] especially the hermits.[9] Indeed Langland's protests and rebukes lead one to think the 14th century might best be described as being

"Touched by the adulterous finger of a time
That hovered betwixt war and wantonness."

But besides preaching fidelity to marriage, which was the theme of

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1. The Good Wife, line 77. 2. C XIX, 89.
3. IX, 107. 4. C XI, 284. 5. A X, 127.
6. B IX, 174. 7. Jessop, 73. 8. C IV, 188.
9. C I, 52.

many of the romances of the day.[1] Langland protested strongly against that commercial spirit which seems to have been very prevalent. Over and over again he ~~protests~~ speaks against the marriage of a maiden through brokage,[2] when they were chosen - "More for hure richesse than for holynesse other hendenesse - other fur hye kynde."[3] What women should be chosen for is their beauty, manners and good birth,[4] but instead of this, any knight and squire would marry the most detestable old hag for her money. Ill marriages, Langland tells us were especially frequent since the pestilence time[6] and Jessop[6] quotes documents showing that hundreds of widows were married within a few weeks, or even days, of their husbands deaths, and might even repeat it two or three times over. For such marriages Langland predicts nothing but quarrels, and assures us they will never get the flitch of Bacon at Donemowe. This is the earliest known allusion to this peculiar custom, by which any persona who had passed through a year's marriage without a quarrel, or once repenting the match, were rewarded with a flitch of bacon. The flitch was claimed as late as 1876.[7] In the allegory of Lade Mede we have a full description of the ceremonies gone through before a marriage. There is the go-between, who in this case is Lyer.[8] The arrangement of the dowry, here taking the form of the valuable lands of the seven deadly sins,[9] the drawing up of the charters, and the vast gathering in tents all over the hillside to see the wedding.

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1. Schofield, 198. 2. B XIV, 267. 3. C III.
4. C XI, 260. 5. B IX, 164. 6. Jessop, 242.
7. Skeat Notes, p 227. 8. C III, 44. 9. C III, 83.

This is as far as it went, as the lady was then hied off to London, and another mate chosen for her; but this time we are given the surprising information[1] that the lady is to be allowed to ~~choose~~ decide for herself.

The education of children in the larger manors was at this time a most elaborate affair. Generally, the knights sent both sons and daughters away to some other nobleman to be instructed in good manners and all the formalities of etiquette. Of these forms and ceremonies, the intricacies of carving and the guidance of one's personal behavior of which one reads in the Babees Book, Langland says nothing. He is concerned with the moral discipline of the household, and so emphatically does he speak that a certain "Complaint of sundry wicked livers, and especially of the bad bringing up of children" was assigned to the Plowman by R.B. in 1586.[2] Father and mother were responsible for the good morals of their children,[3] doubly responsible indeed, because Langland was sure that the sins of the father would be repeated in the child.[4] For fatherless children, the Church was responsible.[5] In return, the child must be obedient; the first step on the downward path which Pride took was that he

"Formest and ferst - to fader and to moder
Haue ybe unboxome - ich biseche God of mercy."[6]

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1. C 1V, 6.
2. Skeat Index 1X, 29.
3. A X, 66.
4. B 1X, 145.
5. B 1X, 66.
6. C V11, 15.

The first duty of the father to his child was to beat it, according to Reason; the golden age for the child was when

"Children cherissyng - be chastyng with yerdes."[1]

Langland was especially anxious about this because apparently there was a tendency to spoil children since the pestilence time.[2] He goes on to tell us that this was the principle on which his sire and dame brought him up.[3] It was indeed the teaching everywhere: The goodwife tells her daughter

"And if thi children been rebel, and wole not
hem lowe,
If ony of hem mys dooth, nouther banne
hem ne blowe
But take a smerte rodde, and bete hem on a rowe,
Til thei crie mercy, and be of her gilt aknowe."[3]

In the same way for boys,

"A rodde reformeth al her negligence,
In her corage no rancour doth abide,
Who that sparith the rodde all uertues settith aside."[4]

As a part of the nobleman's household, Langland mentions his direct servants, who shared in the pride of their masters,[5] and ~~there were~~ also bondmen quite in the power of their masters.[6] According to the Ely Book of the 13th century,[7] there were but few

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1. B IV, 116. 2. B V, 36. 3. line 188.
4. Stans Puer ad Mensam, line 89. 5. C XVII, 69.
6. C IX, 42. 7. Traill I, 512.

slaves, only 25,000 all told in England, but these were chiefly in the southwest which is just the part of the country with which Langland was acquainted. The greater part of the work was done by those peasants intermediate between these two in standing, who have assumed so prominent a position in the 14th century annals.

Langland in theory regards the peasant from the feudal view point, namely as that part of the social equilibrium who does the work in return for which he is protected by the knight and guided on his way to Heaven by the ecclesiastic. But he has really gone far beyond his view for instead of looking at him as a useful appendage to the two really important orders of society, he realizes that without him that society could not exist at all. This idea is brought out in Langland's theory of the state, which we have already discussed, where he tells us that the Commons

"For profit of alle the poeple - plowmen ordeyned,
To tilie and trauaile - as trewe lyf asketh."[1]

I think he had this same idea in mind when he chose the plowman as his hero, and Piers gives expression to it in speaking to the knight:

"Worth neuere plente amonge the poeple - ther while
my plow liggeth".[2]

The information which Langland gives us about the peasant farmer is chiefly of his external life, just that, in fact which would be known to a boy brought up as a son of the manor, or in a priory with peasants depending on it. I am quite aware that he gives the

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1. B pr. 119 2. B VI, 165.

most touching description of the life of the Cotyer,[1] and this description comes into the discussion of those to whom Piers granted the pardon, but there is evidence in the passage that these are the city poor that he is describing. Their food is bread, ale, cold flesh and fish, with mussels and cockles as a great treat;[2] now this is not the food of the poor in the country, where the villiers proper held 30 acres, and where the cottiers had about five;[3] of this food indeed, Langland has given us a detailed description,[4] and it is composed chiefly as we would expect, of dairy products and vegetables. With these cotes, and the smoky, leaking houses to which he refers elsewhere, Langland had ample opportunity to become acquainted during his residence in poverty in Cornhill.

The relation between peasant and knight was as a rule no longer a friendly patriarchal system, but was carried on by a system of bailiffs.[5] This was rendered necessary by the numerous and scattered manors which one knight held, but it worked ill for the tenants, for the bailiffs made to themselves so bad a name that there arose a popular proverb; "If the lord bids slay, the steward bids play."[6] Of bailiffs in this capacity we do not hear in Langland; they are only mentioned, each time coupled with beadles, as taking part in the marriage of Mede.[7] This would furnish further witness to our belief that Langland's father was but a small property holder who over-saw his farm in person, assisted by his son William; everything points to this assumption, for Langland is very strong

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1. C X, 71. 2. C X, 92. 3. Traill II, 512.
4. C IX, 304.
5. Traill II, 131 6. Bateson, 388. 7. C III, 60 & IV, 2.

for the old patriarchal relationship, the generous provision for all the poor who might come to the gate, and he bewails as a recent innovation the retirement of the family to the private room with a chimney; yet this seems to have been a custom for some time past; it is certainly already[2] the accepted order of the day in "Gawayne and the Grene Knight" (1320-30 according to Morris, though Jusserand[1] would place it later).

The villeins were represented by a reeve chosen from among themselves to protect their interests.[2] It would seem from Langland that these reeves were held responsible for all their lord's possessions[3] as well as overseeing the underlings[4] and paying the wages.[5] It is quite possible that Piers himself was a reeve; he was responsible for the hire of laborers,[6] he oversaw them generally, he did the sowing, which was always the task of a man in authority, and yet he was certainly one of the people. Beneath the reeve, was the bayward who guarded the corn.[7] In the end of the poem,[8] Priesthood is made Hayward to Piers. These are the only officials whom Langland mentions as acting between Knight and Villein, Any differences which might arise were tried in the manorial court on love-days, when the reeve presented his reckoning.[9] Of these love days Langland has not a good word to say; they hinder truth and beguile the people,[10] and as nothing can be done without bribery,[11] they are most oppressive on the mean man and take away whatever he

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1. Hist of Eng. Lit. p 348, Note. 2. Green, 246.
3. B X, 470. 4. C V1, 15. 5. C 1V, 311. 6 C 1X, 120.
7. C V1, 16. 8. C XX11, 334 9. B V, 427.
10. C X11, 17. 11. C 1V, 197.

may have won, for the lord has "spiritus intellectus" and "spiritus fortitudinis"[1] on his side. Langland rebukes this oppresion, this taking from their tenants "more than treuthe wolde",[2] but he admits without a protest the right of the lord over his churl. Although we cannot think that Langland was expressing his own opinion, he uses the expression, "be holden for an hyne"[3] with the meaning," be held of no value," which is significant of the value of the villein in the eyes of men at this time. He tells us that no churl may make a charter nor sell his possessions without his lord's leave;[4] what is more important still is showing how firmly Langland believed in the old feudal relationship is that the same passage goes on to say that should the poor wretch run away, in the end Reason will reckon with him, and Conscience will put him in prison and burn him in purgatory. This is clear evidence that Langland was on the side of the Commons in keeping down the peasants, for this was exactly the point in question after the plague and in the discussions of the Good Parliament. The masters were anxious to get servants and if the peasants on any estate were ill-treated or not well paid away they would go.[5] To prevent this wandering the Statute of Laborers was passed, limiting their wages, or the terms of their service, to that of some years before the plague. This statute was a terrible grievance to the people but Langland instead of expressing sympathy for the poor in this matter, is entirely on the side of the Commons:

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1. C XXII, 465. 2. B XV, 305. 3. A IV, 104.
4. C XIII, 61. 5. E. W. Life, 262.

"but if he be hèighlich huyred - ellis wil he chyde,
And that he was werkman wrought - waille the tyme,
He greueth hym ageines God - and gruccheth ageines resoun,
And thanne curseth he the kynge - and al his conseille after,
Such lawes to loke - laboreres to greue."[1]

It was no more right for a peasant to rebel against oppression than for the Knight to oppress. Of course the ideal relationship is one of love,

"As a leel laborer - that by-leuyth with hus maistre
In hus paye and in hys pyte - and in hus pure treuthe,
To paye hym yf he performeth - and haue pyte yf he faylleth,
And take hym for hus trauaille - al that treuthe wolde."[2]

He holds that it is prosperity which is the cause of their complaints; the laboring man has "waxed fat and kicked," for,

"While Hunger was here mayster - wolde non chide."[3]

He doubtless had in mind the terrible famine of 1353, for Langland could hardly remember those of 1314 and 1335, but it seems a strange attitude in a philanthropist to look back with regret to the crushed submission of starvation.

This matter of the influence of the Plague, i.e., the great plague of 1347 in the development of the labor problem is so important that it deserves some discussion. Traill[4] claims that it "changed the whole face of rural England and by transforming her agricultural system, gave a new direction to her industries, left a lasting impress on her laws, her arts and her manners, and

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1. B VI, 314-319 2. C IV, 350. 3. C IX, 341.
4. Traill II, 184.

and in a word, profoundly and permanently affected the whole future course of her political social and economic life." Taking this as our text, we find that Langland recognizes no direct social result from the plague except poverty in the villages,[1] and a consequent emigration of the clergy to London. As ever, he is concerned with the moral cause and effect. Reason preaches[2] that these pestilences are to punish the sins of the people. Describing death, no doubt with reference to the pestilence, Langland has a most powerful passage:

"Deith cam dryuyng after - and al to douste paschte
Kynges and knyghtes - caysers and popes;
Lered ne lewide - he lefte no man stande;
That hi hitte euene - sterede neuere after.
Many a louely lady - and here lemmanes knyghtes
Sonnede and swelte - for sorwe of Dethes dyntes."[3]

This is followed by one of the most bitterly ironical passages in the whole poem, as Langland describes how "Kynde cessede thoto seon the peuple amende," and saw what? The flourishing of flattery and lechery, with idleness and pride. But though Langland does not intentionally describe the results of the plague, we do find in him witness for the increase in sheep-farming,[4] consequent on the shortage of labor, and the stretches of land without cultivation; for the growth of industry and the influx of men into the cities.

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1. C I, 82. 2. C V1, 115. 3. C XX111, 100.
4. C Y, 260.

for the famous Statute of Laborers of 1351, and for the change in manners. But Traill[1] modifies the importance of the plague by saying that quite spontaneously and smoothly serfdom had been growing extinct, and an increasing class of men were working for wages. Of this also we have witness in Langland, for quite casually he mentions the salary of servants,[2] their hire generally consisting of food and wages[3] and he speaks of Piers receiving hire[4] as of something which everyone would expect. On this we must lay stress, for it shows the gradual development, and ever increasing tendency to commutation of services which gave freedom to the serf, and ready money and consequent luxuries to the lord. This industrial change is so all important to one looking back with a perspective of 500 years, that it is almost a shock to find no discussion of it in the writer of the period who is concerned with the poor. This very unconsciousness of the development, this conservative belief that the old was better, and it is very wicked of the poor man to be claiming higher wages and so forth, is eloquent testimony, I think, to the gradualness of the change, and the little sympathy that was given to this effort of the working man to assert the powers of the people. Langland's solution of the labor problem, which he gives in passus VI and VII of the B text, and which we have already discussed, was doubtless that of many of the very best men in England.

The life of the peasant appeared to Langland as a dreary round

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1. Traill, 188. 2. C VIII, 39.

3. C IX, 204. 4. C VIII, 193.

of work. Of the actual suffering of the poor, Langland paints a black picture in the complaint of Peace against Wrong;[4] the complaint that his family had been insulted, his servants beaten and his possessions carried off, in return for all which he received a worthless tally. This seems to have been only too common, but it is for the joylessness, the colourless misery rather than the actual oppression that Langland pleads

"Comforte the creatures - that moche care suffren
Thorw derth, thorw drouth - alle her dayes here,
Wo in wynter tymes - for wantyng of clothes,
And in somer tyme selde - soupen to the fulle."[1]

But this passionate plea is addressed to Christ, not to any rich lord, for Langland sees no possibility of improvement in this world. He cannot believe it right for the poor man to leave his position, he sharply rebukes such as have turned hermit, because they saw that hermits had fat cheeks, therefore we find that he turns his eyes from this world, altogether, he will glory in tribulation, because those who have had no joy in this life, can of right claim that they should have salvation in the next. Mackail[2] quotes this passage,

"Than the poure dar plede - and preoue by pure reysoune
To have a-lowaunce of hus lorde, - by lawe he cleymeth Ioye
That neuere Ioye hadde - of rightful Iuge he asketh,"[3]

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1. B XIV, 174.
2. Cornhill, Mag.
3. C XVI, 289.
4. C V. 45

as an example of Langland's boldness as a socialist[1]; but Langland is not discussing earthly matters at all here; the question which is being explained by Ratience to Activa Vita is the beauty and desirability of patient poverty, and the "rightful Iuge" is no human being.

The happiest time of the year was harvest[1] when they had enough to eat, and probably soon after harvest would occur their greatest excitement, a yearly visit to some fair to lay in store of provisions. These fairs were of enormous importance, especially those of which Langland makes mention, the fairs of Winchester,[2] Wy[3](i.e. Weyhill) and St. Giles.[4] Yet even this one excitement was not unmixed pleasure, for Wrong[5] was waiting to commit highway robbery, and when he arrived there, the simple countryman was looked on as fair prey for city shappers.[6]

The duties of the peasant were varied, and would leave but little, save "spicerie" to be purchased at the fair. With the arts of tailor, tinker, weaving and winding,[7] Piers was acquainted, and Reason[9] includes the shaping of shoes and clothes in the duties of a peasant as naturally as mowing and reaping. Of first importance on the farms was wheat, and Langland uses "whete"[8] as synonymous with grain. In connection with this Langland tells us that wheat is best when sown in the fall, while flax and leeks need not be sown till Spring, an interesting little detail of information which is proof of first hand acquaintance with farm matters. In addition,

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1. C IX, 323. 2. C XIV, 52. 3. C VII, 211.
4. C V, 51. 5. C V, 50. 6. C VII, 211.
7. BV, 554, 8. C XIV, 43. 9 C VI 15

they had some fruit trees, pears, plums and cherries[1] Langland mentions and some animals, pigs,[2] horses, oxen and geese.[3] When peasant proprietorship, or rather peasant lease-holds, began, the renting of land was accompanied by renting horses and cattle, e.g., 5 shillings a year was the rent for a cow.[4] It was apparently on such a principle as this that Piers[5] was provided with his four oxen and four stots by Conscience and Grace. Langland never wearies of going over lists of the work that was to be done on the farm,[6] the digging and delving, the ploughing, sowing and reaping and threshing, driving the teams, herding cattle and scaring away crows. Delightful he must have thought it to see people working diligently and fulfilling his creed of "He that will not work, neither shall he eat." In these peasant farms the land was unfenced, which accounts for the stress Langland lays on the herding of cattle, and each man's portion consisted of a long strip only separated from his neighbor's by a line of turf. Thus we find Couetyse[7] "pinching" on his neighbor's land, or reaching over for a few sheaves in reaping.

With the poor as with the rich food was an absorbing question, but while it was interesting to the rich for the elaborativeness of the provision and the amusement of the conversation and music at meal times, to the poor it was a vital question of whether they could possibly find enough to keep body and soul together. Hunger, that terrible spirit whom Piers raised to rule his refractory

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1. C XIII, 221 2. C XII, 8. 3. C V, 49.
4. Traill II, 326. 5. C XXII, 262, 267.
6. C VI, 12-19; C VII, 127-129; C IX, 198. etc. 7. C VII, 267.

labourers was always stalking down the little fields, and only too often he developed from Hunger into Famine, a spirit too strong for Piers to lay. But Langland with his strong feeling of other-worldliness, treats hunger, like poverty, as an advantage to the spiritual life, for the sin of Gluttony finds no lodging with the poor man.[1] To us it would seem too humiliating a situation to submit any respectable man to, but Langland says quite complacently

"For defaute of her fode - this folke is at my wille,[2]

and this we can imagine is the way he would advise to deal with such unheard of evils as strikes. It is the natural attitude that the poor should be servile to the rich.[3] In the same way, the poor should not desire fine food, it is sinful pride which makes them want

"freisch fleesch other fysch - fried other ybake,
And that chaud and pluschaud - for chillyng of here mawe."[4]

Apparently the standard meal for the poor was bread and ale,[5] with the addition of bacon, milk and cheese,[6] though milk seems to have been rather despised.[7] What Langland does admit as a hardship is the eating of beans for beans were supposed to be productive of disease and thinness.[8] The meal which Piers prepares for hunger is more elaborate than this, but it must be remembered that Piers is a man of some position, and that before Hunger is finished he collects in the supplies of the whole neighborhood to feed him.

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1. C XVII, 72. 2. B VI, 209. 3. C XVII, 63.
4. C IX, 334. 5. C X. 156. 6. C VIII, 50.
7. B VI, 184. 8. C IX, 226, cp. B.

111. The City.

Langland's views on the questions of his day are, we believe, those of the city man, the most definite information that he gives us about his life is that he lived in London,[1] and yet he does not seem to harmonize so well in a city as elsewhere. In the Church, and the Schools, in the Manor and the manor-farm, Langland is perfectly at home, and even where he is most at variance with their practices his mind seems in perfect sympathy with the principles and traditions of the institutions. Of the city, on the other hand, the impression which Piers the Plowman leaves is that it is inhabited by a population of rogues of varying color and different grades of prosperity, but all engaged more or less dishonestly in trying to get money out of mankind. He finds no great saving principle behind lawyers and merchants which would give them a right to Piers' Pardon. Whether this is due to Langland's being essentially medieval, while cities and commerce belong to the modern order of things, I cannot say, but I feel inclined to believe that it is a trait inherent in his character, and that wherever he lived, he would have been of that unpractical nature which eschewed business methods and commercial theories.

The life of the rich in town and country must have been much alike and much of what we have already discussed in connection with life on the Manor may apply to city establishments also. The qualification which we might make is that probably in Langland's attacks on luxury he is thinking especially of the man in the city. As Langland apparently sank to a much humbler sphere of life in the city than that which he had enjoyed in the country, we find no

1. C xvii. 286

description of the great palaces of the nobles, or even of the comfortable dwellings of the merchants. The luxury which he falls most fiercely upon is that of clothes, which was exactly the form which would fall under his observation as he wandered moodily about the streets, refusing to give the ordinary salutations to his superiors and morbidly believing that every one looked upon him as a madman. In the Lady Mede, we have a picture of the fashionable lady in her crimson robe and ribbons, trimmed with fur and covered with jewels.[1] Lyf with his "dagged" clothes[2] seems to represent the man of fashion, and all through the poem Langland constantly refers to the silks and furs and silver ornaments in which both men and women were arrayed. One of the most noticeable articles of clothing seems to have been the hood, as it was by this the different classes were distinguished. Doctors wore furred hoods,[3] Sergeants silk hoods[4] and Lawyers, white silk hoods.[5] This importance of the hoods was carried down into the lower ranks, and a Commission on the County of York reports that the rebels in the peasant revolt made themselves a livery of white hoods with red tippets.[6] Langland does not mention this interesting fact but he does tell us some strange customs. For instance, it would seem that women were sewn into their clothes,[7] and what seems equally revolting, it was the habit to sleep naked.[8] In fact, the wearing of clothes at all was rather a privilege,[9] which might be forfeited by evil doing. One form of penance was to leave off linen and go

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1 C II, 10. 2. C XXIII, 143. 3. C IX, 292.

4. C IV, 451. 5. C I, 159. 6. Cal.of Pat.Rolls, Aug. 19, 1381

7. C VII, 6. 8. B XX, 195.

9. B XIV, 329

with the rough woolen outer garment next your skin. Poor men, according to an act of 1363, were allowed to wear no clothing but a garment of russet wool, not to exceed 12 pence in value. It was in such a garment[1] as this that Langland clad himself before setting out on the wanderings he describes in his vision, and it was probably a garment like this that the merchants gave to him for copying Piers Pardon for them.[2]

The class whom Langland hated most heartily - and though the good man lays such stress on love, he was human enough to indulge in the most fervent hatred - is the class of lawyers. I should imagine that what first suggested to Langland that he would write a moral allegory on his times, was the evil condition that he found in the law courts, for the chief impression which we receive from his 1st vision is of the complexity and corruption of civil and ecclesiastic law. Though he never says it in so many words, I do not think we can doubt that he was employed in the Court, probably in the subordinate position of a copyer of charters, for besides a general knowledge of the methods of procedure at Westminster and the Court of the Archives, he mentions details of legal importance, such as that if a man does not die from the first hanging, he may go free,[3] or again that if a man, even of the rank of a franklin, is hanged, the estate goes to the king.[4] But more conclusive evidence than this is his knowledge of the forms of a charter. In the enfeoffment of Mede he draws up a

1. C XI, 1, cp. C I, 2. 2. A VIII, 43.

3. B XVIII, 377. 4. C XI, 239.

mock charter beginning in due form with "Sciant presentes et futuri"[1] but ending "In the date of the deuel,"[2] and later he gives the conditions which will make a charter chalangeable before a Chief Justice, namely false Latin, interlining, and omissions.[3]

The love of money is the root of all the evil in Westminster; one class after another of officials Langland mentions, constables, bailiffs, sheriffs, beadles, and they all must be bribed if you are to hope for justice. Then at the trial itself there will be corruption of the jury,[4] and as for the lawyers, Heaven help anyone who gets into their clutches

"Thou myght bet mete the myst - on Malverne hulles,
Than gete a mom of hure mouth - til moneye be hem shewed."[5]

Westminster indeed Langland shews us ~~first~~ as Meed's happy hunting ground, with not the faintest prospect of any justice, for not only was it the resort of avaricious lawyers, but the clients who came up were of the most unprincipled character, ready even, like Couetyse, to

"holdeliche bar adown - with many a brighte noble
Moche of the witte and wisdome - of Westmynster halle,"[6]

or they might be there simply to escape justice.[7]

The ecclesiastical courts, the consistory and Court of the Arches, had no better fame. Their elaborate machinery could never be put in motion without meed[8] and continued meed was necessary to

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1. C 111, 78'
2. C 111, 114.
3. C XIV, 117.
4. A 3, 136.
5. C XI, 163.
6. B XX, 131.
7. B XX, 282.
8. B XV, 334.

keep it going. One of Langland's most skilful and scathing rebukes he serves out to these ecclesiastical courts when he describes the beasts of burden, namely the various arms of the law, who carried Meed and her company to London.[1]

In all this attack on the lawyers, one feels that Langland is not quite fair, because he is speaking on the assumption that it is wrong for lawyers to be paid for their services,[2] a theory which we would hardly accept now. He does suggest a more reasonable solution of the problem when he urges that the State should provide lawyers to plead for the poor,[3] so that they may have an equal chance with the rich, but as a rule we feel that he is under the impression that lawyers do as little to earn their living as do the worst of his beggars. This is the same principle as that which makes him reckon the taking of usury among the greatest of sins,[4] and of course it was a belief which lasted down to Shakespeare' time, and after. Also in the 14th century the hatred of usury was mixed up with the hatred of the Jews, so it is the more remarkable that we find Langland speaking kindly of the Jews,[5] for he does not spare in rebuking usury, or "chevisaunce" as it was now called, to evade the law against all forms of usury. As Langland rebuked lawyers in the person of Meed and Warym Wisdom, so usury is personified in the Confession of Avarice,[6] and there we see how far the abuse might go, even to the acquiring of the estates of the rich

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1. C III, 176. 2. B VII, 40. 3. B VII, 43.
4. B II, 175. 5. B IX, 81. 6. B V, 245.

and to the utter destitution of the poor. The manner of thought about such things is revealed in Conscience's long speech on the different kinds of meed. Thus:

"In marchaundise ys ne mede - ich may it wel avowe
Hit is a permutacion a-pert-lich - o pene-worth for another."[1]

Their ideas seem to have been so concrete that they felt money should only go in exchange for things, or labor[2] which is productive of some definite thing; but as brain work produced no visible result, it should receive no money, and so the lawyers and usurers and priests suffered.

In the middle ages there was a contempt for peaceful trade, but one of the ways in which England broke away from the intellectual domination of France was when she began to recognize in the 14th century that her prosperity was passing from dependence on the agricultural classes to dependence on the commercial classes, and in consideration of this held the commercial classes in honor. Mahan[3] traces England's supremacy at sea back to the rise of the feeling in the 14th century, and we may today thank these men who were willing to admit that trade did not degrade a gentleman. When none of the modern professions were open to gentlemen, and when they were not equipped for them had they been open, The result was that merchants were generally the younger sons of noble houses, and Langland puts on a par riches from rents and from shops.[4] Besant[5] makes the very interesting observation that on the tombs of St.

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1. C 1V, 315. 2. C 1V, 307. 3. Infl. of Sea Power on History, Intr.
4. Besant, 153. 5. C XV, 185.

Leonard's and St. Peter's, London, the butchers, fishmongers, mercers, drapers and grocers, all have shields. Now Langland, though he admits as I have just said, that merchandise is an honest means of livelihood, has no sympathy with this commercial growth, nor any comprehension of what great things it entailed; once again, he shows himself distinctly conservative.

There were the three classes[1] of merchant adventurer, retail trader and craftsman. It seems to be the great merchants he is referring to in his discussion[2] of Piers Pardon, and they are excluded from the pardon, not for dishonest practices, as one might expect, but for working on Sunday, and swearing contrary to their conscience. The charge against them then is that they are too engrossed in worldly affairs, for Covetous,[3] again, who was apparently a successful merchant, with trade extending to Bruges and to Prussia, confesses that he was worrying about his business enterprises all through divine service. As punishment for this they were allowed no place in Piers Pardon "a pena et a culpa" but they had a special letter from Truth promising that he would send the angel Michal to protect them from devils at the day of their death on condition they would build hospitals, mend roads and bridges, and assist penniless maidens, bedridden folk, prisoners and poor scholars. As a matter of fact this is exactly what the great merchants in London were doing, and most generous gifts we owe to them, and I think Langland might have admitted them to his pardon. Here--

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1. Besant, 147 2. C X, 22-43. 3. C VII, 278

but here only--I am afraid we find him narrow-minded even to the point of injustice.

With the second class , the retail traders, Langland is better acquainted, and he brings the more definite accusations against them of cheating and dishonesty, such very familiar charges as mixing their wares, and putting the best to the front.[1] He recognizes[2] from the first that "cheffare" ~~this~~ is the best way to make money, but his mind is possessed of an unconquerable prejudice, so that we find he lets Gyle[3] finds refuge with the merchants, and Lyer is much at home with grocers. Of one of these traders, Langland traces the history,[4] the career of the successful sharper, who began with lies and false weights as an apprentice, then from the drapers he learned to stretch the cloth so that ten yards would be equivalent to twelve; he was helped in his evil course by his wife, who bought wool by false measure, and mingled the ale. As he grew more prosperous he meddled with usury, and drew in wealth from rich and poor, till he was as rich as a Jew and as much hated as a dog.

When we reach the lowest class of craftsmen, Langland's tone becomes gentler, for he can look with pleasure on all the hard work these people are doing. List after list of craftsmen he gives us, not an occupation can be unrepresented. Sometimes we see them at work far into the night by the light of a torch,[5] and sometimes at play, drinking in the tavern, or engaged in the rowdy chaffer

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1. C VII, 261. 2. C I, 32. 3. C III, 222.
4. B V, 201-267. 5. B XVII, 217.

of the "New Fair", a sort of pawn shop and auction fused in one. Amongst these men, Langland himself lived, in Cornhill and ~~Langland~~ he knew their ways and lives only too well. An interesting confirmation of the fact that he did live in Cornhill is given by the minute description which he gives of the process of weaving[1] which is technically correct in every detail, and cornhill was the quarter of London devoted to weaving and the drapers.[2] Every manufacture had its own section, and everything London needed was made in the city, so as Langland wandered round the city he became acquainted with all kinds and descriptions of industry, and of all he leaves record in his poem. This is quite representative of the second half of the 14th century because it was only a little before this time that English manufactures had been able to compete at all with foreign products. Another interesting fact is the number of women workers he mentions. In almost every industry they were employed, and it is a very different idea that Langland gives us of city women, from those lovely ladies with their long fingers who were the ornaments of the manors. Here they are engaged in work of all kinds, especially the debasing task of keeping taverns, and a bold evil character was developed, such as Langland must have shrunk from with loathing.

In the country, it seemed that Langland was only acquainted with the external life of the peasants, but in the city he went into their homes and knew their private life, their personal troubles

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1. B XV, 444.

2. Besant, 170.

and simple virtues. One of the most pathetic and living pictures in the whole poem is that of the poor woman struggling to feed her children, to do spinning to make enough moneyto pay the rent, and kept awake at night by her baby

"That reuthe is to rede - othere in ryme shewe
The wo of these women - that wonyeth in cotes."[1]

This is the very finest type of poor man whom Langland is describing here, the man who works hard to keep up appearances, and will starve rather than beg. Some of this suffering may have been Langland's own, so feelingly does he speak, especially when he describes the leaky house, where

"He seketh and seketh - til he slepe drye",[2]

and the house full of smoke; though here Langland has no sympathy, the man's remedy is in his own hand, so he says quite characteristically he "Koweth and corseth - that Chist gyue hym sorwe
That sholde brynge yn bettere wode - other blowe til hit brente"

What seems to have impressed Langland most in his whole acquaintance with London are the beggars and the criminals. Of the rich he did not know very much; for his poor neighbors he could express approval and pity, and the object of his poem was not to express approval, but on these two classes of idlers and wasters he poured forth all the vials of his wrath, for they had every attribute which his soul loathed. The frequency with which he returns to the subject and the rules which he lays down for dealing with them is

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1. C X, 82. 2. C XX, 302.

an indication of how medieval England swarmed with beggars. Langland distinguishes two classes, the good and the bad. The deserving poor, of whom he gives a list[1] in admitting them to Piers Pardon are those who could not work, such as the old and feeble, the broken-limbed, prisoners, men in misfortune from fire or flood, etc. etc. For these he constantly expresses pity, as he thinks of their hard conditions:

"Ac beggars a-boute Myd-somere - bredlees thei soupe,
And yut is wynter for him wors - for wet-shoud thei gangen,
A-curst and a-fyngred - and foule rebuked
Of these worlde-riche men - that reuthe hit is to hungre.
Now, Lord, send hem somer som-tym - to solace and to Ioye.[2]

For such as these he pleads with the rich urging them to care for them and feed them.[3] This class, indeed, was recognized by the law, and Langland tells us that they had special privileges, such as being excused from services on inquests, permission to work on holy days and so forth.[4] But there was another class, the class of "wastrouss" and "faitours" on whom Langland would have no mercy, and as his indignation rises, it inspires him to some of his most vivid pictures. Terribly revolting creatures[5] they are, wicked and misshapen, crouching by the wayside with their bag and bottle, trying to draw pity by displaying their deformed children, poor little children whose backs they have deliberately broken so as to draw alms.

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1. C X, 175-187. 2. C XVII, 13. 3. C IX,229
4. C XIX, 80. 5. C X, 169.

This is the class of lollars, to which he refers constantly in scathing language. The most biting satire he uses in describing the lollar at home, sitting by the hot coals with his legs spread out, warming first one side, then the other,

"Reste hym, and reste hym - and his ryg turne,
Drynke drue and deepe - and drawe hym thanne to bedde."[1]

A crew of men such as this gather round Piers and prove themselves idle, greedy and quarrelsome, caring nothing for Church, law or knight. They begin by making a very sorry show

"Tho were faitoures aferde - and feyned hem blynde,
Somme leyde here legges alire - as such loseles conneth,
'For we may nought swynke ne swete - suche sikenesse us eyleth!'"[2]

Hunger soon works a miraculous cure in these faitours, and Langland's solution of this problem is not to imprison all sturdy beggars, as was the plan of the government, but feed them on nothing but horses' bread till they feel inclined to work. This is the advice of Hunger and he tells us we may "hold it for a wisdom".

Sometimes Langland does not seem so stern against actual criminals as he is against beggars. I think he must, like Browning, have ~~acted~~ hated inaction so heartily that he would prefer even evil doing to doing nothing at all. Prisoners, bolted with iron,[3] were amongst those whom Piers was willing to feed, and Langland never heaps invective upon the doers of violence. Constantly he is referring to

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1. C X, 144.
2. C IX, 14.
3. C IX, 143.

highway robbery, murder and broken heads, as the most matter of course thing in the world, as indeed it was. The age still showed the traces of barbarism in its unrestrained passions and readiness in fighting and bloodshed. This is seen in the most cursory examination of the Calendar of Patent Rolls, where not only men but women are constantly on record for assault and murder, e.g., on April 6,1381, there was granted "Pardon to Thomas de Ledene & Isabella his wife, for having assaulted John Westcote, monk of Perschore Monastry on Saturday after St. Bartholomew's on the highway at Perschoreshull, robbed him of a 'coule', a girdle and a purse with 30 shillings and imprisoned him till he made a fine of 30 marks." In the same month, April 22, 1381 pardon was granted to a certain "Margery, for the death of John Parys, chaplain." This was in "self-defence" as were many of the other attacks, and we can quite imagine some of Langland's strong brewsters and Webbesteres turning on any man who dared insult them. There was a great variety of punishments, hanging, imprisonment in all forms, generally loaded with irons;-thus Wrong was to be in prison 7 years in fetters so that he would be able to see neither hands nor feet;-and the slighter, the very uncomfortable punishment of the Stocks, the pinning-stools, etc. Yet the punishments described do not seem so terribly cruel and frequent as is the general impression about the middle ages, and pardons were very numerous. Again referring to the Calendar of Patent Rolls, we find that in the month before the peasant revolt, the King granted 46 pardons, of which 18 were for murder. Langland refers to the benefit of the clergy, and this is ~~not~~ interesting because the verse he quotes is different

1. B XII, 191.

from that which was generally used. But one of his most important details of information is to the effect that even in 1377 heretics had already suffered death by fire, for Langland after a bold statement, turns on the grete clerkes with the defiant words:

"If I lye on you to my lewed witte - ledeth me to brennynge"[1]

Such was the courage of this man who had set himself the task, in all the world to

"tellen it for treuth sake - take hede who so lyketh."

IV. Social Theories.

In attempting to sum up Langland's interpretation of 14th century life and thought, the most vital question seems to be his attitude to the problem of poverty and riches, for though we have seen that he shews himself awake to other principles which were live questions in his day, such as Nationality, Insularity, War, ~~and~~ the purity of social life, theories of monarchy, and a whole host of theological problems, the labor problem, and the respective duties of poore and rich are always in the foreground..

Though Wealth compares but unfavourably with poverty in "Piers the Plowman," Langland's opinion of it is not one of animosity:

"Ac leueth nouht, ye lewede men - that ich lacke richesse."[2]

Once again, it is not the institution[3] - if we may call the rich class an institution- that he attacks, but the way in which the

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1. B XV, 81.
2. C XIV, 26.
3. B VIII, 81.

members of this class act. The fundamental dogma of his social creed is that no one should be unproductive, and so the very first attack he makes in his poem is on those Wastours who destroyed with gluttony what labourers won.[1] All through the poem he shews up this contrast between wasters and winners, between robbers, sturdy beggars, minstrels, false hermits, usurers, lawyers, on the one hand, and ploughmen, craftsmen and the knight's & clerics who fulfilled their duties on the other. Now, Langland admits in his theory of the state that the Commons should support the rich, and he never, save in his own very exalted description of the golden age, suggests that the upper classes should indulge in manual labor. The duty of the rich man is generosity to his poorer neighbor, and the fault which Langland finds with the rich is that the possession of wealth tended to harden their hearts so that they would pay no heed to the poor man crying at the gate. Such stress does Langland lay on this that he feels no other virtue is of any avail in comparison,

"For though ye be trewe of yowre tonge - and trewlich wynn
And as chaste as a childe - that in cherche wepeth,
But if ye louen lelliche - and lene the poure
Such good as God yow sent - godelich parteth,
Ye ne haue na more meryte - in masse ne in houres
Than Malkyn of hire maydenhode - that no man desireth."[2]

This of course is the natural sequence of the emphasis Langland lays on love, here love in the special sense ~~in~~ which Charity has received in England, but he also feels that the possession of riches

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1. A pr. 22. 2. B I, 177.

will give rise to other sins

"Right as weodes wexen - in wose and in donge,
So of rychesse upon richesse - arisen al vices,"[1]

and the sin which they are very apt to produce is profanity and irreligion.[2] Thus the souls of the rich are in greater peril than those of the poor. In short, Lamgland's theme all through passus X11, X111 and X1V (C text) is "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of God,"[3] and our Lord's simile of the camel going through the eye of a needle is closely parallelled by Langland's comparison of the rich man to a merchant encumbered with his bags and boxes, who can't proceed nearly so rapidly as the messenger, bearing but a letter.[4] There is certainly less sympathy with the rich in the C text than in B & A, a change which can be referred to the events in his own life which reduced him to poverty in his old age, and in the bitter position of a dependent[5] he learnt how hard were the hearts of the rich. In B he found Charity in both rich and poor;

"I haue seyn hym in sylke - and somme tyme in russet",[6]

but in C[7] he will not allow him to appear in silk. Again, he introduces a long passage into the C[8] text elaborating the idea of the right to Heaven which is given by poverty, but most noticeable of all - and this is rather sad - while he has gained in his sympathy with the poor, while, e.g., he can introduce that beautiful picture of the poor woman in the Cote and her brave husband turning the fair

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1. C X111, 230.
2. B X, 101.
3. Luke XV111, 24 cp. C XV11, 1.
4. C X1V, 33.
5. C. V1, 49.
6. B XV. 214.
7. C XV11, 342.
8. C X1V, 1-100.

outward, he has lost in his comprehension of the mind of the rich. It is this comprehension of the position of the rich who sometimes lack pity simply because they do not understand the suffering,[3] which offers strongest proof that Langland came from among the ranks of those possessed of a comfortable income, stronger proof even than his contention that workmen's children should not raise themselves out of their natural position by entering the Church.[2] But in the bitterness of poverty he loses this sympathy and in the C text he omits his prayer for reuthe on rich men.[3] I must say here that Manly[7] takes the exactly opposite view that the C text speaks in defense of the rich; I do not see, however, that the passages to which he refers will prove his point. Though Langland began life in comfortable circumstances, we may conclude pretty surely that he had personal acquaintance with poverty in his later life, both from the manner of living which he describes in C VI, and also from his vision of Fortune,[4] who after following him five and forty years,[5] turned his foe and left him to the mercies of poverty.[6] If we may accept this literally, then his knowledge of poverty in the A text is due to observation only, while that in the B text is the result of his own experience. But never in the whole poem, as I read it, is there a suggestion that he discusses poverty as inclusive of himself. It is always either the didactic or the pitying tone of a sympathetic outsider observing it first as the son of the manor taking an interest in his father's peasants, perhaps, like the

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1. C X, 71-97. 2. C VI, 63. 3. B XIV, 168
7 Cbg. II, p 30.
4. B. XI,11. 5. B XI, 46. 6. B XI, 61.

knight, engaging in ploughing as a "solas", and later dwelling in Cornhill among them but not of them, hated by them in fact for shewing up the evils and idleness of their life.[1] Langland believed that poverty was less productive of sin than was wealth, and he shows in detail that the poor man is free from the temptations of the seven deadly sins, except avarice; most important of all, however, is that they possess the sweet gift of charity;

"Ne were mercy in mene men - more than in ryght ryche,
Meny time mendynaus - myghte gon a-fyngred",[3]

which is a statement as true today as in the 14th century. Though Langland has won fame as a champion of the poor, his eyes were fully opened to the faults[2] of his protegés; he was constantly being discouraged by the bold bad ways of "wastours" - a class in which he probably included those rebel villins for whom we have such pity nowadays - and it is worthy of remark that though he later assures us that poor men are free from the seven deadly sins, all the illustrations of the seven deadly sins in his second vision, are drawn from the ranks of the poor, and display the extremes of vulgarity, shiftlessness and sin. Bearing thesefacts in mind, I think we may discover all Langland's disappointments and ambitions in the words of Piers:

"Ys no final loue with this folke - for al here faire speeche;
And hit ben my blody brothren - for God bouhte us alle.
Treuthe taughte me ones - to louye hem echone,
And helpen hem of alle thyng - ay as hem nedeth."[4]

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1. C V1, 3. 2. C 1, 324. 3. C X11, 49
4. C 1X, 216.

Langland's claim to the title of the apostle of the poor is earned and rightly earned, by the qualification that he loved them even while recognizing that they were lazy, selfish and ungrateful, which is a much finer thing than an abstract love for an ideal poor man.

The ideal side is by no means lacking, and his exaltation of poverty is based on several different ideas. In the first place there is that medieval asceticism which believed the ideal state is one of poverty, a voluntary renunciation of this world's goods,[1] and the more goods you had to renounce the more virtuous is the deed. Such opinions of course cast a glamour over the whole thing, whether the poverty was according to the man's desire, or not. This belief was probably founded on the teaching of the Gospels, Christ's command[2] to the young man who had great possessions, "Yet lackest thou one thing; sell all that thou hast and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven, and come, follow me," and Langland would also learn it from the patristic writings, indeed he supports it by the example of those hermits,[3] men of wealth and family, who left all. His second support seems more individual, he found the poor everywhere and he had such faith in the wisdom of God's counsels that he could not feel it right to murmur against the condition

"For alle myghtest thow haue maked - men of grete welthe;
And liche witty and wys - and lyue with-oute neode;
As for the bests, as ich hope - aren somme poure and some riche.[4]

1. B XI, 264.
   C XVII, 101
2. Luke XVIII, 22.
3. C X, 201.
4. C XVIII, 19.

The other component parts of Langland's attitude towards poverty are more interesting because they show the modern ideas of the brotherhood of man, the exaltation of labor, the beauty of simple virtues and the value of the individual life, being grafted upon the traditional belief that the poor were created to serve the rich. The belief that through the blood of Christ we become

"bretheren as of o blode - as wel beggares as erles",[1]

Langland's belief in all men working so that the way to Truth, is the way of honest labor, and his sympathy with the virtues of the poor, I have already discussed; but his emphasis on the intrinsic value of a man, merely as a living soul, deserves some attention. This is the chief lesson that Dean Stubbs[3] draws from Piers the Plowman. On this subject, Mackail[4] says: "No modern socialist could put the claims of labor more trenchently than this 14th century poet," and quotes

"Some putten hem to the plow - pleyed ful selde,
In settyng and in sowyng - swonken ful harde,
And wonnen that wastours - with glotonye destruyeth."[5]

This feeling runs through all Langland's passuonate pleading for consideration for the poor, but his strongest argument, which raises the whole question to its very highest level, is the responsibility of the individual[6] and the installation of Reason and Conscience as guides of the soul. Another plea is the value which

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1. B XI, 193 — 2. Supra, pp — 3. The Christ of English Poetry, Lecture II.
4. Cornhill Mag. — 5. B pr. 20. — 6 A x.71

they have in the eyes of Christ

"For oure ioye and oure hele - Iesu Cryst of heuene,
In a pore manners apparaille - pursueth as euere."[1]

Even more than that, Jesus Christ Himself took on Him the form of a poor man.[3] Exactly this same argument he uses as the strongest plea for temperance:

"Allas! that drynke shal for-do - that God dere boughte,
And doth God forsaken hem - that he shope to his likenesse."[4]

An almost identical thought is found in Masefield;[5]

"While we whom Jesus died to teach
Fought round on round, three minutes each."

It was from the combined influence of all these forces working in the poem that made Langland take as his hero, Piers the Plowman, or perhaps rather we should say made the readers of the poem select Piers the Plowman as the hero, for the space which Langland devotes to him is small. Piers in his first form cannot be better described than in the words of Ten Brink:[6] "Piers there may be said to typify human nature as blessed with divine grace, hearing God's voice in its conscience, and fulfilling its life task in the simplicity of faith and in good work." ~~He~~ Piers sums up Langland's ideal of virtues, in sharp contrast with all the sinners who have been acting and confessing up to the time of his appearance. This is very skilfully brought out by the identity of language between the

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~~1. A X, 71.~~ 2. B X1, 179. 3, B X1, 225.

4. B 1X, 64. 5. The Everlasting Mercy, p. 7.

6. Hist. of Eng. Lit, p, 365.

conclusion of Piers' Testament[1] and Sloth's Confession.[2] Probably we can hardly conceive how daring a thing it was for to take a plowman as the guide of life, and to give him command not only of the humble classes but even of knights and ladies. Though it was most daring and original then, he has been rather a favorite figure ever since. Belleza[3] quotes two examples,

"Plowman, shepherds, have I found, and more than once, & still could find,
Sons of God, and kings of men in utter noblesness of mind,"[4]

and from Macauley's speeches, "That there is no better sword than that which is fashioned out of a ploughshare." Certainly, the closest parallel, a parallel in its essential spirit, Miss Cameron pointed out to me in Masefield's "Everlasting Mercy", for here the hero of the poem finds purification in the work of the plowman, and sees in it a type of Christ.

"I knew that Christ was there with Gallow.
That Christ was standing there with me,
That Christ had taught me what to be."

Masefield is perhaps the modern poet who most strongly resembles Langland, resembles him in loving and championing the poor, even while recognizing and presenting their grossest faults. Langland could not better have expressed his creed than does Masefield in

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1. B VI, 102. 2. B V, 467. 3. Englische Studien 1895, p 326.

4. Lockesley Hall, 60 years after.

the "Consecration" to "Salt Water Ballads"

"Not of the princes and prelates with periwigged charioteers
Riding triumphantly laurelled to lap the fat of the years,
Rather the scorned - the rejected - the men hemmed in with
the spears.

Of the maimed, of the halt and the blind in the rain & the cold
Of these shall my songs be fashioned, my tales be told" .

And here the parallel is made even closer by Masefield's use of almost perfect alliterative verse.

Another plowman, a reference for which I am again indebted to Miss Cameron, is Browning's "Echetlos", and though he goes in for war, not peace, this plowman has the same character and his epitaph might well serve for Piers, or for the creator of Piers, of whose name and person we are so uncertain:

"Care for no name at all!
Say but just this; 'We praise one helpful whom we call
The Holder of the Ploughshare." The great deed n'er grows small."

Chapter IV.

CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE

1. National and Universal Characteristics.

In Langland's character, M. Jusserand discovers the true Englishman, uniting Saxon mysticism with Norman energy. Similarly in his poem we recognize the union of these two elements both in thought and expression; from the Anglo-Saxons Langland took his alliterative verse, from the French his allegorical form, and from the union of the two, his language. In thought and subject matter it is more difficult to disentangle the parts to be assigned to each. Of Piers the Plowman, Lowell[1] writes "In it appears at her best the Anglo-Saxon Muse, a first cousin of poor Richard, full of proverbial wisdom, who always brings her knitting in her pocket, and seems more at home in the chimney corner;" while the Frenchman Taine finds that in Piers the Plowman[2] "the conception of the world, proper to the people of the north, all sad and moral, shows itself already . They are never comfortable in their country.... Hence arise melancholy and the idea of duty. Man naturally thinks of life as of a battle, oftener of black death which closes this deadly shew." That so marked an Anglo-Saxon element as these two critics discover, should appear in the 14th century poet is proof of the vitality of the Anglo Saxon spirit, and also of the independence of thought of the author, for in the middle ages France

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1. My Study Windows 2. Hist. of Eng. Literature.

was the all powerful force in Literature and from her came the forms and ideas which were supreme in all the countries of Europe. In the North her Trouvères were masters in the fields of the Chansons de Geste, of the Romances and of the Tales; in the South, the Troubadours were establishing the lyrical art; but all things else pale into nothing beside the importance of one 13th century book "Le Roman de la Rose," which for its influence on subsequent prose and verse both at home and abroad, might well take precedence of any book in any literature at any time. There was at this time a community of thought for the whole civilized world because all minds were the products of the same training, and were exercised on the same subjects. The most important element in men's lives was theology and that was provided by the Church universal, in which unity of belief and a common attitude towards life were preserved not only by a union of all with the central authority, but also by the wanderings of friars and pilgrims. What makes this influence even the more pronounced in Literature is that practically every author was a cleric. In social life, again, all nations were brought to a greater or less degree of uniformity by the all-prevailing regulations of chivalry & feudalism. In direct mental training at schools and universities, the Church is again a powerful influence, and quite apart from that, the same half-dozen text books were used all the world over, and every student studied Aristotle, Boethius and the problem of Universals; Scholars were brought even more closely together by the habit of wandering from one University to another, and till the 14th century, a student would hardly consider his education complete without spending some

time at Paris. Their subject matter was equally universal. Originality was regarded with suspicion, so every author chose his theme from some classic authority who was recognized everywhere. It might be of a religious or didactic nature and then it would be the seven deadly sins or something connected with the Church services or doctrines, or it might be a Romance, and it was admitted that there were but three subjects to choose from;

"Ne sont que trois matières à nul home attendant
De France et de Bretaigne et de Rome la grant."[1.]

Finally, if the author turned away from homily or romance he would be pretty sure to betake himself to allegory in which he might combine the two, and then it would be on the lines of the "Roman de la Rose," which was in itself famous largely because it was a consummation of all that was most popular in previous literature of the kind.

What makes the 14th century the most interesting age in all intellectual development is that in this period, we find the distinctive characteristics of nationality appearing. Especially was this the case with England. By means of the conquest she had been brought very much under the influence of France; the upper classes who were the only classes to develop a literature of which we have record, were chiefly Normans, and they used the French language and French types of literature. But under the fighting kings Edward I and Edward III, English national feeling, a feeling neither

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1. Jean Bodel, "Chanson des Saisnes".

Anglo-Saxon nor Norman, began to appear, as we have already pointed out, and when the nation was there, poets arose to express its feelings. Even Gower, writing in French could exclaim:

"O gentile Engleterre, a toi j'escrits."

With national characteristics there began to appear also personal characteristics, or perhaps we should rather say, the personal characteristics were the national ones. Up till now most poems had been anonymous, and without trace of the opinions of their authors; even the lyrics were often purely formal, with their passion and sentiment measured out by rule. In Petrarch's sonnets and Chaucer's meditations and digressions we have the advantage of making acquaintance with a man as well as with a book.

In these qualities, a literature universal in form and subject matter, but transfused with elements of personal and national interest, Langland is fairly representative of 14th century letters.

11. Metre and Language.

Langland's use of alliterative measures has provided matter for dispute. It has been most sternly condemned by Courthope,[1] who would assign the cloud of indifference through which Piers the Plowman has been struggling to the monotony of this measure, which lost its semi-lyrical chant with the changes in the structure of the language. The charge of monotony, I think, is entirely unfounded, as I shall attempt to show in my next chapter; here we

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1. Hist. of Eng. Poetry I, p. 246.

must notice what vogue this form had. As we have already seen in discussing his opinions on social questions, Langland's mind was of a conservative type; also, his first aim was to reach the common people, therefore very naturally he chose the old alliterative verse which had persisted among the people even when the French and Latin verse forms were supreme in the 12th and 13th centuries. Langland thus connected himself with the traditions of the glorious past when the English school of Poetry was second to none. In the finished beauties of Cynewulf's verse, this poetry had come to an end - save for its sudden reappearance in Maldon - and it is very remarkable how the stream had flowed on underground to reappear in a whole school of poets in the ~~medieval~~ middle of the 14th century. Though "Piers the Plowman" is the most eminent example in alliterative measures, Langland is but one of a band of poets representing all forms of verse, such as "Sir Gawayne and the Greene Knight," "Pearl", the "Tale of Gemelyn," etc., etc.

The same motives which led Langland to use the old popular measures were probably active in his choice of the vernacular, instead of Latin or French, as the vehicle of his thought, and though Gower could produce works of almost equal merit in all three languages, if we may judge from the Latin verse of his own composition which Langland inserts at rare intervals, it is fortunate that he was led to the choice. Not that I think there was any possibility of his using any other language, for Latin would have been addressed to a limited audience of clerks, and French, even if he was sufficiently well acquainted with it to make use of it, was already passing out of common use, even among the

upper classes. Yet an apology was still thought necessary for using the vernacular, and it is little wonder if an author turned to the staple forms of Latin and French if he wanted recognition for his work, when he contemplated the confusion of dialects which made one Englishman a foreigner to another. The growth of the feeling of nationality was bound to bring men to the use of their own tongue. In Robert of Gloucester we have a fine patriotic note:

"England is a well good land, I ween, of all lands the best".[1] Langland offers no apology for his book, but it might well have been that of Robert of Brunne, who a century before had been equally earnest in denouncing the abuses of his age.[2]

"I made nought for no disours,
Nor for no seggers, nor harpers,
But for the love of simple men
That strange English cannot ken."[3]

Not the least of the advantages to be derived from Piers the Plowman is the light which it casts upon middle English in the transition form, a little more antiquated than Chaucer.[4] Such an examination lies outside the realm of this thesis, nor could it be made altogether advantageously until we have the critical texts promised by Messrs Chambers and Grattan and Mr. Knott, for grammatical forms, dialect and spelling are to be referred very often to Adam Scrivener rather than to the author. Skeat believed that the Laud MS, from

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1. Supra, p 125
1. Schofield, 360. 2. ibid, 415. 3. ibid, 362.
4. Bernard, 16.

which he printed his B text, may be the author's autograph copy, and from this MS, supported by the testimony of others, he concluded that "beyond a doubt, Langland used a mixed dialect,"[1] and as to the part of England it represented he would not offer an opinion. It is generally assigned to the West Midlands, and the West Midlands were the most productive of original work at this time and earlier.[2] The most interesting part about the dialect is that traces have been found in the later texts which would point to London influence on the author's speech. Another interesting point as casting light upon the author's biography is his constant grammatical error of using 'is' and 'was' with plural nouns.[3] This error, his constant awkwardness of grammatical construction,[4] and a suggestion of vagueness in his rules of Latin grammer, might be used as arguments against his having attended the University.

Because of his using the old form of verse, it has been supposed that Langland must also have used "Saxon English." As a matter of fact, a fusion of English and French is well represented for the proportion of Anglo-Saxon words is the same as in Chaucer, i.e., 88%,[5] which, to compare him with modern authors, is practically the same proportion as in Shakespeare, Tennyson and Longfellow. Marsh modifies this statement[6] by the explanation that Langland's vocabulary is really more colloquial than Chaucer's,

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1. Pref II, Text B, p. XLiii. 2 Schofield, 144.
3. Pref II, Text B, p, XLV, e.g. B V, 99; C Vii, 87.
4. e.g. C X, 190. 5. Marsh, 124. 6. Marsh, p 168.

because the words of foreign origin are largely drawn from the habitual language of religious life. This is one reason why Piers the Plowman is certainly more difficult for the modern reader than is Chaucer, and another is due to the demands of alliterative poetry which at times forced the writer to use rare words, though it does not deserve the scorn which Warton heaps upon it.[1] Langland's vocabulary is so copious and comprehensive that perhaps it is in words rather than forms that it is most valuable for linguistic study; besides many words which are very rare, Skeat mentions at least five, which are unique to Piers the Plowman. Once he definitely explains to us the meaning of the word "loller" in "Englesch of our eldres."[2]

111. Allegory.

Allegory, either as interpretation or invention, is the commonest, even if it is not the characteristic mode of thought in the Middle Ages. As all the allegories go back more or less indirectly to the "Roman de la Rose," especially to the work of Guillaume de Lorris who adjusted the principles of allegorical handling which he found in lyrics and theology, to the uses of love poetry. Allegory and symbolism appealed to the medieval mind because it did not have the scientific habit of thinking a thing straight out, but liked to come at it by devious paths, and winding ways. Langland was no exception to the general rule in his use of allegory, for his dreams, his pilgrimages, his

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1. Warton, 1840 II, p 101. 2. C X, 214.

assault on Unity and his seven deadly sins are all a part of a common stock, and we cannot say where he got them, for they were in the air. Miss Owen[1] has made a study of Langland's allegory in comparison with some earlier and contemporary French allegories, and her results serve to show that "There was a common stock of allegorical material of which the writer, or writers, of Piers the Plowman made use,"[1] and that a part of this material are the long discussions, and abrupt transitions, and some of the strange allegorical devices, all of which have been regarded as defects in "Piers the Plowman." Miss Owen was unable to determine whether Langland was directly influenced by any of these poems though it seemed probable that he did know the "Roman de la Rose", but more important than the discovery of a sure and certain influence are the evidences of originality which she found in Piers the Plowman.[2] The essential difference lies in the fact that to the French, the allegory is an affair of the intellect, used for a definite didactic or satirical purpose, while in "Piers the Plowman," it records the author's personal experiences and reveals an individuality very different from any French allegorist.

In Langland's allegory he includes practically all the uses to which this form was put in England. It was most constantly used for instruction in righteousness and the best known expression of this is Grostête's "Chasteau d'Amour," which in common with Piers the Plowman tells the story of man's evil condition, and the life and death of Christ for his salvation. The two draw together

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1. Owen, p 127. 2. ibid, p 131.

In the device of describing Christ's humanity as His assuming the clothes of a man.[1] Langland's political purposes find a companion in the poem "On King Richard's Ministers", which resembles Richard the Redeless rather than Piers the Plowman in its punning conceits on names. The symbolism of the bestiary is again to be illustrated rather from Richard the Redeless than from Piers the Plowman, but the fable could nowhere find a better example than in the Mice and the Ratones of the B prologue. The only other really important allegory in English - for the "Chateau d'Amour" was originally in French and in Latin - is the "Pearl". This uses the same device of a dream, but it differs from Piers the Plowman by being limited to the presentation of one distinct and abstract theory. In the revelation of personal feeling and to a certain extent the character of the man revealed, "Pearl" seems to draw nearer to Piers the Plowman than any other medieval poem.

With the greatest allegory of his time or of all times, Langland has many characteristics in common, for both Dante and Langland, in a vision, give an ideal order of society, based on Scripture, and influenced by the education of the Church, though Langland's conception, perhaps because he is more practical, is not quite so symmetrical and logical. Both represent their own age, and in much the same way, for while we have seen that Langland not only shows us the life of man, but reveals the principles and institutions which are the basis of that life, so Saint Beuve[3] says

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1. C XXII, 12. ~~2. Ibid, 219.~~

3. Causeries de lundi, 1854, p. 208.

of Dante "Le poëme de Dante, c'est l'expression de l'histoire de son temps prise au sens le plus étendue, l'expression non seulement des passions, des haines politiques, des luttes, mais encore de la science, des croyances et des imaginations d'alors", and even as Langland devotes his second poem to the discussion of his own thoughts and feelings, so "l'inspiration première et principale de la Divine Comédie est une inspiration toute personelle, et, si l'on peut dire. lyrique." Both, again, are bounded by their age, they strongly believe in authority, especially the authority of the Church, and so the universality of their appeal comes from their representing more intensely the life of their own time. There are details of resemblance also, due to the common stock of material in the age, such as meeting the 7 deadly sins.

Miss Owen discusses the form of Langland's allegory in the three divisions of Personification, Allegorical Action, and allegorical Devices. The allegorical devices are numerous in Langland, including allegorical armour, clothing, buildings, etc., almost all of which are paralleled in the French allegories, but he has not the patience and subtilty necessary to work them out to the full; thus he begins an elaborate device of a road marked off by brooks and fields called after the ten commandments, and then we hear no more of it. We feel that he was mechanically drawing on the common stock here, his heart and imagination took no heed of it and so the device simply drops out of his tale for Langland never could turn out work by the yard; it must come by inspiration.

In the allegorical action there is the same uncertain quality, so uncertain is it that many critics deny any unity to the poem at all. There are rather important subordinate actions, Piers ploughing, the ~~dreams~~ dinner of Conscience, Christ's jousting and the attack on Unity. ~~Of~~ In each of these we get a definite and vivid impression of the scene, of the doings of the characters, and of the significance of the whole. Though they are entirely unconnected one with another, they are united by the common figure of Piers who is found in each of them. But these subordinate actions and the devices to which I have referred above are but embroidery upon the real texture of the allegory, which is composed of what Miss Owen calls the "Pilgrimage and Quest" motive and in which she finds "what has been perhaps, an unsuspected unity of intention."[1] I would find an even greater unity of intention than does Miss Owen, though this intention does not always pass into execution.

The central idea in the first two visions is the pilgrimage to Truth, a scheme much the same as that of the Pilgrim's Progress, a journey from this life to the next, for between the field full of folk, which represents this world, and the Tower of Truth which they are to seek is the ditch dreadful of sight which is death. The essential weakness of the allegory lies in the fact that Truth is God the Father Himself, and so is the object of the pilgrimage, but also there is truth in the abstract which is to be the manner of the pilgrim's life. It must be remembered that he introduces his allegory not to portray the moral struggles of the Christian

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1. Owen, 63.

life, like Bunyan, but to read lessons on the everyday life in this world, therefore, instead of setting out on the pilgrimage, he introduces Falseness, the counterpart to Truth, to shew how quickly men are turned out of the right way. Though Truth is not forgotten,[1] Langland finds that emphasis is being transferred from Truth to Conscience and Reason, so in despair he wakes up and begins over again with his field once more. This time the whole world is going to seek St Truth,[2] but as the first vision had shewn that search ending in a failure, they must begin with repentance, and so we have the Confessions which do not break the thread of the allegory, for they end with the beginning of the Pilgrimage:

"A thousent of men tho - throngen togederes,
Weopyng and weylyng - for heore wikkede dedes,
Criying upward to Crist - and to his clene moder
To have grace to seche Seint Treuthe - God leue thei so mote."[3]

The figure of Piers, who was destined to take the first part in the poem, is here first introduced as servant of Truth and guide to the pilgrims. In the pilgrimage which only now really begins we find the difference between Piers the Plowman and the Pilgrim's Progress. Langland's object was not primarily to develop his allegory, but to use it as the thread upon which to hang lessons for his fellow men; so instead of taking them out of the world and making them walk along a straight path - which is of course an unnatural state of

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1. A II, 85; 111, 149, 274. 2. A V, 41.
3. A V, 260.

affairs, so that Christian and Faithful do not really touch actual life again until they reach ~~Saint~~ Vanity Fair - he has them carry on a very real every day life of working for Piers, but still with Truth as their Master. At the same time he regards this life as a pilgrimage, for Piers declares his intention of being Truth's

"Pilgrim atte plough - for pore ~~sinners~~ mennes sake,"[1]

and the workers at the half acre are styled "pilgrims". The Vita de Dowel, Dobet ~~and~~ et Dobest is really a separate poem, with some of the same characters reappearing, so we need not call it a lack of unity, that the search changes from one for Truth to one for Dowel. In this second poem the quest is always more or less definitely in mind, and it only ends with the beginning of the fresh search for Piers.

In Langland's use of personification Miss Owen[2] finds something entirely original inasmuch as all the personifications are living persons. In consequence of this his characters are not overburdened with allegorical devices, and often the original didactic intention is entirely lost sight of in the interest of working out the character. This vitality of the persons I think was due not only to the quality of Langland's mind, but also to another influence which was at work, though not so directly as allegory, in shaping the form of Piers the Plowman - I mean the miracle and morality plays.

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1. A V11, 95.

2. Owen, 34.

The Morality plays arose from that same love of abstractions as gave rise to allegory. These plays in turn helped to establish this mode of thinking and when men saw Mankind, and the Virtues and Vices moving and acting before their eyes, naturally the presentation of them became real and vivid. Langland knew that his characters would be perfectly familiar, for it was as natural to that age to see "Wit" or "Pride" walking round in the flesh as it is to the modern child to read tales of ~~criminals~~ animals thinking and conversing. The type to which Piers the Plowman bears most resemblance is the conflict of the Vices and Virtues, the type which was most strongly developed, and from it he may have taken his idea of the dialogues in the second poem. Besides getting realism and dramatic force from the Moralities, Langland is directly indebted to them, and more especially to the Miracle Plays for his subjects, his characters and his mise en scène. The "Castle of Perseverance" may have furnished him with his opening scene with its Tower of Truth and Castle of Care, and later it may have given suggestions for the siege of ~~the~~ Unity Holy Church. The most striking resemblance is that to the Coventry Mysteries where at times such as the Harrowing of Hell, a very close parallel can be drawn. Of course Langland went for his material to the original source, the Gospel narratives and the Gospel of Nicodemus, but in presentation, he was influenced by the Mystery, and also, probably, by the "Chateau d'Amour." This resemblance with the Coventry Plays is especially interesting because they are the cycle which introduced most allegory. Besides the presentation we can see a similarity of idea. The definite aim of the Miracle Play was always the ~~study~~ struggle

of good against evil, and as in Piers, there is a strong tendency to pessimism for the characters usually degenerate, mankind generally gives in to evil. To another type also Langland shows resemblance, the type of the Coming of Death. Taking everyman as representative, though it did not appear in England till the next century, we find the same ideas of the temptation of man by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, in Langland's Vision of Fortune; and this vision was substituted in the B text for a much closer parallel to Everyman in A XII. Here Hunger and Fever seek Life and when faced by Death Langland can find support nowhere save in Dowel.

While Langland thus drew suggestions from the plays, he in turn acted upon them, and Miss Keiller[1] has worked out a comparison shewing that the Macro Play of Mankind "depended for its central situation, its characters, its surroundings and general trend of thought" on the scene of Piers' ploughing.

IV. Tendencies of 14th Century Thought.

Even as allegory was triumphant in the realm of form, so didacticism was all prevailing in the realm of 14th century thought. The change from romance to morals might be attributed to the change in the national life, the dawning feeling of democracy, the passing of power from the highest nobility, the rise of commerce and industry - all the respectability of a middle class state, and the

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1. Publications of the Modern Language Association, XXVI, 2.

increasing interest, and the discovery of poetry, in the common things of life. The development is parallel with that in the 19th century when the waning of French influence and the rise of the middle class state produced, or was accompanied by, Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning, all of whom have close affinity with Langland. The morality, the sense of duty, and the contemplation which Taine finds in Langland, are not only Anglo-Saxon, there is a hortative character to all compositions at this time, and in England this was super-imposed upon the already serious Teutonic outlook upon life. The allegories, even when devoted to some secular subject, probably love, are full of theological or scientific discussion. The Tales all had a moral tacked on to them, and even the Romances were brought under the universal influence, and we find "Gawayne and the Grene Knight" teaching the lesson of steadfastness under temptation as frankly as do any of the "Idylls of the King"". The one exception to this rule is lyric verse, a branch of poetry which was now first appearing, for though "Deor" and "The Wanderer" are of lyric inspiration, the first poem with what Saintsbury[1] calls the true "lyric cry" is the "Cuccu Song" of 1240, after which we get no more till about 1310 when there appeared some of the prettiest things in all Literature - "Alison", "Blow, Northerne Wynd" and "Spring." Each one of them is a darling, a perfectmjoy of a song. with its melody, and its freshness, and its love for life and nature. The art of self-expression seems to go hand in hand with appreciation of nature and does not appear in primitive literature.

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1. Flourishing of Romance, p. 212.

But though they are the products of a mature and skilled art of poetry these poems have all the fascination of early youth; and then they went to sleep for a hundred years to wake up in the Elizabethan age as fair and fresh as did the princess at her lover's kiss. This love of nature is found in the Romances, of course in Chaucer, and also in the "Pearl" poet, and that not only the regular Rose-garden, May-morning nature, but appreciation of the wilder aspects, and the fierceness of winter,

"Ferly fair was the fold, for the frost clanged
In red ruddied upon rak rises the sun."[1]

"Piers the Plowman" belongs wholly to its age in its didactic qualities, even the lyric elements, the revelation of himself in the second poem are of a highly moral turn. But his love for nature, for brooks and birds and flowers, and especially for summer, is as keen as that of the poet who sang:

"Lenten ys come with love to toune,
With Blosem and with briddes roune,
That al this blisse bryngeth."[2]

In this love of nature, Langland is putting on the jewels of the romances, even as they at times array themselves in his russet robes to instruct mankind. But the warlike array of such poems as "Havelock the Dane" and "King Horn," or the gauzes and lace of the sentimental romances, is a garb in which Langland never appears. Especially incongruous is the latter, but in the vigor and vitality of characters in such a poem as Havelok, and some of its descriptions of life, there is a certain similarity with "Piers the Plowman."

1. Gawayne & the Grene Knight, III. 2. Spring Song, 1310.

The three elements introduced into Medieval didactician by the middle class developments of this age, says Francke,[1] are, support of democracy, opposition to the Roman Church, and the exhibition of classical influence. To what extent is Langland representative of these forms? The feeling for democracy took two forms, both of which are illustrated in Piers the Plowman. There are those theoretical forms discussing the condition of the poor, sometimes asserting the brotherhood and equality of man, sometimes more closely in Langland's vein, glorifying labor.

"Nul n'est vilains si de cuer non,
Nul n'est gentils hom ensement,
S'il n'uevre de cuer gentement."[2]

Recognition of the poor and sympathy with them is found in the ballads, but these more often belong to the second class, which was far the more numerous, of attack on existing conditions, political songs, interesting because of their genuine passion and their expression of the feeling of the day. Of Langland's connection with these I shall speak again, but here I should like to mention as typical of them the "Parliament of the thre Ages" and "Wynnere and Wastoure", because not only do they attack much the same conditions as Piers the Plowman, but Langland was probably indebted to them, at least in his opening. Other poems in turn drew their inspiration directly from "Piers the Plowman," and especially attractive to these imitators was the figure of the plowman himself. In this connection we must notice that the

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1. Pub. Mod. Lang. Ass'n, 1890. 2. "Fourteenth Century," p 22.

suggestion has been brought forward that as a matter of fact Piers may not be Langland's own creation at all, but a piece of traditional folk-lore.[2] Of this however there is no proof. The most remarkable of these imitations is "Peres the Ploughmans Crede", which imitates "Piers the Plowman" in using the motive of a quest, in its satire on the friars, and especially the character of the Ploughman. There are many others, but none of them need special mention, unless it be "The Crowned King", which follows Langland in its presentation of the relation between King and Parliament.

These political poems pass into Francke's second division, for in them we find innumerable attacks upon the evils in the Church, the luxury, ignorance and sin of the clergy, and especially a fierce attack on the friars. Once again, Langland is thoroughly representative of his time. I do not know of any works in English actually attacking Church doctrines except those of Wiclif and his followers, and with them I have already shown that Langland has no sympathy. Few except those who were openly schismatic could go further than Langland, who as we have seen, will attack even the Pope and urges the disestablishment of the Church. In this connection we might note that Langland's prophecy of the king who would seize the lands of the Church is quite characteristic of his time, for Wells[1] lists some 8 or 10 prophetic writings in the vernacular, besides numerous others in Latin and French, going back

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1. Wells, 220.
2 Trevelyan

to Geoffrey of Monmouth's Books of Merlin in the early 12th century.

The exhibition of direct classical influence it is harder to find in English literature, perhaps we might look for it in the sermons and homilies which were composed by men trained in Boethius and Aristotle. In "Piers the Plowman" there are evidences of it in his constant reference to Cato and other classical authorities, and also in the evidence his poem affords of his scholastic training, as we have shewn above. Indirectly all the literature of the age was thus influenced, for the abstractions and personifications first appeared in Boethius and the "Psychomachia" of Prudentius, which passed thence into all literature by way of the "Roman de la Rose." Besides these three forms which Prof. Franche chose as representative of the democratic tendencies of this period there are other forms of didactic literature with which he is connected, but on which we need dwell in no detail. Two types, however, are worth mention as showing where Langland went for material. First there are the numerous paraphrases of the Bible and commentaries on it; 35 of these Wells[1] finds in the Vernacular, a good many of them in verse. No doubt Langland was influenced by them in his innumerable paraphrases of the Bible, especially the Gospel story. The other type is that of Homilies and Legends, which are inseparable because the legends so often furnished subject matter for the sermons. Langland gives us several samples of Medieval sermons from the lips of Reason and Conscience and from the legends, especially the "Legenda Aurea", he drew numerous examples to point his moral or adorn his tale.

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1. Wells, 397.

V. How Langland interprets the 14th Century.

It is a part of the democratic tendency in 14th Century Literature that we should be provided with an abundance of material revealing to us the conditions of life. The quality and scope of Langland's interpretation of the 14th century may be best determined by comparing him with other contemporary authorities and these authorities fall into two classes, statistics and pure literature. If we compare Piers the Plowman with such books of statistics as the Rolls of Parliament and the Liber Albus of the City of London we find much the same subject matter, less detail, but more general effect. Speaking of the power of Parliament, M. Jusserand says[1]: "In two documents only does that power appear great and impressive as it really was, and those documents are: the Rolls wherein are recorded the acts of Parliament, and the poem of William Langland" In Langland we see the dignity of Parliament for he has skill in giving a general impression of the state of affairs, and we find the power of the Commons summed up in the ~~first~~ one line.

"Might of the Commons - made him to regne."

In the Rolls, on the other hand, while a general impression is given of minute and far-reaching power, Parliament seems to be chiefly concerned with individuals rather than with principles or general legislation. Just the same is true of the Liber Albus, but it is particularly interesting comparing these two because Langland tells us so much about London Life, and here we can follow out the same difficulties with regraters, adulterations of food, and so forth.

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1. Jusserand, P. P. p 107.

But of course the great difference is that the books of statutes are dealing with abstractions, Langland is dealing with men and women and their feelings about those statutes, or the effect of the statutes on them. Half way between statistics and pure literature stand the chronicles but there is not much direct historical information in Piers the Plowman. We have a few references to slight happenings such as the great wind, and the famine in London when Chicestre was mayor; there is mention of the plague quite frequently, a reference to the Statute of Laborers, and hints of misgovernment and the king's need of money; we hear too of disastrous events in the French Wars and of the murder of Edward II, but this is marvellously little for a period so full of important events as was Langland's life time. Perhaps, as has been suggested, he did not dare to be too definite, but it seems to me he contains the breath and finer spirit of the Chronicles, for while we are not told the facts we get the spirit of the times which found expression in the struggles with the Pope, the war with France, Wiclif's movement and the peasant revolt.

When we turn to the realm of Literature, there is a closer resemblance in manner though not in matter. First there are all those political satires and poems on the evils of the time to which we have alredy referred; these deal with much the same abuses and approach them in much the same attitude. But "Piers the Plowman" is much more than these, because he is constructive as well as destructive, and he makes the time live before us. In this respect, perhaps the Paston Letters seem the nearest to him of anything,

for though they are in the next century, they treat of the same manor house life, and also, chiefly, because we are dealing with such essentially living persons. Of course, in the letters we have the added interest of dealing with one family; we should have a closer parallel if all the events in the poem were grouped round Piers' own family, if we knew, for example, that the poor woman in the cottage,[1] was Piers' daughter; and yet a girl called "Do-right-so-or-thy-Mother-schal-the-bete" could never, I think, have been so real as her father, nor could we feel such interest in her as in the unfortunate Elizabeth Paston with her many beatings and her five suitors; and there is nothing so romantic in Piers the Plowman as the true love between Margery Paston and Richard Calle. In such poems as are collected in the "Babees' Book" the didactic spirit is quite like Langland's, but they deal with the life of the highest nobility which hardly came within Langland's range, for except in the affairs of the kingdom, Langland seldom rises higher than manorial society, the subject too is quite remote, for he is too much in earnest to be concerned with matters of etiquette. In the same way the Romances give us many interesting details of information, but they deal with a different class of life, so that they are supplementary rather than corroborative to Langland's pictures. Also they look at life from a different standpoint, and see the festival side, Langland is concerned with ~~their~~ its duties and failings. This same comparison applies to Chaucer; his people are out on

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1. C X, 71.

holiday, while Langland's "pleiden ful seylde."[1] In fact, between the two, one gets a full picture of the age, which is complete in neither. The 14th century was an age of magnificience and of squalor; of new learning and of deep thinking; of modern inventions and of Anglo-Saxon traditions; of victorious French wars and of a crushed and deceived peasant revolt; of rich merchants and nobles, and of downtrodden workmen and villeins; of skin-deep polish and of earnest rudeness; of proud joy and of heart-eating sorrow; of Chaucer and of Langland. They began from the opposite poles. Chaucer was the prptegé of John of Gaunt, the hated of commons and of clergy to both of which classes Langland belonged, and yet in many ways, the two draw together. The characters they introduce are often the same. The courteous and kindly if unpractical knight who was Piers patron might well have been a younger brother of Chaucer's Knight who

"loved chivalrye
Trouthe and honour, freedom and curteisye."

The pleasant characters of the plowman and the parson one feels must have some connection with Langland's hero; it would seem as if the poore Persoun, who would not run to London, and who taught Christ's lore and "first he folwed it himselve" were framed on the pattern which Langland lays down, while in the Clerk of Oxenford I think I recognize Langland himself. Even so, the sins of the monks and friars in Langland are living before us in the hunting,

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1. C I, 22.

luxurious wandering monk and the friar so attentive to women, so easy of confession and such a good beggar. But the interests of the two creators are different. The representations of business and of labor are mere sketches in Chaucer; they did not interest him to the full, and yet Traill[1] declares, and very reasonably, that "the idea of representing the various grades of the commonwealth and of making them undertake a pilgrimage, is without doubt due to Langland's Piers the Plowman." Where Chaucer adds to Langland chiefly, I think, is in introducing the life of the Court, the ordinances of chivalry, and the romantic side of feudalism, which in Langland are seen only from a distance and without sympathy. So we find in Chaucer that elaborate code of behavior of knights to ladies of which we find no hint in Langland. On the other hand, Chaucer shows an interest, a sort of superficial one I think, in the problems of the age; there is mention of Jack Straw and his revolt[2] and reproofs to the evil ways of knights.[3]

Now, finally, after finding so much which Langland gives us in common with our other sources, and that which they give which we do not find in him, does Langland give us anything which we find nowhere else? what is the unique gift which he brings, which would never have been ours had "Piers the Plowman" not been written? Jusserand[4] has already answered this question and he tells us that in the Visions we find the ideas of the greatest number: average

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1. Traill II, 292. 2. Nun's Priests' Tale, 3. Parson's Tale

4 P.P. 103-106.

English opinion, the background which gives force to the picture, are the active passions of the multitude, "All the latent possibilities of volcanoes which this inward fire represents" and in forming this background he has conveyed the impression of a distinctly English crowd, with their enthusiasm, anger and joy. "Langland thus shows us what we find in none of his contemporaries; crowds, groups, classes, living and infividualized; the merchant class, the religious world, the Commons of England. He is above all the only author who gives a sufficient and contemporaneous idea of that grand phenomenon, the power of Parliament."

To this I think we might add that, while others do introduce merchants, ecclesiastics and members of commons, Langland is the only one who writes sympathettically of the humblest classes. Chaucer introduces neither the very highest nor the very lowest; but while bishops and kings do not suffer from lack of attention elsewhere, we could hardly have any conception of the swarming class of parasites on Society - the beggars, the hermits and pardoners, the "wastours", without Langland's vivid pictures. Though we do hear about the independent poor, I do not think we could ever have learned to love them, even while recognizing their faults, had not Langland chosen one day to act as guide to an expedition amongst them.

The peculiarity and importance of his position seems to me is that he stands between the two classes which we have just discussed, one-half way between books of statistics and books of pure literature. The statistics are like seeds or bulbs, which look dry and unpromising enough, but drop them into good soil like the

mind of Mr. Jessop or Mr. Jusserand, and behold, the living plant and flower are produced. "Piers the Plowman"on the other hand is already a thriving plant which can be a joy and profit to the ordinary individual. We have the accuracy of statistics combined with the vitality of pure literature. The essence of the whole matter, I think, lies in the character of Langland. "Piers the Plowman"on account of its length, of its variations and inconsistencies and fluctuations presents us with the life of a human being, so that it is almost as good as having a 14th century man stand before us in the flesh, and say ' ask me what you will and I will tell you how we acted in my time." And it is no ordinary man either; it is a man of the acutest powers of observation and a well developed intellect, so that besides telling us what happened, he can give us the significance of events, and, most important of all, how men thought in those days.

This part which Langland plays in the interpretation of the 14th century is very much that now held by the novel, in so far as we may say that one of its functions is to "catch the manners living as they rise." From the times of the"Lives of the Saints", which was the only form of novel with which Langland was acquainted, up to the present day, fiction has proved pliable matter for historians, though not of scientific accuracy, by its expression of the distinctive features of its age. Now this is exactly the characteristic to be found in Langland. In him, as in novels, we see the life of his time incidentally to the main purpose of the book, and through the actions of the characters. The parallel can

be amplified further outside the sphere of interpretation of their age inasmuch as novelists constantly enter the field of the moralist and instruct or reprove as well as interpret and entertain. Langland too shows one of the most important characteristics of the novelist in the skill with which he depicts character, and the vividness of individual scenes. Of course, there is no resemblance in form, for though we have the possibilities of a plot in the marriage of Mede, Langland has not the narrative skill and the architectural ability to carry it through, even had he desired to do so. The succession of scenes with which we are presented are not even of a type of such as the book as Tristram Shandy, for the scenes are there, not as illustrations of character, or for their own interest, but to point a moral or to reprove a vice. When Mede has fulfilled her purpose of shewing up the corruptions in lawcourts, etc, we hear no more of her, and whether she married Conscience we neither know nor care. As there is no narration, even so there is no development of character. The character Piers who is present all thfough does of course change, but this is allegorical, not natural development. His character sketches rather resemble the rapid drawings of Earle's Microcosmographia; sketches, which may indeed be regarded as one of the ancestors, perhaps rather a collateral ancestor, of the novel, of modern writers. One might expect to feel a sense of brotherhood between this didactic poem and the virtuous novels of the 18th century whose object was the criticism of life, to teach moral lessons. As a matter of fact Langland seems to approach more nearly to the great novelists of the 19th century, partly because of the resemblance that exists between the 14th century and the 19th., and

more on account of the character of the man. Langland had too much humor to fall into the platitudes and long drawn agonies of Richardson's sentiment, and too much common sense and too keen a knowledge of life to attempt to teach the lesson that virtue is always rewarded. Slushy sentiment is the very last thing to be found in"Piers the Plowman." The novelist whom he seems to approach most closely is Dickens. Both write with a definite object, of shewing up the evil in their times, and contrasting it with some ideal; some of Dickens' books read like a highly elaborated tract, and in"Bleak House" the whole object of the book is its moral purpose. They are even at one in some of the objects of their attack; thus to promote compassion for the unfortunate and the erring, while punishing the hopelessly wicked, we may say is the definite purpose of"Oliver Twist," as well as being the undercurrent to all his books; the lawyers, for whom Langland can never find a good word meet equally hard treatment in Dickens, and in"Hard Times"we find the thesis of the book is that the law should be the same for all, while Langland urges that the State should pay lawyers so that the poor may have equal rights with the rich. Their method of attack is the same too; namely, by means of satire poured upon typical characters, Langland's characters are more openly allegorical perhaps, but I think we could easily pick out an assembly of the seven deadly sins in Dickens and his names are hardly less symbolic than Langland's. The special sins that Dickens loves to assail is hypocrisy, and Langland could present some powerful rivals to Dickens' gallery of humbugs. Humbug of all kinds

Dickens falls upon - literary, political, moral and religious. Lamgland deals chiefly with religious imposters, but he has a word for "faitours" in other walks of life also, and as Mackail[2] says, he "touches off the whining beggar with as keen a satire as Dickens." Some of the characters are almost startlingly alike, e.g., the friar, that glutton and hypocrite who attends Conscience's feast, and the hypocrite and glutton Chadband, the "vessel" who is entertained by Mrs. Snagsby. The friar, as well as Chadband, we might say "is rather a consuming vessel and can wield such weapons of the flesh as a knife and fork, remarkably well."[1]

This vivid sarcastic way of presenting scenes and characters constantly appears, though Langland is too much in earnest, for his humor to carry him into farce the way Dickens' so often does. It is noticeable how fond both are of a scene concerned with eating and drinking. The range of characters is something the same; Dickens is not successful in handling the aristocracy, but he does shew to the best advantage in his men of the people and those social parasites whom Langland falls upon so fiercely. Dickens too has that ability in painting crowds which Langland possesses in so marked a degree. Both show the same tendency to insularity, and in England itself, the life which they give us is chiefly that of the great city.

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1. Bleak House, XIX.
2. Cornhill Mag.

Chapter V.

PIERS PLOWMAN, THE POEM

We have found that Piers the Plowman is representative of certain literary developments of the 14th century, and that he standa in sharp contrast to others, but if we are to take this poem as representative of 14th century literature we must judge it independently as a literary production belonging not to any special period. So far we have been studying it in its extra-poetic value, for though it may be one function of poetry to be "a criticism of life", it is a function which it holds in common with the historian and the philosopher. It is but just, therefore, after shewing how clearly Langland was representative of his time, and how penetratingly and truthfully he has left record of that time, to examine in how far he belongs to all time, and to do reverence to him as a poet. Since "it is a matter of the simplest demonstration, that no man can be really appreciated but by his equal or superior,"[1] I do not for a moment propose to test Piers the Plowman with any measuring rod of my own device. The plan upon which I shall proceed in this chapter, is to select from other poets, their dicta on the nature of poetry, and attempt to show in how far Piers the Plowman illustrates the qualifications demanded. In studying a poem we must look at it from two points of view, for "the Poet creates the ornamental and moves the deepest and noblest parts of our being."[2] Let us examine first the more concrete, the form.

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1. Ruskin, Modern Painters, I,I,I. 2. Poetry as a Fine Art

1. Poetic Form.

Looking at form, in the most rigid sense of the word, and so laying aside for the moment all ideas of emotion and musical quality, we may say that the cardinal distinction of verse as distinct from prose is that it shall have a "repeat", be "patterned lang".[1] The pattern in Piers the Plowman is in the form of alliteration,[2] in which the repeat consists of 3 out of the 4 stressed syllables in a double line beginning with the same rime-letter. Principal stress should, in perfect regularity, fall on the first stressed syllable of the second half line, and to this must answer the two sub-letters of the first half line. Langland avoids that monotony which Courthope finds in alliterative verse by varying not only the unstressed syllables, but also his alliterated syllables. Sometimes his repeat fails altogether, or the chief letter will be omitted: these are changes which we can only regard as flaws, but some of his other alterations seem to add subtle qualities to the rhythm. Significance will be added to an unimportant word by making it bear the chief rime-letter, though here too we may find the flaw of chief stress being laid on a preposition or occuring in the middle of a word. Further variety is given by introducing four repeats into a line, or using different letters for each half line.

We are not very far on our way to poetry with just a repeat, therefore let us proceed with another definition, that definition of Phillips, which Mackail[3] adapts into what he thinks may have been Milton's . "Poetry is rhythm in verses". Rhythm is effected by the distribution of stress, so that even where the rime letter is

1. Nature of Poetry, p 11.
2 Skeat - Percy Folio III, throughout
3. Lectures on Poetry, 11.

missing rhythm may still be preserved if the ictus of the strong syllable is forceful enough, though it is much more likely to be unobserved. In alliterative verse an infinite variety is possible and suggestions and shades of meaning may be introduced which would be entirely ruled out under the stricter code of quantitative metre, or even in the freeer forms of English accentuation. By a multiplication of unstressed syllables, especially in the "catch" or anacrusis at the beginning of the second half line, we obtain a slow-moving rhythm, with a sense of fulness and completion, admirably adapted to certain effects,

"And grete loue and lyking - for eche of hem
loveth other,"[1]

while, on the other hand, by eliminating as many as possible, we can introduce vigorous, almost brusque emphasis:

"Lesyng of tyme - treuthe wote the sothe."[2]

By total omission of the rime-letter in the second half, there is a curious impression of the second half being there only as a comment on the first half,

"But alle is buxumnesse there and bokes - to rede and to lerne".[3]

The preponderating unit of Middle England alliterative verse is the ~~point~~ foot which Skeat calls a "dominant", i.e. a loud, followed by two softs, the measure of a dactyll, and with much of the same character. The effect of this metre is very swift, as can easily be detected by reading a few lines of Piers Plowman, and then a few

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1. BX, 305. 2. B IX, 98. 3, B X, 303.

lines of Chaucer. The effect, Skeat[1] points out, is like a charge of cavalry, a comparison which naturally suggests the similar effect of the Virgilian Dactyllic hexameter

"Quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum."[2]

In general there is but little resemblance but the Vigilian slow grandeur, and the unmeasured alliterative line. The characteristic most often assigned to it is that of vigour, a sort of sturdy John Bull force there is about this essentially English rhythm, but also from the freedom which I have already remarked, it shows a versatility which can adapt itself to description or to pathos, as well as to vigorous action or lively discussion. Langland never allows himself to be hampered by the ties of his metre, sound he will ever sacrifice to sense, and as he grew older his alliterativeness slightly decreased.[3] When rhythm is cunningly handled there is a quality enters into it which transforms verse into poetry, and we fulfil Dryden's definition that poetry should be "articulate music". Alliterative verse is well compared with music,[4] for in both, while the accents must remain constant, the number of notes is indifferent. though every note not only the rhythmical stress, contribute to the general effect. When we examine his lines in detail we find Langland master of the mysteries of English sounds. Listen to the soft full vowels and the gentle consonants of his opening lines:

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1. Percy Folio III, p XXXVI.
2. Aeneid, VIII, 596.
3. M. Deakin . Mod. Lang Review
4. Marsh, p 543.

"Bote in a Mayes morwynge - on Maluerne hulles;
I was weori of wandringe - and wente me to reste
Under a brod banke - bi a bourne syde,
And as I lay and leonede - and lokede on the waters,
I slumberde in a slepyng - hit sownede so murie." [2]

Not a single harsh jarring sound is there here; in the later texts I do not think it is an improvement to have introduced the short, crisp ac in place of the lingering bote. The music in these lines recalls the description of Sleep's dwelling in Spenser,[3] master of melody, but in tender sound it most resembles Wordsworth's mumuring sonnet

" A flock of sheep that leisurely pass by,
One after one; the sound of rain, and bees
Mumuring."

Certainly a critic who would describe these lines as "tame, inert, if not actually lifeless",[4] shows a mind "fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils". There is the same singing quality, the "charm of words in tuneful order" in the lines "Fortune me fette
Into the londe of longynge - and loue hue me broughte
And in a mynour hihte myddelerd - hire made me to loke." [5]

But it would be a mistake to think Langland's music is all of this soft variety. More often it might be described as a ringing chant:

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1. Marsh, p 543. 2. A pr. 5. 3. Faerie Queene I, I, 41.

4. Quiller Couch, 182. 5. C XV, 168.

"Ac pore peple, thi prisoneres - lorde, in the put of myschief,
Comforte tho creatures - that moche care suffren
Thorw derth, thorw drouth - alle her dayes here
Wo in wynter tymes - for wantyng of clothes,
And in somertyme selde - soupen to the fulle,
Comforte thi careful - Cryst, in thi ryche,
For how thow confortest alle creatures - clerkes bereth witnesse"[1]

Sometimes it concentrates into a short threatening trumpet-note,

" For Hunger hyderwardes - hyeth hym faste;
He shal awake thorw water - wasters to chaste,
Ar fewe yeres be fulfilled - famyne shal aryse".[2]

Or sinks into pleading minors, as in the whole passage on the joyless life of the poor which ends

"For to wrother - hele was he wrought - that neuere was Ioye yshape
Angeles that in helle now been - hadden som tyme Ioye.[3]

In other passages, in the bitterness of his soul, we have crashing force:

"Accorsede theoues, unkynde Cristene men - for covetise & enuye
Sleeth a man."[4]

Or a trenchant vigor that one hesitates to class as music

"And gnawen God with their gorge - when their guttes fullen."

For lines of glory and majesty we find abundant example in the 21st passus; perhaps nowhere does the poet's power over his instrument

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1. B XIV, 174-180.
2. C IX, 345.
3. C XVI, 290-302
4. C XX, 254.

appear to better advantage, though I have chosen my examples elsewhere to show that the whole poem is impregnated with music.

When we come to resolve the form of the verse into its component parts, and study the images and the diction, we are faced with the difficulties of calculating the influence which archaic forms have upon our modern minds. If "every original language near its source, is the chaos of a cyclic poem"[1] how much credit are we to apportion to Langland?

"The greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor . . . it is a mark of genius."[2] Metaphors are not abundant in Latin poetry; we hear of the Ship of State, but the image that they prefer is the elaborate simile, and, by way of Italian poetry, Chaucer introduced this style of simile into England. In Anglo-Saxon poetry on the other hand, in Beowulf, e.g., we come across an occasional "fugle" or "style gelicost," but similes are very rare, while metaphors in the shape of Kennings meet us in every line. Langland is true to the Anglo-Saxon tradition, for though there are a good many similes, they are all of the simplest kind; I do not think even Sellert has been able to discover an elaborate one, though some of them are very expressive:

"As a leke hadde yleye - longe in the sonne,
So loked he with lene chekes - lourynge foule."[3]

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1. Shelley, 269.
2. Arist. XXII, 9.
3. B V, 82.

"The poet" it has been said "is a thinker in images." Now this is an essential quality of Langland's mind; in fact, a part of the whole medieval mind, as I have said, is an inability to think of a thing straight; they must come at it in a roundabout way. The modern mind we are pleased to think works in a straight line of truth, of scientific exactness; the medieval mind pursued the curved line of beauty. We find Langland thinking in images like his contemporaries, so he writes an allegory, his whole poem is one great image, and its component parts are a series of smaller images, personification and symbolism. Or if we take 'images' in its smaller sense as metaphors, we find some very lovely ones in the poem, especially when his mood is most exalted; the finest are connected with Christ. We have the vivid expression, which says so much

"But Christ in a pore mannes apparel pursueth
us ever."

In the 21st passus we have a beautiful image of Christ's love:

"For ich thaw am lord of lyf - loue is my
drynke.
And for that drynke todaye - deyede, as hit
semede;
Ac ich wol drynke of no dich - ne of no
deop cleregie,
Bote of comune coppes - alle Cristene soules."[2]

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1. Poetry as a Fine Art, 34.

2. C XX1, 406.

Some of his most effective images are gained by his use of verbs:

"Charite - ye cheweth and deuoureth,"[1]

and there is the line which reminds us of Shakespeare:

"The sorwe of deyinge
The which unknitteth al kare - and consynge
is of reste."[2]

We have already spoken of the poet's vocabulary in dealing with his interpretation of 14th century literature, but we must say something about so disputed a point as poetic diction. Coleridge's dictum of "The best words in the best order" being poetry, expresses the importance of due selection and combination. But in diction more than in anything else it is difficult for the modern mind to appreciate the exact connotation of the medieval word, or, even more, the medieval use of a familiar word. "Early risers of literature who gather phrases with the dew still on them have their poetry done for them, as it were, by their vocabulary."[3] When one comes across so charming a word, e.g., as "Fauntekyn" one does feel the middle ages have an advantage, and if we agree with Aristotle that "that diction is lofty and raised above the common-place which employs unusual words,"[4] a 14th century poem scores again by mere reason of its age each time it brings in a "wanhope" or an "yknowe". On the other hand, the poet may suffer from the debasement of words, which makes seem ridiculous the introduction into a serious passage that Satan "out of heuene hobleden faste."[5]

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1. C III, 140. 2. B XVIII, 213. 3. Lowell.
4. Poetics, XXII, 1. 5. A I, 113.

Langland answers very well to Wordsworth's theory of poetic diction: "My purpose was to imitate, and, as far as is possible, to adopt the very language of men."[1] Seldom, if ever, can Langland be accused of going out of his way to strive after effect other than that which is imparted by his own passion. On the other hand, he dose not hesitate to use the word which best expresses his thought, no matter if it be strange. It has been claimed that in the middle ages there was a tendency to great literary decoration and efflorescence of language,[2] especially tempting to fulfil the exactions of alliterative verse. This accounts for the number of unusual words which we have already noted, but Langland's style can never be described as florid or strained except in one or two places where we see the influence of dialectic. One cannot but be impressed by the resemblance between Wordsworth and Langland. Take, e.g., "the Leechgatherer;" here we have a figure which would at once have appealed to Langland - poor but diligent; and Langland describes exactly the same idea of the "resolution and independence" of the poor:

"Many other men - that muche wo suffren
Bothe a-fyngrede and a-furst-to turne the fayre out warde,
And beth abashed for to begge - and wolle nat be aknowe
What hem needeth at here neihebores - at non and at even."[3]

Yet there is "a breath and finer spirit" about Wordsworth. Langland cannot turn aside from his terrible earnestness, to frame fair lines like those with which the "Leechgatherer" begins:

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1. Pref. to Lyrical Ballads 2. Ker Dark Ages, 35.
3. C X, 84.

"And with her feet she from the plashy earth
Raises a mist; that, glittering in the sun,
Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run."

But we must not attribute this discrepancy entirely to their personal qualifications. Wordsworth gained somewhat from his time and inheritance, for if, as Keats[1] says, there has been a "general and gregarious advance of intellect" which makes Wordsworth in any way deeper than Milton, how great is the advance between Langland and Wordsworth! Though Wordsworth does at times descend to such banalities as "My lordly dressing-gown, I pass it by", he never fell so far from selection "made with true taste and feeling" as to represent Holy Church reproving a suppliant with the expression "Thou dotede daffe."[3] This again may be referred to the age which welcomed buffoonery in Miracle plays, and grotesques in Cathedral choirs. The rudeness of some of the expressions can be forgiven for their vigor

"The gome that so gloseth chartres - a goky he is yholden,
So is he a goky, by God - that in the godspel failleth."[4]

Both poets show at times a tendency to produce passages where we feel that what they are saying could have been said as wisely and as well in prose; and here Wordsworth really deserves more blame for he at times deliberately sets to work and writes a prosey poem, whereas we need not wonder if Pegasus' wings at times grow weary in a

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1. Letters May 3 1818. 2. Pref. to the Lyrical Ballads
3. C II, 139. 4. C IV, 120.

flight of 7000 verses. One sin Langland is guilty of into which Wordsworth never fell, and that is his fondness for conceits and quibbles, which almost suggests a forerunner of Euphues, e.g., the mysterious line for which Bradley has suggested so brilliant an interpretation:

"With half a laumpe lyne in Latyne - ex vi transicionis".[2]

But in spite of the assertions and reassertions of the preface to the second edition, there is a distinction between the diction of poetry and that of prose. "As the elements of metre owe their existence to a state of increased excitement, so the metre itself should be accompanied by the natural language of excitement,"[5] and though Wordsworth would hardly subscribe to Aristotle's contention[3] that only enough ordinary language should be used to render the subject perspicuous, while its general character must be unusual, rare, metaphorical, lengthened, he does admit "It will naturally and upon fit occasions lead him to passions the language of which, if selected truely and judiciously must necessarily be dignified and variegated, and alive with metaphors and figures." At the call of emotion Langland produces the most lovely lines, forceful but simple, lines that might be described in Milton's time honored phrase as "simple, sensuous and passionate."

"And al the wikkednesse in this worlde - that man myghte worche or thynke,
He is no more to the mercye of God - than in the see a geede."[4]

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1. M.L.R., V. 340.
2. B XIII, 151.
3. Poetics XXII, 1.
4. B V, 290.
5 Coleridge, quoted Quiller Couch, 65

Perhaps in simple chastity none is better than

"Pitous liche and paal - as prison that deyeth,
The lord of lyf and of light - tho leyde hus eyen to gederes."[1]

While in more exalted spirit we have such a line as

"Now y seo wher hus soule - cometh seilinge hiderwardes
with glorie and with gret light - God hit is, ich wot wel."[2]

Lines such as these are faultless in detail and the effect is so perfect that they come upon us like the joys of nature - moonlight on the snow, or the song of birds at dawn.

After all is said and done, the most important attribute of poetic style, as of any other, is that which Wordsworth expresses in the quotation just cited, or in the words of a greater than Wordsworth - "decorum, which is the grand master-piece to observe."[3] I think we need no further examples to show how skilfully the poet adapts his manner to his matter; words, sounds and combinations of sounds are all chosen to express his thought. Indeed, it could hardly be otherwise, for what he had to say was so infinitely more important to Langland then how he said it, that it is impossible for him to have mere verbiage. His defects chiefly rise from his struggle to express himself more clearly and emphatically, or from the enthusiasm of the moment which carries him along in defiance of rules of construction. It is constantly true of

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1. C XX1, 59. 2. C XX1, 344.
3. Milton on Education.

Langland that

"words like nature, half reveal
And half conceal the soul within."

I think it was because he himself felt this that there is so much repetition. Of course one might take an extreme view, and say that confusion of language well suits with the occasional confusion of thought that one meets in Dowel.

The beginning, end, and middle of adverse criticism of Piers the Plowman is its lack of unity, and the absence of the "pattern" in the general scheme. We wander on from subject to subject till the bewildered reader heartily echoes the critics decision that Langland had no architectonic sense. Yet this is a little harsh. The more one reads the poem, the more unity and regular development is perceived in it, and it is quite possible that to the author, who spent his whole time over it, in whose mind the poem rested whole, the criticism of lack of clearness and structure would be perfectly preposterous, even as the criticism of obscurity in his poems, even in "Sordello," was never intelligible to Browning. Let us then attempt to think of it as he probably thought of it: "The Book concerning Piers the Plowman," we suppose that he called it, and in Piers, and the thoughts dominating the whole which are personified by Piers, the unity is supplied. The poem as a whole might be compared to a fugue, with the theme of Piers appearing and reappearing in it. From the colophon to the Harleian manuscript[1] it would appear that from the first Langland had in mind that transformation of Piers which is definitely expressed by "Petrus est Christus."[2]

1. Skeat. A prefᵗ p. xxxiii 2. B xv 206

Yet the removal of the passage of identification in the C text is a gain to the consistency of Pier's' character, for Piers has throughout typified ideal humanity, and while Piers, that is the best efforts of man, to recover the fruit taken by the devil failed, Christ in Piers' armour could succeed.[1] His final return as Holy Church - or rather as its ministers - to his ploughing skilfully preserves the unity of conception.

Even apart from this central motive we can trace definite lines of construction. The prologue of the A text is an admirable example of close knit thought, and the characters introduced, and the way he treats them form an excellent introduction to the whole poem. This general content of the poem is even better described by the lines introduced into the C text:

"Al the welthe of this worlde - and the woo bothe,
Wynkyng as it were - wyberly ich saw hyt,
Of trywthe and of tricherye - of tresoun and of gyle.[2]

Manly[3] has laid great emphasis on the artistic skill displayed in the construction of Al, but the first passus has proved a bone of contention between him and M. Jusserand.[4] But I think we might make quite a different analysis of it, for Holy Church here is not only explaining the Vision of the Field full of Folk to Langland, but is instructing him in righteousness. We might expect therefore to find here the seven virtues in contrast to the deadly sins later on. The passus would then gain in the C revision, for

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1. Academy, 1887.
2. C 1,10.
3. Cbg. II, 1.
4. Mod. Phil. V1 & V11.

it is only here that we find fortitude. The passus might then be divided as follows: Temperance, A 17-40; C 17-40 Prudence, A 52-55, C 50-53; Hope is only introduced indirectly by means of Despair, A 59-68, C 57-68; Faith A 74-91, C 73-89; Justice A 92-126, C 90-95; Fortitude C 96-98; Charity A 130_185, C 135-205. The action of the whole of the first two Visions is clear and progressive and follows the distinct theme of the Pilgrimage of Truth. Dowel is perhaps the most difficult to follow, for it is so weighted with disquisition that the events will mardly march, but if we accept Mensendieck's interpretation of it as the growth of the author's soul, we have no difficulty, I think, in tracing the succession of ideas. Dobet and Dobest, dealing definitely with the Life of Christ and the attack on the Castle of Unity are perfectly comprehensible.

Quite frequently we seem to see the mind of the author at work preparing the way for something to be introduced later. In the first passus,[1] we have the exact idea of Piers Pardon. In the 5th passus of B,[2] one seems to get the first suggestion of Christ appearing in Piers armour, which is developed in the 18th passus, and in this same 5th passus,[3] we have a suggestion of the Harrowing of Hell in the 18th passue. But most remarkable of all is where the very bones of the structure appear and for answer to a question we are referred to a later passus:

"Ymaginatyf her afterward - shal answere to youre purpose,"[4]

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1. A I, 117-122 2. B V, 508. 3. B V, 501-3.

4. B X, 115. ~~5. C XV, 1-22.~~

but the answer only comes in the C text.[5] The composition of ~~the~~ a long poem is a most delicate operation, especially when, like "Piers the Plowman," it was composed and revised at various times. Of course Poe[1] holds that a long poem is a contradiction in terms, because a poem should come within the reach of one burst of emotion. Keats[2] on the other hand defends a long poem, as being preferred both by poets and lovers of poetry. He goes on to point out that it is the supreme test of a poet's power of invention. In judging a long poem, Quiller Couch has made some very illuminating remarks - one really feels an apology is due to Langland when one quotes in connection with his work a critic who could say "Anglo-Saxon literature, such as it was, died of inherent weakness, and of its collapse the vision of Piers the Plowman may be regarded as the last dying spasm."[3] However, Langland was magnanimous, and will no doubt forgive this twaddle. Well, as I was saying, Quiller Couch points out that the capital difficulty in verse is saying ordinary things,[4] bridging the mountain peaks of emotion so to speak, which is really an adaptation of Poe's theory. This is why rapidity is so essential to annihilate the flat passages. We have already admitted that Langland has flat passages; but where he has action, it is essentially rapid; indeed with his abrupt "with that"s introducing some new perhaps totally unconnected idea, he plunges in true epic style

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1. Poe, 197.
2. Letters Oct 8, 1817.
3. Art of Writing, 163.
4. idem, 75.
5. C xv. 1-22

"in medias res" and avoids all the flats of introductions even though he does incur the charge of confusion. But take it with all its blemishes, and this long poem remains still, as Keats[1] says, a little Region in which the Lovers of Poetry may wander.

11. Poetic Substance.

When we pass from an analysis of poetic form to the same treatment of poetic matter it is like trying to measure the clouds after making a similar attempt with the ocean. From the earliest times the great artificers have left record of the form of measurement to be used, and in each case, I think, we find Langland answers to the test.

As the essential attribute of the fine arts Aristotle brings forward imitation produced by harmony.[2] In poetry this imitative harmony is expressed in language, its objects are men of a higher or lower type in action[3] and these may be as they were or are, as they are said or thought to be, or as they ought to be.[4] We have already shown that Langland fulfills (in certain measure) the requirements of harmony and language. This whole essay has been devoted to a determination of how accurate is his imitation. Especially in the earlier parts of the poem do we find vivid and and life-like portraiture of men in action. In the Confessions scenes we have men of the lower type and the material is furnished for a comedy.

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1. Oct. 8, 1817. 2. Poetics I. 2. ibid II.
4. ibid, XXV.

Here is a picture in two lines.

"Thanne a-waked Wratthe - with to white eyeu,
With a nyttylynge nose - nyppyng hus lyppes."

Would we see men in action we need only turn to the immortal Tavern scene in Gluttony's Confession, with its lively conversation, swift action and vivid presentation, where we have a crowd of 27 distinct individuals and "an hep" of others, and the effect of crowd and noise and squalor is brought out by clear strokes, and due attention to detail, while we never lose sight of the central figure, the Falstaff of the scene. Perhaps his master pieces are these characters of low life, a whole rogues gallery we have of feigning beggars, hypocritical ecclesiastics, lying hermits and idle knaves, from the lightning sketches in the prologue, to the more elaborate and less successful full length portrait of Haukyn Activa Vita.

But Langland is not confined to men whom Aristotle would relegate to comedy. How sympathetically he can draw the plain, every day life with its mingled elements of tragedy and mirth, of good and of bad, is seen in his description of "Powre folke in cotes."[2]

Finally, we have men as they ought to be. This is the most difficult part of his task because the perfect man is apt to turn into a creature

"too bright and too good
For human nature's daily food."

1. C VII, 103 2. C X, 71-83.

Some of the allegorical characters, the painfully superior Dame Study, and Scripture, suffer from this feeling, others again he rescues by some vivid touch as when Witte in confusion dares not speak before his wife - a feminist and suffragette she would have been now. In Piers Plowman himself, we always feel the human element in the first meeting with him. Brave and dilligent follower of Truth, he touches hands with mortals in his righteous indignation against the idle, in his manly setting of his affairs in order, and finally, in his distress at the criticism of his pardon. But in making an image of perfection Langland never makes too high demand on our credulity, for with perfect reverence and simplicity he draws the one perfect man, "The King's Son of Heaven."

But we are now going beyond Aristotle's definition, for when we come to describe things as they ought to be, we can hardly call it imitation. Yet though not in direct statement, Aristotle goes outside imitation in implication, both by including in his category things as they ought to be, and by his derivation of the word. We have the exact parallel to Aristotle's "τὸ ποιεῖν" in Langland, for he describes his occupation as "meddling with making."[1] When we come to "making" we have more than imitation, so let us turn to another definition: Go back ~~from~~ before Aristotle perhaps 500 years and far away to the East, and we find Zoroaster saying "Poetry is apparent pictures of unapparent realities." When we speak of unapparent realities we get into quite a different realm, the atmosphere is

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1. B. XII, 16.

rarer and the clouds more baffling, yet we feel that Aristotle in his clear-cut definition fell short, and that it is only when we look upon the Poet as a maker, a divinely inspired bard, a "Vates" that we can realize something of the true nature of poetry, ~~but~~ This has been repeatedly said by critics of poetry, but each in turn seems to add something to our appreciation of the fact. A poet must look with steady eye into the heart of things. What says Shelley[1]: "A poem . . .is the creation of actions according to the unchangeable forms of human nature, as existing in the mind of the Creator, which is itself the image of all other minds." "It lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world and makes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar;" or even more beautifully expressed in his verse

"We will entangle buds and flowers and beams
Which twinkle on the fountains' brim, and make
Strange combinations out of common things."[2]

Carlyle reverses the statement: "It is a man's sincerity and depth of vision that makes him a poet. See deep enough and you see musically." The vision of the poet is to that of the ordinary man, what the eagle was to David

"And I lay in my hollow and mused on the
world that might ~~be~~ lie
Neath his ken, though I saw but the strip 'twixt
the hill and the sky.".[3]

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1. Shelley, 9.
2. Prometheus Unbound III, 3.
3. Saul, XII.

Before we come to this central idea of poetry in Langland, how is the gift acquired, and did Langland show evidence of acquiring it in that way? In the first place, the poetic gift is a spark, a light divine, a something given by God Himself, unaccountable and incommunicable. Since Langland's ~~power~~ poem has lived 600 years one may feel assured he possessed that spark. But the endowment may be developed, and into the mysteries of that development we may now penetrate under the guidance of Wordsworth.

Three influences Wordsworth names and on the second he lays such slight stress that it might be almost negligible were it not that we can see its influence in Langland.

The first influence is the communion with nature; in this, man's mind is to be receptive, to be formed by the plastic hand of nature which can shape it and store it "in a wise passiveness." But nature, which is first an object in itself, leads up to the love of man and is but a means to the knowledge of him;

"One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man
Of moral evil and of good
Than all the sages can."

But in spite of his accusation of the "dull and endless strife" of books, they are the second element in the shaping of the poet's mind. "All books which lay their sure foundations in the heart of man," especially the poets, for they are

"Only less
For what we are and what we may become,
Than Nature's Self, which is the breath of God,
Or His pure Word by miracle revealed."[1]

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1. Prelude V.

Both of these are aids to the study of the human mind, but the last class in the school must be the direct study of

"Men as they are men within themselves".[1]

Then the full stream of poetry will arise

"In strength, reflecting from its placid breast
The works of man and face of human life,"[2]

and as its highest achievement

"Instruct them how the mind of man becomes ~~a thousand times more beautiful than the earth on which he dwells~~ *A thousand times more beautiful than the earth On which he dwells*."

We find evidence in Langland of his having studied nature with love and attention, wondering

"at wham - and wher that the pye
Lernede legge stickes - that leyen in here nestes;
Ther is no weyght, as ich wene - sholde worche here nest to paye,[3]

and admiring "the floures in the fryth . . . so clere and so brighte."[4]

He loved summer, that sovereign joy of beasts, but especially does he love the birds:

"Blisse of the briddes - abyde me made,
And under lynde in a launde-lenede ich a stounde,
To lithen here laies - and here loueliche notes,
Murthe of here merye mouthes - made me to slepe."[6]

and as in Wordsworth, though in less degree, he sees man through nature. He looks into the mirror of Myddel-erde, and sees the sun and the sea, the birds and the beasts that he may learn to love "Kynde".[5]

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1. Prelude X1.
2. Prelude X111.
3. C X1V, 159.
4. B X11, 219.
5. C X1V, 133.
6. C X1 63

From his innumerable quotations one would be inclined to think Langland owed more to books ~~than to nature~~ and especially to the Bible, than to nature; and how great and good an influence the knowledge of the Scriptures has on an author's style, and on his mind, has been asserted by Ruskin.[1] In the list[2] which Skeat has drawn up of the probable contents of the Poet's library, we see how strongly ecclesiastic were his studies. But it was from man that he learned most of man, working with them in the fields, dwelling in Cornhill, walking through the streets, or sitting silent and observant in some great lord's hall. We feel that his pictures of men have been drawn with his "eye on the object", and that he read the heart of man, its passions and failings and ambitions and virtues, as well as it is possible for human eyes. Finally, when the mind is stored and trained and awakened, which we may say are the respective effects of the three influences, the poet does not just write verse to order by the yard. There must be an external stimulus, an exaltation of mind and soul, and then comes the poetry "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings".[3] There are few passages, especially in the earlier passus of Piers the Plowman, which can be read without impressing on one that they are the product of the powerful feelings of their producer, raised to fever-heat by the conditions around him.

Thus equipped, we may expect to find that Langland did possess that gift of interpretation, to see through the individual to the universal, and through all shams to the true springs of action.

1. ~~Prelude~~ Praeterita 1 & 11. 2. Index 1V. 3. Pref. Lyrical Ballads.

With majesty and power he pours invective upon every shape of insincerity. Truth, he demands, truth in the inmost parts. The very defects of his poem are glorified in this earnestness, for it is this earnestness alone which called forth his poem, to lift the veil from bad and good alike, to tell mankind what are the issues of life, what it is that matters, for this he dreamed and wrote and strove in bitterness of soul and in raptures of spirit. "Out of the fulness of the heart the mouth speaketh." The rock has been melted in a volcano of indignation, and poured forth in a glowing stream which sank of itself into this rude pattern, not deliberately cut out with chisel and hammer and fitted into a flawless mosaic.

But it is not only revelation that we seek; history or a Commissioner's report might give that. Nor is it just an examination of the springs of human action; this is fit subject for philosophy. Poetry, as Sydney says, goes beyond either of these. Not only, with history, does Langland give an imitation of life, and not only with philosophy does he give an interpretation of life both of which must be done by the true poet; more than this, as Mr. Yeats says, "All art is in the last analysis an endeavour to condense as out of the flying vapours of the world an image of human perfection, and for its own and not for the art's sake."[1] Charioted "on the viewless wings of poesie" we may ascend from the cave of shadows to the true light and the true realities, for in poetry we have the idea unmarred by its embodiment; as saith

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1. Quoted MacKail The Nature of Poetry.

Sidney "Nature never set forth the earth in so rich tapestry as diuers Poets haue done ...her world is brasen, the Poets only deliver a golden."[1]

When Langland set out upon his search for his ideal, Truth, and prepared to record his struggles and achievements, he was walking in the path of poetry and was condensing for us "an image of human perfection." Of course this is not all; plenty of people set out on that search who make no poem of it, but all the same they are in the way of poetry, and it is merely a matter of chance on whom the goddess will descend, who shall be chosen as the conductor of that "permanent essence", that "universal energy" which is poetry in its transcendental aspect.[2] When we who are not blessed with the touch of this "spiritual ether" wish to have a revelation we must come to the poems which are a manifestation and materialization of it, and in them we find with Shelley that "poetry lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, and mkaes familiar objects be as if they were not familiar." We have already discussed, though under a different name, Langland's image of perfection, how he held the "mirror up to nature and made beautiful that which was distorted,"[3] but we may recall them again now; true kingship, perfect Holychurch, ideal relations between rich and poor; this for the state. For the individual he has the man Piers, the servant of Truth, fulfilling all the duties that fall to the lot of human life, and Piers as Christ, the conquerer

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1. Apologie, p 8.
2. Mackail, p 314.
3. Shelley, p 9.

of evil. Then he goes to the springs of action and gives the two ideals for mankind, Truth and Love.

Poetry is imitation, it is revelation; now we advance a step further and find that poetry is in its essential nature creation. If we put the case barely it seems like a contradiction in terms. In Mrs. Browning we find these in justification:

"You write so of the poets and not laugh?
Those virtuous liars, dreamers after dark,
Exaggerators of the sun and moon?-
I write so of the only truth-tellers,
The only speakers of essential truth,
The only teachers who instruct mankind
To find man's veritable stature out."[1]

They are "the only truth tellers", and Aristotle calmly announces "It is Homer who has chiefly taught other poets the art of telling lies skilfully,"[a] and Shelley too declares "the truest poetry is the most feigning." For this reason Plato, "of all philosophers the most poeticall" would hunt them out of his State, and Langland himself had little patience with feigning minstrels. Surely we must not submit Langland, the truth-seeker to a test as to his ability in telling lies. This 3rd function of poetry - a function and not an accident, is imagination.[3] Now imagination in Langland is made parallel with wisdom and opposed to "weening". It is by

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1. Aurora Leigh. 2. Poetics XXlV, 9.
3. Mackail, 260.

confusing it with weening that poetry has been made synonymous with lying. Mackail[1] traces the use of Imagination

"which bodies forth the forms of ~~the~~ things unknown,"

through Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Coleridge; and concludes that imagination is the shaping spirit in poetry.[2] In fact this is

"The light that never was on sea or land
The inspiration and the poet's dream."

Impossible to analyze, we would but "murder to dissect"; we can only bow the head and rejoice in the light of it. I know not how, but Langland has it.

But imagination can be more narrowly restricted to that faculty in the poets mind which enables him to add something to reality. Imagination in Langland is most apparent in his allegorical personages. These are most of the type of "Gorgons and hydras and chimeras dire" but rather an adaptation of the characters of every day life. Langland's imagination is not of so strong a flight as Milton; we have no such fearful and wonderful creatures as Sin and Death, shadows and shapes like nothing in Heaven or earth.

When Langland takes pains to draw a figure his art is that of the dramatist rather than that of the allegorist. He introduces an abstract idea, e.g., "Reddite", and straightway it

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1. Mackail 265. 2. Mackail, 278.

becomes a personage "Evan Yield again"; "Qui bona egerunt" is the title to Heaven, and the next division of the poem is devoted to a living "Dowel" - though "Dowel" has ~~real~~ little, real existence. Some of his seven sins are even strong enough to demand a name and occupation, and each of them might serve as hero - if hero it may be called - of a comedy of character, such as Plautus' "Miles Gloriosus," Destouches "Le Dissipateur", "L'Irrésolue" etc., or Molieres "L'Avare." Some of the briefest of his impersonations are the most vivid e.g., who cannot see the whole figure and character of Book, that "wight with two brode eyen".[1]

His characters - those human characters which we have already mentioned are very like Bunyan's, e.g., one recognizes an early Mr. Worldly Wise-Man in Waryn Wysman and Wyly-man his felawe, and both draw their figures with much the same end in view. But there is a difference: the purely allegorical figures, the Study and Scripture and Wit and Imaginatyf are far more colourless than any of Bunyan's figures. . Of all the poets, I think Langland's imagination most closely approaches that of Spencer. There is the same profusion of characters, the same type of abstraction is personified, and there is the same looseness of construction. The Dowel characters could be described exactly as Mackail[2] describes the "Fairie Queene." "It is difficult to remember as we read it, whom we are reading about, or how they came there. They drop out and reappear capriciously; we are pleased to meet

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1. C XXI, 240. 2. Springs of Helicon, p 113.

them, we half think we have seen them before and it does not matter when they are gone." No, it does not matter in the least when they are gone, for it is Langland speaking all the time, and he continues to speak. In the descriptions of both poems we see their imaginations draw together. I have already pointed out the likeness in their lines connected with Sleep, and the likeness is to be traced again in the elaborate detail introducing a vivid total effect in their descriptions of the seven deadly sins, or to take an examplewhich is not so well worn, is not Minerva,[1] with her wealth and fairness and rich attire

"With golden hands and silver feet beside,
That many lords have her to wife desired"

own sister to the Lady Meed, whose "a-raye with hure rychesse rauesshede (the Poet's) herte."

What is most exclusively Langland's property is his hero. There has never been another Piers, and though it is possible, the idea arose out of some popular traditional character, its essential reality and beauty I am sure is due to Langland and Langland alone. One would give the crown of invention to Piers were it not that according to some critics the author(or authors) of the poem achieved an even greater triumph. All through the poem there presides a vivid personality called Will,of the details of whose life and of whose character, we have considerable knowledge. If the poem is wholly unautobiograhpical, if "Will" is

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1. Fairie Queene, V, II, 9 & 10.

pure invention, assuredly we have before us a miracle in verse, and the obscure poet who shaped this living man, this breathing soul whom at the first reading we hail as "brother, Englishman and friend," may rank above Shakespeare in powers of invention.

If we judge of his image from his background, ~~and~~ the stage-setting so to speak, of the poem rather than its characters, we have less material to judge from, but Langland can still support his claim to be one of the great creative artists in verse. Especial praise must be given to the opening passus, where with a few strong, swift strokes he conjures up before us the great field, the towers and murky vale, and peoples it as he says with

"Al the welthe of this worlde - and the woo bothe"

Here we find Langland fulfilling Lessing's definition of poetry as distinct from painting and sculpture, for in this field there is a crowd in motion, ploughing and praying, chaffering and cheating, and while we never lose the sense of a vast concourse, this impression is induced by individualized sketches. Natural description one does not expect in a satiric philosophical poem. but when we come to look for it we find that his imagination led him to describe the fair appearances of the Universe as well as the men who inhabit and pollute it.

When we pass out of this world into the unseen, as in dealing with purely imaginary figures, his handling is much less masterly. In speaking of Dante, Saint-Beuve[1] said "l'invisible même est rendu avec tout de géométrie et de réalite." There is none of this geometric exactitude in Langland. Of his hell, we receive no detailed descriptions of circle within circle, ever descending and

1. Causeries de Lundi 1854

ever growing more terrible. Nor have we great stretches of burning plains and lakes, wonderful palaces and weird shapes, as in Milton. It seems probable that passus C XX1 is built on the plan of some Miracle Play. The four maidens come together in some undefined place "Descendit ad inferna" which can hardly be characterized as Heaven, Earth or Hell. Perhaps the vaguer term Hades would be applicable to it. But Langland does not attempt to take his readers down into Hell; Christ's triumph is only reported, and in the report we get no clear idea of any attribute of the infernal regions except the very solid gates and bars. Langland's imagination stays by the earth and the boiling brimstone and brazen guns[2] might have played a part in any baronial assault. Not that we can say Milton's imagination shews a more soaring flight, though it may be on a grander and more elaborate scale in the 6th book of Paradise Lost.

There is at times a tendency to limit the range of poetry by confining it to the beautiful. We all are familiar with Poe's famous phrase "The rhythmical creation of beauty".[3] Now this would describe his own poems well, but we hardly feel it is applicable to Langland. What would more conform to Piers the Plowman is his other definition of the Poetic Principle as "the Human Aspiration for Supernal Beauty,"[4] if we may unite with it that truth which Poe would explicitly separate. Again, Shelley would have it that poetry "lifts the veil from the hidden beauty of the world," elsewhere that it is "The record of the best and happiest moments in the happiest and best minds."[5]

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1. Causeries de Lundi 1854.
2. C XX1, 293.
3. Poetic Principle, 204.
4. Poetic Principle, 217.
5. Shelley, 35.

Now to these descriptions, Piers the Plowman hardly answers. In one sense, he does lift the veil from the hidden beauty of the world, in his insistence on truth and love, but taking the phrase literally, we must admit that it is from hidden evil rather than from hidden beauty he withdraws the veil. And assuredly it was not in his happiest moments that he wrote his fierce invectives, his sad complaints and his heart-searching arguments. Shall we then deny him the title of poet? or are Shelley and Poe speaking of the accidents, rather than the functions of poetry? Let us judge Shelley out of his own mouth to see if he thought happiness and beauty essentials. "Stanzas written in Dejection near Naples" can hardly be described as "the record of moments," yet assuredly this is one of Shelley's loveliest lyrics: *Again*:

"A hater went and sat by a ditch
And he took an old cracked lute
And sang a song which was more of a screech
'Gainst a woman that was a brute."

Shelley hardly withdraws the veil from the hidden beauty of the world here. True, this is but a fragment, but I venture to believe that it is a poem, for it is certainly creative.

If we are going to dwell on superlatives let us rather choose Milton's definition of poetry as the "Composition and pattern of the best and <u>honorablest</u> things," and this we might apply to much of Piers the Plowman.

So far our critics have been agreed, but now we come to a point where they differ. Some hold that poetry is greatest because it has greatest power in enforcing virtue. Others would

argue that poetry is an end in itself, and its adaptation to any other end is false art. "A poet" says Shelley,[1] "would do ill to embody his own conceptions of right and wrong, which are usually those of his place and time, in his poetical creations which participate in neither." "Unless incidentally," says Poe "it has no concern whatever with Duty or with Truth".

Now this is quite out of harmony with Langland who would side entirely with the other view, as represented in Sidney. Sidney begins with Aristot;e's definition, but he confines it to what should be, so that the distinguishing mark of poetry "is that fayning not-able images of vertues, vices, or what els, with that delightfull teaching."[2] He then proceeds to prove that Poetry may claim superiority over Moral Philosophy and History, in that it best serves "the ending end of all earthly learning (which is) vertuous action,"[3] and therefore "in the most excellent work is the most excellent workman."

If then we are "to beleeue, with Sealiger, that no philosopher's precepts can sooner make you an honest man than the reading of Virgil,"[4] surely we may believe that the same end may be accomplished by the reading of Piers the Plowman. Langland wrote with the definite purpose of instructing his fellowmen in the ways of virtue. His object was that of his hero's

"To be a pilgrim atte plowe - for pore mennes sakes."

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1. Shelley, p. 13. 2. Sidney 12. 3. Sidney, 28.
4. Sidney, p. 61.

Far from poetry being an end in itself he feels that he must apologize for meddling with making when he might have been singing his psalter. Yet Shelley is not entirely out of sympathy with this didactic principle for he admits that "to be a poet is to apprehend the true and the beautiful."[1] But then to Shelley, as to Keats, "beauty is truth, truth beauty," while to Langland Truth is a most difficult though all ~~impossible~~ important life-question, and the statement that it is beauty was by no means all he knew or needed to know. Poe[2] makes the distinction between early and modern poetry lie in this very fact that in the earlier, giving as example Cowley and Donne, the moral is the end in view, while in the modern, such as Wordsworth and Coleridge, the moral may be inculcated just as forcibly, but it is always subservient to the poetry as an end in itself. We can then appreciate the truth of Mackail's judgment, that "The Vision of Piers the Plowman partly fails - this is perhaps a hard saying - from want of that inhuman quality which is inherent in nearly all great art."[3]

Not caring for his own fame, sacrificing his love of study and his prospects of advancement, and perhaps unconsciously forfeiting the highest possible greatness for his poem, Langland devoted his life to the service of his poor and evil brethren,

> "Alle maner of men - that thow myghte asspye,
> That nedy ben, and naughty - helpe hem with thi godis,
> Bothe hem and lakke hem noughte - late God take the veniaunce
> Theigh thei done yuel - late thow God y-worthe."

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1. Shelley, p 5. 2."On Old Eng. Poetry."

3. Cornhill Mag.

Finally, did Langland bring anything within poetic range which was excluded by his compeers? for this assuredly is the great gift of the great poet. In our own age we owe to Kipling the discovery of the poetry in machinery and when he says "I found nought common on thy earth," we feel there is a bond of union between him and Langland. Langland brought down poetry from the flights of romance and the abstractions of allegory, from the rhapsodies of passion and the assaults of Satire, to enter in at lowly doors. This had been done centuries before in Hesiod, and for us it had to be done once more in the Lyrical Ballads. But there is much more than this, much more than anything I have discussed, much more than any critic has suggested or dreamed of, for this is true poetry, and of it we may say

"All high poetry is infinite; it is as the first acorn, which contained all oaks potentially. Veil after veil may be undrawn, and the inmost naked beauty of the meaning never exposed. A great poem is a fountain forever flowing over with the waters of wisdom and delight; and after one person and one age has exhausted all its divine effluence which their peculiar relations enable them to share, another and yet another succeeds, and new relations are ever developed, the source of an unforseen and an unconceived delight,"[1] for Piers the Plowman "is the precious life-blood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life."

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1. Shelley, 29.

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