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Gawain and the Green Knight

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Piers the Ploughman

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INTRODUCTION

I. SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is the finest representative of a great cycle of verse romances devoted wholly or principally to the adventures of Gawain. Of these there still survive in English a dozen or so; in French — the tongue in which romance most flourished — seven or eight more; and these, of course, are but a fraction of what must once have existed.¹ No other knight of the Round Table occupies anything like so important a place as Gawain in the literature of the middle ages. He is the first mentioned of Arthur's knights, for about 1125, ten years before Geoffrey of Monmouth dazzled the world with his revelation of King Arthur, William of Malmesbury in his *Chronicle of the Kings of England* had told of the discovery of Gawain's tomb in Ross, Wales, and had described him as Arthur's nephew and worthy second. In all the early romances Gawain is peerless for utter courage and courtesy. Where other knights quailed, Gawain was serene; where other champions were beaten, Gawain won; and where no resolution, strength, or skill could avail, Gawain succeeded by his kindness, his virtue, and his charming speech. The strange knight in the *Squire's Tale* gave his message so politely, says Chaucer,

"That Gawain with his olde curteisye
Though he were come ageyn out of Fairye
Ne coude him nat amende with a word."

But in time other heroes became more popular than he, and in some of the French prose romances of the thirteenth century Gawain's character was defaced that others might appear to excel him; and Malory in his *Morte Darthur* (c. 1470), which is based chiefly upon these later French romances, and Tennyson in his *Idylls of the King*, which in turn is mostly based on Malory, have unfortunately perpetuated the debased portrait. To get a glimpse of the real Gawain one should read, besides our piece, such romances as the *Carl of Carlisle*,² *Golagros and Gawain*,³ *The Wedding of Sir Gawain*,⁴ the *Mule Sans Frein*⁵ and the episodes in Miss Weston's *Sir Gawain at the Grail Castle*, and *Sir Gawain and the Lady of Lys*, in the attractive little series of *Arthurian Romances Unrepresented in Malory's Morte d'Arthur*.⁶

Gawain and the Green Knight has been preserved to us, like many another precious

¹ The English romances were first collected by Sir Frederick Madden in his *Syr Gawayne*, edited for the Bannatyne Club in 1839; the French have been described by G. Paris in the *Histoire Littéraire de la France*, vol. xxx, pp. 29-103. Nothing like a complete study of Gawain has been made; the best accounts available are those of Miss J. L. Weston in her *Sir Gawain*, London, 1897; of Schofield, *English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer*, p. 124; of Nutt in the new *Encyclopædia Britannica* under "Gawain"; and of J. E. Wells in his recent *Manual of the Writings in Middle English*, p. 51.

² Edited by Madden, *Syr Gawayne*, p. 185; *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript*, ed. Hales and Furnivall, vol. iii, p. 275.

³ Ed. Madden, p. 129, and Amours, *Scottish Alliterative Poems*, Scottish Text Society, 1897.

⁴ Madden, p. 297; *Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript*, vol. i, p. 103.

⁵ Edited Méon, *Nouveau Recueil de Fabliaux et Contes*, 1823, vol. i, p. 1; R. T. Hill, Baltimore, 1911; Orłowski, Paris, 1911.

⁶ London, 1903 and 1907.

work — for example *Beowulf* — by a single lucky manuscript, Cotton Nero A. X. of the British Museum. It is found there along with three other remarkable poems of the same dialect and style, all in the same handwriting; and naturally the four pass as the work of one author, although not all scholars are agreed on this point. These three are *Pearl* (1212 lines), a highly finished elegy in an elaborate stanza, a masterpiece of delicate beauty and craftsmanship; *Patience*, and *Cleanness* (or *Purity*), of 500 and 1800 lines respectively, both written in the most powerful and highly colored alliterative verse, the former telling the story of Jonah, the latter of Belshazzar's feast and fate.¹

These poems are the artistic culmination of what is called the alliterative revival of the fourteenth century in England, the best-known example of which is *Piers the Ploughman*. Other splendid pieces, worthy to stand beside these, are *Winner and Waster*, *The Parliament of Three Ages*, and the Thornton *Morte Arthure*.² It is a surprising and not well-explained phenomenon that after two centuries or so of the short-lined, rhyming verse in stanzas or in couplets such as the young Chaucer wrote — which is generally considered to be of French origin — there should suddenly appear a great bulk of poetry in the archaic unrhymed style of the Anglo-Saxons. The great peculiarity of this verse is alliteration, the repeating of the same letter or sound at the beginning of several words in a line — a device which has never been given up in English poetry. A characteristic Anglo-Saxon line is, —

“Wadan ofer wealdas; wudu baer sunu.”
To wade over the wolds; the son bare the wood.

Any vowel could alliterate with any other, thus, —

“Innan ond utan iren-bendum.”
Inside and outside with iron-bands.

The chief accent fell on the alliterative syllables, of which there could be three, as in the examples given, or two — these being the commonest types; or four, or none — these rarer. The number of unaccented syllables was immaterial; but a line consisted normally of four feet, with a caesural pause in the middle. In our poem we find somewhat the same conventions, as in line 3, —

“The tulk that the trammes of tresoun there wrought”;

and line 27, —

“For-thi an aunter in erde I attle to schawe.”

In our piece groups of such lines are concluded by an odd phrase and a little rhyming stanza of five lines, often called a “bob and a wheel.” This poetry was dignified,

¹ The only easily accessible edition of *Gawain and the Green Knight* is that of R. Morris for the Early English Text Society in 1864 — revised edition by Gollancz in 1897. Translations have been published by Miss Jessie L. Weston, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in *Arthurian Romances Unrepresented in Malory's Morte d'Arthur*, London, 1898, in prose; and in *Romance, Vision, and Satire*, Boston, 1912, in verse; by E. J. B. Kirtlan, London, 1912; and by C. M. Lewis, New Haven, Conn., 1913 — the last a very free, entertaining fantasy on the original theme. The other three poems were edited by Morris for the Early English Text Society in *Early English Alliterative Poems*, 1864 (several subsequent editions). *Pearl* has been well edited, with a valuable introduction, by C. G. Osgood in the *Belles-Lettres Series*, 1906; and by I. Gollancz, London, 1907; *Patience* by H. Bateson, Manchester, 1912.

² The first two were edited together by Gollancz for the Roxburghe Club in 1897; the *Parliament*, separately, Oxford, 1915; the *Morte Arthure* by Perry and Brock for the Early English Text Society, and by Miss M. M. Banks, London, 1900; translation of the last by A. Boyle in Everyman's Library.

strong, resonant, and in skillful hands apt for stirring deeds and rich, highly colored description; but it was the alliteration, probably, which tempted to use words in a forced sense, and to invent odd and fanciful terms — at any rate, these northern and Scottish poets were very much given to that sort of thing. Of course, the fact that they wrote with extreme virtuosity in a richly worded dialect, strange to us heirs of a more southern speech, has much to do with this effect. This poetry flourished chiefly in the north. Chaucer, naturally, was familiar with it, and makes his parson say, —

“But trusteth wel, I am a Southren man,
I can nat geste — rum, ram, ruf — by lettre,
Ne, God wot, rym holde I but litel bettre;”

which rather sounds as if Chaucer had meant to have an alliterative poem precede the *Parson's Tale*.¹

Our romance, and the rich field of folklore within which it lies have recently been made the subject of a penetrating study by Professor G. L. Kittredge,² whose main results may be thus summarized. *Gawain and the Green Knight* is doubtless, like the great majority of mediæval English romances, a translation from the French, although the French original is now lost. To the author of this French poem is due the happy combination of two fine old widely current stories. One of these, the “Challenge,” can be traced back to an elaborate Irish version of the year 1000 or earlier — the manuscript containing it, the celebrated *Book of the Dun Cow*, was written about 1100. In this a supernatural being with a replaceable head tests the hero's courage much as he does in our poem. In the other, the “Temptation,” the chosen hero, by resisting the seductive lady, is enabled to free the lady's husband from an enchantment. Both these tales occur separately in mediæval romances, the former in the *Book of Caradoc* — a continuation of Chrétien's *Percival*,³ the *Mule Sans Frein*, *Perlesvaus*,⁴ and *Humbaut*,⁵ the latter in the *Carl of Carlisle*, the *Chevalier à l'Épée*,⁶ and elsewhere. The work of the brilliant French combiner was, like numerous other French Arthurian romances of his period, a well-constructed and pellucid narrative. It did not attain the moral depth of our poem, where Gawain's virtues, the elaborateness and keenness of his temptation, and his repentance for his slight fault, are more powerfully set forth. There is no reason to suppose that the beautiful descriptions of wild nature were in the French poem; and very likely the arming of the hero and the hunting were less elaborated there. It seems probable, too, that our author has changed the motivation and the ending of the story; for in his original it would be natural to suppose from the analogues that the Green Knight enticed Gawain to his castle in order that this greatest of heroes might rid him of his strange hue and giant form, and that, after Gawain had succeeded, the disenchanted knight accompanied him to Arthur's Court. The English author gave this up, and invented another and weaker motivation, based on the well-known hatred of Morgan la Fay for Queen Guinevere. It is the only blemish in the otherwise faultless

¹ A learned discussion of alliterative verse may be found in J. Schipper's *History of English Versification*, Oxford, 1910, chapters II and III.

² Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1916.

³ Ditto, vol. I.

⁴ Edited Méon, I, 127; E. C. Armstrong, Baltimore, 1900.

⁵ Edited Potvin, *Percival*, vol. III, p. 117.

⁶ Edited Stürzinger and Breuer, Dresden, 1914.

construction that the reason here assigned for the Green Knight's visit to Arthur's Court is Morgan's desire to frighten Guinevere out of her wits.

Another English version of our tale is found in Bishop Percy's Folio Manuscript. This is a late romance of 516 lines, in six-line stanzas like the following: —

“He had a lady to his wiffe,
He loved her deerlye as his liffe,
She was both blyth and blee;
Because Sir Gawaine was stiffe in stowre
She loved him privilye paramour,
And she never him see.”

Most scholars regard the *Ballad Green Knight*, as it is often called, as a mere working-over of the alliterative romance; but because the author of it has reverted to a better and older sort of motivation — i.e., the love of the Green Knight's wife for Gawain — and because he has likewise restored the presumably older features of the Green Knight's becoming one of the Round Table, and for other reasons, some hold that the *Ballad Green Knight* is derived from a form of the story older than our romance; and that in this older form the Green Knight's wife was a fairy, who for love of Gawain lured him to the other-world by this odd heading adventure.¹

It is also said in the *Ballad Green Knight* that it is because of this adventure of Gawain's that the Knights of the Bath wear a lace about the neck until they have won their spurs, or a lady takes it off. And after the alliterative romance in our manuscript follows the motto of the Knights of the Garter — “Hony soyt qui mal pence.” Obviously, then, there has always been an effort to connect Gawain's green lace with some chivalrous order in England, and such efforts still continue; but as yet it has not been made to seem very probable that the writer of the present poem had in mind anything of the kind.²

Of our author we know only what can be deduced from his works. He must have been a native of Lancashire or thereabouts, since he employs the North-West Midland dialect, as it is called, and since he describes with so much accuracy and gusto the wild scenery of the three north-western counties of England. None but a person truly religious could have written a poem informed with so lofty a moral tone. Perhaps no other writer of his age could have pictured the scenes between Gawain and the lady without having them border either on the luscious or the coarse. And only a man conversant with the highest society of his time, a man who had seen the world, could describe with such loving wealth of detail the knightly trappings, the merry evenings at the castle, and the stirring hunts. More elaborate guesses about his personality may be found in the editions of Gollancz and Bateson. His work appears to fall within the third quarter of the fourteenth century, a time when a great number of French romances were being translated into English, and when Wycliffe, Gower, Chaucer, and Langland were flourishing.

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¹ This theory is set forth by Mr. J. R. Hulbert in *Modern Philology*, vol. XIII, pp. 49 and 113.

² The latest protagonist of this theory is Mr. Isaac Jackson in *Anglia*, vol. XXXVII, p. 393. The whole question is sensibly reviewed by Mr. Hulbert in the last portion of his article.

II. PIERS THE PLOUGHMAN

The Vision of William concerning Piers the Ploughman is one of the most extraordinary productions in English Literature. Of uncertain authorship, and composed and revised at different times, it was based on no single model. Confused and intricate in structure, belonging as a whole to no one literary type, it yet ranks with the work of the methodical and voluminous Gower, and almost with that of Chaucer, as a contribution to the understanding of the England of the fourteenth century.

I

The poem exists in forty-five known manuscripts¹ which differ greatly among themselves. The variations are due in the first place to the fact that the work was revised and extended on a large scale at least twice, and it is customary to distinguish three main versions: A, written about 1362 (2567 lines); B, about 1377 (7242 lines); and C, about 1393 or 1398-1399 (7357 lines). But the manuscripts are far from falling neatly into these three groups. Not only do the last four passus or cantos of A seem to have been written later than the prologue and the first eight, and the last part of the twelfth by a certain John But, but many manuscripts represent either intermediate revisions or contamination of earlier with later versions.

Whether the original author is responsible for the revisions and additions is still a matter of controversy, the solution of which is made harder by the difficulty of arriving at a pure text of the several versions. The view commonly accepted until a few years ago is that represented by Skeat in the Introduction of his Oxford edition and by Jusserand in his *Piers Plowman* (1894).² These scholars regard B and C as later revisions by the same author who composed A, and they explain the changes in style and mode of thought as due to the maturing or decay of his powers. The opposed view, brought into prominence by Manly in his article in the *Cambridge History of English Literature* in 1908, regards the work as it now stands as showing five hands: (1) A, prologue and passus 1-8; (2) A, passus 9-12, lines 1-56; (3) A, passus 12, lines 57 to end (John But); (4) revision of A resulting in B; (5) revision of B resulting in C.³

The arguments by which these contrary opinions are supported are intricate and varied, and cannot be explained without an elaborate analysis of the whole work. The part of the poem (or collection of poems), however, which is printed in the present volume is generally agreed to represent the work in its first form, and can be studied without reference to the problems raised by the continuations. Moreover, these first two thirds of A are complete in themselves, and are distinctly superior to the later parts in structure and coherence.

The authorship of the poem is as uncertain as the history of its growth. The traditional ascription of it to a William Langland is based on notes written on vari-

¹ Described by Skeat in his edition of the poem for the Early English Text Society, and in vol. II of his large Clarendon Press edition, 1886. This edition contains all three texts. The work was first printed in 1550 by Robert Crowley.

² Translated by M. E. R. from *Les Anglais au Moyen Age: l'épopée mystique de William Langland*, by J. J. Jusserand, Paris, 1893.

³ For the main arguments on both sides of the question, see *The Piers Plowman Controversy*, Early English Text Society, Original Series, Extra Issue 139, London, 1910 (published, 1912).

ous fifteenth-century manuscripts of the B and C texts, but these are not consistent with one another, one giving the name as "Robert or William Langland," one as "Willelmus de Langland," other three as "Willelmus W." It has been customary to clothe this shadow of a name with details, presumed to be autobiographical, drawn from the poem itself. But it is practically certain that these details and the figure of the dreamer, Long Will, who has been identified with Langland, are merely parts of the fiction, and are of no value as biographical evidence.¹ It is therefore no longer necessary to encumber our memories with statements as to dates and places, since such statements have no real historical basis.

II

Piers Plowman, to use the common short title, is written in the alliterative verse which had been the customary medium of Anglo-Saxon poetry, and which, as explained in the introduction to *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, had a period of revival in the fourteenth century. The language, however, is closer to normal fourteenth-century English than that of most contemporary alliterative poems. The author, indeed, was at times led to avoid the obvious word by the necessities of metre, but the absence of the additional difficulties of an intricate stanza relieved him from a pressure that did much to render the work of his fellows contorted and obscure. The present modernization attempts to retain as far as possible the alliterative and accentual characteristics of the original.

In purpose the poem is didactic and satiric; in form it is a series of allegorical visions. The author seeks to expose the sins and abuses of his time, and to instill the religious principles which would reform these, both in the individual and in society. Any work with such an aim is likely to emphasize the darker side of human nature, and this has to be kept in mind in using *Piers Plowman* as a document for the history of society. Though a severe critic of social and ecclesiastical conditions, the poet cannot be regarded as a radical innovator with respect to institutions. He not only accepts the division of society into classes, but finds the reform of abuses to lie in each man's doing his duty in that sphere of life in which God has placed him. The laborer is not urged to seek to rise above his class; and when the knight offers to learn to plough, Piers recommends him to attend to his knight's business — to protect the church, to treat his tenants and workmen well, to keep down the game that destroy farmers' crops, and to avoid dissipation. The author, though a reformer, is no leveler, and his gospel is a gospel of work.

Structurally, the original poem consists of two visions, divided by a few lines in which the dreamer awakes and falls asleep again. This device is an extremely common one in allegory, and serves the obvious purpose of affording a transition to a world of symbols, serving notice that realistic standards of probability are not to be applied. Common, too, is the figure of the interpreter, represented in the first vision by Holy Church, who explains the allegorical signification of the dream. Our author, however, avails himself of her services for a short time only.

The opening scene of the first vision presents allegorically this world as a field lying between heaven and hell. It is populated by specimens of various classes, all

¹ See A. E. Jack, "The Autobiographical Elements in *Piers Plowman*," *Journal of Germanic Philology*, vol. III, pp. 393-414.

engaged in characteristic occupations. The only personification here is Holy Church, who introduces the main action of the first vision, the marriage of Meed. In this the allegorical element is much more prominent, and involves both action and actors. The attempt to marry Meed to Falsehood signifies the effort to make permanent the corrupt use of money, and the counter-proposal to marry her to Conscience signifies the establishing of a system of just rewards.

The second vision (v-vii) has two parts; one in which Conscience and Repentance preach so effectively as to bring about the conversion of a series of characters typifying the seven deadly sins;¹ the other in the form of a pilgrimage to seek Truth. In the former the delineation of the sinners gives occasion for the most vivid picturing of contemporary manners to be found in any of the versions of the poem, that of the Glutton being especially notable. In the latter the device of the allegorical pilgrimage, already familiar in French literature and destined to produce three hundred years later the greatest of English religious allegories, is probably used for the first time in English. In the course of the pilgrimage another convention is introduced — an allegorical castle with personifications in charge of the various offices.

But though the main structure is that of the allegorical vision, there are many passages which are not allegorical at all. Some of these consist of direct realistic description of human nature or social conditions, others are long religious or moral discussions. Though these last at times become wearisome, they are all interesting to the student of the thought of the time; and no less than the more vivid pictures are they suffused with the intense earnestness and sincerity which lift this poem to a distinguished place in satirical and didactic literature.

W. A. NEILSON.

¹ Wrath is missing; as Manly supposes, by an accident to the manuscript. He is present in B and C.

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT

FYTTE THE FIRST

1. After the siege and the assault had ceased at Troy, the city been destroyed and burned to brands and ashes, the warrior who wrought there the trains of treason was tried for his treachery, the truest on earth.¹ This was Aeneas the noble; he and his high kindred afterwards conquered provinces, and became patrons of well nigh all the wealth in the West Isles. As soon as rich Romulus turns him to Rome, with great pride he at once builds that city, and names it with his own name, which it now has; Ticius turns to Tuscany and founds dwellings; Longobard raises homes in Lombardy; and, far over the French flood, Felix Brutus establishes Britain joyfully on many broad banks, where war and waste and wonders by turns have since dwelt, and many a swift interchange of bliss and woe.

2. And when this Britain was founded by this great hero, bold men loving strife bred therein, and many a time they wrought destruction. More strange things have happened in this land since these days than in any other that I know; but of all the British kings that built here, Arthur was ever the most courteous, as I have heard tell. Therefore, I mean to tell of an adventure in the world, which some count strange and extraordinary even among the wonders of Arthur. If ye will listen to this lay but a little while, I will tell it forthright as I heard it told in town, as it is set down in story that cannot be changed, long written in the land in true words.

3. This King lay royally at Camelot at Christmas tide with many fine lords, the best of men, all the rich brethren of the Round Table, with right rich revel and careless mirth. There full many heroes

¹ Construction clear, though sense odd. Antenor and Aeneas were the traitors who in the mediæval story of Troy handed over the city to the Greeks. Antenor remained unpopular, but Aeneas suffered no loss of reputation. See Lydgate's *Troy Book* in the publications of the Early English Text Soc., Bk. IV, l. 4539 f.

tourneyed betimes, jousted full gaily; then returned these gentle knights to the court to make carols.² For there the feast was held full fifteen days alike with all the meat and the mirth that men could devise. Such a merry tumult, glorious to hear; joyful din by day, dancing at night. All was high joy in halls and chambers with lords and ladies as pleased them best. With all the weal in the world they dwelt there together, the most famous knights save only Christ, the loveliest ladies that ever had life, and he, the comeliest of kings, who holds the court. For all this fair company were in their prime in the hall, the happiest troop under heaven with the proudest of kings. Truly it would be hard to name anywhere so brave a band.

4. When New Year was fresh and but newly come, the court was served double on the dais. As soon as the king with his knights was come into the hall, the chanting in the chapel came to an end; loud was the cry there of clerks and others. Noel was celebrated anew, shouted full often; and afterwards the great ones ran about to take handsel;³ called aloud for New Year's gifts, paid them out briskly, busily discussed the gifts; ladies laughed full loud, though they had lost; and he that won was not wroth, that may ye well trow. All this mirth they made till the meat time. When they had washed, worthily they went to their seats, the best man ever above, as it best behoved. Queen Guinevere full beautiful was set in the midst, placed on the rich dais adorned all about. Fine silk at the sides, a canopy over her of precious cloth of Toulouse, and tapestries of Tars,⁴ that were embroidered and set with the best gems that money could buy. Truly no man could say that he ever beheld a comelier lady than she, with her dancing gray eyes.

5. But Arthur would not eat till all were

² Dancing and singing in a ring.

³ New Year's gifts of good omen.

⁴ Oriental figured stuff.

served. He was so merry in his mirth, and somewhat childlike in his manner; his life pleased him well; he loved little either to lie long or to sit long, so busied him his young blood and his wild brain. And another custom moved him also, that he through chivalry had taken up; he would never eat upon such a dear day before he was told an uncouth tale of some adventurous thing, of some great marvel that he could believe, of ancient heroes, of arms, or of other adventures; or unless some person demanded of him a sure knight to join with him in jousting, to incur peril, to risk life against life, trusting each in the other, leaving the victory to fortune. This was the king's custom whenever he held court at each goodly feast among his free company in the hall. And so with undaunted face he strides stoutly to his seat on that New Year, making great mirth with everybody.

6. Thus the great king stands waiting before the high table, talking of trifles full courteously. The good Gawain was placed there beside Guinevere, and Agravain of the Hard Hand sat on the other side, both of them the king's sister's sons and full sure knights. Bishop Baldwin at the top begins the table, and Ywain, Urien's son, ate by himself. These were placed on the dais and honorably served, and after them many a good man at the side tables. Then the first course came in with blare of trumpets, which were hung with many a bright banner. A new noise of kettle-drums with the noble pipes, wild and stirring melodies wakened the echoes; that many a heart heaved full high at their tones. Dainties of precious meats followed, foison of fresh viands, and on so many dishes that it was difficult to find place before the people to set on the cloth the silver that held the several courses. Each man as he himself preferred partook without hesitation. Every two¹ had twelve dishes between them, good beer and bright wine both.

7. Now will I tell you no more of their service, for everybody must well understand that there was no lack of opportunity for the people to take their food.² Another

¹ It was extremely sumptuous having only two at a mess; i. e. only two sharing the same cup and platter.

² It seems to make somewhat better sense if we transpose, as has here been done, lines 132 and 133; otherwise this passage means that a second course came in heralded by new music.

noise full new suddenly drew nigh, for scarcely had the music ceased a moment, and the first course been properly served in the court, than there burst in at the hall door an awesome being, in height one of the tallest men in the world; from the neck to the waist so square and so thick was he, and his loins and his limbs so long and so great, that half giant I believed him to have been, or, at any rate, the largest of men, and withal the handsomest in spite of his bulk, that ever rode; for though his back and breast were so vast, yet his belly and waist were properly slim; and all his form according, full fairly shaped. At the hue of his noble face men wondered; he carried himself in hostile fashion and was entirely green.

8. All green was this man and his clothing; a straight coat sat tight to his sides; a fair mantle above, adorned within; the lining showed, with costly tripping of shining white fur; and such his hood also, that was caught back from his locks and lay on his shoulders, the hem well stretched;³ hose of the same green, that clung to his calf; and clean spurs under, of bright gold upon silk bands richly barred, and shoes⁴ on his shanks as the hero rides. And all his vesture verily was clean verdure, both the bars of his belt, and the other beauteous stones that were set in fine array about himself and his saddle, worked on silk. It would be too difficult to tell the half of the trifles that were embroidered there, with birds and flies, with gay gauds of green,—the gold ever in the middle; the pendants of the poitrel, the proud crupper, the bits,—and all the metal was enamelled; the stirrups that he stood on were coloured the same, and his saddle bow likewise, and his fine reins⁵ that glimmered and glinted all of green stones. The horse that he rode on was of the same colour too, a green horse, great and thick, a steed full stiff to guide, in gay embroidered bridle, and one right dear to his master.

9. This hero was splendidly dressed in green; and the hair of his head matched that of his horse;⁶ fair flowing locks enfolded his shoulders; a beard as big as a bush hung

³ Translation doubtful.

⁴ Word doubtful.

⁵ Our "reins" is a mere stop-gap. The MS. has the puzzling *sturts*.

⁶ Translating *hors swete* of the MS. as "horse's suite."

over his breast; and it, together with his splendid hair that reached from his head, was trimmed evenly all round above his elbows, so that half his arms were caught thereunder in the manner of a king's hood,¹ that covers his neck. The mane of that great horse was much like it, very curly and combed, with knots full in many folded in with gold wire about the fair green, — always one knot of the hair, another of gold. The tail and the forelock were twined in the same way, and both bound with a band of bright green, set with full precious stones the whole length of the dock, and then tied up with a thong in a tight knot; where rang many bells full bright of burnished gold. Such a steed in the world, such a hero as rides him, was never beheld in that hall before that time. His glances were like bright lightning, so said all that saw him. It seemed as if no man could endure under his blows.

10. He had neither helm nor hauberk, nor gorget, armour nor breastplate, nor shaft nor shield to guard or to smite; but in his one hand he had a holly twig, that is greenest when groves are bare, and an axe in his other, a huge and prodigious one, a weapon merciless almost beyond description; the head had the vast length of an ell-yard, the blade all of green steel and of beaten gold; the bit² brightly burnished, with a broad edge, as well shaped for cutting as sharp razors. The stern warrior gripped it by³ the steel of its stout staff, which was wound with iron to the end of the wood and all engraven with green in beauteous work. A lace was lapped about it, that was fastened at the head, and tied up often along the helve, with many precious tassels attached on rich embroidered buttons of the bright green. This hero turns him in and dais the hall, riding straight to the high dais, fearless of mischief. He greeted never a one, but looked loftily about, and the first word that he uttered was: "Where is the governor of this company? Gladly I would see that hero and speak with him."

He cast his eye on the knights and rode

¹ The word *capados* here translated "hood" is rare. It might conceivably mean "carnail," a protection of mail for the neck and part of the head, that hung down from or under the helm.

² "Bit" is still used for the cutting edge of an axe.

³ Not in the MS.

fiercely up and down, stopped and gan ponder who was there the most renowned.

11. All gazed fixedly on the man, for everybody marvelled what it might mean, that a knight and a horse could have such a colour: as green grown as the grass, and greener, it seemed; shining brighter than green enamel on gold. All were amazed who stood there, and stalked nearer to him, with all the wonder in the world what he would do; for many marvels had they seen, but such never before. Therefore for phantom and faery the folk there deemed it; and for that reason many a noble warrior was slow to answer, and all were astonished at his voice and sat stone still in a deep silence through the rich hall. Their voices⁴ sank as though they had suddenly fallen asleep. I deem, however, that it was not all for fear, but somewhat for courtesy. But now let him to whom all defer undertake the wight.

12. Then Arthur before the high dais beheld that adventure, and saluted the stranger properly, for never was he afraid, and said, "Sir, welcome indeed to this place. I am called Arthur, the head of this hostel. Light courteously down and tarry, I pray thee; and whatso thy will is we shall wit after."

"Nay, so help me he that sits on high," quoth the hero. "To dwell any time in this house was not my errand; but because the fame of this people is lifted up so high, and thy town and thy men are held the best, the stoutest in steel gear on steeds to ride, the wightest and the worthiest of the world's kind, and proved opponents in other proper sports; and here courtesy is known, as I have heard tell, — it is this that has enticed me hither certainly at this time. You may be sure by this branch that I bear here that I pass in peace and seek no quarrel; for if I had set out with a company in fighting fashion, I have a hauberk at home and a helm both, a shield and a sharp spear shining bright, and other weapons to wield, I ween well also; but since I wished no war, my weeds are softer. Now if thou be as bold as all men tell, thou wilt grant me graciously the game that I ask."

Arthur knew how to answer, and said: "Sir courteous knight, if it is battle that thou cravest, thou shalt not fail of a fight here."

⁴ Possibly "faces" or "looks."

13. "Nay, I demand no fight; in faith I tell thee there are but beardless children about on this bench. If I were hasped in arms on a high steed there is no man here to match me, their might is so weak. Therefore I crave in this court a Christmas game, for it is Yule and New Year, and here are many gallants. If there be a man in this house who holds himself so hardy, is so bold in his blood, so rash in his head, that he dares stiffly strike one stroke for another, I shall give him as my gift this rich gisarn, this axe, that is heavy enough, to handle as he likes; and I shall abide the first blow as bare as I sit. If any warrior be wight enough to try what I propose, let him leap lightly to me and take this weapon — I quit-claim it forever, let him keep it as his own — and I shall stand him a stroke firmly on this floor. At another time, by our Lady, thou wilt grant me the boon of dealing him another blow; I will give him respite of a twelvemonth and a day. Now hie, and let us see quickly if any herein dare say aught."

14. If he had astonished them at first, stiller were then all the retainers in hall, the high and the low. The warrior on his steed settled himself in his saddle, and fiercely his red eyes he reeled about; bent his thick brows, shining green; and waved his beard, awaiting whoso would rise. When none would answer him he coughed aloud, stretched himself haughtily and began to speak; "What! Is this Arthur's house," said the hero then, "that is famous through so many realms? Where is now your pride and your conquests, your fierceness, and your wrath and your great words? Now is the revel and the renown of the Round Table overcome by the word of a single man; for all tremble for dread without a blow shown."

With this he laughed so loud that the lord grieved; the blood shot for shame into his fair face. He waxed as wroth as the wind; and so did all that were there. The king so keen of mood then stood near that proud man.

15. "Sir," said he, "by heaven thy asking is foolish; and as thou hast demanded folly, it behooves thee to find it. I know no man that is aghast of thy great words. Give me now thy gisarn, for God's sake, and I will grant thy boon that thou hast bidden."

Quickly he leaped to him and caught at his hand; and the other alights fiercely on foot. Now Arthur has his axe, and grips the helve; he whirls it sternly about as if he meant to strike with it. The bold stranger stood upright before him, higher than any in the house by a head and more; with stern cheer he stood there, stroked his beard, and with cool countenance drew down his coat, no more afraid or dismayed for Arthur's great strokes than if some one had brought him a drink of wine upon the bench.

Gawain, that sat by the queen, turned to the king; "I beseech now with all courtesy that this affair might be mine."

16. "Would ye, worthy lord," quoth Gawain to the king, "bid me step from this bench and stand by you there, — that I without rudeness might leave this table, and that my liege lady liked it not ill — I would come to your help before your rich court; for methinks it is obviously unseemly that such an asking is made so much of in your hall, even though ye yourself be willing to take it upon you, while so many bold ones sit about you on the bench; than whom, I ween, none under heaven are higher of spirit, nor more mighty on the field where strife is reared. I am the weakest, I know, and feeblest of wit; and to tell the truth there would be the least loss in my life. I am only to praise forasmuch as ye are my uncle; no other nobility than your blood know I in my body. And since this adventure is so foolish, it belongs not to you; I have asked it of you first; give it to me. Let this great court decide¹ if I have not spoken well."

The heroes took counsel together and they all gave the same advice, — to free the crowned king and give the game to Gawain.

17. Then the king commanded Gawain to rise from the table; and he right quickly stood up and made himself ready, kneeled down before the king and took the weapon; and Arthur lovingly left it to him, lifted up his hand and gave him God's blessing, and gladly bade him be hardy both of heart and of hand. "Take care, cousin," quoth the king, "that thou give him a cut; and if thou handle him properly, I readily believe

¹ This word is supplied. Perhaps "speak" would be more conservative.

that thou shalt endure the blow which he shall give after."

Gawain goes to the man with gisarm in hand; and he boldly awaits him, shrinking never a whit. Then speaks to Sir Gawain the knight in the green; "Rehearse we our agreement before we go farther. First I conjure thee, hero, how thou art called, that thou tell me it truly, so that I may believe it."

"In good faith," quoth the knight, "Gawain am I called, who give you this buffet, whatever befalls after; and at this time twelvemonth I am to take from thee another with whatever weapon thou wilt, and from no wight else alive."

The other answers again, "Sir Gawain, so thrive I as I am heartily glad that thou shalt give this blow."

18. "By Gog," quoth the green knight, "Sir Gawain, it delights me that I am to get at thy fist what I have requested here; and thou hast readily and truly rehearsed the whole of the covenant that I asked of the king, save that thou shalt assure me, sir, by thy troth, that thou wilt seek me thyself wheresoever thou thinkest I may be found upon the earth, and fetch for thyself such wages as thou dealest me today before this rich company."

"Where should I seek thee?" quoth Gawain. "Where is thy place? I know never where thou livest, by him that wrought me; nor do I know thee, knight, thy court, nor thy name. But tell me truly the way and how thou art called, and I will use all my wit to win my way thither, — and that I swear thee, for a sooth, and by my sure troth."

"New Year will suffice for that; no more is needed now," quoth the man in green to Gawain the courteous. "To tell the truth, after I have received thy tap, and thou hast smitten me well, I shall promptly inform thee of my house and my home and mine own name. Then thou mayest inquire about my journey and hold promise; and if I speak no speech, then thou speedest the better, for thou mayest linger at ease in thy land and seek no further. Take now thy grim tool to thee and let us see how thou knockest."

"Gladly, sir, for sooth," quoth Gawain as he strokes his axe.

19. The green knight on the ground prepared himself properly. With the head a

little bowed he disclosed the flesh. His long, lovely locks he laid over his crown, and let the naked nape of his neck show for the blow. Gawain gripped his axe and gathered it on high; the left foot he set before on the ground, and let the axe light smartly down on the naked flesh,¹ so that the sharp edge severed the giant's bones, and shrank through the clear flesh² and sheared it in twain, till the edge of the brown steel bit into the ground. The fair head fell from the neck to the earth, and many pushed it with their feet where it rolled forth. The blood burst from the body and glistened on the green. Yet never faltered nor fell the hero for all that; but stoutly he started up with firm steps, and fiercely he rushed forth where the heroes stood, caught his lovely head, and lifted it up straightway. Then he turned to his steed, seized the bridle, stepped into the steel bow and strode aloft, holding the head in his hand by the hair; and as soberly the man sat in his saddle as if no mishap had ailed him, though he was headless on the spot. He turned his trunk about — that ugly body that bled. Many a one of them thought that he had lost his reason.

20. For he held the head straight up in his hand; turned the face toward the highest on the dais; and it lifted up the eyelids and looked straight out, and spoke thus much with its mouth, as ye may now hear: — "Look Gawain, that thou be ready to go as thou hast promised, and seek loyally, hero, till thou find me; as thou hast promised in this hall in the hearing of these knights. To the green chapel go thou, I charge thee, to receive such a blow as thou hast dealt. Thou deservest to be promptly paid on New Year's morn.³ As the knight of the green chapel many men know me; therefore, if thou strivest to find me, thou shalt never fail. And so come, or it behooves thee to be called recreant."

With a wild rush he turned the reins, and flew out at the hall door — his head in his hand — so that the fire of the flint flew from the foal's hoofs. To what country he vanished knew none there; no more than they wist whence he was come. The king and Gawain roared with laughter at that

¹ Some such word has to be supplied after naked.

² "Grease" in the original.

³ Morris's punctuation of this passage has been altered.

green man; but this adventure was reckoned a marvel among men.

21. Though the courteous king wondered in his heart, he let no semblance be seen, but said aloud to the comely queen with courteous speech, "Dear dame, today be never dismayed; well becoming are such tricks at Christmas, in lack of entertainment, to laugh and sing about among these pleasant carols of knights and ladies. Nevertheless I may well go to my meat, for I can not deny that I have seen a marvel." He glanced at Sir Gawain and said cheerfully, "Now, sir, hang up thine axe; it has hewn enough." And it was put above the dais to hang on the tapestry where all men might marvel at it, and by it avouch the wonderful happening. Then they turned to the board, these heroes together — the king and the good knight — and the keen men served them double of all dainties, as was most fitting; with all manner of meat, and minstrelsy both. They spent that day in joy until it came to an end. Now take care, Sir Gawain, that thou blench not for the pain to prosecute this adventure that thou hast taken on hand.

FYTTE THE SECOND

1. This hanel of adventures had Arthur at the beginning, in the young year, since he yearned to hear boasting. Although there was little news when they went to their seats, now they are provided with stern work,¹ their hands quite full. Gawain was glad to begin those games in the hall; but it would not be surprising if the end were heavy; for though men be merry in mind when they have much drink, yet a year runs full swiftly, and yields never the same; the beginning full seldom matches the end. And so this Yule went by, and the year after it, each season in turn following the other. After Christmas came the crabbed Lent, that tries the flesh with fish and more simple food. But then the weather of the world quarrels with winter, and though the cold still clings, the clouds lift; copiously descends the rain in warm showers, and falls upon the fair earth. Flowers show there; green are the garments both of fields and of groves; birds hurry to build, and lustily

they sing for the solace of the soft summer, that follows thereafter. Blossoms swell into bloom in rows rich and rank; and lovely notes are heard in the beauteous wood.

2. After the season of summer with the soft winds, when Zephyrus blows on weeds and herbs, happy is the plant that waxes then, when the dank dew drops from the leaves, to await the blissful glance of the bright sun. But then harvest hastens and hardens it soon: warns it to wax full ripe against the winter. He drives with drought the dust to rise, — from the face of the earth to fly full high. The wild wind of the welkin wrestles with the sun. The leaves fall from the bough and light on the ground. The grass becomes all gray that erst was green. Then all ripens and rots that which formerly flourished; and thus runs the year in yesterdays many; and winter returns again without asking any man,² till the Michelmas moon has come in wintry wise. Then thinks Gawain full soon of his anxious voyage.

3. Yet till Allhallows day with Arthur he lingers; and Arthur made a feast on that festival for the hero's sake, with great and gay revel of the Round Table. Knights full courteous and comely ladies all for love of that man were in sorrow; but nevertheless they spoke only of mirth; and many a joyless one there made jests for his gentle sake. After meat he mournfully addresses his uncle, and speaks of his passage, and openly he says — "Now, liege lord of my life, leave I ask of you. Ye know the cost of this case; I do not care to tell you even a trifle of its dangers;³ but I am ready to start for the fray no later than tomorrow morn, to seek the man in the green, as God will guide me."

Then the best of the castle gathered together, Ywain and Erec, and others full many, Sir Dodinel de Sauvage, the Duke of Clarence, Lancelot and Lyonel and Lucan the Good, Sir Bors and Sir Bedever, big men both, and many other proud ones, with Mador de la Port. All this company of the court came nearer to the king, to counsel the knight, with care at their hearts. There was much deep grief felt in the hall that so worthy a one as Gawain should go on that errand, to endure a sorry dint and

¹ Morris's punctuation of this passage has been changed.

² Passage a bit vague.

³ Morris's punctuation altered.

deal none himself with his brand. But the knight ever made good cheer, and said, "Why should I swerve from stern and strange destiny? What can a man do but try?"

4. He lingered there all that day, and on the morn made ready. Early he asked for his arms, and they were all brought. First a carpet of Toulouse was stretched over the floor, and much was the gilt gear that gleamed upon it. The brave man stepped thereon and handled the steel, clad in a doublet of costly Tars, and afterwards a well wrought hood, closed on top and bound within with a glistening white fur. Then they put the sabatons¹ upon the hero's feet, lapped his legs in steel with fair greaves, to which were attached well polished poleynes² fastened about his knees with knots of gold. Fine cuisses then, that well enclosed his thick, brawny thighs, they attached with thongs. Next the decorated burnie³ of bright steel rings upon precious stuff encased the hero, and well burnished braces upon his two arms, with elbow-pieces goodly and gay and gloves of plate, and all the goodly gear that might avail him at that time, with rich coat armour, gold spurs well fastened, and a sure brand girt about his side by a silken sash.

5. When he was hasped in arms his harness was rich; the least latchet or loop gleamed with gold. So, harnessed as he was, he heard his mass, offered and adored at the high altar. Then he came to the king and his court; courteously took his leave of lords and ladies; and they kissed him, and convoyed him, entrusting him to Christ. By that time was Gringolet ready, and girt with a saddle that gleamed full gaily with many gold fringes; everywhere nailed anew, prepared for that emergency. The bridle, barred about, was bound with bright gold; the decoration of the breastplate and of the fine housings, the crupper and caparison, accorded with the saddle-bow, and all was adorned with rich red gold nails, that glittered and gleamed like the gleam of the sun. Then he took the helm and quickly kissed it. It was stoutly stapled and stuffed within; it was high on his head, hasped behind, with a light urison⁴ over the ventail,⁵ embroidered and bound with the best gems on a

broad silken border; and birds on the seams like painted popinjays⁶ preening themselves here and there; turtle-doves and true-loves⁷ thickly interlaced. As many birds there were as had been in town for seven winters. The circlet that surrounded his crown was even more precious — a device of gleaming diamonds.

6. Then they showed him the shield, that was of sheer gules, with the pentangle painted in pure gold. He took it by the baldric and cast it about his neck; and it became the hero passing fair. And why the pentangle pertains to that noble prince I mean to tell you, though it should delay me. It is a sign that Solomon set formerly as a token of truth, by its own right, for it is a figure that holds five points, and each line overlaps and locks in another; and throughout it is endless; and the English call it everywhere, as I hear, the endless knot. Therefore it suits this knight and his clear arms, forever faithful in five things, and in each of them five ways. Gawain was known for good and as refined gold, devoid of every villainy, adorned with virtues. Therefore, the new⁸ pentangle he bore on shield and coat, as the man most true of speech and the knight gentlest of behaviour.

7. First, he was found faultless in his five wits; and again the hero failed never in his five fingers; and all his affiance in this world was in the five wounds that Christ received on the cross, as the creed tells; and where-soever this man was hard bestead in the mêlée his pious thought was in this above all other things — to take all his strength from the five joys that the courteous Queen of Heaven had of her child. For this cause the knight had her image comely painted in the greater half of his shield, that when he looked down thereupon, his courage never abated. The fifth five that I find that the hero used, were generosity and fellowship above all things, his purity and his courtesy that never swerved, and pity that passes all qualities. These very five were more surely set upon that warrior than upon any other. Now all these⁹ were established fivefold in this knight, and each one was fastened in another that had no end, and they were fastened on five points that never failed, nor met anywhere, nor sundered

¹ steel shoes. ² knee pieces. ³ coat of mail.

⁴ scarf. ⁵ visor.

⁶ parrots.

⁷ true lover's knots.

⁸ Should it be *now*?

⁹ These five larger virtues.

either, but finished always without end at each corner, wherever the game began or concluded. Therefore on his fair shield this knot was painted royally with red gold upon red gules. That is the true pentangle as the people properly call it. Now was the gay Gawain armed. He caught up his lance right there, and with a good-day he went for evermore.

8. He spurred his steed with the spurs and sprang on his way so swiftly that the stone struck out fire after him. All who saw the gentle man sighed in heart, and the heroes said all together to each other in their love for that comely knight, "By Christ, it is a shame that thou, hero, must be lost, who art so noble of life. In faith it is not easy to find his match upon the earth. To have acted more warily would have been better counsel; and to have made yon dear one a duke; it would well become him to be a brilliant leader of people here. This would have been better than to have him utterly destroyed, given over¹ to an elvish man for mere boasting pride. Who ever knew any king to take such counsel as to suffer knights to be so tricked for a Christmas game." Much warm water welled from eyes when that seemly sire departed from the dwellings that day. He made no stop, but wightly went his way; many a tiresome path he rode, as I heard the book tell.

9. Now rides this hero, Sir Gawain, through the realm of Logres in God's behalf, though to him it seemed no play. Oft alone companionless he lodged at night in places where he found not before him the fare that he liked. No company had he but his foal by friths and downs, nor nobody but God to talk with by the way; till that he approached nigh unto North Wales. He kept all the isles of Anglesey on the left side, and fared over the fords by the forelands, over at the Holy Head, till he again took land in the wilderness of Wirrel. There dwelt but few that loved either God or man with good heart. And ever as he fared he asked of men that he met if they had heard any talk of a green knight of the green chapel in any spot thereabout, and all nicked him with nay, that never in their life saw they any man of such green hue. The knight took strange roads by many a rough bank. His cheer changed full oft ere he saw that chapel.

¹ The meaning of the verb is doubtful.

10. Many a cliff he overclimbed in strange countries; far sundered from his friends, lonely he rode. At each ford or water where the hero passed it were strange if he found not a foe before him, and that so foul and so fell that it behooved him to fight. So many marvels in the mountains there the man found that it were too tedious to tell of the tenth part. Sometimes he warred with serpents, and with wolves also, sometimes with savages that dwelt in the cliffs; both with bulls and bears, and boars sometimes; and giants that assailed him from the high fell. Had he not been doughty and stern, and served God, doubtless he had been dead and slain full oft. But the warfare tried him not so much but that the winter was worse, when the cold clear water shed from the clouds, and froze ere it might fall to the barren earth. Near slain with the sleet he slept in his iron more nights than enough on naked rocks, where clattering from the crest the cold burn ran, and hung high over his head in hard icicles. Thus in peril and pain and plights full hard through the country wanders this knight all alone till Christmas Eve. At that tide to Mary he made his moan that she might direct his riding and lead him to some dwelling.

11. Merrily on the morn he rides by a mount into a forest full deep, that was strangely wild. High hills were on each side, and woods beneath of hoar oaks full huge, a hundred together. The hazel and the hawthorn were twined all together, covered everywhere with rough ragged moss, with many unblithe birds upon bare twigs that piteously piped there for pain of the cold. The knight upon Gringolet rides all alone under the boughs, through many a moss and mire, mourning for his trials, lest he should never survive to see the service of that Sire who on that very night was born of a lady to quell our pain. And therefore sighing he said: "I beseech thee, Lord, and Mary, that is mildest mother so dear, for some harbour where I might properly hear mass and thy matins tomorrow. Meekly I ask it, and thereto earnestly I pray my pater and ave and creed." He rode in his prayer and lamented for his misdeeds. Oft-times he blessed himself, and said, "Christ's cross speed me."

12. The hero had not crossed himself more than thrice ere he was aware in the

wood of a dwelling on a hill, above a clearing, on a mount, hidden under the boughs of many a huge tree about the ditches; a castle the comeliest that ever knight owned, set on a prairie, a park all about, with its beautiful palace, pinnaced full thick, and surrounded with many a tree for more than two miles. The hero gazed at the castle on that one side as it shimmered and shone through the fair oaks. Then he humbly doffed his helm and devoutly he thanked Jesus and St. Julian — who are both gentle — who courteously had directed him and harkened to his cry. "Now bon hostel," quoth the man, "I beseech you yet!" Then he spurs Gringolet with his gilt heels, and he full fortunately takes the way to the chief road, that soon brought the hero to the bridge-end in haste. The bridge was securely lifted, the gates locked fast; the walls were well arrayed; no wind blast did it fear.

13. The hero that sat on his horse, abode on the bank of the deep double ditch that stretched to the place. The wall sank in the water wondrous deep, and again a full huge height it towered aloft, of hard hewn stone up to the top courses, corbelled under the battlement in the best manner; and above fine watch-towers ranged along, with many good loop-holes that showed full clean. A better barbian that hero never looked upon. And farther within he beheld the high hall, with towers set full thickly about, and fair and wondrous high filioles with carved tops cunningly devised. Chalk-white chimneys enough he saw that gleamed full white on the battlements. So many painted pinnacles were set everywhere, built so thick among the crenellations of the castle, that it verily appeared cut out of paper. Fair enough it seemed to the noble knight on his horse if he could only attain the shelter within, to harbour in that hostel, while the holiday lasted. He called, and soon there appeared on the wall a right pleasant porter who took his message and greeted the knight errant.

14. "Gawain," quoth Gawain, "would you go my errand to the high lord of this house to crave harbour?"

"Yea, by Peter," quoth the porter; "and truly I trow that ye are welcome, sir, to dwell while you like."

Then the man went again quickly, and a crowd of folk with him, to receive the knight. They let down the great draw and

eagerly poured out, and kneeled down on their knees upon the cold earth to welcome the hero as it seemed to them proper. They opened up wide the broad gate for him and he raised them courteously, and rode over the bridge. Several attendants held his saddle while he alighted, and afterwards good men enough stabled his steed. Then knights and squires came down to bring this hero joyfully into the hall. When he lifted up his helm people enough hurried to take it at his hand, in order to serve the courteous one; his sword and his shield they took too. Then he greeted full courteously the knights each one; and many a proud man pressed there to honour that prince. All hasped in his high weeds, they led him to the hall, where a fair fire burned fiercely upon the hearth. Then the lord of the people came from his chamber to meet courteously the man on the floor. He said, "Ye are welcome to wield as you like what is here; all is your own to have at your will and commandment." "Gramercy," quoth Gawain. "Christ reward you for it." Like glad heroes either folded the other in his arms.

15. Gawain looked on the man who greeted him so goodly, and thought it a bold hero that owned the castle, a huge warrior for the nonce, and of great age. Broad and bright was his beard, and all beaver-hued. Firm-gaited was he on his stalwart limbs; with a face as fierce as fire, and a free speech; and to the hero he seemed well suited indeed to govern a nation of good people.

The lord turned to a chamber and promptly commanded to give Gawain a retinue to serve him in lowly wise; and there were ready at his bidding men enough, who brought him to a bright bower where the bedding was curtains of pure silk with clear gold hems, and covertures right curious with comely borders, adorned above with bright fur. Curtains running on ropes, red gold rings, tapestries of Toulouse and Tars hung on the wall, and under foot on the floor of the same pattern. There with mirthful speeches the hero was despoiled of his burnie and of his bright weeds. Quickly men brought him rich robes that he might pick and choose the best for his change. As soon as he took one and was wrapped therein, that sat upon him seemly with sailing skirts, the hero by his visage verily seemed to well

nigh every man in looks glowing and lovely in all his limbs; it seemed to them that Christ never made a comelier knight. Wherever in the world he were, it seemed as if he might be a prince without peer in the field where fell men fight.

16. A chair before the chimney,¹ where charcoal burned, was prepared for Sir Gawain richly with cloths and cushions, upon counterpanes that were both fine. And then a beauteous mantle was cast on the man, of a brown fabric richly embroidered, and fairly furred within with the best skins, all of ermine; the hood of the same. And he sat on that settle in seemly rich attire, and warmed him thoroughly; and then his cheer mended. Soon a table was raised up on trestles full fair, and set with a clean cloth that showed clear white, napkins, salt-cellar, and silver spoons. The hero washed when he would and went to his meat. Men served him seemly enough, — double fold as was proper — with pottages various and suitable, seasoned in the best manner; and many kinds of fish, some baked in bread, some broiled on the coals, some boiled, some in sauces savoured with spices; and always discourse so pleasant that it pleased the warrior. Full freely and often the hero called it a feast right courteously, when all the retainers together praised him as courteous.² "Do this penance now, and soon things will be better!" Right mirthful was he for the wine that went to his head.

17. Then they questioned and inquired sparingly in skilful queries put to the prince himself, till he courteously acknowledged that he was of the court which noble Arthur holds alone, who is the rich, royal king of the Round Table; and that it was Gawain himself that sits in the house, by chance come for that Christmas. When the lord had learned that he had that hero, he laughed aloud, so dear it seemed to him; and all the men in the castle made much joy at appearing promptly in the presence of him who contains in his own person all

worth and prowess and gracious traits, and is ever praised; above all the men in the world his renown is the greatest. Each warrior said full softly to his companion — "Now shall we see courteous turns of behaviour, and the blameless forms of noble talking; what profit there is in speech may we learn without asking since we have taken that fine father of nurture. God has indeed given us his grace, who grants us to have such a guest as Gawain, on account of whose birth men sit and sing for joy. This hero will now teach us what distinguished manners are; I think that those who hear him will learn how to make love."

18. When the dinner was done and the dear ones risen, the time was nigh arrived at the night. Chaplains took their way to the chapels, and rang full loudly, as they should, to the melodious evensong of the high time. The lord turns thither, and the lady also. Into a comely closet daintily she enters. Gawain joyfully proceeds, and goes thither straightway. The lord takes him by the mantle and leads him to his seat, recognizes him openly and calls him by his name, and says he is the welcomest wight in the world. And Gawain thanked him thoroughly and either embraced the other, and they sat soberly together during the service. Then the lady desired to look on the knight, and came from her closet with many fair maidens. But she was fairer than all the others in flesh and face, in skin and form, in complexion and demeanour — more beautiful than Guinevere, it seemed to the hero. He walked through the chancel to greet that gracious one. Another lady led her by the left hand, that was older than she; an ancient lady it seemed, and one highly honoured by the knights about her; but unlike to look on were the ladies, for if the younger was fair, yellow was the other. Rich red on the one bloomed everywhere; rough wrinkled cheeks rolled on the other. The kerchiefs of the one broided with many clear pearls, openly displayed her breast and her bright throat, which shone clearer than snow that falls on the hills. The other covered her neck with a gorget, that wrapped her black chin in milk-white pleats. Her forehead was completely enveloped in silken folds, adorned and tricked³ with small ornaments;

¹ In the old meaning of fireplace, fire-back, or grate.

² Possibly the host, and not Gawain, is the subject of this sentence, which then might be translated: "Full freely and oft the host called it a feast (i.e. made the feaster welcome) right courteously, when all the retainers praised him (Gawain or the host?) as courteous." In the next two sentences the host is pretty certainly the subject. With this interpretation cf. *Macbeth*, III, 4, 33: "The feast is sold that is not often wou'd, while 'tis a-making, 'tis given with welcome."

³ The precise, but not the general, meaning of the two participles is uncertain.

and naught was bare of that lady but the black brows, the two eyes, the nose, and the naked lips; and those were ugly to behold and oddly bleared. A gracious lady in the land one might call her forsooth! Her body was short and thick, her hips round¹ and broad. More pleasant to look on was the being she led.

19. When Gawain looked on that beautiful one who gazed graciously, he took leave of the lord, and went toward them. The elder he saluted, bowing full low; the lovelier he took a little in his arms; he kissed her comely, and knightly he greeted her. They welcomed him, and he quickly asked to be their servant if it pleased them. They took him between them and led him conversing to the fireplace in the parlour; and straightway they called for spices, which men speeded to bring them unsparingly, and the pleasant wine therewith each time. The lord leaped merrily up full often, and saw to it that the mirth never faltered. Gaily he snatched off his hood and hung it on a spear, and exhorted them to win it as a prize — he to have it² who could make the most mirth that Christmas tide. "And I shall try, by my faith, with the help of my friends³ to compete with the best, ere I lose my apparel." Thus with laughing mien the lord makes merry in order to glad Sir Gawain with games in the hall that night. When it came time, the king commanded lights; Sir Gawain took his leave and went to his bed.

20. On the morn when as every man knows God was born to die for us, joy waxes in every dwelling in the world for his sake. So it did there on that day, with many dainties at meats and meals, right quaint dishes, and brave men on the dais dressed in their best. The old ancient wife sits the highest, the courteous lord placed by her, as I trow; Gawain and the gay lady together just in the middle, as the courses⁴ properly come; and afterwards the rest throughout all the hall, as it seemed best to them, each man in his degree was properly served. There was meat, there was

mirth, there was much joy, that it were arduous for me to tell thereof, though to note it I took pains belike.⁵ But yet I know that Gawain and the lovely lady took comfort in each other's company, in the choice play of their sharp wits, and the pure courtesy of their modest talk; their disport surpassed indeed that of any royal game. Trumps and drums came playing loudly; each man minded his own business, and they two minded theirs.

21. Much delight was taken there that day, and the second; and the third followed as pleasantly. The joy of St. John's day was gentle to hear of; and it was the last of the festival, the people considered. There were guests to go upon the grey morn; therefore wondrous late they sat up and drank the wine, danced full gayly with sweet carols. At the last, when it was late, they took their leave, each good man to wend on his way. Gawain gave his host good day; but the good man takes him, and leads him to his own chamber, by the fireplace; and there he draws him aside and properly thanks him for the great worship that he had granted him in honouring his house on that high tide, in embellishing his castle with his good cheer. "Indeed, sir, while I live I shall be the better that Gawain has been my guest at God's own feast."

"Gramercy, sir," quoth Gawain, "in good faith the merit is yours; all the honour is your own, — the high King reward you; and I am your man to work your behest in high and in low as I am bound by right."

The lord eagerly strives to hold the knight longer; but Gawain answers him that he can in no wise.

22. Then the hero asked of him full fairly what extraordinary deed had driven him at that dear time from the king's court, to go all alone so boldly, ere the holidays were wholly over.

"For sooth, sir," quoth the hero, "ye say but the truth; a high errand and a hasty had me from these dwellings; for I am summoned to such a place as I know not in the world whitherward to wend to find it. I would not for all the land in Logres fail to reach it on New Year's morn — so our Lord help me. Therefore, sir,

⁵ The clause literally translated is insignificant; we expect something like "and yet I should fall for all my pains."

¹ The meaning of *bay* is doubtful.

² These four words supplied.

³ This phrase may go with "lose," thus aggravating the joke.

⁴ This word (*mess*) can refer to the courses (the food), or to the "mess" (the two persons eating together, i.e. using the same goblet, platter, etc.).

this request I require of you here, that ye tell me truly if ever ye heard tale of the green chapel, where in the world it stands, and of the knight green in colour that keeps it. There was established by statute an agreement between us that I should meet that man at that landmark if I could but survive. And of that same New Year there now lacks but little, and by God's Son I would gladlier look on that person—if God would let me—than wield any possession in the world. Therefore, indeed—by your good will—it behooves me to wend; I have now at my disposal barely three days; and I were as fain fall dead as fail of mine errand."

Then laughing quoth the lord, "Now it behooves thee to stay; for I shall direct you to that spot by the time's end—the green chapel upon the ground. Grieve you no more; for ye shall be in your bed, sir, at thine ease some days yet, and set out on the first of the year and come to that place at mid-morn, to do what you like. Stay till New Year's day; and rise and go then. One shall set you on your way; it is not two miles hence."

23. Then was Gawain full glad, and merrily he laughed; "Now I thank you especially for this above all other things; now that my quest is achieved, I shall dwell at your will, and do whatever else ye decide."

Then the sire seized him and set him beside him, and let the ladies be fetched to please them the better. Fair entertainment they had quietly among themselves; the lord in his jovial, friendly demeanor behaved as a man out of¹ his wits that knew not what he did. Then he spake to the knight, crying loud, "Ye have agreed to do the deed that I bid. Will ye hold this hest here at once?"

"Yea, sir, forsooth," said the true hero, "while I stay in your castle I shall be obedient to your hest."

"Since ye have travelled from afar," quoth the warrior, "and then have sat late with me, ye are not well nourished, I know, either with sustenance or with sleep. Ye shall linger in your loft and lie at your ease tomorrow till mass time; and go to meent when ye will with my wife, who shall sit

with you and comfort you with her company till I return home; and I shall rise early and go hunting." Gawain grants all this, bowing courteously.

24. "Yet further," quoth the hero, "let us make an agreement. Whatsoever I win in the wood, it shall be yours; and whatsoever fortune ye achieve, exchange with me therefor. Sweet sir, swap we so, swear truly, whichever one of us gets the worse or the better."

"By God," quoth Gawain the good, "I consent thereto; and whatever game you like, agreeable it seems to me."

"On this beverage just brought the bargain is made," said the lord of that people; and both laughed.

Then they drank and played and amused² themselves, these lords and ladies, so long as it pleased them; and then with polite demeanour and many fair gestures, they stood up and lingered a while, and talked quietly, kissed full comely, and took their leave. With many a gay servant and gleaming torches each hero was brought to his bed full softly at the last. Yet before they went to bed they oft rehearsed the covenants. The old lord of that people knew well how to keep up a jest.

FYTTE THE THIRD

1. Full early before the day the folk arose; the guests that would go called their grooms, and these hastened to saddle the horses, arrange their gear, and truss their mails. The great ones arrayed themselves to ride, leaped up lightly and caught their bridles, each wight on his way where it well pleased him.

The dear lord of the land was not the last; arrayed for the riding, with retainers full many, he ate a sop³ hastily after he had heard mass, and took his way quickly with his bugle to the field. By the time that any daylight gleamed upon earth, he with his heroes were mounted on their high horses. Then these hunters that understood it, coupled their hounds, unclosed the kennel doors and called them thereout, blew blithely on bugles three simple calls. At this the braehets⁴ bayed and made a wild noise, and the hunters chastised and turned

¹ *Wolde* in the text is translated as a corruption of some such word as "was lacking," or "wandered."

² Word doubtful.

³ Took a light repast.

⁴ Hounds that hunt by scent.

back those that wandered off, — a hundred hunters of the best there were, as I have heard tell. To their stations the trackers went; hunters cast off the couples; and then arose for the good blasts great uproar in that forest.

2. At the first noise of the quest the game quaked; the deer moved down into the dale, dazed for dread; hurried to the height; but quickly they were hindered by the beaters, who cried stoutly. They let the harts with the high heads go their way, the wild bucks also with their broad palms,¹ for the generous lord had forbidden that there should any man meddle with the male deer in the close season. But the hinds were held back with "Hay!" and "Ho!" and the does driven with great din to the deep glades. There might one see as they ran the flight of arrows; at each turn under the boughs out flew a shaft, that savagely bit on the brown hide with full broad heads. How they leaped and bled and died by the banks! And ever the hounds with a rush eagerly followed them; hunters with shrill horn hastened after with such a resounding cry as if cliffs had cracked. What game escaped the men who shot was all run down and torn at the stands. The deer² were pestered at the heights, and worried at the waters; the people were so alert at the low stations, and the greyhounds so great, that got them quickly and pulled them down as fast as a man could see. The lord, shouting for joy, shot and alighted full oft, and passed the day thus with joy till the dark night.

3. So this lord sports by the eaves of the linden wood, and Gawain the good man lies in his gay bed; reposes till the day light gleams on the walls, under the beautiful coverlets, curtained about. And as he fell into a doze, faintly he heard a little din at the door, then distinctly;³ and he heaved up his head out of the clothes, caught up a corner of his curtain a little, and watched warily in that direction to see what it might be. It was the lady, loveliest to behold, who drew the door to after her right slyly and quietly, and turned toward the bed. The hero grew bashful and laid himself down cunningly and pretended that he slept. And she stepped quietly, and stole to his bed,

cast up the curtain, and crept within, and seated herself full softly on the bedside, and stayed there surprisingly long, to see when he should awake. The man lay pretending a full great while, bothered in his conscience what this affair might mean or amount to. Marvellous it seemed to him. But yet he said to himself, "More seemly would it be to find out by asking what she would." Then he waked, and stretched, and turned to her; unlocked his eyelids, and made believe he was amazed, and crossed himself with his hand, to be the safer for his prayer. With chin and cheek full sweet, of mingled white and red, right lovely she looked, with her small laughing lips.

4. "Good morrow, Sir Gawain!" said that fair lady. "Ye are a careless sleeper when one can enter thus. Now ye are certainly taken; unless we can make a truce I shall bind you in your bed, ye may be sure of that!" All laughing the lady shot those jests.

"Good morrow, fair one," quoth Gawain the blithe. "I shall be at your disposal, and that pleases me well, for I yield me outright and pray for grace, — and that is the best course, I judge, for I am in straits." And thus he returned the jests with many a blithe laugh. "But would ye, lovely lady, grant me leave, free⁴ your prisoner and bid him rise, I would leave this bed and dress myself better. Then I could talk with you in more comfort."

"Nay, forsooth, fair sir," said that sweet one, "ye shall not rise from your bed; I shall manage you better. I shall tie you up securely,⁵ and afterwards talk with my knight that I have caught; for I ween well, ye are indeed Sir Gawain, whom all the world worships whereso ye ride. Your honour, your courtesy, is heartily praised, by lords, by ladies, by all alive; and now ye are here, forsooth, and we all alone. My lord and his people are gone far away; the other men in their beds, and my maidens also; the door shut and closed with a strong hasp; and since I have in this house him whom all like, I shall make good use of my time while it lasts. Ye are welcome to my person, to do whatever you wish; I am perforce, and must remain, your servant."

⁴ Meaning doubtful.

⁵ A mere guess: the line appears to be literally "I shall cover you here the other half also."

¹ The flat, broad part of the horn.

² Subject supplied. ³ Meaning not quite sure.

5. "In good faith," quoth Gawain, "a great privilege it seems to me — though I be not now he that ye speak of. To reach such reverence as ye rehearse here, I am a man unworthy, I know well. By God, I should be glad — if it seemed good to you — to do what I might in speech or in service to enhance your worship;¹ — it were a pure joy."

"In good faith, Sir Gawain," quoth the gay lady, "if I should speak ill of the fame and the prowess that pleases all others, or esteem it light, it would show but small discernment.² But there are ladies enough who were liefer have this courteous one in their power — as I have thee here, — to dally dearly with your dainty words, to comfort themselves and dispel their cares, — than much of the treasure and gold that they have. But I praise the Lord who rules the skies that through his grace I have wholly in my hand that which all desire."

Great cheer she that was so fair of face made him; the knight with discreet speeches answered her every proposal.

6. "Madame," quoth the merry man, "Mary reward you, for in good faith I have found your generosity noble. People judge a person's deeds largely from the accounts of others;³ but the praise that they accord my deserts is but idle. It is simply your own nobility, who know nothing but good."

"By Mary," quoth the gracious one, "methinks it is otherwise; for were I worth all the store of women alive, and all the wealth of the world were in my hands, and I should bargain and choose to get me a lord, then for the good traits that I have found in the knight here, of beauty and graciousness and gay seeming, and from what I have heard before and hold in this case to be true, there should no hero in the world be chosen before you."

"Indeed, worthy one," quoth the hero, "ye might⁴ have chosen much better; but I am proud of the estimation that ye put upon me; and as your devoted servant I hold you my sovereign, and your knight I become; and Christ pay you for it."

Thus they spoke of various things till past the midmorn; and ever the lady be-

haved as if she loved him much. But the hero fared with caution and made courteous pretences. "Though I were the fairest of women," mused the lady, "little love would he show, because of the danger that he seeks without reproach — the blow that may slay him, but must needs be undergone." The lady then asked leave, and he granted her full soon.

7. Then she gave him good day, and of a sudden laughed; and as she stood there she astounded him with right sharp words: "Now may he that speeds each speech, pay you for this entertainment; but that ye are Gawain, it goes not in my mind."⁵

"Wherefore?" quoth the hero; and eagerly he asks, afraid lest he had failed in the performance of his design.⁶ But the lady blessed him and spake in this wise: "A man as good as Gawain is properly held — and courtesy is closed so entirely in him — could not easily have lingered so long with a lady but he had on some trifling excuse or other⁷ courteously craved a kiss."

Then said Gawain, "Indeed, be it as you like; I shall kiss at your commandment as becomes a knight, and fear⁸ lest he displease you; so urge that plea no more." She comes nearer at that and takes him in her arms; stoops graciously down and kisses the man. They courteously entrust each other to Christ. She goes forth at the door without more ado, and he prepares to rise, and hurries amain; calls to his chamberlain, chooses his weeds, steps forth blithely to mass when he is ready; and then he goes to his meat, behaving always courteously, and makes merry all day till the bright moon rises. Never was a hero fairer entertained by two such worthy dames, the older and the younger. Much disport they make together.

8. And ever the lord of the land is bound on his sport, to hunt in holts and heath at barren hinds. Such a sum of does and of other deer he slew there by the time the sun was low, that it were a marvel to estimate. Then eagerly they all flocked together at the last; and quickly of the slain deer they made a quarry. The leaders

⁵ The negative is supplied.

⁶ Possibly, "in some form of courtesy."

⁷ Literally, "By some touch of some trifle at some tale's end."

⁸ "Fear" is an emendation by Morris; the clause is obscure.

¹ The passage is none too clear.

² The last clause is obscure in the text.

³ The passage is obscure. ⁴ "might" supplied.

hastened thereto with men enough; gathered the greatest of grease,¹ and proceeded properly to undo² them as the occasion demands. Some that were there tried them at the assay³ and found two fingers of fat on the leanest of all. Afterwards they slit the slot,⁴ seized the arber,⁵ cut it free with a sharp knife, and tied it⁶ up. Next they cut down along the four limbs and rent off the hide; then they opened the belly, took out the paunch, cutting eagerly, and laid aside the knot.⁷ They began at the throat again and skilfully divided the weasand from the windpipe and threw out the guts. Then they cut out the shoulders with their sharp knives, and pulled them through by a little hole, so as to have whole sides. Next they divided the breast, and cut it in two; and once more they began at the throat, split the beast quickly right up to the crotch, took out the advancers,⁸ and immediately severed all the fillets by the ribs, and took them off properly along the backbone even to the haunch, — all of which hang together. Then they heaved it up whole and cut it off there; and that they took for the numbles,⁹ as it is rightly called. At the fork of the thighs they cut the flaps behind; hastily they hewed the carcass in two, and severed it along the backbone.

9. Both the head and the neck they hewed off then, and afterwards they sundered the sides swiftly from the chine, and the corbie's fee¹⁰ they cast in a green tree. Then they pierced either thick side through by the rib, and hung them each by the hocks of the haunches — each man for his fee, as it befell him to have it. Upon a skin of a fair beast they fed their hounds with the liver and the lights, the leather of the paunches, and bread bathed in blood mingled thereamong. Loudly they blew the prize, and bayed their hounds; then they started to carry home their meat, blowing full stoutly many loud notes. By the

time daylight was done the band had all arrived at the comely castle, where the knight is quietly waiting in comfort beside a bright fire. When the lord arrived and Gawain met him, there was joy enough.

10. Then the lord commanded to gather in the hall all the household, and both the ladies to come down with their maids. Before all the folk on the floor he bade men fetch his venison before him; and all in merry sport he called Gawain, told him the number of the choice beasts, and showed him the fat meat cut from¹¹ the ribs; "How like you this play? Have I won the prize? Have I properly earned thanks by my woodcraft?"

"Yes, indeed," quoth the other hero; "here is the fairest store that I saw this seven year in the season of winter."

"And all I give you, Gawain," quoth the host, then; "for by our plighted covenant you can claim it as your own."

"That is true," replied the hero, "and I say to you the same; I too have won this worthy thing within doors; and I am sure that with quite as good will it belongs to you." He throws his arms about his fair neck and kisses him as courteously as he knew how. "Take you there my merchandise; I have won no more; though I should give it up willingly even if it were greater."

"It is good," quoth the good man; "gramercy therefor. Perchance it might be better if you would tell me where you won this same favour by your own¹² wit."

"That was not the agreement," said he; "ask me no more, for ye have got all that belongs to you, be sure of that."

They laughed and made merry in low tones; then they went quickly to supper with new dainties enough.

11. And afterwards as they sat by a fireplace in a chamber, servants poured to them off the choice wine; and again in their jesting they agreed to make the same bargain on the morning that they made before, — whatsoever chance betide to exchange their winnings at night when they met, whatsoever new they win. They made this agreement before all the court, and the beverage was brought forth merrily at that time.¹³ Then at length they politely took leave; and everybody hurried to bed.

¹ The correct hunting term for "the fattest."

² Cut up.

³ Probably at the side of the neck, or on the brisket.

⁴ Probably at the hollow of the breast bone.

⁵ The gullet probably.

⁶ The *schyre* is presumably the "arber"; though in l. 2256 it appears to be the skin of the neck or nape.

⁷ i.e. the entrails, with the gullet knotted to prevent the filth from escaping.

⁸ This titbit is sometimes called a part of the numbles.

⁹ A choice cut; hence, capriciously, our humble-pie.

¹⁰ A bit of the offal for the crows.

¹¹ Literally "upon."

¹² Possessive uncertain.

¹³ A drink ratifies the agreement — as before.

When the cock had crowed and cackled but thrice, the lord had leaped from his bed; likewise his followers each one, so that the meat and the mass were promptly despatched, and the troop ready for the chase in the wood ere any day sprang. With hunters and horns they passed through the plains, and uncoupled the racing hounds among the thorns.

12. Soon they heard the cry of the dogs by a marsh side. The huntsman encouraged the hounds that first caught the scent, hurled sharp words at them with a great noise. The hounds that heard it hastened thither quickly, and fell immediately to the scent, forty at once. Then there rose such a resounding cry of gathered hounds that the rocks about rang. The hunters cheered them with horn and with mouth; then all together they swung in a troop between a pool in that wood and a wild crag. On a hill, beside a cliff at the side of the bog, where the rough rock was rudely fallen, they fared to the finding, and the hunters after them. The men surrounded both the rock and the hill, because they knew well that he was within them, — the beast that the bloodhounds were proclaiming there. Then they beat on the bushes and bade him rise up, and he savagely rushed out athwart the men, the most formidable of swine. Long since had he left the herd on account of his age, for he was a huge beast, the greatest of boars. His grinders when he grunted grieved many, for at his first burst he thrust three to the earth, and sped hastily forth at great speed without respite. And they hallooed "High!" full loudly, and cried "Hay, hay!" With horns to mouth lustily they blew the reheat.¹ Many were the merry cries of men and of hounds that hastened after this boar with hue and cry to kill him. Full oft he bides at bay, and maims the pack in the mêlée. He hurts many of the hounds and grievously they howl and yell.

13. The hunters pushed forward then to shoot at him, aimed at him with their arrows and hit him often. But the shafts that struck on his shields,² give way at the pith, and the bars would not bite on his brawn though the shaven shafts shivered in pieces; the head hopped out again wheresoever it

hit. But when the dints of their keen strokes scared him, then mad for destruction he rushed on the men, did them sore hurt where he hurled forth, and many a one grew wary thereat and gave back a little. But the lord on a light horse hurries after him, blowing his bugle like a bold hero. He winds the reheat as he rides through thick groves, following this wild swine till the sun declined. Thus they drive on the day with such doings while our lovely hero lies comfortably in his bed at home in clothes full rich of hue. The lady did not forget; she came to greet him; full early she was by him to change his mind.

14. She comes to the curtain and peeps at the knight. Sir Gawain at once welcomes her worthily, and she returns his greeting right promptly, seats herself softly by his side, laughs openly, and with a lovely look addresses these words to him: "Sir, if ye be Gawain, it seems to me a very strange thing that a man of such quality should not follow the conventions of good society; and should after making acquaintance with a person cast him utterly from his mind. Thou hast already forgotten what I taught you yesterday in the best language that I knew."

"What is that?" quoth the hero. "Forsooth I know not. If what ye say be true, I am to blame."

"Yet I taught you about kissing," replied the fair lady; "wherever a countenance is known, quickly to claim a kiss; that becomes every knight who practices courtesy."

"Cease such speech, my dear lady," said the ready man. "I durst not claim it lest I should be denied. If I proposed and were refused, I should certainly be wrong in proffering."

"By my faith," quoth the lovely dame, "ye cannot be refused. Ye are strong enough to compel it by strength if ye pleased, supposing any were so ill-bred as to deny you."

"Yea, by God," said Gawain, "your speech is good; but violence is considered discourteous among my people, as is any gift that is not given with a good will. I am at your command to kiss when ye like. Ye may begin when ye please, and leave off whenever it likes you."

The lady stoops down and gracefully

¹ A call for collecting the hounds.

² The tough skin of the flanks.

kisses his face. They converse long of the fears and joys of love.

15. "I should like to know from you, sir," said the peerless lady, "if it vexes you not, — what might be the reason that so young and so gallant person as ye now are, one so courteous and so knightly as ye are known everywhere to be, *have never spoken of love*.¹ For in relating the pains of true knights, the chief thing praised in all of chivalry is the royal sport of love, — and the science of arms: it is the title, token, and text of their works; how heroes for their true love adventured their lives, endured for their sweethearts doleful hours, and afterwards avenged themselves by their valour; dispersed their care, and brought bliss to bower, with plenteous rewards for themselves. And ye are the most renowned knight of your time; your fame and your worship walks everywhere, — and now I have sat by you here two separate times, yet have I never heard from your head a single word that pertained at all to love, less or more. And ye, that are so courteous and so distinguished in your vows, ought willingly to show and teach to a young thing some tokens of the art of true love. Why are ye so rude who are so praised? Is it that ye deem me too dull to hearken to your dalliance? For shame! I came hither all alone to sit and learn from you some accomplishment: do teach me part of your skill while my lord is from home."

16. "In good faith," quoth Gawain, "God reward you! Great is the entertainment, and huge the pleasure to me, that so worthy a one as ye should come hither, and take pains with so poor a man, and play with your knight in any wise; it delights me. But to take upon myself the task of expounding true love, of touching upon the themes of that text, and tales of arms before you, who I wot well have more knowledge of that sort by the half than I or a hundred such have, or ever shall have so long as I live, — that were a manifold folly by my troth, dear one. But I would work your will with all my might, highly beholden to you as I am; and I wish evermore to be your servant, so God save me."

Thus the fair lady besought him, and

tried him oft, for to have won him to wrong, — whatever it was she purposed; but he defended himself so fairly that no fault appeared, nor any evil on either side; they knew nought but joy. They laughed and played a long time, till at last she kissed him, took her leave fairly, and went her way.

17. Then the hero bestirred himself and rose to the mass; and afterwards their dinner was dight and splendidly served. The hero sported with the ladies all day, but the lord raced over the laud full oft, following his uncouth swine, that rushed along the banks and bit in sunder the backs of his best brachets.² There he abode at his bay till bowmen broke it, and mangre his head made him move forth. Many fell arrows there flew when the folk gathered about, but yet at times he made the stoutest to start; till at the last he was so weary he could no more run; but with the haste that he might he won to a hole in a cleft by a rock, where the burn runs. He got the bank at his back and began to scrape; the ugly froth foamed from the corners of his mouth, and he whet his white tusks. It was not pleasant for all the bold hunters that stood about him to approach him even remotely; and to go nigh him durst none for fear of harm. He had hurt so many before, that all seemed then full loath to be more torn with the tusks of that savage and crazed beast.

18. When the knight came himself, rein-ing his steed, and saw him bide at the bay near his men, he lighted nimbly down, left his courser, pulled out a bright brand and boldly strode forth, and hurried fast through the stream where the fell one abode. The wild creature was ware of the wight with weapon in hand, and heaved on high his hairs; so fiercely he snorted that many feared for their lord lest to him befell the worse. The swine rushed directly upon the hero, so that man and boar were both in a heap in the wildest of the water; but the boar had the worse, for the man marked him well as they first met and skilfully set his point exactly in the slot,³ pierced him up to the hilt so that his heart split, and he gave way squealing and went quickly down the water. A hundred hounds seized him and fiercely bit on him. Men

¹ The words in italics are rashly supplied by the translator. For several lines here the construction is unclear.

² hounds. ³ The proper piercing spot in the chest.

brought him to land and the dogs finished him.¹

19. There was blowing of the prize² on many a loud horn, high halloing aloft by mighty hunters; brachets bayed the beast as the masters bade who were the chief huntsmen of that swift chase. Then a wight that was wise in woodcraft begins skilfully to unlace³ this boar. First he hews off its head and sets it on high; and afterwards splits him all down his rough back, and takes out the bowels and sings them on the coals; then with bread mingled with these, he rewards his hounds. Afterwards he cuts the brawn in fine broad shields, and has out the hastlets⁴ in the proper manner. And now they bind the halves all whole together, and afterwards stoutly hang them on a stiff staff. Now with this same swine they take their way home. The boar's head was borne before the warrior who slew him at the stream through the force of his own strong hand. It seemed long to him until he saw Sir Gawain in the hall; then he called, and Gawain came promptly to take his fees there.

20. The lord jested⁵ full loudly, and merrily he laughed when he saw Sir Gawain; with pleasure he spoke. The good ladies were called and the household gathered. He showed them the shields and told them the tale of the girth⁶ and length of the wild swine; and also of his viciousness in the wood where he fled. That other knight full comely commended his deeds, and praised it as a great bag that he had made; for such a brawn of a beast, the bold man said, nor such sides of a swine, saw he never before. Then they handled the huge head; the courteous man praised it and made much of it to honour the lord.

"Now Gawain," quoth the good man, "this game is your own, by fine and fast foreword, truly ye know."

"It is sooth," quoth the hero; "and as truly all my getting I shall give you in turn, by my troth." He took the warrior about the neck and courteously kissed him, and another time he served him the same.

¹ Present and past tense are oddly mixed in this stanza, as often in the poem. This time they have been normalized.

² The horn-blowing for the game's death.

³ cut up. ⁴ cutlets.

⁵ Two words not clear.

⁶ Translating *largesse* as "largeness."

"Now we are even," quoth the warrior, "tonight of all the covenants that we knit by law since I came hither."

Said the lord, "By St. Giles, ye are the best that I know! Ye will be rich in a short time, if ye drive such chaffer!"

21. Then they raised tables aloft on trestles, and cast cloths upon them. The clear light then appeared along the walls, as men set and distributed waxen torches all about the hall. Much mirth and glee rose up therein, about the fire on the hearth, and in various wise at the supper and after. Many noble songs they sang, as Christmas carols and new dance tunes, with all the mannerly mirth that a man can tell of. And ever our lovely knight sat beside the lady. Such seemly cheer she made to the hero, sought with such sly stolen⁷ glances to please the stalwart one, that the wight was all amazed, and wroth with himself. But he would not on account of his breeding reprove her, but responded in all courtesy, howsoever outrageous she might be. When they had played in the hall as long as their will lasted, the lord called to bedwards, and to the room with a fireplace they passed.

22. And there they drank and talked, and the lord proposed again to make the same arrangement for New Year's Eve. But the knight craved leave to depart on the morn, for it was nigh at the term that he must keep. The lord hindered him from that, persuaded him to linger, and said, "As I am true man, I pledge my troth thou shalt reach the green chapel to do thy tasks, sir, by New Year's light, long before prime. Therefore lie in thy loft and take thine ease; and I shall hunt in this holt and keep the covenant — change merchandise with thee when I return hither; for I have tried thee twice, and faithful I find thee; now, 'third time, best time.'⁸ Think on the morrow. Make me merry while we may, and be joyful; for a man can catch trouble whensoever he likes."

This was readily granted and Gawain stayed. Drink was quickly brought to them, and to bed they went with lights. Sir Gawain lay and slept full still and soft all night; the lord, mindful of his hunting, was dight full early.

⁷ A guess for *stollen*.

⁸ The line is not clear; literally, perhaps, "third time, throw best."

23. After mass he and his men took a morsel. Merry was the morning. He asks for his mount, and all the sportsmen who should accompany him on horse were ready mounted on their steeds before the hall gates. Wondrous fair was the field, for the frost still lingered. The sun rose in a rack of ruddy red, and drove all the clouds from the welkin. The hunters uncoupled by a holt side, and the rocks in the forest rang for the noise of their horns. Some dogs fell on a scent where the fox had loitered; followed it oft obliquely¹ through the cunning of their wiles. A kennet² cried upon it; the huntsman encouraged him, and his fellows hastened after, panting thickly. They ran forth in a rabble on Reynard's very track, and he hurried before them. Soon they found him; and when they actually saw him they chased him fast, baying him full fiercely with a huge noise. And he trants³ and turns through many a rough grove; doubles and hearkens by hedges full often. At the last by a little ditch he leaps over a spinny, and steals out full stilly by a rough rand.⁴ Half escaped from the wood he turns with wiles from the hounds; but then he arrived, ere he knew it, at a chosen stand, where in an instant three stout hunters in gray threatened him at once. He blenched again quickly, and bravely started off; with all the woe in the world, he turned away to the wood.

24. Then was it a pure joy to listen to the hounds, when all the gathered mute⁵ got view of him. The cry they set on his head at the sight was as if all the resounding cliffs had clattered down in a heap. Here he was halloed when the hunters met him, loudly cried upon with noisy calls; there he was threatened and often called thief; and ever the ticklers were at his tail so that he could not tarry. Oft he was run at when he raked out, and oft he reeled in again, so wily was Reynard. And ever he led the bespattered lord and his troop in this manner among the hills, now in them, now over, now under, while the courteous knight at home slept wholesomely within the comely curtains on the cold morn.

But the lady for love cared not to sleep nor to give up the purpose that bode in her heart; but up she rose quickly and took her

way thither in a gay mantle meetly reaching to the earth, and furred full fine with skins of the best. No ornaments of gold on her head; but only the bright stones set about her tressour⁶ in clusters of twenty. With her fair face and her lovely throat all naked, her breast bare before and behind too, she comes within the chamber door and closes it after her, throws up a window and calls on the wight, and smartly thus stirred him with her fair cheery words. "Ah man, how can you sleep, this morning is so clear!" Though he was drowsing deep, yet could he hear her.

25. In the dreary depths of a dream the noble was sunk, like a man suffering from many sad thoughts, how destiny should *dight him*⁷ his weird at the green chapel that day when he met the man, and had to abide his buffet without more debate. But when he had fairly recovered his wits, he emerged from his dreams and answered with haste. The lovely lady came laughing sweetly, stooped over his fair face and courteously kissed him. He welcomed her worthily with choice cheer. To see her so glorious, and so gaily attired, so faultless of feature, and so lovely of colour, warmed his heart with willing joy. With smooth and gracious smiling they straightway waxed mirthful. All was bliss and good cheer that passed between them. They exchanged goodly words; much happiness they felt, and great was the peril between them, unless Mary thought of her knight.

26. For that beauteous princess constrained him so sorely, and the danger pressed him so nigh, that of necessity it behooved him either accept her love or rudely refuse it. He thought much of his courtesy, lest he should prove a clown; and more on his villainy if he should do sin, and be traitor to the hero who owned the castle. "God shield!" quoth the warrior, "that shall not befall!" With a little love-dalliance he laid aside all the pointed speeches that sprang from her mouth.

Quoth the lady to the hero: "Ye deserve blame if ye love not her who is so near you,— of all creatures in the world most wounded in heart;— unless indeed ye have a sweetheart, a dearer being, that pleases you better, and ye have plighted faith so

¹ Word obscure. ² small hound. ³ twists.
⁴ Unploughed strip by woodside. ⁵ pack.

⁶ headdress, caul.
⁷ Words in italics supplied by Morris.

firmly to that gentle one that ye care not to loosen it. — Verily now that is what I believe, and I pray you that you tell me truly; for all the loves in the world deny not the truth with guile."

"By St. John!" said the knight, and courteously he smiled, "I have none, and none will I have."

27. "That is the worst of all!" quoth the lady. "I am answered indeed, to my sorrow. Kiss me now comely and I shall go hence. I can only mourn in the world as a maid that loved much."

Sighing she stooped down and kissed him seemly; and then she severed from him, and said as she stood, "Now, dear, at this departing do me this comfort; give me somewhat of thy gift, thy glove if it might be, that I may think on thee, sir, to lessen my mourning."

"Now in truth," quoth that man, "I would I had here for thy love, the dearest thing that I wield; for truly ye have right oft in reason deserved a greater reward than I could reckon. But to exchange with you love-tokens, that would profit but little. It is not for your honor to have at this time a glove of Gawain's gift for a keepsake; and I am here on an errand in lands uncouth, and have no men with mails full of precious things for remembrances at this moment; and that mislikes me, lady. But every man must act according to his circumstances, and none should take it ill or repine."

"Now, courteous and honourable one," quoth that lovesome lady, "though I shall have nothing of yours, yet shall ye have of mine."

28. She reached him a rich ring of red gold work with a gleaming stone standing aloft, that shed blushing beams like the bright sun; know ye well it was worth wealth full huge. But the man refused it, and readily he said: "I desire no great gifts, my gay one, at this time. I have naught to give you, and naught will I take."

She offered it him full pressingly, and he refused her offer, and swore swiftly on his sooth that he would not take it. And she sorrowed that he refused, and said thereafter, "If ye refuse my ring, since it seems too rich, and ye would not be so highly beholden to me, I shall give you my girdle, that will enrich you less."

She lightly caught a lace that went about her sides, knit upon her kirtle under the bright mantle. It was adorned with green silk, and ornamented with gold, broidered all around, decked with fringes;¹ and that she offered to the hero, and gaily besought that, though it were unworthy, he would take it. And he denied that he would in any wise take either gold or present ere God sent him grace to achieve the chance that he had chosen there. "And therefore, I pray you, be not displeased, and give over your attempt; for I intend never to consent. I am dearly beholden to you because of your entertainment; and ever in hot and in cold I will be your true servant."

29. "Now refuse ye this silk," said the lady then, "because it is simple in itself, as it certainly seems to be? Lo! little it is, and less it is worth; but whose knew the virtues that are knit therein, he would esteem it at a greater price peradventure; for whatsoever man is girt with this green lace, while he has it fittingly wrapped about him, there is no warrior under heaven than can wound him; for he could not be slain by any device in the world."

Then the knight paused, and it came to his heart that it would be a jewel for the peril that awaited him when he arrived at the chapel to undergo his ordeal. Could he manage to be unslain, that were a noble device. Then he indulged her entreaties and suffered her to speak; and she pressed the belt on him and offered it to him eagerly. And he accepted it, and she gave it him with a good will, and besought him for her sake never to discover it, but to conceal it loyally from her lord. The man agreed that never person should know it indeed but they twain. Full oft he thanked her, right glad in heart and thought. By that she had kissed the stout knight three times.

30. Then she takes her leave and leaves him there, for more entertainment she could not get from that man. When she was gone Sir Gawain bestirs himself, rises and dresses in noble array. He lays up the love-lace the lady had given him, hides it full cleverly where he can find it again. Then promptly he takes his way to the chapel; quietly approaches to the priest and prays him there

¹ Reading *fringes* for MS. *fyngres*; or we may keep the text and translate, "wrought, embroidered, by fingers."

that he would elevate his life, and teach him better how his soul should be saved when he should go hence. Then he shrives him cleanly and shows his misdeeds, both the more and the less, beseeches mercy, and begs for absolution. And the priest assoils him thoroughly and set him as clean as if doomsday had been due on the morrow. And afterwards Gawain makes more mirth among the fair ladies that day with comely carols and all kinds of joy than ever he did before, till the dark night. Everyone had pleasure of him there, and said indeed that he had never been so merry since he came hither.

31. Now let him linger in that place, where may love betide him. The lord is still in the field leading his men. He has overtaken this fox that he followed so long, as he sprinted over a spiny to spy the rascal, where he heard the hounds that hastened fast after him. Reynard came running through a rough grove, and all the rabble in a rout right at his heels. The man was ware of the game, and warily abode; pulled out his bright brand and struck at the beast; and he dodged from the sharp weapon and would have turned; but a dog seized him ere he could, and right before the horse's feet they all fell on him and worried this wily one with a great noise. The lord lighted quickly, and caught him forthwith; pulled him full hastily out of the dogs' mouths, and holding him high over his head, halloed fast; and there many fierce hounds bayed him. Hunters hied them thither with horns full many, ever blowing the recheat¹ till they saw the hero. As soon as his noble company was come, all that bare bugle blew at once, and all the others that had no horns halloed. It was the merriest mute² that ever men heard — the rich riot that there was raised for Reynard's soul. They rewarded the hounds there, stroked them and rubbed their heads; and afterwards they took Reynard and turned off his coat.

32. And then they hastened home, for it was nigh night, blowing full stontly in their great horns. The lord alighted at last at his dear home, found fire on the floor, and the hero beside it, Sir Gawain the good, that glad was withal among the ladies; in

their love he had much joy. He wore a mantle of blue that reached to the earth; his surcoat, that was softly furred, became him well; and his hood of the same hung on his shoulder. Trimmed all about with fine fur were both. He met this good man in the middle of the floor, and all joyfully he greeted him, and goodly he said: "Now I shall fulfill our covenant, that we have just made, where no drink was spared." Then he embraces the knight and kisses him thrice with as much gusto and as soberly as he could give them.

"By Christ!" quoth the other knight, "ye get much bliss in the profits of this business — if ye drive good bargains!"

"Of the bargain, no matter," quoth curtly that other, "so long as the debts that I owed are properly paid."

"Mary!" quoth the other man, "my offering is the worse, for I have hunted all this day, and naught have I got but this foul fox-fell; the fiend have the good ones! And that is full poor to pay for such fine things as ye have given me here, three such rare kisses."

"It is enough," quoth Sir Gawain; "I thank you, by the rood." And as they stood there the lord told him how the fox was slain.

33. With mirth and minstrelsy, with meats at their will, they made as merry as any men could. With laughing of ladies, with merry jests, Gawain and the good man were both as glad as if the court were mad, or else drunk. Both the man and his retinue made many jokes till the season arrived when they must sever; the men had to go to their beds at last. Then humbly this gentle man takes his leave of the lord first; and fairly he thanks him. "For such a joyous sojourn as I have had here, for the honor you have shown me at this high feast, the high king reward you! I can only give you myself to be one of your men, if that pleases you. For I must needs, as ye know, proceed, tomorrow, if ye will grant me some man to show, as you promised, the way to the green chapel, as God will suffer me to take on New Year's day the doom of my fate."

"In good faith," quoth the good man, "with a good will! All that ever I promised you, I will perform." Therewith he assigns a servant to set him in the way, and

¹ The note that recalls all the dogs.

² Noise of the whole band.

conduct him by the downs, that he should without hesitation travel through the forest and fare at the best in the woods. The lord thanked Gawain for the worship he had been willing to show him. Then the knight took his leave of the beautiful ladies.

31. With care and with kissing he speaks to them, and many earnest thanks he presses upon them. And they returned him the same again promptly; they entrusted him to Christ with sighings full sad. Afterwards he graciously departs from the household; each man that he met he thanked him for his service and his solace, and the various pains with which they had been busy to serve him. And each man was as sad to sever from him there as if they had ever dwelt worthily with that hero. Then with people and with light he was led to his chamber and blithely brought to bed to be at his rest. Whether he slept soundly I dare not say, for he had much to think of on the morrow if he would. Let him lie there; he was near what he sought. If ye will be still a while I shall tell you how they fared.

FYTTTE THE FOURTH

1. Now nighs the New Year, and the night passes. The day drives on to the dark, as God bids; but outside wild storms wakened in the world; clouds cast the cold keenly to the earth; with discomfort enough to the naked, the snow from the north flew sharply, and nipped the game. The blustering wind blew from the heights, and drove each dale full of great drifts. The man who lay in his bed heard it right well; though he locks his lids, full little he sleeps. By each cock that crew he knew well the hour. Promptly he leaped up ere the day sprang, for there was the light of a lamp that gleamed in his chamber. He called to his chamberlain, who quickly answered him, and bade him bring his burnie and saddle his horse. The chamberlain gets up and fetches him his weeds, and arrays Sir Gawain in proper fashion. First he dressed him in his clothes to keep out the cold, and then he put on the rest of his harness, that had been well kept, both mail and plate, and brightly polished. The rings of his rich burnie had been rocked from the rust,¹ and all was fresh as at first; and Gawain was

¹ That is, in a barrel of sand.

fain to give thanks for it. The attendant had wiped each piece well and often. Then the noblest man betwixt here and Greece bade his steed be brought.

2. Meanwhile, he threw upon himself his finest weeds; his surcoat with its coginace of excellent work, virtuous stones set upon velvet, all wrought about and bound with embroidered seams, and fairly furred within with rare skins. Yet left he not the lace, the lady's gift,—that forgot not Gawain for his own good. When he had belted his brand upon his broad haunches, he dressed his love-token double about him, the knight swathed sweetly about his waist the girdle of green silk, which became him well, upon the royal red cloth that was fair to see. But this hero wore not the girdle for its wealth, for pride of the pendants, though they were polished, and though the glittering gold gleamed on the ends; but to save himself when it behoved him to suffer, to await his doom without resistance, with no brand or knife to defend him. By this the good man is ready and goes out quickly. Full often he thanks the distinguished company.

3. Gringolet the huge and strong was ready, who had been kept skilfully in the safest manner. The proud horse in his splendid condition longed for spurring. The hero approached him, noticed his coat, and said soberly, and by his sooth swore — “Here, in this castle, is a company that are mindful of courtesy. The man who maintains them, joy may he have; the dear lady, love betide her in this life, since they for charity cherish a guest and uphold honor in their hand. May the Being reward them who holds the heaven on high — and also you all. And if I might live any longer in the world I should give you some reward if I could.” Then he stepped into stirrup and strode aloft. His servant offered him his shield; he put it on his shoulder. He spurred Gringolet with his gilt heels, and the steed jumped on the stone; no longer he stood still, but pranced. Gawain's servant, who bore his lance and helm, was by then on the horse. “This castle I entrust to Christ; may he give it aye good chance!”

4. The bridge was let down, and the broad gates unbarred and borne open on both sides. The hero crossed himself quickly and passed the boards, praised the porter, who

knelt before him giving good day and praying God that he save Gawain. And so he went on his way with his one man that should teach him how to find that dismal place where he should receive the rueful blow. They rode by banks where boughs are bare; they climbed by cliffs where the cold clings; the sky was upheld, but it was ugly beneath; mist hung on the moor and melted on the mount; each hill had a hat, a huge mist-cloak. Brooks boiled and broke from the banks about, shattering sheer on their shores where they showered down. Dreary was the way, where they should travel by the wood, till soon came the season when the sun rises at that time. They were on a hill full high, the white snow about them, when the man that rode beside him bade his master abide.

5. "I have brought you hither, sir, at this time; and now ye are not far from that famous spot that ye have asked and inquired so specially after. But I shall say to you forsooth, since I know you, and ye are a man that I love well, if ye would work by my wit ye should be the better for it. The place that ye press to is held full perilous. There dwells in that waste a wight the worst upon earth; for he is stiff and stern and loves to strike; and greater he is than any man in the world, and his body bigger than the four best that are in Arthur's house, and bigger than Hector or any other. He maintains that adventure at the green chapel. There passes by that place none so proud in arms but he dins him to death with dint of his hand. For he is a man without measure and uses no mercy; for be it churl or chaplain that rides by the chapel, monk or mass-priest, or any man else, he likes as well to kill him as to go alive himself. Therefore I tell ye as truly as ye sit in the saddle, come ye there ye shall be killed—trust me well—though ye had twenty lives to spend. He has dwelt here full long and caused much strife in the land. Against his sore dints ye cannot defend yourself.

6. "Therefore, good Sir Gawain, let the fellow alone, and go away some other road, for God's sake. Repair to some other country, where Christ may speed you; and I shall hie me home again, and promise you further—which I will swear by God and all his good saints, so help me God and the

halidom and oaths enough—that I will loyally conceal you, and never tell tale that ever ye fled for any man that I know of."

"Gramercy," quoth Gawain. And sternly he added. "Well worth thee, man, who wishes my good; and I will believe thou wouldst loyally conceal me. But if thou kept promise never so faithfully, and I gave up here, sought for fear to fly as you advise, I were a knight coward; I could not be excused. But I will go to the chapel whatever chance may fall, and talk with that same man the tale that I like, be it good or evil, as it pleases fate to have it. Though he be a stern champion to cope with, and armed with a club, full well can God manage to save his servants."

7. "Mary!" quoth that other man, "now thou sayest as much as that thou wilt take upon thyself thine own destruction; if it pleases thee to lose thy life, I shall not let nor hinder thee. Have here thy helm on thy head, thy spear in thy hand; and ride down this same lane by yon rock-side till thou be brought to the bottom of the rugged valley; then look a little up the grassy slope on thy left hand, and thou shalt see in that ravine the chapel itself, and the burly man on the field who keeps it. Now farewell in God's name, Gawain the noble, for all the gold in the world I would not go with thee nor bear thee fellowship through this wood a foot further."

At that the man turned his bridle in the wood, hit the horse with the heels as hard as he could; leaped over the land, and left the knight there all alone.

"By God's self," quoth Gawain, "I will neither grieve nor groan. To God's will I am full obedient, and to him I have entrusted myself."

8. Then he spurs Gringolet and follows the path; pushes in by a hollow beside a thicket; rides through the rough slope right to the dale; and then he looked about him, and wild it seemed to him. He saw no sign of dwelling anywhere around, but on both sides high steep banks, and rough hunched crags with projecting stones; the shadows of the cliffs seemed to him terrible. Then he paused and held back his horse, and oft changed his cheer while seeking the chapel. He saw none such on any side, and strange it seemed to him. But soon, a little distance off on a grassy spot he descried a

mound as it were, a smooth hill by the bank of the stream near a ford of the flood that ran there. The burn bubbled there as if it were boiling. The knight urges his steed, and comes to the hill; lights nimbly down, and ties the rein and his rich bridle to a tree by a rough branch; then he turns to the hill and walks about it, debating with himself what it might be. It had a hole at the end and on either side, and was overgrown with grass in clumps everywhere, and was all hollow within—nothing but an old cave or a crevice of an old crag. He could not understand it at all. "Alas, Lord," quoth the gentle knight, "can this be the green chapel? Here about midnight the devil might tell his matins."

9. "Now," quoth Gawain, "it certainly is mysterious here; this oratory is ugly, overgrown with herbs. Well it besseems the wight clad in green here to do his devotions in the devil's wise. Now I feel in my five wits it is the fiend that has made this bargain with me, to destroy me here. This is a chapel of mischance; may ill fortune betide it! It is the cursedest kirk that ever I came in!"

With high helm on his head, his lance in his hand, he strides up to the rock of the rude dwelling. Then he heard from that high hill, in a rough cave, on a bank beyond the brook, a marvellously savage noise. Lo, the cliff clattered as though it would split, as if one were grinding a scythe on a grindstone. It whirred and screeched like water at a mill; it rushed and rang that it was ruth to hear.

"By God," quoth Gawain then, "that gear, I fancy, is being prepared to give me a good reception. Yet though I must lose my life, fear shall never make me change colour."

10. Then the knight called full high: "Who dwells in this place to keep covenant with me? For now the good Gawain is passing right here. If any wight wishes ought, let him come hither fast, now or never, to fulfill his need!"

"Abide!" quoth one on the bank over his head. "Thou shalt have in all haste that which I promised thee once."

Yet he kept on with that noise sharply for a while, turning and whetting, ere he would come down. And then he crossed by a crag and came from a hole, whirling out of a

dark place with a fell weapon—a Danish axe new dight, to give the blow with. It had fast to the helve a great head, sharpened on the stone. Four feet long was the weapon—no less, by that lace that gleamed full bright. And the man in the green was arrayed as before—both his skin and his limbs, locks, and beard; save that on foot he strides fairly on the earth. He set the steel shaft to the stone and stalked beside it. When he came to the water, where he did not wish to wade, he hopped over on his axe, and fiercely advanced, with savage ferocity pacing the broad snow-covered glade. Sir Gawain met the knight and bowed to him, not at all low. The other said, "Now, sweet sir, in a covenant a man can trust thee."

11. "Gawain," quoth the green warrior, "may God preserve thee. Indeed thou art welcome, hero, to my place; and thou hast timed thy travel as a true man should. And thou knowest the covenants made between us; at this time twelve month, thou tookest what fell to thee,—and I at this New Year was to repay you handsomely. And now we are in this valley entirely alone; here are no men to part us, however we may behave. Have thy helm off thy head, and have here thy pay. Make no more debate than I offered thee then, when thou whipped off my head at one blow."

"Nay," quoth Gawain, "by God that lent me life, I shall grudge thee not a whit whatever misfortune falls. But arrange thee for thy one stroke, and I shall stand still and hinder thee not the least from doing the work as you like."

He bent the neck and bowed down, showing the flesh all bare; and behaved as if he cared not. For no dread would he flinch.

12. Then the man in the green got ready quickly, gathered up his grim tool to smite Gawain. With all the might in his body he bare it aloft, and aimed a savage blow as though he wished to kill him. Had it driven down as earnestly as he feinted, the ever doughty one would have been dead of his dint. But Gawain glanced to one side on the gisarm as it came gliding down to slay him there in the glade, and shrank a little with the shoulders from the sharp iron. The other warrior with a quick motion withheld the bright weapon, and then he reproved the prince with many proud words.

"Thou art not Gawain," said the man, "who is held so good, who never flinched for any army by hill nor by vale; and now thou fleest for fear before thou feelest any harm. Such cowardice I never heard of that knight. I neither winced nor fled, sir, when thou didst strike, nor tried any tricks in King Arthur's house. My head flew to my foot, and yet I never budged; and thou, ere any harm taken, art fearful in heart. Wherefore the better man I ought to be called for it."

"I flinched once," quoth Gawain, "and will do so no more. Yet if my head should fall on the stones, I cannot restore it."

13. "But make ready, sir, by thy faith, and bring me to the point. Deal to me my destiny, and do it promptly; for I shall stand thee a stroke, and not start again till thine axe has hit me — have here my troth."

"Have at thee then!" quoth the other, and heaves it aloft, and aims as savagely as if he were mad. He strikes at him mightily, but touches the man not; for he withheld his hand cleverly ere it could hurt. Gawain awaits it properly and flinches with no member, but stands still as a stone, or a stump that is twisted into the rocky ground with a hundred roots.

Then merrily spoke the man in the green: "So, now thou hast thy heart whole it behoves me to hit. Now keep back the fine hood that Arthur gave thee, and see if thou canst keep thy neck whole from this stroke."

Said Gawain in great anger: "Why, thrash on, thou wild man! Thou threatenest too long. I guess that thine own heart is timid!"

"Forsooth," quoth the other warrior, "thou speakest so fiercely that I will not delay thine errand a bit longer." Then he takes his stride to strike and knits both brow and lip. No wonder Gawain mislikes it and gives up all thought of escape.

14. Lightly he lifts his axe and lets the edge come down fairly on the bare neck. Yet though he smote rudely, it hurt him but little; only cut him on one side so that it severed the skin. The sharp bit reached the flesh through the fair fat, so that the bright blood shot over his shoulders to the earth. And when the hero saw the blood glint on the snow, he leaped forth more than a spear's length, eagerly seized his helm, cast it on his head, threw his shoulders under his fair shield, pulled out a bright sword

and fiercely spoke. Never in this world since he was born of his mother was he half so blithe.

"Cease, sir, of thy blow! Offer me no more. I have without strife taken a stroke in this place; and if thou givest me more, I shall promptly repay and yield quickly again, trust thou that! Only one stroke falls to me here. The covenant which we made in Arthur's halls provided just that; and therefore, courteous sir, now hold!"

15. The warrior turned from him and rested on his axe. He set the shaft on the ground, leaned on the head, and beheld how the doughty hero stood his ground grimly, fully armed and devoid of fear. In his heart it pleased him. Then with a great voice, and a huge laugh, he spoke merrily to the hero: "Bold sir, in this place be not so savage. Nobody has here unmannerly mishandled thee, nor done but according to covenant made at the king's court. I promised thee a stroke and thou hast it; hold thee well paid. I release thee of the remnant, of all other rights. If I had been skilful peradventure I could have given you a worse buffet. First I menaced you merrily with a pure feint, and gave thee no blow; which was but justice, considering the covenant which we made on the first night, and which thou held with me trustily; for truly all the gain thou gave me as a good man should. The second feint this morning, sir, I proffered thee, because thou didst kiss my fair wife and didst hand the kisses over to me; for these two occasions I gave thee here but two bare feints without harm. A true man truly restores; such an one need dread no harm. At the third time thou didst fail; and so take thee that tap."

16. "For it is my weed that thou weardest, that same woven girdle. Mine own wife gave it thee, I know well, forsooth. Now know I well thy kisses, and thy virtues also. And as for the wooing of my wife, I managed it myself. I sent her to try thee, and truly it seems to me thou art the most faultless hero that ever went on foot. As a pearl is of greater price than white peas, so is Gawain, in good faith, compared with other gay knights. But in this case, sir, you lacked a little, and loyalty failed you. But that was for no amorous work, nor wooing either, but because ye loved your life, — the less I blame you."

That other brave man stood a great while in a study; so stricken was he for grief that he groaned within. All the blood of his breast rushed to his face; and he shrank for shame when the warrior talked. This was the first word that the man spoke — “Cursed be cowardice and covetousness both! In you is villainy and vice, that destroy virtue.” Then he caught at the knot and loosed the fastening; fiercely reached the belt to the warrior himself. “Lo! there is the deception, foul may it fall! For fear of thy knock cowardice taught me to make a truce with covetousness, to forsake my nature, which is generosity and loyalty, that belong to knights. Now am I faulty and false, and a coward have ever been. From treachery and untruth ever come sorrow and care. Here I confess to you, knight, that my conduct is all faulty. Let me but please you now, and after I shall beware.”

17. Then the other laughed and said courteously: “I hold it quite remedied, the harm that I had. Thou hast made a clean confession, acknowledging all thy misdeeds, and hast received the penance openly from the point of my edge. I hold thee quit of that plight, and purified as clean as if thou hadst never forfeited since thou was first born. And I give thee, sir, the girdle that is gold hemmed. Since it is green, as is my gown, Sir Gawain, ye may think upon this same adventure where thou goest forth among great princes; and this shall be a genuine token among chivalrous knights of the adventure of the green chapel, and ye shall come again this New Year to my dwelling, and we shall revel the remnant of this rich feast full well.” The lord pressed the invitation and said, “With my wife, who was your great enemy, I think we shall reconcile you.”

18. “Nay, forsooth,” quoth the hero; and seizing his helm, he took it off quickly and thanked the warrior. “I have had a good visit, bliss betide you; and may He pay you well who directs all mercies. Commend me to that courteous one, your comely mate; both the one and the other, my honoured ladies, who have thus with their craft quaintly beguiled their knight. But it is no wonder that a fool should rave, and through wiles of women be won to sorrow. For so was Adam beguiled by one, and Solomon by many, indeed; and Samson also,

Delilah dealt him his weird; and David thereafter was deceived by Bethsheba, who suffered much sorrow. Since these men were plagued by their wiles, it were a huge gain to love them well and believe them not — if a person but could; for these men were of old the best, and the most fortunate, excellent above all others under the heavens; and all they were beguiled by women whom they had to do with.¹ If I be now deceived, meseems I might be excused.

19. “But your girdle,” quoth Gawain, “God reward you for it! That will I keep with good will; not for the precious gold, nor the samite nor the silk, nor the wide pendants, for its wealth nor for its beauty nor for its fine work; but in sign of my fault I shall behold it oft; when I ride in renown I shall lament to myself the fault and the deceit of the crabbed flesh, how tender it is to catch stains of filth; and thus when pride shall prick me for prowess of arms, a look on this love-lace shall moderate my heart. But one thing I would pray you — may it displease you not — since ye are lord of the land yonder where I have stayed worshipfully with you — may the Being who upholds the heaven and sits on high repay you for it! — how name ye your right name? and then no more.”

“That shall I tell thee truly,” quoth the other then. “Bernlak de Hautdesert I am called in this land through the might of Morgen la Fay, who dwells in my house. She has acquired deep learning, hard-won skill, many of the masteries of Merlin; — for she has at times dealt in rare magic with that renowned clerk, who knows all your knights at home. Morgan the Goddess is therefore her name; no person is so haughty but she can tame him.

20. “She sent me in this wise to your rich hall to assay its pride and try if it were true that circulates about the great renown of the Round Table, She prepared for me this wonder to take away your wits, to have grieved Guinevere and caused her to die through fright of that same man, that ghostly speaker with his head in his hand before the high table. That is she, the ancient lady at home. She is even thine aunt, Arthur’s half-sister, the daughter of

¹ This passage is none too clear.

that Duchess of Tintagel upon whom dear Uther afterwards begot Arthur, that is now king. Therefore, I beg you, sir, to come to thine aunt; make merry in my house; my people love thee, and I like thee as well, sir, by my faith as I do any man under God for thy great truth."

But he answered him nay, he would in no wise. They embraced and kissed, each entrusted other to the Prince of Paradise, and they parted right there in the cold. Gawain on horse full fair rides boldly to the king's court, and the knight all in green whithersoever he would.

21. Wild ways in the world Gawain now rides on Gringolet, he who had got the boon of his life. Oft he harboured in houses, and oft without; and many an adventure in vale he had, and won oft; but that I care not at this time to mention in my tale. The hurt was whole that he had got in his neck; and he bare the glistening belt about him, crossed obliquely like a baldric, the lace fastened under his left arm with a knot, in token that he was taken in a fault. And thus he comes to the court, the knight all sound. There wakened joy in that dwelling when the great ones knew that good Gawain had come; joyous it seemed to them. The king kisses the knight, and the queen also; and afterwards many a sure knight, who sought to embrace him and asked him of his journey. And wondrously he tells it, confessing all the trials that he had, the adventure of the chapel, the behavior of the knight, the love of the lady—and, at the last, the lace. He showed them the nick in his neck

that he caught at the lord's hands for his unloyalty. He grieved when he had to tell it; he groaned for sorrow, and the blood rushed to his face for shame when he declared it.

22. "Lo! lord," quoth the hero, as he handled the lace, "this that I bear in my neck is the badge of this blame. This is the evil and the loss that I have got from the cowardice and covetousness that I showed there. This is the token of untruth that I am taken in, and I must needs wear it while I may last; for none may hide his shame without mishap, for where it once is incurred, depart will it never."

The king and all the court comfort the knight. They laugh loud at his tale, and lovingly agree that the lords and ladies that belong to the Table, each knight of the brotherhood, should have a baldric, an oblique band about him of a bright green, and wear that for the sake of the hero. And that emblem was accorded the renown of the Round Table, and he was ever after honoured that had it.

As it is told in the best book of romance, thus in Arthur's day this adventure betid, which the Brutus books bear witness of. After Brutus the bold hero first came hither, when the siege and the assault had ceased at Troy, many adventures of this sort happened. Now may He that bore the crown of thorns bring us to his bliss. AMEN.

HONY SOIT QUI MAL PENCE.

WILLIAM LANGLAND(?)

THE VISION OF WILLIAM CONCERNING PIERS THE PLOUGHMAN

VERSION A

PROLOGUE

In a summer season, when soft was the sun,

I clad me in rough clothing, a shepherd as I were;

In habit of a hermit, unholy of works,
Went I wide in this world, wonders to hear.
But on a May morning on Malvern Hills
To me befell a marvel, a fairy thing methought.

I was weary of wandering and went me to rest

Under a broad bank by a burn side;
And as I lay and leaned and looked on the waters,

I slumbered in a sleep, it sounded so pleasant. 10

Then did I dream a marvellous dream,
That I was in a wilderness, wist I not where;

And as I beheld into the east, on high to the sun,

I saw a tower on a hill-top, splendidly fashioned;

A deep dale beneath, a dungeon therein,
With a deep ditch and dark, and dreadful to see.

A fair field full of folk found I there between,

Of all manner of men, the mean and the rich,

Working and wandering, as the world requireth.

Some put them to the plow, and played full seldom, 20

In plowing and sowing produced they full hardly

What many of these wasters in gluttony destroy.

And some gave themselves to pride, appeared them accordingly,

In fashion of clothing strangely disguised.
To prayer and to penance put themselves many,

For love of our Lord lived they full hard,
In hope to have the bliss of heaven's kingdom,

As anchorites and hermits that hold themselves in cells,

Covet not in the country to gad all about,
With luxurious living their body to please.

And some chose trade, to prosper the better, 31

As it seems to our sight that such men should;

And some mirth to make, as minstrels can,
And get gold with their glee, guiltless, I trow.

But jesters and buffoons, Judas's children,

Found for themselves fantasies and of themselves fools made,

Yet have their wits at command, to work if they will.

What Paul preached of them I dare not prove here;

Qui loquitur turpiloquium,¹ he is Lucifer's servant.

Askers and beggars fast about flitted, 40
Till their bags and their bellies brimful were crammed;

Feigned for their food, fought at the ale-house;

In gluttony, God wot, go they to bed
And rise up with ribaldry, these bullying

beggar-knaves;

Sleep and sloth follow them ever.

Pilgrims and palmers pledge themselves together

To seek the shrine of St. James and saints at Rome;

Went forth in their way with many wise tales,

And had leave to lie all their life after.
Hermits in a band with hooked staves 50

Went to Walsingham, and their wenches after.

¹ He who speaketh baseness.

Great lubbers and long, that loath were
to work,
Clothed themselves in capes to be known
for brethren,

And some dressed as hermits their ease to
have.

I found there friars, all the four orders,
Preaching to the people for profit of their
bellies,

Interpreting the gospel as they well please,
For covetousness of capes construes it ill;
For many of these masters may clothe
themselves at will,

For money and their merchandise meet oft
together. ⁶⁰

Since Charity hath turned trader, and
shriven chiefly lords,

Many wonders have befallen in these few
years.

Unless Holy Church now be better held
together

The most mischief on earth will mount up
fast.

There preached a pardoner, as he a priest
werc,

And brought up a bull with bishop's seals,
And said he himself would absolve them all
From breach of fasting and broken vows.

The laymen liked him well, believed his
speech,

And came up kneeling and kissed his
bull; ⁷⁰

He banged them with his brevet,¹ and
bleared their eyes,

And purchased with his parchment rings
and brooches.

Thus ye give your gold gluttony to help,
And grant it to rascals that run after
lechery.

Were the bishop holy and worth both his
ears,

They should not be so brazen to deceive so
the people.

Yet it is not against the bishop that the
knave preacheth;

But the parish priest and pardoner share
the silver

That the poor parishioners should have but
for them.

Parsons and parish priests complain to
their bishops ⁸⁰

That their parish hath been poor since the
pestilence² time,

¹ Letter of indulgence.

² Probably the great plague of 1348-1349.

And ask leave and licence at London to
dwell

To sing there for simony,³ for silver is
sweet.

There hang about a hundred in hoods of
silk,

Sergeants, it seems, to serve at the bar;
Plead at the law for pence and for pounds,
Not for love of our Lord unloose their lips
once.

Thou mightest better measure the mist on
Malvern hills

Than get a mum of their mouth till money
be shown.

I saw there bishops bold and bachelors
of divinity ⁹⁰

Become clerks of account, the king to
serve;

Archdeacons and deacons, that dignity
have

To preach to the people and poor men to
feed,

Have leapt to London, by leave of their
bishops,

To be clerks of the King's Bench, to the
country's hurt.

Barons and burgesses, and husbandmen
also,

I saw in that assembly, as ye shall hear
hereafter.

Bakers, butchers, and brewers many,
Woollen weavers, and weavers of linen,

Tailors, tanners, and fullers also, ¹⁰⁰

Masons, miners, and many other crafts,
Ditchers and delvers, that do their work ill,

And drive forth the long day with "Dieu
vous sauve, dame Emma."⁴

Cooks and their boys cry "Hot pies, hot!
Good geese and pigs, go dine, go dine!"

Taverners to them told the same tale
With good wine of Gascony and wine of

Alsace,
Of Rhine and of Rochelle, the roast to di-
gest.

All this I saw sleeping, and seven times
more.

PASSUS I

What this mountain meaneth, and this dark
dale,

And this fair field full of folk, fairly I
shall you show.

³ Getting money singing anniversary masses for the
dead.

⁴ "God save you, dame Emma"—apparently a popu-
lar song.

A lady lovely in face, in linen clothed,
Came down from the cliff, and called me
gently,

And said, "Son, sleepest thou? Seest thou
these people

How busy they be about vanity?

The most part of the people that pass now
on earth,

If they have honour in this world, they care
for nothing better;

Of other heaven than here they have no
regard."

I was afraid of her face, though she fair
were,

And said, "Pardon, madame, what does this
mean?"

"This tower and this hill," quoth she,
"Truth is therein,

And would that ye wrought as his word
teacheth,

For he is Father of faith, that formed you all
Both with skin and with face, and gave you
five senses

For to worship him therewith, while ye be
here,

And because he commanded the earth to
serve you each one

With woollen, with linen, with livelihood at
need,

In moderate manner, to put you at ease,
And commanded of his courtesy in common
three things,

Their names are needful and to name them
I propose

By rule and by reason, to rehearse them as
follows:

The one clothing is, from chill you to
save,

And the second meat at meals, against dis-
comfort of thyself;

And drink when thou art dry, but do it not
out of reason

So that thou be the worse when thou work
shouldest.

Dread delightful drink, and thou shalt do
the better:

Moderation is medicine, though you crave
much.

All is not good for the soul that pleaseth
the body,

Nor all food to the body that is dear to the
soul.

Believe not thy body, for a liar him teach-
eth

(That is, the wicked world) thee to be-
tray.

For the fiend and thy flesh follow together
And injure thy soul — set it in thy heart;
And that thou shouldest beware, I teach
thee the better."

"Ah, madame, *merci*," quoth I, "thy
words please me well.

But the money on this earth, that men so
fast hold,

Tell me to whom that treasure belongeth."

"Go to the Gospel," quoth she, "that
God speaks himself,

When the people asked him about a penny
in the temple,

If they should honor therewith Caesar their
king.

And he asked of them of whom spake the
lettering,

And whom the image was like that thereon
stood.

'Caesar,' they said, 'we see well, each one.'
*Reddite ergo quae sunt Caesaris Caesari et
quae sunt Dei Deo.*¹

'Then render,' quoth Christ, 'what to Cae-
sar belongeth,

And what is God's to God, or else ye do
ill.'

For Right Reason should rule you all,
And Common Sense be warden, our wealth
to guard,

And tower of our treasure to give it you at
need;

For husbandry and he hold well together."

Then I asked her fairly, for [the sake of]
him that made her,

"That dungeon in that deep vale, that
dreadful is to see,

What may it mean, madame, I thee be-
seech,"

"That is the Castle of Care," quoth she;
"whoso cometh therein

May curse that he was born to body or to
soul.

Therein dwelleth a wight that Wrong is
called,

Father of falseness, — he founded it him-
self.

Adam and Eve he egged on to do ill;
Counselled Cain to kill his brother;

Judas he cheated with the Jews' silver,
And on an elder tree hanged him after.

He is a hinderer of love, and lieth to all
those

¹ *Matthew*, xxii, 20.

That trust in their treasure, wherein is no truth."

Then had I wonder in my wits what woman it might be

That such wise words of Holy Writ me showed;

And I greeted her in the High Name, ere she thence went,

What she might be indeed that taught me so fairly.

"Holy Church I am," quoth she, "thou oughtest to know me,

I received thee first, and thy faith taught thee.

Thou broughest me pledges my bidding to do,

And loyally to love me, while thy life lasted."

Then kneeled I on my knees and cried to her for grace,

And prayed her piteously to pray for our sins,

And eke to teach me kindly on Christ to believe,

That I might work the will of Him that made me a man.

"Show me no treasure, but tell me this same:

How I may save my soul, thou that holy art held."

"When all treasure is tested, truth is the best;

I appeal to 'God is Love' to judge the truth. It is as precious a jewel as dear God himself.

For whoso is true of his tongue, and telleth naught else,

Doth his work with truth, and doth no man ill;

He is accounted of the Gospel, on earth and above,

And also likened to our Lord, by Saint Luke's words.

Clerks that know it should teach it about, so
For Christians and non-Christians, each claims it for himself.

Kings and knights should conduct themselves reasonably,

And rightly roam the realms about, And take trespassers and tie them fast

Till truth had determined the trespass to the end.

For David, in his days, he dubbed knights, Made them swear on their sword to serve truth ever,

That is plainly the profession that pertaineth to knights,

And not to fast one Friday in five score years,

But to hold with men and women that seek the truth,

And leave off for no love nor grasping of gifts;

And he that oversteps that point is apostate of the order,

For Christ, king of kings, knighted ten, Cherubim and Seraphim, seven such and another,¹

And gave them mastery and might, in his majesty,

And over his army made them archangels, And taught them through the Trinity truth

to know,

And to be obedient to his bidding, he bade them naught else.

Lucifer with legions learned it in heaven. He was loveliest to see, after our Lord,

Till he broke obedience through boast of himself.

Then fell he with his fellows, and fiends they became,

Out of heaven into hell hobbled fast, Some into the air, and some to the earth, and

some into hell deep;

But Lucifer lieth lowest of them all; For pride that he put on, his pain hath no

end. And all that work wrong, wend they shall, After their death day, and with that devil

But they that work that word that Holy Writ teacheth,

And end, as I said before, in profitable works,

May be sure that their souls shall to heaven, Where Truth is in Trinity and crowneth

them all.

For I say certainly, in view of the texts, When all treasure is tried, Truth is the best.

Teach it to the ignorant, for the lettered know it,

That Truth is a treasure, the finest on earth."

"Yet have I no natural knowledge," quoth I, "thou must teach me better,

By what power in my body it beginneth, and where."

"Thou dotest, dolt," quoth she, "dull are thy wits.

¹ B C. A reads *an al the four ordres.*

It is a natural knowledge that tells thee in
the heart 130

For to love thy lord liefer than thyself;
No deadly sin to do, die though thou
shouldest.

This, I trow, is Truth! Whoso can teach
thee better

See that thou suffer him to say it, and then
teach it further!

For thus teacheth us His Word — work
thou thereafter —

That Love is the liefest thing that our Lord
asketh,

And eke the plant of peace. Preach it to
thy harp

Where thou art merry at thy meat, when
men bid thee sing;

For from the heart's own wisdom springeth
the song.

That belongs to the Father that formed
us all, 140

He looked on us with love, and let His
Son die

Meekly for our misdeeds, to amend us all.
And yet wished He no woe to them that
wrought Him that pain,

But meekly with mouth mercy He be-
sought,

To have pity on that people that tortured
Him to death.

Here thou mightest see example, in Him-
self alone,

How He was mighty and meek, that mercy
did grant

To them that hanged him high, and his
heart pierced.

Therefore I recommend the rich to have
ruth on the poor,

Though ye be mighty at law, be meek in
your works. 150

*Eadem mensura qua mensi fueritis, reme-
cietur vobis.*¹

For the same measure that ye mete, amiss
or otherwise,

Ye shall be weighed therewith, when ye
wend hence.

For though ye be true of tongue, and hon-
estly win,

And eke as chaste as a child that in church
weepeth,

Unless ye live truly and also love the poor,
And such good as God sent truly share,

Ye have no more merit in mass nor in
hours

¹ *Matthew*, vii, 2.

Than Mawkin of her maidenhood that no
man desireth.

For James the gentle bound it in his book,
That faith without works is feebler than
nothing, 160

And dead as a doornail unless the deed
follow.

Chastity without charity — know thou in
truth —

Is as useless as a lamp that no light is
in.

Many chaplains are chaste, who charity
have none;

No men than they are harder when they
are advanced;

Unkind to their kin and to all Christians;
They devour their own alms and demand
ever more.

Such chastity without charity will be
claimed² in hell.

Curates that should keep themselves clean
in their bodies,

They are cumbered with care and cannot
escape it, 170

So hard are they with avarice clamped to-
gether;

That is no truth of the Trinity, but treach-
ery of hell,

And a teaching of laymen more grudgingly
to give.

For these are words written in the evangel,
*Date et dabitur vobis;*³ for I deal to you
all

Your grace and your good hap, your wealth
to win,

And therewith acknowledge me naturally
for what I send you.

This is the lock of Love that letteth out my
grace

To comfort the careworn, cumbered with
sin.

Love is the liefest thing that our Lord
asketh, 180

And eke the straight way that goeth into
heaven.

Therefore I say as I said before, in view of
these texts,

When all treasures are tried, Truth is the
best.

Now have I told thee what Truth is, that
no treasure is better,

I may no longer linger; now our Lord keep
thee!"

² B *chained*.

³ Give and it shall be given unto you, *Luke*, vi, 38.

PASSUS II

Yet kneeled I on my knees, and cried to
 her for grace,
 And said, "Mercy, madame, for the love
 of Mary of heaven,
 That bore the blessed babe, that bought us
 on the cross,
 Teach me the natural skill to know the
 False."
 "Look on the left hand," quoth she, "and
 see where he standeth,
 Both False and Flattery, and all his whole
 following!"
 I looked on the left side, as the lady me
 taught;
 Then was I ware of a woman, wonderfully
 clothed,
 Trimmed with fur, the richest upon earth,
 Crowned with a crown, the king hath no
 better. ¹⁰
 All her five fingers were furnished with
 rings
 Of the preciouslest jewelry that prince ever
 wore.
 In red scarlet she rode, ribboned with gold,
 There is no queen more gorgeous that on
 earth quick is and alive.
 "What is this woman," quoth I, "thus
 wonderfully attired?"
 "That is Meed,¹ the maiden," quoth she,
 "that hath me marred oft,
 And lied about my lore to lords about.
 In the Pope's palace she is as privy as myself;
 And so should she not be, for Wrong was
 her sire.
 Out of Wrong she sprang to misfortune of
 many. ²⁰
 I ought to be higher than she, for I am
 better born.
 Tomorrow is the marriage made of Meed
 and False;
 Flattery, with fair speech, hath brought
 them together,
 And Guile hath persuaded her to grant all
 his will.
 And all is by Liar's leading that they live
 together.
 Tomorrow is the marriage made, true as I
 tell thee,
 That thou might'st know, if thou wilt, what
 they all are

¹ Meed is properly reward; but the signification here varies from legitimate payment to gross bribery. It is often best translated by "graft."

That belong to that lordship, the great and
 the small.
 Know them there if thou canst, and keep
 thee from them all,
 If thou desirest to dwell with Truth in his
 bliss; ³⁰
 Learn His law that is so loyal, and then
 teach it further.
 I may no longer linger, to our Lord I com-
 mend thee.
 And become a good man, spite of greed, I
 advise."
 When she was gone from me, I looked
 and beheld
 All this rich retinue that reigned with
 False
 Were bid to the bridal on both of the sides.
 Sir Simony is sent for, to seal the charters
 That False or Flattery at any price had
 got,
 And dower Meed therewith, in marriage
 for ever.
 But there was neither hall nor house that
 might harbour the people ⁴⁰
 That each field was not full of folk all
 about.
 In midst of a mountain, at the hour of
 mid-morning
 Was pitched a pavilion, a proud one for the
 nonce;
 And ten thousand of tents spread out be-
 sides,
 For knights from the country and strangers
 about,
 For assizers, for summoners, for sellers, for
 buyers,
 For ignorant, for learned, for laborers in
 villages,
 And for the flattering friars, all the four
 orders,
 All to witness well what the deed desired,
 In what manner Meed in marriage was en-
 dowed; ⁵⁰
 To be fastened with False, the fee was
 levied.
 Then Flattery fetched her forth, and to
 False gave her
 On condition that False shall sustain her
 forever,
 She to be obedient and ready his bidding
 to fulfil,
 In bed and at board, obedient and courte-
 ous,
 And as Sir Simony shall say, to follow his
 will.

Now Simony and Civil Law stand forth
both,

Unfolding the dowry that Falseness made,
And thus began these men and bellowed
full loud:

"This know and witness, all that dwell on
earth, 60

That I, Flattery, endow False with that
maiden Meed,

To be present in pride, for poor or for
rich,¹

With the Earldom of Envy ever to last,
With all the Lordship [of Lechery]² in
length and in breadth;

With the Kingdom of Covetousness I crown
them together,

With the Isle of Usury and Avarice the
false,

Gluttony and great oaths I give them to-
gether,

With all delights and lusts the devil to
serve,

With all the service of Sloth I endow them
together;

To have and to hold, and all their heirs
after, 70

With the appurtenances of purgatory, into
the pains of hell:

Yielding for this thing, at the year's end,
Their souls to Satan, to send into pain,
There to dwell with Wrong, while God is
in heaven."

In witness of which thing Wrong was the
first,

Pierce the pardouer, a Pauline doctor,
Bett the beadle of Buckinghamshire,
Randolph the reeve of the Rutland district,
Taborers and tumblers and tapsters many,
Mund the miller and many more besides.

In the date of the devil³ the deed was
sealed, 81

In sight of Sir Simony and by notaries'
signets.

Then tormented was Theology when he
this tale heard,

And said to Civil Law, "Sorrow on thy
head

Such a wedding to make to render Truth
wroth;

And ere this wedding be wrought, woe thee
betide!

For Meed is a wealthy one, a maiden with
goods;

God grant us to give her where Truth will
assign!

And thou hast given her to a trickster, God
give thee sorrow!

The text telleth not so, Truth knows the
sooth: 90

Dignus est operarius mercede sua; ⁴

'Worthy is the workman his hire to have;'
And thou hast bestowed her on False, fie
on thy law!

For lechers and liars lightly thou trustest,
Simony and thyself injure Holy Church;
Ye shall abide it both, by God that me
made,

At one year's end when ye reckon shall;
He and these notaries annoy the people.

For well ye know, deceivers, unless your
wits fail,

That False is a schemer, a shirker of work,
And a bastard born of Beelzebub's kin. 100

And Meed is a jewelled one, a maiden of
gentry,

She might kiss the king for cousin, if she
would.

Work by wisdom and then by wit,
Lead her to London, where law is handled,

See if legally it be allowed that they lie to-
gether,

And if the justice will adjudge her to be
joined with False.

Yet beware of the wedding, for wise is
Truth,

For Conscience is of his council, and know-
eth you each one;

And if he find such defect that ye with False
hold

It shall oppress your souls sorely at
last." 110

To this Civil Law assented, but Simony
would not

Till he had silver for his advice and his seal.
Then fetched Flattery forth florins enough,

And bade Guile go and give gold about,
And especially to these notaries that they
have no lack;

And fee False Witness with florins enough,
For he can master Meed and make her do
his will;

For where falseness is often found, there
faith faileth.

When the gold was given, great were the
thanks

To False and to Flattery, for their fair
gifts. 120

¹ B To be prynde in pryde and pouerte to despise.

² B C. ³ Presumably, in parody of Anno Domini.

⁴ Luke, x, 7.

Many came to comfort False against care,
And swore on holy relics, "Cease shall we
never

Ere Meed be thy wedded wife, through
wisdom of us all.

For we have so mastered Meed with our
smooth words

That she agrees to go with a good will

To London to look if the law will

Judge you jointly to be joined for ever."

'Then was False fain, and Flattery blithe,
And had all men called from the country
about

To array them ready, both burgesses and
sheriffs, ¹³⁰

To wend with them to Westminster, to
witness the deed.

Then hunted they for horses to carry them
thither;

But Flattery fetched forth foals of the best,
And set Meed on the back of a sheriff
newly shod,

And False on a juror that softly trotted,
(For Falseness against the faith jurors
seducth,

Through cumbering of covetousness, to
climb over truth,

That the faith is down trodden and falsely
defamed,

And Falseness is become a lord, and lives
as he likes):

Flattery on a fair speech, full finely at-
tired; ¹⁴⁰

For fair speech without faith is brother to
Falseness;

And thus jurors are summoned to serve the
false,

And fair speech for Flattery who many
deceives.

Then notaries who had no horses, annoyed
they were

That Simony and Civil Law should go on
foot.

Then said Civil Law, and swore by the rood,
That summoners should be saddled and
serve them each one;

"And have provisors appareled, in palfrey
wise,

Sir Simony himself shall sit on their backs,
And all deans and sub-deans as prancers
prepare ¹⁵⁰

For they shall bear bishops and bring them
to rest.

The people of the Paulines, for pleas in
the consistory,

Shall serve myself, who Civil Law am
called;

Put a cart saddle on our commissary, our
cart he shall draw,

And fetch our victuals from the fornicators;
And make of Liar a long cart, to draw all
these others,

Story-tellers and frauds that on foot re-
main."

Now False and Flattery fare forth to-
gether,

And Meed in the midst, and all the crowd
after.

Leisure I lack to tell the train that follows
them, ¹⁶⁰

Of as many manners of men as on earth
live.

But Guile was leader and guided them all.
Soothness saw them well and said but little,

But pricked on his palfrey, and passed
them all,

And came to the king's court, and Con-
science told,

And Conscience to the king repeated it
again.

"Now, by Christ," quoth the king, "if I
might catch

False or Flattery, or any of his fellows,
I would be wreaked on these wretches that
work so ill,

And have them hanged by the neck, and
all that maintain them; ¹⁷⁰

No man on earth shall bail out ¹ the least
of them,

But right as the law decides, let it fall on
them all.

And command the constable, that came at
the first,

To attack the traitors, in spite of any bribe;
I order you to fetter False fast, in spite of
any kind of gifts,

And to cut off Guile's head, let him go no
further;

And bring Meed to me, in spite of them all.
To Simony and Civil Law I send a warning

That Holy Church for them is harmed for
ever.

And if ye catch Liar, let him not escape ¹⁸⁰
Being set on the pillory, in spite of any
prayer;

I bid thee watch for them well, let none of
them escape."

Dread at the door stood, and the din
heard,

¹ B C. *meynprise*. A *meyntene*.

And quickly went he to warn the False,
 And bade him flee fast, and his fellows too.
 Then False for fear fled to the friars,
 And Guile took to flight, in fear of death;
 But merchants met him, and made him
 abide,
 Besought him in their shops to sell their
 ware,
 Apparelled him as a 'prentice, the people to
 serve. ¹⁹⁰
 Lightly Liar leapt away thence,
 Lurked through lanes, lugged about by
 many.
 He was nowhere welcome, spite of his many
 tales,
 But hunted out everywhere, and ordered
 to pack.
 Pardoners had pity, and took him indoors,
 Washed him and wrung [his clothes], and
 wound him in clouts,
 And sent him on Sundays with seals to
 churches,
 And for pence gave pardon, pounds at a time.
 This learned the leeches, and letters to him
 sent.
 To dwell with them, diagnoses to make. ²⁰⁰
 Grocers spake with him to look after their
 wares,
 For he had skill in their craft, and knew
 many gums.
 Miustrels and messengers met with him
 once,
 And held him back half a year and eleven
 weeks.
 Friars, with fair speches, fetched him
 thence;
 That visitors might know him not, kept him
 like a friar;
 But he hath leave to leap out, as often as
 he liketh,
 And is welcome when he will, and dwells
 with them oft.
 And all fled for fear and flew into cor-
 ners;
 Save Meed the maiden, no man dared
 abide; ²¹⁰
 But, truly to tell, she trembled for fear,
 And wept, too, and wrung her hands, when
 she was arrested.

PASSUS III

Now is Meed the maiden taken, and no
 more of them all,
 By bendles and bailiffs, brought to the
 king.

The king called a clerk, I know not his
 name,
 To take Meed the maiden, and make her at
 ease.

"I shall try her myself, and truly inquire
 What man in this world would be dearest
 to her.

And if she work by my wit, and my will
 follow,

I shall forgive her the guilt, so help me
 God!"

Courteously the clerk then, as the king
 commanded,

Took the maiden by the middle, and
 brought her to the chamber. ¹⁰

There was mirth and minstrelsy to please
 Meed withal.

Those that dwell at Westminster worship
 her all.

Gently, with joy, the Justice soon
 Repaired to the chamber where the lady
 was,

Comforted her kindly, and made her good
 cheer,

And said, "Mourn thou not, Meed, nor be
 thou sorrowful,

For we will guide the king and thy way
 shape,

For all the craft of Conscience, and scheme,
 as I trow,

That thou shalt have both might and mas-
 tery, and do what thou likest

With the king and the commons, and the
 court too." ²⁰

Mildly then Meed thanked them all

For their great goodness, and gave them
 each one

Goblets of pure gold, and pieces of silver,
 Rings with rubies, and riches enough,

The least of their company a mutton¹ of
 gold.

Then took they their leave, these lordings,
 of Meed.

With that there came clerks to comfort
 the same:

"We bid thee be blithe, for we be thine
 own

To work thy will, while our life lasteth."
 Courteously then she promised them the
 same, ³⁰

To love them loyally and make them
 lords,

And in consistency at court to tell their
 names.

¹ A gold coin.

"No ignorance shall hinder them, the most ignorant that I love,
From being advanced; for I am known
Where learned clerks are left in the lurch."

Then came there a confessor, caped like a friar;

To Meed the maiden full meekly he bowed,
And said full softly, as if it were in shrift,
"Though learned and lay had all by thee lain,

And though False had followed thee these fifteen winters,

I shall absolve thee myself, for a load of wheat,

And also be thy bawd, and bear well thy errand

Among clerks and knights, to bring down Conscience."

Then Meed, for her misdeeds, to that man kneeled,

And shrove her of her sins, shamefully, I trow.

She told him a tale, and gave him a noble —
To be her bedesman, and her bawd after.

Then he absolved her soon, and next to her said,

"We have a window a-making, will cost us full dear:

If thou woulst glaze the gable, and grave therein thy name,

Secure should thy soul be to dwell in heaven."

"Knew I that," quoth the woman, "there is neither window nor altar,

That I would n't make or mend, and my name write thereon,

That each man should say, I should be sister of your house."

But God to all good folk such graving forbids,

And saith, *Nesciat sinistra quid faciat dextra*:¹

'Let not thy left hand, late nor early,
Be aware what thy right hand works or bestows.'

But share it so secretly that pride be not seen

Neither in sight nor in soul; for God himself knoweth

Who is courteous or kind, covetous or the contrary.

Therefore, I teach you, lords, such writing to leave,

¹ *Matthew*, vi, 3.

The writing in windows of your good deeds,

Or calling to God's people, when ye give your doles;

Peradventure you have your hire for it here.

For our Saviour it saith, and himself preacheth,

Amen dico vobis, receperunt mercedem suam; ²

'Here verily they have received their reward forthwith.'

Mayors and masters, and ye that are go-betweens

'Twixt the king and the commons, to guard the laws,

To punish on pillories, or on cucking-stools,
Brewers, bakers, butchers, and cooks,

For these are the men on earth that most harm work

To the poor people that buy in small parcels.

They pilfer from the people privily and oft,
And grow rich through retailing, and buy themselves rents

With what the poor people should put in their bellies.

For if they acted honestly, they would not build so high,

Nor buy burgh holdings, be ye certain.

But Meed the maiden the mayor she besought

From all such sellers silver to take,
Or presents, not in pence, as cups of silver,

Rings with rubies, the retailer to favor.

"For my love," quoth the lady, "love them well, each one,

And suffer them to sell somewhat beyond reason."

But Solomon the sage, a sermon he made,
To amend mayors and men that guard the law,

And told them this theme that I shall tell now:

Ignis devorabit tabernacula eorum qui libenter accipiunt munera.³

Among these lettered⁴ men this Latin meaneth

That fire shall fall and burn at the last
The houses and the homes of them that desire

For to have gifts in youth or in eld.

² *Matthew*, vi, 2.

³ Fire shall consume the tabernacles of bribery, *Job*, xv, 34.

⁴ A *lewede*.

Now be ye ware, if ye will, ye masters of
 the law,
 For the truth shall be sought of your souls,
 so help me God!
 The toleration that ye grant such wrongs to
 work.
 While the chance is in your choice, choose
 ye the best.
 The king came from council, and called
 for Meed,
 And sent off quickly servants to fetch
 her,
 And brought her to the presence, with bliss
 and with joy;
 With mirth and with minstrelsy they
 pleased her each one.
 Courteously the king commenteth to tell,
 To Meed the maiden speaketh those words:
 "Unwisely, I wis, wrought hast thou oft; ¹⁰¹
 But worse wroughtest thou never than
 when thou False took.
 But I forgive thee this guilt, and grant
 thee my grace;
 Henceforth to thy deathday do so no more.
 I have a knight called Conscience, come
 lately from far,
 If he wish thee to wife, wilt thou him
 have?"
 "Yea, lord," quoth that lady, "Lord forbid
 I should other!
 Unless I bow to your bidding, hang me at
 once!"
 Then was Conscience called to come and
 appear
 Before the king and his council, clerks and
 others. ¹¹⁰
 Kneeling, Conscience to the king made
 obeisance,
 To know what his will was, and what he
 would do.
 "Wilt thou wed this woman," quoth the
 king, "if I will assent?
 She is fain of thy fellowship, and would be
 thy mate."
 "Nay," quoth Conscience to the king,
 "Christ forbid it me!
 Ere I wed such a wife, woe me betide!
 She is frail of her flesh, fickle of her
 tongue,
 She maketh men misdo many score times;
 Trusting to her treasure, find sorrow full
 many.
 To wives and widows wantonness she
 teacheth;
 Learneth them lechery that love her gifts;

Our father Adam¹ she brought down with
 fair promise;
 Poisoned popes, and impaireth Holy Church.
 There is no better bawd, by Him that me
 made!
 Between heaven and hell, in earth though
 men sought.
 She is wanton in her wishes, tale-bearing
 with her tongue,
 Common as the cart-road to knaves and to
 all;
 To priests, to minstrels, to lepers in hedges,
 Jurors and summoners, such men her praise;
 Sheriffs of shires were lost but for her. ¹³⁰
 She causeth men to lose their land, and
 their lives after,
 And letteth prisoners go, and payeth for
 them oft.
 She giveth the jailer gold and groats to-
 gether,
 To unfetter the false, to flee where they
 like.
 She taketh the true by the top, and tieth
 him fast,
 And for hate hangeth him that harm did
 never.
 They that are curst in consistory count it
 not at a rush,
 For she gives capes to the commissary, and
 coats to the clerks;
 She is absolved as soon as herself it pleas-
 eth.
 She may as much do in space of one month
 As your secret seal in seven score days. ¹⁴¹
 She is privy with the pope, as provisors
 know;
 Sir Simony and she put seals on the bulls;
 She blesseth the bishops, though ignorant
 they be.
 Prebendaries, parsons, priests, she main-
 taineth,
 To keep lemans and concubines all their
 life days,
 And bring forth children against the laws
 forbidding it.
 Where she stands well with the king, woe
 to the realm!
 For she is favorable to False who tramples
 Truth oft.
 Barons and burgesses she brings into servit-
 tude, ¹⁵⁰
 She bribes with her jewels, our justices she
 ruins.

¹ So Vernon MS. All others read *Your father*; i.e. Edward II.

She lieth against the law, and hindereth it
so hard

That faith may make no headway, her
flouris go so thick.

She leadeth the law as she liketh, and love-
days maketh,

Bewilderment for a poor man, though he
plead ever.

Law is so lordly and loath to make an end
Without presents or pence, it pleaseth full
few.

Learning and covetousness she coupleth
together.

This is the life of the lady, our Lord give
her sorrow!

And all that maintain her, mischance them
betide! 160

For the poor may have no power to com-
plain though they suffer,

Such a master is Meed among men of
goods."

Then mourned Meed, and made her moan
to the king

To have space to speak, hoping to succeed.
Then the king granted her grace with a
good will:

"Excuse thyself if thou canst, I can say no
more;

For Conscience hath accused thee, to dis-
miss thee for ever."

"Nay, lord," quoth that lady, "believe him
the worse

When ye know verily where the wrong
lieth.

Where mishief is great, lord, Meed may
help, 170

And thou knowest, Conscience, I came not
to chide

Nor to defame thy person with a proud
heart.

Well thou wittest, Conscience, unless thou
wilt lie,

Thou hast hung on my neck eleven times,
And also grasped my gold, and given it
where thou likedst.

Why thou art wroth now, seems to me a
wonder,

For yet I can, as before, honor thee with
gifts,

And maintain thy manhood, more than thou
knowest,

And thou hast foully defamed me, before
the king here.

For never killed I a king, nor counselled
thereto; 180

Nor did I ever as thou thinkest,¹ I appeal
to the king.

In Normandy was he not annoyed for my
sake;

But thou thyself, in truth, didst shame him
there,

Creptest into a cabin, to keep thy nails
from cold,

Thoughtest that winter would have lasted
ever,

And dreadedst to have been dead for a dim
cloud,

And hastedst homeward for thy belly-
hunger.

Without pity, pillager, poor men thou rob-
bedest,

And bore their brass on thy back to Calais
to sell.

There I stayed with my lord, his life to
save, 190

Made him mirth full much, to leave off
mourning,

Clapped them on the backs, their hearts to
embolden,

Made them leap for hope to have me at
demand:

Had I been marshal of his men, by Mary
of heaven!

I durst have laid my life, and no less bet,
He 'd have been lord of that land, in length

and in breadth;

And also king of that kith, his kin to help;
The least bairn of his blood a baron's peer.

Truly, thou Conscience, thou didst counsel
him thence,

To leave that lordship for a little silver, ²⁰⁰
That is the richest realm that the rain falls
upon!

It cometh a king who keepeth a realm
To give meed to men that meekly him
serve;

To aliens, to all men, to honor them with
gifts.

Meed maketh him beloved and held to be
a man.

Emperors and earls, and all manner of lords,
Through gifts get young men to run and
to ride.

The pope and his prelates presents receive,
And give men meed to maintain their laws.

Servants for their service — ye see well the
truth — 210

Get meed from their masters as they may
agree.

¹ A dust; B demest.

Beggars for their prayers beg men for
meed,
Minstrels for their mirth ask for meed.
The king gives meed to his men to make
peace in the land;
Men that teach children¹ meed from them
crave.
Priests that preach to the people to be
good
Ask meed and mass-pence and their meat
too.
All kinds of craftsmen crave meed for their
'prentices;
Meed and merchandise must needs go to-
gether.
There may no wight, as I ween, without
meed live."²²⁰
"Now," quoth the king to Conscience, "by
Christ, as methinks,
Meed is worthy much mastery to have!"
"Nay," quoth Conscience to the king, and
kneeled to the ground;
"There be two kinds of meed, my lord, by
thy leave.
The one good God of His grace giveth, in
His bliss,
To them that work well while they are
here.
The prophet preached it, and put in the
Psalter,
Qui pecuniam suam non dedit ad usuram,
etc.²
Take no meed, my lord, from men that are
true;
Love them, believe them, for our Lord of
heaven's love.
God's meed and His mercy therewith thou
mayst win.²³⁰
But there is a meed without measure
that desireth mastery,
To maintain misdoers meed do they take;
And thereof saith the Psalter in the end of
the Psalms,
*In quorum manibus iniquitates sunt; dextra
eorum repleta est muneribus;*³
That their right hand is heaped full of
gifts,
And they that grasp their gifts, so help me
God!
They shall abide it bitterly, or the Book
lieth.

¹ B. A knoweth clerkes.

² He that putteth not out his money to usury . . . shall never be moved. *Psalms*, xv, 5.

³ In whose hands is mischief, and their right hand is full of bribes. *Psalms*, xxvi, 10.

Priests and parsons, that pleasure desire
And take meed and money for masses that
they sing,
Shall have reward in this world, as Mat-
thew hath granted:
*Amen dico vobis, receperunt mercedem suam.*⁴
What laborers and low folk get from their
masters²⁴⁰
Is no manner of meed, but moderate hire.
In merchandise is no meed, I may it well
avow;
It is a permutacion, one penny for another.
But didst thou never read *Kings*,⁵ thou re-
creant Meed,
Why vengeance fell on Saul and his chil-
dren?
God sent to say, by Samuel's mouth,
That Agag and Amalek, and all his people
after,
Should die for a deed that his ancestors
had done,
Against Israel, and Aaron, and Moses his
brother.
Samuel said to Saul, 'God sendeth thee
commandment²⁵⁰
To be obedient and ready his bidding to
do:
"Wend thither with thy host women to kill,
Children and churls, chop them to death;
Look thou kill the king, covet not his goods
For millions of money; murder them each
one,
Men and beasts, burn them all to ashes."⁷
And because he killed not the king, as
Christ himself commanded,
Coveted fair cattle, and killed not his
beasts,
But brought with him the beasts, as the
Bible telleth,
God sent to say that Saul should die,²⁶⁰
And all his seed for that sin shamefully
end.
Such a mischief Meed made the king to
have,
That God hated him ever, and his heirs
after.
The conclusion of this clause care I not to
show,
In case it should annoy me; an end will I
make:
And even as Agag had it, to some will it
happen;

⁴ Verily I say unto you, they have received their re-
ward, *Matthew*, vi, 2.

⁵ *1 Samuel*, xv.

Samuel will slay him, and Saul will be
blamed,
David shall be diademed and daunt them all,
And one Christian king keep us each one.
Conscience knoweth this, for common sense
me taught 270
That Reason shall reign, and realms govern;
Meed shall no more be master on earth,
But Love and Lowness and Loyalty to-
gether.
And on him that trespasseth against Truth,
or doth against his will,
Loyalty shall execute the law, or he shall
lose his life.
Shall no sergeant for that service wear a
silk hood,
Nor any striped robe with rich fur.
Meed, from the misdoers, maketh men so
rich
That Law is become a lord, and Loyalty is
poor.
Unkindness is commander, and Kindness is
banished. 280
But Common Sense shall come yet, and
Conscience together,
And make of Law a laborer, such Love
shall arise."

PASSUS IV

"Cease," said the king, "I suffer you no
more.
Ye shall be reconciled in truth, and serve
me both.
Kiss her," quoth the king, "Conscience, I
command."
"Nay, by Christ," quoth Conscience, "I
take my leave rather!
Unless Reason advise me thereto, first will
I die!"
"And I command thee," quoth the king to
Conscience then,
"That thou haste thee to ride, and Reason
thou fetch;
Command him that he come, my counsel to
hear.
For he shall rule my realm, and advise me
the best
About Meed and others, and what man
shall wed her; 10
And take care, Conscience, so help me
Christ!
How thou ledest my people, learned and
lay."
"I am pleased with that promise," said the
fellow then,

And rode right to Reason, and whispered
in his ear,
Said as the king sent, and then took his
leave.
"I shall array me to ride," quoth Reason,
"rest thee awhile,"—
And called Cato his servant, courteous of
speech—
"Set my saddle upon Suffer-till-I-see-my-
time,
And look thou girth him well with very
many girths;
Hang on him a heavy bridle to bear his
head low; 20
Yet will he make many a neigh, ere he
come there."
Then Conscience on his steed rideth forth
fast,
And Reason with him rideth, hurrying hard,
But on a wain Witty and Wisdom together
Followed them fast, for they had to do
In Exchequer and Chancery, to be dis-
charged of things;
And rode fast, for Reason must advise
them how best
To save themselves from shame and from
harm.
But Conscience came first to court by a mile,
And ran forward with Reason, right to the
king. 30
Courteously the king then came to Rea-
son,
Between himself and his son set him on the
bench,
And consulted a great while wisely to-
gether.
Then Peace came to parliament, put up
petition,
How that Wrong against his will his wife
had taken,
And how he ravished Rose, Reynald's love,
And Margaret of her maidenhood, for all
she could do.
"Both my geese and my pigs his fellows
fetched away;
I dare not for dread of them fight nor
chide.
He bowed of me Bayard, and brought
him again never, 40
Nor any farthing for him, for aught that I
could plead.
He maintaineth his men to murder mine
own,
Forestalleteh me at fairs, brawleth at my
bargainings,

Breaketh in my baru-door, and beareth
away my wheat,
And giveth me but a tally for ten quarter
of oats.

And yet he beat me besides, and lieth by
my maiden;

I am not so hardy to look him in the face."
The king knew he said sooth, for Conscience
him told.

Wrong was a-feared then, and Wisdom
sought

To make his peace with pence, and proffered
forth money,

And said, "Had I love from the king, little
would I reckon

Though Peace and his power complained on
me ever."

Wisdom went then, and so did Wit,
Because Wrong had done so wicked a deed,
And warned Wrong then, with such a wise
tale:—

"Whoso worketh wilfully maketh wrath off:
I say it about thyself, thou shalt it soon find.
Unless Meed make it right, thy ill-luck is
on thee,

For both thy life and thy land lie in the
king's grace."

Wrong then to Wisdom wept for help, ⁶⁰
Him for his bandy-dandy¹ readily he paid.

Then Wisdom and Wit went together
And took Meed with them, mercy to win.

Peace put forth his head, showed his bloody
poll:

"Without guilt, God wot, got I this harm."
Conscience and the king knew the truth,
Knew well that Wrong was a wicked one
ever.

But Wisdom and Wit were zealous and
eager

To overcome the king with money if they
might.

The king swore then, by Christ, and by his
crown both, ⁷⁰

That Wrong for his works should woe suffer,
And commanded a constable to cast him in
irons:

"He shall not these seven years see his feet
once."

"God wot," quoth Wisdom, "that were not
the best;

If he amends make, let him give surety;
To be a pledge for his bale,² and buy him
boot,³

¹ Probably, corrupt influence.

² Injury, harm done.

³ Redress.

And amend his misdeed, and be always the
better."

Wit accorded herewith and said to him the
same;

"It is better that Boot should bring down
Bale

Than that Bale be beaten and Boot be
ne'er the better." ⁸⁰

Then Meed humbled herself and mercy be-
sought,

And proffered Peace a present all of pure
red gold:

"Have this from me," quoth she, "to amend
thy harm with,

For I will wager for Wrong, he will do so
no more."

Peace then pitifully prayed the king
To have mercy on that man, that harmed
him oft;

"Because he hath pledged me amends, as
Wisdom him taught,

I forgive him that guilt, with a good-will;
So that ye assent thereto, I can no more
say,

For Meed hath made me amends, I may no
more ask." ⁹⁰

"Nay," quoth the king then, "so God give
me bliss!

Wrong wendeth not so away, till I wot
more;

Leapt he so lightly away, laugh he would
And again be the bolder to beat my serv-
ants;

Unless Reason have ruth on him, he re-
maineth in the stocks

As long as I live, unless more love change
it."

Then some advised Reason to have ruth
of that rascal,

And to counsel the king and Conscience
both;

That Meed might be surety, Reason they
besought.

"Advise me not," quoth Reason, "ruth to
have, ¹⁰⁰

Till lords and ladies all love truth,
Till Peronelle's fur be put in her box,

Till over-cherished children be chastened
with rods,

Till the holiness of ribalds be held [com-
mon] as a hind;

Till clerks and knights be courteous with
their mouths

And hate to do their ribaldry, and use it no
more;

Till priests their preaching prove in themselves,
 And do it in deed, to draw us to God;
 Till Saint James be sought where I shall
 ordain,
 And no man go to Galicia, unless he go
 for ever; ¹¹⁰
 And no Rome-runners for robbers abroad
 Bear over sea silver that beareth the king's
 stamp,
 Neither groats nor gold graven with the
 king's crown,
 Upon forfeit of that fee, whoever finds it at
 Dover,
 Unless it be a merchant or his men, or mes-
 senger with letters,
 Or provisors or priests that popes advance.
 "And yet," quoth Reason, "by the rood,
 I shall no ruth have,
 While Meed hath any mastery to plead in
 this hall;
 But I may show you examples, I say it of
 myself.
 For I say it for my soul's sake, if it so
 were ¹²⁰
 That I were king with crown, to keep a
 realm,
 Should never Wrong in this world, that I
 might know of,
 Be unpunished by my power, on peril of my
 soul!
 Nor get grace through gift, so help me God!
 Nor for meed get mercy, unless meekness
 cause it.
 For *Nullum Malum*, the man, met with *Im-
 punitum*,
 And bade *Nullum Bonum* be *irremuneratum*.¹
 Let thy clerk, sir king, construe this in
 English;
 And if thou workest it wisely I wager both
 my ears
 That Law shall be a laborer and cart dung
 a-field, ¹³⁰
 And Love shall lead thy land, as it dearly
 pleaseth thee."
 Clerks that were confessors got together
 in couples
 For to construe this clause, and explain it
 after.
 When Reason to these men rehearsed these
 words,
 Was none in that courtroom, great or small,
 That held not Reason a master there, and
 Meed a great wretch.

¹ No evil unpunished; no good unrewarded.

Love made light of Meed, and laughed her
 to scorn,
 And said it so loud that Soothness it heard:
 "Whoso wisheth her to wife, for wealth of
 her goods,
 Unless he be picked for a cuckold, cut off
 both mine ears!" ¹⁴⁰
 Was neither Wisdom then, nor Witty his
 fellow,
 That could utter a word, to gainsay Reason;
 But stared in a brown study and stood as
 beasts.
 The king accorded, by Christ, to Reason's
 cunning,
 And repeated what Reason had rightly
 shown:
 "But it is hard, by mine head, to bring it
 hereto,
 All my lieges to lead in this level way."
 "By Him that was stretched on the rood,"
 quoth Reason to the king,
 "Unless I rule thus thy realm, rend out my
 ribs!
 If it be so that obedience be at my com-
 mand." ¹⁵⁰
 "I assent," quoth the king, "by Saint Mary,
 my lady,
 When my council is come, of clerks and of
 earls.
 But readily, Reason, thou ridest not hence,
 For as long as I live, let thee go will I not."
 "I am ready," quoth Reason, "to remain
 with thee ever;
 So that Conscience be our counsellor, care
 I for no better."
 "I grant gladly," quoth the king, "God
 forbid he fail us,
 And as long as I live, live we together."

PASSUS V

The king and his knights to the church
 went
 To hear matins and mass, and to the meat
 after.
 Then waked I from my winking, I was wo-
 ful withal
 That I had not heavier slept and seen more.
 Ere I a furlong had fared, a faintness me
 seized,
 That further might I not a-foot, for default
 of sleep.
 I sat softly adown, and said my creed,
 And so I babbled on my beads that it
 brought me asleep.
 Then saw I much more than I before told,

For I saw the field full of folk that I before
 showed,
 And Conscience with a cross came to preach.¹⁰
 He prayed the people to have pity on
 themselves,
 And proved that these pestilences were for
 pure sin,
 And this southwestern wind on a Saturday
 at even
 Was clearly for pride, and for no cause
 else,
 Peartrees and plumtrees were dashed to
 the ground,
 In ensample to men that we should do the
 better.
 Beeches and broad oaks were blown to the
 earth.
 And turned the tail upward in token of
 dread
 That deadly sin ere Doomsday should de-
 stroy them all.²⁰
 On this matter I might mumble full long,
 But I say as I saw, so help me God!
 How Conscience with a cross commenced to
 preach.
 He bade wasters go work at what they best
 could,
 And win what they wasted with some sort
 of craft.
 He prayed Peronelle her fur-trimming to
 leave,
 And keep it in her coffer for capital at need.
 Thomas he taught to take two staves,
 And fetch home Felice from the cucking-
 stool.
 He warned Wat his wife was to blame,³⁰
 That her head-dress was worth a mark and
 his hood worth a groat.
 He charged merehants to chasten their
 children,
 Let them lack no respect, while they are
 young.
 He prayed priests and prelates together,
 What they preach to the people to prove it
 in themselves —
 “And live as ye teach us, we will love you
 the better.”
 And then he advised the orders their rule
 to obey —
 “Lest the king and his council abridge your
 supplies,
 And be steward in your stead, till ye be
 better ordered.
 And ye that seek St. James, and saints at
 Rome,⁴⁰

Seek me Saint Truth, for He can save you
 all;
Qui cum patre et filio, fare you well!”
 Then ran Repentance and rehearsed this
 theme,
 And made William to weep water with his
 eyes.
 Pernel Proud-heart flung herself on
 the ground,
 And lay long ere she looked up, and to Our
 Lady cried,
 And promised to Him who all of us made
 She would unsew her smock, and wear in-
 stead a hair shirt
 To tame her flesh with, that frail was to
 sin:
 “Shall never light heart seize me, but I
 shall hold me down⁵⁰
 And endure to be slandered as I never did
 before.
 And now I can put on meekness, and mercy
 beseech
 Of all of whom I have had envy in my
 heart.”
 Lust Lecher said “Alas!” and to Our
 Lady cried
 To win for him mercy for his misdeeds,
 Between God himself and his poor soul,
 Provided that he should on Saturday, for
 seven years,
 Drink but with the duck and dine but once.
 Envy Envy, with heavy heart, asketh after
 shrift,
 And greatly his guiltiness beginneth to
 show.⁶⁰
 Pale as a pellet, in a palsy he seemed,
 Clothed in a coarse cloth, I could him not
 describe;
 A kirtle and a short cloak, a knife by his
 side;
 Of a friar's frock were the fronts of his
 sleeves.
 As a leek that had lain long in the sun
 So looked he with lean cheeks; foully he
 frowned.
 His body was swollen; for wrath he bit his
 lips.
 Wrathfully he clenched his fist, he thought
 to avenge himself
 With works or with words, when he saw his
 time.
 “Venom, or varnish, or vinegar, I trow,⁷⁰
 Boils in my belly, or grows there, I ween.
 Many a day could I not do as a man ought,
 Such wind in my belly wellethe ere I dine.

I have a neighbor nigh me, I have annoyed
 him off,
 Blamed him behind his back, to bring him
 in disgrace,
 Injured him by my power, punished him full
 off,
 Belied him to lords, to make him lose silver,
 Turned his friends to foes, with my false
 tongue;
 His grace and his good luck grieve me full
 sore.
 Between him and his household I have
 made wrath; 80
 Both his life and his limb were lost through
 my tongue.
 When I met in the market him I most hate,
 I hailed him as courteously as if I were his
 friend.
 He is doughtier than I, I dare do him no
 harm.
 But had I mastery and might, I had murder-
 ed him for ever!
 When I come to the church, and kneel be-
 fore the rood,
 And should pray for the people, as the
 priest teacheth us,
 Then I cry upon my knees that Christ give
 them sorrow
 That have borne away my bowl and my
 broad sheet.
 From the altar I turn mine eye and be-
 hold 90
 How Henry hath a new coat, and his wife
 another;
 Then I wish it were mine, and all the web
 with it.
 At his losing I laugh, in my heart I like
 it;
 But at his winning I weep, and bewail the
 occasion.
 I deem that men do ill, yet I do much
 worse,
 For I would that every wight in this world
 were my servant,
 And whoso hath more than I, maketh my
 heart angry.
 Thus I live loveless, like an ill-tempered
 dog,
 That all my breast swelleth with the bit-
 terness of my gall;
 No sugar is sweet enough to assuage it at
 all, 100
 Nor no remedy drive it from my heart;
 If shrift then should sweep it out, a great
 wonder it were."

"Yes, surely," quoth Repentance, and ad-
 vised him to good,
 "Sorrow for their sins saveth full many."
 "I am sorry," quoth Envy, "I am seldom
 other,
 And that maketh me so mad, for I may not
 avenge me."
110

Then came Covetousness, I
 could not describe him,
 So hungry and so hollow Sir Harvey looked.
 He was beetle-browed with two bleared
 eyes,

And like a leathern purse flapped his cheeks;
 In a torn tabard of twelve winters' age; 111
 Unless a louse could leap, I can not believe
 That she could wander on that walk, it was
 so threadbare.

"I have been covetous," quoth this Caitiff,
 "I admit it here;
 For some time I served Sim at 'The Oak'
 And was his pledged apprentice, his profit
 to watch.

First I learned to lie, in a lesson or two,
 And wickedly to weigh was my second les-
 son.

To Winchester and to Weyhill I went to
 the fair

With many kinds of merchandise, as my
 master bade; 120

But had not the grace of guile gone among
 my ware,

It had been unsold these seven year, so
 help me God!

Then I betook me to the drapers, my
 grammar to learn,

To draw the list¹ along, to make it seem
 longer.

Among these rich striped cloths learned I
 a lesson,

Pierced them with a pack-needle, and
 pleated them together,

Put them in a press, and fastened them
 therein

Till ten yards or twelve were drawn out to
 thirteen.

And my wife at Westminster, that
 woollen cloth made,

Spake to the spinners to spin it soft. 130
 The pound that she weighed by, weighed a
 quarter more

Than my balance did, when I weighed true.

I bought her barley, she brewed it to sell;
 Penny-ale and white perry, she poured it
 together,

¹ The edge of the cloth, in measuring.

For laborers and low folk, that work for
their living.

The best in the bed-chamber lay by the
wall,

Whoso tasted thereof bought it ever after,
A gallon for a groat, God wot, no less

When it came in cups. Such tricks I used.

Rose the retailer is her right name; ¹⁴⁰

She hath been a huckster these eleven win-
ters.

But I swear now soothly that soon will I
quit,

And never wickedly weigh, nor false trade
practise,

But wend to Walsingham, and my wife
also,

And pray the Rood of Bromholm to bring
me out of debt."

Gluttony Now beginneth the Glutton to go
to the shrift,

And wanders churchwards, his shrift to tell,
Then Bet the brewster bade him good mor-
row,

And then she asked him whither he would
go. ¹⁴⁹

"To holy church," quoth he, "to hear mass,
Since I shall be shriven, and sin no more."

"I have good ale, gossip," quoth she;

"Glutton, what say you?"

"Hast aught in thy purse," quoth he, "any
hot spices?"

"Yea, Glutton, gossip," quoth she, "God
wot, full good;

I have pepper and peony-seeds, and a pound
of garlick,

A farthing worth of fennel-seed, for these
fasting days."

Then goeth Glutton in, and great oaths
after;

Cis the shoemaker's wife sat on the bench,
Wat the ward of the warren, and his wife
both,

Tomkin the tiuker and twain of his serv-
ants; ¹⁶⁰

Hick the hackney-man, and Hogg the
needle seller,

Clarice of Cock's-Lane, and the clerk of the
church,

Sir Piers of Prie-Dieu, and Pernel of Flan-
ders,

Dawe the ditcher, and a dozen others.

A fiddler, a rat-catcher, a scavenger of
Cheapside,

A rope-maker, a riding-boy, and Rose the
dish-maker,

Godfrey of Garlickshire, and Griffin the
Welshman,

And of tradesmen a band, early in the
morning

Stand Glutton, with good-will, a treat in
good ale.

Then Clement the cobbler cast off his
cloak, ¹⁷⁰

And at "the new fair" made offer to bar-
ter it;

And Hick the ostler flung his hood after,
And bade Bett the butcher act on his be-
half.

Then were chapmen chosen, the articles to
value;

Whoso had the hood should have something
to boot.

They rose up rapidly, and whispered to-
gether,

And appraised the penny-worths, and parted
them by themselves;

There were oaths a-plenty, whoso might
hear them.

They could not, in conscience, accord to-
gether,

Till Robin the rope-maker was chosen to
arise, ¹⁸⁰

And named for an umpire, to avoid all de-
bate,

For he should appraise the pennyworths,
as seemed good to him.

Then Hick the ostler had the cloak,
On condition that Clement should have his
cup filled,

And have Hick the ostler's hood, and hold
him well served;

And he that first repented should straight
arise

And greet Sir Glutton with a gallon of
ale.

There was laughing and cheating¹ and
"Let go the cup!"

Bargains and beverages began to arise,
And they sat so till evensong, and sang
some while, ¹⁹⁰

Till Glutton had gulped down a gallon and
a gill.

He had no strength to stand, till he his staff
had;

Then 'gan he to go like a gleeman's bitch,
Sometimes to the side, sometimes to the
rear,

Like a man laying lines to catch birds with.

¹ A loteryng; ² Bouryng; ³ lakeryng.

When he drew to the door, then his eyes
grew dim, ²⁰⁰
He stumbled at the threshold, and threw to
the ground.
Clement the cobbler caught Glutton by the
middle,
And to lift him up he laid him on his knees;
And Glutton was a great churl, and grim
in the lifting,
And coughed up a caudle in Clement's lap,
That the hungriest hound in Hertfordshire
Durst not lap that loathsomeness, so un-
lively it smacketh;
So that, with all the woe in the world, his
wife and his wench
Bore him home to his bed, and brought him
therein.
And after all this surfeit, a sickness he
had, ²¹⁰
That he slept Saturday and Sunday, till sun
went to rest.
Then he waked from his winking, and
wiped his eyes;
The first word that he spake was, "Where
is the cup?"
His wife warned him then, of wickedness
and sin.
Then was he ashamed, that wretch, and
scratched his ears,
And 'gan to cry grievously, and great dole
to make
For his wicked life, that he had lived.
"For hunger or for thirst, I make my vow,
Shall never fish on Friday digest in my maw,
Till Abstinence, my aunt, have given me
leave; ²²⁰
And yet I have hated her all my life-time."
Sloth Sloth for sorrow fell down swoon-
ing,
Till *Vigilate*, the watcher, fetched water to
his eyes,
Let it flow on his face, and fast to him
cried,
And said, "Beware of despair, that will
thee betray.
'I am sorry for my sins,' say to thyself,
And beat thyself on the breast, and pray
God for grace,
For there is no guilt so great that His mercy
is not more."
Then Sloth sat up and sighed sore,
And made a vow before God, for his foul
sloth, ²³⁰
"There shall be no Sunday this seven year
(save sickness it cause)

That I shall not bring myself ere day to
the dear church,
And hear matins and mass, as I a monk
were.
No ale after meat shall withhold me thence,
Till I have heard evensong, I promise by
the head.
And¹ yet I shall yield again — if I have so
much —
All that I wickedly won, since I had wit.
And though I lack a livelihood I will not
stop
Till each man shall have his own, ere I
hence wend:
And with the residue and the remnant, by
the rood of Chester, ²⁴⁰
I shall seek Saint Truth, ere I see Rome!"
Robert the robber, on *Reddite*² he looked,
And because there was not wherewith, he
wept full sore.
But yet the sinful wretch said to himself:
"Christ, that upon Calvary on the cross
died'st,
Though Dismas³ my brother besought grace
of thee,
And thou hadst mercy on that man for *me-
mento*⁴ sake,
Thy will be done upon me, as I have well
deserved
To have hell for ever if no hope there were.
So rue on me, Robert, that no counsel
have, ²⁵⁰
Nor ever ween to win by any craft that I
know.
But, for thy much mercy, mitigation I be-
seech;
Damn me not on Doomsday because I did
so ill."
But what befell this felon, I cannot well
show,
But well I know he wept hard, water with
his eyes,
And acknowledged his guilt to Christ again
thereafter,
That the pikestaff of Penitence he should
polish anew,
And leap with it o'er the land, all his life-
time,

¹ Ll. 236-259, dealing with the restitution of stolen goods, appear in C in connection with Avarice. The attaching of them to Sloth in A and B seems to point to some confusion in the text. Note that in A the sin of Wrath is omitted.

² Make restitution, *Romans*, xiii, 7.

³ The name given to the penitent thief in the apocryphal *Gospel of Nicodemus*.

⁴ Remember me, *Luke*, xxiii, 42.

For he hath lain by *Latro*,¹ Lucifer's brother.
 A thousand of men then throught together,
 Weeping and wailing for their wicked
 deeds,²⁶¹
 Crying up to Christ, and to His clean Mother,
 To give grace to seek Saint Truth, God
 grant they so might!

PASSUS VI

Now ride these folk, and walk on foot
 To seek that saint in strange lands.
 But there were few men so wise that knew
 the way thither,
 But they bustled forth like beasts, over
 valleys and hills,
 For while they went after their own will,
 they went all amiss;
 Till it was late and long, when they a man
 met,
 Apparelled as a palmer, in pilgrim's weeds.
 He bore a staff bound round with a broad
 list²
 In woodbine wise twisted around.
 A bag and a bowl he bore by his side; 10
 A hundred vials on his hat were set,
 Signs of Sinai and shells of Galicia;
 Many a cross on his cloak, and the keys of
 Rome,
 And the vernicle in front, that men should
 him know,
 And see by his signs whom he had sought.³
 These folk asked him fairly from whence
 he came.
 "From Sinai," he said, "and from the
 Sepulchre;
 From Bethlehem and Babylon, I have been
 in both;
 In India and in Assisi, and in many other
 places.
 Ye may see by my signs that sit on my
 hat²⁰
 That I have walked full wide, in wet and
 in dry,
 And sought good saints for my soul's
 health."
 "Knowest thou a holy one men call
 Saint Truth?
 Canst thou show us the way to where he
 dwelleth?"

¹ The word used in *Luke* of the crucified thieves.

² Edge of cloth.

³ The references here are to the badges showing the shrines a pilgrim had visited: the vial or ampulla for Thomas of Canterbury; the scallop shell for St. James of Compostella in Galicia; the cross for Palestine; the keys and the handkerchief of St. Veronica for Rome. "Sinai" refers to the shrine of St. Catharine there.

"Nay, so God gladden me," said the
 man then,
 "Saw I never palmer, with pikestaff nor
 with scrip,
 Such a saint seek, save now in this place."
 "Peter!" quoth a Plowman, and put
 forth his head,
 "I know him as naturally as a scholar doth
 his books;
 Clean Conscience and Wit showed me to
 his place,³⁰
 And pledged me then to serve him for ever.
 Both in sowing and in setting, while I work
 night,
 I have been his fellow these fifteen winters;
 Have both sowed his seed and tended his
 beasts,
 And also cared for his corn and carried it
 to house,
 Ditched and delved, and done what he or-
 dered,
 Within and without watched his interests;
 Among these people is no laborer whom he
 loves more,
 For though I say it myself, my service him
 pleases.
 I have my hire of him well, and sometimes
 more;⁴⁰
 He is the promptest payer that poor men
 have;
 He withholdeth from no kind his hire that he
 hath it not at even.
 He is as lowly as a lamb, lovely of speech;
 And if ye will wit where he dwelleth
 I will show you the way home to his place."
 "Yea, dear Piers," said these palmers,
 and proffered him hire.
 "Nay, by the peril of my soul," quoth
 Piers, and began to swear,
 "I would not finger a farthing, for St.
 Thomas's shrine!
 Truth would love me the less for a great
 while after!
 But, ye that wend to him, this is the way
 thither:⁵⁰
 Ye must go through Meekness, both man
 and wife,
 Till ye come to Conscience, that Christ
 may know the truth
 That ye love him dearer than the life in
 your hearts,
 And then your neighbors next in no wise
 injure
 Otherwise than thou wouldest that men
 should do to thee.

So bend your way by a brook, Be-obedi-
cut-in-speech,
Forth till ye find a ford Honor-your-fathers;
Wade in that water, wash yourselves well
there,
And ye shall leap the lightlier all your life-
time.
Soon shalt thou then see Swear-not-but-
thou-have-need — 60
And-specially-not-in-vain-take-the-name-
of-God-Almighty.
Then will ye come by a croft, but go ye
not therein,
The croft called Covet-not-men's-cattle-
nor-their-wives-
Nor-none-of-their-servants-that-they-
might-be-hurt;
See thou break no bough there, unless it
be thine own.
Two stocks there stand, but stay thou not
there,
They are called Slay-not, Nor-steal-not;
strike forth by them both;
Leave them on thy left hand, look thou not
after them,
And hold well thy holy-day ever till even.
Then shalt thou turn aside at a brook, Bear-
no-false-witness, 70
It is furnished within with florins, and with
many oaths;
See thou pluck no plant there, for peril of
thy soul.
Then shalt thou see Say-sooth, so-it-is-to-
be-done-
And-look-that-thou-lie-not-for-any-man's-
bidding.
Then shall thou come to a court, clear
as the sun,
The moat is of Mercy, surrounding the manor,
And all the walls are of Wit to hold Will
outside;
The battlements are of Christendom, man-
kind to save,
Buttressed¹ with the Belief wherethrough
we must be saved.
All the houses are roofed, hall and cham-
bers, 80
With no lead but Love-as-brethren-of-one-
mother.
The tower wherein is Truth is set above
the sun,
He may do with the daystar whatever he
pleaseth.

¹ Lit., surmounted with wooden boardings, as in
medieval fortifications.

Death dare not do anything that he for-
biddeth.
Grace is called the gate-guard, a good man
in truth,
His man is called Amend-thou, for many
men know him;
Tell him this as a token, for truth knows
the sooth:
'I performed the penance that the priest en-
joined me;
I am sorry for my sins, and so shall I ever
be
When I think thereon, though I were a
pope,' 90
Bid Amend-thou humble himself to his mas-
ter once,
To lift up the wicket gate that the way
shut
When Adam and Eve ate their bane;²
For he hath the key of the catch, though
the king sleep.
And if Grace thee grant to go in this
wise,
Thou shalt see Truth himself sit in thy
heart.
Then look that thou love Him well, and
His law hold;
But be well aware of Wrath, that wicked
wretch,
For he hath envy of Him that in thine
heart sitteth,
And putteth forth Pride to praise thy-
self. 100
Boldness in thy good deeds blindeth thine
eyes;
And so art thou driven out and the door
closed,
Locked and fastened to keep thee there-
out,
Haply a hundred year ere thou again en-
ter.
Thus mayst thou lose His love by thiinking
well of thyself,
But get it again by Grace and by no gift
else.
And there are seven sisters that serve
Truth ever,
And are porters at posterns that to the
place belong.
The first is called Abstinence, and Humility
the second,
Charity and Chastity are two full choice
maidens, 110
Patience and Peace many people help,

² B apples unrosted.

Largess the lady leadeth in full many.
But whoso is sib to these sisters, so help me
God!

Is wonderfully welcome and fairly received.

And, but ye be sib to some of these seven,
It is full hard, by my head, any of you all
To get entrance at that gate unless greater
be the grace."

"By Christ," quoth a cut-purse, "I have
no kin there!"

"Nor I," quoth an ape-warden, "for aught
that I know!"

"Certain," quoth a waferseller, "knew I
this for truth,
I should go no foot further, for any friar's
preaching."

"Yes," quoth Piers the Plowman, and
preached for their good,

"Mercy is a maiden there and hath might
over all;

She is sib to all sinful men and her son also;
And through the help of these two (no
other hope have thou,)

Thou mightest get grace there, so thou go
betimes."

PASSUS VII

"This would be a wicked way, unless one
had a guide

Who might follow us each step, that there
we may come."

Quoth Perkin the plowman, "By Peter the
apostle,

I have a half-acre to plow, by the high-
way;

Were it well plowed, then with you would
I wend,

And show you the right way, till ye found
truth."

"That would be a long delay," quoth a
lady in a veil;

"What shall we women work at the while?"

"Some shall sew sacks, that the wheat spill
not,

And ye wives that have wool, work on it
fast,

Spin it speedily, spare not your fingers,
Unless it be a holy day, or else a holy eve.

Look out your linen, and labor thereon
fast;

The needy and the naked, take heed how
they lie,

And cast on them clothes against the cold,
for so Truth willeth;

For I shall grant them livelihood, unless
the land fail,

As long as I live, for our Lord of Heaven's
love.

And ye, lovely ladies, with your long fin-
gers,

That have silk and sendal,¹ sew when you
have time

Chasubles for chaplains, and churches to
honor;

And all manner of men that by meat live
Help him to work well that your food win-
neth."

"By Christ," quoth a knight then, "thou
knowest us best!

Save one time truly, thus taught was I
never!

But teach me," quoth the knight; "if I can
plow,

I will help thee to labor while my life
lasteth."

"By Saint Peter," quoth Piers, "since
thou profferest so humbly

I shall work and sweat and sow for us both,
And also labor for thy love all my lifetime,

On condition that thou keep Holy Church
and myself

From wasters and wicked men that would
us destroy.

And go thou and hunt hardily hares and
foxes,

Bears and bucks that break men's hedges,
And fetch thee home falcons fowls to kill;

For they come into my croft and crop my
wheat."

Full courteously the knight conceived
these words;

"By my power, Piers, I plight thee my
troth,

To fulfill the bargain, while I may stand!"

"But yet one point," quoth Piers, "I shall
pray thee no more;

Look thou trouble no tenant, unless Truth
will assent:

And if poor men proffer you presents or
gifts,

Take them not; peradventure you may
them not deserve;

For thou shalt give them back again at one
year's end,

In a place of sore peril that purgatory is
called.

And beat thou not thy bondman, the better
thou shalt speed,

¹ A thin silken stuff.

(And be thyself true of tongue, and lying
tales hate;)

Unless it be wisdom or wit thy workmen to
chastise.

Revel not with ribalds, hear not their
tales,

And especially at meat such men eschew,
For they are the devil's Tale-Tellers, I let
thee understand."

"I assent, by Saint James," said the knight
then,

"To work by thy word, while my life en-
dureth."

"And I shall apparel me," quoth Perkin,
"in pilgrim's wise,

And wend with you the right way, till ye
Truth find."

He cast on his clothes, clouted and mended,
His garters and his cuffs, to keep his nails
from cold;

He hung a basket on his back, in stead of
a scrip;

A bushel of bread-corn he bringeth therein:
"For I will sow it myself, and then with
you wend.

For whoso helpeth me to plow, or do any
sort of labor,

He shall have, by our Lord, the more hire
in harvest,

And shall make merry with the corn, who-
ever begrudgeth.

And all kinds of craftsmen that can live
with Truth,

I shall find them their food, if they faith-
fully live,

Save Jack the juggler, and Janet of the
stews,

And Robert the ribald, for his filthy words.
Truth taught it me once, and bade me tell
it further,

*Deleantur de libro,*¹ I should not deal with
them,

Holy Church is bound from them no tithe
to take;

*Et cum justis non scribantur*²
They have escaped by good luck; ³ may
God amend them!"

Dame Work-when-there-is-time is the
name of Piers's wife;

His daughter is called Do-right-so-or-thy-
mother-will-beat-thee;

¹ "Let them be stricken out from the book [of the
living]," *Psalms*, lix, 28.

² "And let them not be written with the just."
Ibid.

³ A *Thei ben a-scaped good thrift*.

His son is called Suffer-thy-sovereigns-to-
have-their-will-

And-judge-them - not, - for-if-thou-do-thou-
shalt-dearly-pay-for-it.

"May God be with all, for so his word
teacheth;

For now I am old and gray, and have of
my own,

To penance and to pilgrimage I will pass
with these others.

Therefore I will, ere I wend, write my
testament.

In Dei nomine, amen. I make it myself.
He shall have my soul that best hath de-
served it,

And defend it from the fiend, for so I believe,
Till I come to my account, as my creed me
tellet,

To have release and remission on that
rental I expect.

The church shall have my corpse, and keep
my bones;

For of my corn and capital she craveth the
tenth.

I paid her promptly, to save my soul from
peril,

She is bound, I hope, to bear me in mind,
And remember me in her memory among
all Christians.

My wife shall have what I won with
truth, and no more,

And divide with my friends and my dear
children;

For though I die this day my debts are
cleared;

I bare home what I borrowed ere I to bed
went:

And with the residue and the remnant, by
the rood of Chester!

I will worship therewith Truth in my life,
And be his pilgrim at the plow, for poor
men's sake.

My plough-foot ⁴ shall be my pikestaff and
push at the roots,

And help my coulter to carve and close the
furrows."

Now have Piers and the pilgrims to the
plow gone,

To plow this half-acre help him full many.
Ditchers and delvers dug up the ridges;

Therewith was Perkin pleased, and praised
them gladly.

⁴ A *plough-pote* (*pote* = pusher). B *plow-fote*; C
plough-fote, plough-foot.

⁵ Left unplowed.

Other workmen there were that wrought
 full many,
 Each man in his manner made himself
 work;
 And sum, to please Perkin, picked up the
 weeds.
 At high prime¹ Perkin let the plough
 stand,
 While he himself oversaw who had best
 wrought;
 He should be hired thereafter, when har-
 vest-time came.

Then sat some, and sang at the ale,
 And helped him to plow with "Hey, trolly-
 lolly!"

"Now, by the Prince of Paradise," quoth
 Piers then in wrath, 110

"Unless ye rise the sooner and haste ye to
 work,
 Shall no grain that here groweth gladden
 you at need,
 And though ye die for lack of it, the devil
 take him that cares!"

Then were the rogues afraid and feigned
 themselves blind.

Some laid their legs across as such scound-
 rrels can,
 And complained to Piers, with such piteous
 words:

"For we have no limbs to labor with, our
 Lord we thank for it;

But we pray for you, Piers, and for your
 plow too,

That God of his grace our grain multiply,
 And reward you for your alms that ye give
 us here! 120

For we may neither work nor sweat, such
 sickness us aileth."

"If it be truth that ye say," quoth Piers,
 "soon I shall spy it!"

Ye be wasters, I wot, and Truth knows the
 sooth!

I am his old servant, and ought him to warn
 What wasters in the world his workmen
 destroy.

Ye eat what they should eat that plough
 for us all;

But Truth shall teach you his team to drive,
 Both to sow and to set, and save his pro-
 duce,

Scare crows from his corn, and keep his
 beasts,

Or ye shall eat barley bread, and of the
 brook drink. 130

¹ Nine o'clock in the morning.

But if they be blind or broken-shanked, or
 bedridden lie,

They shall have as good as I, so help me
 God,

Till God of his grace cause them to arise.

Anchorites and hermits that keep to their
 cells

Shall have of my alms, all the while I live,
 Enough each day at noon, but no more till
 tomorrow,

Lest the fiend and their flesh should defile
 their souls;

Once at noon is enough for him that no
 work doeth,

He abides in better state that tastes not too
 often."

Then wasters arose, and would have
 fought; 140

To Piers the Plowman one proffered his
 glove,

A Breton, a braggart, boasted himself also,
 And bade him go hang with his plow, bald-
 headed wretch!

"For we will have of thy flour, willy nilly,
 And take of thy meat when that us pleaseth,
 And make us merry therewith, spite of thy
 face!"

Then Piers Plowman complained to the
 knight,

To guard him as agreed from cursed
 wretches,

From wasters that lie in wait winners to
 rob.

Courteously the knight, as his nature
 was, 150

Warned wasters and taught them to do
 better;

"Or ye shall pay dearly by the law, by the
 order that I bear!"

"I was not wont to work," quoth the waster,
 "I will not begin now!"

And recked little of the law, and less of
 the knight,

And counted Piers worth a pea, and his
 plow too,

And menaced him and his men, when they
 should next meet.

"Now by the peril of my soul," quoth Piers
 the Plowman,

"I shall punish you all for your proud
 words!"

And whooped after Hunger then, that heard
 him at once:

"Wreak me on these wasters," quoth Piers,
 "that this world rob!" 160

Hunger in haste seized waster by the maw,
And wrung him so by the belly that both
his eyes waterd,

And buffeted the Breton on both his
cheeks;

He looked like a lantern all his life after.
He so beat the boys he nigh burst their
ribs,

Had not Piers with a pease-loaf prayed him
to cease;

And with a bag¹ of beans beat them both,
And hit Hunger therewith between his lips,
And he bled inwards a bowlful of gruel;

Had not the physician first forbidden him
water 170

To moisten the barley-bread and the ground
beans,

They had been dead by this day, and buried
all warm.

Then rogues for fear flew to barns,
And laid on with flails, from morn till even,
So that Hunger was not hardy enough even
to look up

For a potful of pease that Piers had made.
A baud of hermits seized hold of spades,
And dived in dirt and dung to drive Hun-
ger out.

Blind and bedridden were cured a thou-
sand,

That lie as blind and as broken-legged ¹⁸⁰
Upon a warm Sunday by the highway;
Hunger killed them with a hot cake.

Lame men's limbs were rendered lithe that
time,

And they became herds, to keep Piers's
beasts,

And prayed, for charity, with Piers to
dwell,

All for craving of his corn, to cast out
Hunger.

Piers was proud thereof, and put them in
office,

And gave them meat and money, as they
might deserve.

Then had Piers pity, and prayed Hunger to
wend

Home to his own hearth,² and hold himself
there forever. 190

"And yet I pray thee," quoth Piers, "ere
thou pass hence,

With vagabonds and beggars what is best
to do?

I wot well, when thou art gone, they will
work full ill;

¹ A *bat*. ² A *hurde*, earth; B *erde*; C *erthe*.

It is misfortune maketh them to be now so
meek,

And for lack of food thus fast do they work;
And they are my blood brethren, for God
bought us all.

Truth taught me once to love them each
one,

And help them in all things, according as
they need.

Yet would I know if thou knewest what
were the best,

And how I might master them, and make
them work." 200

"Hear now," quoth Hunger, "and hold it
for wisdom.

Bold beggars and rascals that may earn
their meal by work,

With hound-bread and horse-bread hold up
their hearts,

And cheat them with bones³ against swell-
ing of their bellies;

And if the fellows grumble. bid them go
work,

And they shall sup the sweeter when they
have it deserved.

And if thou find any fellow that fortune
hath harmed

With fire or with false folk, try such to
know;

Comfort them with thy means, for Christ
of heaven's love.

Love them and lend to them, so the law of
nature wills. 210

And all manner of men, that thou mayest
spy,

That are needy, or naked, and nought have
to spend,

With meat or with money make them fare
the better,

With word or with work while thou art
here.

Make friends with such, for so Saint Mat-
thew teacheth,

*Facite vobis amicos de mammona iniquitatis.*⁴

"I would not grieve God," quoth Piers,
"for all the gold on ground;

Might I do as thou sayest without sin?"
said Piers then.

"Yea, I promise thee," quoth Hunger, "or
else the Bible lieth;

Go to Genesis the giant, the engenderer of
us alle;

³ A *banne hem with bones*; B *abate him with benes*;
C *a-bane hem with benes*.

⁴ Make for yourselves friends of the mammon of un-
righteousness, *Luke*, xvi, 9.

'In sweat and swink thou shalt earn thy
meat,¹ 220
And labor for thy livelihood,' for so our
lord ordered.

And Sapience said the same, I saw it in the
Bible.

'*Piger propter frigus,*² no field he till,
He shall crave and beg, and no man abate
his hunger.'

Matthew of the man's face³ uttereth
these words,

'The unprofitable servant had a talent, and
because he would not use it
He had ill-will of his master evermore
after';

*Auferte ab illo unam, et date illi, etc.,*⁴

He took from him his talent, for he would
not work,

And gave it in haste to him that had ten
before;

And afterwards he thus said, his servants
it heard, 230

'He that hath shall have, to help where
need is,

And he that hath not, nought shall have, nor
no man help him;

And he that hopeth to have, from him it
shall be taken away.'

For Common Sense would that each man
should work,

By teaching or by tillage, or travailing with
hands,

Active life or contemplative; Christ would
so also.

For so saith the Psalter, in the psalm be-
ginning, 'Blessed is everyone,'

Labores manum tuarum quia manducabis,
*etc.*⁵

To him that gets his food here, with travail-
ing in truth,

God gives his blessing, for his livelihood
that laboreth."

"Yet I pray thee," quoth Piers, "for char-
ity, if thou knowest 240

Any leaf of leechcraft, let me learn it, my
dear.

For some of my servants are sick at times,

¹ *Genesis*, iii, 19.

² The slothful shall not plow by reason of the winter,
Proverbs, xx, 4.

³ "An allusion to a common representation of the
evangelists which likens Matthew to a *man*, Mark to
a *lion*, Luke to a *bull*, and John to an *eagle*." Skeat.

⁴ Take ye away the talent from him, and give to him,
etc. Matthew, xxv, 28.

⁵ For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands, *Psalms*,
cxxxviii, 2.

Work not for a week, so acheth their belly."
"I wot well," quoth Hunger, "what sick-
ness aileth them;

They have eaten in excess, that maketh
them groan oft.

But I command thee," quoth Hunger, "if
health thou desirest,

That on no day thou drink till thou hast
had some dinner;

Eat not, I command thee, till Hunger take
thee

And send thee some of his sauce, the better
to savor;

Keep some till supper-time, and sit not too
long, 250

Arise up ere appetite have eaten his fill.
Let not Sir Surfeit sit at thy board;

Love him not, for he is a lecher, and lewd
of tongue,

And after many meats his maw is a-longing.
And if thou diet thyself thus, I dare bet

both mine ears
That Physic shall his furred hood for his
food sell,

And eke his Calabrian⁶ cloak with buttons
of gold,

And be fain, by my faith, his physie to
leave,

And learn to labor on the land, lest liveli-
hood fail.

There are more liars than leeches, our Lord
them amend! 260

They do men to death by their drink, ere
destiny would."

"By Saint Paul," quoth Piers, "these be
profitable words!

This is a lovely lesson; our Lord reward
thee for it!

Away now when thou wilt; be it well with
thee ever!"

"I promise thee," quoth Hunger, "hence
will I not wend

Ere I have dined this day, and drunk too."
"I have no penny," quoth Piers, "pullets to
buy,

Neither geese nor pigs, but two green⁷
cheeses.

And a little curds and cream, and un-
leavened cake,

And a loaf of beans and bran, baked for my
children. 270

And I say, by my soul, I have no salt bacon,
Nor any cook-boys, by Christ, collops to
make.

⁶ Trimmed with grey Calabrian fur. ⁷ Fresh made.

But I have onions and parsley, and many
cabbages,

And eke a cow and a calf, and a cart-mare
To draw a-field my dung, while the drought
lasteth.

By these means must I live till Lammas
time;

By that time I hope to have harvest in my
croft;

Then may I prepare thee dinner as thou
dearly likest it."

All the poor people pease-cods fetched,
Beans baked into bread they brought in
their laps,

Little onions their chief meat, and ripe
cherries many,

And proffered Piers this present, to please
his hunger with.

Hunger ate this in haste, and asked after
more.

Then these folk for fear fetched him many
Onions and pease, for they him would please;
After these were eaten, he must take his
leave

Till it was near to harvest, when new corn
came to market.

Then were these folk fain, and fed
Hunger eagerly

With good ale and gluttony, and caused
him to sleep.

And then would not the waster work, but
wandered about,

Nor any beggar eat bread that had beans
in it,

But cocket and clearmatin,¹ and of clean
wheat;

Nor any halfpenny ale in any wise drink,
But of the best and the brownest that brew-
ers sell.

Laborers that have no land to live by,
but only their hands,

Deign not to dine today on yesterday's
vegetables.

No penny-ale may please them, nor a piece
of bacon,

Unless it were fresh flesh, or else fried fish,
Hot and very hot, lest they chill their
stomachs.

Unless he be hired at a high price, he will
surely chide,

Call curses on the time that he was made
a workman,

And curse the king hard, and all his council
after

¹ Kinds of fine bread.

For enforcing such laws as chastise la-
borers.

But while Hunger was master here there
would none chide

Nor strive against the statutes, so stern
they looked.

I warn you all, workmen, win while ye
may;

Hunger hitherward again hieth him in haste.
He will awake with high-waters² the
wasters all;

Ere five years are fulfilled, such famine shall
arise,

Through floods and foul weather fruits shall
fail;

And so saith Saturn, and sendeth us warning.

PASSUS VIII

Truth heard tell hereof, and to Piers sent
To take his team, and till the earth;

And purchased him a pardon *a poena et a
culpa*,³

For him and for his heirs, for evermore
after.

And bade him stay at home, and plow his
leas,

And all that ever helped him, to plow or to
sow,

Or any kind of task that might Piers help,
Part in that pardon the Pope hath granted.

Kings and knights that guard Holy
Church,

And rightfully rule the realm and the
people,

Have pardon through Purgatory to pass
full soon,

With patriarchs in Paradise to play there-
after.

Bishops that bless, and both the laws⁴
know,

Look on the one law and teach men the
other,

And bear them both on their backs, as their
banner showeth,

And preach to their parsons the peril of sin,
How their scabbed sheep shall their wool
save,

Have pardon with the Apostles when they
pass hence,

And at the Day of Doom with them on da's
sit.

Merchants, in the margin, had many
years' remission,

² Floods.

³ From punishment and guilt.

⁴ Duty to God and duty to man.

But not a *poena et a culpa* would the Pope
them grant.

Because they hold not their holy-day as
Holy Church teacheth,

And because they swore by their souls —
“so help them God!” —

Against their clean conscience, their goods
to sell.

But under his secret seal Truth sent a
letter,

And bade them buy boldly what they liked
best,

And then sell it again, and save the win-
ning,

And make *maison-dieux*¹ therewith, the sick
to help,

And wicked customs vigorously amend;

Build again bridges that broken were,³⁰
Help to marry maidens or make them nuns;

Poor widows that would not be wives again,
Find such their food, for love of God of
heaven;

Let scholars to school, or to some other
craft,

Assist² religion, and endow it better;

“And I shall send you myself Saint Michael,
my angel,

That no devil shall harm you, when you shall
die,

And hinder me from sending your souls safe
into heaven,

And before the face of my father prepare
your seats.

Usury and avarice and oaths I forbid,⁴⁰
That no guile go with you, but the grace of
truth.”

Then were merchants merry, they wept
for joy,

And give Will for his writing woolen
clothes;

Because he copied thus their clause, they
gave him great thanks.

Men of law had least, for they are loath
To plead for mean men, unless they get
money;

So saith the Psalter and Sapience also.

*Super innocentes munera non accipiunt. A
regibus et principibus erit merces
eorum.*³

From princes and prelates their pension
should come,

And from the poor people no pennyworth
should they take.

But he that spendeth his speech, and
speaketh for the poor man,⁵⁰

Who is innocent and needy, and no man
hath harmed,

That comforteth him in misfortune, covet-
eth not his goods,

But, for our Lord's love, law for him
showeth,

No devil, at his death-day, shall harm him
a mite,

That he be not secure and safe; and so
saith the Psalter.

*Qui facit haec, non movebitur in eternum.*⁴
But to buy water, or wind, or wit (the third
thing),

Holy Writ would never grant, God knows
the truth!

These three as thralls have grown among
us all,

To wax or to wane, whichever God liketh.
His pardon in purgatory is petty, I trow,⁶⁰

Who any pay from poor men for pleading
receiveth.

Ye lawmakers and lawyers, ye know
whether I lie;

Since ye see that it is so, serve at your best.
Living laborers, that live by their hands,

That truly give and truly pay their tithes
And live in love and in law for their lowly
hearts,

Had the same absolution that sent was to
Piers.

Askers and beggars are not in the bull,
Unless the suggestion be sound that causes
them to beg.

For he that beggeth or asketh, unless he
have need,⁷⁰

He is false as the fiend, and defraudeth the
needy,

And also beguileth the giver, all against his
will.

They live not in love, nor any law keep;
They wed no women that they have to do
with;

But as wild beasts wickedly work together,
And bring forth bairns that bastards are
held.

Either their backs or their bones they
break in their youth,

And go begging with their children ever-
more after.

There are more misshapen among them,
whoso takes heed,

⁴ He that doeth these things shall never be moved,
Psalms, xv, 5.

¹ Hospitals.

² A Rule; B C Releve.

³ *Psalms*, xv, 9.

Than of all other men that in the world
wander. 80

They that live their life thus may loath the
time

That ever they were created men, when
they shall hence fare.

But old men and hoary, that helpless are
in strength,

And women with child, that cannot work,
The blind and bedridden, with broken limbs,
That take sickness meekly, like lepers and
others,

Have as full pardon as the Plowman him-
self;

For love of their humble hearts our Lord
hath them granted

Their penance and their purgatory to have
here upon earth.

"Piers," quoth a priest then, "thy par-
don must I read, 90

For I will construe every clause, and know
it in English."

And Piers, at his prayer, the pardon un-
foldeth,

And I, behind them both, beheld all the
bull.

In two lines it lay, and not a letter more,
And was written right thus, in witness of
tru'h:

Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in viam eternam;
*Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum.*¹

"Peter!" quoth the priest then, "I can no
pardon find,

But 'Do well and have well, and God shall
have thy soul;

And do evil and have evil, hope thou none
other

But that after thy death-day to hell shalt
thou wend!"

And Piers, for pure vexation, pulled it
asunder, 100

And then he said to them these seemly
sayings:

"*Si ambulavero in medio umbræ mortis, non
timebo mala, quoniam tu mecum es.*"²

I shall cease from my sowing," said Piers,
"and work not so hard,

Nor about my livelihood so busy be more!
In prayer and in penance my plowing shall
be hereafter,

¹ And those who did good shalt go into eternal life; but who did evil, into eternal fire. Cf. *Matthew*, xxv, 46.

² Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me, *Psalms*, xxiii, 4.

And lower where I laughed, ere my life fail.
The prophet his bread ate in penance and
weeping;

As the Psalter says to us, so did many
others;

Who loveth God loyally, his livelihood is
plentiful:

*Fuerunt mihi lacrimæ meæ panes, die ac
nocte.*³

And, unless Luke lies, he teacheth us an-
other,

That too busy we should not be, here upon
earth, 110

While we dwell in this world, to make glad
the belly.

*Ne solliciti sitis,*⁴ he saith in his gospel,
And showeth it by example our souls to
guide.

The fowls in the firmament, who feedeth
them in winter?

When the frost freezeth, food they require;
They have no granary to go to, yet God
gives them all."

"What?" quoth the priest to Perkin, "by
Peter! as methinketh,

Thou art lettered a little; who taught thee
to read?"

"Abstinence the abess mine A B C me
taught,

And Conscience came after and showed me
better." 120

"Were thou a priest," quoth he, "thou
mightest preach when thou couldst;

'*Quoniam literaturam non cognovi,*'⁵ might
be thy theme!"

"Lewd losel!" quoth he, "little lookest
thou on the Bible,

Solomon's sayings seldom thou beholdest;
'Sling away these scorners,' he saith, 'with
their vile scolding,

For with them readily I care not to rest;'
Ejice derisores et jurgia cum eis, ne crescant."⁶

The priest and Perkin then disputed to-
gether,

And through their words I awoke, and
waited about,

And saw the sun in the south just at that
time. 129

Meatless and moneyless on Malvern hills,
Musing on this dream, a mile length I went.

³ My tears have been my meat day and night, *Psalms*, xlii, 3.

⁴ Be not anxious, etc., *Matthew*, vi, 25.

⁵ For I have known no learning, *Psalms*, lxxi, 15 (Vulgate).

⁶ *Proverbs*, xxii, 10 (translated in previous lines).

Many a time this dream has made me to study
 For love of Piers the Plowman, full pen-
 sive in my heart;
 For it I saw sleeping, if such a thing might
 be.
 But Cato construeth it nay, and the canon-
 lawyers too,
 And say themselves, "*Somnia ne cures.*"¹
 But as for the Bible, bear witness how
 Daniel divined the dreams of a king,
 Whom Nebuchadnezzar² these clerks name.
 Daniel said, "Sir King, thy dream means
 That strange knights shall come thy king-
 dom to claim;
 Among lower lords thy land shall be di-
 vided."¹⁴¹
 As Daniel divined, it fell out indeed after,
 The king lost his lordship, and lesser men
 it had.
 And Joseph dreamed dreams, full mar-
 velous also,
 How the sun and the moon and eleven stars
 Fell before his feet and saluted him all.
 "*Beau fils,*" quoth his father, "for famine
 we shall,
 I myself and my sons, seek thee in need."
 It fell out as the father said, in Pharaoh's
 time,¹⁵⁰
 Where Joseph was justice, Egypt to keep.
 All this maketh me on dreams to think
 Many a time at midnight, when men should
 sleep,
 On Piers the plowman, and what sort of
 pardon he had,
 And how the priest impugned it, all by pure
 reason,
 And divined that Do-well surpassed an in-
 dulgance,
 Bienals and trienals³ and bishops' letters.
 Do-well on doomsday is worthily praised,
 He surpasseth all the pardons of St. Peter's
 church.
 Now hath the Pope power pardon to grant,
 The people without penance to pass into
 joy.¹⁶¹

¹ Take no heed of dreams, Dionysius Cato, *Distich*, ii, 31.

² Really Belshazzar, as Skeat shows. *Daniel*, v, 28.

³ Massees for the dead said for two and three years.

This is a part of our belief as learned men
 teach us,
*Quodcumque ligaveris super terram, erit
 ligatum et in coelis.*⁴
 And so believe I loyally (our Lord forbid I
 should other)
 That pardon and penance and prayers do
 save
 Souls that have sinned seven times deadly.
 But to trust to trienals truly methinketh
 Is not so secure for the soul, certes, as Do-
 well.
 Therefore I counsel you men that are rich
 on earth,
 Trusting by your treasure trienals to have,
 Be ye none the bolder to break the ten com-
 mandments.¹⁷⁰
 And especially ye mayors, and ye master
 judges,
 That have the wealth of this world, and for
 wise men are held,
 To purchase pardon and the Pope's bulls,
 At the dreadful day of doom, when the dead
 shall arise
 And come all before Christ, and accounts
 yield
 How thou leddest thy life, and his law kept-
 est,
 What thou didst day by day, the doom will
 rehearse;
 A pouchful of pardon there, with provincial
 letters,
 Though thou be found in fraternity among
 the four orders,
 And have indulgence doubled, unless Do-
 well thee help,¹⁸⁰
 I would not give for thy pardon one pie-heel!
 Therefore I counsel all Christians to cry
 Christ mercy,
 And Mary his mother to be their intercessor,
 That God give us grace, ere we go hence,
 Such works to work, while we are here,
 That after our death-day, Do-well rehearse,
 At the day of doom, that we did as he us
 told.

*Explicit hic Visio Willelmi de Petro de
 Ploughman.*

⁴ What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be
 bound in heaven, *Matthew*, xviii, 18.



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