

THE VISION OF WILLIAM
CONCERNING
PIERS THE PLOWMAN

IN THREE PARALLEL TEXTS

TOGETHER WITH

RICHARD THE REDELESS

BY WILLIAM LANGLAND

(ABOUT 1362—1399 A.D.)

EDITED FROM NUMEROUS MANUSCRIPTS

WITH PREFACE, NOTES, AND A GLOSSARY

BY THE

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PIERS THE PLOWMAN

AND

RICHARD THE REDELESS

WILLIAM LANGLAND

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CONTENTS OF VOLUME I.

	PAGE
EXPLANATION OF THE METHOD OF PRINTING THE TEXTS . . .	I

PIERS THE PLOWMAN.

A. PROLOGUE;	B. PROLOGUE;	C. PASSUS I . . .	2, 3
A. PASSUS I;	B. PASSUS I;	C. PASSUS II . . .	20, 21
A. PASSUS II;	B. PASSUS II;	C. PASSUS III . . .	40, 41
A. PASSUS III;	B. PASSUS III;	C. PASSUS IV . . .	62, 63
A. PASSUS IV;	B. PASSUS IV;	C. PASSUS V . . .	100, 101
		C. PASSUS VI . . .	118
A. PASSUS V;	B. PASSUS V		122
		C. PASSUS VII . . .	131
		C. PASSUS VIII. . .	167
A. PASSUS VI			180
A. PASSUS VII;	B. PASSUS VI;	C. PASSUS IX . . .	192, 193
A. PASSUS VIII;	B. PASSUS VII;	C. PASSUS X . . .	226, 227

VITA DE DO-WEL.

A. PASSUS IX;	B. PASSUS VIII;	C. PASSUS XI . . .	252, 253
A. PASSUS X;	B. PASSUS IX		264
A. PASSUS XI;	B. PASSUS X;	C. PASSUS XII . . .	284, 285
A. PASSUS XII			326
B. PASSUS XI;	C. PASSUS XII (<i>continued</i>) . . .	330, 331, 333	
	C. PASSUS XIII		333
	C. PASSUS XIV		352
B. PASSUS XII;	C. PASSUS XV		366, 367

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
B. PASSUS XIII; C. PASSUS XVI	386, 387
B. PASSUS XIV	414
C. PASSUS XVII	423

VITA DE DO-BET.¹

B. PASSUS XV; C. PASSUS XVII (<i>continued</i>)	436, 437
C. PASSUS XVIII	453
B. PASSUS XVI; C. PASSUS XIX	478, 479
B. PASSUS XVII; C. PASSUS XX	498, 499
B. PASSUS XVIII; C. PASSUS XXI	520, 521

VITA DE DO-BEST.

B. PASSUS XIX; C. PASSUS XXII	550, 551
B. PASSUS XX; C. PASSUS XXIII	578, 579

RICHARD THE REDELESS.

PROLOGUE	603
PASSUS I	606
PASSUS II	609
PASSUS III	615
PASSUS IV	626

¹ In the C-text, the *Vita de Dobet* begins with Pass. xviii.

THE VISION OF WILLIAM

CONCERNING

PIERS THE PLOWMAN.

[In the following pages all three versions of this Poem are exhibited in parallel texts. The A-text, or earliest version, appears at the upper part of the pages, as far as it goes. Being much shorter than the others, it disappears from the latter portion of the text.

The B-text, or second version, appears on the lower part of the left-hand pages; towards the end, it occupies the whole of each left-hand page.

The C-text, or latest version, appears on the lower part of the right-hand pages; towards the end, it occupies the whole of each right-hand page.

The A-text is printed as it occurs in V = Vernon MS. (in the Bodleian Library). All deviations from V are shewn in the foot-notes, and are taken from other MSS., viz. T = Trin. Coll. Cam. R. 3. 14; H = Harl. 875, Brit. Museum; U = Univ. Coll. Oxford; H₁ = Harl. 6041; D = Douce 323 (Bodleian Library). V is imperfect, ending at Pass. XI. 180; the rest of this Passus is from T. Pass. XII is from MS. Rawl. Poet. 137, collated with U throughout lines 1-19; the rest of this Passus occurs in the Rawlinson MS. and in the Ingilby MS. *only*. Observe that the text in V abounds with *Southern* forms, due to the scribe.

The B-text is printed from L = MS. Laud 851 (Bodleian Library). All deviations from L are given in the foot-notes, and are taken from other MSS., viz. W = the MS. printed by Mr. Wright (Trin. Coll. Cam. B. 15. 17); O = Oriel 79; R = Rawl. Poet. 38; C = Camb. Univ. Lib. Dd. 1. 17; B = Bodley 814; C₁ = Camb. Univ. Lib. Ll. 4. 14; and Y = Mr. Yates Thompson's MS.

The C-text is printed from P = MS. Phillipps 8231. All deviations from P are shewn in the foot-notes, many being mere corrections (due to collation) of defective spellings. The other MSS. are E = Laud 656; I = Ilchester MS.; M = Museum MS. (Cotton, Vesp. B. 16); F = Camb. Univ. Lib. Ff. 5. 35; G = Camb. Univ. Lib. Dd. 3. 13; S = Corpus Christi Coll. Camb. 293; B = Bodley 814; K = (Kenelm) Digby 171 (Bodleian Library); T = Trin. Coll. Cam. R. 3. 14.]

Prologus.

IN a somer sesun · whon softe was the sonne,
 I schop me in-to a schroud · a scheep as I were;
 In habite of an hermite · vn-holy of werkes,
 Wende I wydene in this world · wondres to here. 4
 Bote in a Mayes morwynyge · on Maluerne hulles
 Me bi-fel a ferly · a feyrie me thouhte;
 I was weori of wandringe · and wente me to reste

INCIPIT LIBER DE PETRO PLOWMAN.

Prologus.

IN a somer seson · whan soft was the sonne,
 I shope me in shroudes · as I a shepe were,
 In habite as an heremite · vnholly of werkes,
 Went wyde in this world · wondres to here. 4
 Ac on a May mornynge · on Maluerne hulles
 Me byfel a ferly · of fairy me thouhte;
 I was wery forwandred · and went me to reste
 Vnder a brode banke · bi a bornes side, 8
 And as I lay and lened · and loked in the wateres,
 I slombred in a slepyng · it sweyued so merye.
 Thanne gan I to meten · a merueilouse sweuene,
 That I was in a wilderness · wist I neuer where, 12
 As I bihelde in-to the est · an hiegh to the sonne,
 I seigh a toure on a toft · trielich ymakid;
 A depe dale binethe · a dongeon there-inne,
 With depe dyches and derke · and dredful of sight. 16
 A faire felde ful of folke · fonde I there bytwene,
 Of alle maner of men · the mene and the riche,
 Worchyng and wandryng · as the worlde asketh.

Vndur a brod banke · bi a bourne syde, 8
 And as I lay and leonede · and lokede on the watres,
 I slumberde in a slepyng · hit sownede so murie.

Thenne gon I meeten · a meruelous sweuene,
 That I was in a wildernesse · wuste I neuer where, 12
 And as I beo-heold in-to the est · an-heiz to the sonne,
 I sauh a tour on a toft · triȝely i-maket;
 A deop dale bi-neothe · a dungun ther-inne,
 With deop dich and derk · and dredful of siht. 16

A feir feld ful of folk · fond I ther bi-twene,
 Of alle maner of men · the mene and the riche,
 Worchinge and wondringe · as the world asketh.

HIC INCIPIT VISIO WILLELMI DE PETRO PLOUHMAN.

PASSUS I.

IN a somere seyson · whan softe was the sonne,
 Y shop me in-to shrobbis · as y a shepherde were,
 In abit as an ermite · vnholy of werkes, 4
 Ich wente forth in the worlde · wonders to hure,
 And sawe meny cellis · and selcouthe thynges.
 Ac on a May morwenyng · on Maluerne hilles
 Me byfel for to slepe · for weyrynesse of wandryng;
 And in a launde as ich lay · lenede ich and slepte, 8
 And merueylously me mette · as ich may ȝow telle;
 Al the welthe of this worlde · and the woo bothe,
 Wynkyng as it were · wyterly ich saw hyt,
 Of tryuthe and of tricherye · of tresoun and of gyle, 12
 Al ich saw slepynge · as ich shal ȝow telle.
 Esteward ich byhulde · after the sonne,
 And sawe a toure, as ich trowede · truthe was ther-ynne;
 Westwarde ich waitede · in a whyle after, 16
 And sawe a deep dale · deth, as ich lyuede,
 Wonede in tho wones · and wyckede spiritus.
 A fair feld, ful of folke · fonde ich ther bytwyne,
 Alle manere of men · the mene and the ryche, 20
 Worchyng and wandrynge · as the worlde asketh.

Summe putten hem to the plouz · and pleiden hem ful seldene, 20
 In eringe and in sowynge · swonken ful harde,
 That monie of theos wasturs · in glotonye distruen.

And summe putten hem to pruide · apparayden hem ther-after,
 In cuntinaunce of clothinge · queinteliche de-gysset; 24
 To preyre and to penaunce · putten heom monye,
 For loue of vr lord · liueden ful harde,
 In hope for to haue · heuene-riche blisse;
 As ances and hermytes · that holdeth hem in heore celles, 28
 Coueyte not in cuntre · to carien a-boute,
 For non likerous lyfode · heore licam to plese.

And summe chosen chaffare · to cheeuen the bettere,

Some putten hem to the plow · pleyed ful selds, 20
 In setting and in sowyng · swonken ful harde,
 And wonnen that wastours · with glotonye destruyeth.

And some putten hem to pruide · apparaild hem there-after,
 In contenaunce of clothyng · comen disgised. 24

In prayers and in penance · putten hem manye,
 Al for loue of owre lorde · lyueden ful streyte,
 In hope forto haue · heueneriche blisse;
 As ances and heremites · that holden hem in here selles, 28
 And coueiten nought in contre · to kairen aboute,
 For no likerous lifode · her lykam to plese.

And somme chosen chaffare · they cheuen the bettere,
 As it semeth to owre syt · that suche men thryueth; 32
 And somme murthes to make · as mynstralles conneth,
 And geten gold with here glee · synneles, I leue.
 Ac iapers and iangelers · Iudas chylderen,
 Feynen hem fantasies · and foles hem maketh, 36
 And han here witte at wille · to worche ȝif thei sholde.
 That Poule precheth of hem · I nel nought preue it here;
Qui turpiloquium loquitur · is Luciferes hyne.

Bidders and beggeres · fast aboute ȝede, 40
 With her belies and her bagges · of bred ful ycrammed;
 Fayteden for here fode · fouȝten atte ale;
 In glotonye, god it wote · gon hij to bedde,

A. 34. *This line is from T; also in HUD; V omits it.* 41. bratful T;
 bretful H; bredful UD; faste VH. B. 20. putten W; put L; see l. 23.
 34. Read gyltles, as in Text A. 39. is—hyne W; L om. 41. belies W;
 bely L. bagges WCO; bagge L. C. 22. pute P. 23. sawyng P.

As hit semeth to vre siht · that suche men scholden; 32
 And summe murthhes to maken · as munstrals cunne,
 And gete gold with here gle · gilltes, I trowe.

Bote iapers and iangelers · Iudas children,
 Founden hem fantasyes · and fooles hem maaden, 36
 And habbeth wit at heor wille · to worchen ȝif hem luste.
 That Poul precheth of hem · I dar not preouen heere;
Qui loquitur turpiloquium · hee is Luciferes hyne.

Bidders and beggers · faste a-boute eoden, 40
 Til heor bagges and heore balies · weren bratful I-crommet;
 Feyneden hem for heore foode · fouȝten atte alle;
 In glotonye, God wot · gon heo to bedde,

Sommē putte hem to plow · and pleiden ful seylde,
 In setting and in sowyng · swonken ful harde,
 And wonne that thuse wasters · with gloteny destroyeth. 24
 Somme putte hem to pruyde · and parailede hem ther-after,
 In contenance and in clothyng · in meny kynne gyse;
 In praiers and in penaunces · putten hem manye,
 Al for the loue of oure lorde · lyueden ful harde, 28
 In hope to haue a gode ende · and heuene-ryche blysse;
 As ances and eremites · that holden hem in hure cellys,
 Coueytynge noȝt in contrees · to carien a-boute
 For no lykerouse lyflode · hure lykame to plesē. 32
 And somme chosen cheffare · they cheuede the betere,
 As hit semeth to oure syght · that soche men thryueth.
 And somme murthes to make · as mynstrals conneth,
 That wollen neyther swynke ne swete · bote swery grete othes, 36
 And fynde vp foule fantesyes · and foles hem maken,
 And hauen witte at wylle · to worche yf they wolde.
 That Paul prechith of hem · prouen hit ich myghte,
Qui turpiloquium loquitur · ys Lucyfers knaue. 40
 Bydders and beggers · faste a-boute ȝoden,
 Tyl hure bagge and hure bely · were bretful ycrammyd,
 Faytynge for hure fode · and fouhten atten ale.
 In gloteny, god wot · goth they to bedde, 44

24. wit P. distryeth P. 26. contenance P. 28. lyueden ESM;
 lyuend P. 29. goud (for gode) P. 33. cheffede P; cheued S.
 42. bretful MFE; bredful P. 44. god wot MF; tho gomcs PS.

And ryseth vp with ribaudye · this Roberdes knaues; 44
Sleep and sleuzthe · suweth hem eure.

Pilgrimes and palmers · plihten hem to-gederes
For to seche saint Ieme · and seintes at Roome;
Wenten forth in heore wey · with mony wyse tales, 48
And hedden leue to lyzen · al heore lyf afir.
Ermytes on an hep · with hokide staues,
Wenten to Walsyngham · & here wenchis afir;

Grete lobres and longe · that loth weore to swynke 52
Clotheden hem in copes · to beo knowen for bretheren;
And summe schopen hem to hermytes · heore ese to haue.

And risen with ribaudye · tho Roberdes knaues; 44
Slepe and sori sleuthe · seweth hem eure.

Pilgrymes and palmers · plighted hem togidere
To seke seynt Iames · and seyntes in Rome.
Thei went forth in here wey · with many wise tales, 48
And hadden leue to lye · al here lyf after.
I seigh somme that seiden · thei had ysouzt seyntes;
To eche a tale that thei tolde · here tonge was tempred to lye,
More than to sey soth · it semed bi here speche. 52

Heremites on an heep · with hoked staues,
Wenten to Walsyngham · and here wenchis after;
Grete lobyen and longe · that loth were to swynke,
Clotheden hem in copis · to ben knowen fram othere; 56
And shopen hem heremites · here ese to haue.

I fonde there freris · alle the foure ordres,
Preched the peple · for profit of hem-seluen,
Glosed the gospel · as hem good lyked, 60
For coueitise of copis · construed it as thei wolde.
Many of this maistres freris · mowe clothen hem at lykyng,
For here money and marchandise · marchen togideres.
For sith charite hath be chapman · and chief to shryue lordes,
Many ferlis han fallen · in a fewe ȝeris. 63
But holychirche and hij · holde better togideres;
The moste myschief on molde · is mountyng wel faste.

There preched a pardonere · as he a prest were, 68

A. 49. afir THUD; tyme V. 50, 51. *These lines are from TUH,D; VH omit them.* 54. hem THD; V om. 61. and THUD; V om. B. 67.

I font there freres · all the foure ordres,
 Prechinge the peple · for profyt of heore wombes, 56
 Glosynge the gospel · as hem good liketh,
 For couetyse of copes · construeth hit ille;
 For monye of this maistres · mowen clothen hem at lyking,
 For moneye and heore marchaundie · meeten ofte to-gedere. 60
 Seththe charite hath be chapmon · and cheef to schriuen lordes,
 Mony ferlyes han bi-falle · in a fewe 3eres.
 But holychirche bi-ginne · holde bet to-gedere,
 The moste mischeef on molde · mounteth vp faste. 64
 Ther prechede a pardonere · as he a prest were,

And aryseth with ribaudrie · tho Roberdes knaues;
 Slep and synful sleuthe · seweth suche euere.
 Pylgrimis and palmers · plyzhten hem to-gederes,
 To seche seint Iame · and seyntys of Rome, 48
 Wenten forth in hure way · with meny vn-wyse tales,
 And hauen leue to lye · al hure lyf-time.
 Eremites on an hep · with hokede stauens,
 Wenten to Walsyngham · and hure wenches after; 52
 Grete lobies and longe · that loth were to swynke,
 Clothede hem in copis · to be knowe fro othere,
 And made hem-selue eremites · hure eise to haue.
 Ich fond ther frerus · alle the foure ordres, 56
 Prechyng the peple · for profit of the wombe,
 And glosynge the godspel · as hem good lykede;
 For couetise of copes · contrariede som doctors.
 Meny of this maistres · of mendinant freres, 60
 Hure monye and marchaundise · marchen to-gederes;
 Ac sutth charite hath be chapman · and cheef to shryue lordes,
 Many ferlies han fallen · in a fewe 3eres;
 Bote holy churche and charite · choppe a-doun swich shryuers,
 The moste myschif on molde · mounteth vp faste. 65
 Ther preched a pardonere · as he a prest were,

And brouzt vp a bulle · with bisschopes seles,
 And seide that him-self mihte · a-soylen hem alle
 Of falsnesse and fastinge · and of vouwes I-broken. 68
 The lewede men likede him wel · and leeueth his speche,
 And comen vp knelynge · and cussededen his bulle;
 He bonchede hem with his breuet · and blered heore eizen,
 And rauhte with his ragemon · ringes and broches. 72
 Thus 3e giueth oure gold · glotonye to helpen,
 And leueth hit to losels · that lecherie haunten.
 Weore the bisschop i-blesset · and worth bothe his eres,

Brouzte forth a bulle · with bishopes seles,
 And seide that hym-self myzte · assoilen hem alle
 Of falshed of fastyng · of vowes ybroken.
 Lewed men leued hym wel · and lyked his wordes, 72
 Comen vp knelyng · to kissen his bulles;
 He bonched hem with his breuet · and blered here eyes,
 And rauzte with his ragman · rynges and broches.
 Thus they geuen here golde · glotones to kepe, 76
 And leueth such loseles · that lecherye haunten.
 Were the bischop yblissed · and worth bothe his eres,
 His seel shulde nouzt be sent · to deceyue the peple.
 Ac it is nauzt by the bischop · that the boy precheth, 80
 For the parisch prest and the pardonere · parten the siluer,
 That the poraille of the parisch · sholde haue ȝif thei nere.
 Persones and parisch prestes · pleyned hem to the bischop,
 That here parissches were pore · sith the pestilence tyme, 84
 To haue a lycence and a leue · at London to dwelle,
 And syngen there for symonye · for siluer is swete.
 Bischopes and bachelers · bothe maistres and doctours,
 That han cure vnder criste · and crounyng in tokne 88
 And signe that thei sholden · shryuen here paroschienes,
 Prechen and prey for hem · and the pore fede,
 Liggen in London · in lenten, an elles.
 Somme seruen the kyng · and his siluer tellen, 92
 In cheker and in chancerye · chalengen his dettes
 Of wardes and wardmotes · weyues and streyues.

Heo scholde not beo so hardi · to deceyue so the peple. 76
 Saue hit nis not bi the bisschop · that the boye precheth;
 Bote the parisch prest and he · de-parte the seluer,
 That haue schulde the pore parisschens · ȝif that heo ne weore.

Persones and parisch prestes · playneth to heore bisschops, 80
 That heore parisch hath ben pore · seththe the pestilence tyme,
 And asketh leue and lycence · at Londun to dwelle,
 To singe ther for simonye · for seluer is swete.

[Compare A. PROL. 90-95, p. 18.]

And brouȝte forth a bulle · with bisshopis seles,
 And seide that hym-selue · myȝte asoillie hem alle 68
 Of falsnesse of fastinges · of vowes to-broke.
 Lewede men lyuede hym wel · and likeden hus wordes,
 Comen and kneleden · to kyssen his bulles;
 He blessedde hem with hus breuet · and blerede hure eyen, 72
 And raghte with hus rageman · rynges and broches.
 Thus ȝe ȝeueȝ ȝoure golde · glotones to helpe,
 And leneth it to loreles · that lecherie haunten.
 Were the bisshop blessid · other worth bothe hus eren, 76
 Hus sele sholde noȝt be sent · in deceit of the puple.
 Ac it ys noȝt by the bysshop · that the boye precheth,
 The parsheprest and the pardoner · parten the seluer,
 That poore puple in parshes · sholde haue, yf thei ne were. 80
 Persones and parsheprestes · pleynede to the bisshop,
 That hure parshens ben poore · sitthe the pestelence tyme,
 To haue licence and leue · in Londone to dwelle,
 And synge ther for symonye · for seluer ys swete. 84
 Bisshopes and bachilers · bothe maisters and doctors,
 That han cure vnder cryst · and crownynge in tokne,
 Ben chargid with holy churche · charyte to tulie,
 That is, leel loue and lif · a-mong lered and lewed; 88
 Thei lyen in Londone · in lentene, and elles.
 Somme seruen the kynge · and hus seluer tellen,
 In the chekkere and the chauncelrie · chalengynge hus dettes,
 Of wardes and of wardemotes · wayues and strayues. 92

82. parshen P. 84. for IMF; the wyle P. 87. wit P. 89. lyen FS;
 leyen P.

[*Not in A-text.*]

And some seruen as seruantz · lordes and ladyes,
And in stede of stuardes · sytten and demen.

96

[*Compare B. x. 280-283.*]

Here messe and here matynes · and many of here oures
Arn don vndeoutlych; · drede is at the laste
Lest crist in consistorie · acorse ful manye.
I parceyued of the power · that Peter had to kepe, 100
To bynde and to vnbynde · as the boke telleth,
How he it left with loue · as owre lorde hight,

B. 99. consistorie WCO; constorie L. C. 95. herde hit P. 97. broght I;
y-set P. bounden P. 98. tol IMFS; tool P. 99. ther hangeth MFI;
hongeth there P. 100. wordle P. 104. world MF; wolde P. wryt IS;
wryst P. 105. the IMFS; P om. 109. fore P. 118. For-thi FS; For
thei P. 121. on SM; in P. *So in* L. 123. 130. hit left MF; losfe P.

[Not in A-text.]

Somme aren as seneschals · and seruen othere lordes,
 And ben in stede of stywardes · and sitten and demen.
 Conscience cam and acusede hem · and the comune hit herde,
 And seide, 'ydolatrie 3e soffren · in sondrye places menye, 96
 And boxes ben broght forth · i-bounden with yre,
 To vnder-take the tol · of vntrewe sacrifice.
 In menyng of miracles · muche wex ther hangeth;
 Al the world wot wel · hit myzte nat be trywe: 100
 Ac for it profitith 3ow to porswarde · 3e prelates soffren
 That lewede men in mysbylyue · leuen and deien.
 Ich lyue wel, by oure lorde · for loue of 3oure couetyse,
 That al the world be the wors; · as holy wryt telleth 104
 What cheste, and meschaunce · to the children of Israel,
 Ful on hem that free were · thorwe two false preestes.
 For the synne of Ophni · and of Finées hus brother,
 Thei were disconfit in bataille · and losten *Archa dei*; 108
 And, for hure syre sauh hem syngen · and soffrede hem don ille,
 And nojt chased hem ther-of · and wolde nojt rebukie hem,
 A-non, as it was ytold hym · that the children of Israel
 Weren disconfit in bataille · and *Archa dei* yloȝ, 112
 And hus sones slayen · anon he ful for sorwe
 Fro hus chaire thare he sat · and brak hus necke a-tweyne.
 And al was for veniaunce · that he but nojt hus children;
 And for they were preestes · and men of holychurche, 116
 God was wel the wrother · and tok the rathere veniaunce.
 For-thi ich se3e, 3e preestes · and men of holychurche,
 That soffren men do sacrifice · and worshepen maumettes,
 And 3e sholde be here fadres · and techen hem betere, 120
 God shal take veniaunce · on alle swiche preestes
 Wel harder and grettere · on suche shrewede faderes,
 Than euere he dude on Ophni · and Finees, or on here fader,
 For 3oure shrewede suffraunce · and 3oure owene synne. 124
 3oure masse and 3oure matynes · and meny of 3oure houres
 Aren don vndeotlich · drede ys at the laste.
 Leste crist in hus constorie · of 3ow a-corse menye.
 Ich parceuede of the power · that peter hadde to kepe, 128
 To bynden and vnbynden · as the boke telleth,
 How he hit lefte with loue · as oure lorde wolde,