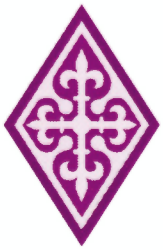
Six Ecclesiastical Satires



edited by
James Dean

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Six Ecclesiastical Satires

Middle English Texts

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Six Ecclesiastical Satires

Edited by
James M. Dean

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Piers the Plowman's Crede

Introduction

PPC, also known as *Pierce the Ploughman's Creed*, is an anonymous alliterative verse satire of 850 lines written between 1393 and 1401. The poem exists complete in two sixteenth-century paper manuscripts, Trinity College Cambridge MS R. 3. 15 and British Library MS Bibl. Reg. 18. B. XVII; in a fragment, British Library MS Harley 78 (fol. 3r); and in a black-letter edition (London, Reyner Wolfe, 1553). There are two modern editions, those of Thomas Wright (1856) and Walter W. Skeat (1867 for the Early English Text Society). Skeat's edition, based on the Trinity MS, remains standard, although it needs revising and updating.

The author, who probably came from the Southwest Midland region but who had connections in London, was influenced by Langland's *Piers Plowman* and by Wycliffite writings. *PPC* is especially significant as a witness to antifraternal literature of the late fourteenth century. The poem has both literary and cultural value — indeed, it is difficult to separate the literary from the cultural.

PPC, like *Piers Plowman*, concerns a poor man's quest for spiritual truth. He wants to learn the Apostles' Creed — the simple pre-Nicene statement of faith — but at the beginning of the story he does not know where to find someone to instruct him. He consults friars — a Franciscan, a Dominican, an Austin, and a Carmelite, respectively — hoping to learn what he calls the "graith," the plain truth, but is dismayed that the friars instead denounce the rival fraternal orders or try to dun him for money. The implication is that the friars do not know the Creed, which was a charge often leveled against the fraternal orders. In despair the narrator encounters a plowman, Piers, who condemns the friars as hypocrites and who teaches him the Creed in simple, unglossed language.

The poem is often vivid in its portrayals, for example, of the venal friars, who, like Jean de Meun's Faussemblant, indict themselves through their words. The Carmelite calls the narrator a "fool" for not giving him money, since the Carmelites do not bestow their pardons and prayers gratis but always receive a donation: "Oure power lasteth nought so feer, but we some peny fongen" (407). The friar hastens away to a housewife who has agreed to favor the Carmelite order in her will. The Dominican friar, whom the narrator locates in the refectory, is de-

scribed as being fat as a barrel, "With a face as fat as a full bledder / Blowen bretfull of breth" (222–23). His chin frames a jowl that "lollede / As greet as a gos eye [egg] growen all of grece, / That all wagged his fleche as a quyk myre" (224–26). This passage bears comparison with Langland's "doctour" of divinity at the feast (*Piers Plowman* B passus 13).

The narrator also describes Piers and his family with a keen eye for detail. As in the C version of *Piers Plowman*, which includes Will's domestic circumstances in Corn Hill with his wife Kit (passus 6), Piers in *PPC* is characterized as a ragged plowman who toils with his wife, while nearby sit a "litell childe lapped in cloutes" (438) and a pair of two-year-olds. The wife carries a long goad with which she prods the feeble oxen; and she, like her husband, is meanly dressed, wearing only "a cutted cote, cutted full heyghe," and "Wrapped in a wynwe schete to weren hire fro weders, / Barfote on the bare ijs [ice], that the blode folwede" (434–36). To a certain extent these passages of description exist for the satire, but they also help convey a memorable *idea* of the character — Piers — who speaks authoritatively about spiritual issues in the poem. His very poverty, and his marked difference from the pampered friars, give him considerable power as a spokesman and norm for spiritual values.

As a cultural document, almost a treatise, *PPC* provides a gauge of antifraternal and Lollard sentiment in late Ricardian England. Antifraternal attacks originated in disputes between the secular clergy and friars in thirteenth-century Paris, and the themes were taken up by later writers, including Jean de Meun and Chaucer. In the mid-fourteenth century, Richard FitzRalph, Archbishop of Ireland, wrote influential tracts and delivered sermons attacking the friars for usurping privileges traditionally associated with the secular clergy, especially rights to preaching, hearing confession, and burial. In *De pauperie Salvatoris* (On the Savior's Poverty, 1356), FitzRalph carefully defined Christ's poverty as a natural state of lordship, "the renunciation of civil dominion and a reliance on the original dominion by which all the just share in common the goods of this world" (Szittya); and in his most important work, *Defensio curatorum*, an address delivered at the Avignon consistory before the Pope (8 November 1357), FitzRalph demanded that the friars be stripped of their privileges. John Wyclif formulated similar concepts for clerical disendowment.

The author of *PPC* articulates significant aspects of the Lollard agenda, including the usual attacks on friars but also specific allegations against the fraternal orders. He not only tries to document the claim that the friars fulfill Christ's warnings about hypocrites in Matthew 23, but he also charges that they premeditate their readings of Scripture rather than relying on divine inspiration (586–90); that they are ruthless in extracting money from housewives (408–14);

that the Dominicans in their sumptuous convents include spying-holes and postern gates for coming and going (164–68); that they formulate intricate plots to visit their mistresses — "Grey grete-hedede quenes with gold by the eighen" — "in townes" (82–85); and even that they murder their brethren when the latter cannot produce sufficient cash through begging (626–28). That the friars themselves level many of these accusations only heightens the satire. Such attacks mirror similar charges in the Wycliffite sermon *Vae octuplex* (not before 1411) and in Middle English lyrics. In a poem ("On the Minorites [1382]"), for example, an anonymous poet declares:

> Þai preche all of pouert, bot þat loue þai noght,
> For gode mete to þair mouþe þe toun is þurgh soght;
> Wyde are þair wonnynges & wonderfully wroght,
> Murdre and horedome ful dere has it boght.

Details of this attack — the hypocritical preaching, love of good food, spacious dwellings, and vicious practices — all find their way into *PPC*. Similarly, in an antifraternal lyric entitled by Robbins "The Friar's Answer," a friar bitterly complains about his loss of revenue since lay people now have access to Scripture:

> Allas! what schul we freris do,
> Now lewed men kun holy writ?
> Alle abowte wherre I go
> Þei aposen me of it.
> Þen wondriþ me þat it is so
> How lewed men kun alle writ.
> Sertenly we be vn-do
> But if we mo anende it.

The author of *PPC* develops stereotypes for each of the four orders; and these stereotypes owe much to Lollard views. The Franciscans are the most hypocritical because they try to appear the most humble; the Dominicans are the most arrogant as well as the richest, most avaricious order; the Austins are the most vicious in attacking the other orders; and the Carmelites are the most straightforward, and outrageous, in begging for money. Piers, however, speaks approvingly of the founders of the fraternal orders, Francis and Dominic, but he censures their followers as evil. At one point Piers invokes Wyclif as a truthteller who cautioned the friars against their iniquitous behavior. He also speaks approvingly of Walter Brut, a Lollard and Welsh pacifist, who described himself as "a sinner, a layman, a farmer and a Christian" but whom the friars characterized as a

heretic. Bishop Trefnant of Hereford put Brut on trial for his views; the trial ended in 1393, which may be considered a *terminus a quo* for the composition of *PPC*.

PPC was written in the long line typical of the so-called Alliterative Revival, an English literary movement (perhaps self-conscious, perhaps not) of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Long-line poems of the Alliterative Revival, which include *Wynnere and Wastoure*, *Patience*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *St. Erkenwald*, and *Parlement of the Thre Ages*, usually contain four primary stresses per line and a varying number of unaccented syllables. Typically, but not invariably, alliteration (or assonance) occurs in three of the stressed syllables while the fourth stressed syllable remains unalliterated: a a / a x. In the first three lines of *PPC*, for example, alliteration (and stress) occurs on the letter *c* (line 1), *f* (line 2), and *s* (line 3).

> *C*ros, and *c*urteis *C*rist, this begynnynge spede,
> For the *F*aderes *f*rendchipe, that *f*ormede hevene,
> And thorugh the *s*peciall *S*pirit that *s*prong of hem tweyne. . . .

Although *PPC* resembles other poems of the Revival, it does not exploit the special diction characteristic of late fourteenth-century alliterative verse (except for *Piers Plowman*). As Turville-Petre says: "Langland had shown that alliterative poetry could appeal to a wider audience by avoiding the ornateness and verbal complexity that characterised the works of the northern poets. The lead was followed by the Wycliffite author of *Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*, who rigorously excluded all traces of the characteristic alliterative diction." This accessibility helped *PPC* survive as a living poem into the sixteenth century.

The text of this edition is based on a microfilm copy of Trinity College Cambridge, MS R. 3. 15, and is corrected by a microfilm version of British Library MS Reg. 18. B. XVII; by the black-letter edition of 1553, which has manuscript status; by Wright's 2nd ed. of 1856 in *The Vision and Creed of Piers Plowman*; and by Skeat's edition of 1867 for the Early English Text Society. I use Trinity because, as has been recognized since Skeat's edition, the text is superior to the 1553 edition even though it postdates the edition by as much as fifty years. I rely on Skeat and Wright for many reasonable corrections and emendations, but I often revert to manuscript readings, especially when Skeat's corrections involve spelling variants or normalizations (e.g., MS *hathe* for Skeat's *hath* at line 294; MS *beyn* rather than Skeat's *ben* at 364; MS *covetun* and *covetyne* rather than Skeat's *coueten* at 468 and 638). In these respects the present text is more conservative than Skeat's edition, but it contains the following normalizations: *th* for þ (thorn);

y, *g*, or *gh*, as the context demands, for ȝ (yogh); *and* for & (ampersand); and *I* for *y* or *i* as the first person pronoun. For the sake of emphasis and clarity, I sometimes introduce capitals, e.g., *Chirche* for MS *chirche*, *Hym* for MS *hym* [= Christ], etc.; and italics (e.g., *A-B-C* for MS A.b.c); and boldface to introduce the four fraternal orders (e.g., A **Menoure** at line 33).

Skeat believed that lines 817–21, witnessed only by the 1553 edition (printed by Wright as lines 1629–38), were sixteenth-century interpolations — he calls them "spurious" — so he printed the lines in brackets and italics. He conjectured that the editor of the 1553 edition inserted the lines to cover up for his deleting lines 822–23 and 828–30, which concern transubstantiation. I have not followed Skeat in questioning the lines, since they help "complete the Creed" in ways that harmonize with late fourteenth-century Lollard thought (Lawton).

Scriptural citations are from the Douai-Rheims version. Quotations from *Piers Plowman* B-text are from the edition of George Kane and E. Talbot Donaldson (London: Athlone, 1975); quotations from the C-text are from the edition of Derek Pearsall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978). Quotations from the antifraternal lyrics in the Introduction and Notes are from *Historical Poems of the XIVth & XVth Centuries*, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), abbreviated HP XIV & XV. Quotations from Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987). Citations from Middle English lyrics refer to *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown (Oxford: Clarendon, 1932), and *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown and rev. G. V. Smithers, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957), abbreviated, respectively, EL XIII and RL.

Manuscripts and Black-Letter Edition

MS Trinity College Cambridge R. 3. 15 [abbrev. A].

British Library MS Bibl. Reg. 18. B. XVII [abbrev. B].

British Library MS Harley 78 fol. 3r.

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Piers the Plowman's Crede

Cros, and curteis Crist, this begynnynge spede, *aid*
For the Faderes frendchipe, that fourmede hevene,
And thorugh the speciall Spirit that sprong of hem tweyne, [1]
And alle in on godhed endles dwelleth. *a single*
A and all myn *A-B-C* after have I lerned,
And patred in my *Pater Noster* iche poynt after other, *repeated; each*
And after all myn *Ave Marie* almost to the ende.
But al my kare is to comen, for I can nohght my Crede. [2] *know*
Whan I schal schewen myn schrift, schent mote I worthen: [3]
The prest wil me punyche, and penaunce enjoyne. *punish*
The lengthe of a Lenten, flech moot I leve *meat must; abstain from*
After that Estur ys ycomen, and that is hard fare;
And Wedenesday iche wyke withouten flech-mete. *each week*
And also Jesu hymself to the Jewes he seyde:
"He that leeveth nought on me, he leseth the blisse." *believes; loses*
Therfor lerne the byleve levest me were, [4]
And if any werldly wight wille me couthe, *tell*
Other lewed or lered, that lyveth therafter, [5]
And fulliche folweth the feyth, and feyneth non other, *professes*
That no worldliche wele wilneth no tyme, *weal desires*
But lyveth in lovynge of God, and His lawe holdeth,
And for no getynge of good never his God greveth, *material goods; offends*
But followth Him the full wey, as He the folke taughte.
But to many maner of men this matter is asked,

---

[1] *And through the special Spirit that sprang from the two of Them*

[2] *But all my sorrow is coming, for I don't know my Creed (see note)*

[3] *When I shall make known my confession, I must be ruined*

[4] *Therefore, I would be gladdest to learn the faith ("belief")*

[5] *Either unlettered or lettered, who lives in this way*

Bothe to lered and to lewed, that seyn that they leveden [1]
Hollich on the grete God, and holden alle His hestes. *Wholly; commandments*
But by a fraynyng forthan faileth ther manye. *an inquiry thus many fail*
For first I fraynede the freres, and they me fulle tolden, *questioned*
That alle the frute of the fayth was in here foure ordres, *their*
And cofres of Cristendam, and the keye bothen,
And the lok of beleve lyeth in her hondes. *lock*
Thenne wende I to wyten, and with a whight I mette, *know; man*
A **Menoure** in a morow-tide, and to this man I saide: *Minorite (Franciscan friar)*
"Sire, for grete God's love, the graith thou me telle — *plain truth*
Of what myddelerde man myghte I best lerne *earthly*
My Crede? For I can it nought, my kare is the more; *know; sorrow*
And therfore, for Cristes love, thi councell I praie.
A Carm me hath ycovenaunt the Crede me to teche. [2]
But for thou knowest Carmes well, thi counsaile I aske."
This Menour loked on me, and lawghyng he seyde,
"Leve Cristen man, I leve that thou madde! *Dear; believe; rave*
Whough schulde thei techen the God, that con not hemselve? [3]
Thei ben but jugulers and japers, of kynde, *tricksters; jokesters, by nature*
Lorels and lechures, and lemmans holden. *Villains; keep mistresses*
Neyther in order ne out, but unnethe lybbeth, *live unconstrained*
And byjapeth the folke with gestes of Rome. *dupe; tales*
It is but a faynt folk, ifounded upon japes, *only; weak*
Thei maken hem Maries men — so thei men tellen — *them*
And lieth on our Ladie many a longe tale.
And that wicked folke wymmen bitraieth,
And bigileth hem of her good with glaverynge wordes, *possessions; flattering*
And therwith holden her hous in harlotes werkes. *their; scoundrels'*
And, so save me God, I hold it grete synne
To gyven hem any good, swiche glotones to fynde, *support*
To maynteyne swiche maner men that mychel good destruyeth. *such; much*
Yet seyn they in here sutilte to sottes in townes, *their craftiness; fools*
They comen out of Carmeli Crist for to followen,
And feyneth hem with holynes, that yvele hem bisemeth. *ill suits them*

---

[1] *Both to the learned and the ignorant, who say they believe*

[2] *A Carmelite friar has agreed to teach me the Creed*

[3] *How should they teach you about God, who don't know themselves?*

Thei lyven more in lecherie and lieth in her tales
Than suen any god liife — but lyrken in her selles, *follow; honest; lurk; cells*
And wynnen werldliche god, and wasten it in synne. *worldly goods*
And yif thei couthen her Crede other on Crist leveden, *knew; or; believed*
Thei weren nought so hardie swich harlotri usen. [1]
Sikerli I can nought fynden who hem first founded, *Truly*
But the foles foundeden hemself, Freres of the Pye,
And maken hem mendynauns, and marre the puple. *mendicants; harm people*
But what glut of the gomes may any good kachen, [2]
He will kepen it hymself, and cofren it faste, *stash it securely*
And theigh his felawes fayle good, for him he may sterven. [3]
Her money may biquest and testament maken,
And no obedience bere, but don as hym luste. *acts just as he pleases*
And ryght as Robertes men raken aboute *like robbers [they] roam*
At feires and at ful ales, and fyllen the cuppe, *crowded ale-fests*
And precheth all of pardon to plesen the puple. *people*
Her pacience is all pased and put out to ferme, [4]
And pride is in her poverte, that litell is to preisen. [5]
And at the lulling of oure Ladye, the wymmen to lyken, [6]
And miracles of mydwyves, and maken wymmen to wenen *suppose*
That the lace of oure Ladie smok lighteth hem of children. [7]
Thei ne prechen nought of Powel, ne penaunce for synne, *St. Paul's doctrine*
But all of mercy and mensk that Marie may helpen. *grace*
With sterne staves and stronge they over lond straketh *wander*
Thider as her lemmans liggeth, and lurketh in townes, *There where their*
Grey grete-hedede quenes with gold by the eighen, *crones; eyes*
And seyn that her sustren thei ben that sojourneth aboute;
And thus about they gon and Godes folke bytraieth.
It is the puple that Powell preched of in his tyme. *people; Paul*

---

[1] *They were not so bold [to] practice such wickedness*

[2] *But whatever glutton of the men (mendicants) may seize any goods*

[3] *Though his brothers lack goods, as far as he is concerned they can die*

[4] *Their patience has vanished and [been] put out to pasture*

[5] *And pride is in their poverty, [in which] there is little to praise*

[6] *When lullabies for the Virgin are sung, to please the women*

[7] *That the lace from Our Lady's shift delivers their children (by easing childbirth)*

He seyde of swich folk that so aboute wente, *such*
'Wepyng, I warne yow of walkers aboute.
It beth enemyes of the Cros, that Crist upon tholede. *suffered*
Swich slomerers in slepe slauthe is her ende, *slumberers; sloth*
And glotony is her god, with gloppyng of drynk, *gulping*
And gladnes in glees, and gret joye ymaked; *songs*
In the schendyng of swiche schall mychel folk lawghe.' *downfall; many; laugh*
Therfore, frend, for thi feyth, fond to don betere, *strive*
Leve nought on tho losels, but let hem forth pasen, *louts*
For thei ben fals in her feith, and fele mo othere." *many more*
"Alas! frere," quath I tho, "my purpos is i-failed, *said; lost*
Now is my counfort a-cast; canstou no bote, *cast away; know you no remedy*
Where I myghte meten with a man that myghte me wissen *teach*
For to conne my Crede, Crist for to folwen?" *learn*
"Certeyne, felawe," quath the frere, "withouten any faile. *said*
Of all men opon mold we Menures most scheweth *earth; Friars Minor*
The pure Apostells life, with penance on erthe,
And suen hem in saunctite, and suffren well harde. *emulate them*
We haunten none tavernes ne hobelen aboute; *frequent; stumble*
At marketts and myracles we medleth us nevere. *miracle plays; concern ourselves*
We hondlen no money but menelich faren, *shabbily*
And haven hunger at the meate, at ich a mel ones; *every meal*
And haven forsaken the worlde and in wo lybbeth *live*
In penaunce and poverte, and precheth the puple,
By ensample of oure life, soules to helpen;
And in povertie praien for all oure parteners *lay brethren (see note)*
That gyveth us any good, God to honouren,
Other bell other booke, or breed to our fode, *either bell or*
Other catell other cloth to coveren with our bones, *Either possessions*
Money or money-worthe — here mede is in heven. *their reward*
For we buldeth a burwgh, a brod and a large, *convent*
A chirche and a chapaile with chambers alofte,
With wide windowes ywrought and walles well heye *high*
That mote bene portreid and paynt and pulched ful clene [1]
With gaie glittering glas, glowing as the sonne.

[1] *That must be drawn and painted and completely polished*

And myghtestou amenden us with money of thyn owne, [1]
Thou chuldest cnely bifore Crist, in compas of gold, *should kneel*
In the wide windowe westwarde, wel nighe in the myddell,
And Seynt Fraunces himself schall folden the in his cope, *thee*
And presente the to the Trynitie, and praie for thy synnes.
Thy name schall noblich ben wryten and wrought for the nones; *occasion*
And, in remembraunce of the, yrade the forever. *read there*
And, brother, be thou nought aferd. Bythenk in thyn herte,
Though thou conne nought thi Crede, kare thou no more. *know not*
I schal asoilen the, syre, and setten it on my soule, *absolve you*
And thou maie maken this good, thenk thou non other." *If*
"Sire," I saide, "in certaine I schal gon and asaye" — *try*
And he sette on me his honde, and asoilede me clene, *absolved me entirely*
And their I parted him fro, withouten any peine; *thereafter*
In covenant that I come agen, Crist he me betaughte. [2]
Thanne saide I to myself: "Here semeth litel trewthe.
First to blamen his brother, and bacbyten him foule, *backbite; foully*
Theire-as curteis Crist clereliche saide,
'Whow myght-tou in thine brother eighe a bare mote loken, [3]
And in thyn owen eighe nought a bem toten? *eye; perceive*
See fyrst on thiself, and sithen on another, *Look; only then*
And clense clene thi syght, and kepe well thyn eighe, *utterly*
And for another mannes eighe ordeyne after.'" [4]
And also I sey Coveitise catel to fongen, *saw Greed seize property*
That Crist hath clerliche forboden and clenliche destruede, *forbidden; completely*
And saide to his sueres forsothe on this wise: *followers*
'Nought thi neighbours good covet yn no tyme.'
But Charite and Chastete ben chased out clene,
But Crist seide, 'by her fruyt men shall hem ful knowen.'"
Thanne saide I, "Certeyn, sire, thou demest full trewe." *judge truly*
Thanne thought I to frayne the first of this foure ordirs, *question*
And presede to the **Prechoures** to proven here wille. *pressed on; probe*
Ich highede to her house to herken of more; *hied*

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[1] *And if you could enhance (i.e., enrich) us with your own money*

[2] *With the understanding that I return, he commended me to Christ*

[3] *How might you espy in your brother's eye a mere speck*

[4] *And only afterwards regulate another man's eye*

And whan I cam to that court I gaped aboute.
Swich a bild bold, ybuld opon erthe heighte — *building; built*
Say I nought in certeine siththe a longe tyme. — *saw; for*
I yemede upon that house and yerne theron loked — *inspected; eagerly*
Whough the pileres weren ypeynt and pulched ful clene, — *How; entirely polished*
And queynteli icorven with curiouse knottes, — *elaborately carved*
With wyndowes well ywrought wide up o-lofte.
And thanne I entrid in, and even-forth went, — *straight ahead*
And all was walled that wone, though it wide were, — *dwelling*
With posternes in pryvytie, to pasen when hem liste; [1]
Orcheyardes and erberes evesed well clene, — *arbors edged all around*
And a curious cros craftly entayled, — *carved*
With tabernacles ytight to toten all abouten. [2]
The pris of a plough-lond, of penyes so rounde,
To aparaile that pyler were pure lytel. [3]
Thanne I munte me forth the mynstre to knowen, — *went*
And awaytede a woon, wonderlie well ybeld, [4]
With arches on everiche half and belliche ycorven, — *handsomely carved*
With crochetes on corners, with knottes of golde, — *crockets*
Wyde wyndowes ywrought, ywritten full thikke,
Schynen with schapen scheldes to schewen aboute, — *coats of arms*
With merkes of marchauntes ymedled bytwene, — *badges; intermingled*
Mo than twenty and two twyes ynoumbred. — *More*
Ther is none heraud that hath half swich a rolle, — *no herald*
Right as a rageman hath rekned hem newe. — *catalogue (list)*
Tombes opon tabernacles tyld opon lofte, — *raised*
Housed in hirnes harde set abouten, — *nooks*
Of armede alabaustre, clad for the nones, [5]
Made upon marbel in many maner wyse, — *of marble*
Knyghtes in her conisantes, clad for the nones, — *identifying emblems*
All it semed seyntes ysacred opon erthe; — *sanctified*
And lovely ladies ywrought leyen by her sydes

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[1] *With secret postern gates, to come and go when it pleased them*

[2] *Furnished with lookout cells to spy all around*

[3] *The cost of a year's plow-land, of pennies so round, / could not adorn that pillar*

[4] *And saw a dwelling, wonderfully well constructed*

[5] *Of alabaster with coats of arms, decorated appropriately*

In many gay garmentes that were gold-beten. *[of] beaten gold*
Though the tax of ten yer were trewly ygadered, *years; gathered*
Nolde it nought maken that hous half, as I trowe. [1]
Thanne kam I to that cloister and gaped abouten *looked*
Whough it was pilered and peynt and portred well clene, *How; fully adorned*
All yhyled with leed, lowe to the stones, *covered*
And ypaved with peynt til, iche poynte after other; *painted tiles*
With kundites of clene tyn closed all aboute, *conduits*
With lavoures of latun lovelyche ygreithed. [2]
I trowe the gaynage of the ground in a gret schire *believe; income; large shire*
Nolde aparaile that place, oo poynt til other ende. [3]
Thanne was the chaptire hous wrought as a greet chirche,
Corven and covered and queyntliche entayled, *curiously engraved*
With semliche selure yset on lofte, *decorated ceiling*
As a Parlement hous ypeynted aboute.
Thanne ferd I into fraytour, and fond ther an other, *refectory*
An halle for an heygh kinge, an housholde to holden,
With brode bordes aboute, ybenched wel clene, [4]
With windowes of glas, wrought as a chirche.
Thanne walkede I ferrer and went all abouten, *further*
And seigh halles full hyghe and houses full noble, *saw*
Chambers with chymneyes, and chapells gaie;
And kychens for an hyghe kinge in castells to holden;
And her dortour ydighte with dores ful stronge; *dormitory furnished*
Fermery and fraitur, with fele mo houses, *Infirmary; refectory; many more*
And all strong ston wall sterne opon heithe, *walls sturdy in their height*
With gaie garites and grete, and iche hole yglased; *garrets; wholly polished*
And othere houses ynowe to herberwe the quene. *enough; lodge*
And yet thise bilderes wilne beggen a bagg-ful of wheate *want [to]*
Of a pure pore man, that maie onethe paie *From a wholly poor; scarcely*
Half his rente in a yer, and half ben behynde.
Thanne turned I agen, whan I hadde all ytoted, *again; observed*
And fond in a freitour a frere on a benche, *refectory*

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[1] *It would not [be enough] to build half that house, I believe*

[2] *With washbasins of brass beautifully fashioned*

[3] *Wouldn't furnish that place, one part to the end*

[4] *With wide tables [all] around, fully furnished with benches*

A greet cherl and a grym, growen as a tonne,[1]
With a face as fat as a full bledder — *bladder*
Blowen bretfull of breth, and as a bagge honged — *very full*
On bothen his chekes, and his chyn with a chol lollede — *jowl*
As greet as a gos eye growen all of grece, — *goose egg; fat*
That all wagged his fleche as a quyk myre. — *[Such] that; quagmire*
His cope that biclypped him wel clene was it folden,[2]
Of double worstede ydyght doun to the hele. — *made; heel*
His kyrtel of clene whijt clenlyche ysewed; — *surcoat; pure white*
Hyt was good ynow of ground greyn for to beren.[3]
I haylsede that herdeman, and hendliche I saide: — *greeted; graciously*
"Gode syre, for Godes love, canstou me graith tellen — *plain truth*
To any worthely wijght that wissen me couthe — *person; could teach me*
Whou I schulde conne me Crede, Crist for to folowe,
That levede lelliche himself, and lyvede therafter, — *truly; accordingly*
That feynede non falshede, but fully Crist suwede? — *followed*
For sich a certeyn man syker wold I trosten, — *more surely*
That he wolde telle me the trewthe and turne to none other.
And an Austyn this ender daie egged me faste;[4]
That he wolde techen me wel he plyght me his treuthe, — *pledged*
And seyde me, 'serteyne, sythen Crist died, — *since*
Oure ordir was yvelles and erst yfounde.'" — *guiltless; first established*
"Fyrst, felawe," quath he, "fy on his pilche! — *said; furred clothes*
He is but abortijf, eked with cloutes. — *monstrous; dressed meanly in rags*
He holdeth his ordynaunce withe hores and theves, — *whores*
And purchaseth hem pryvileges with penyes so rounde.
It is a pur pardoner's craft — prove and asaye! — *quintessential*
For have thei thi money a moneth therafter, — *[if] they acquire; month*
Certes, theigh thou come agen, he nyl the nought knowen. — *though; won't know you*
But, felawe, our foundement was first of the othere, — *founding; prior to*
And we ben founded fulliche, withouten fayntise; — *deceit*
And we ben clerkes ycnowen, cunnynge in scole, — *famous; clever*
Proved by procession, by processe of lawe. — *Tested in due course*

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[1] *A large and fierce peasant, grown [as large] as a barrel*

[2] *His outer garment that covered him very neatly was folded*

[3] *It had good enough soil (i.e., was dirty enough) to grow grain*

[4] *For an Austin friar has recently egged me on urgently*

Of oure ordre ther beth bichopes wel manye,
Seyntes on sundry stedes that suffreden harde; *places*
And we ben proved the prijs of popes at Rome, *most excellent*
And of gretest degre, as godspelles telleth." *the Gospels*
"A, syre," quath I thanne, "thou seyst a gret wonder,
Sithen Crist seyd Hymself to all His disciples:
'Which of you that is most, most schal he werche,
And who is goer byforne, first schal he serven,'
And seyde, 'He sawe Satan sytten full heyghe,
And ful lowe ben yleyd.' In lyknes He tolde
That in povernesse of spyrit is spedfullest hele, *greatest health*
And hertes of heynesse harmeth the soule. *arrogance*
And therfore, frere, fare well. Here fynde I but pride. *only*
I preise nought thi preching but as a pure myte." *mere*
And angerliche I wandrede, the **Austyns** to prove, *sound out*
And mette with a maister of tho men, and meklich I seyde: *master; humbly*
"Maister, for the moder love that Marie men kalleth, *mother's; call*
Knowest thou ought, ther thou comest, a creature on erthe, *at all*
That coude me my Crede teche and trewliche enfourme, *inform [about]*
Withouten flaterynge fare, and nothing feyne? *whole-heartedly*
That folweth fulliche the feith and none other fables,
Withouten gabbynge of glose, as the godspelles telleth? *elaborate commentaries*
A Menour hath me holly byhyght to helen my soule, *Franciscan friar; promised*
For he seith that her sekte is sykerest on erthe, *their sect; best*
And ben keperes of the keye that Cristendome helpeth,
And purliche in poverte the apostells they suweth."
"Alas!" quath the frier, "almost I madde in mynde, *rave*
To sen hough this Minoures many men begyleth! *see how*
Sothli, somme of tho gomes hath more good himselve [1]
Than ten knyghtes that I knowe of catell in cofers. *possessions*
In fraytour thei faren best of all the foure orders, *refectory*
And usen ypocricie in all that they werchen, *do*
And prechen all of parfitnes; — but loke now, I the praye, *perfection*
Nought but profre hem in pryvite a peny for a masse, *Just offer them secretly*
And, but his cnave be prest, put out myne eighe, [2]

[1] *Truly, some of those men have more goods themselves*

[2] *If his servant is not ready [to take the penny], put out my eye*

Though he hadde more money hid than marchauntes of wolle! *wool*
Loke hough this loresmen lordes bytrayen, *how these teachers*
Seyn that they folwen fully Fraunceses rewle, *[St.] Francis's rule*
That in cotynge of his cope is more cloth yfolden *cutting*
Than was in Fraunces froc, whan he hem first made. *Francis's cloak*
And yet, under that cope, a cote hathe he furred
With foyns, or with fitchewes, other fyn bever, [1]
And that is cutted to the kne, and queyntly ybotend, *expertly buttoned up*
Lest any spirituall man aspie that gile. *observe that ruse*
Fraunces bad his bretheren barfote to wenden. *go*
Nou han thei bucled schon for bleynynge of her heles, [2]
And hosen in harde weder, yhamled by the ancle, *cut short at*
And spicerie sprad in her purse to parten where hem lust. *give away*
Lordes loveth hem well, for thei so lowe crouchen; *bow*
But knewen men her cautel and her queynt wordes, [3]
Thei wolden worchypen hem nought but a litel, *honor them only*
The image of ypocricie, ymped upon fendes. *grafted; fiends*
But, sone, yif thou wilte ben syker, seche thou no ferther. *secure; seek*
We friers be the first, and founded upon treuthe.
Paul, *primus heremite*, put us himselve *the first eremite*
Awey into wildernes, the werlde to dispisen;
And there we lengden full longe, and lyveden full harde, *dwelled*
Forto all this freren folke weren founded in townes *Until; mendicant*
And taughten untrulie — and that we well aspiede.
And for chefe charitie, we chargeden us selven; *took it upon ourselves*
In amending of this men we maden oure celles *these*
To ben in cyties yset, to styghtle the people, *supervise*
Preching and praying, as profetes schulden.
And so we holden us the heved of all Holy Chirche. *head*
We have power of the pope purliche assoilen *totally to absolve*
All that helpen our hous, in helpe of her soules,
To dispensen hem with in dedes of her synne — *for their*
All that amendeth oure hous, in money other elles, *something else*
With corne, other catell, or clothes of beddes, *foodstuff; goods*

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[1] *With martin's fur, or with fitchet's fur, or [with] fine beaver*

[2] *Now they have buckled shoes for sores on their heels*

[3] *But if men knew their trickery and their cunning words*

Other bedys or broche, or breed for our fode. *beads or brooches*
And yif thou hast any good, and wilt thiself helpen,
Helpe us herteliche therwith; and here I undertake
Thou schalt ben brother of our hous, and a boke habben,
At the next chaptire, clereliche ensealed; *duly sealed*
And thanne oure Provinciall hath power to assoilen *absolve*
Alle sustren and bretheren that beth of our order.
And though thou conne nought thi Crede, knele downe here. *know not*
My soule I sette for thyn to asoile the clene,
In covenaunt that thou come againe and katell us bringe." *With understanding*
And thanne loutede I adoun, and he me leve grauntede, *knelt*
And so I partid him fro and the frere left.
Thanne seid I to myself, "Here is no bote! *remedy*
Heere pride is the *Pater Noster*, in preyinge of synne;
Here Crede is coveytise, now can I no ferther.
Yet will I fonden forth and fraynen the Karmes." *venture; ask*
Thanne totede I into a taverne, and ther I aspyede *looked; espied*
Two frere **Karmes** with a full coppe. *Carmelites*
There I auntrede me in, and aisliche I seide: *made bold to go; timidly*
"Leve syre, for the Lordes love that thou on levest, *Dear; believe in*
Lere me to som man, my Crede for to lerne, *Guide*
That lyveth in leel lijf and loveth no synne, *honorable*
And gloseth nought the godspell, but halt Godes hestys, *commandments*
And nether money ne mede ne may him naught letten, *reward; deter*
But werchen after Godes worde, withouten any faile.
A Prechour yprofessed hath plight me his trewthe [1]
To techen me trewlie; but woldest thou me tellen *if you would*
For thei ben certayne men and syker on to trosten, [2]
I wolde quyten the thi mede, as my mighte were." [3]
"A trefle!" quath he, "trewlie, his treuth is full litell. *trifle*
He dyned nought with Domynike sithe Crist deide! *since; died*
For with the princes of pride the Prechours dwellen.
Thei bene as digne as the devel that droppeth fro hevene. *haughty; fell*

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[1] *A professed Dominican has pledged me his word*

[2] *For they are confident men and more trustworthy*

[3] *I would pay you as great a reward as I can*