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ENGLISH VERSE OF COMPLAINT

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by

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"þanne is dobest to be holde . to blame þe gylty."

Piers Plowman, B, X, 256

A body of verse was composed in the 13th and 14th centuries which was popular in origin and appeal and which developed into literature of considerable merit. Editors, scholars, and critics have not, for the most part, considered this body of verse, the verse of complaint, as an entity worthy of study. The verse has furnished analogues for Chaucerian scholarship and provided illustrations of popular feelings for the historian, but it has not been studied as a whole in any systematic way. The justification of this dissertation is that such a study would be valuable, and one of the theses is that the body of literature forms a "kind" of literature of sufficient extent and homogeneity to throw light upon popular opinions and attitudes during a century of change and turmoil, the century of the Peasants' Revolt and the Lollard movement.

The term "kind" is a more appropriate designation for this body of literature than "genre" because the verse of complaint contains subject matter, forms, devices, and emotions more varied than the traditional and established genres of, for example, epic, tragedy, and lyric poetry, or of satire, novel, or short-story. The Eighteenth century idea of genre includes the notion that a genre had some platonic existence, and authors

must imitate it, in Greek literature. The literature arising in medieval times did not imitate Greek models, but their contemporaries or immediate predecessors' creations. Many medieval "kinds"--as distinguished from "genres"--first saw the light of day and last the gloom of oblivion within a short space of time, like the day-fly. The homily, the fabliau, the exemplum, and the romance grew and changed and finally melted into other literature. Another distinction between "kind" and "genre" besides imitation, and continuity, is the expectation of the audience. The reader or listener to a tragedy has a more definite expectation aroused than a reader or listener to a complaint. The criteria determining the grouping of a "kind" need not be so strict nor so many as those of a "genre."

The verse of complaint had dim and scattered antecedents and descendents. It arises and disappears in the Middle Ages, leaving few traces of the once-flourishing vine. Some of those traces will be discussed, but the emphasis in this study is on the intrinsic worth of the verse itself, its value as background literature for the study of other literature of the period, and for the insights it provides into popular attitudes and opinions.

The verse of complaint consists, roughly, of that verse which editors, bibliographers, historians, and anthologists have called "didactic," or "satirical," or "literature of reproof," or "political poems." The editors' definitions of these terms vary and in many instances overlap, but the term "complaint" includes aspects of all these definitions and refers to a body of verse which Wells describes thus:

> Among the most interesting pieces of English verse of the period before 1400, are the political songs and ballads. Most of these are rude, many are coarse, and few are to be dignified with the name of literature. But they are right out of the life of the times--they are full of the hot passion and the bitter

> scorn of the participant or the concerned onlooker; or they are the intense utterance of the more cultivated and accomplished clerk or minstrel striving to express the feeling of the day, or so to present the events of the time as to influence others to his own attitude.[1]

Much of what Wells said will be modified in the course of this study, but it is true that the verse of complaint does provide insight into the temper and passions of the 14th-century Englishman.

I

Wells devotes a chapter in his Manual to "Works Dealing with Contemporary Conditions," and includes a classification of these works into (1) "Political Pieces," which are subdivided into "Non-Prophetic Writings," and "Prophetic Writings," and (2) "Satires and Complaints," which are subdivided rather peculiarly into "Works Not in Alliterative Long Lines," and "Works in Alliterative Long Lines." This dissertation excludes "Prophetic Writings" from the "kind" of the verse of complaint, inasmuch as it forms a "kind" of its own and has received suitable study.[2] The verse of complaint includes the three other classifications made by Wells. "Satire," however, is a term barely applicable to the verse considered in this dissertation, although many editors and scholars use that designation. Wells himself recognizes the awkwardness of the term:

> Of what may be called satire <u>in the limited sense of the term</u>, there is little in English before the sixteenth century. Yet extant from before 1400 are a number of English writings that deal with contemporary distresses, abuses, or ill conduct, with an ultimate object of correction.[3]

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[1] John E. Wells, <u>A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1400</u> (New Haven, 1916), pp. 208-209.

[2] Rupert Taylor, <u>The Political Prophecy in England</u> (New York, Columbia University Press, 1911).

[3] Wells, p. 227. Italics mine.

The "limited sense of the term" is not clear, but the expanded sense seems to include many things not usually associated with satire. For example, when Wells discusses a particular poem, "The Land of Cokaygne," (762)[1] which he calls a satire, he notes that the author was sympathetic rather than hostile toward the aberrant monks and nuns, an attitude not normally a characteristic of satire. Wells uses the term "complaint" in a more meaningful way when discussing "The Song of the Husbandman" (696)[2]: "In passionate bitterness, as from the bottom of his soul, the author of the 'Song' raises a powerful plaint of despairing misery."[3] The distinction between "satire" and "complaint" in Wells' usage seems to be that the former is humorous and sympathetic and the latter is bitter and despairing. Satire is not always humorous, and it is rarely sympathetic. Wells' distinction becomes less clear when he describes Wynnere and Wastoure (3137)[4]: "The poem is an interesting composite of dream-vision, allegory, debate, occasional poem, and satire or complaint."[5] The poem contains many bitter statements, but it is not humorous, nor does the author treat the objects of criticism sympathetically, nor is he despairing.

Wells probably derived the conjunction of the two terms from

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[1]W. Heuser, Die Kildare-Gedichte, Bonner Beiträge zur Anglistik, XIV (Bonn, 1904), pp. 145-50. The number in parentheses is the index number given the poem for accurate identification in Carleton Brown and Rossell Hope Robbins, The Index to Middle English Verse (New York, 1943). Wells discusses the poem on p. 228 of his Manual.

[2]Thomas Wright, Political Songs of England (Camden Society VI, 1839), pp. 149-59.

[3]Wells, Manual, p. 229.

[4]Israel Gollancz, ed., Select Early English Poems (London, 1920), III.

[5]Wells, Manual, p. 243.

Thomas Wright's introduction to The Political Poems and Songs[1] where Wright links "criticism or satire"[2] and "criticize" and "complain bitterly."[3] In another place, he describes a poem as "a sort of general complaint of, or satire on, the corruptions of society at that period."[4] The distinction seems to be that a complaint is a lamentation, and a satire is a criticism. The distinction is unwieldy because a single poem may both lament and criticize. The term "complaint" denotes both "lamentation" and "criticism."

S. M. Tucker uses the term "satire" very broadly in his Verse Satire in England before the Renaissance.[5] His book deals with some of the literature considered in this dissertation. Tucker finds reservations forced on his use of the term, for example, when he considers Piers Plowman (1459)[6]:

> To call Piers Plowman a Satire is to use the term in the broadest possible sense. The great allegory, through its general lack of humor and particularly its large constructive element, becomes a didactic poem, a fairly complete criticism of its age, rather than a Satire.[7]

It seems much more convenient to group such materials under one term.

The difficulties of terminology are proper studies for scholars. A more recent writer, Charles E. Davidson, sees three divisions of literature, divisions which are useful for his own purpose:

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[1]2 vols., Rolls Series, 1859, 1861. [2]Ibid., I, xxix.

[3]Ibid., xlv. [4]Ibid., lxx. [5]New York, 1908.

[6]W. W. Skeat, ed., EETS 28, 38, 54, 81 (London: 1867, 1869, 1877, 1884). References to the Early English Text Society publications are differentiated in the Brown and Robbins Index as follows: Original Series publications are numbered in Arabic numerals, and Extra Series in Roman numerals.

[7]Tucker, Verse Satire, pp. 70-71.

> Middle English verse satire itself must be clearly differentiated from two related literary forms, the moral-didactic poem and the complaint. The didactic poem characteristically lays down rules for conduct, and its speaker is an authoritative preacher. The complaint, a form of poetry which laments the decadence of the times, is negatively expressed by a speaker who acts as a spokesman for the people. The satire, on the other hand, has a militant tone, for it attacks vice and folly. Furthermore, satire uses humor and tends to be more specific than the other forms. In practice, however, all three forms may be combined in one poem.[1]

Davidson understands the complaint to be a link between didactic literature and satire, and bases his main distinction among the three upon the relationship between poet and audience. The didactic poem is given as if from the pulpit and its main purpose is to instruct. The complaint is usually made by a person on a level with his fellow sufferers. The satire attacks vice and folly. Davidson discusses the three forms in his second chapter and it would be well to summarize his discussion here because some of his ideas are relevant to this thesis. The complaint harks back to the past as an authority; "It is definitely not the nature of complaint to urge society to correct its conduct, but anyone who listens to the complaint and is aware of its implication will see that it cries for a reaffirmation of moral values."[2] The distinction between correction and "reaffirmation of moral values" is not clear. Davidson continues by stating that the complaint, moreover, is never humorous, but is a lamentation. Satire is not concerned with the reform of morals either:

> The didactic poem has as its purpose teaching moral precepts; the complaint, lamenting immorality; the satire, attacking immorality and folly. But each type to a greater or less degree implies the necessity for reform.[3]

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[1] "Middle English Verse Satire," an unpublished dissertation (Yale, 1953), Summary p. ii. Italics mine.

[2] Ibid., p. 58.

[3] Ibid., pp. 72-3.

The difficulty of the distinctions is that ultimately the definition breaks down into a multiplicity of other definitions. The question is simply that if the three forms are so closely allied, why bother to distinguish them?

There is little difficulty in defining didactic literature; it is a sermon or a law which instructs directly, the utterance of the priest or judge to the congregation or nation, of a person in authority to someone with less authority. Davidson is correct about the relationship of poet and audience in the complaint and the didactic poem; the complaint sounds as if a spokesman of the people is addressing the people and criticizing the upper classes of the nobility and the clergy, assuming a moral authority shared by his popular audience not his by right of class or occupation. What Davidson does not add is the relationship between the satirist and his audience; the satirist speaks to his familiars, men of wit, sophistication, and learning and his poem often has the air of a private joke. Middle English verse lacks much of this wit and sophistication, and, exclusive of Chaucer, it has little irony, sarcasm, or humor. To be sure, there is irony and sarcasm in Langland's great poem, but it is not deft and incisive as it is in Swift.

John D. Peter discusses complaint and satire because he finds that Renaissance satire derives from medieval literature of complaint; he mentions Tucker's book:

> Tucker felt that the essence of Satire was 'destructive criticism', a view which one feels would have been resented as much by Johnson as by Langland.[1]

Peter also refers to Wells' use of the terms:

> Wells and Owst do not themselves use the terms disjunctively, but rather as a canopy-like heading under which all the

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[1] Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature (Oxford University Press, 1956), p. 3.

> variety of their material can be decently included. But it is easy enough to separate them, and in fact as soon as they are disjoined 'Complaint' becomes an extremely useful term. Its connotations are different from those of 'Satire', yet at the same time it is close enough in meaning to be readily applicable to a type of writing which, though commonly included under Satire, is much better left distinct. I mean the vast medieval literature of reproof that ranges from comprehensive works like Handlyng Synne down to lyrics and epigrams a few lines long.[1]

Peters' method of distinguishing between complaint and satire is to contrast Chaucer and Langland, particularly Chaucer's monk of the Prologue with Langland's Sloth. He concludes that complaint deals in personifications or allegory while satire is usually concrete; that complaint is impersonal, and satire is personal; that because of the last difference, satire has a greater range of criticisms than does complaint, which is often bound to a system such as the Seven Deadly Sins or allegory; that satire is scornful and attacks a third party, not the writer nor the reader and that complaint is sober and corrective and attacks everyone; that satire is specific and deals with individuals while complaint is vague and more concerned with the abuse than the abuser; and that satire is often sophisticated, while complaint is frequently naive. These distinctions are valuable for the definition of complaint, particularly in distinguishing Chaucer and Langland, but some of the distinctions are doubtful; it is hoped that a broader and more inclusive survey of the verse of complaint, including Piers Plowman (1459), will enable better distinctions and definitions to be made.

II

This brief survey of the historical use of the term "complaint" is unsatisfying because the authors disagree about the definitions of

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[1] Ibid.

terms. It seems as if each author had a different body of verse in mind, and this is true, although all authors have in mind some poems in common. All agree that the literature criticizes, but disagree as to whether the criticism is positive or negative, constructive or destructive, personal or impersonal, and if all these, in what degrees. All agree that the verse contains elements of didacticism, complaining, and satire, but disagree as to which term properly describes the predominant characteristic of the verse. The following chapters are, in part, an effort to educe a concise definition of complaint and to distinguish complaint from didactic literature and from satire, but a preliminary definition is useful in preparing a refined one. A preliminary definition can be tested against the verses that are quoted and cited in the following pages.

Peter's delimitation of complaint as the "vast medieval literature of reproof" furnishes part of a preliminary definition. The verses which express criticism, directly or indirectly, can be called "complaints." Davidson's distinctions about the relationship between poet and audience among the three, didactic, complaint and satirical literature, is another element of a preliminary definition. Didactic literature represents a priest instructing a congregation; satirical literature addresses a group of fellow-sophisticates, and they laugh together about the object of criticism; the verse of complaint laments or criticizes persons in authority and represents those harmed by those in authority, but it often is not addressed to those whom it attacks.

This study is concerned with all verse containing criticisms or lamentations, but the verse representing the orthodox point of view of the Church is not emphasized. Another criterion for including a poem in the group, "verse of complaint," is that only such verses are included

which are composed primarily of criticisms or which contain a large number of criticisms.

Poems which editors call "satires" are herein called "complaints" for much the same reason that Peter gave; the verse is not satirical in the sense that later satires are. One rarely finds in 14th-century literature the wit, irony, sarcasm, ridicule, and exaggeration that one finds in Erasmus, Nashe, Jonson, Swift, and Pope. Middle English literature is more naive and less expert than these, more apt to "make much moan" and lamentation, or bristle with curses and denunciations, more full of keening than laughter, utilitizing the cudgel and mace instead of the rapier with a Toledo blade. One reason for this difference is given by Wells; the verse of complaint was composed by a minstrel or poor cleric with slightly more education or skill than the mass of men for whom the poems were made and to whom they were recited.

The term "complaint" seems more appropriate than "satire" because the former is the term used by 14th-century men themselves. The word "compleyn" or "compleignte" appears occasionally, as in the Prologus to the Confessio Amantis (2662)[1]: ". . . eche in his compleignte telleth/ How that the world is al miswent,/ And ther upon his jugement/ Yifth every man in sondry wise." (Prologus, 516-19) Another poem, (2146)[2] illustrates the kind of poem Gower is discussing:

> Men hem compleynes of untrewyth
> lawe es dede and þat es Rewth
> Trechery es al oboue
> And grauen he as trewlouf.

On the other hand, the term "satire" was strange to the 14th-century

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[1]G. C. Macaulay, ed., EETS LXXXI and LXXXII (London, 1900, 1901).

[2]Carleton Brown, A Register of Middle English Religious Verse (2 vols., Oxford, 1920), I, 71.

writer. John Trevisa in his translation of the Polychronicon of 1387 derives "satirical" thus: ". . . some poet is i-cleped satiricus, and hab bat name of satis, bat is enow, for be matire bat he spekeb of he toucheb at be fulle."[1] "Complaint" seems a better term because it is the term used in the 14th century to refer to the verse considered hereunder and because it denotes and connotes it more accurately than does "satire."

III

There are further similarities and differences between the literature designated as "didactic," "complaint," and "satirical." They are quite similar in motive. All three forms arise when men perceive that the real world is imperfect and that men are immoral when compared with what the world and men should be. All three forms state or imply a contrast between the ideal and the real. There are different systems of values used to make the contrast among the three forms of literature: The priest uses the orthodox Christian ideals for the contrast; the satirist uses some of those ideals, but often his idea of what is right and what is wrong results from his own individual thinking. The complaint very clearly uses orthodox Christian ideals to make the contrast, but the poet of complaint selects from those doctrines; sometimes, he criticizes the world or men not from a moral point of view at all.

The distinction between the systems of values used in the three forms, and the distinction about the relationships of the poet and his audience in the three forms combine to make a further distinction which

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[1]Quoted in A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller, eds., The Cambridge History of English Literature (New York and Cambridge University Press, 1933), II, 85.

explains another characteristic difference among the three. The priest laments, denounces, and instructs, and his statement is very often direct and clear. He has authority to do so. The satirist is often indirect, usually because he achieves a literary effect thereby; irony, for example, is a form of indirectness. The satirist has no real authority but what he assumes. The poet of complaint also assumes an authority not his by class or occupation, and partly because he attacks those in authority and has reason to fear retaliation and partly for literary effect, the complaint is likely to be indirect. The priest may attack those in authority, not often with impunity, and the satirist sometimes does so also, but more often he attacks those who cannot strike back. The poet of complaint has no authority; he speaks for those with no authority; he can easily be punished if discovered, and he has much to fear if he is direct.

The point to be made here is that the verse of complaint, taken as a whole, represents the moral beliefs, the feelings, and the attitudes of the populace at large in 14th-century England about the twin masters of Church and State. What the poems complain about indicates to some extent what was wrong with the nation and how the peasantry felt about the evils, what they felt to be good as well as what they felt to be evil. The verse of complaint has that predominant characteristic. Some of the poems do represent special interest groups, for example, the Lollard poems, and Langland's point of view seems his own, but for the most part the poet takes his themes and his attitudes for his poems from the people in order to produce poems which appeal to them.

The motive of complaint is the disparity between what is and what should be. The guiding moral beliefs of the times were the doctrines of orthodox Christianity. When men saw events or acts of men which con-

trasted with their beliefs, they complained. Undoubtedly men murmured and grumbled about the hardships and persecutions they thought they had undergone; they whined about the injustices done to them. This oral grumbling and whining is the raw material which the minstrel and poor cleric found and which he turned into verse. The two origins of complaint, the sermon and men's grumbling and complaining, appear in the verse of complaint in combined form, never very long separated. But two distinct kinds of verse emerge, containing both the modified sermon and the modified grumbling, different only because of emphasis. One is the complaint wherein the emphasis is on moral criticisms, deriving from the pulpit. The other is concerned quite practically with institutions and men who abuse the laws and bring economic hardships upon the people. The moral concerns of the complaint become in later times the materials of satire, for Erasmus' Praise of Folly as well, for that matter. The more practical documents become "White Papers" or quite constructive statements of plans for ameliorating the human condition. The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye[1], for example. The practical and moral concerns in the verse of complaint are closely intertwined, and for a century at least they remain so, forming a body of verse which has a number of common characteristics which set it off from other "kinds" of literature of the period.

IV

These preliminary distinctions and definitions cannot be made any more clearly here; they suffice to introduce the verse of complaint. The best definition is an inspection and a description of the poems

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[1]Wright, Pol. Poems, II, 157-205.

themselves. Much of this dissertation is concerned with doing so. Another aim of this study is to show the relationships between didactic literature and complaint and to suggest some of the sources of later satire. The verse of complaint is, however, a "kind" that has but a temporary existence, called into existence by contemporary conditions, and finally taken over by professional writers. The verse suggests many of the attitudes of the people of the time, as Wells remarks, toward their rulers and spiritual guides. Another justification for this thesis exists: a study of the verse of complaint is relevant to other literature of the period. A number of the poems discussed have a bearing upon the works of the major writers; usually, the student and scholar trace out these connections in order to throw light on the major writers. To take the verse as a whole, however, allows a more accurate interpretation of the major writers, for the verses are placed in their own context. Chaucer, Rolle, Wyclif, and Gower can be viewed against a broad and comprehensive background.

V

A few more introductory remarks will prepare the reader to understand the nature of the complaint. The complaint is an explanation of the evils men see. The poet tries to show what the evils are, why they exist, and whey they are evils. That is why he refers to the moral beliefs and ideals. That effort is, however, secondary. The primary purpose of complaint is to express lamentation and criticism, a lament that evils exist and criticism of those responsible for the abuses. As many writers have pointed out, this implies constructive advice or criticism. The evil and the remedy are often connected. The poems of complaint express emotions ranging from dark hopelessness through frustration to anger;

they lament and denounce, but often they express contempt and disgust. The poet speaks for the mass of men, assuming a moral authority which their resentment finds attractive. The poems point out the beams in the priest and friar's eyes, the abuses of the law, and the ill-governing of the kingdom, or, from another point of view, the violation of the social contract implicit in the feudal system. In achieving the tone of moral authority, the poet refers to popular beliefs, to Christian doctrine, the Bible, the laws, in short, to the universal truths believed in his time.

This dissertation is limited to the 13th and 14th centuries because it is a period of great interest to the students of literature and because much of the best verse of complaint was written in that period. The complaints in prose are omitted; there were none which could be called literature of complaint. Public documents in English, such as the Petition from the Folk of Mercerye[1] of 1386, are few and far between. Sermons in prose are not likely to represent the popular point of view, and there are few in English in the 14th century. Wyclif's sermon on the Nativity makes a derogatory comment upon the Pope's worldly power,[2] and a number of his other writings attack the friars, but the Lollard attitudes can be found in verse as well. Generally speaking, a number of attitudes found in Latin sermons and poems can be traced in the verse of complaint; many of the Latin verses on the times are much more virulent and caustic than those in English, and the struggles in Latin waged within the Church were very bitter; except for the Lollards and Wyclif, once the Church was attacked by the laity, she presented a united front.

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[1] A. Brandl and O. Zippel, Middle English Literature (2nd. ed., New York, 1949), pp. 248-49.

[2] Ibid., pp. 245-52.

The greatest omission from this study is Chaucer. Many of the complaints discussed below throw light on Chaucer's treatment of his characters, but Chaucer does not write complaints, nor are any of his works composed primarily of complaint. Chaucer is satirical at times, certainly, and there are droll touches of irony in his characterizations, but for the most part he aimed his works at an aristocratic circle; they are not particularly popular in origin or appeal. In short, the verse of complaint discussed in this study is limited to those verses which seem indicative of a popular point of view, and verse is the popular medium of expression. It should by now be clear that the lyrical love complaints are not included in this study, even though they are criticisms, for they form a subcategory of the genre of lyric poetry.

This dissertation attempts to answer a number of questions about the verse of complaint: who or what is complained about? Who is complaining, and to what audience? What moral criteria are used to make the complaint? How are the complaints made: what forms, devices, and emotions are employed by the poet? What does the verse of complaint reveal about the beliefs and attitudes of the people about their times? What does it reveal about other literature of the period? The following chapters consider these questions, and in so doing describe the verses of complaint, define the term "complaint," and indicate that the verse of complaint is a "kind" of literature, and that it is worthy of study.

VI

The form of the dissertation requires a note of explanation. The following chapters are divided between general and specific complaints; the specific complaints are further divided into specific complaints about the nobility, the clergy, and the third estate. Each chapter is subdivided

into smaller categories to enable the reader to find the subject complained about in a context, and to enable him to use these chapters as a subject index. The Table of Contents lists all but the lowest order of categories.

Because a number of quotations are given to illustrate the discussion of the objects of complaint, and because some of these poems have no distinguishing title, a uniform method of identifying the poems has been employed. Whenever a poem is referred to or quoted from, the Incipit number assigned to the poem in the Brown and Robbins Index to Middle English Verse will be found in parentheses near the title or description of the poem. The first time a poem is referred to, its printed source will be found in a footnote. Thereafter the reader may use the Index to the Poems, where will be found the Brown and Robbins number, in numerical order, followed by the date and the authority for it, the printed source used in the dissertation, and the pages of the dissertation upon which the poem is quoted, cited, or discussed. The reader will find the Index to the Poems useful for making cross-references and can find the variety of complaints found in a given poem. The titles of well-known poems will be found in the Bibliography, followed by their Brown and Robbins Index number. The quotations from long poems are identified in the text by the book, passus, or section number in Roman numerals, followed by the inclusive line numbers, all in parentheses, to the right of the last line quoted, or if the quotation is written into the text, directly following the quotation. Further references to poems illustrating the discussion of the subject will be found in the footnotes.

The form of the typescript enables this dissertation to be used as a bibliographical tool, as a catalogue of complaint. The brief identification of the quotations allows footnotes to be kept to a minimum.

CHAPTER TWO

GENERAL COMPLAINTS

The objects of complaint--what the poems complain about--can be divided into two large groups to facilitate examination. The first group is designated "General Complaints"; this group, the subject of this chapter, includes those poems which list a fault or faults attributed to some or all groups, classes, or generations of men, or the nation, or the world at large. In short, the writer complains about man's evil propensities and attributes to him some sin or sins. These complaints are "general" in that the evils are stated in a general way, that is, "covetousness," rather than "specific" evils, such as bakers who skimp on the ingredients in their loaves. The poem has as its object an abstraction of many specific evils, but the specific evils are not mentioned. The listener supplies his own illustrations of the abstract evil.

The second large group, "Specific Complaints," includes those documents which list a fault or faults, usually specific faults, of a particular class, occupational group, or any group of persons, or even a particular person. The abstractions may be there, but more often than in the General Complaint the sins or evils are made clear and specific, for example, Pernel's fashionable horned headdress is evil because it is a sign of pride. Usually the specific evils are described or listed without being called evil; the sin involved is understood. One other distinction between these two groups should be noted here; on the whole the general complaint is made in a tone of lamentation, and the specific

complaint is made in a tone of anger. This difference is due to the difficulty of waxing angry about an abstraction. The tone of lamentation of the general complaint implies that the evil situation will never be improved until the end of the world. The angry criticism of the specific complaint implies that improvement is possible and should be made. Because of these distinctions the general complaint forms a separate kind of poem with its own tone and mood, its own modus operandi, and its own manner of viewing the world.

Evils of the Time

Of the "General Complaints" a small number belong together because they are quite general and quite short. They form a fitting introduction to the whole body of verses of complaint: all the basic complaints are included in these poems, and from the number of manuscripts in which they are found it is presumable that they were popular. These verses belong together because nearly all of them are described by Brown and Robbins in their Index as dealing with "The Abuses of the Age," or "The Evils of the Times," or "On the Degeneracy of the Times," titles borrowed from specific editions of the poems. Some fifteen items in some forty-five manuscripts are so designated. They are short, general, have a tone of lamentation, and have an air of being proverbs, maxims, or folk-sayings. Evidently one of the most popular of these is from a 13th-century manuscript (1820):

> King conseilles,
> Bissop loreles,
> Wumman schameles,
> Hold-man lechur,
> Jong-man trichur,
> Of alle mine live
> Ne saw I worse five.[1]

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[1] A number of variations of this verse occur; vide the Brown and

This verse explains the unhappy present by the faults of the world at large. The five terrible "things" represent the basic complaints made in the whole literature of complaint.[1]

Sometimes the general complaint ascribes present evil to a single cause, a lack of truth, or a lack of love, as in this short lament (2145):

> hallas! men planys of litel trwthe:
> hit ye dede and tat is rwthe;
> falsedam regnis and es abowe,
> and byrid es trwlove.[2]

Another, later, poem (3133) also attributes the evils of the times to falsehood:

> Sythen that Lawe for wille begynne to slaken
> And falshed for sleyght is itaken
> Robbinges and reuynges is holde purchas
> And foul fals lechery is pryuy solas
> Now may Ingelond syngen Alas.[3]

The above poem uses the simple rhetorical device of "since . . .(or when), . . .then . . ." to give emphasis to the concluding line. The emphasis results from the accumulation of the evils and from the explanation of them. The above poem also substitutes the vice for the virtue

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Robbins Index, 1820. One version makes the "-les" ending consistent, thereby stating the contrast between the virtue and the vice in one word. The version quoted is printed in Thomas Wright and J. O. Halliwell-Phillips, Reliquiae Antiquae (2 vols., London, 1841, 1843), II, 15.

1A slightly longer list adds the authority of Bede to the warning, 4051, R. Morris, An Old English Miscellany, EETS 49 (London, 1872), pp. 184-5.

2BR 2145 is printed in Carleton Brown, Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century (Oxford, 1957), p. 54. The emphasis differs in another version which is otherwise quite similar: law is dead and trechery rules. BR 2146, printed in Carleton Brown, A Register of Middle English Religious Verse (2 vols., Oxford, 1920), I, 71.

3A. G. Little, Studies in English Franciscan History (Manchester University Press, 1917), p. 155.

to show the wide extent of the evils.[1]

In another verse (2008), the lack of love in men's hearts and the presence of other vices explain the evil condition of the land:

> Love is out of lond iwent;
> Defaute of loue þis lond haþ shent.
> Reuthþe and treuthþe and charite
> Beþ out of lond, alle þreo:
> Pride, enuye, and lecherie,
> Couetise, and tricherie,
> Habbeþ þis lond one here baillye.[2]

The listing of vices is another popular device; the accumulation of evils creates considerable effect. The following poem (4273) is effective because the vices it lists are closely connected:

> ȝissinge and glosinge and felsship beon riue.
> luþer lustes ouer floten . with fals gile and strife
> hardnesse and bakbiting wiþ scornes out bersten;
> Bote almus dede and trouþ, wiþ semli plei þei resten.
> Vnkundenesse, vnkunninge, vnclannesse, beon arerd
> so þat harmes pei boden, as ich am aferd.[3]

The eternal complaint, the mother of all other sins, is the lack of truth and the prevalence of trickery. The poems quoted above were quite probably popular property; John Ball in this insurgent poem (1791) uses that theme, and the listing of other vices or sins, to achieve considerable

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[1]The following poem (4006) is a warning, but it may conceal a complaint about contemporary conditions:

> "Whene pryde is moste in prys
> Ande couetyse most wys,
> Ande lucchery moste in vse,
> þefe maade reue,
> þenne schall englonde mys-chewe."

Printed by F. J. Furnivall, Queene Elizabethes Achademy, EETS VII (London, 1869), p. 85.

[2]F. J. Furnivall, Political, Religious, and Love Poems, EETS 15 (London, 1886), p. 257.

[3]Ibid., p. 251.

effect in this well-known poem of about 1380:

> John Ball Saint Mary Priest
> Greeteth well all manner of men,
> And biddeth them in name of the Trinitie,
> Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
> Stand manlike together in truth,
> And helpe truth, and truth shall help you.
> Now reigneth pride in price,
> Couetise is holden wise,
> Lechery without shame,
> Gluttonie without blame.
> Enuie raigneth with reason,
> And sloth is taken in great season,
> God do boote, for now is time, Amen.[1]

Another late 14th century poem (592) juxtaposes the vices and virtues and the past and present in a typical way, but in an effective way:

> Charite, chaste, pite, arn waxin al colde;
> Couetise, Lust, & maistrie, arn be-comin al bolde;
> Consel, god accord, & wedloc ben nou noþing of tolde.
>
> Stronge, trewe, & corteis kepte þe land;
> Bot now feynte, false, folis, it han vndir hand;
> þeues, liers & fowlwimmen boldeli ferth stand.
>
> Vnder dercnesse, darket lit of stedefastnesse.
> Vnder sleuþe, darkit þe loue of holinesse.
> For faute of rit domusman, þe lauwe slepit of ritwisnesse.
>
> Wif, wille, and richesse han þe maistrie take;
> Vertu, godede, & almisdede arn al for-sake;
> Oker, lieyng, & wantonesse, mickel serwe make.[2]

There are a few specific complaints made in this poem; the second stanza may refer to the nobility or to the government, and the last line of the third stanza is clearly an attack on judges. The poem as a whole is stated in abstractions.

Besides these short poems of general complaint, there are other poems which might be included in this large division; they are the quick

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[1]The last seven lines of this poem and the others quoted are quite similar to the poem quoted in the footnote on p.21 (4006); The prophecy becomes a complaint and a call to arms. 1791 is printed by C. Mackay, Songs and Ballads (Percy Society, 1840), I, 2.

[2]F. J. Furnivall, EETS 15, p. 264.

surveys of society by which vices are pointed out. In the well-known "A lutel soth Sermun" (1091)[1] of some 54 lines are crammed fulminations against backbiters, robbers, homicides, lechers, whoremongers, false chapmen, cheating bakers and brewers, priests' wives, disobedient children drunkenness, and illicit love. The description of the latter is quite explicit. The poem is more specific than most of the others quoted above, yet it is a scattered attack on a large subject by an irascible and paternal parson. Similar to "Sermun" are two macaronic poems, the first belonging to the reign of Edward II, and the second to that of Richard II, which have a central theme, that no one can trust another. "Quant homme deit parleir" (2787)[2] is in Latin, French, and English, and laments that because law is misused, fraud, woe, anger, treason, stupidity and strife result. It is a dejected, angry, and bitter poem, voicing the general corruption of the age. "Syng I wold butt alas . . . "(3113)[3] England has decayed, is the tenor of the second macaronic poem in antiphonal Latin and English; lust and pride predominate, truth is set aside, friends are now enemies, and falsehood rules with avarice. The nobility has no pity on the peasants, and the Church is as corrupt as the laity; there is no hope. Fashions in clothing are so luxurious (in both the Middle English and the modern sense) that proper manners are impossible; the tight pants and long-pointed shoes prevent kneeling in church. These specific complaints add up to a large and angry general complaint.

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[1]Morris, EETS 49, pp. 186-91.

[2]Thomas Wright, Political Songs of England (Camden Society VI, 1839), pp. 251-2.

[3]Thomas Wright, Political Poems and Songs (Rolls Series, 1859, 1861), I, 207-8.

Langland's Vision of Piers Plowman (1459)[1] is the epitome of the large General Complaint. It contains a great number of specific complaints: the survey of the world that the poet makes in his vision, on Malvern Hill overlooking the "faire felde ful of folke," the pilgrimage to find Truth, and the later visions use a device that is found in many complaints. The survey of the world takes many forms which will be noted as instances occur; the device is a practical one for the poet of complaint because it enables him to give illustrations of his moral theme, in Piers Plowman, the sin of covetousness. The specific evils are almost always subordinate to the abstraction. The poet rarely criticizes anyone or any group of persons directly, yet when the Vices come forward to confession after hearing Conscience's sermon in passus V, Wrath was once a friar, Avarice was a chapman, Sloth was a priest, and we see how the poet is pointing out the sinners as well as the sins. Indeed, one of the literary qualities of the poem is that it does not stay on an abstract level entirely but includes little portraits along with its great didactic arguments.

The first two hundred lines of the Prologue describe the "faire felde ful of folke" and is a view of all England in miniature, criticizing directly and indirectly, the people. The rich and the poor are there, the winners and wasters, the devout and the covetous, merchants and minstrels, including jesters and slanderers (perhaps even poets of complaint), and there are dissembling and gluttonous beggers, palmers, pilgrims, hermits and their "lemmans," covetous and cheating friars who gloze the gospel:

> For sith charite hab be chapman . and chief to shryue lordes,
> Many ferlis han fallen . in a fewe 3eris. (64-5)

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[1]The "B" text, W. W. Skeat, ed., EETS 38 (London, 1869, reprinted 1950), is the source for all references unless otherwise indicated.

Pardoners show their bulls and boast they can assoil anyman and everyman; men came and gave them rings and brooches. Priests go to London and "syngen þere for symonye" and so do bishops; some clerics serve the king, and some serve lords; cardinals are corrupt. The king is led in by knighthood, but the power of the commons gave him his crown. Natural Wit, or Conscience, made clerks to counsel the king, and the king and his knights ordered men to plow and grow food for all. The lunatic, the angel, and the goliard speak Latin to the king about the power of the crown. The story of belling the cat is then told. The list continues with the sergeants at law who spoke only for money, barons, burgesses, bondsmen, even down to the village people in this Breughel-like scene:

> Baxsteres & brewesteres . and bocheres manye,
> Wollewebsteres . and weueres of lynnen,
> Taillours and tynkeres . & tolleres in marketes,
> Masons and mynours . and many other craftes.
> Of alkin libbyng laboreres . lopen forth somme,
> As dykers & delueres . þat doth here dedes ille,
> And dryuen forth þe longe day . with "Dieu vous saue, Dame Emme!"
> Cokes and here knaues . crieden, "hote pies, hote!
> Gode gris and gees . gowe dyne, gowe!"
> Tauerners vn-til hem . tolde þe same,
> "White wyn of Osey e . and red wyn of Gascoigne,
> Of þe Ryne and of þe Rochel . þe roste to defye."--
> Al pis seiȝ I slepyng . and seuene sythes more. (218-230)

Langland thus establishes the world and society as his purview; what follows in the poem is a series of specific complaints that accumulate into a general complaint on the evils of the times; the cursory treatment in the prologue is similar to the short poems discussed above.

Gower's Prologus to the Confessio Amantis (2662)[1] is quite general in its examination of the three estates: The basic theme of

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[1]Ed. G. C. Macaulay, EETS LXXXI and LXXXII (London, 1900-1).

that gigantic poem is stated quite simply:

> Noght upon on, bot upon alle
> It is that men now clepe and calle,
> And sein the regnes ben divided,
> In stede of love is hate guided,
> The werre wol no pes purchace,
> And lawe hath take hire double face,
> So that justice out of the weie
> With ryhtwisnesse is gon aweie: (125-132)

The absence of love explains the ills men cry against. Love is wanting in all levels of society.[1] Gower evidently believes that the mainspring of the world is love, and the poem is an exploration of the mechanism and how it should work among even fallible men.

The poem on the "Evils of the Times" may be short or long, but its main point is an abstraction which indicates the reason for the evils found. Often the single cause has many effects, and one general sin causes many lesser sins, which perhaps may be abstractions also. The tour of the world is an effective method of showing the evils. This type of poem is important and interesting because it shows in expression and content a popular manner of understanding the events of the times.

"The Past was better"--A Theme

One persistent theme of the verse of complaint is a belief that the world has degenerated from a more perfect past, and that it continues to worsen. The exploration of this theme shows the popular understanding of the evils of the time. It has been mentioned above quite briefly in describing the rhetorical device used to gain emphasis, the "Since,... then..." method. This device implies the past was better. The character-

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[1]Near the end of the poem (Book VIII, lines 2971-3105) Gower exhorts all classes to virtue: the clergy to use charity, the knights to defend the Church, to cause extortion to cease, the merchants to deal honestly, the king to preserve peace and humbly to follow God's law. Such prayers require improvement, and it may be deduced that the present situation is less than perfect.

istic device of the complaint is the contrast between "then" and "now." It may be that those words, or the past and present tenses (as in 592 on page 22), or both, are used; this theme is implied by the phrase "truth (or law, or charity) is dead," once having flourished mightily. In a poem on the death of Edward III (5), the backward view dominates, not only for purposes of eulogy but for the tacit and sometimes explicit comparison with the present; this stanza is illustrative:

> Þis gode Comunes, bi þe rode!
> I likne hem to the schipes mast,
> Þat with heore catel and heore goode
> Mayntened þe werre boþ furst and last.
> Þe wynd þat bleuȝ þe schip wiþ blast
> Hit was gode preȝers, I sei hit atrete.
> Nou is deuoutnes out icast,
> And mony gode dedes ben clen forȝete.[1] (73-80)

The comparison of the past with the present always produces pejorative commentary on the present. Sometimes the comparison is quite complex. In Piers Plowman (1459) occur these lines: "Elleuene holy men . al þe worlde torned/ In-to lele byleue . . . . ." (XV, 430-1) but the work should be easier now, for:

> . . . .we han so manye Maistres,
> Prestes and prechoures . and a pope aboue,
> Þat goddes salt shulde be . to saue mannes soule. (XV, 432-4)

But such is not the case. When Gregory sent Augustine to Canterbury, the bishop wrought many miracles and converted many people. . . . but now the situation is reversed; there are many priests but so few converts, so few devout men. The explanation is stated clearly:

> It is reuth to rede . how riȝtwis men lyued,
> How þei defouled her fleesh . forsoke her owne wille,
> . . . . . no boke but conscience,
> Ne no richchesse but þe Rode . to reioyse hem Inne;
> . . . .
> And þo was plente & pees . amonges pore & riche;
> And now is routhe to rede . how þe red noble
> Is reuerenced or þe Rode . receyued for þe worthier
> Þan crystes crosse, þat ouer-cam . deþ and dedly synne. (XV, 495-503)

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[1] Kenneth Sisam, Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose (Oxford, 1937), pp. 157-60.

The theme emerges again and again; the past was golden, and the present is lead.

Gower's use of the past-present comparison is in part implicit in the quotation which follows, for here each past good implies a present evil, and the reversal of good to bad is made clear in the shift from past tense to present tense. The accumulation of "tho" until the tension is released in "now" is quite impressive. This too is from the Prologus to the Confessio (2662):

> If I schal drawe in to my mynde
> The tyme passed, thanne I fynde
> The world stod thanne in al his welthe:
> Tho was the lif of man in helthe,
> Tho was plente, tho was richesse,
> Tho was the fortune of prousse,
> Tho was knyhthode in pris be name,
> Whereof the wyde worldes fame
> Write in Cronique is yit withholde;
> Justice of lawe tho was holde,
> The privilege of regalie
> Was sauf, and al the baronie
> Worschiped was in his astat;
> The cities knewen no debat,
> The poeple stod in obeissance
> Under the reule of governance,
> And pes, which ryhtwisnesse keste,
> With charite tho stod in reste:
> Of mannes herte the corage
> Was schewed thanne in the visage;
> The word was lich to the conceite
> Withoute semblant of deceite:
> Tho was ther unenvied love,
> Tho was the vertu sett above
> And vice was put under fote.
> Now stant the crop under the rote,
> The world is changed overal,
> And thereof most in special
> That love is falle into discord. (93-121)

The quotation at such length is made because it illustrates almost all the possible combinations of devices which reveal the presence of the theme of the golden past. The quotation also shows how the short General Complaint persisted as a popular device and how even an aristocratic

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writer used it. The theme is so often revealed that it is safe to assume it to be present even when it is not explicitly stated. The nostalgia of the past is an important theme in the temper of the complaint and often adds hopelessness to the lamentation, or bitterness to the criticism.

Money as an Evil

A large number of complaints are about money, about covetousness, avarice, or greed, radix omnium malorum. Money is often considered to be evil in itself. It is more often considered evil because it leads to other sins. We have already seen examples of this complaint above (2008): "Couetise, and tricherie,/ Habbeþ þis lond one here baillye" is one of the complaints on the "Evils of the Times" quoted on page 21. The theme penetrates many complaints, and in many guises. Great riches, heaped-up and unspent, is evil because it is a Christian duty to give alms to the poor. The moral critics more often view covetousness as a sin which leads to many other sins, which in turn lead to damnation, lechery, usury, vanity and pride, bribery, guile and falseness. To get money, men cheat and scheme and pervert the truth; if someone else has more money, the sin of envy is committed. The traditional view is illustrated by these sober, didactic verses found in the prologue to Walton's Boethius (2820):

> Richt as povert causith sobirnes,
> And febilnes enforcith contenence,
> Richt so prosperitee and gret riches
> The moder is of vice and negligence;[1]

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[1]W. W. Skeat, Oxford Chaucer, I, . 47, and VII, . 449. Another didactic poem points out the debilitating effect of envy and the desire for great riches; see 3365, infra, p. 97 under the discussion of "The Wynnere and Wastoure Theme."

A good example of the complaint dealing with money is the famous "Sir Peny (1480)."[1] The personification of money, or bribery, makes the poem an indictment of money qua money as well as its evil effects; the central image of the poem, Sir Peny in regal progress before the worshipping throngs, is a compelling one. He may loose and bind, compel the law to his favor, woo women with scarlet and green gowns, control the peace, buy heaven and hell, and, in short, almost everything, yet in spite of his manifest evil, he is constantly admired. A vice is portrayed as a virtue; there is a touch of irony in that.[2] The device of the progress is also evident; the parade through society enables the poet to criticize the whole world:

> Papes, kinges, and Emperoures,
> bisschoppes, abbottes, and priowres,
> person, prest, and knyght,
> Dukes, Erles, and ilk barowne,
> to serue him er þai ful boune
> both bi day and nyght.

This is one of the few complaints that is comical or humorous. The criticism is that men are not trustworthy and charitable but follow their own interests. The indirectness of the criticism is characteristic of complaint. The listeners to the poem laugh at the poem and are compelled to agree with the criticism, even when they are guilty of the sin themselves. The audience may include the priest, parsons, women, judges, and barons, but it seems more likely that the audience is composed primarily

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[1]Rossell Hope Robbins, Secular Lyrics of the XIV and XV Centuries (Oxford, 1955), pp. 50-55. Both versions of the poem are printed, BR 1480 and BR 2747.

[2]It should be noted that Sir Peny and Lady Mede are personifications of vices, but that they all receive respect and admiration. Folly is similarly personified in Erasmus' Praise of Folly but the irony is much more definite in the later work. By irony is meant that the literal statement is intended to be understood as differing from the real meaning.

of the peasantry. If this is so, then the appeal of the poem, besides its humor, is to the "have nots" who resent the "haves."[1]

An early 14th-century poem, a "Song on the Times" (4144),[2] includes the sin of covetousness in its discussion of the sins of the times; the fable of the lion, wolf, fox, and ass is the vehicle of criticism:

> Whose þenchiþ vp þis carful lif,
> Niȝte and dai þat we beþ inne,
> So moch we seeþ of sorow and strif,
> And lite þer is of world is winne;
> Hate and wreþ þer is wel riue,
> And trew loue is ful þinne;
> Men þat beþ in heiȝist liue
> Most icharged beþ wiþ sinne.

Covetousness has the law in hand, and pride and contention continue. While the Church and the Law should drive covetousness out of the land, they do not do so; the king's ministers are corrupted and take from the husbandman all he has. The fable illustrates this ramification of avarice. The innocent man is victimized by the greater powers. The fable is cast in the terms of covetousness causing oppression. The lack of love allows the use of any means to satisfy that covetousness.

Another view of covetousness can be found in Wynnere and Wastoure (3137).[3] In this poem Wynnere resembles the traditional miser, the man who saves all he makes. However, there is great emphasis placed on Wynnere's ability to make money. Wastoure is the personification of the spendthrift. The poem is a debate between the two before Edward III who is to decide which of the two is better; it ends in a draw. One is reminded of the fable of the ant and the grasshopper. The two debaters

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[1] See infra the category of "The Attack on the Rich," and the "Poor are oppressed" theme, chapter III.

[2] A. Brandl and O. Zippel, Middle English Literature (New York, 2nd ed., 1949), p. 182-4.

[3] I. Gollancz, Select Early English Poems (London, 1920), III.

are, in a way, characterized by their supporting armies: In Wynnere's army are the pope, the four orders of friars, lawyers, foreign and domestic merchants, and other profit seekers. In Wastoure's army are soldiers, brave men-at-arms, lusty squires, knights, lords, and barons who have used up their lands to support themselves. The poet is able to draw together in one place all those he wishes to criticize by the device of the armies. This is another illustration of the broad scope, the abstract and indirect quality, and the lack of specific examples found in the general complaint. The poet is posing a serious economic problem; the vast mass of the population is being crushed between the two. Wynnere provides employment, but because he is a sharp trader and his employees are few, the mass of people are not helped by him but instead are harmed. Wastoure neglects his lands and the peasants on them are having trouble surviving. Wastoure does employ people to serve him in his rich feasts and to make his expensive clothing, but this does not provide much employment for the peasants either. Wynnere's covetousness therefore has serious economic results. Wastoure further charges him with avarice, with not giving alms to the poor, with heaping up his money where it is of no use, and with losing his soul through the sins he commits to gain money.

In The Parlement of the Thre Ages (1550)[1] the figure of Medill-elde is similar to Wynnere, but the criticism of the merchant's business is only a moral one. Elde tells the stories of the nine worthies to show how death dims all worldly glories: "Ne there es reches ne rent may rawnsone 3our lyues,/ Ne noghte es sekire to 3oure-selfe in certayne bot dethe, . . ." (634-5). What is interesting about the figure of Medill-elde

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[1]Israel Gollancz, ed., Select Early English Poems (London, 1915), II.

and Wynnere is that the criticism of covetousness in the nobility and the clergy shifts onto the merchant, or the burgher, who is striving to accumulate capital necessary for further investment. There seems to be popular resentment against this, as we have already seen: this resentment will be considered under "Specific Complaints" in greater detail.

The significance of Lady Mede in Piers Plowman (1459) revolves around the two meanings of "mede"--reward, and bribe. Langland recognizes that money can be used for good or ill. Lady Mede conceals her evil nature under the mask of goodness. The dreamer asks Lady Holy-Church:

> "Madame, mercy," quod I . "me liketh wel 3owre wordes,
> Ac þe moneye of þis molde . þat men so faste holdeth,
> Telle me to whom, Madame . þat tresore appendeth?" (I, 43-45)

She replies, as did Christ, "Render unto Ceasar that which is Ceasar's, and unto God that which is God's." The dreamer asks for no treasure except how to save his soul, and the Lady replies: "Whan alle tresores aren tried, . . . trewthe is þe best." (I, 85) When the dreamer asks Lady Holy-Church how he will know falsehood, she points to Lady Mede who has just appeared, richly dressed, with as many diamonds as Edward III gave Alice Perrers. Later, when Lady Mede is betrothed to Falsehood, the marriage contract is read; here the causal qualities of covetousness and falsehood are listed: flattery, envy, lechery, sloth and gluttony. Mede is made responsible for the wantonness of wives and widows, for bribing judges, and for conniving the issue of pardons.

Later in the poem the traditional arguments about riches appear; here is the appeal to authority:

> "Poule preueth it inpossible . riche men to haue heuene,
> Salamon seith also . þat syluer is worst to louye:
> Nichil iniquius quam amare peccuniam.
> And caton kenneth vs to coueiten it . nau3t but as nede techeth,
> Dilige denarium, set parce dilige formam.
> And patriarkes and prophetes . and poetes bothe
> Wryten to wissen vs . to wilne no ricchesse,
> And preyseden pouerte with pacience; . þe apostles bereth witnesse,
> þat þei han heritage in heuene . and bi trewe ri3te,
> þere riche men no ri3te may clayme . but of reuthe and grace." (X, 336-44)

The complaint direct is simply that "many men on þis molde . more setten here hertis / In good þan in god . . ." (X, 392) A more plaintive remark is this:

> Allas! þat ricchesse shal reue . and robbe mannes soule
> From þe loue of owre lorde . at his laste ende! (XIV, 132-3)

In a harsher line, the same idea: "þe heigh waye to-heuene-ward . oft ricchesse letteth." (XIV, 211) Covetousness is connected with pride in this statement:

> And pryde in ricchesse regneth . rather þan in pouerte,
> Aret in þe Maister þan in þe man . some mansioun he hath.
> Ac in pouerte þere pacyence is . pryde hath no myȝte. (XIV, 215-7)

Many other occasions provide examples of the evil of covetousness and how it produces other sins, but these illustrations suffice.[1] Langland seems harder on the rich than the orthodox preacher is; covetousness is the central theme of the poem, and explains the lack of love which knits the soul to Christ.

Covetousness is condemned because it leads to other evils; riches cause pride, which threatens the soul's salvation. As has been shown, the sin of covetousness in these general complaints serves to explain the condition of the times. It is an important and pervasive theme.

Extravagence

Extravagence, particularly the vanity of fashion, is a complaint connected with covetousness. In The Parlement of the Thre Ages (1556)

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[1]Langland is, of course, repeating the traditional attitude toward money, explained and analyzed in countless sermons. The corrupting effect of money is pointed out in a late 14th century didactic poem, "A disputison bitwene a god man and þe deuel," 3247, Carl Horstmann, Minor Poems of the Vernon MS, EETS 98 (London, 1892), pp. 329-54, lines 167-172. Gower has a slightly different point of view about money: when everything was held in common, men were not greedy, but when men began to hold property privately, then peace departed and war came on every side. 2662, V, lines 6 ff.

Elde criticizes Youth for his fancy clothes and expensive riding gear, the reins were of silk and the bridle made of gold; the richness of Youth's costume is well described: "He was gerede all in grene, alle with golde by-weuede,/ Embroddirde alle with besantes and beralles full riche:" All that vanity, says Elde, will be wiped away on the last day. In Wynnere and Wastoure (3137) Wastoure is criticized for his extravagence and luxury, his extensive feasts, rich clothes, while the poor have nothing. Says Wynnere:

> Bot ones I herd in a haule of a herdmans tong--
> Better were meles many þan a mery nyghte. (364-5)

Wastoure's main sin is his extravagence, but he reveals his pride in his answer to this charge; what, says he, shall lords live as lads on foot? Obviously not. Prelates should live better than priests, and merchants of price better than peddlars. The peasants should be happy to have a piece of meat now and then. Wastoure's belief is clearly intended to be condemned, and his extravagence criticized along with it.

The fine clothes of a flattering courtier in "Mede and Muche Thank" (1475)[1] are scorned by the worn soldier in a debate between the two. The hypocritical courtier seems to believe that he has the better bargain, while the soldier, his life spent in battles and prisons, condemns the lying servility of the sycophant. The luxury of the courtier is a result of wrong. In a macaronic Poem on the Times (3113), rich and ornate clothes prevent prayer and also excite pride and vanity; "Galauntes, purs penyles" is the taunt; the same could be said of Wastoure. Another poem (1857) contains this line:

> For pride hath sleve, the lond is almusles.[2]

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[1]J. Kail, ed., Twenty-Six Political and Other Poems, EETS 124 (London, 1904), pp. 6-9.

[2]Wright, Pol. Songs, pp. 253-8.

The fashion was to wear long sleeves, quite full at the wrist, and dangling almost to the ground. A somewhat cynical poem (1156) but with an amusing image in it, continues the Wastoure idea:

> He that lovyth welle to fare,
> Ever to spend and never spare,
> But he have the more good,
> His here wol grow throw his hood.
>
> Quod More[1]

A 13th-century attack on women's dress (2285)[2] merits mention here because of its insistence upon vanity:

> Ne be þi wimpil never so jely ne so stroutende
> Ne þi faire tail so long ne so trailende,
> That tu ne schalt at evin al kuttid bilevin,
> And tou schalt to bedde gon so nakid as tou were borin.[3]

A stanza in "The Simonie" (4165)[4] describes the fancy clothes of squires, a description reminiscent of Youth in The Parlement of the Thre Ages(1556):

> A newe taille of squierie is nu in everi toun:
> The raye is turned overthvert that sholde stonde a-doun
> Hii ben degised as turmentours that comen from clerkes plei;
> Hii ben i-laft wid pride and cast nurture a-wey
> in diche;
> Gentille men that sholde ben, ne beth hii none i-liche.[5] (282-287)

The point is clear that extravagence is a sign of pride and vanity; most of the complaints on this subject bear this out.

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[1]Rel. Ant., II, 67. [2]Ibid., 15.

[3]Grooms ape their masters' rich clothing and draw a nasty stanza in "On the Retinues of the Great," 2649. Wright, Pol. Songs, pp. 237-40.

[4]Brandl, pp. 184-202.

[5]The fashion of carrying a short dagger at the belt was ridiculed rather severely; here is the good man's didactic description of a waster's clothes from "A disputison bitwene a gode man and þe deuil" (3247):

> "Viterde hodes and Clokes also,
> Al þat vile pride schal don hem ful wo;
> Þei struye godes þer-wiþ; And torne hit to fen,
> Þat muche mihte helpe; Sely pore men.
> Now is non worþ a fart,
> But he bere a baselart
> I-honget bi his syde,
> And a swynes Maw, & al is for pride." (265-272)

Complaints about Particular Sins

Guile

Covetousness, extravagance, vanity, and pride receive much criticism in the verse of complaint, so much, in fact, that one suspects these attacks indicate a popular resentment against the noble rich. Other complaints support that suspicion. Another interesting fact is the relationships among the sins discussed; besides the causal qualities of pride, for example, there are connections of that sin with covetousness and extravagance. The connections were undoubtedly fostered by sermon analyses, but they occur in the popular verse of complaint as well, and help to organize the verse. One might say that all sins are connected. A brief discussion of other sins which are lamented in the verse of complaint will suffice here. Guile or falsehood or hypocrisy are sins deserving attention; so frequently the critics discover that the sheep's coat hides a wolf that the very fact that there is a disguise receives criticism. The courtier (1175) even makes a defense of his flattery:

> Hy flateryng, glosyng, not me harmes.
> I gete loue, and moche richesse,
> Whan wel-faryng men of armes
> In fight, in prescan, and in presse. (49-52)

This "doublenesse" was thoroughly reprehensible to the medieval moralist both lay and ecclesiastic. Falseness and "mode" are connected in this short poem (759) too:

> Falsenesse and couetys er feris,
> wil neber oper be-sweke;
> lewte and pouert er peris,
> haue þai no ritte in ys rike.
> ilke man in lande neu leris
> wyt falsedam to pinchyn and pike;
> es þer no man þat þam sterys
> bot heuer are vnlawis illyke.
> Falseness, I vnderstande,
> haves dreuen trwyte of lande,
> and tort and fort as sworen þar owth
> þat law and lesse is ouer-clope.[1]

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[1]Carleton Brown, Religious Lyrics of the XIV Century (Oxford, 1951), p. 54.

The poem which discusses this complaint most explicitly (3420) was written during the second half of the 14th century. It has such cynical and bitter expression that quotation even at length--it consists of eight 12-line stanzas--would not convey those qualities completely. Here is the first stanza:

> þe Mon þat luste to liven in ese,
> Or eny worschupe her to ateyne,
> His purpos I counte not worþ a pese,
> Witterli, but he ordeyne
> þis wikked world hou he schal plese
> Wiþ al his pouwer and his peyne:
> 3if he schal kepe him from disese,
> He mot lerne to flatere and feyne;
> Herte & mouþ loke þei ben tweyne,
> þei mowe not ben of on assent;
> And 3it his tonge he mot restreyne,
> For hos seiþ þe soþe, he schal be schent.[1]

The truth is hidden by everyone--"leue þe tixt and take þe glose"--and friendship is faint: "Falshede is called a sotilte." John Ball's confederate Jacke Trewman makes approximately the same statement (1655), but his criticism is addressed to the clergy:

> Jacke Trewman doeth you to vnderstand
> That falsenesse and guile hath raigned too long;
> And truth hath been set vnder a locke,
> And falsenesse raigneth in every flocke,
> No man may come truth to,
> But he sing, si dedero; . . . .[2]

In Piers Plowman (1459) Lady Mede is the daughter of False, and is pledged to marry Falsehood; by this genealogy the listener or reader is meant to make the relationship between covetousness and guile. False ". . .hath a fykel tongue,/ And neuere sothe seide . sithen he come to erthe." (II, 25-6) Here is how Mede's bethrothal was contrived:

> And now worth þis Mede ymaried . al to a mansed schrewe,
> To one fals fikel-tonge . a fendes bi3ete;
> Fauel þorw his faire speche . hath þis folke enchaunted,
> And al is lyeres ledyng . þat she is þus ywedded. (II, 39-42)

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[1] Ibid., pp. 152-4. [2] Mackay, I, 4.

The moral is stated in the third passus:

> For so is þis worlde went . wiþ hem þat han powere,
> That who-so seyth hem sothes . is sonnest yblamed.[1] (III, 280-81)

Guile is an important and terrible sin because it is the means whereby Satan deceived Eve; Christ says to Satan: "For þe dede þat þei dede . þi deceyte it made;/ With gyle þow hem gete . agayne al resoun." (XVIII, 331-2) And these are consigned to eternal damnation.

Mum and the Sothsegger (*6)[3] is concerned with the complaint that men do not tell the truth, but keep silent, and use soft flattery to obtain advancement, money or power. This theme is similar to "Mede and muche Thank (1475)," the dialogue between the courtier and the soldier. Mum and the Sothsegger is in effect a general complaint; the poet wanders through society to discover the answer to the question, who is right, the man who keeps his mouth closed and says only what his master wants to hear, or the man who tells the truth regardless of the consequences. The result is an accusation of sin against all those who hold with Mum. Since this poem will be discussed quite thoroughly under "Specific Complaints" only a mention of it here is justified.

Backbiting

These are other sins of the tongue frequently associated with guile, and while frequently attributed to the courtier, they are equally applicable to other occupations, bishops, priests, bakers, and millers.

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[1]This echoes 3420 quoted on the page previous.

[2]A more didactic statement is from the "Disputison bitwene a god man and þe deuel" (3247): "The world is full of falsehood, no truth remains in word or deed; the son beguiles the father, the daughter the mother, the cousin the friend, each man the other. . .(229-232). The lamentation is quite dispirited, perhaps because the implication of distrust reaches so far and so wide.

[3]M. Day and R. Steele, EETS 199 (1934).

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[3]M. Day and R. Steele, EETS 199 (1934).

It has the status of a sin because the results are widespread and damaging. One of the more striking condemnations of backbiting is in a didactic homily from the North Homily Cycle (79).[1] The story, summarized, is this: after a monk who had spoken ill of his fellows had died, another monk saw him in a vision; the first monk was in horrible agony in hell, biting and eating his own tongue, which had been burned to a cinder. In tears the tormented monk tells his dreaming brother of his sin and cautions the dreamer, rather needlessly under the circumstances, not to bear tales.[2] The moralists' injunction was rarely followed. More often the tongue had its desire. When Wrath comes forward to make his confession in Piers Plowman (1459), his eyes are white, his neck hangs; 'I was once a friar,' he says, 'and taught limiters to lie with low speech to please lords. I often caused strife with my slandering tongue, especially between priests and friars. And when I once was a cook for nuns, there was no end to the scandal I made amongst them, and sometimes I brought the nuns to blows; I talk so when I've had a bit of drink!' The most frightening thing about the confessions that the personifications of the sins make is that the sin becomes worse and worse, and more and more hopeless. The central appeal of Piers Plowman to the contemporary listener is the promise of salvation if certain conditions are met: the most important condition is repentence. If repentence is sincere,

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[1]C. Horstmann, "Die Evangelien-Geschichte der Homiliensammlung des Ms. Vernon," Archiv, LVII (1877), 310.

[2]A didactic poem, "þe visions of seynt poul," (1898) illustrates the orthodox point of view; the damned souls in hell are visited by Saint Paul. The backbiters are sunk to the knees in a flood of toads and snakes; the guiding angel says:

> "Heo ben Backyters of men
> þat in word and dede, as I þe say,
> Hyndred heor euencristen þat þei may." (100-102)

Hortsmann, EETS 98, 251-60.

all sins are forgiven, a promise which suffuses with a golden light the message of Christianity--that is at least the tenor of Piers Plowman.

Langland's general theme of covetousness is neatly illustrated by lesser sins connected with the main theme. The abstract nature of the connection is shown by the particular elements of Lady Mede's marriage contract. Part of Mede's marriage agreement with False allows them the privilege:

> To be prynces in pryde . and pouerte to dispise,
> To bakbite, and to bosten . and bere false witnesse,
> To scorne and to scolde . and sclaundere to make, (II, 79-81)

Backbiting may be a calculated means to advancement, but it may also be a natural result of another sin, envy. When the personification of Envy comes to confession in the great scene in passus V, he is described thus:

> Eche a worde þat he warpe . was of an Addres tonge,
> Of chydynge and of chalangynge . was his chief lyflode,
> With bakbitynge and bismer . and beryng of fals witnesse; (V, 87-89)

The condemnation is quite severe.[1] The proverb which seems to sum up the popular view of this sin is: "Tonge breketh bon, and nath hire-selue non."[2]

Contention and Strife

The sin of pride is clearly connected with extravagence, covetousness, and backbiting, but pride also causes contention and strife, sins often included in the list of vices explaining the evil times. One

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[1]Gower evidently had the popular condemnations of backbiting in mind when he came to discuss "Detraccion" in the Confessio (2662); his treatment of the theme is more aristocratic than the poems discussed hitherto, and he probably had more acquaintance with the courtiers proficient in this sin than did other poets. Vide: I, 387-407.

[2]W. W. Skeat, ed., Early English Proverbs (Oxford, 1910), no. 79.

poem (3113) says:

> Lechury, lust, and pryde,
> haec sunt quibus Anglia paret.

The fable of the lion, wolf, fox, and ass (4144) joins pride and contention.[1] The most important exposé of this sin is in a poem on the evil times of Edward the Second, "The Simonie" (4165), which searches out pride and covetousness in all occupations and makes those sins the cause of bad years, murrain, and civil strife. This stanza speaks of contentious nobles:

> Pride prikede hem so faste, that nolde theih nevere have pes
> Ar theih hadden in this lond maked swich a res,
> That the beste blod of the lond shamliche was brouht to grounde,
> If hit betre mihte a ben, allas! the harde stounde bitid;
> That of so gentilleblod i-born swich wreche was i-kid. (433-438)

God punishes the land directly with pestilence, great winds, storms, and earthquakes, but indirectly also through the contentious men who make such trouble amongst their fellow men. Pride is a cause of disobedience, and disobedience leads to strife. Lucifer is the traditional example of "wikked wille" (IX, 205) and he is used to illustrate this moral theme in Piers Plowman (1459):

> Ac lucifer lowest . lith of hem alle;
> For pryde þat he pult out . his peyne hath none ende; (II, 124-5)

Conscience in his sermon argues that the great wind was God's punishment for men's pride. (V, 15) Pride is the cause of other punishments as well:

> . . .so is pryde waxen
> In religoun and in alle þe rewme . amonges riche & pore,
> þat preyers haue no power . þe pestilence to lette. (X, 75-77)

In the final onslaught against Piers, Pride sends forth Surquidous and Spill-love, "one speke-yuel-byhynde," who by sophistical arguments attempts to undermine Piers and the people. Conscience and the cardinal

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[1] Vide supra, p. 31.

virtues, however, come to his aid and achieve victory over Pride.[1] Langland's evangelical message exhorts men to humility and charity; pride is the antithesis of these; charity cleanses men from pride.

The Lack of Charity

Contention, envy, covetousness, and backbiting prevail; the lack of charity and the lack of trust in the land are other complaints and represent another point of view explaining the evils in the land. "Whon Charite is no lengor cheere" (4157)[2] is the refrain of one of these poems, a refrain which unifies the more specific evils that the poem discusses:

> Mony a Mon, riht as him seemeþ
> A þing þat he neuer kneuh ne wist,
> Boþe lordes & Mene Men he demeþ,
> And speketh of hem riȝt as him list.
> Allas! for ȝif a mon nou trist
> His broþer or his cosyn neere,
> He schal be deceyued in his fist,
> For charite is no lengore cheere. (9-16)

Lack of charity means distrust; lack of trust leads to suspicion; suspicion leads to animosity; animosity leads to strife; and father is set against son and brother against brother.[3] The Plowmans Tale (3448),[4] a Lollard attack on the Church, laments that the poor get no alms while priests accumulate money. In Piers Plowman (1459) charity is an essential

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[1]That sin has many guises; another form seems to be indicated in passus XV, 195-197.

[2]Brown, Rel. Lyr. XIV Cent., pp. 170-73.

[3]This complaint occurs elsewhere in the General Complaints and is an important theme; see 2145 on page 20, and 2008 on page 21, which both attribute the evil times to the lack of love; 4144 on page 31 says "trew loue is ful þinne" and hate and wrath predominate; 4273 laments, page 21. "vnkundenesse."

[4]Skeat, Oxford Chaucer, VII, 147-90.

theme:

> For-þi is loue leder . of þe lordes folke of heuene,
> And a mene, as þe Maire is . bitwene þe kyng and þe comune;
> Ri3t so is love a ledere . and þe lawe shapeth
> Vpon man for his mysdedes . þe merciament he taxeth. (I, 157-160)

The rich must have pity on the poor and give alms through love, yet good works without faith are without merit. Many chaplains are chaste, "ac charite is awey," (I, 188) and they eat up the money they should give to the poor. "Loue is leche of lyf," says Langland, but too many are sick:

> I seigh neuere such a man . so me god helpe,
> That he ne wolde aske after his . and otherwhile coueyte
> þinge þat neded hym nou3t . and nyme it if he my3te! (XV, 153-155)

Charity is, of course, more than giving alms. It is a love for one's fellow man, and a love of God. In Piers Plowman, charity and love have a mystical quality of superabundant grace, as if it were the essence of life itself and of God. The despairing laments about the lack of charity seem to refer to that essential meaning and suggest that men are not full of care for their fellow human beings.

Sloth, Lechery, and Drunkenness

These three sins do not receive much attention in the verse of complaint. They are mentioned, as it were, in passing in the General Complaints. Some of the specific complaints criticize the friars for laziness, among other faults, and the didactic criticisms preach against sleeping in church, but for the most part these sins do not receive much popular criticism.

In Piers Plowman (1459) sloth is connected with gluttony, and with gluttony are connected drunkenness and lechery. Gluttony and Sloth are given to Mede and False in their marriage agreement:

Glotonye he gaf hem ake . and grete othes togydere,
And alday to drynke . at dyuerse tauernes,
And there to iangle and to iape . and iugge here euene cristene,
And in fastyng-dayes to frete . ar ful tyme were.
And þanne to sitten and soupen . til slepe hem assaille,
And breden as burgh-swyn . and bedden hem esily,
Tyl sleuth and slepe . slyken his sides;
And þanne wanhope to awake hym so . with no wille to amende,
For he leueth be lest . þis is here last ende. (II, 92-100)

The portrait of Sloth[1] in Passus V is very interesting:

þanne come sleuthe al bislabered . with two slymy eiȝen,
"I most sitte," seyde þe segge . "or elles shulde I nappe; (V, 392-3)

He falls asleep over his prayers. When he is awakened he says he does not know his Pater Noster, but he does know rhymes about Robin Hood. He forgets his vows and penances; he lies, swears, sleeps with his "lemman" in Lent, but gets absolved by friars. He then, rather surprisingly, says:

I haue be prest and parsoun . passynge þritti wynter,
[illegible]
Bettre þan in beatus vir . or in beati omnes
[illegible]

Many of the complaints about sloth are directed at the lower clergy, but usually not against monks. Sloth next confesses to drunkenness, eating much food and drink, and that it [illegible] because "I ran aboute in zeuthe . and gaf ne noȝte to iuge." (V, 44) Repentance then has to awaken him again before the penitential is recited. Altogether this is an amusing portrayal. Later in the poem this grim and humorous statement is made:

Woche we worth bat man . bat mys-reuleth his in-witte,
And bat be gloteuns delibares . her god is her wombe;
Quorum deus venter est.
For bei serue sathan . her soule schal be haue; (IX, 87-89)

The complaints against sloth and gluttony are general, but quite often

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[1]The portrait of Glutton in Passus V has long been famous; the gathering at the tavern is described in such terms that the moral is plain. Vide infra "Specific Complaints About the 3rd Estate."

they are specific accusations; the peasant had no time nor substance to commit those sins. His familiar was more likely to be that ghostly Hunger who appears so threateningly in Passus VI and compels the laggards to do Piers' bidding and to work.

The direct and unblushing attack on lechery, especially the by-play of flirtation in church, is striking in "A lutel soth Sermun (1091). The poet threatens the lovers with hell and damnation, yet they continue to whisper together and go to the ale, and thence into the evening, despite the admonitions of priest and parents. The figure of Youth in The Parlement of the Thre Ages (1556) indicates his delight in pleasure by including female companionship:

> With ladys full louely to lappyn in myn armes,
> And clyp thaym and kysse thaym and comforthe myn hert;
> And than with damesels dere to daunsen in thaire chambirs; (247-49)

"Elde" answers this by telling how he too was once young, but time tells a different story in the mirror: "Paramours and pride puttes [dethe] full lowe." (633) John Ball warns that "Lechery without shame" exists (1791). "Foul fals lechery is pryuy solas" runs another poem (3133). The "old mon lechur" and the "Wimmon schomeles" are included in other complaints (4051) on the times. But the charge is not one of the more important complaints; again the targets for this complaint are the clergy and women.[1] Piers Plowman (1459) of course contains references to this sin, but they are entirely orthodox and didactic. Lady Holy-Church herself connects drunkenness and lechery and cites the example of Lot. (I, 30) Lady Mede receives the lordship of Lechery and all the rights

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[1]A didactic poem against adultery (839) may have been a popular complaint. Catherine R. Borland, A Descriptive Catalogue of the Western Medieval Manuscripts in Edinburgh University Library (Edinburgh, 1916), p. 332.

to wanton and flirtatious deeds and words, perhaps a reference to courtly love, "waitynges with eies," (II, 89) and "ydel thoughtes." When Lechery comes forward to make his confession, he is given as penance the duty to "Dryncke but myd þe doke . and dyne but ones," a reference to the belief that lechery is caused by rich food and strong drink. (V, 75) Fortune bids the dreaming poet to look into the mirror of the world, and he sees there all fleshly delights. Fortune has two assistants, "Concupiscencia-carnis" and "coueytise-of-eyes" who entice the dreamer with their blandishments. Elde, however, warns him that all three are fickle despite their pleasant promises. (XI, 12)

The portrait of Glutton in the fifth passus of Piers Plowman describes the sin of drunkenness quite graphically, and yet it is not quite convincingly disgusting; the inebriated crew seems to be having too much of a good time until Glutton becomes too drunk. There is a certain amount of bonhomie evident before the scene becomes disgusting. It is, somehow, more convincing a tavern scene than the gathering at the Tabard.[1] There is a couplet (4079) which makes the objection of the moralist to that sin quite clear:

> Whil 3at i was sobre sinne ne dede i nowht,
> but in drunkeschipe i dede 3e werste 3t mihten ben thowht.[2]

Popular complaints about sloth, lechery, and drunkenness are few; there are a number of verses in celebration of the good brown ale;[3] complaints about those sins do not seem very representative of popular attitudes.

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[1]Moral Gower devotes some sixty lines to drunkenness:(2602), VI, 15-75.

[2]Brown, Register, I, 329.

[3]For example, (549), Robbins, Sec. Lyr. XIV & XV Cents., p. 9; (*24), p. 106.

Mutability--A Theme

The theme of mutability, the idea that time passes and changes all things, is a very important part of the tone and texture of the verse of complaint. This theme usually voices the fear of death, the worry about past sins, the horrors of the grave, and the apprehension of the Last Judgment. It is a personal kind of complaint. The vanitas vanitatem tone with its condemnation of worldly things furnishes a rationale for the complaint; "look to your end" is the constant refrain. Elde, in The Parlement of the Thre Ages (1556), is dressed in black, and his feebleness, his tottering steps, and his mumbled words of warning are bleak: the Nine Worthies met their end in spite of their glory; youth passes into middle age and middle age passes into old age, and the dreamm is done. Of what value are the strivings and yearnings, for gay coats, for rents and lands, when the one necessity is the remission of sins?[1] A number of poems illustrate this theme; the most familiar (695) exists in a number of texts and versions and seems to be proverbial:

> Vyche day me cumeþ tydinges þreo,
> For wel swiþe sore beoþ heo;
> þe on is þat ich schul heonne,
> þat oder þat Ich noth hwenne;
> þe þridde is my meste kare,
> þat ich not hwider ich scal fare.[2]

Another instance of this complaint is simply entitled "Elde" (718)[3] and

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[1]It should be noted here that sin is condemned primarily because it threatens salvation, and only secondarily because it makes the world more difficult to live in. This distinction is discussed later in the dissertation.

[2]Carleton Brown, English Lyrics of the XIII Century (Oxford, 1953), p. 19 and p. 372.

[3]W. Heuser, Die Kildare-Gedichte, Bonner Beiträge, XIV (Bonn, 1904), 170-2.

is found in an early 14th-century manuscript. The speaker laments one by one his infirmities, the loss of his friends, the difficulties with his children, his sins, and his misfortunes. What gives the poem its bitter, hopeless tone is the mention of the lack of respect given him; boys mock his infirmities; "Vch schenlon me bischrew." The poem seems to be a pure expression of personal misery. One wonders if the plight of the aged in this period was everywhere so bad as it is described here.

A more orthodox expression is this stanza from a poem (1402) written a little later in the 14th century; the last line is a refrain:

I wolde witen of sum wys wiht
  Witterly what þis world were:
Hit fareþ as a foules fliht,
  Now is hit henne, now is hit here,
Ne be we neuer so muche of miht,
  Now be we on benche, nou be we on bere;
And be we neuer so war and wiht,
  Now be we sek, now beo we fere,
  Now is on proud wiþ-outen peere,
    Now is þe selue I-set not by;
  And whos wol alle þing hertly here,
    þis world fareþ as a Fantasy.[1]

"we stunteþ but a stounde," the poem continues. Another version (1580) of the theme almost achieves irony in its reversal:

In þis werd þat hys so wicke [world]
  I ne mai no stunde abide;
For mischances arne so þicke
  And reueleke it be-tide;
Wylum haued I fere and flicke,
  God hors on to ride;
Nou hys min hors a wrechyd sticke
  þat stondit be my seyde.[2]

The theme appears in Piers Plowman (1459), the thesaurus of all complaints, and in a number of other poems. It suffices here to note only that it is a

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[1]Brown, Rel. Lyr. XIV Cent., pp. 160-4.

[2]W. W. Skeat, "Elegy on the Death of King Edward I," Modern Language Review VII (1912), 150.

widespread and deeply penetrating theme. The turning wheel may be unpredictable, except that it will always turn, but the apprehension of change and death is mitigated by the feeling of peace that some of the meditative and contemplative verses give; that release from the world makes the nostalgia and regret and fear less terrifying and less poignant.

The theme of mutability is important in the verse of complaint because it sets the tone of many of the poems. It is connected with the theme "the past was better" in its essential meaning; everything changes and passes except evil. The note of fear, a deep and pervasive fear, emerges from these poems and makes them very impressive. The idea of mutability is also a method of achieving contrast between "then" and "now." This is an important device in the poetry of complaint. For the most part, however, the personal lament forms a group of poetry by itself; it is discussed here because the idea and the tone of the theme penetrates all verse of complaint.

Women

Another object of the "General Complaint" is women, women in general, all women, but mostly wives. This category is placed here in this chapter because it does not seem to fit elsewhere; the verse is "general" in that the critic includes all women--there are none good--in his poem. The criticisms are that women are lecherous, greedy, giddy, inconstant, guileful, domineering, nagging, spiteful, and in short scarcely less malignant an evil than the devil himself. These complaints are difficult to assess. They may reflect the despairing cry of the husband, but they may also be the result of prolonged celibate brooding, and they may even be humorous clichés which the minstrel found effective, just as they are still effective today. A didactic poem (1917) which may be a

result of monkish brooding is this one:

> Liþer lok and tuingling,
> Tiheng and tikelinge,
> Opin breat and singing,
> Þeise mid-outin lesing,
> Arin toknes of horeling.[1]

"A lutel soth Sermun" (1091) comments quite clearly on giddy Jankyn.

Here is another little poem (1974) which connects lechery and the fashion-hungry female:

> Nou hath prude the pris in everuche plawe;
> By mony wymmon un-wis y sugge mi sawe,
> For 3ef a ledy lyne is leid after lawe,
> uch a strumpet that ther is such drahtes wl drawe;
> in prude
> Uch a screwe wol hire shrude
> Thah he nabbe nout a smoke hire foul ers to hude.

Crist to the devil's mill:

> Nou ne lacketh hem no lyn boses in to beren;
> He sitteth ase a slat swyn that hongeth is eren.
> Such a joustynde gyn uch wrecche wol weren,
> Al hit cometh in declyn this gigelotes geren;
> upo lofte,
> The devel may sitte softe,
> Ant holden his halymotes ofte.[2]

The invective is severe and sharp, as most of the complaints are, but the criticism is interesting in itself, for it reveals the use of lockets on the forehead or temples, and that earrings are decorations that attract masculine attention.[3] A very brief poem, four lines in a Latin sermon, "Contra mulieres ornantes" (4093), describes the beauties of the bower thus:

> Þho haues hornes als na rum . and ha neck als a swan
> and a midel als ha breck . ha tayl als ha pacock.[4]

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[1] Max Förster, "Kleine Mitteilungen zur mittelenglischen Lehrdichtung," Archiv CIV (1900), 304.

[2] Brown, Eng. Lyr. XIII Cent. pp. 133-4.

[3] (285), a poem quoted earlier, connects the vanity of fashions and luxury, page 36, supra.

[4] W. R. James, Catalogue, II, 476.

All of which have pejorative connotations; the horned headdress is a standard metaphor of vanity, lechery, and extravagence. The discussion of "Sir Peny" (1480) mentioned that women worship that hardy knight; indeed, a whole stanza is devoted to them:

> With Peny may men wemen till
> Be thai never so strange of will,
> So ofte may it be sene,
> Lang with him will thai noght chide,
> For he may ger tham trayl syde
> In gude skarlet and grene.

The desire for fancy clothes leads women to sin, to trick and to deceive.[1]

The criticism of women has a religious motive which enters into popular belief quite early. The popular criticism has a slightly different cast. Robert of Brunne's Handlyng Synne (778)[2] declares most of the traditional ideas about the place of women, and echoes some complaints about their variance from it:

> God made womman man to gyue,
> To be hys helpē yn hys lyue;
> He madē here nat, man to greue,
> No to be mayster, but felaw leue,
> No nat ouer logh, no nat ouer hy,
> But euene felaw, to be hym by; (1611-16)

Women are still a threat. Robert relates a tale about the devil, who had made a well-dressed women and placed her close to a deacon in church; the deacon was unable to keep his eyes off her. The story reveals how much the priest feared women. Robert concludes:

> For wommens sake, þys tale y tolde,
> þat þey oute of þe chaunsel holde
> wyþ here kercheues, þe deuylys sayle,
> Elles shal þey go to helle, boþe top and tayle;
> For at hym þey lernē alle
> To temptē men yn synne to falle. (8881-6)

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[1]"The Bargain of Judas" (1649) is a strange poem; it retells the Biblical story. A woman is made responsible for the betrayal of Christ, however. Judas is sent to town with thirty pieces of silver to buy meat. He meets his sister, and after eating goes to sleep. His sister calls in their kinsmen who rob him of the money. Judas is therefore compelled to sell his Master to replace the money. Brown, Eng. Lyr. XIII Cent., pp. 38-9.

[2]F. J. Furnivall, EETS 119, 123 (London, 1901-1903).

They are fiends in disguise. In a curious outburst Robert tells the story of a miner's wife who, when her husband was trapped in a collapsed tunnel, made offerings for him in church; thus was he saved, but the moralist remarks:

> Fewe swyche wymmen now we fynde,
> þat to here husbondes are so kynde! (10753-4)

He advises men, almost bitterly:

> Trust 3e nat moche on 3oure wyues,
> Ne on 3oure chyldryn, for no þyng.
> But makeþ 3e self, 3oure offryng:
> For, so kynde a womman as y of tolde,
> lyueþ nat now, be þou bolde. (10792-6)

That is a fearful thing to say. Part of the reason for such serious distrust is that women, all women, are the daughters of Eve, and they are therefore theologically suspect as the weaker vessels. The clerical attitude emerges in more popular verse. In the moving lullaby in which a mother speaks to the drowsy child of the turning wheel of furtune in "þis fals world"; Eve seems to receive the more blame (2025):[1]

> Lollai, lollai, litil child, þis wo adam þe wro3t,
> Whan he of þe appil ete, and eue hit him betacht. (35-6)

The popular jokes about women sound like proverbs. Women are sinful, is the attitude of the clergy; women are ornery, bothersome, and impossible, is the tenor of the popular complaint (*63):

> A yong wyf and an arvyst goe,
> Moche gagil with bothe:
> A man that hath ham yn his clos,
> Reste schal he wrothe.[2]

And the mother-in-law (3818):

> Two wymen in one howse,
> Two cattes and one mowse,
> Two dogges and one bone,
> Maye never accorde in one.[3]

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[1] Brown, Rel. Lyr. of XIV Cent., pp. 35-6.

[2] Rel. Ant., II, 113. [3] Rel. Ant., I, 233.

This is a persistent complaint against women: they are not easy to live with. The maid is sweet and humble, but after marriage. . .the blind eat many a fly. This pseudo-Chaucerian balade (2661) echoes a popular idea and explains the wonderful dissembling of women:

> Whan maidens are wedded and houshold haue take,
> All their humility is exiled away,
> And the cruel hertes beginneth to awake,
> They do all the besie cure that they can or may,
> To vexe their houshold maisters that soth for to say
> Wherfore ye yong men I rede you for thy,
> Beware alway, the blind eats many a fly.[1]

The only mention of women and their frailties in Piers Plowman (1459) is from the Bible:

> Thre þinges þere ben . þat doth a man by strengthe
> Forto fleen his owne hous . as holywryt sheweth,
> þat one is a wikked wyf . þat wil nou3t be chasted,
> Her fiere fleeth from hyr . for fere of her tonge. (XVII, 315-19)

A leaking roof and a smoking fire are the other two. And the worst of these is, presumably, the housewife's tongue. Skeat found this proverb from Alfred:

> Ne wurth thu neuer so wod, ne so wyn-dr.nke,
> That euere segge thine wife alle thine wille. no. 40

and from Hendyng:

> Monimon syngeth
> When he hom bryngeth
> Is yonge wyf;
> Wyste he whet he broghte,
> Wepen he mohte. no. 78

The loquaciousness of women receives much condemnation. A rather clever poem (3078) purporting to be the entreaty of a housewife to her magical broom reads:

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[1]A. Chalmers, English Poets (London, 1810), I, p. 560.

'Say me, viit in þe brom,
Teche me wou I sule don
þat min hosebonde
me louien wolde.'

'Hold þine tunke stille
& hawe al þine wille.'[1]

There are, of course, poems which defend women.[2] For the most part, however, the vote is against them, with the limitations mentioned above. Fifteenth Century verse contains many examples attacking women; it becomes a favorite theme.

Conclusion

These are, then, the objects of the General Complaint. The theme of money is often iterated and dominates the moral criteria of the verse. There is a general silence about the sins of sloth, lechery, and drunkenness. Despite this emphasis, the moral themes of complaint are quite similar to the moral themes of sermons, that inexhaustible well of sermon subjects, the Seven Deadly Sins. In the general complaint the poet registered his criticism in quite a broad way, making no reference to any particular object, but simply classifying the evils under one or more sins. It is clear that this kind of poem is effective in at least two ways, which perhaps justifies their existence. First, such a poem is easily agreed to by its hearers, who sigh for the "good old days" and accept the mutability theme. These make an emotional bond among men. Secondly, the hearers were easily able to find in their own experience specific illustrations of the general charge, and indeed had heard approximately the

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[1]Brown, Eng. Lyr. XIII Cent., p. 32.

[2]"I Repent for blaming women," HR 1504, charges that women use deceit because men taught them to, and the poet therefore repents. G. L. Brook, The Harley Lyrics (Manchester, 1956), p. 44.

same things said from the pulpit. The general complaint has easy application, as do many aphorisms, saws, and proverbs, and the minstrel undoubtedly utilized these already accepted ideas to entertain his audience.

But the general complaints help to continue the beliefs that people had about the nation and the world and the people in it, and further help to explain the events and conditions of the times. The religious teachings of sin and redemption appear to have been deeply accepted for the most part, transformed perhaps from the context of the priest into the context of popular belief. While this is not the place to hazard a proof, most of the poems discussed above do not sound like the didacticism of a priest or friar preaching, but more like that preaching at one remove, caught, as it were, over the years in the sieve of the lay conscience and lay belief.

The General Complaints set the tone for all the verse of complaint and provide the basic moral criteria used in the Specific Complaints. These moral criteria enable the judgment and criticism to be made, organize the Specific Complaints, and affect the temper of the complaints as well. As the Specific Complaints are discussed, the emphasis upon the theme of covetousness will become apparent.

CHAPTER THREE

SPECIFIC COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE NOBILITY

While the General Complaint testifies that the times are bad because of the prevalence of abstract evils or sins, or because some particular sin causes or encourages other sins, the Specific Complaint illustrates the evils or sins by referring to particular actions or particular men. The generalized evil is made flesh, so to speak, and clothed in iniquity. It has been noted that to the listeners, the General Complaint was not vague nor abstract; the listener could easily supply concrete instances to fit the general statement. The Specific Complaint listed the practices or events which men thought to be evil, and almost always the particular evils pointed to a general or abstract sin. The mental process of moving from particulars to abstraction and back to particulars again seems to have been habitual, fostered, if not begun, by the theologians and priests, and practised quite frequently in sermons, handbooks, and complaints. Brunne's Handlyng Synne (778) and Langland's Piers Plowman (1459) both contain a parade of vices, their divisions and subdivisions, complexities and interrelationships manifoldly analyzed. Different devices are used and different purposes are aimed at, but the moral foundation exists in both, and in both the listener's ability to move back and forth between general sin and particular evil is assumed and exploited.

The Specific Complaint moves in the realm of particulars, but the world of universals is never forgotten. The devices used to organize the particulars may be the Seven Deadly Sins, allegory or personification, visions, or the tour of the world, all of which are found in Piers Plowman (1459). These devices will be noted in the following discussion, but it may be noted here that many of the Specific Complaints are indirect or covert criticisms, that is, for example, particular persons are not often named but are referred to by heraldic devices or puns or some other indirect device. Usually, the object of complaint is a class of persons, a group, often an occupational group, rather than specific persons. There are exceptions, of course, but not many. The criticism may have been covert and indirect because the complainant wished to protect himself against reprisal--there are a number of complaints that powerful lords take such action--or for the reason that the abuse was so widespread that no one person was particularly guilty. Whatever the reasons might be, a characteristic of the Specific Complaint is that it does not attack a particular person but a group of persons.

The three traditional divisions of medieval society are the subjects of the three chapters discussing the Specific Complaints. This chapter is concerned with the nobility, the bellatores, and the next two chapters will discuss the complaints about the Church, the oratores, and the third estate, or laboratores, respectively. Other methods of division are used by writers of complaints, Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) and Wynnere and Wastoure (3137). The traditional method of organization, however, is the one most often followed, as in "The Simonie" (4165), Piers Plowman (1459), and the Confessio Amantis (2662).

The function of the nobility was to protect the people by guarding them against attack from abroad and from civil strife at home, primarily by the establishment and enforcement of justice. In the period of this investigation the nobility were to some extent concerned with the administration of the land, with supervising farming and the production of food; the nobility under its feudal obligations was required to fight England's wars. The 14th century saw the beginning of the Hundred Years' War with France, and wars against the Scotch and the Spaniards as well. The Black Death caused economic problems which led to the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. The increase in the production of wool and wool products, the rise of the guilds and the increase in wealth of merchants--all these made problems with which the king and his nobles had to deal. Men complained of injustice and inequality resulting from these problems. The historical background of these complaints will be dealt with as the complaints themselves are discussed; there is not space enough to consider the crowded and fascinating panorama of the 13th and 14th centuries in toto. An examination of the specific complaints about the nobility will, however, provide a fairly broad historical perspective of the period and suggest, in part at least, the temper of the populace, and popular attitudes toward those events. To make the analysis clear and to allow examination from a number of points of view, the specific complaints about the nobility have been divided into four groups: political complaints, economic complaints, complaints about the rich, and complaints about the administration of justice.

Political Complaints

Gower states in the Prologus to the Confessio Amantis (2662)

that discord between the king and his nobles, or between the king and his people, causes much evil in the land. The music of Arion's harp means concord:

> And every man upon this ground
> Which Arion that time herde,
> Als wel the lord as the schepherde,
> He broghte hem alle in good acord;
> So that the comun with the lord,
> And lord with the comun also,
> He sette in love bothe tuo
> And putte awey malencolie. (1062-69)

If the poem was addressed to Richard II, perhaps Gower is Arion, and his poem the harp which would soothe the realm and bring the commons and the king into "good acord." This did not happen; discord remained until Richard's deposition in 1399 and after. The two centuries covered in this study were full of discord between king and barons, between barons and barons, and between king and commons. The Church fought with the state and was rent by the Great Schism and by the strife of friar and priest. Gower intends to include all these difficulties, and to lay them at the feet of Discord. Six years later than the Confessio he composed a poem, his last in English, "In Praise of Peace" (2587)[1] where his opinion of Richard is clear; it is addressed to Henry IV and renders tribute to him for saving the land from Richard's misrule:

> God hath thee chose, in comfort of us alle;
> The worship of this land, which was doun falle,
> . . . .
> Ther is no man may saye in other wyse
> That god him-self ne hath the right declared;
> Whereof the land is boun to thy servyse,
> Which for defaute of helpe hath longe cared. (4-18)

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[1]Wright, Pol. Poems, II, 4-15.

Gower uses the traditional metaphor of the body politic:

> Of that the heed is syk, the limmes aken; 260

The limbs did ache; the complaints were made about the head. The point is this: the complaints in verse about the government of England in the period 1200-1400 revolve around discord.

The King

That the king is "conseilles" (1830), or willful, or too young (4051), are proverbial complaints, as has been seen in the General Complaints. They appear in the Specific Complaints as well, where applicable, along with more detailed criticisms. Compared with other topics, there are not very many complaints about the king, but from the complaints that are made, it is easy to see which kings were popular.

John. A Short English Metrical Chronicle (1105)[1] devotes six lines to Richard I, but 110 lines to John. It was probably written soon after 1307, or about a century after John's death, yet it is rather bitter:

> & suþþe regned kyng Jon
> In his tyme al Engelond
> Was enterditid in his hond
> For on erchebischop
> þat was wisman & no sot.
> He het steuene of Langedone
> þe kyng hym nolde vndergonge (I, 919-25)

John was cruel, reports the Chronicle; he once took offence at a one-eyed fletcher, presumably an old soldier, who winked at the king as the monarch rode through Bishop's Gate. John had the fletcher's other eye put out. The Papal Interdict is the subject of considerable criticism:

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[1] E. Zettle, EETS 196 (London, 1934).

> ȝut he dude more schrewednesse
> For a prest nolde synge his masse.
> In þat tyme þat Engelond
> Was enterdit in his hond
> He dude hym sle with peyne & sorwe
> . . . .
> In helle ich hope he haþ his mede. (I, 946-53)

The chronicler tells the story of a monk of Swineshead who decides to poison the king, and so, having been absolved in advance, gains access to the king and gives him poisoned plums. John takes the precaution of having the monk eat some plums too, and both die. The monk is excused, however, because: "He ne dude hit for non enuye ne onde / Bote for to saue al Engelond." (I, 1019-20)

Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle (727)[1] has a much longer account of John's reign and contains censures of almost everything that John did: his divorce, the suspicion that he murdered the young Arthur his nephew, the conflict over the election of Archbishop Langton, the quarrel with the pope, the Interdict, his confiscations of Church lands, and his loss of Normandy. The discord between king and his barons did not begin nor end with John nor with the Magna Charta. References to the almost continuous struggles occur in a number of poems. If the king was in any way weak, the barons took advantage; the baronial uprisings are an index to the stability of the realm. When the barons united and captured the king, the chronicler gives these reasons:

> Vor hor wiues & hor doȝtren . þe king ofte vorlay .
> & hangede men gultles . vor wraþþe al longe day . (10491-2)

John repudiated the Charter, as others were to do after him, and there was more fighting and bloodshed. The chronicler refers to the poisoning and supports the opinion of the other chroniclers:

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[1] W. A. Wright, ed., Rolls Series (London, 1887).

At newework he deide . a sein lukes day .
He was ihasted þat vnnepe . þre dawes sik he lay .
ȝuf eni man þer to help . god it him vorȝiue .
Vor he adde er þis long . to muche wrechede idriue .
In þe ȝer of grace he deide . tuelf hundred & six tene .
& seuentene ȝer he was king . & fif monþes ich wene .
& fif dawes & þat þouȝte . mani man longe iwis .
At wircetre in þe munstre . vaire ibured he is . (10552-59)

The chronicler's sympathy with the Church is clear, but it is probable that popular attitudes were similar; John was hated by the Church and by the barons, and it is likely that the people hated him too.[1] The traditional description of King John is all black, of an angry, cruel, willful, and grasping man, without pity or charity, or any redeeming feature. His death brought relief to the nation, and the accession of Henry III under the guardianship of William Marshall, whom everyone trusted, increased the hope in the future.

Henry III. Unfortunately, that hope was not sustained. The Short Chronicle (1105) criticizes Henry for the Barons' War, and laments the death of Simon de Montfort; the strife arose "þoru wickede red" (line 1036) and the king's antagonism to Simon is attributed to the fact that Simon "wolde haue goude lawes"[2] (line 1038) and for that reason he was killed. According to another version of this chronicle, Henry loved churches more than castles, "heye halles peynted wiþ floures / . . . . / He loued noiþer fiȝt ne striif." (2290-92) This may refer to

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[1]Hardyng's Chronicle, (710), ed. H. Ellis, London, 1812, written almost two and a half centuries after John's death, and probably not very reliable, repeats most of the criticisms given above, and adds that John's tax levies were also hated:

"In his first yere a taxe he tooke full out,
Of eche plough land thre shyllynges fully payed,
For whiche the people bitterly for him prayed." (Capiter Cxli)

[2]The Provisions of Oxford and the Statutes of Westminster were baronial reforms aimed at limiting the king's power. Both stem from the Magna Charta.

the French courtiers with whom the king surrounded himself, and by whom he is supposed to have been influenced.

The "Song on the Battle of Lewes" (3155)[1] is strongly partisan to Simon de Montfort, and since it is the first political song in English, considerable discussion is justified. It is a soldier's song, undoubtedly meant to be sung over the campfires of the victorious army, full of sarcastic taunts, derisive and contemptuous of Henry's army and supporters, and particularly of the king's brother, Richard, Earl of Cornwall and King of Almaigne (Alemania), to whom it is addressed; the thirty thousand pounds mentioned in the first stanza was the amount offered to Richard to make peace between the king and the barons:

Sitteþ alle stille ant herkneþ to me:
þe kyng of Alemaigne, bi mi leaute,
þritti þousent pound askede he
For te make the pees in þe countre,
Ant so he dude more.
Richard,
þah þou be ever trichard,
Tricchen shalt þou never more.

Richard of Alemaigne, whil þat he wes kyng;
He spende al is tresour opon swyvyng;
Haveþ he nout of Walingford o ferlyng:--
Let him habbe, ase he brew, bale to dryng,
Maugre Wyndesore!
Richard, etc.

Simon's tactics in the battle were simple and effective. He placed a weak group of Londoners in the center, and when Prince Edward charged, Simon with a superior force drove in from the flanks; the royal forces were divided and captured piece-meal. Richard of Almaigne found himself thus cut off and suffered the indignity described in these two stanzas:

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[1] Brown, Engl. Lyr. XIII Cent., pp. 131-2.

The kyng of Alemaigne wende do ful wel,
He saisede þe mulne for a castel;
Wiþ hare sharpe swerdes he grounde þe stel,
He wende þat þe sayles were mangonel
To helpe Wyndesore.
Richard, etc.

þe kyng of Alemaigne gederede ys host,
Makede him a castel of a mulnepost,
Wende wiþ is prude ant is muchele bost,
Brohte from Alemayne mony sori gost
To store Wyndesore.
Richard, etc.

The next two stanzas attack the Earl of Warenne who allegedly had robbed England to help the king, and the stanza following these criticizes another royal supporter, Hugh de Bigot. The last stanza criticizes Prince Edward and predicts exile. Edward was kept prisoner by Simon until the former escaped.

Be þe luef, be þe loht, sire Edward,
þou shalt ride sporeless o þy lyard
Al þeryhte way to Dovere-ward;
Shalt þou never more breke foreward,[1]
Ant þat reweþ sore;
Edward, þou dudest ase a shreward,
Forsake þyn emes lore![2]
Richard, etc.

There are no direct jibes at Henry, although the poem may be incomplete; the listing of royal supporters may end with the same kind of attack on the king. The indirect criticism, although it is barely a criticism, is the mock pity for "Wyndesore," which probably stands for the king. The fifth stanza may refer to Henry:

By God, þat is a-boven ous, he dude muche synne
þat lette passen over see þe erl of Warynne:
He haþ robbed Engelond, þe mores ant þe fenne,
þe gold ant þe selver, ant y-boren henne,
For love of Wyndesore.

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[1]A reference to Edward's impetuous charge on the Londoners. He learned his lesson well.

[2]Edward's uncle was Simon, who had married Henry's sister. Richard of Almaigne was also an uncle, the king's brother, but it seems more likely that the reference is to Simon.

The nation as a whole frowned on large amounts of money leaving the country. The criticism of the king is indirect, but it is there; the criticism is not at all clear, but it is clearly a criticism.

Henry III is the last king discussed in Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle (727). The account of that reign is a long one, but the chronicler does not offer many criticisms. Peter de Roches is considered an evil counsellor to the king, and so are the French favorites of a later period thought to be injurious to the poor as well as to the barons. The attempt of the barons to force the king to accept the Provisions of Oxford and the Statutes of Westminster is recounted, and so also is the disagreement among the barons which prevented any lasting control of the monarch by the barons. An interesting reference is made to the message Simon de Montfort sent to the king just before the battle of Lewes, promising fealty if the king would "graunte hom þe god lawes . & habbe pite of is lond." (11,356) The king of course refused. The chronicler mentions the incident of the windmill at that battle and praises the knight who captured Richard of Almaigne. (11,383) Prince Edward escapes from his captors and leads the royal forces, swollen with the dissident barons, against Simon at Evesham in 1265. The chronicler remarks: "Suich was þe morþre of einesham . uor bataile non it nas ." (11,736) Simon de Montfort was slain and foully dismembered; great revenge was taken on the barons and the baronial cause was all but crushed. Such cruelty, says the chronicler, caused "a derk weder . / . Grisloker weder þan it was . ne miȝte anerþe be" (11,742-45). The royal vengeance may have caused some of the barons to go to desperate lengths; Simon de Montfort the younger held the castle of Kenilworth against the royal besiegers, and even against the power of the Church. Henry asked the pope to send a legate who, in full regalia, laid the

papal curse upon the rebels, but the rebels retaliated in a manner that illustrates the tough ribaldry of the medieval soldiery:

> Hii of þe castel tolde . her of gret despit .
> Cope & oþer cloþes . hii lete make of wit .
> & maister philip porpeis . þat was a quointe man .
> Clerc and hardi of is dedes . & hor cirurgian .
> Hii made a wit legat . in þis cope of wit .
> A3e þe oþer rede . as him in despit .
> & he stod as a legat . vpe þe castel walle .
> & amansede king & legat . & hor men alle .
> Swuich game ilaste longe . among hom in suich striue. (11,922-930)

Kenilworth capitulated and Simon escaped his father's fate. The kingdom had a respite from strife. Prince Edward had taken the cross when Henry died in 1272.[1]

Edward I. There seem to be no complaints about Edward I, 1272-1307, a much better ruler than his father, a better soldier, a more efficient, vigorous and rescourceful administrator. It is difficult to account for this lack. It may be accidental that no verse survives containing complaints about this king, particularly since there are few verses in English from his reign. It may be that Edward I distracted the people with his wars against the Welsh, Scotch, and French, the cost of which was borne by the nobility on a more efficient basis of duties, and by the clergy who found themselves taxed without their consent. Yet the fact is that neither group voiced their complaints in English verse.

Edward II. The verse of the reign of Edward II, however, contains a number of complaints. The traditional apprehension regarding a young king is indicated in the Short Chronicle (1105) by the prayer

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[1] Hardyng's Chronicle (710), however, criticizes the barons and defends the king's French favorites. There is a hint of lost criticism in the chronicler's defense of Prince Edward; Edward was not crookbacked, "As some menne wrote the right lyne to depryue." (Capiter Cxlvii)

"Saue oure ȝonge kyng Edward / & ȝyue hym grace his londe to ȝeme." Other poets were apprehensive too; "An Elegy on the Death of Edward I" (205)[1] praises the dead king and holds his example up for the young king to see:

Nou is Edward of Carnavan
  King of Engelond al aplyht,
God lete him ner be worse man
  Then is fader, ne lasse of myht
  To holden is pere-men to ryht.
Ant understonde good consail,
  Al Engelond for te wisse ant diht;
Of gode knyhtes darh him nout fail.

Such apprehension was justified.[2] A poem written about 1311, "On the King's Breaking the Magna Charta" (1857), in Anglo-Norman and English, contains a direct criticism of Edward. "One can make and unmake, something done too often, and therefore England is ruined . . . ";

Nostre prince de Engletere,
  Par le consail de sa gent,
At Westminster after the feire
  Made a gret parlement.
La chartre fet de cyre,
  Jeo l'enteink et bien le crey,
It was holde to neih the fire,
  And is melten all awey.

The poet then considers in a rather general way the reasons "Whi Engelond is brouht adoun." Four philosophers answer the question in varying ways; the first says:

. . . I understonde
Ne may no king wel ben in londe,
  Under God Almihte,
Put he cunne himself rede,
Hou he shal in londe lede
  Everi man wid riht.

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[1]Wright, Pol. Songs, pp. 246-50.

[2]1307 is the date of composition given by the Middle English Dictionary, "Plan and Bibliography" fascicle (Ann Arbor, 1954), but if the poem were written later, and was intended to seem to have been written in 1307, then the prayer is really a complaint. The same device is used in the political prophecy.

Now instead of right counsel, might rules:

> For might is riht,
> Liht is night,
> And fiht is fliht.
> For miht is riht, the lond is laweles;
> For niht is liht, the lond is loreles,
> For fiht is fliht, the lond is nameles.[1]

While these statements are general, the application is clearly meant to apply to Edward, who could not prevent his barons from murdering his favorites, favorites who gave self-interested counsel, and who could not win a battle. The other three philosophers give similar reasons; luxury, covetousness and pride reign. The last philosopher returns to the traditional concept of the willful king, unwilling to accept good counsel. The "King Counseilles" theme appears time and time again; it is an indirect attack upon the king, made indirectly because the king rules by a divine right that cannot be questioned without committing heresy and treason.

The theme of the child as king is utilized in another poem, described as "The Government of Edward II Criticized"(4235):

> Wos maket of a clerc hurle.
> And prelat of a cheurle.
> And of a child maked king.
> þanne is þe londe vndirling.[2]

This idea appears very often, but not in connection with the ideas of the first two lines.[3]

The most famous poem of complaint is "The Song of the Husbandman"

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[1]These rhymes seem deliberately obscure, almost runic; the last line may be a criticism of England's ability to wage victorious war. "Because battles turn to retreats, the land has lost its reputation."

[2]Zettle, EETS 196, p. 107.

[3]The criticism of men who cross the lines dividing the classes increases during the 14th century; the idea is common, and traditional.

(696).[1] Written during the reign of Edward II, it contains complaints about the high taxes which were taken from the yeoman farmer. The poem gains much of its effect from the listing of the numerous officials who demand their due. Beset on every side by continual duties and taxes, his land and cattle and other goods dwindling, by bad crop years, and by his feudal dues, the narrator concludes: "Ase god is swynden anon, as so for te swynke." All these ills derive from the king, is the indirect complaint.

Ich herde men upo mold make muche mon,
  Hou he beþ i-tened of here tilyynge:
"Gode 3eres and corn boþe beþ a-gon,
  Ne kepeþ here no sawe ne no song synge.
Nou we mote worche, nis þer non oþer won,
  Mai ich no lengore lyve wiþ mi lesinge.
3et þer is a bitterore bit to þe bon,
  For ever þe furþe peni mot to þe kynge.
Þus we carpeþ for þe kyng, and carieþ ful colde,
  And weneþ for te kevere, and ever buþ a-cast.

The speaker attacks the rich who "pileþ þe pore" and afflict them with the numerous supervisors. The master beadle with his writ sealed with the green wax for taxes appears:

3et comeþ budeles wiþ ful muche bost:
  "Greyþe me selver to þe grene wax:
Þou art writen y my writ, þat þou well wost."
  Mo þen ten siþen told y my tax:

The husbandman gives all he has saved to meet the demands, and must pay a bribe as well:

Comeþ þe maister budel, brust ase a bore,
  Seiþ he wole mi bugging bringe ful bare.
Mede y mot munten, a mark oþer more,
  Þah ich at þe set dey sulle mi mare.
Þus þe grene wax as greveþ under gore,
  Þat me us honteþ ase hound deþ þe hare.
. . . .
To seche selver to þe kyng y mi seed solde:
  Forþi mi lond leye liþ, and leorneþ to slepe.

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[1] Brandl, p. 134.

The generalization is not lacking: thus evil will walks the land, law is lost, falsehood fattens, and the world is filled with woe. The poem is contrived, perhaps, but it is artfully contrived; the reader senses the dwindling hope of the speaker in his increasingly hopeless situation. The bitterness makes the criticism emphatic, but the tone is full of lamentation and despair as well. When the head is sick, the limbs ache.

The Short Chronicle (1105) attributes many of the ills of the reign to Edward's counselors, Peter Gaveston and Hugh Despenser. The barons accused Gaveston of treachery and summarily cut off his head. The chronicler says that Edward

> . . . les his lond saun faile
> þurch his wicked conseyle
> þurch sir Howe þe Spenser
> þat was his wicked conseyller (I, 2345-8)

The strife between the barons and the king is referred to in this prayer:

> . . . send good pees bytween þe kyng
> And þe baruns opon alle þing
> And alle þe gode men in þis lond
> God shelde him fram werre strong. (I, 1134-7)

The blame for this contention should not fall on the king alone, but on the barons, who, throughout this period, squabbled fiercely. The king deserves censure if he cannot control his nobles, as Henry III and Edward II could not. "The Simonie" (4165) alleges that the king's councillors and officials rob his taxes and argue for increasing tax levies (319 ff.). Edward II was the object of many complaints.

Edward III. The fifty-year reign of Edward III, 1327-1377, is a period in which many complaints against many objects were composed, but practically none attacked the king personally. He was praised for his military glory by Laurence Minot, and in a poem on his death (5), he is truly lamented. Sir Israel Gollancz suggests that Wynnere and Wastoure

(3137) is a covert criticism of the monarch and his son for their extravagence in war and peace on the one hand, and for their shrewd encouragement of commerce on the other, both to the detriment of the nation. Edward encouraged trade in order to find money for the war but was notoriously generous in maintaining his own personal establishment. The Black Prince was well-loved by his friends for his lavish gifts, and well-hated by his peasants who eventually paid for them. The poem criticizes the excesses of both Wynnere and Wastoure, as will be discussed below, but it also criticizes the king.

To what extent Piers Plowman (1459) complains about the king is difficult to determine. The B text, written circa 1378, mentions the coronation of Richard II, and refers to a number of events in the reign of Edward III. The story of belling the cat has a vague similarity to the events of the later parliaments, during which several of the king's ministers, and even Alice Perrers, the king's mistress, were indicted and forced to quit the king's entourage. They quickly regained power and crushed those who indicted them. The cat might even be the king, and the rats and mice the parliament,[1] but it is difficult to be sure; the poet speaks with similar restraint:

> What þis meteles bemeneth . ȝe men þat be merye,
> Deuine ȝe, for I ne dar . bi dere god in heuene! (208-9)

The criticism of the king is almost always indirect, and perhaps the poet meant the listener to have Edward in mind when he describes the trial of Lady Mede. What is said there in a general way is perhaps intended to refer specifically to Edward; there is no way of knowing for certain. The story itself is simple: Lady Mede has become too

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[1]The "Kitten" is likely John of Gaunt.

powerful:

> There she is wel with þe kyng . wo is þe rewme,
> For she is fauorable to þe fals . and fouleth trewthe ofte. (III, 152-3)

The lady is accused by Theology, and the case is brought to the king. Conscience refuses to marry her and says that Reason will punish wrong-doers; Reason comes and advises the king to act with strict justice. If the vision does refer to the actual political situation, then the implication is that Edward has been badly advised, by Fede and Falsehood, that he has not acted justly and strictly, and that he has not governed with reason nor conscience. This is a severe criticism if the vision is meant to be "divined" so.

In the fifth passus Conscience counsels the king: ". . . þe comune to louye, / It is þi tresore, if treasoun ne were . and triacle at þi nede.'" (V, 49-50) but in the 19th passus, a king comes forward and vindicates himself. He makes the usual medieval claims; he is the law and can never act contrary to justice; he can take what he needs from both Church and commons without reproof. Conscience answers him with a surprising condition:

> "in condicioun," quod conscience . "þat þow konne defende
> And rule þi rewme in resoun . riȝt wel, & in treuth,
> Take þow may in resoun . as þi lawe asketh;
> Omnia tua sunt ad defendendum, set non ad depredandum!"
> (XIX, 474-7)

The implied criticism is clear.

Richard II. A number of poems survive that are important for the complaints they contain about Richard II, 1377-1399, and the events of his time, many more than were written in Edward's time. The B and C texts of Piers Plowman, Gower's Confessio Amantis (2662) with its two beginnings and endings, Pierce the Ploughmans Crede (663),[1] Mum and

[1] W. W. Skeat, ed., Oxford, 1906.

Sothsegger (*6), and numerous shorter poems. One of these is the quite famous, "Distich on the Year 1391" (3306):

> The ax was sharpe, the stokke was harde,
> In the xiiii yere of Kyng Richarde.[1]

This grim verse evidently criticizes the severity of the punishment the king meted out. The usual complaint is repeated; the king is evilly advised. He was quite young when he came to the throne; the "Elegy on the Death of Edward III" (5) says: "An ympe biginnes for te growe." A macaronic complaint of 1388 (3113) moans:

> Englond sum tyme was
> regnorum gemma vocata;
> Of manhod the flowre
> ibi quondam floruit omnis;
> . . . .
> The kyng knowyth not alle
> non sunt qui vera loquuntur

Exactly what "no one tells the king the truth" means cannot be answered; it may mean that the king is not intelligent enough to choose good advisers, and not intelligent enough to rule wisely himself. A long poem that attacks the king's ministers and the king himself is Mum and the Sothsegger (*6), known before the discovery of another fragment as Richard the Redeles. The R fragment of some 770 lines is told in the first person. The poet is at church in Bristol when news arrives that while Richard is fighting "pe wilde Yrisshe" Henry of Lancaster had entered the kingdom in the East. The people wonder which to support; most of them wish an end to misrule and a settlement of their grievances and so support Henry. After a short advertisement of his book, wherein the poet apologizes for his temerity in giving advice--an apologia in advance--the poem proper begins:

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[1]Sisam, p. 161.

Now, Richard þe redeles / reweth on 3ou-self,
þat lawelesse leddyn 3oure lyf / and 3oure peple bope; (I, 1-2)

The king has ruled with guile and worked his will on the people. Covetousness rules his counselors and his crown is cracked. The courtiers wished luxury and ease, and so they combined to pluck the pence of the poor. No one dares complain for fear of the dukes. Richard favored young men in fancy clothes, and the true knights and wise men are shoved to the end of the hall. This theme is repeated throughout the R fragment. The king gave a number of liveries and had many retainers, and these men took from the poor under the guard of their White Hart badges. He packed the parliament with his own supporters and got them to grant high taxes. The king was too extravagent, wasted his money, and had to raise more.[1] The king is quite directly criticized; he is the cause of spreading evils.

The M fragment is 1751 lines long, too long to examine here; its thesis is that no one is willing to tell the truth, but only to stay silent because preferment is given to the tactful. The poet wanders through courts and schools, towns, and monasteries, (and into a vision as well) seeking the answer to the question, "who is right, Mum or Sothsegger?" Those who side with Mum, and most do, are thereby condemned. Mum is the source of evil in the land, says the poet; the effect of such a statement is a warning to, and a criticism of, the king.

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[1]Hardyng's Chronicle (710) devotes six stanzas to a description of the excesses of Richard's court; ten thousand came to dinner every day; there were three hundred cooks, thousands of chambermaids, grooms, and yeomen, all dressed in finery. There were hundreds of clerics, some of them quite unlettered. Lechery was privy solace, especially for the clergy. The description seems exaggerated, but the last two lines sound true: "Great taxe ay the kyng tooke through all the land, / For whiche commons hym hated bothe free and bond." (Capiter Cxciii) Hardyng reports this as hearsay, but most agree that Richard was excessively extravagent.

Gower lessened his earlier praise of Richard in the second version of the Confessio (2662), both at the beginning and at the ending of the poem. The poem originally ended with a prayer for the king, but the revised form is a prayer for the state of England. Gower includes the complaints about Richard mentioned above: "For ther mai be no worse thing / Than Covoitise aboute a king:" (V,2229-30). A king should give largesse, but he should not be prodigal; he should be wary of flatterers. Gower criticizes the large number of retainers kept by the nobility, but does not criticize the wearers of the White Hart. Gower even repeats some of the general complaints:

> And forto lokyn evyrmore,
> Wher of the poeple pleigneth sore,
> Toward the lawes of oure lond,
> Men sein that trouthe hath broke his bond
> And with brocage is goon aweie,
> So that no man can se the weie
> Wher forto fynde rightwisnesse. (VIII, 3029-35)

The poet discusses the duties of a king and emphasizes that a king must rule himself well before he can rule his people; he should not be proud, nor indulge in lust. Since this advice has been substituted for praise of the king, a complaint may be implied.[1]

There is a correlation between the number of complaints occuring in a given reign about the king and the fate of the king; the correlation may be accidental, that is, a result of some other cause, but it is still curious that John, Henry III, Edward II, and Richard II received more criticism than Edward I and Edward III, and that Edward II and Richard II were deposed. The criticisms are indirect, more of the king's counsellors

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[1]Gower seems to be playing a game of "if the shoe fits" and he is careful to have the king's size. The General Complaint may be phrased in abstractions for this purpose. Other indirect references employ this device, for example, Piers Plowman; vide infra, Chapter VI, "The Temper, Devices, and Forms of Complaint."

than of the king himself, and while the indirectness may be politic and tactful, the intensity of the complaints and particularly their repetition suggests that the king was complained about orally much more than is suggested by the traditional view of medieval society as static and serene.[1] The following category reviews the complaints about the king's counsellors which are really criticisms of the king, and adds those complaints which appear to be focussed on the counsellors directly.

The King's Counsellors

The complaints about the king's advisers bear investigation because the verses reveal much of the popular understanding of the government. The popular understanding of government seems oversimple, perhaps, but that itself is significant. A poem on the times, of the reign of Edward II, with the fable of the lion, fox, wolf, and ass (4144), has this stanza:

> Þos kingis ministris beþ i-schend,
> To riȝt and law þat ssold tak hede,
> And al þe lond fort amend:
> Of þos þevis hi takeþ mede.
> Re þe lafful man to deþ i-broȝt,
> And is catel a-wei y-nom:
> Of his deþ ne telliþ hi noȝt,
> Bot of har prei hi hab som. (33-40)

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[1]Oral complaints were probably composed; R. M. Wilson, in The Lost Literature of Medieval England (London, 1952), pp. 201-2, notes the following:

> "In the following year [1378] an account of certain happenings at Oxford tells of a song against the young king, Richard II, and this time it is definitely stated to have been in English. A member of the king's household came to Oxford. There he was serenaded by some of the students with a song in English 'containing words against the honour of the king,' the affair ending with a general discharge of arrows through the window of his room. Complaint was made, and the Chancellor and vice-chancellor of the University were summoned before the Council. When it appeared that no punishment had been inflicted upon the culprits, the Chancellor was made to resign and the vice-chancellor imprisoned."

The fable illustrates this theme dramatically. A debate between a courtier and a soldier (1475) contrasts a sycophant and his lies and flattery with the sincere and suffering soldier. The most specific attack on particular counsellors uses puns on the names of courtiers of Richard II (3529); the assumption is that the puns are recognizable to the listeners of the time, just as the general complaints awoke specific events in the memories of the hearers:

> Ther is a busch that is forgrowe;
> Crop hit welle, and hold hit lowe,
> or elles hit wolle be wilde.
> The long gras that is so grene,
> Hit most be mowe, and raked clene;
> forgrowen hit hath the fellde.
>
> The grete bagge, that is so mykille,
> Hit schal be kettord, and maked litelle;
> the bothem is ny ought.
> Hit is so roten on ych a side,
> Ther nul no stych with odur abyde,
> to set thereon a clout.[1]

The "busch" is Sir John Bushey; the grass that is so green is Sir Henry Greene, and the "bagge" is Sir William Bagot. The events noted in the poem require much explanation; briefly they are these: Bushey (busch) brought about the death of the duke of Gloucester (Thomas of Woodstock, the swan, "a gentel bryde"); Greene slew the earl of Arundel (a worthy steed, a reference to the Arundel crest); Bagot ("bagge") procured the banishment of the earl of Warwick. The son of the duke of Gloucester was carried to Ireland, "an uncod place," and kept in prison; the son of the earl of Arundel, Thomas, found refuge with Henry, duke of Lancaster, ("an eron"), in the north. The basic metaphor of the overgrown field now becomes overloaded with other birds; the geese make a parliament and support the heron while the peacocks (a reference to Richard's other

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[1]Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 363-6.

gaily dressed retainers) gather their forces. The heron will rest on the bush and take his prey on the green; the bag is full of rotten corn (evidently the profits of the wicked counsellor) and the peacocks and the geese will be fed. The bush will be cut down and uprooted and taken to town; the rot in the grass will be "dynged ouȝt" and the great bag will be hung up to dry, the corn will dribble out through the tears and rents:[1]

> Now God, that mykelle is of myȝt,
> Grant us grace to se that syȝt,
> ȝyf hit be thy wille;
> Our lene bestes to have reste
> In place that hem lyketh beste,
> that were in point to spylle.

The counsellor is covetous, gives bad advice to further his own ends, and uses his position to get rid of his enemies; these deeds harm the nation. The quasi-divinity of the king protects him from direct attack; the power of the nobles is their insurance. The poem was written soon before or soon after the deposition when retaliation was less likely. It should be noted that perhaps this poem, and Mum and the Sothsegger, may be commenting on the last reign in such a way as to advise the present king.

Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) comments on the means the courtier employs to gain his ends:

> Thees knightz of þe cunseil þat nygh þe king dwellen,
> And eeke lordz y-lettred of coone lawe and ofre,
> Forto kepe his coroune fro couetous peuple,
> Han pulled þaym-self þe peres right to þe pure stalke,
> and lickid so þe leves - he hath þe leste dele,
> For þay holden of his honour halfendele and more. (1648-53)

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[1]Gower uses the same names in his Cronica Tripertita, which describes the same period. The Complete Works of John Gower, ed., G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1899-1902).

The poet also warns that young men make poor counsellors; they lack experience and sobriety, are more interested in fancy clothes than in sound thinking.[1] Piers Plowman (1459) indicates the same vice when Reason says he will not have pity on Mede until . . . "þe kynges conseille . be þe commune profyte" (IV, 123). Charity used to walk the earth--once even wore a friar's frock--but now "In kynges courte he cometh ofte . þere þe conseille is trewe, / Ac if coueityse be of þe conseille . he will nouȝt come þer-inne." R. M. Wilson gives evidence that a song once existed which criticized Peter de la Mare, the Speaker of Edward III's parliament, and that another song even attacked John of Gaunt; no other information about these lost songs exists.[2]

Parliament

The verse of complaint does not have very much to say about the political functions of the king's counsellors, nor much to remark about parliament. The distinction between the council and parliament was probably less clear than this analysis would suggest. The curia regis includes all those whom the king invites to advise him, and the development of a House of Lords separate from a House of Commons was not completed at the end of the 14th century. The king had his favorites and to them gave his ear, but the power of the lesser gentry, the knights of the shire, increased when the knights entered into a kind of coalition with the merchants, the guilds, and other burghers. While the great lords are attacked for their corruption, the lower elements of parliament

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[1]Gower (2662) seems to be in agreement with Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) in his criticism of young counsellors: ". . . yong conseil, which is to warm, / Er men be war doth ofte harm, / Old age for the conseil serveth . . . ." (VII, 4135-37).

[2]Wilson, pp. 201-2.

gained influence and control, intermittently and in varying degrees, over the purse. When the king wanted taxes voted, parliament deliberated and presented petitions of grievances before acting officially upon the grants. Richard, always in need of money, resorted to "packing" the parliament with his supporters.

The fourth passus of Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) (R fragment) describes a parliament in session, almost as clearly as if the poet had been there. The passus begins with a criticism of the extravagence of Richard's household and his court dandies and his need for money, most of which had been taken from the poor or got on credit elsewhere.

> And whanne þe reot and þe reuell / þe rent þus passid,
> And no þing y-lafte / but þe bare baggis,
> þan felle it afforse / to fille hem ageyne,
> And feyned sum folie / þat failid hem neuer,
> And cast it be colis / with her conceill at euene,
> To haue preuy parlement / for proffitt of hem-self, (IV, 20-25)

Writs were sent to the great peers and prelates and to sheriffs summoning them to parliament. The sheriffs were instructed to choose knights who would support the government's business. The first event of the parliament was the Chancellor's speech for the crown; he . . .

> . . . prononcid þe poyntis / aperte to hem alle,
> And meved for mony / more þan for out ellis,
> In glosinge of grette / lest greyues arise.
> . . . .
> But 3it for þe manere / to make men blynde,
> Some argued agein rith / þen a good while,
> And said, "we beth seruantis / and sallere fongen,
> And ysent fro þe shiris / to shewe what hem greueth,
> And to parle for her prophete / and passe no ferthere,(IV, 36-48)

And to grant no taxes wrongfully, unless there were war. The description of the members is amusing and contemptuous; some were ciphers "þat noteth a place / and no þing availith," and some had supped with Simon, others were talebearers to the king who informed on friends; some slept; some talked nonsense; some were so stupid that they got lost in their arguments.

But there were others who evidently wished to gain some concessions or not to grant the tax. The metaphor of the ship is used here, and the lords lay alee, blamed the skipper for his ignorance of the course, and warned him of the "wedir-side"; the mast bent at the month-end, and if they had not struck sail, the blast would have blown them overboard. The "blast" probably refers to the king's power. Some were privy with the council and knew how the debate should end, "Or some of þe semble / shulde repente" (IV, 85), and others went with the majority no matter what.

> Some parled as perte / as prouyd well after,
> And clappid more for þe coyne / þat þe kyng owed hem[1]
> Thanne for comfforte of þe comyne / þat her cost paied,
> . . . .
> And some dradde dukis / and Do-well for-soke; (IV, 88-93)

The fragment breaks off here, but it is assumed that the ending found the counsellors victorious.

What is interesting is the description of the parliament, the cynical and sarcastic attitude toward the institution, as if it were incapable of anything worth-while. The specific criticism is that parliament was "packed," powerless, and cowardly. The implication that the king would use force upon some of the members if they did not vote correctly is part of the attack on the maintenance of retainers.

The M fragment contains a passage which describes the result of parliament's grievances:

> And yf a burne bolde hym to bable þe sothe
> And mynne hym of mischief þat misse-reule asketh,
> He may lose his life and laugh here no more,
> Or y-putte into prisone or y-pyned to deeth
> Or y-brent or y-shent or sum sorowe haue. (165-169)

Mum is the master of all estates. When the poet encounters in his dream

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[1]Probably the great merchants or burghers.

a bee-keeper killing drones, the question is posed: ". . . who shoulde haue / The maistry, Mum or þe sothe-segger." (1101-2) And the bee-keeper replies:

> For of al þe mischief and mysse-reule þat in þe royaulme groweth
> Mum hath be maker alle þees many yeres,
> And eek more and moulde, I may wel aduowe;
> And principally by parlement to proue hit I þenke,
> When knightz for þe comune been come for þat deede,
> And sembled ferto shewe þe sores of þe royaulme
> And spare no speche þough þay spille shuld,
> But berste oute alle þe boicches and blaynes of þe hert
> And lete þe rancune renne oute a-russhe al at oones
> Leste þe fals felon festre with-ynne; (1115-1124)

The festering within will cause rebellion,[1] so it is better that parliament voice the grievances. The criticism of parliament is simply that they have not done so.

These passages are similar to the fable of belling the cat in the Prologue of Piers Plowman (1459). The rats and mice appear to be debating the means of belling the powerful cat just as the hotheads burst out their complaints in Mum and the Sothsegger (*6), and are cooled by the wise counselors. A dispute occurs among the rats and mice about the responsibility for paying for the bell; the dispute indicates how difficult it was to achieve united strength, just as the members of parliament in Mum haggle and quibble.[2] The contempt for parliament in Mum is perhaps similar to Langland's use of rats and mice, and his term "longe studye" (151) for their debate is an ironic commentary on the procedure of parliament described in Mum.

The details given in Mum suggest that the poet was a member of parliament who thought that body could possibly be an agent for good,

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[1]The poet is perhaps profiting from hind-sight, the Peasants' Revolt of 1381.

[2]Vide: Mum, IV, 88-90, supra, pp. 81-2.

was disappointed when it was not, and angry at those who prevented it from being so. He seems wise and realistic in his expectation of failure. Langland does not seem particularly interested in parliamentary reform; his aim seems almost exclusively moral.

The aims of complaint are twofold, and they are consistent, but they are not often found together: the reform of morals of men, and the reform of actions or institutions. The former is moral and ethical, to save the soul; the latter is concerned with the improvement of the world and the world's institutions. They are consistent in that moral institutions foster good morals in men; the purpose of the earthly society is the establishment of Christianity on earth, and the salvation of souls at the Last Judgment. Langland is more interested in the individual's soul, and the author of Mum in the improvement of man's earthly condition.

There are few suggestions that laws should be changed or discarded. Parliament had no legislative function; the curia regis handled matters of law. The petition of grievances gradually became a way of securing necessary legislation. For the most part, law was not made but was found by judges upon inquiry into custom or the statutes. The M fragment of Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) makes a few references to laws and customs:

> . . . I herde hit myself
> Y-cried at þe crosse, and was þe king-is wille
> Of custume of coylaige þe comunes shuld be easid.
> But how þe couenant is y-kepte I can not descryue,
> For with þe king-is cunseil I come but silde. (147-151)

In another passage the poet speaks of the king's revenue; once, he says, it was sufficient, but now it has been taken from him by those lords who should have protected it:

Not-withstanding statutz ful strattely y-made
To stable many statutz and strong lawes make.
Put execucion falle what may hit availle
Ne more þenne þe mose may or þe maij floures
To breke dovne bastiles þat beste is y-made. (1641-45)

The laws are good, but they are not followed. The criticism is not of the laws that exist, but of the lawbreakers; no new laws need be made.[1] Laws were given by the king, and parliament had little to do with them. There are no complaints that parliament had failed in this function, although such a criticism may be implied by the attack on parliament as weak and cowardly.

The complaints considered thus far in this chapter may be called "political" in the narrow sense, that is, concerned with the administration of the government. The complaints are few in number, and not very much more specific than the general complaint that the king is badly advised. Parliament has attracted little respect, and the nation as a whole seems satisfied with the laws that exist, but cry out against those who break the law. Let us now turn to the second large subcategory of the specific complaints about the nobility.

Economic Complaints

Political complaints and economic complaints are often connected, for both involve money. The attack in Rum and the Sothsegger (*6) on those who plunder the king's revenue is that the scrambling by the lords after his money leads to strife and conflict:

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[1]The poet does suggest one law: when he is discussing lawsuits he complains that the poor are at a disadvantage when suing a rich man. The rich man can afford to lose a suit but the poor man cannot, so that often a rich man can do as he wishes and will not be brought to justice. Legal costs are high, and so, the poet suggests, the cost of the writ should be borne by the loser. (1613 ff.)

This was grovnde and bigynnyng of gurdyng of heedes,
And eeke more of mourdre / and many-folde wronges
That han y-falle for foly withynne bees fourty wintre. (1554-6)

The lords' desire for riches and envy of each other caused civil strife; the people came to hate the tax collectors because they knew where the money went. The king's own income should not be thus pared; he needs it "for his haynous werres / To maynteyne his manhoode . . ." (1665) one of the few criticisms of the king for making war. To distinguish this as an economic complaint is to make a change in emphasis only, for it is political as well. With this emphasis in mind, a number of subjects will be considered.

The Waste of War and Strife

"The Simonie" answers the question "Whii werre and wrake in londe and manslauht is i-come" and why cattle starve and men go hungry and why food is so expensive. Covetousness is one answer, and it is the reason why men strive one against the other; the barons, full of pride, beran it:

The fend kidde his maistri, and arerede a strif,
That everi lording was bisi to sauve his owen lyf,
and his god.
God do bote thereon, for his blessede blod!

Gret nede hit were to bidde that the pes were brouht,
For the lordinges of the lond, that swich wo han i-wrouht,
That nolde spare for kin that o kosin that other;
So the fend hem prokede uch man to mourdren other
wid wille,
That al Engelond i-wis was in point to spille. (423-32)

The strife among the barons brought hardship to the peasantry as well. Wynnere and Wastoure (3137) lists soldiers and knights in the ranks of Wastoure; this implies a criticism of war, although it is not a direct one. Wastoure must sell his lands to find money for the war and this is generally economically dangerous to the nation. Wastoure is also

accused of not taking good care of his land. Gower, in "The Praise of Peace" (2587), states quite explicitly:

> The werre bringth in poverte at his heles,
> Wherof the comun people is sore grieved; (113-4)

Cities are ruined, laws weakened, and religion defiled in war. Gower seems to realize that war may be necessary, but it is still an evil, particularly for the peasants who fight it, and who ultimately must pay for it. Both war and civil strife are condemned, but the former more than the latter.

War as National Glory. For the most part war was praised rather than condemned. There are numerous poems and songs celebrating English victories over the Scotch and French; these verses reflect the Englishman's pride in his arms and in his country's military prowess, and they indicate what the Englishman thought of his enemies. The songs (3352, 2754) against the Scotch are full of rough derision:

> The fote folke
> Puth the Sectes in the polke,
> and nakned their nages[1]

Or:

> For scatred er þe Scottis
> & hodred in þer hottes,
> neuer þei ne the.
> Right als I rede,
> þei tombled in Tuede
> þat woned bi þe se.[2]

They are vigorously merry. Another poem celebrating the Scotch wars of Edward I is a "Song on the Execution of Sir Simon Fraser" (1883)[3] which begins in a captivating way:

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[1]Wright, Pol. Songs, pp. 295-6. [2]Wilson, p. 208.

[3]Wright, Pol. Songs, pp. 212-23.

Lystneþ, lordynges, a newe song ichulle bigynne
Of þe traytours of Scotlond þat take beþ wyþ gynne;
. . . .

þat y sugge by þis Scottes þat bueþ nou todrawe,
þe hevedes o Londone-brugge whose con y-knawe:
He wenden han buen kynges, ant seiden so in sawe;
Betere hem were han y-be barouns ant libbe in Godes lawe
Wiþ love.
Whose hateþ soth ant ryht, Lutel he douteþ Godes myht,
þe heye kyng a-bove. (1-15)

The details of the capture and judgment and execution are given with relish and glee. The falseness of the Scotch lords is the main idea; they swore fealty to Edward, but:

Fals wes here foreward so forst is in May,
That sonne from the southward wypeth away;

Only Robert the Bruce remains to be captured; if he were to surrender, the common people would be happy in peace. The poem ends with this warning:

Tprot, Scot, for þi strif!
Hang up þyn hachet and þi knyf,
Whil him lasteþ þe lyf
Wiþ þe longe shonkes.

The poems of Laurence Minot, written between 1333 and 1352 in the reign of Edward III, attack the Scotch and the French both. They need not be considered at any length. The Scotch are blamed for starting the war, for their boasting, censured for their rebellicusness, and praised for their bravery. They are full of guile as well. The poems praise Edward and his men in lavish terms. The poems against the Scotch taunt them for believing the promises of Philip of Valois and his son John, who incited the Scotch to attack England while she was fighting France; there is considerable glee in the taunt that the promises were never kept. The French are often attacked as cowards; in one poem (709) Philip flees from the English even though he has greater numbers because

the English were so formidably arrayed in battle formation.[1] The same terms of reproach used against the Scotch are employed against the French. Philip is supposed to have wept at the English successes (2149).[2] The last poem (3899)[3] heaps ridicule on John for the loss of the castle of Guines.[4] The Spanish foes fed the fishes after a sea battle near Sluys (1401); the Spaniards are considered to be prideful and thieving. Edward recaptured much of the booty the Spaniards had taken on their coastal raids, and taught them "new lare."[5]

While there are more poems concerned with the French than with the Scotch, the reader's impression is that the Scotch are derided more vigorously and more fiercely than the French. Perhaps the English respected the Scotch fighting ability more than they did that of the French. The Minot poems show considerable feeling for England as a nation, and reveal considerable disdain and contempt for other nations. The poems are happy and gleeful in mood, exultant, and full of indications of pride in England and her king. The existence of these poems may explain the dearth of complaints against war and the king: the nascent national feeling or patriotism would not find such poems very agreeable.

Taxes

One would expect that complaints about the king's wars might

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[1]Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 66-9. [2]Ibid., 75-80.

[3]Ibid., 89.

[4]An English archer named John of Doncaster and thirty followers out for booty gained access to the castle secretly, subdued a few guards, and captured the rest of the garrison while they were eating dinner. It was a marvelous feat and deserved such praise. The unhappy French are suitably mocked.

[5]Ibid., 87-9.

be diverted into complaints about the king's taxes which paid for the war, but such does not seem to be so. There are few poems attacking taxes. One of them is the "Song of the Husbandman" (#68) discussed in part above, whose central complaint is the fourth penny that goes to the king. The vehemence of the criticism can be sensed from the description of the beadles, with their rolls and writs with the green wax, sniffing for bribes, armed with unappeasable authority, and imperious in it. The blame is diverted from the king. This same idea is found in "The Simonie" (#165) where it is given even stronger statement:

> An if the king in his lond maketh a taxacioun,
> And everi man is i-set to a certain raunczoun,
> Hit shal be so forbisnet, totelli[ch] and totwitte,
> That halvendel shal pen in the fendes flitte
> Of helle;
> Ther beth so manye partyners may no penes telle.
>
> A man of Kent soundeth wel is hed to XII tunne rounde,
> And also muche seith another that reverth mest trouth to grounde,
> And beth an hep of lesinges sitten a-bitwen the hed.
> To lesen oure nedes hii have, but that is wel sped
> And sliche,
> That the pore is thus i-piled and the riche richer.
>
> Ac if the king hit wiste, I trowe he wolde be wroth,
> How the pore beth i-piled, and hu the silver goth;
> Hit is so deskatered bothe bi[der] and thicke,
> That halvendel shal ben stole, ar hit come to prikke
> And accounted;
> An if a pore man speke a word, he shal be foule afrounted.
>
> Ac were the king wel avised and wolde werche bi skille,
> Litel rede sholde he have swiche pore to pile;
> Thurfte him nouht seke tresor so fer, he mihte finde her,
> At justices, at shirreves, chevetaurs and chaunceler
> And at les:
> Swiche mihte finde him i-nouh and late pore men have pes. (301-24)

The obvious inequalities described in the second stanza above may reflect some antagonism between the rich and the poor; it is more likely that the rich man bribed the collector to assess his goods at a low level;

the poor man cannot afford a bribe. A macaronic poem "On the Rebellion of Jack Straw" (1382-90)[1] explains that high taxes are necessary because everyone robs the money-bags:

Tax has tenet us alle,
  Erobat hoc vere tot validorum,
The kyng therof had nalle,
  Fuit in manibus curialorum;
Hit had harde hensalle,
  Jam sanctus time dolorum;
Bevrance tale most falle,
  Propter regis malorum.

The poem is not at all sympathetic to the rebels; it gives the peculiar reason for the rebellion that although everyone is hurt by taxes, the peasants blame the king, when they should have blamed only the bad men who surround the king. The appropriate prayer to the king was "miserere", not "occidere".

The practice of complaining about taxes was due to the respect for the king's power and right, or authority, and the fact that men paid no tax. The levy of a poll tax is generally considered a cause of the peasants' revolt. There was a great amount of agitation and grumbling before the revolt occurred, but there are very few instances in the years of complaint which relate such turmoil.

The Peasants' Revolt of 1381

The conditions discussed thus far in this chapter, as well as those mentioned below, are related to the great rebellion of peasants in 1381. This event seems to have been long in brewing; there are various reasons for it. The plagues of 1348-49 had economic effects; the price of land rose, and the scarcity of labor caused wages to rise. The feudal system had also proved itself to be inefficient in some ways;

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[1]Ibid., p. 224

landlords more and more began to commutate feudal services of their peasants for money payments and rents. The landlord thereby got cash for his needs, often to pay soldiers to fulfill his military obligations to the king, and the peasant got more time for his own farming. The landlord then hired day laborers for the harvesting and planting. The plagues, making labor scarce and expensive, hastened this process. The wage-price spiral was becoming dangerous, although the rises were slow, and the Statute of Labourers of 1351 attempted to fix wages and prices and to compel workers and craftsmen to accept work from the first person to ask them and to prevent them from moving about to find higher wages. It was impossible to enforce this law. More and more villeins left the land, and the class of unattached laborers increased.

The most immediate cause of the revolt was a series of poll taxes which fell with increasing severity upon the class of landless workers; previous tax levies were laid on property. The first of these was in 1377, the second in 1379, and a third in 1380. Lunt remarks:

> This [third levy] was intended to be heavier on the rich than on the poor, but it was apportioned with such ignorance that in many communities the poor had to pay at a heavier rate than ever before. As a result false returns were made on a large scale. When the returns were sorted, the evasion was discovered. In 1381 commissioners were sent out to investigate the frauds and to collect from the evaders. The commissioner for Essex was resisted by force, and the villagers who participated in the riot at once aroused all Essex.[1]

Piers Plowman (1459) speaks of the discontented laborers with contempt:

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[1] W. E. Lunt, History of England (New York, 3rd. ed., 1947), p. 245. "The Simonie" (4165) suggests the fact that the tax evaders, corrupt officials, and bribery made the tax oppressive of the poor.

And þo wolde wastour nouȝt werche . but wandren aboute,
Ne no begger ete bred . þat benes Inne were,
But of coket or clerematyn . or elles of clene whete;
Ne none halpeny ale . in none wise dryhke,
But of þe best and of þe brounest . þat in borghe is to selle.
And laboreres þat haue no lande . to lyue on but her handes,
Deyned nouȝt to dyne a-day . nyȝt-olde wortes.
May no peny ale hem paye . ne no pece of bakoun,
But if it be fresch flesch other fische . fryed other bake,
And þat chaude or plus chaud . for chillyng of here mawe.
And but if he be heighlich huyred . ellis wil he chyde,
And þat he was werkman wrouȝt . waille þe tyme,
Ageines catones conseille . comseth he to iangle:--
Paupertatis onus pacienter ferre memento.
He greueth hym ageines god . and gruccheth ageines resoun,
And þanne curseth he þe kynge . and al his conseille after,
Suche lawes to loke . laboreres to greue. (VI, 304-320)

They had not complained when Hunger had threatened them; Piers warns them of evil times to come for their impertinence. The attitude of the laborers revealed in this passage resembles the famous distich (3922)[1] used by John Ball as a text for his sermon on Blackheath after the peasants had effected his release from prison:

When Adam dalf, and Eve span,
Who was then the gentleman?

The passages quoted from Piers Plowman and from John Ball's sermon have long been famous. A recent monograph on the Peasants' Revolt[2] interprets the Revolt in terms of the economic class struggle. More moderate historians, however, find a more complex explanation. The contention that the idea of social equality had a rough expression in the Revolt must be viewed with suspicion. It is more likely that the successful resistance of the Essex peasants to the tax collectors stimulated a sense that the peasants had a great deal more power than they thought they had. Their use of that power was quite conservative, on the whole,

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[1]Sisam, p. 152.

[2]Phillip Lindsay, and Reginald Groves, The Peasants' Revolt, 1381 (The Anchor Press, Tiptree, Essex, 1951?).

compared with the risings in France and the Low Countries in the same period. A fair assumption is that the peasants did not want to take over the government or force drastic reforms; they wished to present a petition of grievances in as effective a manner as possible. The complaints about parliament suggest that the comune had no voice in the established government.

The macaronic poem on the rebellion of Jack Straw (3256) is highly critical of the rebelling peasants. The insurrection, says the poet, began in Kent when some ruffians gathered arms, and, acting like fools, attacked the rich. Churls were their chieftans, and gathering others as they went from Kent to London, they demanded freedom from their bonds. They got charters to that effect from the king, little realizing that they were to have deeper bondage. Their pride increased and they began to riot. They slew the bishop, burned the Savoy palace, and killed others, notably Sir Robert Hales, the king's Treasurer. Finally Richard cast them down at Smithfield, and the revolt was over. The poem argues that taxes have harmed everyone and that the peasants really had no reason for the revolt; the poet exults in the peasants' easy belief in the charters and the revocation of them, a fact which does not endear the poet to the modern reader.

Other poems on the rebellion exist; two of these have been quoted above (1791 on page 22, and 1655 on page 38). Both say that truth is lost, and that pride and covetousness reign. They are general in statement, but their application is to the events of June, 1381. Another poem of the revolt (1796) is in a letter from John Ball to the peasants of Essex; it contains the famous reference to Piers Plowman. "Hobbe be Robbere" may be Sir Robert Hales, the Treasurer:

Iohon Schep, som tyme Seynte Marie preat of 3ork, and now of Colchestre, greteth wel Iohan Nameles, and Iohan þe Mullere, and Iohon Cartere, and biddeþ hem þat þei be war of gyle in borugh, and stondeth togidre in Godes name, and biddeþ Peres Plougman go to his werk, and chastise wel Hobbe þe Robbere, and takeþ wiþ 3ow Iohan Trewman, and alle hiis felawes, and no mo, and loke schappe 3ou to on heued, and no mo.

Iohan þe Mullere haþ yground smal, smal, smal;
þe Kynges sone of heuene schal paye for al.
Be war or ye be wo;
Knoweþ 3our freend fro 3our foo;
Haueth ynow, and seith 'Hoo';
And do wel and bettre, and fleth synne,
And seketh pees, and hold 3ou þerinne;
And so biddeþ Iohan Trewman and alle his felawes.[1]

The warning of guile is reminiscent of the general complaints, but the rest of the letter is business-like. The injunction is to maintain unity and discipline, and obey the leader. The document indicates the fairly complex organization of the revolutionaries, with John Trewman as liaison between the various groups. The names used give the air of a "front populaire" to the poem.

Hardyng, in his Chronicle (?1C), illustrates the bias of contemporary historians in these lines; the revolutionaries:

. . . asked hym all bondmen to bee free,
And taxe none euer after payed to bee.

They asked eke Iake Strawe & Wat Tiler
To bee made dukes of Essex & Kente,
To rule the kyng thens forth in peace and warre,
For they bee wyse of royall regiment. (Capiter CLxxxviii)

Such claims are extravagent. The rebellion was more orderly than most; the objects of destruction were manorial records and deeds, including those of monasteries, which bore testimony to feudal bonds; Sir Robert Hales was murdered, as was Archbishop Sudbury. The demands made to the king were simply that feudal dues be commutated to a modest fourpence

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[1]Sisam, p. 161.

rent. There was some indiscriminate looting in London as well. These acts could not justify, in retrospect at any rate, the vengeance taken on the peasants, which was swift, sure, and thorough. Rebellion was crushed; its objectives forgotten; the death of Wat Tyler at Smithfield and the execution of John Ball soon afterward were only the beginning of a rain of blood throughout the country.

A poem written soon after 1382 (4268)[1] refers to the rebellion and attacks the nobles who fled before the peasants. The revolt and the earthquake are God's punishments for sin:

> Whon þe Comuynes bi-gan to ryse,
> Was non so gret lord, as I gesse
> þat þei in herte bi-gon to gryse
> And leide heore Iolyte in presse.
> Wher was þenne heore worþinesse,
> Whon þei made lordes droupe & dare?
> Of alle wyse men I take witnesse,
> þis was a warnyng to be ware.

The poem is a general complaint on covetousness; there is no direct connection between covetousness and the rebellion, but the avarice of men caused God to make men revolt.

In spite of the tremendous importance, social, political, and economic, of the Peasants' Revolt, there are few comments about it in verse. It may be that poems about the revolt were repressed as deliberately as were the peasants. None of the historians of the period is favorable to the peasants, nor is Langland, nor the moralist just discussed. Except for John Ball and his comrades none was sympathetic; this fact makes their attempt all the more creditable and courageous.

The "Wynnere and Wastoure" Theme. The terms "winning" and "wasting" are used frequently in the complaints considered in these

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[1] Brown, Rel. Lyr. XIV Cent., pp. 186-8.

chapters, and they bear some scrutiny, for they reveal some of the medieval economic ideas. "Wynnyng" simply means the accumulation of money. The connotation is clearly that winning is evil when the means of obtaining it are evil. What has been said of covetousness in the chapter on the General Complaints applies here as well. The accumulation of too much money is another evil; money, in "Sir Peny" (1480):

> . . . makes many be forsworne,
> and sum life and saul forlorne,
> him to get and wyn.

"A Sarmun" (3365) didactically states the theory of worldly goods:

> Þoȝ man hit hab, hit nis noȝt his,
> Hit nis ilend him bot alone
> Fort to libbe is lif iwisse
> And help þe nedful þat nab non.
>
> Nou mani wrecche becommiþ þralle,
> Hi nul noȝt spene, bot ȝime in store;
> . . . .
> For niȝt and dai is al har þoȝte,
> How hi hit mow hab and winne,
> Fast to hold and spene riȝt noȝte,
> And leliþ ouer har lif in þinne.[1] (69-80)

Such a man shall wend to the devil. This is the traditional notion of "winning"; the opposite is equally evil, as in the list of the evils of the time: "A pore man a waster, haveles" (1820); usually a waster is a man who spends everything he has; the traditional meaning is a devastator or pillager.

The two terms were used for his own purposes, and in so doing were meanings added to them, by a poet around 1352-53. The "Good short refreyte" between Wynnere and Wastoure (3137) is interesting because it is not a moralistic and didactic poem, and because it is concerned with an economic and political problem of considerable difficulty. A number of complaints are made by both Wynnere and Wastoure but the

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[1]Heuser, pp. 89-97.

poem as a whole makes a complaint about the times, and reveals indirectly part of the reason for the Peasants' Revolt.

The poet detaches himself from the world of real events by putting the debate into a dream and making personifications of the two economic forces involved. In his dream the poet sees two large, glittering, and imposing armies approach each other over a wide field. As they make their preparations, a stalwart warrior appears over a hill between them, closely followed by a royal caravan that pitches a colorful tent. The knight calls the leaders of the two armies before him and leads them to the king. The armies are described by referring to their heraldic devices. In Wastoure's army are the nobles and their soldiers, richly dressed and accoutred; and they signify the senseless waste and impoverishment of war, the largesse of generous leaders, the expense of foreign campaigns with the consequent neglect of the land and the peasants. In Wynnere's ranks are the pope, the friars, and both foreign and domestic merchants; this army signifies those who accumulate wealth, and it refers particularly to the merchant class which had been fostered by Edward III in his attempts to raise money for the war.

The clear implication is that those in Wynnere's ranks are greedy; here is the poet's description of the friars:

> Thies are Sayn Franceys folke, þat sayen alle schall fey worthe;
> They aren so ferse and so fresche, þay feghtyn bot seldom.
> I wote wele for wynnynge thay wentten fro home;
> His purse weghethe full wele that wanne thaym all hedire. (159-62)

The debate before the king is reminiscent of the bold "flyting" of warriors before individual combat. Wastoure chides Wynnere for his craftiness and guile, his continuous scheming for gain, while he already has more than he can use:

> Let be thy cramynge of thi kystes, for Cristis lufe of heuen!
> Late the pople and the pore hafe part of thi siluere;
> For if thou wydwhare scholde walke, and waytten the sothe,
> Thou scholdeste reme for rewthe, in siche ryfe bene the pore.
> (255-58)

Indeed the unseen and unheard audience to the debate is the poor who are figuratively trapped between the two debaters and unable to extricate themselves. Wynnere replies that Wastoure's strife and extravagence destroy the winner's goods. Wastoure answers that at least he gives employment to the poor with his luxury. Wynnere describes a typical feast in great detail and charges that two Wastoures eat ten men's food. Wastoure argues that Wynnere controls the grain market and raises the price of food. He becomes quite angry: should lords live like lads a-foot, he asks? Then Wynnere comes to an important point: how, if you are so poor, can you buy your wife a rich robe, with trailing sleeves and decorated with ermine? Wynnere answers his own question: by selling your wood lots and hoping the second growth will do for your children. Wastoure explodes into a defense of his class:

> It lyes wele for a lede his leman to fynde,
> Aftir hir faire chere to forthir hir herte.
> Then will scho loue hym lelely as hir lyfe one . . . 418-420)

Wastoure warns Wynnere that "þe deuyll at þi dede-day schal delyn þi gudis" and gives his own idea of the purpose of life, not the wasting of it in piling up money, but to "Take þe coppe as it comes, þe case as it falles." The two points of view are clear, and both are worldly.

The judgment of Edward III is severe. Wynnere is to go to the pope at Rome where he will be well treated to luxury. Wastoure is to go to Cheapside and gull the country boys. The punishment is the opposite of the crime. There are other complaints implied in the poem, particularly of the Church--the pope is in Wynnere's ranks--and of the courtiers,

who are in Wastoure's army. The complaint about war is indirect, as is the criticism of Edward III for waging it. The Black Prince is perhaps criticised; Sir Israel Gollancz quotes from R. P. Dunn-Pattison's biography:

> Thus it was that he whom the nation idolized for his bravery and generosity, who was regarded throughout Europe as the most humane and courteous warrior of the day, was loathed and execrated by his own tenants and peasantry . . . . Debt was the curse of the Prince's life from the campaign of Crecy to the day of his death.[1]

Westoure's show seems to fit the Black Prince. The remarkable insight into the economic problem is that Wynnere and Wastoure are interdependent; each needs the other, and in moderation they are both beneficial to the nation, but the extreme of each activity is highly detrimental. Wastoure neglects his lands and the peasants on them suffer, or he sells them to Wynnere for cash to maintain his estate or go to war, and the peasants probably suffer then too. Wynnere is criticized not only for his attitude toward life, but for his avarice, and probably for his usury (traditionally defined as the use of money to make money rather than the use of money to feed, clothe, and house oneself). Sharp business practices harm the peasant whose economic life is shifting from a feudal to a commercial basis. The theory of the just price is difficult to practise, and undoubtedly many utilized the fluctuation in prices and wages to their own advantage.[2] Both Wynnere and Wastoure are criticized for their lack of consideration for the vast mass of humanity in large part dependent upon them; this is the most important complaint of the poem.

Another important consideration is that the merchant class is

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[1] The Black Prince (London, 1910), p. 129.

[2] Vide: the discussion of "Usury" in Chapter V infra.

given recognition for their influence. While there have always been wasters, among all classes, winners have been rather few; in this poem they are quite powerful. The wasters, on the other hand, seem to be identified with the nobility, idle barons home from the wars who do not want to return to their lands, who wish only to lead a life of gaiety. The conflict between the two is important because it illustrates the rising power of the merchant class and the contempt of the nobility for the merchants. The two terms of the title become fixed and are used in other poems.

A poem entitled "Mede and Muche Thank" (1475) is a dialogue between a courtier and a soldier; the courtier is a drone, a Wastoure:

> I likne a gloser, in eche weder
> To folwe the wynd, as doth the fane.
> 3e begeten hony togedere;
> To stroy3 that cometh the drane.
> He thenkeb bere wit is wane
> To stroige the hony, and feule hit shede;
> Glozer hath brought faytour lane
> To hall and chambre, to lordes, for mede. (57-64)

Wastoure sins in his luxury and greed, and in the means he uses to satisfy his desires, flattery and lying. Another poem (1857) says:

> . . . . It is no wonder
> Off thise eyres that goth under,
> Whan theih comen to londe
> Proude and stoute, and ginneth 3elpe,
> Ac of thing that sholde helpe
> Have theih neht on honde.

Their pride, extravagance, and lechery leave them penniless.

Piers Plowman (1459) has a number of references to this theme.[1] In the prologue in the field of folk were some who "In settyng and in sowyng . swonken ful harde, / And wonnen that wastours . with glotonye

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[1]Sir Israel Gollancz suggests that the poem may have been inspired by Wynnere and Wastoure (3137), but this is difficult to prove.

destruyeth." (21-2) The first item in Conscience's sermon uses the terms:

> He bad wastoure go worche . what he best couthe,
> And wynnen his wastyng . with somme manere crafte. (V, 24-5)

And in the same passus the confession of Avarice reveals the Wynnere again, his false weights and measures, diluted ale, stretched cloth, and the like. The portrait is in effect a history of the rise of a merchant from peddlar to banker. He has done business with lords, "And lene folke þat lese wel . a lyppe at euery noble." (V, 264) He has made mercers and drapers knights. He has no pity on poor men but would skin them if he might, and he hoards his money and never gives any to the poor. Repentance warns him that his money will be stolen by his executors: "And þat was wonne with wronge . with wikked men be despended." (V, 267) Avarice is to give up his trading and give his ill-got gains to the bishop and pray for forgiveness. In the next passus Piers makes a covenant with the knight that if the latter will protect the Church and the people from "wastoures and fro wykked men . þat þis worlde struyeth" then Piers will win the food. Piers calls upon the knight to punish the idlers who watch Piers plowing, a whole troop of them; you waste what men win, cries Piers.[1] The braggart waster defies both Piers and the knight, but he cannot defy Hunger. In this passus also is the identification of waster with the landless laborer who is never satisfied; this has been discussed in the pages dealing with the Peasants' Revolt.

Langland uses the terms "Wynnere" and "Wastoure" in a different sense than the author of the poem by that name. Langland means the

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[1]See the discussion of complaints about the "Peasentry", infra, Chapter V, wherein the same passage is described further.

merchants and chapmen by "Wynnere" and some of the clergy too, but he does not seem to include the same people as appeared in the debate. By "Wastoure" he means only lazy and gluttonous peasants; there is no attack on the nobility under that name. Langland is more concerned with the moral implications of the words; the earlier poet is not so much concerned. What is interesting is the recurrence of the two terms in Langland's poem.

Mum and the Sothsegger (•6) contains a few instances of the words; the indictment of Richard II accuses him of waste and riot and covetousness. The vision of the bee-keeper seems constructed for the attack on the drones:

> But þe dranes doon worste, deye mote þay alle;
> Thay haunten þe hyue for hony þat is ynne,
> And lurken and licken þe liquor þat is swete,
> And trauelyn no twynte / but taken of þe beste
> Of þat þe bees bryngen fro blossomes and floures. (982-86)

These are the wasters, and in the context of the political system of the bees that is explained at this point in the poem they probably are the courtiers and retainers of Richard II. The terms are not used, but the ideas are. The sober presentation of an economic problem is made a moral problem in Piers Plowman, but in Mum it is once again economic and political. The significance of the "Wynnere and Wastoure" theme lies in the connotation that the peasants do not receive their just reward; they work for all, but the government and the Church waste what they produce. Wynnere and Wastoure establishes different ideas, certainly more sophisticated ideas, of economics than do the other poems, but in all of them exists the vague belief that the peasants are not receiving their due.

"The Poor Are Oppressed" Theme. One of the ways the verse of

complaint attacks the nobility is the lament that the poor are oppressed; this is a general statement and it has a number of specific objects, but it should be considered at this point in the discussion because it connects a number of different topics. In Wynnere and Wastoure (3137) the poor are the audience of the debate, and it is their complaint that is being placed before the king. Wastoure tells Wynnere that "Thou scholdeste reme for rewthe, in siche ryfe bene the pore." The same theme underlies the appeals of John Ball and Jack Trewman, and it is found in Pum and the Sothsegger (*6). Such a widespread complaint should be considered carefully for the implication of the breach between classes.

A poem titled "Over the Bier of the Worldling" (2369)[1] sets the contrast quite sharply:

> þu ete þine mete y-makit in cousis,
> þu lettis þe pore stondin þrute in forist & in is,

The funeral ceremony and the idea of mutability do not hide the real satisfaction on the worldling's death. Robert of Brunne (778) adds to the list of oppressors:

> Lorde! how shul þese robbers fare,
> þat þe pore peyyl pelyn ful bare,--
> Erlës, knyȝtës, and barouns,
> And cuper lordyngës of tounnes;
> Iustyses, shryues, and baylyuys,
> þat þe lawës alle to-ryues,
> And þe pore men alle to-pyle;
> To ryche men do þey but as þey wylle. (6789-96)

The "Song on the Times" with the fable of the lion, fox, wolf, and ass (4144) indicates how the poor are victimized by the crafty and the strong; the poet prays the Church:

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[1] Brown, Eng. Lyr. XIII Cent., p. 64.

To entredite and amonsi
Al thai, whate hi evir be,
That lafful men doth robbi,
Whate in lond what in see;
And thos hoblurs, namelich,
That husbond benimeth eri of grund;
Men ne schold ham biri in non chirch,
Bot cast hem ute as a hund.

In a poem attacking the retinues of the nobles (2649) the attendants are cursed long and hard for the damage they do; the horsemen are blamed for their cross-country trips and the consequent harassment of the peasants. The same resentment of the rider by the walker--a class distinction--is found in "The Song of the Husbandman" (696):

þus wil walkeþ in lond, and lawe is forlore,
And al haþ piked of þe pore þe prikyares prude.

þus me pileþ þe pore and pykeþ ful clene;
þe ryche men raymeþ wiþouten eny ryht,

The noble sport of hunting is mentioned twice, but in both instances the peasants are the hares. "The Simonie" (4165) explains the evils in the land by the covetousness in men's hearts; that is why "hungger and derthe on eorthe the pore hath undernome," and why prices are high. The many instances of corruption are borne most pitifully by the poor; in fact the standard of measurement is based on Biblical injunctions and on how the poor are affected. The corrupt priest, for instance, either does not provide alms as he should, or he hires a "daffe" who does not know anything and cannot fulfill his religious duties. Bailiffs and sheriffs pester the poor, and so do justices who accept bribes.

If the king in his werre sent after mihti men,
To helpe him in his nede, of sum toun IX or X:
The stiffeste sholen bileve at hom for X shillinges or XII
And sende forth a wrecche that may noht helpe him selve At nede.
Thus is the king deceyved and pore men shent for mede. (295-300)

The same is true of taxes, as has been seen above. The king has the least

part of them.

> And baillifs and bedeles under the shirreve,
> Everich fondeth hu he may pore men most greve.
> The pore men beth overal somouned on assise,
> And the riche sholen sitte at hom, and ther wole silver rise To shon:
> Godes curs moten hii have, but that be wel don! (337-42)

No matter where one turns, another oppressor looms. For all this sin God sent a bad corn year.

> A mannes herte mihte blede for to here the crie
> Off pore men that graduen, "Allas! for hungger I die up rihte!"
> This auhte make men aferd of Godes muchele miht. (388-91)

But of course it does not. The poem contains a number of other complaints which will be examined later; it is sufficient here to show the point of view implied by the "poor are oppressed" theme.

"For-thi I rede 3ow riche . haueth reuthe of þe pouere," (I, 173) says Conscience (1459) after his short sermon on love; "faith without works is dead." Langland always bears the poor in mind. Lady Mede most harms the poor, especially when she interferes with justice: "For pore men mowe haue no powere . to pleyne hem þou3 þei smerte." (III, 167) But when Reason rules, then the commons will not be oppressed by king nor knight, constable nor mayor. (III, 313) Piers' advice to the knight is that no tenant be harmed, nor taxed unreasonably, . . .

> And mysbede nou3te þi bonde-men, þe better may þow spede;
> þowgh he be þyn vnderlynge here . wel may happe in heuene,
> þat he worth worthier sette . and with more blisse,
> þan þow, bot þou do bette . And lyue as þow shulde: (VI, 46-49)

It may be assumed that the advice refers to a very real grievance. The poem abounds with references to the oppressed poor.

Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) in its attack on Richard II's courtiers remarks that their finery "makeþ þe peple for pens-lac / in pointe for to

wepe;" (III,142) and criticizes the retainers and purveyors of the king in considerable wrath; the wearers of the king's white hart badges . . .

> . . . plucked þe plonayle - from þe pore skynnes,
> And schewed her signes - for men shulde drede
> To axe ony mendis - for her mys-dedis.
> . . . .
> þey bare hem þe bolder - for her gay broches,
> And busshid with her brestis - and bare adoun þe pouere.
> (II, 32-39)

Richard's taxes are given a strange motive: "By pillynge of 3oure peple - 3oure prynces to plese, / . . . . / Or be tallage of 3our townes - without ony werre." (I, 13-15) Justice is perverted by bribes, and the king's purveyors take without thought of making good the costs. The same plaints are made in the B fragment, and others are added.

The extent of this theme cannot be illustrated because it lies embedded in many of the complaints, as in Wynnere and Wastoure (3137), the inert and faceless audience exerting a steady but silent criticism. This theme should not be given too much emphasis, for it may only be an emotional appeal by an adroit propagandist. Oppression in a feudal society is a matter of degree, and it probably mattered little to the average peasant; the importance lies in the use of the theme by the writers of complaint; whether sincere or not, whether the purpose of its use was to attack the Church or state or a malfunction of either, the recognition of the poor is important.

The Attack on the Rich

One of the important questions to consider is the possibility that the verse of complaint includes any evidence that there is antagonism between the rich and the poor. Riches in the abstract are condemned, and both Wynnere and Wastoure, the rich merchant and the noble profligate,

have been criticized from the point of view of the poor; the poor are oppressed is an underlying thesis of a number of poems, and the Peasants' Revolt indicated that many felt the feudal contract was inadequate to protect the workers. The rich are the nobles, the religious, and the merchants, and the criticisms of all three groups give a reasonable amount of evidence to conclude that they are criticized because they are rich rather than because they are barons, or bishops, or bankers. It is not just an abstraction but a very real resentment.

This resentment is tinged with the religious beliefs about riches and their accompanying sins. Robert of Brunne (778) typifies this attitude:

> 3e ryche men, 3e ryche purchasours,
> 3e wene þat al þe worlde be 3ours;
> And yn alle 3oure moste purchace
> Comþ 3oure deþ sunnest yn place; (6041-52)

A Norfolk bondsman is praised for his words to a lord who did not respect the sanctity of a churchyard:

> þe lorde þat made of erþe, erles
> Of þe same erþe made he cherles;
> Erlës myȝt, and lordës stut,
> As cherlës shal yn erþe be put;
> Erlës, cherlës, alle at ones
> Shal none knowe ȝoure, fro oure, bones. (8695-8700)

A few lines later Robert speaks in his own person: "Lordynges, --þyr are ynow of þe, / Of gentyl men, þyr are but fe." (8715-6) Undoubtedly the resentment of the "horsemen" in the poem on the retinues of the nobles (2649) is a vague resentment of the nobles, possibly because they are rich and powerful; the poem ends with a fervent wish that the horsemen be lodged in hell. The same sentiment is found in "The Song of the Husbandman" (696). Langland (1459) warns the rich not to trust in the pardons they buy:

For-þi I rede 3ow, renkes . þat riche ben on þis erthe,
Vppon trust of 3owre tresoure . triennales to haue,
Re 3e neuere þe balder . to breke þe ten hestes; (VII, 181-3)

Langland adds mayors and judges and masters to his list of rich men; "A poke ful of pardoun" will not help on the Judgment Day unless one does well. Men lack charity; the more money they get, the less good they do in alms-giving. The Bible is cited: "Who-so hath moche, spene manliche . so meneth Thomie / And who-so litel weldeth . reule him þer-after;" (X, 87-9) rich men should not eat in private parlors by themselves, but in the great hall and share their bread. When in private, says Langland, I have heard them carpe against God as if they were clerks. Finally, wealth is likened to a peacock's tail, which, no matter how pretty, hinders its flight; so the rich man has hindrances to heaven. A macaronic poem (3113) has these sad lines:

The rych make mery,
sed vulgus collachrimatur;

That, perhaps, is the basis of the resentment. More likely the complaints of the oppression of the poor and the attack on the rich are related. It seems as if all possible complaints about the rich are made in Rum and the Sothsegger (*6): they are covetous, they rob the poor; they give few alms if any; they are full of pride, subtlety and guile. The poet in his search finds more than a hundred "mvmmers" at the king's court among the knights. (80C) One of the devices of the poem is the use of books the poet found in his bag; in one of these books:

There is a copie of couetise, how conscience is revled
Whenne he hath gadrid a greete bagge and good at his wil,
And wrongfully y-wonne hit þorough wiles of his hert,
And is y-runne in riches þorough ryfling of þe peuple,
He maketh maisons deu þerewith whenne he may live no longer;
But while he had power of þe penyes - þe poure had but lite.
(1683-8)

The attack on the rich needs little statement here: the complaint is made less against the nobility than against the religious, as will be seen in a later chapter.

The Lust for Power

The nobility are also criticized because of their lust for power, and the motive for this lust is covetousness and pride. It is not a widespread complaint. "Mede of mys-doeres . maketh many lordes, (III, 295) / And ouer lordes lawes . reuleth þe rewmes," says Langland (1459). The poet of Mum and the Sothsegger (•6) explains Richard's cracked crown by saying that his courtiers plucked his power away from him and kept it in their own lands:

> But where þis croune bicome . a clerk were þat wuste;
> But so as I can . declare it I thenke,
> And nempne no name; . but þe þat nest were,
> Full preuyly þey pluckud . þy power away,
> And reden with realte . 3oure rewme þoru-oute,
> And as tyrauntis, of tiliers . token what hem leste,
> And paide hem on her pannes . whan her penyes lacked. (I, 49-55)

These same courtiers were the false councillors discussed above, and all their advice. . .

> Al þat þey moued . or mynged in þat mater
> Was to be sure of hem-self . and siris to ben y-called;
> For þat was all her werchinge . in worde and in dede. (I, 103-5)

References to "maistri" appear in a number of pooms signifying the hunger for power in minor nobles who seek advancement and wealth. Part of the criticism is based on the traditional concept of the three estates, a concept which is becoming questioned in theory and broken in practice. Knightships could be bought by mercers, as Avarice says in Piers Plowman, but this is not as significant a method of climbing from one class to another as was the Church; the universities are attacked by the traditionalists for educating a sutter's son to sit next to a lord. The mass

of the people are not so much concerned with this kind of social advancement as they are with some of the methods whereby men attained higher rank or greater power. The attack on the rich and on the nobility for the most part deals with other matters

The Large Retinues of the Nobles

The agents of oppression were quite often the retainers kept by nobles, a practice that increased throughout the 14th century. These men wore the livery of their lord and formed his detachment when he went to war. They stayed with him at home, when they were not on campaign, to the detriment of peace and quiet of the manor or town. They were often used in the strife with neighbors or other barons and in the law courts. A peasant would not complain to the lord about any offense done to him by the retainers because he was either threatened by the men themselves, or because his complaint would simply be ignored by the lord who did not care or dare to alienate his men. The people hated them. A poem quoted in part above "On the Retinues of the Great" (1264) is commented upon by Thomas Wright thus:

> The following song is a satire upon the numerous retinues of the nobles and rich people, whose idle attendants and servants preyed upon the produce of the industrious peasantry. It shows how great were the pride and ostentation of the courtiers of the latter years of Edward I.

This seems a slight exaggeration; protected by their masters the attendants seem like terrible house-guests:

Of ribaudz y ryme
Ant rede o ni rolle,
Of pedelynges, gromes,
Of Colyn ant of Colle,
Harlotes, hors-knaves,
Pi pate ant by polle;
To devel ich hem to-lyvre
Ant take to tolle!

One can visualize quite easily the din and confusion in the kitchen:

The harlotes bueth horlynges,
  Ant haunteth the plawe:
The godelynges bueth gloteuns,
  Ant drynketh er hit dawe.
Sathanas huere syre
  Seyde on is sawe,
Gobelyn made is gerner
  Of grorene mawe.

They are lazy and quarrelsome and ludicrously ape their masters' fashions.

There is a curious reference to the depredations of the king's purveyors, those who accumulated food and other goods for the king's use, in a metrical romance of King Edward and the Shepherd (988).[1] The shepherd complains that since he lives close to Windsor castle, his cattle have been taken from him, and all he has to show for it is a "stick of tre," a hazel stick notched to show the amount of purchase and then split in two, one piece going to the shepherd, the other to the treasurer; the shepherd is then supposed to be paid for his cattle. The shepherd encounters King Edward in disguise, and makes a number of complaints about the purveyors. The vehemence of the complaint is peculiarly strong, perhaps because the shepherd's grievances are redressed and the king vindicated:

þei do but rode, þe Kynges men;
þei ar worse þen sich ten,
  þat bene with hym no dell.
þei goo aboute be viii or nyne
And done þe husbondys mycull pyne,
  þat carfull is theire mele.
þei take geese, capons, and henne,
And alle þat euer þei may with renne,
  and reves vs oure catell.
. . . .
þei toke my hennes and my geese
And my schepe with all þe fleese,
  And ladde þem forthe awey.
Be my doȝtur þei lay alnyȝt;
. . . .
Into my carthawe þei me dryfe;
Cut at þe dur þei put my wyfe,
  For she is olde gray hore. (148-177)

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[1] W. H. French and C. B. Hale, Middle English Metrical Romances (New York, 1930), pp. 950-85.

The shepherd is probably exaggerating, or so the rest of the poem seems to imply, but it is probable that such highhandedness did occur sufficiently often to make a reference to it clear to the audience of the poem.

Richard's downfall in Rum and the Sothsegger (*6) is credited to his giving so many liveries. The retainers did not stand by him in his need, but either ran away or surrendered to Henry. They rode through the country and made trouble, and so the king's badge became hated by the poor. The White Hart prevented men from complaining.

> For þo þat had hertis / on hie on her brestis,
> For þe more partie / I may well avowe,
> þe bare hem þe bolder / for her gay broches,
> And busshid with her brestis / and bare adoun þe pouere
> Liages þat loued 3ou þe lesse / for her yuell dedis. (II, 36-40)

For every heart that Richard marked, he lost ten score faithful hearts.

> And euere with here wylis & wast / ofte þey hem anoyed,
> þat pouerte hem prickid / full preuyliche to pleyne,
> But where, þey ne wyste / ne ho it wolde amende.
> þus 3e derid hem vnduly / with droppis of anger,
> And stonyed hem with stormes / þat stynted neuere,
> But plucked and pulled hem / anon to þe skynnes,
> þat þe fresinge frost / freted to here hertis. (II, 121-127)

The armed retainers come to court and exert pressure on judge and jury for their own purposes. There was much complaint of the retainers. Their acts can be guessed at with considerable certainty in an age of violence and hot tempers. They were the agents of the "maistri" which men lamented, the responsibility for whom men ascribed to the nobility.[1]

The Attack on the Courtiers

Another indication of the attack on the rich is the complaint about the extravagence, lechery, and intrigue of the courtiers. An

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[1]Gower adds his voice to the complaints on this topic; near the end of the Confessio (2662) he discusses the chivalry; some are to be commended, and others amended. The retainers' extortion, fighting, and pilfering cause the commons to complain of oppression. (VIII, 3011-20)

examination of the verse reveals the extent and intensity of the complaints. Wynnere (3137) criticizes the extravagence of Wastoure. One of the general complaints (1857) refers to long sleeves, practically synecdoche for courtier:

For pride hath sleve, the lond is almusles.

The sleeves were long and wide; they were costly because they contained so much material. A macaronic poem (3113) remarks that "Verorys han peyntyd slewys." The dandies are so fashion-conscious that they spend all their money on clothes: "Galauntes, purs penyles . . . Fresch of the newe towch, / . . . Lityl or nocht in her powch." They have high and wide collars, long spurs, tight hose, and for fear of pricking themselves with their spurs and ruining the curled points of their shoes, they cannot kneel in prayer. They seek special ways to kiss, and chase women while honest men sleep. They drink "fragrantia vina" until sodden:

Thei cry, "Fyl the bowles!
"bonus est liquor, hic manearus;
"For alle crystone sowllys
"dum durant vasa, bibamus!"

The courtier in "Mede and Muche Thank" (1475) lies and flatters to get his gay coat "gawdy gren, / Blasande brigt, embrowdid gay" while the soldier starves in rags. The criticism of the courtier follows the pattern of town mouse and country mouse. The moral overtones of the condemnation of fancy clothes and pride can be heard.

There are few criticisms of the courtier in Piers Plowman (1459); the "raton of renon" remarks upon the chains around the necks of people in London, and this may refer to courtiers. Langland criticizes the court in the episode of Lady Mede for its avarice, and it can be inferred that avarice is the result of a desire for rich clothing. The description

of Lady Mede at the beginning of the second passus presumably reflects the rich clothing of the courtiers; Langland does not often describe clothing, and this delineation leaves much to be desired:

> I loked on my left half . . . .
> And was war of a womman . wortheli yclothed,
> Purfiled with pelure . þe finest vpon erthe,
> Y-crounede with a corone . þe kyng hath non better.
> Fetislich hir fyngres . were fretted with golde wyre,
> And þere-on red rubyes . as red as any glede,
> And diamantz of derrest pris . and double manere safferes,
> Orientales and ewages . enuenymes to destroye.
> Hire robe was ful riche . of red scarlet engreyned,
> With ribanes of red golde . and of riche stones;
> Hire arraye me rauysshed . suche ricchesse saw I neuere; (II, 7-17)

Langland's remarks about the rich can probably be applied to the attendants at court.

The poet of Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) is much more specific in his criticisms of the dandies and sleeve-wearers; they are "trifflours" who did not advise Richard but were more interested in their coats:

> For ben þey rayed arith / þey recchith no forther
> But studieth all in strouutynge / and stireth amys euere;
> . . . .
> For all his witte in his wede / ys wrappid for sothe,
> More þan in mater to amende / þe peple þat ben mys-led. (III, 120-5)

That is the reason why young advisers are bad; they are interested in too many things other than good counsel. The extent to which such folly leads is remarked by the poet:

> For þey kepeth no coyne / þat cometh to here hondis,
> But chaunchyth it for cheynes / þat in chepe hangith,
> And settith all her silver / in seintis and hornis. (III, 138-40)

Wastoure is sent to Cheapside in Wynnere and Wastoure (3137) and is criticized for buying rich clothes for his lady. The poet of Mum is highly indignant at the courtiers who hang more cloth on their hips than they win, who spend all their money so that dukes praise them. The latest fashion is to have long sleeves, so long that they touch the ground. If Pernel praises the pleats behind, then the sleeves are worth

any amount of money. The pleats are so pretty that women adopted them too:

> But now þer is a gyse / þe queyntest of all,
> A wondir coriouse crafte / y-come now of late,
> That men clepith kerving / þe clobe all to peois,
> þat seuene goode sowers / sixe wekes after
> Moun not sette þe seemes / ne sewe hem ageyn. (III, 162-6)

This costs ten times as much as the cloth. And so the dandies continue to strut and stare and strive against virtue. The world would soon mend if lords would "dryue out þe daggres / and all þe Duche cotis" and dismiss "þe proude peniles / with his peynte sleve." Wit, the good counselor in his homely clothes, is ridiculed by "þe sleues / þat slode vppon erthe." The courtiers' clothes are not their only distractions. Besides giving selfish advice, they:

> . . . rest on þe daies
> And spende of þe spicerie / more þan it neded,
> Bothe wexe and wyn / in wast all abougte,
> With deyntes y-doubled / and daunsinge to pipis,
> In myrthe with moppis / myrreurs of synne. (III, 272-6)

The other criticism of the courtiers in the poem is of course their flattery and intrigue. Lum speaks of the advantages of such conduct:

> But folowe thaym in thaire folie and fare muche þe bettre,
> Easily for oyle, sire, and elles were I nyce. (III, 246-7)

Sothsegger remarks that these courtiers allow scandal to fall on the king when they do not advise him truly.

Langland (1459) makes an obscure reference to intrigue at court in these lines; Charity is the subject:

> In courte amonge iaperes . he cometh but selde,
> For braulying and bakbytyng . and beryng of fals witnesse. (XV, 232-3)

Not much criticism of the courtiers for lechery can be found in these poems. Lady Mede is by nature lascivious. The fine clothes are meant

any amount of money. The pleats are so pretty that women adopted them too:

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to further amorous designs.[1] Lady Mede says at one point, however, to a friar:

> "Wist I that," quod þat woman . "I wolde nouȝt spare
> For to be ȝowre frende, frere, . and faille ȝow neure
> Whil ȝe loue lordes . bat lechery haunteþ,
> And lakkeþ nouȝt ladies . þat loueþ wel þe same. (III, 51-4)

Perhaps the general populace took for granted the lechery of courtiers.[2] "The Simonie" (4165) condemns the knights for their indolence, and those who were not borne of noble blood:

> Knihtshipe is acloied and ifelfulliche i-diht;
> Kunne a boy nu breke a spere, he shal be mad a knicht.
> And thus ben knihtes gadered of unkinde blod,
> And envenimeth that ordre that sholde be so god
> and hende;
> Ac o shrewe in a court many men may shende. (264-9)

Even squires are no longer what they should be; they bear baubles and long beards and swear foully:

> But sholde he for everi fals uth lese kirtel or kote,
> I leve,
> He sholde stonde stare naked twye or day or eve. (275-7)

Knights "brewen strut and stuntise there as sholde be pes" and instead of fighting in the Holy Land they sit in their hall and utter as many villainies as a scold in a town. They dress like gleemen instead of like sober knights. The squires pay the fiend with their boasting and sin; "Gentille men that sholde ben, ne beth hii none i-liche." (287) The same sentiments could consistently be applied to courtiers, who deviate from the standard of the past as widely as these.

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[1]Gower (2662) complains of the dandies who attend church in their finery to show themselves off to the ladies, to ogle and stare. (V, 7040ff.) The religious are much more severely condemned for this sin.

[2]It should be noted that there are no references to anything like courtly love. Robert of Brunne (778) lashes out in his sturdy fashion against the "lordynges" who ravish maidens and seduce wives. (7419-23)

The courtiers are criticized for their luxury because it prevents alms-giving to the poor, and because they waste their goods in fancy clothes and rich feasts. Wynnere (3137) criticizes Wastoure's luxury thus:

> Bot ones I herd in a haule of a herdmans tong--
> Better were meles many pan a mery nyghte. (364-5)

as has been seen in the general complaints. The excesses are criticized as sins that are evil in themselves, and equally evil for society. The traditional idea of a sufficiency of goods, not an excess, for human existence is changing or beginning to change. Another explanation is more practical; the display of wealth by the nobility is becoming more disagreeable to the majority of the population, who perhaps do not hate the rich so much as they envy the display. The use of moral reasons for the complaint may be a rationalization of the real reason, which is just as immoral. For the most part, however, the verses seem sincere and disinterested, based on moral and social reasons, albeit conservative ones, rather than on selfish ones. The indirectness of the complaint and its tendency toward abstraction prevent the analysis from eliciting clear motives; it is safer to assume pure motives unless there is clear evidence for believing otherwise.

The theme used for the moral criticism of the rich in the attacks on the nobility is covetousness. In many instances the complaint includes sins that cause or result from that sin, such as extravagence, lechery, a desire for power, pride, a lack of charity, and so on. The emphasis is, however, on covetousness, and that fact suggests that the complaint has some other motive than moral reproof. The complaint almost always includes an intimation that the complainant has suffered some oppression which he has not deserved. The complaint about covetousness may indicate

that the complainant felt he did not deserve poverty when so many have riches. In short, the moral themes may be a rationalization of a real feeling of envy and jealousy. Any attack on the rich raises that suspicion; one need not subscribe to Marxian ideas of economic class warfare to support such a contention. It seems likely that the commons resented the nobility and the rich and envied the ease and plenty of the well-to-do, but it does not seem likely that such resentment had any formal expression in terms of a medieval socialism. The social structure of the three estates was strong; the goals of the Peasants' Revolt did not involve any great social upheaval but only a hastening of commutation. One is forced to conclude that the attack on the rich was not motivated by envy alone, but by a desire that the nobility fulfill its social function according to the time-honored duties of that estate.

The King's Justice

The last subcategory of the specific complaints about the nobility involves one of the most important functions of government, the impartial administration of justice. The "Poor are oppressed" theme appears often in the complaints about justice. Another common complaint is that judges are corrupt and take bribes. Lawyers seek to drain their clients of everything. The most hopeless of the complaints about the nobility (696) is:

> Thus wil walketh in londe, and lawe is for-lore
> And al is piked of the pore, the prikyares prude.

The poor are at a great disadvantage before the law.

False witnesses are condemned by Robert of Brunne (778), as are those who consent to a false judgment for "mede." (2635, 5399)

The fable of the lion, fox, wolf, and ass (4144) repeats the general complaint that "Coveitise hath the law an honde / That the trewthe he ne mai i-se." The honest ass is hanged, and the lion, wolf, and fox share the spoils. The social significance of this extends beyond justice; it includes an attack on the rich and noble. "Lex lyth doun over al, fallax fraus fallit ubique" is a macaronic version (2787). "The Simonie" (4165) and Piers Plowman (1459), Mum and the Sothsegger (*6), and others connect covetousness with justice and complain that the poor are thereby prevented from receiving their due.

Mum and the Sothsegger expends much of its criticism upon the king's justice, and especially upon the interference with the law by maintenance. This has been referred to briefly, but some of the more trenchant verses are concerned with this problem. After criticizing Richard for his indiscriminate issuance of liveries and badges, the poet remarks that only good men should have badges. A good judge, who lived on his own income who could give truthful judgment and not allow bribery nor lordship to guide the decision when the poor were wrongfully tried, should have a badge and a sufficient salary. (I, 89) Great nobles hold back laws that would relieve the poor unless they are given presents:

> Thus is þe lawe louyd / þoru myȝhty lordis willys,
> þat meyneteyne myssdoers / more þan oþer peple. (III, 310-11)

The poet recounts a courtroom scene where retainers over-awe judge and witnesses:

For chyders of Chester / where chose many daies
To ben of conceill for causis / þat in þe court hangid,
And pledid pipoudris / alle manere pleyntis.
þe cared for no coyffes / þat men of court vsyn,
But meved many maters / þat men neuer thouȝte,
And feyned falshed / till þey a fyne had,
And knewe no manere cause / as comunes tolde.
þei had non oþer signe / to schewe þe lawe
But a preuy pallette / her pannes to kepe,
To hille here lewde heed / in stede of an houe.
þey constrewed quarellis / to quenche þe peple,
And pletid with pollaxis / and poyntis of swerdis,
And at þe dome-ȝeuynge / drowe out þe bladis,
And lente men leuere / of her longe battis.
þey lacked alle vertues / þat a juge shulde haue;
For, er a tale were ytolde / þey wolde trie þe harmes,
Withcute ony answere / but ho his lyf hatid. (III, 317-33)

Another problem is the difficulty of the poor before the law, particularly in paying the necessary fees. At the beginning of fragment M there is a reference to the chancellor, scribes, clerks, justices and judges, sergeants, and even court prentices; these are all enjoined to have pity on the poor "That for faute of your fees fallen in þaire pleyntes; / Haue pitie on þe penylees and þaire pleynte harkeneth." (20-1) Hear them equably, and grant them the cost of writing the writs and of the green wax also. Much later in the poem, the topic is raised again. The poor are not aided by squires as they should be; the squires fear to displease the powerful lords who have oppressed the poor. (1490) Retainers' interference in lawsuits may cost whole estates; the poet here uses a simile of the tug-of-war:

There is a raggeman rolle / þat Ragenelles hymself
Hath made of mayntennance and motyng of þe peuple,
Hough þay sheue at sises and sessions aboute,
And halen so þe hockerope / oon halfe agayne oþer
Til þe strongest steriers and styuest on þe heedes
Haue haled þe howslord oute atte halle-dore.
Strifen so and streiochen streight adovne þe poure. (1565-71)

This hurts the prestige of the crown, for the people begin to think that the poor have no chance before the law:

Thus laboreth þe loos among þe comune peuple
That þe wacker in þe writte wol haue þe wors ende;
Wit wol not gayne a roky a grete man forto plede,
For lawe lieth muche in lordship with leyaute was exiled,
And poure men pleyntes / penylees a-bateth. (1580-84)

The poet then chronicles the hard fates of poor men pursued in litigation by the rich who can afford the legal fees while poor men cannot. The complaint becomes a criticism of the law then, namely that those who bring such suits, when they are in the wrong, should bear the costs.

There is another criticism made besides the attack on maintenance. Too many men bring suit when they need not do so; they waste their estates in court costs and eventually lose everything. The description of the quarrel is eloquent: the taking sides by neighbors and friends, both sides determined not to yield, the case dragging on and on (as in Dicken's Bleak House) until stubbornness becomes ruin. It is foolish, says the poet, to do so when little is at stake, but there are a number of foolish men who think their reputations will suffer if they do not go to law for a slight. Such men had better give up a small suit so that they will be believed when an important matter arises. These general considerations about the king's justice suggest familiarity with legal processes and practices; for the most part they are not so much legal reforms as legal practices that need reforming. The law as such is adequate, but misused. Maintenance imperils orderly justice; might becomes right, and the poor are oppressed. The poet has sympathy for the poor--though he is not blind to their faults--and considerable knowledge of the law.

Corrupt Judges

One complaint against the king's justice is that judges take bribes; an examination of this complaint by itself is justified. Robert

of Brunne (778) makes a number of statements pertinent to this complaint. He tells the tale of a judge who deals mercilessly with the poor; on his deathbed is meted out the same mercy to him. (5443 ff.) In another place the moralist says:

> What shul we say of þys dytours
> þys fals men, þat beyn sysours,
> þat, for hate, a trewman wyl endyte,
> And a þefe for syluer quyte?
> Be he neuer so strong a þefe,
> 3ef he may 3yue, he shal be lefe; (1335-1340)

Sir Peny (1480) is powerful in court; two stanzas of that poem apply to the lawmen:

> In kinges court es it no bote,
> ogaines sir peni forto mote,
> so mekill es he of myght;
> he es so witty, and so strang,
> þat be it neuer so mekill wrang,
> he will mak it right. (19-24)
>
> . . . .
>
> þe domes men he mase so blind
> þat þai may noght þe right find,
> ne þe suth to se.
> forto gif dome þam es ful lath,
> þar-with to mak sir peni wrath,
> ful dere with þam es he. (43-48)

The statement is grimly bantering, half humorous and half serious.

"The Simonie" (4165) is vehemently angry and indignant:

> And justises, shirreves, meires, baillifs, if I shal rede aricht,
> Hii kunnen of the faire day make the derke niht;
> Hii gon out of the heie wey, ne leven hii for no sklaundre,
> And maken the mot-halle at hom in here chaumbre,
> wid weuh;
> For he the hond i-whited, it shal be god i-neuh. (290-295)

This petty corruption reaches higher circles; many high offices pay a man well, and the underlings profit by the example, as do:

. . . thise assisours, that comen to shire and to hundred
Damneth men for silver, and that nis no wonder.
For whan the riche justise wol do wreng for mede,
Thenne thinketh hem theih muwen the bet, for theih han more nede to winne.
Ac so is al this world ablent, that no man douteth sinne. (469-474)

If the judge gets his fee from his convictions, then it is likely he will become rich. The corrupt judge is a fearsome figure; here is an early warning (3621):

3is is 3i sete, domes man,
3if rihtful dom 3if 3ow kan;
wiht 3in hond tak 3ow no gifte,
Ne for biseking doi non unriht;
Lawe and liht is 3i faderis fel,
Loke on 3at and deme wel;[1]

Among Mede's followers in Piers Plowman are sergeants:

3it houed þere an hondreth . in houues of selke,
Seriaunt3 it semed / þat serueden atte barre,
Plededen for penyes . and poundes þe lawe,
And nou3t for loue of owre lorde . vnlese here lippes onis. (210-13)

Conscience accuses Mede of many things, and in discussing justice adds some of the complaints already seen:

Ri ihesus, with here leveles . 3owre iustices she shendeth,
And lith ageín þe lawe . and letteth hym þe gate,
That feith may nou3te haue his forth . here floreines so þikke.
She ledeth þe lawe as hire list . and louedayes maketh,
And doth men lese þorw hire loue . þat lawe my3te wynne,
þe mase for a mene man . þou3 he mote hir eure.
Lawe is so lordeliche . and loth to make ende,
With-oute presentz or pens . she pleseth wel fewe. (III, 154-161)

The connection between avarice and justice is made at the end of the poem as well; in the confused and confusing allegory Simony sends Avarice to the king's council as a baron:

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[1]Rel Ant., II, 120.

And kneled to conscience . in courte afor hem alle,
And gart gode feith flee . and fals to abide,
And boldeliche bar adown . with many a brigte noble
Moche of þe witte and wisdome . of westmynster halle.
He iugged til a iustice . and iusted in his ere,
And cuertilte al his treuthe . with "take þis vp amendment."
And to þe arches in haste . he 3ede anone after,
And torned Ciuile in-to Symonye . and sitthe he toke þe official;
For a mantel of menyuere . he made lele matrimonye
Departen ar deth cam . & deuors shupte. (XX, 129-138)

Mede's trial is of course concerned with the justices; she buys them off with gold cups and ruby rings, and they promise to advise the king to her advantage. Assisors assist her too, and sheriffs know her well; many an evil man has gone free for gold. Another confusing allegory is found in the fourth passus which portrays peace harmed by Wrong; Mede gives gold in order to mitigate the king's anger against Wrong, but Reason interferes and suggests that Wrong be not let go free so easily. In the seventh passus Truth says that corrupt judges and avaricious lawyers get least pardon at their death-day. (VII, 39) There are many other references to corrupt judges in the poem, but there is no need to list them all. Langland's criticism is that the men who take bribes do not judge in the spirit of love they ought to show for the truth and the people.[1] All these quotations indicate the intensity of the condemnation and the fear of the practice. They reflect also the disadvantage the poor felt in litigation with the rich; they reflect the growing sense of injustice done to the lower class. It is interesting to note that Mum and the Sothsegger (ed) does not make this criticism of judges; it does contain two references to sergeants who adhere to Mum's practices.

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[1]Gower (2662) makes the same criticism: woe to the people of the land where judges take bribes, for wrongs cannot be hidden. (VII, 2754ff.)

Avaricious Lawyers

The popular image of the lawyer is more unkind than that of the judge. The social status of the lawyer was low, but it had been lower; lawyers are beginning to gain prestige. "Sir Peny" (2747) contains this stanza:

> þow I haue a man I-slawe
> & forfetyd þe kynges lawe,
> I xal fyndyn a man of lawe
> Wyl takyn myn peny & let me goo.

Two stanzas in "The Simonie" (4165) indicate the attitude toward the legal officials as well as the lawyers, and condemns their guile, greed, and hauteur:

> And ccuntours in benche that stondeth at the barre,
> Theih wolen bigile the in thin hond, but if thu be the warre.
> He wole take .xl. pans for to do doun his hod,
> And speke for the a word or to, and don the litel god,
> I trouwe.
> And have he turned the bak, he makketh the a mouwe.
>
> Attourneis in cuntre theih geten silver for noht;
> Theih maken men biginne that they nevere hadden thought;
> And whan theih comen to the ring, hoppe if hii kunne.
> Al that theih muwun so gete, al thinketh hem i-wonne
> wid skile.
> Ne triste no man to hem, so false theih beth in the bile.
> (343-354)

The peasant resents such hauteur, and he resents what he thinks is unfair treatment.

The many references in Piers Plowman (1459) to lawyers contain the same criticism as is made of judges; they are coveteus and do not act from the motive of love. In Mede's train are the sergeants who plead for pennies and pounds; at the bridal ceremony of Mede, before the interruption, are "vokates of þe arches" (II, 60); the poet sees "mede in the moot-halle . on men of lawe wynke, (IV, 152) / And þei lawghyng lope to hire . and lafte resoun manye."

And a schireues clerke . byschrewed al þe route,
"For ofte haue I," quod he . "holpe 3ow atte barre,
And 3it 3eue 3e me neuere . þe worthe of a russhe." (IV, 168-70)

The king becomes angry at Mede because through her Law was almost ruined. Truth's remarks are quite sober:

Men of lawe lest pardoun hadde . þat pleteden for Mede,
For þe sauter saueth hem nou3te . such as taketh 3iftes,
And namelich of innocentz . þat none yuel ne kunneth;
Super innocentem munera non accipies.
Pledoures shulde peynen hem . to plede for such, an helpe,
Prynces and prelates . shulde paye for her trauaille; (VII, 39-43)

The point of view illustrated by this statement is clear: the poor should be defended out of mercy. This suggests the degree of hardship which legal costs entail. Lawyers seem to be referred to in the discussion of Wit and Wisdom:

Wisdome and witte now . is nou3t worth a carse,
But if it be cardied with coueytise . as clotheres kembeh here wolle.
Who-so can contreue deceytes . an conspire wronges,
And lede forth a loue-day . to latte with treuthe;
He þat suche craftes can . to conseille is clepid;
þei lede lordes with lesynges . and vilyeth treuthe. (X, 17-22)

Yet in many other places is "lawe . . . loth to louye . but if he lacche syluer." (XI, 217) Further iteration is unnecessary to show the popular stereotype.

A curious idea of lawyers and law appears in Wynnere and Wastoure (3137). In the description of Wynnere's army occur these lines:

Anoþer banere es vp-brayde with a bende of grene
With thre hedis white-herede with howes one lofte,
Croked full craftyly, and kembid in the nekke:
Thies are ledis of this londe þat scholde oure lawes 3eme,
That thynken to dele this daye with dynttis full many.
I holde hym bot a fole þat fightis whils flyttynge may helpe,
When he hase founden his frende þat fayled hym neuer. (149-155)

The tax of the green wax is one reference, as mentioned in the "Song of the Husbandman" (696), and the three white-headed men are presumably judges; craftiness and guile are other attributes, but the important

point in the last two lines is the collusion of Symmere with the law. The charge reduces itself to covetousness and bribery. Pum and the Pothsegger (46) introduces another criticism, perhaps implicit in the charge of guile made in "The Simonie" (4165), namely that the jargon of the lawyer is confusing and that it enables him to lead the client by the nose:

> And in al þe kinge-is court þer coiphes been and oþer
> Wym is maister þere more þenne men wenen,
> For sum of þo serres wolle siche side-wayes,
> Whenne þay witen wel y-now where þe hare walketh,
> Thay leden men þe long waye and lyue-laye breken
> And maken moppes wel myry with þaire madde tales,
> Forto sowe siluer seede - and solue ere þay sinne,
> To haue ynne þaire harueste while þe hete dureth. (1141-48)

The general opinion seems to be that lawyers are full of surprising ways of lightening a man's pocket. The references are brief, consistent, and unanimous in denouncing lawyers. The complaint does not die with the 14th century, nor with Fielding and Dickens.

Executors of Wills

The last legal act is making a will. The nefariousness of the executors of wills is legendary in the verse of complaint and forms one of the more humorous collections of quotations. The matter is serious enough, but the extent to which executors went to secure the greatest gain, often very petty gains, as one poem testifies, is a good example of guile and covetousness. The crime is widespread. Robert of Brunne (778) remarks that the pope cursed false executors four times in one year. Robert quotes Seneca:

> Senex, þat mecche of wysdom spellyþ,
> 'Ne be þou neuere yn swych errour
> To make þyn eyr þy secutour,
> Ne þy sekutoure þy fysycyene,
> Yn hopë for to leue a-3ene.' (1180-84)

Souls in purgatory seek the succour of the good executor (6250), but the worst executors are one's relations:

> Of alle executours þat men fynde,
> Werst are þyn ownë kynde,
> And þy chyldryn specyaly
> Are to þy soule vnkyndëly:
> þy chyldryn allë sey ryght þus:
> "whom shuld þey 3yue hyt, but vs?" (6263-68)

The moral is that rich men should take good care of their money themselves, and not bequeath it. The Church was of course interested in wills and testaments for she often profited from them.[1] A translation of a Latin exemplum on the vanity of wealth (2071) warns:

> Man of the self thu haf god mynde
> That thu dest wiht thi hand that schal tu finden;
> Childer ben for-thetele, and wives ben un-kynde,
> That that comed in the sectures hondes often it is by-hynden.[2]

Another short poem (4176) has a sharp, but antique, tag at the end:

> Wyse mon if thou art, of thi god
> Take part or thou hense wynde;
> For if thou leve thi part in thi secatours ward,
> Thi part non part at last end.[3]
>
> Too secutors and an overseere make thre theves.

Here are two exasperated cries (685, 925):

> Do mon for thiselfe,
> Wyl thou art alyve;
> For he that dose after thu dothe,
> God let him never thryve.[4]

Quod Tucket

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[1]Mirk instructs the parish priest to ask this question of the dying in Instructions to Parish Priests (961), ed. Peacock, EETS 31:

> "Hast þou I-be any executour
> To any frende or neghbour,
> And drawe out hys gode þe tylle
> And not I-do þe dedes wylle?" (1187-1200)

[2]T. Wright, Latin Stories (Percy Soc. VIII), p. 33.

[3]Hel. Ant., I, 314. [4]Ibid.

> Godefrey þe ȝuede - he deode asse vnhede
> he made ȝille prut fort - a secutor of al is ȝoid
> Al þat heuere so doit - crist of heuene wrþe hem wroit[1]

More poems exist to the same intent, and they are similar in attitude.

Wynnere's (313?) stinginess and monomania calls forth this vicious statement:

> Thi sone and thi sekteurs, ichone sewes others;
> Maken dale aftir thi daye, for thou durste neuer
> Mawngery ne mynddale, ne neuer myrthe louediste. (302-304)

Wynnere's heirs become wasteures. The last shaft loosed by Wasteure impales Wynnere thus:

> For-thi, wynnere, with wronge þou wastes þi tyme;
> For ȝode day ne ȝlade ȝetys þou neuer.
> þe deuyll at þi dede-day schal delyn þi ȝudis,
> þe þou woldest þat it ware, wyn þay it neuer;
> þi skathill sectours schal seuer þam aboute,
> & þou hafe helle full hotte for þat þou here saued. (440-45)

Piers Plowman (1459) contains references to executors also. Repentance warns Avarice to repent of his ill-got gains, for unless he does repent his heirs will not have any joy of his money, for executors will take it. (V, 266) The idea is repeated in the twelfth passus where "Excecutoures, [are] fals frendes . þat fulfille nought his wille / (XII, 257) þat was writen, and be witnesse . to worche rigt as it wolde." The rich man is in a dangerous state. The idea is repeated again in the fifteenth passus (XV, 126): evil men spend the goods evilly won. Executors are assumed to be evil, with no exceptions and no reprieve. The belief seems to be that a man should take care of his estate while he is alive.

Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) is more explicit in its description of the acts and reasonings of executors; the theme is similar to the

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[1]James, Cat., I, 441.

other complaints, but here the rich man who does not give charity to the poor is criticized for his late attempts, in this instance, of willing money to establish a hospital for the poor:

> Now muche moste his merite be þat mendeth so þe poure
> That gifeth his goode for God-is sake whenne his goste is passed.
> There is a title of testamentz þat I tolde neuer,
> How pryuyly þay been provid and y-put a-side,
> For so þe siluer be y-seluid for þe seel of boffice
> Anu þe feis alle y-tunge - þay folden þaym to-geire
> And casten þaym in a coffre leste þay copied were,
> And sith þay seure þaym by þaymself and seyen þees wordes:
> "Hit is no wise lare forte wake Tarrok while he sleepeth."
> For þough a quyntieme were y-quethe --cor quitance shal be never
> Though executours after-warde execute hit neuer,
> Ne do noght for þe dede as I do whenne I slepe.
> And yit þay seyen for þaymsilf right a subtile reason:
> "Why shuld we dele for þe dede? - He dine not while he myghte.
> He made vs in his mynde among alle his frendes
> To be his trowe attourneys and treete for his debtes,
> For so þat þay haue halfendele - þay move þaym holde content.
> Yit wol not þe goode so ferre- so mote we prouide cure tale,
> For I wol seye for myself - seye þou whenne þe liketh,
> Yf we do as he dude, may no man deme vs yuel,
> Ne rightfully by reason reprove vs nere-after.
> He was hope ware and wise while he was on live,
> And me lust not be lewed leste I fare þe wors.
> His custume was to kepe his goode - so lete vs kepe hit eeke,
> And benne after oure deeth day lete dele for vs alle,
> For oure executours aftre vs shal haue þe same charre."
> Thus þay chiden with charite and chacneth eche other,
> That til þe day of dome þe dele is not parfourmid. (1695-1722)

The poor are the victims of the false executors. The latter are then the more damned.

Almost all the criticisms of the king's justice can be found in the Cook's Tale of Gamelyn (1913).[1] The main plot of the disinherited younger brother, a victim of false executors, includes a bribed jury, a judge and jury intimidated by Gamelyn's band of greenwood men, and an evil sheriff, Gamelyn's older brother. The tale contains the same abuses of justice illustrated in other complaints. Violence and guile

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[1]French and Hale, pp. 209-35.

subdue the right. Of course, Gamelyn is made chief justice by the king at the end of the poem, but the audience must have been at least inured to, and at best appreciative of, the abuses in the tale. The popular attitude toward the corrupt judge, the avaricious lawyer, the thieving executor, and the force of retainers is a compound of fear and anger, fear that men cannot obtain justice, and anger that the evils cannot be remedied.

Conclusion

Fear and dismay at the inescapable and unchangeable moral evil and anger and desperation at the social consequences of abuses of the nobility constitute the attitude and temper of the complaints discussed in this chapter. There is not much humor. There is considerable grimness and resignation. These emotions are typical. The specific complaints about the nobility are largely indirect; the objects of complaint are too powerful to attack directly. The king is not attacked, but is debited with bad advisors; war is not criticized, but the taxes which pay for the war are so. The rich are not attacked, but their fashions and luxury are condemned. The king's justice receives more direct abuse probably because it cannot retaliate as quickly. The dire and terrible vengeance levied upon the peasants after the rebellion of 1381 is powerful evidence of the power of the nobility to retaliate. Many of the poems urge the king to hear the complaints of the people, but there is little evidence that their complaints were heard; that is the point of Mum and the Sothsegger (*6). Indeed the verse of complaint is the vague mutterings of popular discontent, discontent barely able to be identified or made clear. The verse studied in this chapter does

not contain names or dates or occasions; the abuses are vague, elusive, couched in general and non-specific terms. Piers Plowman (1459) carefully does not mention names but works by indirection and implication toward its criticism. Verses which attack the king's ministers by name (e.g., 3529) use obscure puns or heraldic devices, even when retaliation is impossible. When the critics are less vulnerable to retaliation, the criticism is more specific and more outspoken; the Church receives more criticism than the State, the names of the offenders are not given, but their ranks are, from pope to friar. This is not so true of the complaints about the nobility.

The specific complaints about the nobility do indicate a number of important conclusions. During the 14th century the resentment of the poor against the rich seems to increase. This resentment reveals a consciousness of class, and a belief that the poor deserve more of the world's goods. At the same time the belief that one should stay in the class of one's birth is maintained; those who rise above their class are criticized. The stability of the feudal society is desired by the poet of Wynnere and Wastoure (3137); hence, it would seem that the ideal society in the mind of the poet is a conservative and stable one, though the poet recognizes the change in society and attempts to deal with it. Both Wynnere and Wastoure must be controlled so that society as a whole may be benefited. The answer in Piers Plowman to the problems of society is completely conservative; men must improve their morals. The moral message of Mum and the Sothsegger (•6) is a unifying device for a number of important political and economic criticisms, not moral criticisms. Nevertheless the concern for injustices done to the poor forms the important matter of all three poems.

Another conclusion is that the vague mutterings of discontent are continuous, now increasing, now decreasing, but rather constant. The reigns of the less efficient kings, Henry III, Edward II, and Richard II, are periods of more complaints than the reigns of the more efficient kings. The complaining is continuous enough, and of such an emotional tone that it can be inferred that the themes and attitudes of the verse of complaint form an important and influential part of the temper of the literature of the period under consideration. To conceive of the literature of a period in terms of genres is advantageous to the study of that literature, but to contemplate the emotions and attitudes embodied in that literature regardless of genres may lead to an understanding of the people who read or listened to the verse and prose tales.

The specific complaints about the nobility also have a function ascribed to the general complaints, that of explaining, usually in moral terms, the present evil situations; the specific complaint has another function, to illustrate the particular ways of improving the social situation. The specific complaint implies or states the remedy as well as the illness. It is significant, too, that the three important poems of this chapter, Wynnere and Wastoure, Piers Plowman, and Mum and the Sothsegger belong to the latter half of the 14th century, and diagnose as well as prescribe. This implies that while men had realized that earthly existence can be a prelude to a heavenly one, it can also be of value in itself, and that something can be done to ameliorate it.

This last conclusion may be borne out by the discussion in the next chapter of the specific complaints about the Church. The Church is criticized for her worldliness, for her manifest disregard of those whom Christ bade her serve, and for her jealous interest in her own

welfare. The criticism is not only condemnation but a prescription; not only a moral reproof but a social injunction.

CHAPTER FOUR

SPECIFIC COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE CHURCH

The Church prays for all. To pray for the soul is not the only duty of the Church but sums up all her duties nevertheless: to teach the doctrines, the Gospels, the Pater Noster, Ave Maria and the Creed; to exhort men to prepare their souls for the Day of Wrath; to practise the rites and especially the sacrament of the Eucharist; to reprove men for their falling into sin and to assign penance to them; to teach the Ten Commandments; to persuade men to virtue; and by constant prayer to invoke the aid of the Trinity, the Virgin, and the Saints to attain the eventual salvation of men. To do this the Church justified all her acts, and exerted her tremendous power and authority over men. Priests, parsons, monks, friars, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and popes were created to do this blessed work or to see that it was done as well as mortal men, quick with the Holy Spirit, could do it. The best men attempted it and accomplished it, probably to a measure difficult to conceive today. To this high duty, taken for granted by so many, a large number of religious men could hardly adhere. The complaints reflect the deep despair of laymen and clerics when they saw the hypocrisy of the religious and reveal their passionate fear for the danger of their souls.

The Church is criticized more than the state; indeed, if the state is criticized, more often the blame is given to the clergy who

should have prevented the evils. "If gold rusts, what will iron do?" The sin most often ascribed to the clergy is covetousness and the name of Simon (3113) is attached to them:

> Symon, that fals man,
> doctor potat ecclesiarum;
> Moch sorow he began,
> virus diffudit amarum.

The poem titled "The Simonie" (4165) explores the progress of covetousness from the pope's palace to the warmly-dressed monk.

> God greteth wel the clergie, and seith their don amis,
> And doth hem to understonde that litel treuthe ther is;
> For at the court of Rome, ther treuthe shold bi-cinne,
> Him is forboden the paleis, dar he noht com therinne
> for doute;
> And thouh the pope clepe him in, 3it shal he stonde theroute.
>
> Alle the popes clerkes han taken hem to red,
> If treuthe come amonges hem, that he shal be ded.
> There dar he noght shewen him for doute to be slain,
> Among none of the cardinaus dar he noht be sein,
> for feerd,
> If Symonie may mete wid him he wole shaken his berd. (7-18)

The list of specific evils is extensive and will be considered in detail in this chapter. Bribery, chicanery, misuse of tithes, disobedience of the Regula are compounded with malice and falseness. The hunger for money corrupts the layman and thus the land wastes away.

Members of the Church are on Wynnere's side of the debate (3137), and cardinals at Paris provide the silk sheets Wynnere will enjoy in his exile. Another important poem critical of the Church is Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (663). The Plowmans Tale (3448) is no tale at all but a Lollard diatribe. Piers Plowman (1459) attacks the Church; bishops and friars aid Lady Mede, pardoners are busy, and worst of all:

> Ac now is religioun a ryder . a rowner bi stretes,
> A leder of louedayes . and a londe-bugger,
> A priker on a palfray . fro manere to manere,
> An heep of houndes at his ers . as he a lorde were. (X, 306-9)

The poet's attitude is plain. It should be remembered that the peasants rebelled against the wealthy ecclesiastical manors, monasteries, and other clerical landholders as well as against the nobility in 1381, and that foremost among the king's agents of vengeance was a bishop. Langland admonishes the religious very frequently and bids them perform their spiritual duty in sincerety, not hypocritically.[1]

This chapter describes complaints concerning four main aspects of the Church: the papacy and administration, Church discipline, education, and the lower clergy. These subjects overlap, but the analysis is necessary in order to consider the Church from different points of view.

The Pope

An interesting poem of the middle of the 13th century, probably written by a priest, already considers the papacy degenerate. It is titled: "Hwon holy chireche is vnder vote" (4085)[2]:

> Hwile wes seynte peter . i-cleped symon.
> þo queþ vure louerd him to . þu schalt hoten ston.
> Ich wile myne chireche . sette þe up-on.
> þeo þat heo schulde biwite . nv beoþ hire ivon.
> Of alle hire forme freond . nv naueþ heo non.
> þar-fore is hire wurþsype . wel neyh al agon.
> þo her wes symon . and nv is symonye.

St. Peter was a true pope of Rome, the rightful head of Christendom, and so were Clement and Gregory after him; they protected the Church well,

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[1]Gower draws the usual contrast between ancient days and his own in the Confessio (2662): long ago the Lombards did not buy and sell bishoprics, nor benefices with or without cure, but now "Simon the cause hath undertake,/ The worldes swerd on honde is take." (206-42) The Church takes a worldly sword in order to get worldly goods, despite Christ's command for peace. "That scholde be the worldes hele/ Is now, men sein, the pestilence." (278-9)

[2]Morris, EETS 49, p. 89.

but now:

> þo heo stod ful vaste . and seoþþe sume stunde.
> Nu me kasteþ hire to . myd markes and myd punde.
> Of seolure and of golde . to vellen heo to grunde.

The saints are the pillars of the Church; where are they today? St. Thomas suffered martyrdom, Archbishop Stephen fought for her, and through them the Church was worshiped.

> Nv is holy chireche vuele vnder honde.
> Bispes and clerekes . knyhtes and bonde.
> Kynges and eorles . to hire habbeþ onde.
> And þe seolue pope . þat heo bi-wyte scholde.
> Habbe he þe yeftes . of seoluer and of golde.
> Markes and pundes . myd rihte oþer myd wronge.
> Heo let heom alle i-wurþe . þat beoþ so swyþe stronge.
> Away þat heo bi vure daye . so is vnder vote.

The corruption of spiritual duty by "gifts" brings the papacy into disrespect. "The Simonie" (4165) is not so critical of the pope; the pope may call Truth into him, but Simony in the curia prevents him from entering. The pope is listed among those who worship Sir Peny (1480) and serve him in the poem of that title.

The pope's banner is seen in Wynnere's ranks (3137), and is thus described:

> And 3ondere a banere of blake þat þe bent houes,
> With thre bulles of ble white brouden with-inn,
> And iche one hase of henppe hynged a corde,
> Seled with a sade lede; I say als me thynkes,--
> That hede es of holy kirke, I hope he be there,
> Alle ferse to the fighte with the folke þat he ledis. (143-48)

There is a touch of humor in the design of the banner; the papal bulls stand for the pope's power, potent as a bull, but still only paper. Sir Israel Gollancz, editor of Wynnere and Wastoure, provides a more serious interpretation in this remark:

> The Pope's banner is black, with three Papal Bulls, white, a cord of hemp from each with a heavy lead seal. The growing feeling against papal influence in England is no doubt shown by the reference to the Bulls with their heavy leaden seals. The black has probably reference to Pope Clement's connexion with the Benedictine Order, who were the Black Monks.[1]

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[1]Signature (Ciii).

At the conclusion of the debate Edward gives his judgment. Wynnere is to go to the pope at Rome, by way of Paris;

> þe cardynalls ken þe wele, will kepe þe ful faire,
> & make þi sydes in silken schetys to lygge,
> & fede þe & foster þe & forthir thyn hert,
> As leefe to worthen wode as þe to wrethe ones. (462-65)

Papal avarice is the indirect complaint. The criticism of Wynnere applies to the Church as well.

Lady Mede (1459) "In þe popis paleys . . . .is pryue as my-self" (II, 23) according to Lady Holy Church, and Conscience says Lady Mede can get absolution whenever she wishes: "For she is priue with þe pope . prouisoures it knoweth,/ For sire symonye and hir-selue . seleth hire bulles." (III, 146-7) Conscience makes another complaint against the pope: "And sithen he prayed þe pope . haue pite on holi-cherche,/ And er he gyve any grace . gouerne first hym-selue." (V, 51-2) In the fifteenth passus the poet remarks how many bishops the pope has made, and there are so few converts—"What Pope or prelate now . perfourneth þat cryst hi3te, (XV, 482)/ Ite in vniversum mundum & predicate, &c.?" The red noble is preferred to the cross. In the next to last passus a vicar complains of the luxury of cardinals and their presence in kings' courts where they do so much damage. The poet then turns to the pope himself and his lust for power:

> And god amende þe pope . þat pileth holykirke,
> And cleymeth bifor þe kynge . to be keper ouer crystene,
> And counteth nou3t þough crystene . ben culled & robbed,
> And fynt folke to fy3te . and cristene blod to spille. . .(XIX, 439-42)

The worldly purpose of the pope is condemned severely in other poems as well.[1]

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[1] In Gower's Confessio Amantis (2662) is told the story of Pope Boniface VIII (whom Dante placed among the Simoniacs deep in hell, Canto XIX, Inferno) who gained the mantle by deceit, and to further his own ends placed the Interdict on France and was punished for his sins by imprisonment by Charles of Blois. (II, 2803-3084)

The charge is made in Pierce the Ploughmans Crede (663) that the Austin friars buy privileges from the pope when they wish to disobey the Rule. Dominicans are accused of buying bishoprics. This is a Lollard poem concerned particularly with the friars. Another Lollard poem, The Plowmans Tale (3448), has much more to say about the pope. The pope is given the responsibility for all the sins of the Church. He is represented in a one-sided debate by a Griffin, and the Lollard point of view is given by a Pelican, who speaks most of the time. The Pelican charges that the Church wishes to be greater than kings and emperors despite Christ's meekness. They call Christ sanctus deus, but they call the pope sanctissimus. But now can they be called saints who lead the people into error and keep them in thrall by the threat of spiritual power? They are not interested in heaven but the earth.

> Her heed loveth all honour,
> And to be worshipped in worde and dede;
> Kinges mot to hem knele and coure;
> To the apostles, that Christ forbede;
> To popes hestes such taketh more hede
> Than to kepe Christes commaundement;
> Of gold and silver mot ben hir wede,
> They holdeth hem hole omnipotent. (205-12)

The tirade is endless; the pope's spiritual authority is questioned: the pope seems to be above everyone, even Christ, when he sits in state; he damns and saves as if he were God; "Such pryde tofore god doth stink." (221-7) The pope uses Peter's power of salvation and damnation to sell sins, "In winning all their wit they wrall." (370) The pope sells bishoprics too, and other offices. Papal infallibility is questioned (437); St. Peter erred, and so did John, argues the Lollard. Furthermore a shepherd should not use a sword unless he is a butcher. These "traytours" have taken over Judas' role, carrying the purse, and like Judas, they hide and steal the money and misspend

it. If Christ were to return, they would damn him just as they call His words heresy.

The main complaints against the pope are his covetousness and his lust for worldly dominion:

> The emperour yaf the pope somtyme
> So hyghe lordship him about,
> That, at the last, the sely kyme
> The proudë popë putte him out! (693-696)

The criticism against the pope's covetousness is almost always contrasted with Christ's poverty, a doctrine at one time condemned by the Church as a heresy. Indeed, the poem is based on a contrast between what Christ or the Bible says and what the Church does:

> If pope or cardinall live good lyve,
> As Christ cammaunded in his gospell,
> Ayenës that woll I not stryve;
> But, me thinketh, they live not well.
>
> For if the pope lived as god bede,
> Pryde and hyghness he shuld dispyse,
> Richesse, covetyse, and crowne on hede,
> Mekenesse and povert he shulde abye— (1225-32)

The poem is quite repetitious and outspoken. The shepherd neglects his flock except for the shearing; the sins which are preached are the very ones committed by the religious. The Lollard documents continue and intensify the anti-clerical feeling of the first half of the 14th century.

Church and State.

The humiliation of pope Boniface VIII at the hands of the French began the decline of the temporal authority of the Church in international affairs. The Church continued to proclaim her authority, claiming more and more the power over kings and emperors, but that power actually declined. The Lollard complaints attributed to the temporal Church aims obtained by the wielding of a temporal sword. As early as the middle of the 13th century

the temporal interests of the Church had brought it less respect. For the most part the state acknowledged Church supremecy in spiritual matters, but more and more limited Church jurisdiction. The important point of contention was the papal taxation of English clerics. After the outbreak of the Hundred Years' War the English felt that such taxes went to the support of a French pope and attempts were made to restrict those taxes. Consider the animosity shown in this poem of Laurence Minot "On the Siege of Calais" (585)[1]:

> The France men er fers and fell,
> And mase grete dray when thai er dight;
> Of tham men herd alike tales tell,
> With Edward think thai for to fight,
> Him for to hald out of his right,
> And do him treson with thaire tales.
> That was thaire purpos, day and night,
> Bi counsail of the cardinales.
>
> Cardinales, with hattes rede,
> War from Calays wele thre myle;
> Thai toke thaire counsail in that stede
> How thai might sir Edward bigile.
> Thai lended thare bot litill while,
> Till Franche men to grante thaire grace.
> Sir Philip was funden a file,
> He fled, and faght noght in that place.

Much the same attitude is found in Froissart's account of the papal legates who appeared mysteriously before every major battle to try to negotiate a peace. They had very little effect.

The Lollards, however, felt the power of the Church quite keenly, and they made the opposite complaint, that the Church had too much power in England. The Plowmans Tale (3448) says:

> These han more might in England here
> Than hath the king and all his lawe,
> They han purchased hem such powere
> To taken hem whom they list nat knawe;
> And say, that heresy is hir sawe,
> And so to prison woll hem send; (637-42)

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[1]Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 80-3.

The Church taxes without the consent of the commons, as the king does not, and the collectors are corrupt; Church courts are harsher and one cannot defend oneself there; the Church takes a large fee out of preparing and executing wills. The Lollards implored the king and the lords to put the Church in its proper place. John of Gaunt tried to do so, and Wyclif was his unwitting dupe, but only to get the wealth of the Church. The Lollards, naturally enough, hysterically attacked the disciplinary power of the Church, for they were carefully searched out, haled to prison, held for a time, warned, and usually released upon recanting. It was not until after 1400 that the Lollards were more severely punished.[1] The main problems of Church and state do not appear in the verse of complaint. The decline of the power of the Church in temporal matters seems to be a fact. The decline of respect for the Church is due in part to the papal schism.

The Papal Schism. In 1376 the papacy was re-established at Rome, and in 1378 an Italian pope was elected. The French cardinals elected a French pope, who established his see at Avignon. W. E. Lunt remarks:

> For many years thereafter the world was treated to the extraordinary spectacle of two rivals, each claiming to be the vicar of Christ on earth and the supreme head of the church.[2]

The temporal advantages sought by the two popes clearly earned a due contempt, but for some reason difficult to discover few complaints survive. The Plowmans Tale (3448) has only this to say:

> Betwene hem now ther is gret stryf.
> Many a man is killed with knyf,
> To wete which of hem have lordship shall;
> For such, Christ suffred woundes fyve;
> For all such falshed will foul fall. (240-44)

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[1]Lunt, History, p. 255. [2]Ibid., p. 254.

In Piers Plowman (1459) an ignorant vicar complains of the cardinals that troop through the countryside. The commons hate them for their luxury and lechery. They should stay at Avignon "amonge þe iuwes . cum sancto sanctus eris, &c.,/ Or in Rome, as here rule wole . þe reliques to kepe" (XIX, 420-21); but this is the only reference to the schism. Gower touches on the schism in the Confessio Amantis (2062): "Betwen tuo Stoles lyth the fal" (336); the fire of Envy and the love of disputation has led to disbelief; he urges that the Church stand upon the right faith and do its duty. He attributes the schism to national rivalries, and as a consequence the flock is harmed in the absence of the guide. Gower's poem "In Praise of Peace" (2587) contains the idea that the schism is responsible for war:

> Upon three poynts stant Cristes pees oppressed;
> First, holy chirche is in her-self devyded;
> Which oughte, of resoun, first to be redressed;
> But yet so high a cause is nat decyded.
> And thus, whan humble pacience is pryded,
> The remenaunt, which that they shulde reule,
> No wonder is, though it stande out of reule. (253-59)

Except for these brief mentions the schism does not appear among the complaints. The tentative conclusion is that people simply were not very interested, or, since national interests were involved, not disposed to complain very loudly.

Pride and Worldliness

A more general complaint than those about papal politics or the schism are the attacks on the higher Church administration for pride and worldliness. The charge of covetousness is connected with this complaint in an obvious way, each implying the other, in "Hwon holy chireche is vnder uote" (4085), wherein the repetition of "silver and gold," and "marks and pounds" indicates papal preoccupation with the temporal

authority to the neglect of spiritual authority.

The Church is among Wynnere's ranks (3137) and must receive the criticisms attributed to the latter. Jack Trueman's epistle on the abuses of the age (1655), a General Complaint, gives a particular insight into the vice of bribery:

> No man may come truth to,
> But he sing, si dedero;
> Speake, spend and speed, quoth John of Bathon, and therefore
> Sinne fareth as wilde flood.

The amusing and yet contemptuous phrase, implying that the preamble to the bribe has become part of the liturgy, is amplified by the formula for success enunciated by Bishop John of Bathon. It is clearly implied that the bishop is cynical, an important charge. The Plowmans Tale (3448) attacks the worldliness of the clergy, putting them in the ranks of the "riders" "In glitterande golde of grete aray,/ I-paynted and portrei all in pryde/ . . .With golden girdles grete and small." (133-35) They make the Church a whore, selling her services, filling her with wine and ale, stuffing her treasure bags by bargaining for benefices. Their miters have more pearls on them than the queen's headdresses; the golden staff and cloth of gold robes are paid for by the tithes of the poor. Here is a typical stanza of frenzied denunciation:

> They ben as proude as Lucifer,
> As angry, and as envious;
> From good fayth they ben full fer,
> In covetyse they ben curious;
> To catche catell as covytous
> As hound, that for hunger woll yall;
> Ungoodly, and ungracious;
> And nedely, such falshed shal foul fall! (381-88)

The contrast with Christ's teachings is usually like this:

> They ben so roted in richesse,
> That Christes povert is foryete. (781-2)

The Lollard complaints differ in intensity from other writers' criticisms.

Gower makes the same charge but with moderation; these lines are from the Prologue to the Confessio Amantis (Pt.C):

> Nought for the merite of the charge,
> But for thei wolde hemself descharge
> Of poverte and become grete; (301-3)

Thus do men seek promotion in the Church, the best avenue to success. Gower hints at the worldliness of the clergy in remarking upon their declining learning; Sloth, he says, is in the library:

> To studie upon the worldes lore
> Sufficeth now without more;
> Delicacie is swete toth
> Has fostred so that it forloth
> Of clergie al that ther is. (323-7)

The sin of worldliness, it can be seen, includes many more sins in the clergy than it does in the laity. Since more was expected of the clergy than of the laity, the shortcomings of the former were consequently greater.

Wum and the Sothsegger (Pt.C) contains the charge that the clergy is worldly because they adhere to Wum. Keeping silent when the truth should be spoken is the surest way to advancement. The poet refers to the past to criticize their present behavior:

> For clercz were not knowe by þaire cloþing þat tyme,
> Ne by royal raye ne riding aboute,
> Ne by seruice of soueraynes, so me Iou helpe,
> Ne by revel ne riot ne by rente nothir,
> Ne by þaire double dees - ne þaire deuþe hoodes,
> Ne by drynkyng of dollid wyne ne by dntz at eue,
> Ne by worldly workes of writtes ne seelyng,
> Ne by no maniere nicete þat þey now vsen,
> But by þe deedes þat þey dide, I do you to wite. (643-51)

The characteristic turn to the present occurs in these lines:

> Thay bisien more for beneficies benne bibles to reede,
> And been as worldly wise and synners eeke
> As man vppon molde, and asmuche louen
> Wym and þe monaye, by Marie of heuene,
> For mayntenance and mede been þaire two mates. (669-73)

There is more. The main charges are worldliness and covetousness, all of which mean that the prelate does not do his spiritual duty:

> But how shuld a surgeon serue wel his kyre
> That cometh not in seuene yere to se be sore ooues, (1382-3)

The criticism is widespread in complaints about the Church that the shepherd does not minister to the flock, has indeed become befoulled with the same sins against which she preaches. The description is a bleak one, but it is so extensive that one is convinced of its basic truth. The degree of corruption is a problem not to be solved by analysis of the literature. The historical belief is that the Church was corrupt, but not so corrupt as the mass of verse suggests.

Covetousness

The misuse of money includes the charge of worldliness, simony, bribery, absenteeism, and, generally speaking, the complaint that the Church is not fulfilling its spiritual duty. Man can use money for good or for ill, and the literature of complaint time and again comes to the subject, as must any study of the literature, with a compulsiveness and vigor almost too great to bear. "Hwon holy chireche is vnder vote" (4065) ascribes the fall of the Church to money, marks and pounds, silver and gold. "The Simonie" (4165) recounts that the parson hides his peccadilloes, but if discovered he can stop the bishop's mouth with silver. Money illuminates a man's true character; if a poor man comes to a friar to ask shrift, and a rich man comes too, the poor man stands outside in sorrow and peril (169). To "Sir Peny" (1480) is attributed pride and "maistry," the power and authority of a lord. The decoration of a church, the rich clothing of prelates, and the dignity and hauteur and air of authority produced many complaints. These are ultimately democratic

in origin, perhaps, a result of a feeling that men are equal in deserving the fruits of the earth. The professed humility of the servant of Christ may have supported that idea. Whatever these feelings may have been--and of course they cannot be ascertained nor proven but only suspected--there are complaints about the worker's sweat and the friar's ease:

> Wib trauail of trewe men - bei tymbren her houses,
> And of be curious clobe - her copes bei biggen;
> And ar bis getyng is gret - be schal ben good holden.
> And ryzt as frankes dob nourt - but drynkeb vp be wyn,
> Wat ben wib her bagnesse - ben brouzt it to pese,
> Hirt so forebp freres - wib folke vpon erbe; (7.3-7)

Pierce the Ploughman's Creed (1.3) comments on extravagance because the friars do not deserve it; they either do not or cannot tend the poor--wanderer the priest. This is a failure of social and spiritual duty. The social contract is broken.[1]

Pluralism. To have more than one benefice is pluralism. It was a very widespread practice, and the paucity of complaints about it indicates that it may have been broadly accepted. Livings varied widely in value, but the competition for benefices became so acute during the 14th century, that even the poorest living was worth more than a vicar could do the work for a portion of the income. Often enough the priest received the income and did not work at all in his parish or did not even hire a vicar. At one time Wyclif was called upon to explain why there was no vicar in one of his livings. The poorer the benefice, the worse the vicar. In "The Simonie" (.417) the evil is illustrated thus:

> And if a parsoun have a prest of a clene lyf,
> That be a god counseiller to maiden and to wif,
> Shal comen a deffe and dotte him out for a litel lasse,
> That can noiht a fertling worth of god, unnethe singe a masse
> but ille.
> And thus shal al the parish for lac of lore spille. (97-102)

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[1]The Plowmans Tale (3448) makes much the same point, lines 189-196.

The neglect of parish duties is described in the Prologue to Piers Plowman (1459); among the crowd of people are:

> Bischopes and bachelers . both maistres and doctours,
> þat han cure vnder criste . and crounyng in tokne
> And signe þat þei sholden . shryuen here paroschienes,
> Prechen and prey for hem . and þe pore fede,
> Liggen in London . in lenten, an elles. (87-91)

Some of these sin by commission as well as omission; they serve the king, or are stewards to great lords, and say their hours badly. Another criticism of pluralism is that religious men become rich and liable to the evils of riches. The Plowmans Tale (1448) makes this complaint a number of times and connects it with the neglect of the cleric's spiritual duties. They are cattle-catchers and little more. Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) contains a reference to pluralism. The poet has been seeking the answer to his question: who is right, Mum or the Sothsegger.

> Thenne raughte I fro religion, redelees of wittes,
> And caried to closes and cathedralle churches
> There þat pluralite was prisely y-stablid. (553-5)

The priests there are all gluttons. Later in the poem, the speaker dips into his bag of complaints and brings out the old criticism of the "riders":

> Yit is þere a paire of pamphilettz of prelatz of þe royaulme
> In þe bottume of þe bagge, how boldely þay ride,
> Thees persones and þees prebendiers pluralite þat hauen, (1370-72)

These are the few complaints about pluralism: the vicar will be hired at as cheap a rate as possible, and the larger part of the income will be diverted from its proper use to the priest's luxury and sloth. The absentee cleric shares with the rich the attacks by the poor. Like complaints will be discussed in greater detail in the last section of this chapter.

Simony. Robert of Brunne (778) places simony in its traditional category of sin and defines it:

> To coueytyse longeþ symonye,
> þe whych haunteþ almost al clergye.
> Symonye ys, as men telle
> when 3yftys of holy cherche men selle. (5509-12)

To gain advancement without merit a cleric will give money for a benefice or other office, or if such an office is given for money, then "þu art a wulfe of Goddys folde." (5520) Robert counsels lords to give the best man the bishopric and not to take bribes from an inferior cleric. "The Simonie" (4165) has been referred to many times in the course of this analysis, but it most properly belongs here. The poem explores the progress of Simony through society, beginning at the court of Rome where Simony attacks Truth. Silver flows to the bishop, archbishop, and cardinals as water to the sea. The poem creates the aura of malevolent corruption; notice the skillful use of personification in this quotation:

> For sone so a parsoun is ded and in eorthe i-don,
> Thanne shal the patroun have 3iftes anon;
> The clerkes of the cuntre wolen him faste wowe,
> And senden him faire 3iftes and presentes i-nowe,
> and the bishop;
> And there shal Symonye ben taken bi the cop.
>
> Coveytise upon his hors he wole be sone there
> And bringe the bishop silver, and rounen in his ere, . . .(55-62)

The terms "simony" and "coueitise" are sounded throughout the poem with the inevitability and mournfullness of a tolling bell. The result of the bribery is that the office is badly performed. A cheap vicar is hired, and the income is squandered on luxuries. The evil parson is able to bribe the bishop to close his eyes to the parson's sins. The particulars of Simony's corruption are discussed in other sections of this chapter and need not be repeated here.

Piers Plowman (1459) mentions simony in the Prologue:

> Persones and parisch prestes . pleyned hem to þe bischop,
> þat here parisshes were pore . sith þe pestilence tyme,
> To haue a lycence and a leue . at London to dwelle,
> And syngen þere for symonye . for siluer is swete. (83-86)

And at Wede's wedding Simony is one of those who read out the marriage contract. When Theology objects to the contract, he curses Simony for shaming Holy Church. At the very end of the poem another criticism is made. Simony has not only become the purpose of the Church but it prevents the Church from being effective:

> Symonye hym [Coueityse] sente . to assaille conscience,
> And preched to þe peple . and prelates þei hem maden,
> To holden with antecryste . her temperalties to saue; (XX.125-27)

The poet is undermining the position of the Church on temporal power and bringing up the old controversy of the foul vessel and the pure sacrament. The last point is included in Lollard doctrine.

The Plowmans Tale (3448) is violent in its denunciation of simony. Here is an example of heavy-handed irony:

> They usen never no symonye,
> But sellen churches and prioryes (261-2)

Simony is charged again and again:

> They maken parsons for the penny
> And canons of hir cardinals;
> Unnethes amongest hem all any
> That he ne hath glosed the gospell fals!
> For Christ made never no cathedrals,
> Ne with him was no cardinall
> Wyth a reed hatte as usen mynstrals; (309-15)

The Lollards held quite heinous the use by the Church of the power of penance to obtain money, and compared the Church to Judas: "So wolde these trayen him for money" (623). The following stanza is effective

because of its last line:

> Shryft-silver suchē wollen aske is
> And woll men crepē to the crouche;
> None of the sacraments, save askes,
> Withoutē mede shall no man touche.
> On hir bishop their warant vouche,
> That is lawe of the decre;
> With mede and money thus they mouche,
> And this, they sayn, is charite! (941-48)

This position is essential to Lollard doctrine: if the priest is sinful, then the sacrament is invalid, and men are cheated both of their money and their spiritual necessities. The attack on the clergy receives a strong impetus from this argument.

In Mum and the Sothsegger (°6) the poet gives his advice on how to treat the friars when they beg: give them what they ask on condition that they ". . .preche þe peuple þe peril of synne,(474)/ How symonie shendith al hooly churche,/ And not forbere bisshop ne baron þat lyveth." Evidently the bishop looked ill on those who preached about simony.

Simony is a large and general term that includes many kinds of evils, but it connotes a vicious worldliness. The most important acts in man's life, to the devout, are the sacraments, and other religious acts, including penance and absolution. When these are sold or cynically administered, then fear seizes the religious man and he cries out against those who do so and against those who permit it to be done. The fear is illustrated in the frightening description of conspiracy and collusion between bishop and priest, archbishop and cardinal, cardinal and pope in such poems as "The Simonie" (4165) and The Plowmans Tale (3448). Even the personification of Sir Simony retains some of this fearfulness, spectre-like and cruel. The categories immediately following explore other aspects of simony, pardons and bribery.

Pardons. To sell the remission of sins, to prey upon men's hope

for salvation and dread of Hell for covetous motives was horrible. When the Church permitted and abetted this practice, her spiritual influence over men was lessened. The complaints do not attack the sale of indulgences and dispensations, probably because they did not come to the notice of the mass of men. These formed a thriving business in the Church; one suspects that the Church gave some of her decrees only because she could sell dispensations for their disobedience.

"Sir Peny" (1480) may buy both heaven and hell. In "The Simonie" (4165) a rich man goes to a friar to be shriven and brings him a gift. The Lollard attack on the friars in Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (663) is that they sell their religious services and buy dispensations from their Regula; the ploughman says:

> And Austynes rewle - þei reknep but a fable,
> But purchasep hem pryuylege - of popes at Rome. (466-7)

The friars have the privileges of hearing confessions and attending burials, but these are the most lucrative activities. The Austin friar accuses the Dominican of a practice similar to selling pardons:

> He holdep his ordynaunce - wiþ hores and þeues,
> And purchasep hem pryuileges - wiþ penyes so rounde;
> It is a pur pardoners craft - proue and assaye! (245-7)

A Minorite friar alleges that the Carmelites "prechep alle of pardon - to plesen the puple." The trap is baited with honey.

The seventh passus of Piers Plowman (1459) discusses pardons from a different point of view. It is one of the better passages in the poem and deserves summary. At the end of passus VI there is a prophecy of famine. Truth tells Piers to till the earth before the famine comes and purchases a permanent pardon "a pena & a culpa" for Piers and his heirs and all those who help him labor. Then occurs a disquisition on those who will receive pardon; just kings and knights,

bishops who observe the commandments, merchants who do good works, and those who help the poor. The poet inveighs against lawyers and beggars who feign infirmities, but those who are maimed and meek have their purgatory on earth. Then there is a sudden change:

> "Pieres," quod a prest þo . "þi pardoun most I rede,
> For I wil construe eche clause . and kenne it þe on engliche."
> And pieres at his preyere . þe pardoun vnfoldeth,
> And I bihynde hem bothe . bihelde al þe bulle.
> Al in two lynes it lay . and nouȝt a leef more,
> And was writen riȝt þus . in witnesse of treuthe:
> Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam eternam;
> Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum.
> "Peter!" quod þe prest þo . "I can no pardoun fynde,
> But 'dowel, and haue wel . and god shal haue þi sowle,
> And do yuel, and haue yuel . hope þow non other
> But after þi ded-day . þe deuel shal hane þi sowle!'" (VII, 106-115)

Piers then is angry and vows not to work any more but to do penance and say prayers only. Because Piers refers to the Bible, the priest taunts him, and they quarrel. The poet awakens and muses upon his dream:

> And how þe prest preued . no pardoun to dowel,
> And demed þat dowel . indulgences passed,
> Biennales and triennales . and bisschopes lettres,
> And how dowel at þe day of dome . is dignelich vnderfongen,
> And passeth al þe pardoun . of seynt petres cherche. (VII, 168-172)

The musings include an apology in advance, which indicates the care with which the poet guards himself:

> Now hath þe pope powere . pardoun to graunte þe peple
> With-outen eny penaunce . to passen in-to heuene;
> . . . .
> And so I leue lelly . (lordes forbode ellis!)
> þat pardoun and penaunce . and preyeres don saue
> Soules þat haue synned . seuene sithes dedly.
> Ac to trust to þise triennales . trewly me þinketh,
> Is nouȝt so syker for þe soule . certis, as is dowel. (VII, 173-180)

The warning to the rich which follows need not be repeated here. The poet envisions the Last Judgment and says that a "poke ful of pardoun" or letters, or indulgences are not any good unless "dowel" has helped. The point of the passus is the undermining of the prestige of pardons by

the argument of "good works." No matter how carefully the argument is put, the effect of it is powerful, for it cuts through the basis of the authority of the Church. One can infer from this daring that the sale of pardons had done irreparable damage to the authority of the Holy See.

The Plowmans Tale (3448) iterates the complaint: "To putte pennyes in hir purse (167)/ They woll sell both heven and hell." The people are harmed when the prelates sell their seals to pardoners. The consistory court is charged with bringing false accusations in order to get the fines and money payments for penances. The most traditional complaint is this one:

> A simple fornicacioun,
> Twenty shillings he shall pay;
> And then have an absolucioun,
> And al the yere usen it forth he may! (669-672)

Sin does not seem evil, only expensive. It seems likely that men became inured to the practice of selling and buying pardons and cynical about the power of the Church to loose and bind.

Bribery. The popular image of the aspiring priest is that he must bribe to gain advancement. "The Simonie" (4165) contains an apt stanza:

> Voiz of clerk is sielde i-herd at the court of Rome;
> He were he nevere swich a clerk, silverles if he come,
> Thouh he were the wiseste that evere was i-born,
> But if he swete ar he go,.. al his weye is lorn
> i-souht,
> Or he shal singe si dedero, or al geineth him noht.

The phrase "si dedero" has been referred to before,[1] and it seems a phrase which quickly became synonymous with bribery. The other function of bribery was to silence the disciplining tongue of one's clerical

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[1] In Jack Trewman's Epistle (1655).

superior:

> And thise ersedeknes that ben set to visite holi churche,
> Everich fondeth hu he may shrewedelichest worche;
> He wole take mede of that on and that other,
> And late the parsoun have a wyf, and the prest another,
> at wille;
> Coveytise shal stoppen here mouth, and maken hem al stille. (49-54)

The bishop can also be bribed, and so can the dean who should chastise the people.

The treatment of bribery in Piers Plowman (1459), particularly the vision of Lady Mede, is dramatic in nature; the personifications move and act as their characters require in a crowded pageant. Lady Mede is clearly the most important of these personifications: she is richly dressed, even wears a crown, and is treated with considerable respect by her adherents. Indeed, her evil is manifested by the worship which evil men give her, and her power is shown by the strength necessary to defeat her. Even the king is not able to withstand her until Reason is called; Conscience attacks her, but Wit and Wisdom are at first won to her defense. The struggle between good and evil is almost even. Lady Mede, of course, presents herself as "Reward" and not "Bribe" in the homage that vice renders to virtue, yet in her defense the words she speaks only reflect upon her own evil:

> Emperoures and Erlis . and al manere lordes
> For 3iftes han 3onge men . to renne and to ride.
> The pope and alle prelatis . presentz vnderfongen,
> And medeth men hem-seluen . to meyntene here lawes. (III, 212-15)

Conscience distinguishes between the two kinds of "mede"; the evil form is described thus:

> There is an-other Mede mesureless . þat maistres desireth:
> To meyntene mysdoers . Mede þei take:
> And þere-of seith þe sauter . in a salmes ende,
> In quorum manibus iniquitates sunt, dextera
> eorum replete est muneribus:
> And he þat gripeth her golde . so me god helpe!
> Shal abie it bittere . or þe boke lyeth! (III, 245-49)

What follows concerning Lady Mede is not directed against the Church as a whole, but against parsons and priests, who will be discussed later. The first part of the poem is about money, both its use and its misuse; its misuse is responsible for many evils.

Simony is, of course, connected with bribery. Another term which means bribery is "spicerie" and it occurs in Mum and the Sothsegger (*6). The term usually refers to small bribes given to the lower orders of the clergy in the form of spices, which were expensive, difficult to obtain, and highly regarded in cooking and eating. The poet urges men to give alms to friars on condition:

> That þay teche treuly þe texte as hit standeth,
> And abide þereby with a bolde herte,
> And spare for no spicerie ne no speche elles,
> But telle oute þe trouthe and tourne not a-side. . .(477-480)

Later, Mum gives a good description of his own activities, how he sits silently at great men's feasts, putting on wise looks and waiting for the matter discussed to come to a climax:

> He spendith no speche but spices hit make,
> Til he wite whitherward þat wil doo drawe.
> But þenne he knittith a knotte and cometh al at ones
> And getith hym a greet þanke to go among þe beste. (691-4)

Most of the complaints about bribery are concerned with the lesser clergy; the term "simony" seems to include bribery when it is charged against the great.

The criticisms discussed so far indirectly attack the higher administrative levels of the Church and bring indirect discredit upon the pope. Higher ecclesiastics do not receive much criticism; cardinals are spoken of disrespectfully in "The Simonie" (4165), Piers Plowman (1459), and The Plowmans Tale (3448), but they are guilty because they are responsible for allowing or even causing simony and worldliness in the Church. Piers Plowman (1459) contains a curious discussion of cardinals

by a "lewed vycory" in passus XIX: cardinals know nothing of the cardinal virtues, he says, and while every cardinal claims to be from the pope, we clerks must pay for their furs, food, and retinue.

> "þe comune clamat cotidie . eche a man to other,
> 'þe contre is þe curseder . þat cardynales come Inne;
> And þere they ligge and lenge moste . lecherye þere regneth:'--
> For-þi," quod þis vicori . "be verrey god, I wolde
> That no cardynal come . amonge þe comune peple,
> But in her holynesse . holden hem stille
> At Auynoun, amonge þe iuwes . cum sancto sanctus eris, &c.,
> Or in Rome, as here rule wold . þe reliques to kepe;. . ." (XIX, 414-21)

This attitude toward the cardinals is already familiar; the papal schism increased the contempt for cardinals because it was through their instrumentality that the schism was produced by France. The vicar implies that cardinals exert an evil influence in the king's court. "And cryst of his curteisye . þe cardinales saue./ And tourne her witte to wisdome . & to wele of soule'" (XIX, 446-7). The papal court as such is not much criticized.

If there was corruption on the lower levels of the Church, it can be assumed that the same existed among the cardinals, and that influence and other pressures were exerted in providing benefices, dispensations, and other matters in the control of the great prelates.

Doctrine and Dogma

Nor were the doctrine and dogma of the Church often criticized, and the complaints may be treated in a summary fashion. The Lollard poems contain a number of criticisms, some of which were peculiar to the Lollards, while others were widespread and popular. The doctrine of temporal authority--that the Church stood superior to kings and emperors--was more firmly enunciated by the Church as her powers declined throughout the 14th century. The fact was plain to everyone: temporal power was

used for the worldly interests of the Church instead of increasing her spiritual aid. The Lollards attacked the temporal authority of the Church because they feared it, although they were not heavily persecuted until after 1400 when the Church was able to obtain cooperation with the state to try and to execute heretics.[1] The criticisms of extravagence and covetousness, and the resentment shown in Piers Plowman (1459) against the cardinals who interfered with matters of the state, are probably also popular attacks on the temporal power of the Church.

The spiritual authority of the Church is questioned on such matters as transubstantiation. The Lollards inclined toward a more mystical understanding of that doctrine and to discard the scholastic complexities authorized by the Church. Indeed, the scholastic argumentation was in some cases replaced by an epistemological doubt that man could penetrate God's mysteries by reason. One poem (1402), probably not a Lollard one, remarks:

> þe more we trace þe Trinite,
> þe more we falle in fantasye
> But leue we vre disputisoun,
> And leeue on him þat al hab wrou3t; (95-8)

A more mystical interpretation of the rites of the Church is revealed in the Lollard reliance upon the authority of the Bible and Christ's teachings in their complaints. The poems challenge the efficacy of pardons and the validity of the sacraments when they are administered by impure hands. The Church always maintained that the sacrament is pure regardless of the vessel, but the Lollards placed more and more reliance upon "good works" and an upright life, as has been seen in Piers Plowman, where the issue is carefully discussed.

There is considerable dispute whether or not the Lollard move-

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[1]Lunt, History, p. 255.

ment and popular criticism of the Church shook her spiritual authority. Those who maintain that the Reformation of the 16th century had its roots in the 14th urge that Lollardy was never completely crushed. Even if this be true (and there are no facts to support it), the opposing argument seems strong, namely that Lollardy was crushed and that the spiritual authority of the Church was not further diminished nor her doctrines and dogma discarded. The temporal authority of the Church was on the decline; the conflict between Henry VIII and the pope was not concerned only with spiritual authority, but with her temporal authority as well. The 14th century, however, was probably more conservative than a discussion of complaints can suggest which, after all, shows only one side of the problem. While parliament hesitated for twenty years to give the cooperation the Church wanted to deal with heretics, it did so, and most likely because the spiritual authority of the Church and her jurisdiction over heresy could not be disputed.

The discussion in this chapter hitherto describes the complaints about the universal aspect of the Church found in English literature, her administrative and policy-making functions. On the whole, popular complaining was concerned more with the temporal evils of the Church, with her officials and not her laws, with the exercise of her authority rather than questioning that authority itself. The resemblance to criticisms of the government of the state is clear and interesting. The main charge against the government is covetousness, against the Church, simony, its ecclesiastic equivalent. Another topic will now be considered, the means of the Church for maintaining discipline both upon the laity and the lower orders of clergy, and the complaints about the laxity of those disciplinary and supervisory functions.

Church Discipline

The maintenance of proper discipline in the Church was the responsibility of bishops and archbishops who visited the parishes, monasteries, and nunneries in their jurisdiction, took complaints from the members of the institutions, and acted on them, correcting, admonishing, and punishing as they saw fit. It was a heavy responsibility and difficult to execute. Gossip and backbiting seems to have been favorite occupations in towns, monasteries and nunneries, and many of the charges with which the bishop had to deal were probably hearsay. Some of the complaints were undoubtedly true, judging from the sheer amount of criticism contained in the visitation registers. When the bishop did not correct an alleged offender, he became subject to like abuse. In one of the first poems discussed in this thesis (4051), the evil of the priest is connected with the sloth of the bishop:

> Preost þat is wilde.
> Þiscop slou.

It cannot, however, be argued away that the discipline was not always maintained. All too often the bishop was a busy man with many duties, and some duties were perforce neglected. One stanza from "The Simonie" (4165) has already been quoted to show the kind of complaint that was made (48 ff.). Besides the archdeacons, the bishop and archbishop receive blame:

> And erchebishop and bishop, that ouhte for to enquere
> Of alle men of holi churche of what life theih were,
> Summe beth foles hemself, and leden a sory life,
> Therefore doren hii noht speke for rising of strif
> thurw clerkes,
> And that everich biwried other of here wrecchede werkes.
>
> But certes holi churche is muchel i-brouht ther doune,
> Siththen Seint Thomas was slain and smiten of his croune.
> He was a piler ariht to holden up holi churche,
> Thise othere ben to slouwe, and feinteliche kunnen worche,
> i-wis;
> Therefore in holi churche hit fareth the more amis. (31-42)

Being slothful is not so sinful as taking bribes, as do the archdeacons, but the bishop's sale of benefices is worst. To compound the felony the bishop will overlook the sins of the new priest: "But unthank have the bishop that lat hit so go." (90) Who will keep the priests moral and hold the monks and friars to their Regula? The abbots and priors "contrefeten knihtes" (122) and such men will never hold fast to their vows. Such is the bitter complaint about the ability of the Church to keep itself in order. The whole point of Piers the Ploughman's Crede (663) is the friars' flagrant disregard for the purpose of their orders and their simplest religious duty; if this is so, then there cannot have been much discipline. The Plowmans Tale (348) follows the same pattern. The whole Church is sick with the disease of covetousness and no man stands upright. Cannot it then be inferred that the disciplinary agencies of the Church are corrupt?

Except for these specific references, there are no direct statements about visitation and inquisition. In Pum and the Sothsegger (*c) occur these lines reflecting on the delinquency of Visitors:

> There is a volume of visitacion of viftene leves
> How persones and prestis been y-passid ouer
> Thorough fauour of fangyng and no faute amendid,
> And pleyen lille for lalle with many levde kitte. (1353-56)

The main criticism is of absenteeism, but the lesser criticism of the visitor is implied whenever the sins of the subordinates are not rebuked.

What has been said about the discipline within the Church also seems to apply to the discipline the Church exerts upon the laity. The priest with his confessional and the laying of penance, the friar with his absolution, the consistory court with its heavier powers, the pardoner with his bull--all these seem to be for sale.

Consistory Courts

Much can be learned about the consistory courts from a peculiar poem which Wright titles "A Satyre on the Consistory Courts" (2287).[1] The first-person speaker recounts how he is hounced by the officers of the court, brought before it, and punished. It criticizes the court at the same time admitting the justice of its decision. The atmosphere of the court and the aspect of merciless justice, void of human sympathy, make the poem effective, especially when joined with the despair of the speaker. Nevertheless, the reader is meant to laugh at the narrator who speaks his mind in a naive way, acknowledging his guilt. The poem is quoted in full:

Ne mai no lewed libben in londe,
Be he never in hyrt so haver of monde,
    So lerede us bi-ledes;
3ef ich on molde mote with a mai,
Y shal falle hem byfore ant lurnen huere lay,
    Ant rewen alle huere redes.
Ah bote y be the furme day on folde hem by-fore,
Ne shal y nout so skere scapen of huere score;
    So grimly he on me gredes,
That y ne mot lede ther with mi lawe,
On alle maner othes that heo me wulleth awe,
    Heore boc ase un-bredes.
        Heo wendeth bokes un-brad,
        Ant maketh men a moneth a-mad;
    Of scathe y wole me skere,
    Ant fleo from my fere;
    Ne rohte he what it were,
        Boten heo hit had.

Furst ther sit an old cherl in a blake hure,
Of all that ther sitteth semeth best syre,
    Ant leyth ys leg o lonke.
An heme in an herygoud with honginde sleven,
And mo then fourti him by-fore my bales to breven,
    In sunnes 3ef y songe;
Heo pynkes with heore penne on heore parchemyn,
Ant sayen y am breved ant y-broht yn
    Of al my weole wlonke.

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[1] Wright, Pol. Songs, pp. 155-59.

Alle heo bueth redy myn routhes to rede,
Ther y mot for menske munte sum mede,
    Ant thonkfulliche hem thonke.
        Shal y thonke hem ther er y go?
        3e, the maister ant ys men bo.
    3ef y am wreint in heore write,
    Thenne am y bac-bite,
    For moni mon heo maketh wyte
        Of wymmene wo.

3et ther sitteth somenours syexe other sevene,
Mys motinde men alle by here evene,
    Ant recheth forth heore rolle;
Hyrd-men hem hatieth, ant uch mones hyne,
For everuch a parossche heo polketh in pyne,
    Ant clastreth with heore colle.
Nou wol uch fol clerc that is fayly,
Wende to the bysshop ant bugge bayly;
    Nys no wyt in is nolle.
Come to countene court couren in a cope,
Ant suggen he hath privilegie proud of the pope,
    Swart ant al to-swolle.
        Aren heo to-swolle for swore?
        3e, the hatred of helle beo heore!
    For ther heo beodeth a boke,
    To sugge ase y folht toke;
    Heo shulen in helle on an hoke
        Honge therefore.

Ther stont up a 3eolumon, 3e3eeth with a 3erde,
Ant hat out an heh that al the hyrt herde,
    Ant cleopeth Magge ant Malle;
Ant heo cometh by-modered ase a mor-hen,
Ant scrynketh for shome, ant shometh for men,
    Un-comely under calle.
Heo biginneth to shryke, ant scremeth anon,
Ant saith, "by my gabbing ne shal hit so gon,
    Ant that beo on ou alle;
That thou shalt me wedde ant welde to wyf."
Ah me were levere with lawe leose my lyf,
    Then so to fote hem falle.
        Shal y to bote falle for mi fo?
        3e monie by-swyketh heo swo.
    Of thralles y am ther thrat,
    That sitteth swart ant for-swat,
    Ther y mot hente me en hat,
        Er ich hom go.

Such chaffere y chepe at the chapitre,
That maketh moni thryve-mon un-thenfol to be,
    With thonkes ful thunne;
Ant seththe y go coure at constory,
Ant falle to fote uch a fayly,
    Heore is this worldes wynne,
Seththen y pleide at bisshopes plee.

Ah! me were levere be sonken y the see,
In sor withouten synne.
At chirche ant thourh cheping ase dogge y am drive,
That me were levere of lyve then so for to lyve,
To care of al my kynne.
Atte constorie heo kenneth us care,
Ant whissheth us evele ant worse to fare;
A pruest proud ase a po,
Seththe weddeth us bo,
Wyde heo worcheth us wo,
For wymmene ware.

The poet describes a crowded, busy scene, as viewed by an harassed, confused culprit with whom we sympathize and at whom we laugh. But we do not laugh at the criticism of the learned men whose books seem like so many weapons to the ignorant herdsman. The disinterested, uninterested judge in his black gown and the busy clerks scratching away at the parchments are grimly portrayed. The clerks have a sharp eye out for the bribe, according to the narrator, and they had better be thanked, for his name is in their writ. The summoners with their lists, hated by herdsmen, claiming the privileges granted by the pope, are cursed by the defendant. Then the accusation by the shamed Maggy, and our poor hero sees his judgment given at the same time as the accusation in the faces of those black-gowned men. The humorous cliché of the necessary marriage and the condemned bridegroom is worked out fully.

There is in the poem a touch of dismay and fear caused by the power and authority of the court operating in dimly understood ways that is reminiscent of the despair voiced in "The Song of the Husbandman" (696). The humor is forced in the "Satyre," however, and the poem lacks the consistent emotional tone of the "Song." The court is impersonal; there are no religious overtones to the proceedings at all. There are suggestions that false informing and false accusations could be made, that bribes might be given and taken, and that punishment is automatic. Of course,

the speaker is more worried about his punishment, marriage, than about his sin. There are some nice dramatic elements in the poem which lift it above the mediocre, but the suspicion remains that the primary purpose of the poem is male humor.

The criticism of the consistory and of the dean in "The Simonie" (4165) has been mentioned briefly, but it belongs here:

> And officials and deanes that chapitles sholden holde,
> Theih sholde chastise the folk, and theih maken hem bolde.
> Tak a present to the den ther thu thenkest to dwelle,
> And have leve longe i-nouh to serve the fend of helle
> to queme;
> For have he silver, of sinne taketh he nevere 3eme.
>
> If a man have a wif, and he ne love hire noht,
> Bringe hire to the constorie ther treuthe sholde be souht,
> And bringge tweye false wid him and himself the thridde,
> And he shal ben to-parted so faire as he wole bidde
> from his wif;
> He shal ben holpen wel i-nouh to lede a shrewede lyf.
>
> And whan he is thus i-deled from his rihte spouse,
> He taketh his neiheboures wif and bringeth hire to his house;
> And whiles he hath eny silver the clerkes to sende,
> He may holde hire at his wille to his lives ende
> wid unskile;
> And but that be wel i-loked, curs in here bile. (193-210)

The poem of complaint often contrasts what should be with what actually is. The second stanza indicates that divorce, or annulment, was not as rare as one would normally think it would be under the domination of the Church. Bribing the consistory appears in Piers Plowman. When Conscience (1459) describes Lady Wede's misdeeds, he lists this one:

> To be cursed in consistorie . she counteth nou3te a russhe;
> For she copeth þe comissaris . and coteth his clerkis;
> She is assoilled as sone . as hir-self liketh,
> And may nei3e do . in a moneth ones,
> As 3owre secret seel . in syx score dayes. (III, 141-5)

Later in the poem, Charity's habits are discussed; he was once, long ago, a friar, but now he seldom appears in the consistory:

In þe constorie bifor þe comissarie . he cometh nouȝt ful ofte,
For her lawe dureth ouer-longe . but if þei lacchen syluer;
And matrimoigne for monye . maken & vnmaken,
And þat conscience and cryst . hath yknitte faste,
þei vndon it vnworthily . þo doctours of lawe. (XV, 234-8)

Divorce, bribery, lack of mercy prevail. The Lollard complaints about the consistory are, of course, prejudiced. The drawing-out of the trial is criticized in The Plowmans Tale; a man is charged with a sin, (3448) and the clerical officers force him to pay for absolution even though he is innocent; conversely:

Though he be gilty of the dede,
And that he yet may money pay,
All the whyle his purse woll blede
He may use it fro day to day!
These bishoppes officers goon full fay,
And this game they usen over-all;
The pore to pill is all hir pray; (349-55)

The Pelican cries that they "demin all without mercy" (510) and use "agaynst pite, punishments" (520). Lines 669-72 suggest the use of the power of the Church for extortion, but it may be used for protection as well; the Pelican says that lascivious priests when caught out will say they are sorry, but no man is hardy enough to accuse them to the consistory. (877-84) The main criticisms of the disciplinary agency of the Church are that the court is harsh, uses its power for gain and for its own protection. The Lollards charge that the misuse of the power of the court proves that the Church wields a temporal sword as well as a spiritual one, and that this is contrary to Christ's teaching. On the whole, the operation of the court, its jurisdiction and practices, is shaded with evil. It is difficult to decide whether the court was feared or merely regarded with disinterest. The popular conception of it seems to be that it was corrupt.

Inquisition into Heresy

The Lollard criticism of the consistory may find its rationale in the fear of inquisition into heresy, a fear which led the Lollard poets to attack the Church for persecuting them. Into the argument was injected the issue of the two swords: the cursing by bell, book, and candle was not so much feared as the fire and rope. In Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (603) Wyclif is mentioned:

> Wytnesse on Wycliff . þat warned hem wiþ trewþe
> For he in goodnesse of gost . grayþliche hem warned
> To wayuen her wikednesse . and werkes of synne.
> Now sone þis sori men . seweden his soule,
> And oueral lollede him . wiþ heretykes werkes! (526-32)

One senses an hysterical pitch to the complaint indicative of considerable fear. Pierce remarks upon another preacher:

> Alle þat persecution . in pure liif suffren,
> Y prrie, parceyue now . þe pursut of a frere.
> In what manere of meknesse . þise men deleþ,
> Ryhold opon Wat Irut . hou bisilich þei pursueden
> For he seyde hem þe sope . and set, syre, ferþere,
> Hy may no more marren hym . but men telleþ
> þat he is an heretike . and yuele byleueþ,
> And preciþ it in pulpit . to blenden þe puple;
> þei wolden awyrien þat wiȝt . for his well dedes; (643-651)

There is a species of irony here; for doing what the friar ought to do but does not do, the Lollard is persecuted. The condemnation is stronger in The Plowmans Tale (344ff). The Church prevents the poor from preaching, says the Pelican, and for "poor" read "Lollard":

> All tho that han the world forsake,
> And liven lowly, as god bad,
> In-to hir prison shullen be take
> Betin and bounden, and forth lad. (557-60)

There is a reference here to the controversy over apostolic poverty; the Pelican (and Pierce too) puts on himself the mantle of humility and poverty, taking it, as it were, from the friars. The Lollard poet gives

the Griffin lines which are angry and vituperative:

> So with the tales that thou doest tell
> Thou woldest other people dietry,
> With your glose, and your heresy, (1143-5)
> . . . .
> Thou shalt be brent in bidefull fyre;
> And all thy secte I shall diffrye,
> Ye shal be hanged by the swyre! (1234-6)
> . . . .
> Ye shullen be hanged and to-drawe.
> . . . .
> Thou shalt be curred with boke and bell,
> And dissevered from holy churche;
> And clene y-dampned into hell. (1241-3)

The poet unwittingly made a true prophecy. The Pelican answers that he does not fear the cursing, and in the fight between the birds which ends the Tale, the Pelican wins. No other complaints about the inquisition into heresy have been found.

Penance

One other form of discipline was exerted by the Church upon both lay and religious, the authority to hear confession, to assign penance, and to grant absolution. This authority is the basis of the power of the Church. The usual charge is that the substitution of money payment for penance harms the "penitent" and the confessor, who is thereby tempted to covetousness. The complaints against the friars and the priests for their covetousness will be reserved to the final section of this chapter, but there are a few complaints about penance of a different nature. In "The Simonie" (4165) the point is made that because deans can be bribed, the people are made bold to sin. The same point is strongly made in a poem against the friars (2777):[1]

> For had a man slayn al his kynne,
> Go shryve him at a frere,
> And for lesse then a payre of shone
> He wyl assoil him clene and sone,

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[1]Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 263-68.

Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (063) iterates the complaint in many ways; all the friars are willing to absolve the wandering poet for pennies. Pierce recognizes the seat of authority when he remarks:

> Weren her confessiones . clenli destrued,
> Hy schulde nouȝt beren hem so bragg . ne belden so heyȝe,
> . . . .
> þe power of þe apostelle . þei passen in speche,
> For to sellen þe synnes . for siluer oþer mede, (705-12)

The poet gives as his reason for desiring to learn the Creed that his priest has threatened him with a hard penance:

> þe prest wil me punyshe . and penaunce enioyne;
> þe lengþe of a Lenten . flesh moot y leue
> After þat Estur ys ycomen . and þat is hardfare;
> And wedenes-day iche wyke . wiþ-outen flesh-mete. (10-13)

The priest can only gain credit for his motive, but the penance does seem hard. Cynicism is the result of money payment for penance. The poet of Mum and the Sothsegger (06) makes that charge but sees more, and farther-reaching, guile in the friars' power of confession:

> Thorough crafte of confession to knowe men intentz,--
> Of lordz and ladies that lustes desiren,
> And with þaire wyly wittz wirchen on euer
> And mulden vp þe matiere to make þaym fatte,
> And gouuernen þe grete and guilen þe poure. (461-5)

On the whole, there are very few complaints about the severity or kind of penance, or about any violation of the confessional, and, surprisingly enough, the parish priest is not criticized at all. The complaints about the discipline of the Church can be summed up in one word: covetousness.

"Quis custodiet custodies?" might be the central question to ask. It is easy to overestimate the piety of the people of the 14th century; and the parish priest cannot cope with every sin if the sins be many. If there are many corrupt priests, then it becomes impossible to correct them and attempts at discipline are worse than useless; the bishop or archbishop must then enforce those laws which can be practicably enforced.

The consistory courts undoubtedly abused their duties. The summoners probably established a spy system and extorted "protection" money just as the tax collector did. The villagers were probably watched and spied upon by men who did not care about penance and absolution but about profit. It is quite likely that the absence of many complaints about the consistory is due to fear that the poet would be punished.

The Universities and Education

Another main group of complaints is concerned with the universities and education, scholasticism, ill-educated prelates, and anti-intellectualism. This subject is placed in the chapter on the Church because the primary function of the universities was to educate men for the Church. Many graduates became royal officials and served the state, but they were often paid by income from benefices. They were criticized because they were royal officials and could not, therefore, fulfill their more important social duty, the cure of souls. Except for this last criticism and the manifestation of anti-intellectualism, these poems represent a point of view that cannot be called popular, but they are still important complaints.

The town and gown struggles at Oxford did not stimulate any complaints in verse, except in the Chronicle of Robert of Gloucester (727).[1] Lollard comments on scholastic disputations reveal no firsthand knowledge of them but only the usual popular contempt for things dimly understood. One would expect to find among the students the writers of complaints; there are only one or two poems which indicate the weariness of students

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[1] In 1263 a full-fledged battle between the students and the townsfolk was ended only by the intervention of the king and his men, who chased the scholars out of the town. They had broken into a bower's shop and armed themselves, and had picked out the mayor's shop, a wineshop, for special consideration because of a dispute about the closing of a town gate. (11185-11233)

over dialectic, and there is a poem on the same subject by a priest or friar. The universities had the function of providing leadership for the English church and state, and there do not seem to be complaints about the effectiveness of this function. There are complaints about the knowledge and education of parsons, priests, and vicars--those having the cure of souls--but these received their education in a much more hit-or-miss fashion than they do today; i.e. probably did not attend the universities, or, if so, not for long.

Education is referred to frequently in Piers Plowman (1459). The subject is treated fully in passus X in the examination of Do-Well. Personification in a dramatic tableau is used. Wit has a wife named Dame Study. She reproves him for casting pearls before swine, namely those flatterers and fools who prefer riches to wisdom:

> Wisdome and witte now . is nouȝt worth a carse,
> But if it be carded with coueytise . as clotheres kemben here wolle. (X, 17-8)

Whoever can contrive deceits and conspire wrongs is called to council. These men are like jugglers and japers. Those who can preach of holy things are despised. The preacher has become a minstrel, opprobrious for his ribald stories; Dame Study describes a dinner conversation:

> Ac if þei carpen of cryst . þis clerkis and þis lewed,
> Atte mete in her murthes . whan mynstralles ben stille,
> þanne telleth þei of þe trinite . a tale other tweyne,
> And bringen forth a balled resoun . and taken Bernard to witnesse,
> And putten forth a presumpsioun . to preue þe sothe. (X, 124-8)

This refers to disputations among clerics and unlearned men. Dame Study has heard men at the high table "carpen as þei clerkes were . of cryste and of his miȝtes," (X, 102) and questioning God's purpose:

> Suche motyues þei moeue . þis maistres in her glorie,
> And maken men in mysbileue . þat muse moche on her wordes; (X, 113-4)

Dame Study reproves those who desire to know more than God wills because

of intellectual pride:

> For alle þat wilneth to wyte . þe weyes of god almi3ty,
> I wolde his eye were in his ers . and his fynger after, (X, 122-3)

Then occurs one of those excursions into Allegory. The poet asks Dame Study to help him find Do-Well. She recommends him to Clergy and Scripture, who are found down the road of "hennes to suffre-/ Bothe-wel-&-wo" passing by Riches and Lechery until the court of "kepe-wel-þi-tonge-/ Fro-lesynges-and-lither-speche- . and-likerouse-drynkes." Sobriety and Simplicity will be met, and then Clergy to whom Dame Study first gave the Psalter, Wisdom, logic, and music. Another reference to abstruse studies is then made:

> Ac theologie hath tened me . ten score tymes,
> The more I muse þere-Inne . þe mistier it semeth,
> And þe depper I deuyne . þe derker me it þinketh;
> It is no science for sothe . forto sotyle Inne;
> A ful lethy þinge it were . 3if þat loue nere. (X, 180-4)

Langland reveals the suspicion and prejudice against occult sciences, sorcery and alchemy, and also against astronomy, geometry, and geomancy: Dame Study states that she invented those sciences to deceive men.

The poet then hears a long sermon by Clergy. At the end of the sermon the poet makes a startling reversal, casting confusion on the many things said by Dame Study and Clergy which seem valid. The poet holds that predestination rules salvation, that learning does not determine Grace (he cites that Solomon and Aristotle were damned), that many witty and learned men are in hell. The argument is based on this line of thought:

> Clergye þo of crystes mouth . commended was it litel;
> For he seyde to seynt Peter . and to suche as he loued,
> <u>Dum steteritis ante Reges et presides, &c</u>:
> þough 3e come bifor kynges . and clerkes of þe lawe,
> Beth nou3te abasched . for I shal be in 3oure mouthes,
> And 3yue 3ow witte at wille . and kunnynge to conclude
> Hem alle þat a3eines 3ow . of crystendome disputen. (X, 442-8)

The poor ploughman may be saved with one <u>Pater Noster</u> while a wise clerk

who knows many books is damned. The theme of intellectual pride recurs often enough to warrant its inclusion in the literature of complaint: it is evidence of anti-intellectual current in popular thought. The 14th century is a time of mysticism, lay and monastic, and perhaps that also is an influence, comprising as it does a direct way to heavenly knowledge and undermining scholastic study, and ultimately even Church dogma. The poet's rejoinder to Clergy's sermon is directed at Clergy's arrogation of the power of salvation. The poet states simply that the Church does not control Grace, although he prays that Holy Church prove to be a Noah's Ark in dark times.

Reason speaks in the fifteenth passus of the lust for knowledge, how it caused the Fall, and particularly of excessive knowledge:

> For in þe lykyng lith a pryde . and a lycames coueitise,
> Aȝein crystes conseille . and alle clerkes techyng.
> That is, non plus sapere quam oportet sapere.
> Freres and fele other maistres . þat to þe lewed men prechen,
> ȝe moeuen materes immesurables . to tellen of þe Trinite,
> þat ofte tymes þe lewed peple . of hir bileue douten. (XV, 65-70)

It is better to teach the Ten Commandments and the Seven Sins than to contrive complicated doctrine. Even so,

> Doctoures of decres . and of diuinite Maistres,
> þat shulde konne and knowe . alkynnes clergye,
> And answere to argumentz . and also to a quodlibet,
> (I dar nouȝt seggen it for shame) . if suche weren apposed,
> þei shulde faillen in her philosofye . and in phisyk bothe. (XV, 373-7)

An interesting criticism is made about "þise newe clerkes": none of them can versify, nor can read more than Latin or English, and barely can write. Langland's standards seem high.

The Lollards accused the friars of the sin of intellectual pride, as in this passage of the Crede (663) where a Dominican friar, his chaps quivering in indignation at the poet-wanderer's unknowing affront to his order, protests that Augustines were not founded first:

But, felawe, our foundement . was first of þe opere,
And we ben fulliche . wiþ-outen fayntise;
And we ben clerkes y-cnowen . cunnynge in scole,
Proued in procession . by processe of lawe. (250-3)

The anti-intellectual bias is clear in the following quotation, where it is joined with the charge of intellectual pride and absenteeism. Pierce is speaking:

And also þis myster men . ben maysters icalled,
þat þe gentill Iesus . generallyche blamed,
And þat poynt to his apostells . purly defended.
But freres hauen forȝetten þis . (and þe fend suweþ,
He þat maystri louede . Lucifer þe olde),
Wher Fraunceis or Domynik . oþer Austen ordeynide
Any of þis dotardes . doctur to worþe,
Maysters of dyvinitie . her matens to leue,
And chereliche as a queueteyne . his chambre to holden
Wiþ chymene and chapell . and chesen whan him liste,
And serued as a souereine . and as a lorde sitten.
Swiche a gome Godes wordes . grysliche gloseþ;
Y trowe, he toucheþ nouȝt þe text . but takeþ it for a tale.
God forbad to his folk . and fullyche defended
þey schulden nouȝt stodyen biforn . ne sturen her wittes,
But sodenlie þe same word . with her mowþ schewe
þat weren ȝeuen hem of God . þoruȝ gost of him-selue.
How mot a frere studyen . and stumblen in tales,
And leuen his matynes . and no masse singen,
And loken hem lesynges . þat likeþ þe puple,
To purchasen him his pursfull . to paye for þe drynke. (574-94)

The Lollards liked the term "glose" for its ambiguity, "gloss" and "flattering lie." One wonders where the poet of the above passage learned the argumentum ad populum.

The poet-wanderer in searching for the answer to his question, who is right, Mum or the Sothsegger (*6), decides to go where such questions are discussed, the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Orleans. The personifications of the seven arts and sciences cannot answer him. Their answers remind one of the strange behavior of the learned men whom Gulliver meets in his voyage to Laputa.

Sire Grumbald þe grammer þo glowed for anger
That he couthe not congruly knytte þaym to-gedre.
Musik and Mvm mighte not accorde,
For þay been contrary of kynde, who-so canne spie.

Phisic diffied al þe bothe sides,
Bothe Mvm and me and þe soeth-sigure;
He was accumbrid of oure cumpaignye, by Crist þat me bought,
And as fayn of oure voiding as foul of his make.
Astronomy-ys argumentz were alle of þe skyes,
He-is touche no twynte of terrene þinges.
Rethoric-is reasons me luste not reherce.
For he conceyued not þe caas, I knewe by his wordes;
Þut a subtile shophister with many sharpe wordes
Sette þe soeth-sigger as shorte as he couthe.
Þut he wolde melle with Mvm ner more ner lasse,
So chidinz and chateringe as choghe was he euer.
Ieometrie þe ioynour iablid faste,
And caste many cumpas, as þe crafte askith,
And laide leuel and lyne a-long by þe squyre.
Þut I was not þe wiser by a Walsh note
Of þe matiere of Mvm. . . (330-50)

The poet becomes angry and is about to burst forth in anger when he sees on a high seat "A doctour of doutz . . . ful of philosophie." The doctor speaks to the poet:

. . ."Soon, seest þou þis semble of clercz,
How þay bisien þaym on þaire bokes and beten þaire wittz,
And how þay loken on þe levis þe letter to knowe?. . ." (3[illegible]-8)

Never, he says, has anyone asked such a question; "Hit is sum noyous nycete of þe newe ietts." (3745) The clerks, he adds, read the text and no farther, how to live without sin. If you wish an answer to your question, go see the graduates who forget the text and read the gloss and live with lords and use "plaisance of wordes." The ivory tower was criticized then too. In short, the universities were attacked for their lack of utility, but also because of an anti-intellectual bias.

Scholasticism.

The criticism found in Mum and the Sothsegger (*c) of the schools may reveal more of the popular attitude toward the university than the contempt for useless knowledge; the method whereby that knowledge was found, scholasticism, and the dialectic method of disputation, is also

attacked. The "doctour of douts" and his over-specialized colleagues are almost ludicrous, and the scholastic system is in an instant discarded as useless, despite its great contribution to knowledge. To be sure it was a closed system and its assumptions were dogmatic, but once the method was understood and the definitions learned, it was a finely-honed tool. The widening of knowledge was not the only effect of scholasticism; men's intellectual capacities were increased as well.

"The Song of Nego" (1638)[1] seems the product of a witty but disgruntled student who evidently felt that the dialectical method had outlived its usefulness and served only to hide second-rate intelligences: It is quoted in full:

> Hit nis bot trewþ iwend an afte
> Forte sette "Nego" in eni crafte;
> Trewþ so drawiþ to heuen blisse;
> Nego doþ noȝt so iwisse;
> "Forsake" and "saue" is þef in lore,
> "Nego" is pouer clerk in store.
> Whan menne horliþ ham here and þare,
> "Nego" sauiþ ham fram care.
> Awei wiþ "Nego" vte of place,
> Whose wol haue godlis grace!
> Who so wol aȝens þe deuil fiȝte,
> þer mai "Nego" sit ariȝte.
> Ak loke þat we neuer more
> "Nego" sette in trew lore,
> For who so can lite, haþ sone ido--
> Anone he drawiþ to "Nego".
> Now o clerk seiiþ "Nego"
> And þat oþer "Dubito",
> Seiiþ an oþer "Concedo".
> And an oþer "Obligo",
> "Verum falsum" sette þer to--
> þan is al þe lore ido.
> þus þe fals clerkes of har hewid
> Makiþ men trewþ of ham be reuid.

It is the kind of poem a student might make while listening to the highly stylized disputation and grown weary.

Another poem criticizes the emptiness of disputation. "This World

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[1]Wright, Pol. Songs, pp. 210-11.

fares as a Fantasy" (1402) and it is directed didactically at the masters of divinity:

> I wolde witen of sum wys wiht
> Witterly what þis worlde were
> Hit fareþ as a foules fliht,
> Now is hit henne, now is hit here, (1-4)

The gentle sadness of the mutability theme governs the poem. No one but God knows our coming hence nor our going thither, and the same is true of generations, no matter what a man's desire for fame may lead him to do:

> Sum are for-3ete clene as bon
> A-mong alle maner nacions;
> So schul men þenken vs no-þing on
> þat nou han þe ocupacions;
> And alle þeos disputacions
> Idelyche all vs ocupye,
> For crist makeþ þe creacions,
> And þis world fareþ as a fantasye. (29-36)

Both man and beast die, and except that man is more sly, they are alike. Who knows if beasts go to heaven, or if they pray, but their Creator? All sects rave at each other, but all believe in God:

> And bi heore wit heore worchinz preue.
> þus mony maters men don meue,
> Sechen heor wittes hou and why; (68-70)

. . . .

> Whar-to wilne we forte knowe
> þe poyntes of Godes priuete?
> More þen him lustes forte schowe
> We schulde not knowe in no degre;
> And Idel bost is forte blowe
> A Mayster of diuinite
> þenk we lyue in eorþe her lowe,
> And God an heiz in Mageste;
> Of Material Mortualite
> Medle we & of no more Maistrie.
> þe more we trace þe Trinite,
> þe more we falle in fantasye. (85-96)

We must leave our disputations because we cannot discover how Christ was born; instead we must worship. The weariness of useless and tedious argu-

ments, the aimless certainties amidst greater uncertainties, are summed up in quite an excellent way. It is unfortunate that this kind of piety--perhaps like that of Savonarola--is destructive. When extended the argument becomes ruinous to every search for knowledge.

The point of view expressed in Piers Plowman (1459) is already clear: logic and law come under attack in the eleventh passus:

> þanne is byleue a lele helpe . aboue logyke or lawe;
> Of logyke ne of lawe . in legenda sanctorum
> Is litel allowaunce made . but if bileue hem helpe.
> For it is ouerlonge ar logyke . any lessoun assoille,
> And lawe is loth to louye . but if he lacche syluer.
> Bothe logyke and lawe . bat loueth nouȝte to lye,
> I conseille alle crystene . cleue nouȝte þer-on to sore. (XI, 213-19)

Learn, rather, the law of love. In passus XIII the poet dreams again. Clergy takes him to dinner with Conscience, and poor Patience is brought in; the latter and the poet sit at a side-table. Clergy is a master, probably a prebendery connected with a cathedral, and he sits on the dais and eats rich food:

> Of þat men mys-wonne . þei made hem wel at ese.
> Ac her sauce was ouer soure . & vnsauourely grounde,
> In a morter, post-mortem . of many bitter peyne,
> But if þei synge for þo soules . and wepe salt teres: (XIII, 42-5)

The poet is sorry to see the doctor drink so much wine and eat so much rich food; he whispers to Patience:

> "It is nouȝt foure dayes þat þis freke . bifor þe den of poules,
> Preched of penaunces . þat poule þe apostle suffred,
> In fame & frigore . and flappes of scourges;" (XIII, 65-7)

Patience replies that the doctor will suffer penance soon--from indigestion. A discussion follows about the nature of Do-Well. The doctor says that it consists of doing no evil to a fellow Christian. The poet retorts that then the doctor does not do well, for Conscience and the poet have not eaten. Conscience asks the doctor what Do-Well is: the answer is that Do-Well obeys, Do-Bet teaches, and Do-Best does both. Clergy has seven

sons, the sciences, who teach what Do-Well is.

"Til I se þo seuene . and my-self acorden,
I am vnhardy," quod he . "to any wyȝt to preue it.
For one pieres þe ploughman . hath inpugned vs alle,
And sette alle sciences at a soppe . saue loue one,
And no tixte ne taketh . to meyntene his cause,
But <u>dilige deum</u> . and <u>domine, quis habitabit, &c</u>.
And seith þat dowel and dobet . aren two infinites,
Whiche infinites, with a feith, fynden oute dobest,
Which shal saue mannes soule . þus seith piers þe ploughman."
"I can nouȝt her-on," quod conscience . "ac I knowe wel pieres;"
(XIII, 121-130)

The same appeal to common-sense and faith is used to undermine the scholastic disputation in <u>Pierce the Ploughman's Crede</u> (oc3). The ploughman teaches the poet-wanderer the Creed, and then comments on the sacrament of the Eucharist:

And þouȝ þis flateryngе freres . wyln, for her pride,
Disputen of þis deyte . as dotards schulden,
þe more þe matere is moved . þe masedere hy worþen.
Lat þe losels alone . and leue þou þe trewþe,
For Crist seyde it is so . so mot it nede worþe;
þerfore studye þou nouȝt þeron . ne stere þi wittes,
It is his blissed body . so bad he vs beleuen. (819-25)

Indeed, too much musing on the Gospels is dangerous:

þise maystres of dyvinite . many als y trowe,
Folwen nouȝt fully þe feiþ . as fele of þe lewede.
Houȝ may mannes wit . þoruȝ werk of him-selue,
Knowen Cristes pryuitie . þat all kynde passeþ? (26c-9)

These lines are reminiscent of lines 85-88 of "This World fares as a Fantasy" (1402). One more reference, and an amusing one, occurs in <u>Mum and the Sothsegger</u> (*6); the poet-wanderer of that poem is:

Rehershyng þe reasons of bothe two sides,
The pro and þe contra as clergie asketh.
But for witte þat I wanne I wolde þat he knewe
I was neuer þe nyre, but as newe to beggynne
As clerc is to construe þat can not reede. (299-303)

The formal debate cannot solve the problem, even though the moralist can find a quick answer, and the man of common sense knows which is correct.

The popular attitude toward scholasticism and the masters of

divinity is clear from these poems; as a method it is useless, and the knowledge it provides may be dangerous, perhaps magical and devilish; it can lead to the sin of intellectual pride.

Ill-educated Prelates

Another criticism involving education is the prejudice that prelates knew nothing; this seems inconsistent with the criticism that scholasticism produced esoteric sermons, but it is there nevertheless. What seems to be meant by this criticism is that prelates do not occupy pulpits of their own, but instead, in some other kind of business, such as serving the king. The prelates are not much criticized; their lack of education adds a fillip to the other criticisms. The criticism is combined with simony in Piers Plowman (1369); Lady Mede "pleseth biso bissopes . boþe þey ne lewed." (III, 142) The same point is made in The Plowmans Tale (3448) in discussing how an aspirant to a benefice achieves his goal through bribery:

> Though he conne no more good,
> A lordes prayer shal he sped;
> Though he be wild of wille or mood,
> Not understanding what men han red,
> A hoster, and (that God forbede!)
> As good a bishop as my lord Bull,
> Suche a pope is foule be-stad,
> And at the laste wel foul fall! (397-404)

And a more succinct statement is made seven lines later:

> Suche that connê not hir Crede
> With prayer shull be mad prelates;
> Nowther conne the gospell rede,
> Suche shull now welde hye estates. (413-16)

That is most likely a gross exaggeration.[1] Except for these references

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[1]Equally exaggerated are these comments from Lydgate's Chronicle (710), Capiter C.xciii: Richard II had many bishops in his chapel who could not sing a mass or read the Scriptures well; they were "lewed men . . . .in clerkes clothyng" who pretended to great learning, but their parishioners got little good from them. They did, however, have great learning in covetousness, to judge by their practice.

there is little criticism that the prelates are ill-educated.

An interesting criticism concerning education is found in Pierce the Ploughman's Creda (443); in deep disgust the ploughman speaks:

> Now mot ich soutere mis sone . setten to schole,
> And ich a beggers brol . on þe booke lerne,
> And worþ to a writere . and wiþ a lorde dwell,
> Oþer falsly to a frere . þe fend for to seruen!
> So of þat beggers brol . a bischop schal worþen,
> Among þe peres of þe lond . presse to sitten;
> And lordes sones lowly . to þo loselle aloute,
> Knyȝtes croukeþ hem to . and cruccheþ full lowe;
> And his eyre a soutere . ȝ-suled in grees,
> His teeþ wiþ toylinge of leþer . tatered as a sawe! (744-53)

While the quotation does provide an interesting description of a cobbler, the hatred for the friar seems to be applied to the schools as well. It is difficult to account for this unless it reflects the conservative view that one ought to remain in the degree to which one was born. If education can make the difference between a cobbler's son and a bishop, one would expect education to be popular. The poet, however, prefers the younger sons of the nobility for the bishoprics. His main point is that richer men will not exploit their cures for gain, while the cutter's son might.

Royal Officials.

The king employed a number of university graduates as officials in his government; they were, of course, clerics who derived their income from benefices given by the king or his lords or provided by the pope, perhaps upon recommendation by the king. These clerical assistants were absentees without the cure of souls, and consequently they were criticized. Man cannot serve two masters, say the complaints. Among the general complaints there are two couplets (4235) which criticize Edward II for making prelates out of churls, and earls out of clerics. In "The Simonie" (4165) there is a stanza which states the complaint explicitly:

> But everi man may wel i-wite, who so take 3eme,
> That no man may wel serve tweie lordes to queme.
> Summe beth in office wid the king, and gaderen tresor to hepe,
> And the fraunchise of holi churche hii laten ligge slepe
> ful stille;
> Al to manye ther beth swiche, if hit were Godes wille. (43-8)

The royal work had to be done by someone, and the king found his clerks where he could, and paid them by any means he could. It does not seem to be true that the privileges of the Church were lessened, but strengthened, for the patronage of the pope and the king was often bestowed to their mutual advantage and could be used, if necessary, as diplomatic levers. Popular opinion seems to have been that men could rise by education to positions of power and wealth, and that some positions were very lucrative:

> For who so in swich office, come he nevere so pore,
> He fareth in a while as thouh he hadde silver ore; (325-6)

The sins of covetousness and pride are highly unbecoming to the clerical state.

Piers Plowman (1459) has this to say about the royal officials, and about other clerics who serve lords in business capacities; many absentees and pluralists, bishops, bachelors, masters, and doctors neglect their cures and the poor:

> Somme seruen þe kyng . and his siluer tellen,
> In cheker and in chancerye . chalengen his dettes
> Of wardes and wardmotes . weyues and streyues.
> And some seruen as seruantz . lordes and ladyes,
> And in stede of stuwardes . sytten and demen.
> Here messe and here matynes . and many of here oures
> Arn don vndeuoutlych; . . . . (92-98)

In the Crede (663) the Carmelite friar criticizes the Dominican order for worldliness: "þey ben counseilours of kinges; . Crist wot þe soþe,/ Hou þey currey kinges . and her back claweþ!" (364-5) The contrast of good and evil is indicated in this quotation:

> Who wilneþ ben wisere of lawe . þan lewd freres,
> And in multitude of men . ben maysters y-called,
> And wilneþ worshipes of þe worlde . and sitten wiþ heye,
> And leueþ louynge of God . and lownesse behinde? (497-500)

Friars should not beguile the great, nor be confessors and councillors of kings, but should return to their spiritual duty. Much the same complaint is made in The Plowmans Tale (3448). One of the clerics close to the king in Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) openly admits allegiance to Mum:

> For alle þe greet clercz þat with þe king lendith
> Knoweth þis as kindely as clerc doeth his bokes:
> Hit is no siker seruice but for a somer saison.
> But yf hit were for a fool þat wold not be ferthred.
> He might sey sothe sum while among þaym
> And shuld be holde fooly þough hit feul after. (108–113)

It was seen earlier that graduates leave their books and go to serve lords in luxury, read only the gloss and speak gently, confess lords and ladies, and control them thereby. One consequence of this practice is that the clergy were slow to rebuke the great lords for their envious quarrels; these religious are adherents of Mum:

> . . .prelatz aughten haue dite when princz hee mosued,
> And reede þaym so þat rancune roote not in hert,
> And ere þe grame growe ferre . þe ground so to wede
> And amende þat were mysse ere any moore caicche
> Of man-slaughter or mourdre, as hath many dayes. (728–732)

The royal clerical official is criticized because he is an absentee and neglects the cure of souls, because he is proud and covetous of wealth and power, and because he forgets his other religious duties and religion itself. This is approximately the same attitude the medieval Englishman held toward the administrative officers of the pope.

Lollardy.

The Lollard movement arises from the thinking and writing of John Wyclif and from his teachers, from Oxford University, and for that reason is discussed under this heading of the chapter. A movement as broad and vigorous as Lollardy cannot be attributed to a single cause. The upheaval of the Peasants' Revolt had some theoretical justification, found in

Wyclif's On Civil Dominion of 1378, in which it is argued that ownership involves a contract between the owner and God, and that if the owner is immoral, he does not own anything. Wyclif also attacked the doctrines and rites of the Church, progressing finally to his denial of transubstantiation. Behind both of these ideas is a belief that the mediation of priests is not so important as the individual's own faith, belief, prayer, and understanding of God. This is, of course, partially derived from mysticism, the ultimate object of which is a union with God transcending rationality.

The Lollard movement also arises out of popular resentment of the overloaded hierarchy of the Church, her dogma and the manifested corruption of both high and low clerics. The stories of the Christ rebuking the rabbis of the temple are very popular stories in any age because they attack constituted authority, bureaucratic, entrenched, and dogmatic authority. The priest is a custodian of arcanae, and a jealous guard of them; the prophet seeks the ever-welling source of religious life, reinterprets it to fit the times and to make the word of God fresh and persuasive. The monastery developed because of a need for a more perfect Christian life, answered in contemplation and study, and the orders of friars originated because of a need to renew the command of Christ to go forth and preach. The enemy of the prophet is time, for in time the prophet becomes a priest. When the friars became limiters, accumulated wealth, founded houses and chapters and chapels, and fell away from their ideal, then they became objects of popular criticism, the more bitter because they had seemed to be more perfect. The Lollards rode the crest of the popular wave of protest and considered themselves the new evangelists.

Such an interpretation does not, perhaps, do justice to more basic motives of men. The friars were powerful preachers and were often much

more devout and learned men than the village vicars and curates, and they made a deep impression on the people; they were new. The priests found their incomes diminishing, and the scholar monks resented some of the friars' doctrines. The attempt of the friars to combine the active and contemplative life drew the criticisms of both the priests and monks. Gradually the friars obtained permission to preach, to hear confession and grant absolution, and to conduct burials. These are activities normally done by the priest.[1]

There was a great amount of controversy within the Church in the 14th century, and the controversy gradually became a matter of popular feeling; Wyclif and his writings bridge the gap, giving the popular criticisms a theoretical cohesiveness and a point of departure. Lollardy represents only part of the criticisms of the Church and it likely would not have become a movement unless the popular temper was ready to support it. The adherents of the movement were the poor priests, vicars, and curates who for the most part were poorly paid, most of the income going to the absentees, and who faced the competition of the friars for their remaining income. In this way the theological controversies spilled over into popular complaints. Once the movement began, the objects of complaint increase; the friars are not alone, for the whole Church is included in the attacks.

A poem titled "A Song Against the Friars" (2777) attacks other branches of the Church as well. The poem begins in an ironic, tongue-in-cheek way by saying that friars are more given to devotion than are priests,

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[1]An excellent illustration of the antipathy against the friars by other members of the clergy can be found in a letter from the prior of Norwich to Gloucester College at Oxford, quoted in W. A. Pantin, The English Church of the Fourteenth Century (Cambridge University Press, 1955), p. 176.

monks, and canons. Some of the latter love chivalry, rioting, and bawdiness:

> Bot ffrers gyven hem to grete study,
> And to grete prayers,
> Who so kepes thair reule al,
> bothe in worde and dede;
> I am ful siker that he shal
> have heven blis to mede.

The poem continues with more false praise: the friars are men who do great penance, for their food is simple and spare. Suddenly the poet drops the pose, and says the opposite:

> I have lyved now fourty 3ers,
> And fatter men about the ners
> bit sawe I never then are these frerr.

The friars wander about in pairs and deal in merchandise in order to entice housewives. The wife buys their wares, but the husband pays. They use their power of confession and absolution for seduction. The main theme of the poem is that friars are hypocrites; they say they destroy sin, but in effect they foster it because of their cheap absolutions. The CAYM acrostic appears in the poem; C for the Carmelites, A for Austins, I for Jacobins, and M for Minorites. Having the Devil as their founder, there is no doubt that the friars cause much wickedness:

> Ther shal no soule have rowme in helle,
> Of frers ther is suche throng.

The friars compete with the priests, especially since they have received annuals and become limiters. The king ought to dissolve the friars in the same way he did the Templars. While friars can and do preach well, they do not practise what they preach. The poet concludes with a testimonial; although he was a friar for eleven months, he left the habit:

> . . .when I sawe that thair lyvyng
> Acordyd not to thair precking.

A similar poem attacks the Minorite friars (2063) for their dramatizations of the Passion and other Biblical scenes. By the use of false wings and

artificial stigmata, realistic effects were produced, and this, the poet claims, is a misrepresentation of the Deity. The friers are proud and gluttonous:

> Wyde are thair wonnyngges, and wonderfully wroght;
> Murdre and horedome ful dere has it boght,
> With an O and an I, for sixe pens er thai fayle,
> Sle thi fadre, and hope thi modre, and thai wil the assoile.

Those friers who criticize the clergy most do not even know the Creed.

Langland (1459) seems to have been his own man, not a Lollard, but a critic unconnected with any sect. A number of criticisms made in the poem are also made by Lollards, however, and the portrait of Piers as an evangelist who quotes the Bible and largely bypasses the clerical offices in his search for Truth, Do-Well, Do-Bet, and Do-Best suggests Lollard influence. Piers Plowman contains many if not all the popular criticisms of the time and of course holds much of the criticism which follows. It may very well be that the poem influenced the Lollard movement, or that the two are inextricably connected. Piers' pardon, and the priest's challenge of it, in the seventh passus has been discussed. The priest mocks Piers:

> "What!" quod be preest to perkyn . "peter! as me pinketh,
> bow art lettred a litel . who lerned be on boke?"
> "Abstinence be abbesse," quod pieres . "myne a.b.c. me taughte,
> And conscience come afterward . and kenned me moche more."
> "Were bow a preest, pieres," quod he . "bow myzte preche
> where bow sholdest,
> As deuynour in deuynyte . with dixit insipens to bi teme."
> "Lewed lorel!" quod pieres . "litel lokestow on be bible,
> On salomones sawes . selden bow biholdest,
> Eice derisores et iurgia cum eis, ne crescant, &c." (VII, 130-38)

The tactics are those of the Lollards: the direct approach to the Bible, to the virtues, to inspiration rather than education. The poet muses on the dream, and later equivocates about the value of pardons. He states, finally, that pardons may save souls, but Do-Well is better and surer. The conversation just quoted resembles that between a priest and a Lollard;

the priest pretends to superiority in learning and looks down on the simple ploughman, while Piers is portrayed as sincerely searching for instruction. Generally speaking, the Lollard documents bear a tone of hysteria and fanaticism, of bitter criticism, while the other complaints have a tone of humility about them. In passus X, the dreamer ponders the critics of his time:

> þanne is dobest to be bolde . to blame þe gylty,
> Sithenes þow seest þi-self . as in soule clene;
> Ac blame bow neuere body . and þow be blame worthy: (X, 256-8)

This is applied to priests, and in what may be an allusion to Lollards the dreamer commiserates with "Lewed men" who deplore sinful priests; he does, however, warn them to look to their own virtue:

> For-þi, ȝe correctoures, clawetb her-on . and corecteth
> fyrst ȝow-seluen,
> . . . .
> And þanne shal lorel clerkes ben abasched . to blame ȝow or
> to greue,
> And carpen nouȝte as bei carpen now . and calle ȝow doumbe hounder,
> Canes non valentes latrare,
> And drede to wratthe ȝow in any worde . ȝowre werkemanship to lette,
> (X, 284-8)

It would seem that Langland is steering a difficult course between the position of the Church and Lollardy. In the famous passage where Piers is interpreted as Christ (XV, 206) there is a kind of disclaimer of Lollardy: the theme is that man can only be known by his will:

> þere-fore by coloure ne by clergye . knowe shaltow hym neuere,
> Noyther þorw wordes ne werkes . but þorw wille one.
> And þat knoweth no clerke . ne creature in erthe,
> But piers þe plowman . petrus, id est, christus,
> For he ne is nouȝte in lolleres . ne in lande-leperes hermytes,
> Ne at ancres, þere a box hangeth . alle suche þei faiten,
> Fy on faitoures . and in fautores suos! (XV, 203-9)

Langland is the man who stands aside from the world and watches it and comments on it, who tries to understand it in Christian humility and charity, and who knows that the bitter controversy between the Lollards and the Church cannot lead to improvement but to an even more entrenched

antagonism.

Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (603) is a set propaganda piece, but it is a clever one. Its purpose is to show that the friars do not fulfill the mendicant ideal of poverty and preaching but instead seek riches. The aim of propaganda is to seem objective and to persuade without seeming to try to do so. The Crede borrows Piers' name and makes him a spokesman for the poor, but he speaks a diatribe. The poet presents himself in the first person as another poor ploughman who must learn his Creed and who seeks out the four orders in order to do so. Each order declines but instead offers to absolve the wanderer from sin for money, and blames the other orders for various sins. Each order thereby convicts itself of backbiting, and unwittingly reveals its own sins. The wanderer then encounters Pierce who first criticizes all the orders and then teaches the wanderer his Creed. Other devices are used to degrade the friars. Each order is given an unwholesome setting: one fat friar is found sitting in a richly ornamented chapter house; a pair of friars are in a tavern. The Crede, by means of these devices, portrays the Lollards as gentle, humble, and sincere Christians, who are persecuted by evil friars resentful of just criticism.

The Plowmans Tale (3048) was perhaps written by the author of the Crede, but it most certainly was not written by Chaucer, although it is fitted with a head-link similar to those in the Canterbury Tales. The plowman argues violently with the Host and fiercely attacks the persecution of Lollards by the Church. The Tale is cast in the form of a debate, but only the Lollard adherent does much speaking. The Crede is referred to in passing as an attack on the friars, while the Tale attacks the whole Church. It is polemic and resembles the screeching of birds rather than sane argument. The verse is quite poor. The Lollards are

described as persecuted and poor, hounded by the Church on earth and in heaven or hell:

> The other syde ben poore and pale,
> And people put al out of prees;
> And semē caytifs sore a-cale,
> And ever in oon without encreen,
> I-cleped lollers and londlees;
> Who toteth on hem, they been untall. (69-74)

The temporal power of the Church is attacked with all the ferocity born of fear. At one point in the poem the Griffin charges the Pelican with despising the pope and speaking against the sacraments and against tithing. The Pelican answers that he does not despise the pope, only his "hyē pryde" (1181); the sacraments are respected, but not when they are sold; tithing is wholesome, but not when the tithes are given or taken for covetousness. The Lollard position on the doctrine of transubstantiation is simpler and more mystical than the orthodox doctrine:

> I say soth, therew trewē rede,
> His flesh and blood, through his mystry,
> Is there, in the forme of brede.
>
> Now it is there, it nedeth not strive,
> Whether it be subget or accident,
> But as Christ was, when he was on-lyve,
> So is he there verament. (1215-24)

One can see the anti-intellectual bias of the Lollards in this quotation. The more specific complaints will be discussed in the last section of this chapter.

Mum and the Sothsegger (*) is not a Lollard poem, even though it contains anti-clerical criticisms. One suspects that the theme of the poem may be a result of the Lollard movement. The charge of heresy and Lollardy seems to have been used toward any criticism, much as "Un-American" is used now. The effect of this would be to silence the critics. When the poet-wanderer visits the friars they condemn themselves by adhering to Mum in the dispute, because Mum has done them more good. It

is interesting to note that the poet repeats the CAYM acrostic and generally criticizes the Church, and warns that they may persecute the truthtellers.

Lollardy was of course cruelly crushed, but perhaps it had done all the work it could. The initial impetus of the movement gradually slowed, and with the execution of Sir John Oldcastle in 1415, it was in effect stopped. Any reform movement must come within the Church in this period, and as seems universally true, any reform movement becomes a captive of agents with less pure motives. The movement had a popular effect; it was strong enough to voice many of the criticisms of the Church with considerable authority. For a while it had a great leader in Wyclif and accumulated authority thereby, but no power was strong enough to withstand the charge of heresy by an entrenched and accepted Church. The Lollard movement became a lost cause when the Church began to condemn them for heresy, and no matter how many agreed with the criticisms of the Church, they dared not risk that charge.

The Lollard movement suggests a popular desire for meaningful ritual, for sincerety in the performance of religious acts by the priests, and for some realization of the Christian faith in the world. The Church was luxurious and many of its members hypocrites, and the movement enabled the criticisms to be made. The people wanted a religion ruled in the spirit of Christ and not ruled by the Sanhedrin.

The brief discussion of Lollardy is necessary for two reasons: (1) the movement illustrates the transfer of ideas from the university to the market place, and (2) some definition is needed so that the criticisms of the lower clergy can be separated into Lollard and non-Lollard criticisms. The two classes of criticism overlap, of course, and the Lollard propagandists used popular criticism for their own ends,

but the distinction between the two is required to show where if vaguely the one ends and the other begins. One can therefore understand that the chronicler's statement that one of every two men met along the way was a Lollard is an exaggeration and one can infer that the popular criticisms were widely held.

The Lower Clergy

The last main section of this chapter deals with the complaints about the lower clergy with the cure of souls. The complaints are based on the assumption that the social duty of the Church was the cure of souls by both secular and regular clergy, priest, friar, and monk. It is not surprising, therefore, to find complaints that the priest should be a good example to his congregation and is not. The specific instances are almost innumerable. The charge which sums them all up is that the religious are hypocrites. While this dissertation presents only one side of an argument, any attempt to even the balance must include the fact that absenteeism and pluralism, and simony too, allowed men to develop into scholars and officials who contributed greatly to the welfare of Church and the state, to learning, and to the arts. One cannot praise the unifying and civilizing power of the Church on one hand and criticize the means by which that power was obtained on the other. Nevertheless, the by-product of pluralism and absenteeism was often an ignorant and sinful priest, a slothful monk, and an avaricious friar. The most important function of the Church was thereby ill-served.

The "wild priest" (4051) allowed by the bishop who neglects discipline has been discussed above; such an example is hardly edifying to the parish. The complexities of the problem of the sinful priest and the pure sacrament were not clear to most complainants. Robert of Brunne (778)

perhaps relies more on popular belief than on Church doctrine, but he holds that it is sacrilegious for the sinful cleric to give the sacraments:

> Also þe clerk þat haunteþ synne,
> But he lete, and þer-of blynne,
> He shal not serue at þe auter,
> Noþer halewed þyng to comẽ ner. (10269-72)

To the poet of "The Simonie" (415) there is no worse charge than that the priest does not seek the spiritual welfare of his parish but their tithes. An interesting poem (3328)[1] attributed to the Franciscan Jacob Ryman tells of the false fox that came to "oure halle/ And assoyled oure gese both grete and small. . ./ "to oure halle dore/ And shrove oure gese there in the flore." One infers that vulpine absolution is not to the benefit of the goose's soul.

In the crowd of folk in the Prologue to Piers Plowman (1459) are a number of religious: lying palmers, hermits with their wenches, friars who twist the gospel, pardoners who absolve evil men, priests who live in London, and clerks who work for the king. All these neglect or pervert their religious duty to the detriment of the cure of souls. Langland considers pardoners a great menace to salvation; Liar escapes from the King's officers and runs to the pardoners, who care for him and give him pardons and send him to church. (II, 219) Friars also entertain him, and even clothe him as a friar. Lady Mede is worshipped by many clerics. Langland makes Sloth a priest in his strongest indictment. Sloth knows tales of Robin Hood, but not his Pater Noster; he falls asleep over his prayers, and he admits he is a hypocrite. He visits neither the sick nor prisoners and lies abed in lent with his "lemman." The most general criticism of the Church that Langland makes is that the example of a sinful cleric corrupts

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[1]Robbins, Sec. Lyr. XIV and XV Cents., p. 44.

the laity: "Si sacerdocium fuerit in peccatis, totus populus conuertitur ad peccandum." Langland illustrates the worldly priest with contrasting images:

> If lewed men wist . what þis latyn meneth,
> And who was myn auctor . moche wonder me þinketh,
> But if many a prest bere . for here baselardes and here broches,
> A peyre bedes in her hande . and a boke vnder her arme. (XV, 116-19)

Langland's point seems to be that when a cleric sins, the people lose faith in him and become cynical and mistrustful. Near the end of the poem Conscience cries out forlornly that he is falling because of imperfect priests and prelates; friars hear him and hurry to him but because they "couth nought wel her craft . conscience forsoke hem." (XX, 230)

Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (663) repeats many of the same ideas; the sincere ploughman is unable to learn the Creed necessary for his soul's weal because the friars are corrupt. The Plowmans Tale (3448) applies that lesson to the rest of the Church. In Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) the lower clergy hold with Mum and do not speak truthfully. Contrasting images illustrate the idea:

> That bay cunne no crafte saue kepe þaym warme.
> Thay tisien more for benefices þenne billes to reede, (668-9)

In such ways the general complaint is made that the lower clergy do not fulfill their most important social function, the cure of souls. The other complaints add up to this conclusion, their ignorance, worldliness, covetousness, sloth, licentiousness, and their bad example to the people.

The Clergy are Worldly.

In the catechism of complaint many terms seem synonymous. If the clergy neglects the cure of souls, it is likely that the religious are worldly rather than spiritual. It is possible, of course, to view the

cure of souls as a worldly duty of the Church, and the Saints bear witness to the concern that worldly duty might interfere with that worship which the religious soul renders to God. Abbot Samson resolved the dilemma in the spirit of humility; he evidently realized that to cleave only to contemplation when the work of the Church required other duty would be as prideful as to enter into administrative work only. This does not and cannot justify the excesses to which many clerics persistently advanced. That the clerics are worldly is a general sin which includes many other sins, luxury, sloth, and covetousness.[1] In the "Satire on the People of Kildare" (1078)[2] the poet hints at vanities in true satirical fashion. Of a Dominican friar bearing his great Bible on his back, too ostentatiously pious, the poet says, "be þor noȝt to heiȝ." A Carmelite's handsome habit and gilt spice-box, synecdoche for bribery, offend the sturdy poet who deplores pretense. His portraits have the classical quality of woodcuts viewed by a smiling realist. Consider this description of the Franciscan:

> Hail seint Franceis wiþ þi mani foulis,
> Kites and crowis, reuenes and oules,
> Fure and .xx^ti. wildges and a poucok!
> Mani bold begger siwiþ þi route.
> þis uers is ful wel isette,
> Swiþe fure hit was ivette.

There is literary skill displayed here about which one cannot be patronizing. The traditional picture in the first line of St. Francis and the friendly birds is compared with a different portrait of his followers; different birds consort with the modern friars, most of them black-plumaged, in the

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[1]To illustrate the thesis that monks should not follow the latest fashions Robert of Brunne (778) tells the story of a monk who received a rich coat from a dying knight (who had robbed to pay for the coat) and finds that he is burned by the material. Robert tells many stories to underline his teachings, and many of them involve sinning clerics, as do many <u>exempla</u> and homilies.

[2]Heuser, pp. 154-8.

second line. In the third line another sly dig is made: what the "four and twenty white geese" means is not clear, but the reference to the peacock evidently means that the friar is drab and colorless until he spreads his tail. Does this refer to luxurious leather garments that friars are sometimes accused of wearing, carefully concealed under their outside robe? The fourth line completes the contrast between friar at and past: St. Francis was the very opposite of bold, but now his followers use begging to their great advantage. The last couplet with its infectious laughter serves another function; it mitigates the implied criticism, another device to decrease the distance between the critic and the object of complaint.

To the poet of "The Simonie" (4165) one of the most opprobrious manifestations of clerical worldliness was the priest who tried to become a knight:

> For thise worldliche preostes that pleien here maistrie,
> Ti nihte,
> Thi mon wid swerd and bokeler ase hen that wolle fihte.
>
> Summe bereth croune of scolite for the crumbonde croft,
> [illegible] the bissop hem bitok;
> At even he set upon his coif, ine bombeth thi crochet
> Adihteth him a gay wimple al the lewe iet,
> Ssaue sonde;
> And there thi clotheren cumelin when the chanel is ute. (113-20)

Abbots and priors "riden wid hauk and hound, and contrefeten knihtes" (139) and make their penance irksome:

> This is the penaunce that monekes don for ure lordes love:
> Thi weren sockes in here shon, and felted hotes above; (146-7)

The delicate pleasures of the table are not unknown to clerics:

> Where shal men nu finde fattere or reddere of leres?
> Or betre farende folk than monekes, chanons, and freres?
> In uch toun.
> I wot non eysiere lyf than is religioun. (153-6)

The social function is not performed. The poet makes the usual "Then and

Now" contrast:

> Religioun was first founded duresce for to drie;
> And nu is the morte del i-went to eise and glotonie. (151-2)

One can almost hear the "dying fall" of the second line. Prelates are now such large landowners that they cannot prevent wars among other landowners. Worldly interests shunt aside spiritual aims.

One need not look far in Piers Plowman (1459) to find the complaint about worldly clergy. Chastity without charity is useless:

> Many curatoures kepen hem . clene of here bodies,
> Thei ben acombred wib couetitise . bei konne nou3t don it from hem,
> So harde hath auarice . yfrasped hem togideres. (I, 193-5)

When Lad. Pede is confessed by a friar, she is promised absolution if she endows a window with her name on it; the poet preaches:

> Ac god to alle good folke . suche grauynge defendoth.,
> To writen in wyndowes . of here wel dedes,
> On auenture pryde be peynted bere . and pompe of be worlde; (III, 64-6)

Some of this pride adheres to the friars.

The charge of worldliness is so composed of other charges that this discussion only furnishes an introduction to the complaints. Throughout Piers Plowman the clerical penchant for silver is criticized. In Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (c 3), worldliness is made more specific:

> Wenest bou ber wold so fele - swiche warlawes worben,
> Be wore worldlyche wele - and her welfare? (703-4)

Friars are lumped as Pharisees, says Pierce;"Al her brod beldyng - ben belded with synne,/ And in worshipe of be werlde - her synnynge bei holden;" (549-50). A Minorite remarks that Carmelite: ". . . wynnen werldliche god - and wasten it in synne." (c1), and the Carmelite in turn criticizes the Dominicans: "bei prechen in proude harte - and praiseb her order,/ And werldliche worshype - wilneb in erbe." (370-1) The merchants love learning because they receive worldly worship thereby and sit with the

great. The corrupt friars have forced the possessioners to follow their own worldly practices. In short, the friars are worldly indeed.

The Plowmans Tale (3448) only extends the idea to the whole church; the love of "maistry," meaning worldly power and prestige, is condemned in no new way. In "Jum and the Sothesayer" (*t) the poet reports about friars with even reasonableness: "I seye of paym pat suche lore and sense nayghes ober,/ Pat wel I wote pat wilful and worldly pay been sum," (505-4). They listen to Simon's sermons and carry their spice-boxes at the ready. One can see that some idea of apostolic povert, and devotion to spiritual things forms the main attitude toward the lower clergy. How far the popular attitude would allow to the lower clergy the worldly means to perform the cure of souls cannot be determined. The actual pronouncement of the charge reveals that many men thought in terms of two choices, worldly and spiritual, and rather than make some precise measure, chose the extreme.

The Clergy are Greedy and Guileful. One notion that is usually included in the term "worldly" is clerical avarice, and another is the use of guile to obtain money. There is a curious story in Handlyng Synne (778) about a greedy and miserly parson. As he was dying, two friars came to attend him, and while they were watching by his bedside they noticed a coffer sunk in the floor. They had the parson's servants open it and found it full of gold, silver, and jewels. They noticed the parson gesticulate--he evidently was unable to speak--and by his gestures the friars were able to determine that the parson wished them to place some of the gold in his mouth! This they did, and the parson died, happy, evidently, in the belief he could take it with him. Robert points the obvious moral; the parson's wishes were not realized.

"The Simonie" (4165) is devoted to the theme of corrupting avarice. The parson is viewed as covetous of office because he is covetous of money, not to heap it up in miserly fashion but in order to spend it in extravagence:

> And whan this newe parsoun is institut in his churche,
> He bithenketh him hu he may shrewedelichest worche;
> Ne shal the corn in his berne ben eten wid no muis,
> But hit shal ben i-spended in a shrewede huis,
> If he may.
> Al shal ben i-beten out or christemessedey.
>
> And whan he hath i-gadered markes and poundes,
> He priketh out of toune wid haukes and wid houndes
> Into a straunge contre and halt a wenche in cracche;
> And wel is hire that first may swich a parsoun kacche
> In londe.
> And thus their serven the chapele and laten the chirche stonde.
> (67-75)

Such covetous men provide little for their curates and so the people are further harmed, not to mention the scarcity of alms. Friars will go to any lengths to obtain money, according to the poet; they:

> . . .wolde preche more for a busshel of whete,
> Than for to bringe a soule from helle out of the hete
> To rest. (105-7)

They seek out the rich man and try to obtain his bequests and turn off the poor man who needs spiritual help. Covetousness is made to seem a plague that gradually sickens all society.

All those in Wynnere's ranks (3137) are automatically tainted with the sin of covetousness; Franciscan friars are there, and the implication is that they were hired as mercenaries: "I wote wele for wynnynge thay wentten for home;/ His purse weghethe full wele that wanne thaym all hedire." (161-2) The connection between avarice and guile is made in Wynnere and Wastoure, as if there were no way to become rich except by trickery. When Wynnere introduces himself, he says:

I hatt Wynnere, a wy that alle this worlde helpis,
For I ledes can lere, thurgh ledyng of witte.
. . . .
Witt wiendes me with, and wysses me faire;
Aye when I wader my wiles, than glades myn hert. (?77-?77)

The difference between shrewdness and guile is not great. In Piers Plowman (1459) the connection between avarice and guile is more important because of Langland's theme that the clergy has broken faith with the people. Among the crowd in the field are friars:

I fonde þere Freris . alle þe foure ordres,
Preched þe people . for profit of hem-selue[n],
Glosed þe gospel . as hem-self lyked,
For coueitise of copis . construed it as þei wolde. (55-61)

When Lady Wede is arrested, while out Falsehood flees; while is received by the merchants who dismiss him in the clothing of an apprentice, and Falsehood flees to the friars, just as Liar went to the pardoners and thence to the friars. In the eleventh passus there is a disquisition on poverty, "Si vis perfectus esse, vade & vende, &c." (XI, 265) quotes Langland:

If prestes weren parfyt . þei wolde no syluer take
For masses ne for matyns . nouȝte her mete of vsureres,
Ne neither tirtel ne tythe . þei[g]h þei for colde shulde quake,
And bei for drouȝt dede . as dounes seiþ in þe sauter. (XI, 73-7)

Langland's idea is that priests should not ask for money; if they taught truly, they would receive it freely without asking. Langland always seems to be striving toward perfection.

"The Song against the Friars" (1377) speaks of their lucrative begging; all the friars in the world hope to go to England. They also do a large business in selling penance; they make only small money demands, but the volume of their business is large. A "Song against the Minorite Friars" (?1363)[1] implies their avarice: "Thai preche alle of povort, bot

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[1]Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 268-70.

that love thei nought." It is in this poem that fraternal greediness is most strongly put:

> Sle thi faire, and fape thi modre, and
> thai wil the assoile.

Pierce the Ploughmans Crede (613) shows the friars to be greed, and scheming. The Minorite says this of the Carmelites; they: ". . .þingeþ folk - wiþ werres of Rome!/ . . . ./And liggeþ ler[n] or her good - wiþ glouerynge wordes." (47-51) Some of the Carmelites' tricks are amusing. They preach of the Virgin to the women and say "þat þe lord loure Louie swor - liztep ler of children." (76) The Minorite, however, convicts himself out of his own mouth; "We," he says,

> . . .in couentis dwelen - for to loue oure conseruers
> þat zeueþ vs oure viure - wiþ trist vnswiþe,
> Oþer wiþ oþer cloþ - þei couereþ vs wiþ oure bones,
> Mone, or mone-worthe; here mede is in heuen. (112-4)

The use of a self-contradiction is a clever device of the poem. The mention of the bell and book, the means whereby excommunication is made, is almost ironic. The friar is certainly ready with suggestions. The Dominican is found sitting in a garden within a beautifull, decorated friary; while he condemns the Austins' avarice, he unwittingly reveals his own pride. The Austin complains of the greed of the Minorites and their ability to beguile men out of money: "Sopli, some of þo wrecches - haþ more wood him-selue/ þan ten knyztes þat I knowe - of ertell in cofers!" (280-3) The Austin friar then asks the poet for money and promises absolution. Pierce finds two Carmelites in a tavern and listens to their consummation of the sacraments for simony. The poet is encouraged, until one of the Carmelites says; "And þou wilt zyuen vs any good - I would þe here ensuren/ to taken all þy penaunce - . . ." (343-4) When the poet reveals he has no money, the Carmelite breaks off the conversation:

"Fare well!" quap be frere - "for y mot hepen fonden.
And hyen to an housewife - pat hap vs henuepen
Ten pounde in his testament - to tellen pe sope. (406-10)

The search for benefactors is also criticized in "The Tranlie" (4105). The Carmelite says that he might get an annual fee for clothing out of her bequest. The other Carmelite remarks: "God let her no lenger liven - for letteres ben wrange." (417) Evidently, the friars had many obligations. Soon after this example of mendicant cynicism, the poet-wanderer encounters Pierce at his plowing. Pierce says the friars are wolves in sheep's clothing; the Devil founded their orders:

pei coueten confessions - to knowen sore sinne,
And sepulturer also - some wyten to crowne;
But oper cures of Cristen - pei coueten nouzt to done,
Ac pore as wynnyzge liep - pe leten none oper. (57-61)

Pierce waits for only four hundred lines, the tenor of which can be gathered from this invective about sin-selling:

pe power of pe apostelis - pei passen in sleupe,
For to sellen pe synnes - for siluer oper mede,
And purlyche a peine - pe purple assoileb,
And a cullen also - pat pei ne, nopen
Wore; oper money-worpe - and mete to fonge,
And ben at lone and at lode - as burgeises vseth.
pus pey seruen Satanas - and soules bygileb,
Worpynges of malisoun - manseda wrecches! (711-18)

There is no doubt that the Lollard poet found this evil particularly heinous.

The Minister in Mum and the Sothsegger (*c) deplores that his hardworking students leave their studies and go out into the world "and wonen with lordes,/ And with a couetous croke Saynt Nicholes boy throwen" (386-7) and with care and kind words make their livelihoods. When the poet-wanderer visits the friars, he makes a few unkind remarks: the friars deserve no praise except for a few things they have done; for instance, they made a statute that priests should not preach but only friars be allowed to do so, not from avarice, mind, but to help souls gain heaven.

They have also been [illegible] [illegible] friars [illegible] and life, for they [illegible] bare about the legs, [illegible] soft wool [illegible]; they have much trouble doing business within [illegible], and so are forced to handle money, [illegible], since they have been assigned limits for their begging. [illegible]:

> [illegible] sum been so courtoys and kinde of thaire deedes
> That with thaire [illegible] [illegible],
> But he wol pille [illegible]
> And [illegible] (14-4)

And so they accumulate goods but will not help the poor. The poet's [illegible] [illegible], [illegible] ineffective, [illegible]. [illegible]:

> [illegible]
> The [illegible] pe [illegible]
> And [illegible] p [illegible]
> He [illegible] be [illegible] p [illegible]
> [illegible] grace pat growed vp on erthe, ([illegible]1)

[illegible] the [illegible] [illegible] [illegible] for grea.[1] The [illegible] [illegible] these [illegible] [illegible] [illegible].

[illegible]. [illegible] [illegible] of [illegible] ([illegible]) [illegible], [illegible] the [illegible] of the religious, [illegible] categories: they were excellent [illegible], [illegible] they were [illegible] too. They were [illegible] because they desired the luxury they could obtain with the tithes [illegible] of pardons and offerings. All such luxury was contrary to [illegible] except

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[1]The notes to these lines refer to Wirk's *Instructions to Parish Priests* where Wirk remarks humorously: "I won't speak of tithing, for although a priest may have little experience, he knows very well how to ask for his tithes."

for dispensations of various kinds. The complainers resented any compromise with the Rule as smacking of worldliness.

The "Satire on the People of Kildare" (1078) touches on the divagations of the friar, and the monks are criticized for another extravagance: "Depe cun ge bouse, þat is al gure care." "The Land of Cokaygne" (762)[1] is a full-scale attack on the monasteries, or perhaps just one monastery, for its luxury and abrogation of the Rule. The poet reverses the rule of "poverty, chastity, and obedience" for this imaginary abbey. Heaven, he says, is a dull place compared with the Land of Cookery. There is plenty of meat and drink in Cokaygne, much mirth and glee. Women are never angry with men there, and since all the common beasts are missing, caring for them is unnecessary; there are no flies, fleas or lice. The weather is always pleasant. Four rivers flow in the land, one of milk, another of oil, another of honey, and one of wine. There is water, of course, but only for washing. The "mochil ȝrei abbey," has walls of meat, fish, and fowl pasties, gables of cakes, and the pinnacles are made of puddings. The cloister is wonderful:

> Þer is a cloister fair and liȝt,
> Frod and lanȝ, of sewtli siȝt.
> Þe pilers of þat cloister alle
> Beb iturned of cristale,
> Wiþ bor bas and capitale
> Of grene Iaspe and rede corale. (65-70)

The meadows are full of spices of all descriptions; there are four wells, of treacle, balm, healing water, and wine sweetened with honey; the wells are lined with gold and precious stones. There are birds aplenty, including those delightful geese that fly straight from the roasting spit to the table crying "Gees, al hote, al hot." (104) The monks do say mass from time to time, and when they do the glass windows turn

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[1]Heuser, pp. 145-50.

marvelously to crystal.

One of the main points of the poem is the description of the luxury of the monastery in this fantasy-land, and the reader is probably meant to make a mental comparison with the real monastery and the monastic ideal. The poem is great fun; the monastic ideal is turned upside down and the details of the exaggeration are expertly conceived. The typical reader or listener to the poem probably was amused, but he was also compelled to estimate the deviations from the rule by the monasteries, and, because the Rule and the fantasy represent extremes, he was forced to find the real conditions to some degree imperfect. While the criticism is barely discernible beneath the humor, it would be apparent to lay and religious alike.[1]

The main theme of "The Simonie" (4165) includes luxury as a cause and an effect of covetousness. The new person keeps his hounds and falcons; the abbots and priors dress as knights; monks wear socks and felt boots, line their hoods and caps with fur, and take care of their stomachs:

> Religioun wot red I nouther what he schal mon?
> He ne carez noht to muche for his mete ne mon;
> For hous-hire ne for clothes he ne carez noht;
> Ac whan he cometh to the mete, he maketh his mawe tocut
> off the beste;
> And anon therafter he fondeth to kacche reste.[2]

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[1]There is a good possibility that the poet did not mean the poem to have wide circulation but meant it as a kind of private joke. This inference results from the ending of the poem where a severe criticism is implied of the harshness of the period of the novitiate, but such an interpretation is not certain; it may be another burst of humorous exaggeration. If that interpretation is correct, then it seems likely that the poem was written by a novice who resented the unequal conditions of the regular monks and the novices, rather like the modern private, "We do all the work, and they have all the fun," and made a poem about it to be shared with his fellow novices.

[2]A later manuscript of the poem adds another stanza about drinking. Brandl, pp. 190-91, lines 169-74 of the C version.

Much is made of the friar's ability to provide himself with clothing. A "Song against the Friars" (2777) accuses the friars of riot, chivalry, and rivalry, that their scavenging produces more food than they can use; they are indeed good merchants:

> For somme can with a pound of sope
> Gete him a kyrtelle and a cope,
> And som what els therto.

The same charge is made in Piers Plowman (1459), as has been seen, where the friars are accused of changing the gospel to get copes:

> Many of his maistres Freris . mowe clothe hem at lykyng,
> For lowe money and marchandise . more on hem semeth. (60-3)

The well-clothed friar is probably a conspicuous figure, to be contrasted with the rags of the hermits and early friars.

In Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (643) the friars' houses are described in detail, and they are quite luxurious. The house of the Minorites is evidently quite excellent:

> Wib wide windowes y-wrought - and waller well beye,
> bat mote ben portreid and peynt - and pulched ful cleue,
> Wib pole glitterinde glas - glowinde as be sonne. (120-22)

The Minorites promise the wandering poet that he will be painted into a west window enfolded in the arms of St. Francis and presented to the Trinity with the prayers of that Saint, that is, if the poet were to give a little money. The most complete description of a friary in Middle English verse is made of the house of the Dominicans; when the poet enters, he "gaped about":

> Swich a bild hous, y-huld - upon erbe beigte,
> . . . . .
> How be pileres weren y-beynt - and pulched ful cleue,
> And queynteli i-corven - wib curiouse knottes,
> Wib wyndowes well y-wrought - wide vp o-lofte.[1] (157-160)

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[1]Westoure spenke of Wynnere's heaped-up gold (3137); your executors will get it,

> Owthir it freres feche, when thou fey worthes,
> To peyntten with theire peleres, or purgett with thair walles.
> (300-301)

There are also postern-gates, "in pryuytie - to passen whon hem liste" (145) and orchards and gardens all walled about,

> And a curious cros - craftily entayled,
> Wib tabernacles y-tigt - to toten all bouten.
> Pe pris of a plough-lond - of penyes so rounde
> To apparaile bat pyler - were pure lytel. (149-52)

That is only the beginning; when he enters the church proper, he notes the carven arches, the capitals ornamented with flowers, adorned with knots of gold, wide windows bearing the names and works of benefactors, some forty-four of them, the tombs of knights carved in alabaster in their armor, with their ladies beside them "In many a, ryche stones - bat were wel gold-beten." (157) The poet wanderer comments: "bouz pe tax of ten zer - were trewly gadered,/ Nolde it nouzt make bat hous - half, as y trowe." (159-60) The cloister is next described, painted pillars, "portreyed wel clene," covered with lead, ravel with paint, with tin knes, and layers of fitted latten. The chapter-house was built like a great church, carved, covered,

> . . . wib meyntliche entaylea;
> Wib semlich sclure - y-set on lofte;
> As a Parlement-hous - y-peynted aboute. (200-202)

The frayter was:

> An halle for an heyz kinge - an housholde to holden,
> Wib brode bordes abouten - y-benched wel clene,
> Wib windowes of glas - wrouzt as a churche. (208-10)

If nothing else, the friars knew the more wealthy people. The poet wanders through other buildings until he discovers the fat, fat friar seated in the garden, garbed in a double-worsted cope and a clean white kirtle.

The Austin friar berates the Franciscans' falling off from the Rule: they now use more cloth in the cope alone than in St. Francis' whole frock, and under the cope they wear a fur coat cleverly buttoned about the knee "Lest any spirituall man - aspie bat gile." (197)

Francis bade his followers go barefoot, but his spiritual descendents wear buckled shoes and even hose in cold weather. The poet-wanderer listens attentively to these criticisms, and even more carefully when he encounters the poor Lowdman. The description of Pierce forms the basic contrast in the poem, and it is skillful pressure to refer back to the extravagance of the friars--part of the persistent dialectician that the Lowdman utters. The Lowdman, in contrast to the friars, is working; he is dressed in poor and leaves bloody footprints on the frozen ground. Pierce's diatribe stops on the friars with spending money to build front tombs and church floors, their "hyh helefare" (548), and describes their clothing:

> þei schapen hor schapelories - and strecchep hem brode,
> And launcep beige her hemmes - wib rabelyng in stretes;
> þei han gowel wib wijt silk - and semer full swete,
> Y-stoffed wib stic ar - but strawb as silver.

Friars are angry if they are not served first at suppers and feasts, and as for their being beggars, why, who ever saw such begging men, living nothing, dressed in clean cloths and rich furs, with plenty to eat; they should eat herbs and bacon and have:

> . . . entrelles or louves - or pilches y-rosted,
> And comeren hor stomakes - wib curious drynkes,
> bat makeb swiche harlottes - hordome vsen,
> And wib hem wicked worde - wyn on bitrebp! (744-7)

To make the contrast complete, Pierce tosses the poor-wanderer his Creed without asking any more.

The concerted effort by the Lollards to condemn the Church as the rich persecuting the poor is continued in The Clerk's Tale (3448). The following stanza probably applies to the stomach as well as to the spleen; the clerics dine:

> With chaunge of many maner metes,
> With song and solace sitting lowe,
> And filleth hir wombe, and fast fretes;
> And from the metë to the gonge;
> And after mete with harp and songe,
> And hotë spyces ever among; (149-54)

The contrast in this poem is between the richness and pride of the Church and the poverty and humility of Christ. Cleric wear rich clothes, ride fine horses with glittering equipage; they wear long-toed shoes; they go to fairs and dances to kiss the girls: "Such preestes of Lucifer ben sent,/ Lyk conquerours they ben arayd,/ Proude pendaunts at hir ars y-pent." (937-9) Langland's identification of Piers the Plowman with Christ was not lost upon the Lollards.

The poet-wanderer in Pum and the Sothsegger (*1) visits the friars and finds that they wear soft wool socks and, "For be loue of oure lord harde life endures." (428) The poet is much harsher on the inhabitants of the cathedral closes; not only would they not answer his question, but they:

> . . .euer kepte bayn cloos to cracche and to mangier,
> And fedde so be foule flesh bat be velle ne might
> Vnethe kepe be carolyne but yf hit cleue shulde;
> And nad be gutte groned bere bay gurde were,
> Thay had bee sike of swete mete, so me God helpe,
> For piking of prouendre passing bassise; (569-64)

Riding about is criticized too, but not at all in Chaucer's manner:

> Thay ben to blamed of Belial for baire bolde riding;
> Yn cardelle of good gold or gilte gitte leste. (568-9)
> . . . .
> . . .how boldely bay ride,
> Thees personnes and bees prebendiers pluralite bat haue.,
> Poperyng on baire palefrays fro oone place to an other. (1371-3)

The summation of the criticisms of the clergy takes the form of contrast wit the golden past when there were martyrs among the clergy:

> . . .clercz were not knowe by baire cloping bat tyme,
> Ne by royal raye ne riding aboute,
> . . . .
> Ne by revel ne riot ne by rente nothir,
> Ne by baire double dees - ne baire deupe hoodes,
> Ne by drynkyng of dollid wyne ne by datz at eue,
> . . . .
> But by be deedes bat bay dide,. . . (643-651)

One is struck by the consistency and frequency of the complaint about

luxurious clerics. Undoubtedly the richly-dressed friar was conspicuous, and one can imagine muttered remarks by the peasants who saw him go by. Probably, the fat, simpering, and greasy friar was a stereotype. Nevertheless, even a stereotype must have a model, and the numerous complaints suggest numerous examples of the model. Nor can the hatred by the poor against the richer be argued to mitigate the intensity of the complaint, for the contrast between the luxuriousness of the clerics and the ideal humility and poverty of the founders of the friars' orders and the saints and martyrs and hermits is made too often to be termed a rationalization.

The Clergy are Slothful. Part of the complaint, certainly, that the clerics are slothful is due to the fact that they did no physical work, at least they did no conspicuous physical work. More often the complaint means what Robert of Brunne (1303) says it is:

> A persone ys slowe yn holy cherche
> þat on hys shepë wyl nat werche
> How þey shul hem-selfë yeme,
> And god and holy cherche to queme.
> þe lyghë shepard shal hym blame,
> How he lateþ hem go to shame. (4819-24)

The duty of the priest is to correct his flock; any omission of that duty is culpable. The social purpose of the Church is the underlying assumption of that conclusion.

The comment of the poet of "The Simonie" (1149) has been quoted: "I wot non eysiere lyf than is religioun," (156) when he refers to the monks. They are devoted to "ese and delitable." (152) The friars will attend the last rites of a rich man:

> Ac bi the feith I owe to god, if the cors is lene,
> He wole wagge aboute the cloistre and kepen hise fet clene
> in house. (189-191)

The Lollard attack on the friars in Pierce the Ploughman's Crede

(c63) includes the criticism of sloth. The Minorite says this of the Carmelite:

> Swiche slomerers in slepe - slaupe is her end,
> And gloton is her dou - wib flop3yng of dryng, (91-2)

The description of the slese Dominican in his garden competes with Langland's portrait of Sutton in excellence:

> A greet chorl and a grym - growen as a tonne,
> Wib a face as fat - as a full bledder
> Flowen bretfull of frob - and as a bagge honged
> On boben his cheres, and ik chyn - wib a chol lolled,
> As greet as a mos e - growen all of grece;
> bat all wagged his flesh - as a gyltk ire. (271-26)

Pierce avers that friars do not beg because they need to, "but for a lustfull liif - in lustes to dwellen?/ Wib-outen any trauaile - vntrewliche by lyf[illegible]." (1[illegible]-c) The Plowmans Tale speaks of the rest of the Church in the same manner: of monks, "Some say no masse in all a weke," (1007) and they have forgotten poverty and prayer for wealth and ease. (1046) The argument is that the clergy does live a leisurely life when compared with the poor.

Wum and the Wethegrer (*c) says of priests: they have "been so vsid to ease erly and late/ That bey cunne no crafte schal hepe beym warme." (c67-8) The duttony of the canons in the cathedral closes has been mentioned, but one long part of the poem is pertinent to this topic. The poet dreams of a garden in which he finds a bee-keeper killing drones. The bee-keeper describes the drones as eating as much as twenty workers but doing no labor. The metaphor has been applied to the courtiers, but it might refer to the clergy as well. The absentee priest is likened to a physician who never visits his patient. The complaint about the slothful clergy means that they neglect their spiritual duty; it is made intense by resentment that the clergy rest easy while the poor must labor.

The Clergy are not Chaste. The lecherous priest, friar, or monk is proverbial and humorous. He covers his amorous intent and his skillful wooing with a cope of piety. Often he is a sympathetic character; his sin is all too human to be condemned severely.[1] Yet the "preost þat is wilde" (4091) is an object of criticism. The enormity of the sin makes it interesting and the hypocrisy of it is patent. Perhaps the interest derives from the fact that the cleric is supposed to be spiritual, to deny his flesh, and lechery is the worst sin of the flesh; the lapsed cleric bears the brunt of all popular antagonism for religion.

Only the nuns are criticized for unchastity in the "Satire on the People of Kildare," (1076) one of the few instances of nuns being so criticized, and in a quite humorous and delicate way:

> Hail be ze nonnes of seint Mari house,
> Goddes bourneines and his owen spouse!
> Oute mistrodib ze gur schoon, gur fete beb ful tenure;
> Unbeit be sotter þat tawib gur lepir!
> Swiþe wel ze vnderstode,
> þat meni þis diteo so rode.

The playful reference to worn shoes implies that the nuns broke their rule about wandering from the cloister. Instead of worn shoes, they might better have cropped hair. The visitation registers mention instances when nuns went to dances and resisted reform. "The Land of Cokaygne" (740) includes in its fantasy the spirit of the Rerum, uninhibited satisfaction. The old device of substituting profane words for spiritual ones in hymns is paralleled in the poem by this euphemism: the young monks meet young nuns swimming in the river of milk and carry them back to the abbey, "And teclib be nunnes an oreisun (log)/ Wib iuuleue vp and uun."[2]

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[1] Robert of Brunne (7718) sighs: "but how as euer men preche or spelle / Of prestes wymmes wer here euer telle." (7935-6)

[2] Another example of the use of religious terms with sexual meanings is "The Erle Fox" (3328).

The abbot sees his clergy off to their coronation and chooses a guide of the route for his men. The reversal of the rule is followed in describing promotion: instead of the criteria being spiritual greatness, it is sexual prowess.

The complaint is not humorous but severe in "The Pardoner" (1-165). The person can have a wife "and the prest another/ At wille" (51-2) if a bribe is given to the archdeacon. The person takes the tithes of the parish and keeps a whore in every town. "And wel is hire that first may swich a parsoun mette/ in londe." (70-7) The poet seems to recognize the "foule fame" of the lecherous priest:

> But everi man hap wel i-wite, bi the sweete ryde,
> Ther beth so manye prestes, hii ne mowe noht alle be gode:
> And natheles thise gode men fallen oft in fame;
> For thise wanhoune prestes that pleien here nice game
> Bi nihte,
> Hii gon wid sweord and bokeler as men that wolue fihte. (109-14)

The poet is enraged by the priest who carefully plasters down his curls, chooses a wench of the newest fashion, and has a merry time. The poem connects fancy clothes and lechery in the usual way.

Some of the suspicion of the clergy might be due to the confession of one priest to another and their collusion; this particular situation seems to be referred to in a passage from The Plowmans Tale (3[illegible]):

> Though a prest ly with his lemman al night,
> And tellen his felowe, and he him,
> He goth to masse anon-right,
> And sayeth, he singeth out of sinne!
> His bryde abydeth him at his Inne,
> And lighteth his dyner the mene whyle,
> He singeth his masse for he wolde winne,
> And so he weneth god begyle! (973-80)

One can imagine the popular suspicion that the birds of a feather stick together.

It is interesting to note that there is but one reference to lecherous priests in Piers Plowman (1-59): Conscience describes Lady

"ede's power:

> She blesseth þise bisshopes . þeiȝe þo, be lewed,
> Prouendreth persones . and prestes mayteneth,
> To have lemmannes and lotebies . alle here lif dayes,
> And bringen forth bernes . ayein forbode lawes. (III, 1.[illegible]-91)

The uniqueness of this reference is shown by the brevity of Lechery's confession in the vision of the Seven Deadly Sins of Passus five; it is four lines long. In the first part of the poem, Langland wishes to center his criticism on Lady Mede and her corrupting influence, and perhaps he felt that an extended discussion of lechery would interfere with this emphasis. The poet tries to be general, to take a broad survey of the society, and by so doing he cannot very easily single out the clergy as lechers.

The Lollard poems use the charge of lechery against the friars with great frequency and vehemence. The complaint is useful for propaganda, and the Lollards knew it. "A Song against the Friars" (c.1377) is almost entirely devoted to this charge:

> Thai dele with nurses, wymmes, and knyves,
> Wit[illegible] spurtles, gloves, for wenches and wyves;
> Not ever þe gode husband tryves
> Wher thai are hounted tille.
> For when the gode man is fro home,
> And the frere comes to oure dome,
> He serves not us for synne no shome,
> That he ne dos his wille.

The warning continues: do not let a friar shrive your daughter or wife, "Vnther loude ne stille," for a wife may seem to be stable of heart, but the friars are such clever seducers and liars that she may be led astray. Emphasis is placed on the friar's ability to pretend to a virtue he does not possess. The poem is couched as a warning and is not meant to be at all humorous. The Minorite friar in Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (c.3) speaks of the Carmelites as "Lorels and lechures - and lem was holden; . . .And bat wicked folk - wymmen bi-traieb. / And bigileb hem of her good - wib glauerynge wordes, / . . .bei liuen more in lecherie - and

lieth in her tales / þan suen my wol liife." (44–50) They have their wenches:

> Wiþ sterne stanes and stronge - þey ouer lond strakeþ
> þider as her lemmans liggeþ - and lurkeþ in townes,
> (Grey grete-hedede ounes - wiþ gold by þe eigen),
> And seyn, þat here systren þei ben - þat solourneþ aboute; (57–59)

The Dominican friars have their "posternes in prymtie" and hypocritically accuse the Austin friar: he "holdeþ his ordinaunce - wiþ hores and þeues." (245) It is when Pierce reaches the climax of his tirade that he accuses the friars of lechery, and, curiously enough, only in mild circles. Friars live with the great, eating rich food and drinking curious drinks, and by the use of wicked words betray women. If lords knew the guileful craft of the friars, the friars "schulden wonte hunten her lous - so homly on mi3ter, / Ne heddem swiche lropels - in so brode scheten." (271–2) The Plowmans Tale (3446) is just as vehement about the other members of the clergy.

> Some liveth not in lecherye,
> But haunten wenches, widowes, and wyves,
> And wanisheth the pore for putrye;
> Them-selfe it sseth all their lyves.
> And but a man to them him shryves,
> To hevene come never he shall; (285–290)

"For chastite, they maynteyn lechery;" (515). . ."open evel ayenst continence," (521) and they "usen horedom and harlotry." (773) The association of the lechery of the friar with absolution seems to suggest that the absolution is not valid. The Lollards, as has been mentioned above, held that the sinful priest could not administer a pure sacrament, an idea that the Church held to be heresy. Perhaps that idea is behind the complaint in this stanza:

> Fennes wyves they wollen holde;
> And though that they ben right sory,
> To speke they shull not be so bolde
> For sompning to the consistory;

And make hem say with mouth "I ly,"
Though they it sawe with hir y;
His lemman holden openly,
No man so hardy to axe why![1]

The Lollard poems are outspoken in their criticism of the clerics for lechery.

In Mum and the Sothsegger (*c) the CAYM acrostic has the adjective "amoreux" (502) for the Austin friars, and a little later this is said of all friars: "I can not deme deuely of what degre þay bee;/ Thay been not wedded, wel I wote, þough þay wifes haue;" (511-12). While the poet remarks that friars are good merchants, he does not include the charge of lechery usually associated with wandering friars. Bishops take bribes and allow "lemmans and lotebies in peer lote degree" (1351) and churchists amuse themselves in London at lords' courts, "And pleyen lille for lalle with many levi kitte" (1357). On the whole, the imputation is not made often in the poem.

The relative paucity of complaints about lecherous clergy may be due to the fact that the unchaste cleric had become a cliché, a humorous cliché, or had become common belief for the reasons suggested above. It is possible that such a charge, difficult to prove, inconspicuous, could not be made with impunity. The Church considered heretical the idea that the sacraments were invalid when administered by a sinful priest; this may have been a deterrent, except to those already condemned as were the Lollards. The medieval Englishman did not criticize everything; just as the king could not be attacked, perhaps the priest could not be criticized for lechery.[2]

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[1]These lines should be compared with the Creed lines 631 ff.

[2]Gower makes a reference in the Confessio (2060) to immoral clergy, but with a great deal of circumspection; Vide Prologue, 470-80.

There is no doubt that there were lecherous priests, friars, monks, and nuns. They were not criticized as much as our modern conceptions suggest. There is a curious mention in Mirk's Instructions to Parish Priests (941)[1] where, in a matter-of-fact tone, this problem is mentioned. Mirk is telling the reasons which permit a person to confess to a priest other than his own parish priest: (1) when the parish priest is indiscreet; (2) when the communicant sinned with a near relative of the priest, his mother, sister, concubine, or daughter; (3) when the priest had sin with any of his parishioners. One suspects, however, that such clergy were made in the oral and whispered gossip of the times with as much frequency as today.

The Clergy are Ignorant and Ill-educated. Another complaint which is by its nature subject to regular repetition is that the ignorance of the clergy is. The Church was much concerned with the education of the parish clergy and many efforts were made to improve it. One of the justifications of the mendicant orders was that they might raise the level of preaching. The provision of an adequate education in Latin and theology was central to the concerted effort to provide adequate instruction. The friars soon earned a place at the universities for their learning and ability. The discussion of ill-educated prelates (supra) indicates the general tenor of the complaints about the education of the clergy; on the one hand is the anti-intellectualism and on the other a fear that religious instruction is not adequate to save men's souls.

There is a peculiar statement in Handlyng Synne (778): "The more the cherche, the further fro Gode." (9743) Robert is at times rather

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[1] Ed. E. Peacock, EETS 31 (London, 1868).

cynical about his brethren:

> I[k]nowe I kan lasse þe lewed man
> þan some of þese prestes kan.
> Who taken hem more to worldly þynge
> þan prestes do, for alle here prechynge?
> And þe þe clerk, and ouyl dous,
> Of hym ye nat to make no rous,
> What vayleþ to vnderstande þe lettre,
> And lyve lyfe to neuer þe bettre?
> Alle but clergye, I telle it þat lore,
> Whan he lyueþ neuer þe bettre þerefore. (10-16)

The assumption is that the word is powerful if once it is known, one will try to attain it. But what value, then, is it to know the Word if one does not try to attain it? Langland is probably not more anti-intellectual than most priests then the reformers. In "The Simonie" (c.1413) one of the results of the reformation is a moral equivalent of Gresham's Law: bad priests drive out good ones:

> And if þe prouost haue a preest of a selene lif,
> That he ne wot no skilles to maiden ne to wif,
> Shal nemen a defie and putte him out for a litel lesse,
> That can nouht a ferthing worth of wit, vnnethe sing a masse
> but ille.
> And þis schal þan þe parisch for þe nouȝt ille skille.
>
> For riht he thinketh þat foreth þi a preest þat is lewed,
> As þi a dog in a kuge, þat him-self nouȝt his rewed;
> And þerfore he speketh, þe more wot nevere what;
> No more wot a lewed preest in boke wot he nat
> þi dede.
> Thanne is a lewed preest to betir than a dog. (97-108)

The stanzas conjure up a vision of the poverty-stricken vicar reading from a pulpit a sermon he did not write and did not care to understand. This kind of "lewed" vicar very likely used the gloss and not the text in his reading, a practice that is severely condemned in several poems.

The anti-intellectual complaint, can be illustrated by the tenth passus of Piers Plowman (1459). Dame Study reproves her husband Wit; the application seems to be to those who turn sermons into jests and ribaldry. The good old-fashioned preacher of holy things is now little loved. How-

ways, they are more like minstrels than priests. When they are among themselves they mock their religion with sinful arguments about the Trinity.

> Freres and faitours . han founde suche questiouns
> To plese with proude men . sithen be pestilences tyme,
> And preechen at seint poules . for pure enuye of clergie,
> but folie is nouzte fermest in be feith . ne fre of mennes goodes,
> Ne sori for her synnes . so is pryde waxen. . . . (71-5)

That is why priests do not fulfil the petition; not even the fear of losing can solidify their faith. And at the last table they ask why God allows Eve to be seduced by the serpent. Langland comments trenchantly: "For alle but wilnede to wyte . be wey3es of god almyzty,/ I wolde his eye were in his ers . and his fynger after," (X, 187-9). There is more of such criticism which need not be repeated. In Passus XI, the dreamer makes a digression to the other pole of complaint, the ignorant, rather than the over-witty, priest. The complaint is connected with the negligent bishop:

> It is a careful knyzte . and of a croked kynde bycome,
> but hath no londe ne lynage riche . ne good locs of his armes.
> be same I segge for sothe . by alle siche prestes,
> but han nouzther kunnynge ne kynde . but a croune one,
> And a t[o]kne of nouzte . to bi[n]ke[n] of myschiefe,
> Ne with more bileue, as I leue . to lacche berw[e] croune
> Cure, but for coueytyse . or --'louen for clene of berynge.'
> I leue wonder for wyl . and wer-fore be bisshop
> Maket siche prestes . but lewed men bytrayen. (XI, 292-295)

The man is a fool who miswrites a charter, and such is a priest who fails to read his gospel correctly. The implication is that since a charter is void if there are mistakes in it, then so is the mass.

> be bissop shal be blamed . bifor god, as I leue,
> but crouneth suche goddes knizztes . but conneth nouzt sapienter
> Synge ne psalmes rede . ne seggen a messe of be day.
> Ac neuer neyther is blomeless . be bissop ne be cumpleyne,
> For her eyther is endited . and bi[d]de 'ignorancia
> Non excusat episcopos . nec idiotes prestes.' (XI, 303-6)

There is considerable emphasis here upon the parallel between the duty of

a knight and that of a priest; the social function of the clergy evidently was very clear to Langland. Nor is there little doubt that there were vicars who could not read.

The charge is made by a Minorite about the Carmelites in Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (462):

> bis Frere loked on me - and lawzyng; he seyde,
> 'Lewe Cristen man - y leue þat þou redde!
> Hou3 schulde þei techen be God - þat con not hem-selue?' (40-42)

As "proof" of this, the Minorite says: "And 3if þei couþen her Crede - oþer on Crist leueden,/ þei were nouzt so hardie - swiche lollotri vsen." (47-8) The idea is the same as Robert of Brunne's. The Carmelites attack the Dominicans for their rote-learning:

> Loke a ribaut of hem - þat can nouzt wel recen
> Hir rewle ne his respondes - but be pure rote,
> Als he were a conuynge clerke - he casteþ þe lawes
> Nouzt lowli but lordly - and leesinges lyeþ. (370-9)

Pierce includes the complaints discussed hitherto in this category: friars wish to be wise in law, to study the complex questions in theology rather than the gospel, and thus they turn the text into fable and the gloss into truth and by subtle shifts in the gloss are able to make black into white for their own covetous ends: "Wiþ glosinge of goldspelle - þei godes word turneþ." (709) The poet-wanderer had asked the Austin friar earlier for someone:

> þat coude me my Crede teche - and trewliche enfourme,
> Wiþ-outen flaterynge fare - and nopinz feyne?
> þat folweþ fulliche þe feiþ - and none other fables,
> Wiþ-outen gabbynge of glose - as þe godspelles telleþ? (377-5)

The Lollard charge has farther reaching implications: the accretion of glosses changes the meaning of the Bible; this can be extended to mean that the role of the Church as interpreter of the Bible is faulty. The Lollards propose that the Bible is simple and clear and that faith rather than ritual is supreme.

The Plowmans Tale (3048) uses one of the similes of "The Simonie" in this denunciation of the priestly ability in law:

> Vnneth mot they matins say
> For countin[illegible] for court-holding;
> And yet be forbeth [illegible],
> And vnderstont him-self nothing. (7:9-12)

Priests are not, of course, interested in scripture but in wealth, another point found in "The Simonie,"

> [illegible] comaundment hir Spouse
> Hir [illegible] shull [illegible];
> Nother rede the gospell rede,
> Such shull now welde hye estates. (8:1-4)

The Testament of Thoggery (*) recommends that clerics know more about how to read than about the Bible, and the Testament of Love, while [illegible], notes that the school ought to live with lords:

> [illegible] listen for to lerne of letterure no ferther
> Lerne to be lessom of lawe to all paire life-dayes,
> . . . .
> And trauvillen nomore on be texte, but tournen to be glose.(1:6-11)

At one point the Testament argues that even though martyrs knew more than clergy do now, they were martyrs because they had faith not in their learning, a point discussed in The Plowman.

On the whole, there are not many complaints that the lower clergy were ignorant. The ordinary church-goer probably had no way of knowing when the preacher made a mistake in his reading or understanding.[1] The Lollards, often poor persons themselves, did have enough

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[1]Mirk's Instructions for Parish Priests (941) is intended to aid the un-learned priest in his care of the parish, and that is made clear in the first lines of the poem. "Mirk is more interested in giving practical advice than in teaching the gospel, however, and his advice frequently reveals an interesting emphasis; in discussing the baptismal formula, he admits that few men know good Latin; and he advises priests not to worry about the endings of the words but about the beginnings, and, further, the words must come in the right order. He gives some interesting illustrations, and then he cautions: sometimes the words will emerge as a jest,

knowledge to criticize the ignorant vicar--probably any amount of knowledge would have been enough--and did so in fairly vehement terms. They were in a better position to judge on this topic than on many others.

The Clergy are Hypocrites. The complaints about the lower clergy can be summed up in the single charge: they are hypocrites. The intensity of this charge must not be underestimated. The moral criteria by which a man is judged are firm and widely accepted in the late fourteenth century, and while the frailty of man is understood, those who pretend to virtues they do not have are heavily censured. The clergy pretend to be concerned in spiritual things, but priests, friars, and bishops are interested worldly. They pretend to be humble, but they love "worship." They are sworn to poverty, and gather riches, to minister, and live luxurious, to duty and seek ease. They show themselves as continent, but under the cloak of holiness and guile they are lecherous. John of Burnne (1338) defines the sin of hypocrisy: "Ypocrysye, bys ys be synne/ Pey re wyb-oute, and fayle wit[h]-ynne." (3195-6)

One of the gentle complaints about hypocrisy is the "Satire on the People of Kildare" (1346). The poet uses his fingers at the priest, monk, friar, and nun. In the world, the rule is that of "The Law of Kyndenesse" (747). The inversion of the courtesies [illegible] to the charge of hypocrisy, but it is done with humor. The exaggeration of the divagation from the rule is necessary for the reversal of the concluding lines, the penance the novice must do to attain the blessed land.

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but the sacrament is valid as long as the speaker did not intend to jest. Later in his work, Pecock mentions the opposite, but probably refers to "ouer-hyppers": "Yet[t]e bow not be wordes tayle,/ But bey ben out[e] wybowte fayle;" (1777-8) evidently, the result could be worrisome when endings are omitted or wrong. Priests often dropped out whole lines of the mass when they were in a hurry; a fifteenth century poem (3812) describes the busy activities of a special demon, Tutivillus, who catches all the omitted syllables and takes them to Satan for diabolical use, in Houser, p. 223.

The exaggeration gives the poem much of its humor as well, but it should be noted that the complaint often uses the device of contrasting extremes. "The Simonie" (1.45) notes the power of preaching to stir, but no other conclusion about the poet is possible since the contrasts between seeming and being are so vivid. The priest should be beneficed, unmarried and learned, not because he gives a bribe. Priests should care for the poor, not live as they like and oppress the rich. Priests should be [illegible] their calling, not their relatives. The friars should shrive the poor, not the rich. In short, the friars should do their religious duty instead of their political machinations in order to get more. The poet's solution would be found in the strictness of the early Church and the Apostles.

Piers Plowman (B.X) presents Wit and Study as another priests this refrain:

> "But 3e preestes þat prechen . þe pore-mennes goodes,
> And doth it to dyuerse . vt shal prouen 3ow to shame;
> If 3e lyuen as 3e lereden vs . we shal leue 3ow þe bettre."(X, 42-5)

The poet is quite straightforward in the matter as he: "Clergie in other kynnes men . serueth of two þynges,/ And þe þridde is þe worthe . þe reme[illegible] to lyue." (X, 49-50) Later in the same passage the idea is repeated and connected with the idea in the quotation from the fifth passus: every "lif [illegible] shal[illegible] and himself, [illegible] priests, all kinds of prelates, and persons and parish priests who teach and preach to the people. These should be aware, before the tonsil, that they are the salt that they were. (X, 244) Later, the poet attacks the clergy for their rich clothing; the people see it and condemn the clergy for their hypocrisy:

> For ypocrysie in latyn . is lykned to a dongerul,
> þat were hyuneyed with snowe . and smoles wyth-inne;
> Or to a wal þat were whitlymed . and were foule wyth-inne.
> Riȝt so many prestes . prechoures and prelates,
> Ȝe aren enblaunched with bele paroles . and with clothes also,
> Ac Ȝowre werkes and Ȝowre wordes bere-vnder . aren ful vnlouelich.
> (XV, 109-114)

Langland adds, almost in an undertone, that if the people shall not be saved, then the clergy ought to try to save themselves.

The Lollard "Song against the Friars" (c. 1382), after repeating the DAY acrostic, says: "Thus crowned Caym thes foul ordours,/ That fillen the world ful of errours,/ And of ypocrisie." And "their lyvyng/ Accordid not to their preching." The poem on the Minorite friars (c. 1383) attacks its evil: "Thei preche alle of covert, bot tru[e] love bei nou[t]." In Pierce the Ploughman's Creed (c. 1394) the charge of hypocrisy is fundamental, and it is of course the clergy. The Minorite friar criticizes the Franciscans for their over-leniency, and then as a monk, for himself. The Austin friar, in spite of his unworthiness, attacks the Minorites for hypocrisy:

> Lordes lueth hem well - for bi[e] her lowe crouche;
> Bot knowen men her cortel - and her queynt wordes,
> bei wolde worshypen hem - nought but a litel,
> be ipocrisie - ypen upon fendes. (307-9)

Pierce also gives the DAY acrostic and names the founder of the orders the devil:

> Of be Gyrle of Leym - be grete be freres,
> Wi[t] fondel lore on erbe - fe,ned for hem;
> Bot bei wib her fals frib - mikel fol[k] bigeb,
> Crist calle hem bis cell - & bise ypocriter;
> Lew after be wynes - wel wel[e] telleb. (315-9)

More need not be said; the whole poem is contrived for the complaint that the friars are hypocrites. One stanza from The Whyte Pelle (c. 1400) illustrates the charge in that poem:

> Other they ben proude, or coveytous,
> Or they ben harle, or els hungry,
> Or they ben liberall or lecherous,
> Or els moulers with marchandry;
> Or reyntegners of men with maistry,
> Or stewardes, countours, or oleiours,
> And serve god in hypocrisy;[1]
> Such preestes ben Christes fals treytours!

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[1]Besides the modern meaning, the term has another, more special sense: a man who pretends to be praying or performing in a religious

The poet-wanderer of Tom and the Scrivener (*C), however, contents himself with this laconic protest: "They practise alle of deceite as bought be, as fife were, but by grace it is not myght bere betre evill wold arise." (b91-2) [illegible] Langland's [illegible] at the Church in the Prologue to the Confessio (C11-2); [illegible] (b-2)/ [illegible] that is used to the power."

The total effect of the charge of hypocrisy, when connected with other complaints about the Church is a diminution [illegible] of trust in the religious. The Church no longer merits the devotion of the people nor holds the moral [illegible]. There is an element of fear in the complaint that should not be overlooked.

Conclusion

People [illegible] about the state of the people because it was very important to them. [illegible] offered hope for a change or help; life was inflexibly fixed for most [illegible] vision [illegible]. The Church was [illegible] from [illegible] state. One saw a priest every day, but the sheriff seldom. There may be more complaints about the Church because the priest could not so easily [illegible] off to jail. Excommunication was not used in many instances when discontent was expressed. Perhaps one cannot account for the discrepancy in the number of complaints except to say that the Church was closer, more interesting, or more important to men.

The complaints about the Church are more intense, a fact which

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ceremony but who is thinking of something else is also a hypocrite, even though he cannot help himself. This suggests that there is more than dramatic irony in the scene in Hamlet where Claudius attempts to pray.

supports the conclusion that religious matters were considered important. The Lollard poems are quite vehement, presumably because they are efforts at propaganda. Langland's poem voices complaints about the Church's slow moral reformation, but the complaints about the state are more vehemently complained out, because they feared the safety of their own souls; there are other reasons, social or economic motives, resulting from the unfulfilled social obligations of the Church. It is more likely, however, that religious feelings and ideals were more important to them. Their fear of damnation was, perhaps, partial, but social stimulus to complain when the [illegible] priests [illegible] were, the first concern in Wyclif, Langland, and the monk of Leicester. All [illegible] of course, but something of the spirit of Wyclif's work [illegible], and something of his spirit can be found in many verses of complaint.

Men with the fear of damnation [illegible] power to rule, the center point in many of their lives is the sense of sin. It manifests when the means to salvation are corrupt. The Lollards were not extreme politicians, but some of their [illegible] led to this conflict. Salvation [illegible] was [illegible] the Bible. This was a challenge to [illegible] Church [illegible]. The elements of mysticism in Lollard doctrine and among the people should not be underestimated as an effect of Church corruption. Mysticism offers a way to knowledge of God [illegible] interpretation and a simplistic exegesis of the Bible fostered by the Church. Mysticism also offers a way out of the storm, or it were, into a [illegible] light of the kind found in Revel, the vision of the New Jerusalem. The vision is mystic indeed. The sense of disunity reflects the vision in conflict with the real world, one of the theses of this dissertation, and the more disparate the contrast, the more intense the complaint.

One other [illegible] the value of the [illegible] estate, the [illegible]. [illegible] number of criticisms, but very few [illegible] various [illegible]. [illegible] in the sermons, [illegible] more [illegible] or plans [illegible] so [illegible] more [illegible].

CHAPTER FIVE

SPECIFIC COMPLAINTS ABOUT THE THIRD ESTATE

A few complaints exist about the vast mass of people not included in the previous chapters; bakers, brewers, physicians, merchants, and the peasants also received criticisms. There are not very many complaints about these people, and that fact is puzzling and unaccountable. One reason might be that the poet would not wish to offend his audience by criticizing them. The complaint is to some extent an expression wherein the speaker includes or tries to include his audience in his criticism of those in authority. For the most part the persons criticised are not included in his audience. He does not say "I complain," but "we complain." If the audience of the complaints is composed primarily of what is here called the "Third Estate," then one reason for the scarcity of complaints about them is clear.

Another reason rests upon entirely different considerations. Peasants, bakers, and physicians do not often form a group worthy of consideration by the poet of complaints. The complaint has a function of explaining the unhappy present world and it does so usually by referring to the commission of a sin or sins by some authority. "Law is dead," or "the Church is aggrieved," or "the king's counsellors are inept" are better explanations than that bakers skimp on the dough in their loaves, or that brewers water the ale, or that physicians are fools. The Third Estate simply did not have the responsibility for seeing that the world ran right, and they could not be blamed with any degree of convic-

tion.[1]

The complaint is not so much an attempt at artistic expression, however excellent some of the poems are, as it is the expression of the feelings of one group about another: when the Third Estate criticizes its spiritual and political governors, it is complaining, but when the Church and State criticize the people, they are preaching or giving laws, in short, making a didactic statement, usually with an imperative verb. If the verse of complaint is assumed to be popular, if not in origin then in feeling, it is clear that there would be fewer complaints about the people. The General Complaints presumably apply to everyone, and sermons and handbooks on the Seven Deadly Sins and the Ten Commandments, such as Robert of Brunne's (778) or John Mirk's (961), quite clearly refer to the people in the parish; their statements sometimes take on the tones of complaint, as the poets felt, quite understandably, moral anguish about the condition of souls.

But there are complaints by poets about their equals; Langland (1459) identified himself with the class of people most nearly represented by the parade of Sins at confession in the fifth passus, but he assumes a moral authority superior to them and he speaks in a moral tone. In "The Simonie" (4165) and in Gower's Confessio Amantis (2662) the complaints about the Third Estate are not made only for the sake of completeness. The poet of Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) is clearly of a station superior to the Third Estate and criticizes the people. Obviously, then, one cannot make any hard and fast rule that the complaint is limited to the criticism of those in authority; the complaint may be made by a person

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[1]Few people were as extreme as the flagellantes who saw plagues as God's punishment for the sins of all men, although this point of view enters into many complaints. Vide: Piers Plowman (1459) and "The Simonie" (416

about his equal, by a person who, if not in any real authority, at least assumes a moral position from which he may speak as if to moral inferiors. The assumption that is of so much importance to the study of medieval times also furnishes a raison d'être to the verse of complaint. Society will function if all three estates do their duty; any dereliction of duty requires reproach and reproof. Another assumption is that the three estates have a distinct order of merit: when the higher estates criticize a lower, the statement is didactic; when a lower criticizes a higher, the statement is a complaint. This holds as a general rule, but exceptions will be noted in the discussion which follows.

The prologue of Piers Plowman (1459) provides the whole poem with its quality of universality; one way this is done is by including all classes and occupations of the folk in the field, merchants, minstrels, some in fancy clothes, some hard-working ploughmen, robbers, dissembling beggars, as well as craftsmen, tailors, tinkers, brewers, bakers, ditchers, cooks,--all these mingle with the king, barons, parliament-men, and clerics of all descriptions. It has been seen that Langland expresses a popular point of view in his figure of the plowman, but he has a few things to say about the complainers. The king, his knights, and Clergy ordain the commons to support them:

> þe kynge and þe comune . and kynde witte þe thridde
> Shope lawe & lewte . eche man to knowe his owne. (121-2)

A lunatic cries out "God save the king, and may his rightful ruling be rewarded in heaven!" An angel appears and speaks in Latin of the just king who will receive justice. At this point the curious passage of the parliament of rats and mice is introduced by a "Goliardeys":

Thanne greued hym a Goliardeys . a glotoun of wordes,
And to þe angel an heiȝ . answered after,
"Dum rex a regere . dicatur nomen habere,
Nomen habet sine re . nisi studet iura tenere."
Ande þanne gan alle þe comune . crye in vers of latin,
To þe kynges conseille . construe ho-so wolde--
"Preceptа Regis . sunt nobis vincula legis."[1] (139-45)

Langland is criticizing the Goliard for his complaints about the king's council, complaints discussed at the beginning of this dissertation. The import of the Goliard's Latin is that the king must rule within the law, not make it or be superior to it. The parable of the rats and mice who consider how to bell the cat indicates how foolish the Goliard is to argue such an idea. Langland is complaining about complainers, and he includes the commons with the Goliard. If one interprets the parliament of scurrying rats and mice to refer to the commons, then Langland's opinion of them is clear.

In the tenth passus, the poet describes Do-Best: he must be blameless and blame the guilty (X, 256), and shortly following that line the poet attacks the priests for not practising what they preach:

For goddis worde wolde nouȝt be loste . for þat worcheth euere,
If it auailled nouȝt þe comune . it myȝte auaille ȝow-seluen. (X, 272-3)

By Langland's own criteria, the common's complaints are condemned, with a view, one supposes, to establishing more firmly his own criticism, not that the poet considers himself blameless, but simply morally superior.

Langland's whole poem is directed toward an audience wherein the commons bulk large; his is an integrated view of society and the world. With emphasis on moral reform and duty, the poet's sternness is justified.

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[1] Compare the first two Latin lines with the concluding couplet of a macaronic poem "On the Times" (3113):

"O rex, si rex es, rege te, vel eris sine re rex,
Nomen habes sine re, nisi te recteque regas rex."

Wright dates the poem 1388.

certainly, in the temper of the period. The grim figure of Hunger forcing the lazy to work parallels, in a way, Langland's exhortation to virtue. Piers Plowman is more than a poem of complaint because it adds to the complaint the necessary explanation of the means to reform. Most complaints suggest or imply the means to improvement, but few, if any, do so as explicitly as Piers does. The choice of the poor plowman as a main character reflects discredit upon the Church, the State, and also the commons. In this way Piers Plowman is more nearly universal in its application.[1]

The occupational groups represented in the field full of folk will now be considered. Some of the crafts receive a touch of complaint in the "Satire on the People of Kildare," (1078) and as "The Simonie" (4165) works through the various classes of society, a few of the occupations are mentioned. Piers Plowman (1459) has a different approach. The confession of the Seven Deadly Sins contains indirect comments on various workers.

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[1]There is no difficulty in discovering Gower's position (2662); he clearly holds himself superior to the commons, and complains about the complaints of the commons. The common clamor everywhere is that where law is lacking, error increases, as has been often proved;

> "And eche in his compleignte telleth
> How that the world is al miswent,
> And ther upon his jugement
> Yifth every man in sondry wise." (511-19)

Many men blame what is not to blame and praise the unworthy; the world's ills are man's responsibility, not mutable Fortune's. Gower is impatient with the common's clamor.

Occupational Groups

Chapmen and Merchants

The main criticism of chapman and merchants is already clear from the discussion of Wynnere in Wynnere and Wastoure (3137): they are covetous, miserly men who do not give to the poor and are always suspected of cheating and guile. Chapman are little better than peddlars and merchants are chapman who made good. The great merchant was viewed with distrust, an uneasiness due, perhaps, to the viewpoint of the Church toward the amassing of money. The implied complaint about Medill-Elde in The Parlement of the Thre Ages (1556) is that he concerns himself too much with his lands and income and not enough with his soul's salvation. The process of improving one's station, from the itinerant chapman to merchant, buying houses and lands, and gradually accumulating the gold that is dross, also bespeaks a pride and niggardliness that set ill with the peasant. The classes of society are fixed and the man who changes his status upward is automatically convicted of upsetting the status quo.

The poet of the "Satire on the People of Kildare" (1078) gives an interesting picture of the merchant-chapman:

> Hail be 3e marchans wiþ 3ur gret packes
> Of draperie, auoir-depeise, and 3ur wol sackes,
> Gold, siluer, stones, riche markes and ek pundes!
> Litil 3iue 3e þer of to þe wrech pouer.
> Sleiȝ he was and ful of witte,
> þat þis lore put in writte.

The chapman dealt in all kinds of merchandise, making money here and there by selling cloth, buying wool and taking it to markets, carrying jewels to sell to the noble lady, gentleman or bishop. The vast wool trade began on

a small scale; it was collected over the countryside, some of it sold to cottage manufacturers to be spun into thread and woven crudely at home. A large amount was gathered at the ports and shipped abroad to Flanders where cloth was more expertly made. Edward III derived much of his income from this trade, and he encouraged domestic production of cloth, perhaps indirectly, by taxing heavily the exportation of wool.

A chapman is discussed in "The Simonie" (415) and the "then and now" contrast is used:

> And sumtime were chapmen that treweliche bouhten and solde;
> And nu is thilke assise broke, and nas noht 3ore holde.
> Chaffare was woned to be meintened wid treuthe,
> And nu is al turned to treccherie, and that is ruchel reuthe to wite,
> That alle manere godnesse is thus adoun i-smite. (355-60)

The treachery of the chapman may take a number of forms, but the poem refers specifically to none. The tricks of Avarice in Piers Plowman (1459) come to mind, stretching the cloth, diluting the ale, clipping coins, and using false weights and measures. It is interesting to note that an assize, perhaps "thilke assise" of "The Simonie" (415), of weights and measures was established in 1197[1] and was even included in the Magna Charta. It is doubtful that the poet of "The Simonie" would have such a long memory. There were other statutes which controlled or aimed to control business; to prevent the cornering of the market, buying and selling was limited to hours and places so that an open market was guaranteed; standards of quality were set for cloth and other products, but doubt remains as to the practicality of such regulations. They were certainly difficult if not impossible to enforce.[2] Covetous guile is the epitaph of the

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[1]Lunt, History, p. 139.

[2]Mirk (961) instructs his parish priest to ask this question of the dying:

> Has þou vset measures fals,
> Or wyghtes þat were als
> By þe more to bye, & by þe lasse to selle? (943-5)

chapman-merchant, and Langland's personification of avarice in the fifth passus of Piers Plowman (1459) condenses the random complaints collected above into one exposition. Avarice is hungry-looking, his eyes are bleary, and his dress is threadbare, so worn that if the many lice on it could find a better home, they would leave him.

> "I haue ben coueytouse," quod þis caityue . "I bi-knowe it here;
> For some tyme I serued . Symme atte Stile,
> And was his prentis ypli3te . his profit to wayte.
> First I lerned to lye . a leef other tweyne,
> Wikkedlich to weye . was my furst lessoun.
> To wy and to Wynchestre . I went to þe faire,
> With many manere marchandise . as my Maistre me hi3te;
> Ne had þe grace of gyle . ygo amonge my ware,
> It had be vnsolde þis seuene 3ere . so me god helpe! . . ." (V, 200-208)

He then went among drapers and learned to sew pieces of cloth together carefully, and by pressing the cloth made it seem whole and longer. His wife wove cloth and by using false weights and spinning the cloth loosely made it seem more than it was. Repentance asks Avarice if he had ever lent money on interest.[1] Avarice answers, "only in my youth when I learned among Lombards to clip coins." He evidently weighed coins and pared the heaviest a little. He loaned the money thus gained and ruthlessly collected it on the due-date;

> I haue lent lordes . and ladyes my chaffare,
> And ben her brocour after . and bou3te it my-self.
> Eschaunges and cheuesances . with suche chaffare I dele,
> And leue folke þat lese wol . a lyppe at euery noble. (V, 247-250)

He has loaned money to anyone who can pay him well for the use of it, but he never loaned to the poor who needed help. Repentance is angry, and says:

> For were I frere of þat hous . þere gode faith and charite is,
> I nolde cope vs with þi catel . ne owre kyrke amende,
> Ne haue a peny to my pitaunce . of þyne, bi my soule hele,. . . (V. 268-70)

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[1] It should be noted that Repentance asks roughly the same questions that the priest asks at confession, and the procedure loosely parallels that in the Instructions to Parish Priests (961).

Avarice is so evil that not even a friar would accept his money. The combination of covetousness and guile does not double but triple the sin.

The development of the chapman into the merchant and financier is shown by Avarice. The figure of Medill-Elde in The Parlement of the Thre Ages (1550) shows the successful merchant realistically. He is dressed soberly in grey, musing on his rents and lands. He probably did business in wool, and perhaps he raised sheep. He counsels Youth to leave his amorous play and get to work, just as he in turn is counselled by Elde to consider his days and ways, for riches nor rents will ransom his life. The aim of every merchant was to put his money into land where it would earn him money safely after the hazardous years of trade. He would endow himself a window in some friary and live out his days at ease. Medill-Elde is, however, still engaged in money-making, and as such he resembles Wynnere in Wynnere and Wastoure (3137). After enumerating the religious in the ranks of the former, the poet says:

> And othere synes I see, sett appon lofte,
> Some witnesse of wolle, and some of wyne tounnes,
> And oper merchandes merkes, so many and so thikke,
> That I ne wote in my witt, for alle this werlde riche,
> Whatt segge vnder the sonne can the sowme rekken. (188–192)

Presumably, these are similar to the merchants' marks--fourty-four of them--counted by the poet-wanderer of Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (663) when he visited the Dominican's chapel.[1] Wastoure describes Wynnere's accumulation of goods in this way (3137):

> When thou hast waltered and went and wakede all pe nyghte,
> And iche a wy in this werlde that wonnes the abowte,
> And hase werpede thy wyde howses full of wolle sakkes,--
> The bemys benden at the rofe, siche bakone there hynges,
> Stuffed are sterlynges vndere stelen bowndes,--
> What scholde worthe of that wele, if no waste come? (246–51)

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[1] Vide: Crede (663), 171 ff.

Wynnere accumulates goods bit by bit until his store is vast and profitable. Another method of making money is hinted at in this passage:

> Then þe pure plente of corne þat þe peple sowes,
> þat God will graunte, of his grace, to growe on þe erthe,
> Ay to appaire þe pris, þat it passe nott to hye,
> Schal make þe to waxe wod for wanhope in erthe,
> To hope aftir an harde 3ere, to honge þi-seluen. (370-74)

The practice of buying up corn and holding it for the price to rise seems to be referred to by Wastoure. This practice is similar to buying grain from the seller privately. "Forgoeres and vitaillers" are among those who follow Lady Mede in Piers Plowman (1459). (II, 60) Lady Mede's marriage deed gives her the county of Covetousness and all the rents thereof: "That is, vsure and auarice . alle I hem graunte, / In bargains and in brokages . with al þe borghe of theft;--." (II, 86-7). When Guile flees the constable, he is met by merchants, perhaps here tradesmen, who "bishetten hym in here shope . to shewen here ware, / And apparailled hym as a prentice . þe poeple to serue." (II, 213-4) It is interesting to note that this experience apparently served Guile well, for he is next helped by pardoners, and finally by friars "for knowyng of comeres" is coped for a friar.

Lady Mede's speech in her defense attempts to justify her deeds as necessary; she says: "Alkynnes crafty men . crauen Mede for here prentis; / Marchauntz and Mede . mote nede go togideres;" (III, 224-5). Conscience, in distinguishing the two meanings of the term, says that there is no bribery in trade, only an equal exchange, i.e., barter. When, however, Truth sends Piers a pardon, tradesmen are mentioned again among those who shall reach heaven if they amend. The whole passage from the seventh passus merits quotation to make the attitude toward just price and trade clear:

Marchaunts in þe margyne . hadden many 3eres,
Ac none a pena & a culpa . þe Pope nolde hem 3raunte,
For þei holde nou3t her halidayes . as holicherche techeth,
And for þei swere by her soule . and 'so god moste hem helpe,'
A3eir clene conscience . her catel to selle.
Ac vnder his secret seel . trewthe sent hem a lettre,
That þey shulde bugge boldely . þat hem best liked,
And sithenes selle it a3ein . and 3eue þe wynnynge,
And amende mescndieux þere-myde . and myseyse folke helpe,
And wikked ways . wi3tlich hem amende;
And do bote to brugges . þat to-broke were,
Marien maydenes . or maken hem nonnes;
Pore peple and prisounes . fynden hem here fode,
And sette scoleres to scole . or to some other craftes;
Releue Religioun . and renten hem bettere;--
"And I shal sende 3ow my-selue . seynt Michel myn archangel,
þat no deuel shal 3ow dere . ne fere 3ow in 3owre deyinge,
And witen 3ow fro wanhope . if 3e wil bus worche,
And sende 3owre soules in safte . to my seyntes in ioye." (VII, 18-36)

Such a standard is difficult to attain and maintain. Essentially, it is the standard implied by Pastoure to Synnere. It should be noticed that merchants are considered by the poet not to have a very good chance for salvation.

There is an inconsistency between the idea of just price in the last passage quoted and that made by Conscience; the earlier idea is the ortrodox one, that sale is barter, but the later one is more realistic, that profit may be made. The implication of the extensive charities is that the profit may be large, a submission to the inevitable. The inconsistency is puzzling nevertheless. Even the old standards are being strained by the growth and solidification of the mercantile class. England is not yet, however, a nation of shopkeepers, but some of the aspects of that class are becoming apparent, the reputation for guile and shrewd dealing, particularly the shifty apprentice, the popular resentment of dormant capital, the assumption of support for public charities, and the general belief that great wealth makes the salvation of the soul more difficult.

Usury. The prohibition of usury rests on the Biblical injunction that man shall live by the sweat of his brow. The use of money to make money as in borrowing and lending, selling at a profit, or the accumulation of dross is thereby forbidden. The problem which underlies the criticisms of the merchants is emphasized in the complaints about usury and revolve about the notion of the just price: if a man sells his goods, shall he have a profit, and, if so, how much? The Church considered the question frequently. The theory was that so much profit was just if it were necessary for the support of the seller and his family in his station, but it was unjust to trade for the sake of gain.[1] The practice was far different, and Coulton shows the wedges that widened the gap between theory and practice. The problem of just price is discussed with usury. Usury is defined as the taking of money beyond the capital lent, and the justification of interest was the risk involved in the great hazards of trade. A partner in a shipload of goods was allowed as much profit as he could get on the open market in order to balance his losses on past or future expeditions.

Another basis for taking interest was the definition of a loan as a contract, and if the contract were broken, then the loaner was entitled to damages for the loss of the use of the money; this became a legal fiction, and loans were made for thirty days, or sixty days, but finally for one day, with the interest beginning the next day. The monasteries lent money as a matter of course and were important in the economy of the countryside. Another device which undoubtedly interested Medill-Elde

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[1] G. G. Coulton, Medieval Panorama (New York, Meridian ed., 1955), pp. 333 ff.

was the buying of rents, or the income from a given piece of land.[1] At first, of course, the Jews were the agency for capital, and that function was about the only livelihood they were permitted, although they were protected in law and religion by the king, whose wards they were. The verse of complaint vaguely chronicles the popular antagonism toward the Jews.[2]

Despite the practical necessity of lending on interest, the complaints inveigh against the practice. Robert of Brunne (778) remarks;

> Now wyl y speke of okerers
> þat þefys ben yn sum maners.
> To whom þat vsery ys lefe,
> Gostely, he ys a þefe. (2415-18)

Robert also condemns those who store grain to drive up the price and who give none of it to the starving poor; a tale is told of Pers the Usurer who receives his just deserts. Usury includes some of the evils discussed above. Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (663) attacks the friars

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[1]Coulton explains the "census" in this way:

> "X, let us say, owns a piece of land from which he derives a yearly rent of £10. Y purchases from him for £100 or £150 that rent. In plain words, Y invests his £100 or £150 at 10 or 6 2/3 per cent. Thus, such purchases might easily be permitted as non-usurious. If Y had every moral right to buy land outright, why should he not buy the yearly produce of that land? At first, however, it was insisted that the land must actually exist, and that Y must actually purchase it, though on the condition that X might compel its redemption by repaying the money. Gradually, however, that restriction was abandoned in practice. It was too artificial to maintain itself; men bought and sold rents like any other marketable commodity, and the census became a favourite investment for religious bodies. pp. 341-2."

[2]They were expelled by the end of the 13th century, after having had their money confiscated, and their function replaced by first the Italian banking firms (who suffered equally severe treatment) and finally by English merchant banking firms.

for usury also:

> þe power of þe apostells - þei passen in speche,
> For to sellen þe synnes - for siluer oþer mede,
> . . . .
> . . . þat þey may kachen
> Money oþer money-worthe - and mede to fonge,
> And ben at lone and at bode - as burgesses vseth. (711-16)

The Lollard position is clearly that a barter economy is best.[1]

The method of gaining interest described by Avarice in his confession in Piers Plowman (1459) is not clear; it may refer to the device of the broken contract and "damages" required, or to something simpler, the practice of not returning the pledge even though repayment is made:

> I lerned amonge lumbardes . and ieweș a lessoun,
> To wey pens with a peys . and pare þe heuyest,
> And lene it for loue of þe crosse . to legge a wedde and lese it;
> Suche dedes I did wryte . 3if he his day breke.
> I haue mo maneres þorw rerages . þan þorw misereatur & comodat. (V, 212-16)

The "crosse" refers to the cross stamped on the noble. The sin of avarice receives much condemnation in the poem; among those who refuse to follow the exhortations of Conscience to repent their sins are these:

> Thanne alkyn crystene . saue comune wommen,
> Repenteden & refused synne . saue they one;
> And fals men, flatereres . vsureres and theues,
> Lyeres and questmongeres . þat were forsworen ofte,
> Wytynge and willefully . with þe false helden,
> And for syluer were forswore . sothely þei wist it. (XIX, 364-69)

Langland sees money in the traditional manner, as the strongest temptation to evil.

Langland also indicates the connection in the minds of people between the idea of avarice, usury, and the Jews. Because the Jews crucified

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[1]The complaint about "regraters" occurs in a number of didactic poems; a poem on the feast of Corpus Christi (4250), Horstmann, EETS 98, pp. 168-97, states that a "Mokerere" is one who buys more grain than he needs and keeps it until the price rises, nor will he lower the price for the poor out of mercy and charity; "ffor þis is þe Mokereres onswere:/ 'Goþ or wey, Corn is dere!'" (lines 61-2). God will say to him on the day of judgment: "I hungered and ye refused me."

Christ, Faith reproved them:

> And 3owre Fraunchise, þat fre was . fallen is in thraldome,
> And 3e, cherles, & 3owre children . chieue shal 3e neure,
> Ne haue lordship in londe . ne no londe tylye,
> But al bareyne be . & vsurye vsen,
> Which is lyf þat owre lorde . in alle lawes acurseth. (XVIII, 103-7)

There is a more interesting statement in the poem about the Jews. Langland urges that the Church take care of the unfortunate, orphans, idiots, and helpless maidens; he makes a comparison with the Jews:

> A Iuwe wolde nou3te se a Iuwe . go iangelyng for defaute,
> For alle þe moebles on þis molde . and he amende it mi3te.
> Allas! þat a cristene creature . shal be vnkynde til an other, . . .
> (IX, 81-83)

Those whom we consider Judas' fellows are kinder to each other than Christians are. Elsewhere in the poem Langland suggests that since Jews know the first part of the Creed, they should be taught the second. While the redemption of any soul in doubt does get Langland's sympathy, nevertheless, the poet holds them responsible for the crucifixion of Christ.

The verse of complaint does not include any explanation of the massacres of the Jews that convulsed England in the 12th and 13th centuries. They had been forbidden to lend on interest in 1275, which meant their practical expulsion since they were not allowed to own any land or to practise a craft. They were expelled in 1290. Only the reference in Piers Plowman noted above about the Jews is important to this chapter. There are no complaints about the Lombards, whom the peasants singled out for special destruction in the revolt of 1381. The only reference to them has been noted in connection with Avarice's education; from Lombards and Jews he learned to clip coins. (V, 242)

The complaints about usury are sparse, found only in the didactic handbooks and the Lollard poem. The significance of this is clear; men accepted it. Once money is lent on interest and enough men are doing it,

then the interest rates tend to fall to a reasonable level.

Doctors

A story in the North Homily Cycle (300), told in order to show the efficacy of prayer, reveals an interesting attitude toward physicians. A hermit saw the devil disguised as a "leche" go past his gate toward an abbey and divined that the devil hoped to lead the monks into sin by the administration of the drugs in his "boystes-boxes." The hermit prayed. The monks were saved. The devil-physician was foiled. The story is mentioned because of the association of the physician and his drugs with sin and with magic. Then, as now, ignorance fosters suspicion. The didactic manuals are full of warnings against witchcraft.

Another indication of popular sentiment is found in "The Simonie" (4165). The poet here reveals his agreement with Seneca's cynicism[1]:

> And 3it ther is another craft that toucheth the clergie,
> That ben thise false fisiciens that helpen men to die;
> He wole wagge his urine in a vessel of glas,
> And sweareth that he is sekere than evere 3it he was,
> And seins
> "Dame, for faute of helpe thin housebonde is neih slain."
>
> Thus he wole afraien al that ther is inne
> And make many a lesing silver for to winne.
> Ac afterward he fondeth to comforte the wif,
> And seith: "Dame, for of thin, I wole holde his lyf,"
> And lije,
> Thouh he wite no more than a gos wheither he wole live or die.
>
> Anon he wole biginne to blere the wives eije;
> He wole aske half a pound to bien spicerie;
> The VIII shillinges sholen up to the win and the ale,
> And bringe rotes and rindes bretful a male
> Off noht:
> Hit shal be dere on a lek, whan hit is al i-wrouht.

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[1] Vide supra, p. 126, for Robert of Brunne's translation of Seneca's well-known statement about appointing heirs.

He wole preisen hit i-nohw and sweren as he were wod:
"For the kyng of the lond the drink is riche and god,"
And 3eve the godeman drinke a god quantite
And make him worsse than he was-- evele mot he the,
That clerk,
That so geteth the silver and can noht don his werk!

He doth the wif sethe a chapoun and piece beof;
Ne tit the gode man noht thereof, be him nevere so leof.
The best he piketh up him self and maketh his mawe touht,
And 3eveth the godeman soupe the lene broth, that nis noht
For seke:
That so serveth eny man, Godes curs in his cheke! (211-40)

The description is hardly flattering, but, of course, the doctor may not be so inept as the poet makes him; urinalysis is still one of the first tests the diagnostician makes, and the diet of broth is not so harmful a dish as the meat which the poet would have the patient eat, probably tough beef at that. Certainly, the basis of the drink, wine and ale, would serve as well as the alcohol bound in many tonics. The fluid diet does little harm, and the fever passes during the night.[2] The poet thinks the doctor a quack, but he has some skill.

The same prejudices are shown in Piers Plowman (1459); when Liar escapes from the constable sent to apprehend him, he goes first to pardoners, but then: "Thanne loured leches . and lettres þei sent,/ þat he sholde wonye with hem . wateres to loke." (II, 223-4) The implication is clear enough. In the sixth passus occurs the famous passage where Hunger admonishes those who will not work. Hunger also makes a statement about

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[1]Another manuscript of the same poem adds a stanza on this subject; it was written late in the 14th century:

He maketh hym al ny3t at ese, as wel as he can,
And loke that ha fare wel hors and eke man:
A morow he taketh the uryn and waggeth in the sunne,
And seyth: "Dame, blessed be God! thi maystre is i-wonne,
And lyketh."
Thus he bereth a-wey that selver and the godewyf biswyketh. (256-64)

[2]If the "rotes & rindes" included willow bark, which contains a crude form of aspirin, then the fever would most certainly have passed.

dieting. He advises men not to eat so much, "Lat nou3t sire surfait . sitten at þi borde;/ Leue him nou3t, for he is lecherous . and likerous of tonge." (VI, 267-8) Doctors are mentioned directly:

> And 3if þow diete þe þus . I dar legge myne eres,
> þat phisik shal his furred hodes . for his fode selle,
> And his cloke of calabre . with alle þe knappes of golde,
> And be fayne, bi my feith . his phisik to lete,
> And lerne to laboure with londe . for lyflode is swete;
> For morthereres aren mony leches . lorde hem amende!
> þei do men deye þorw here drynkes . ar destine it wolde. (VI, 270-76)

Piers praises Hunger's words. One notes the suspicion of medicine and doctors, and a resentment of the professional assumption of omniscience. Langland's espousal of diet as important to health is one of those medical facts noted in the past by empirically-minded men.

As yet the medical knowledge fostered by Salerno had not reached England in any great extent; surgery had been a prohibited subject at Paris. Medical theory was in effect atrophied. The surgeons were barbers and while they had, perhaps, considerable dexterity from experience in war, they knew no Latin, just as those who knew some Latin knew no Greek or Arabic. Too little is known of the constituents of the draughts prescribed to patients, and too little information of the symptoms of the patients is preserved to enable the modern reader to identify many of the illnesses. The medieval doctor knew of some palliatives, and he knew something of infectious diseases and quarantines, and there were a few hospitals. More credit than that cannot be given unless the folk-cures and old crones' nostrums reveal some empirical medical value hitherto undiscerned. The complaints registered indicate that doctors were resented for their covetousness and high fees, their officious assumption of superior knowledge, and they were feared for the magic they perhaps used.

Overseers

By overseers are meant the petty officials of the lord, reeves, stewards, and bailiffs. Robert of Brunne (778) remarks about the stewards of great lords:

> . . . stywards mow be tolde,
> þat lordyngës courtys holde,
> For nyrhand euery a styward,
> þe dome þat þey ȝeue, ys ouer hard;
> And namely to þe porë man,
> þey greuë hym alle þat þey kan. (5421-6)

Yet there are few references to the officious deeds of the petty officials that surrounded the lord. "The Song of the Husbandman" (696) is one of these. The effect of the poem depends in large part upon the host of persecutors of the yeoman farmer:

> þe hayward heteþ us harm to habben of his,
> þe bailif bocknеþ us bale and weneþ wel do,
> þe wodeward waiteþ us, wo, þat lokeþ under rys:
> Ne mai us ryse no rest, rycheis ne ro.
> . . . .
> Ar londes and ar leodes liggeþ fol lene,
> þorh biddyng of baylyfs such harm hem haþ hiht.

The beadles with their writs sealed with the green wax, the sign of the tax collector, follow the husbandman with threats, hunting him as the hound chases the hare. The husbandman must take his hens, lamprey and salmon to the market and sell them, perhaps sell his pickaxe and other tools, and even his hay before it is ripe, to redeem his pledge to the beadle.

A poem titled "The Man in the Moon" (2066)[1] contains a humorous hint of resentment against the hayward, who kept account of and limited the number of faggots of briars and straw the tenant cut for his own

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[1]Brown, Eng. Lyr. of XIII Cent., pp. 160-1.

fuel. The poem is a whimsical address by the poor peasant to the man in the moon, who in folk-lore carried a bundle of thorns; the peasant muses on his own predicament and compares it with the lunar man. The man in the moon does not seem to be going anywhere, nor is he in any hurry, yet he carries a bundle of briars on his fork — he does not worry about the cold. He probably was out in a field driving stakes and, when no one was looking, cut some briars for himself. The peasant adds that the man in the moon seems afraid:

> ichot of is ernde he nap nout ysped,
> He hap hewe sumwher a burþen of brere;
> þare-fore sum hayward hap taken ys wed.

The peasant then invites the man in the moon to aid in a strategem:

> 3ef þy wed ys ytake, bring hom þe trous,
> sete forþ þyn oþer fot, stryd ouer sty.
> We shule preye þe haywart hom to vre hous
> ant maken hym at heyse for þe maystry.
> Drynke to hym deorly of fol god bous,
> ant oure dame douse shal sitten hym by.
> When þat he is dronke ase a dreynt mous
> þenne we schule borewe þe wed ate bayly.

But the man in the moon does not answer; he is deaf or he does not understand the law; he will not descend until morning, even though the speaker's teeth are chattering. It is clear that the petty tyranny of the hayward is resented.

Other kinds of overseers are among Lady Mede's followers (1459): sheriffs, beadles, and bailiffs; these escort her to her betrothal to Falsehood. The witnesses to the marriage contract include Wrong, Piers the pardoner, Bette the beadle, Rainald the reeve, and Munde the miller. In Conscience's first attack on Lady Mede, he says:

> Sisoures and sompnoures . suche men hir preiseth;
> Shireues of shires . were shent 3if she nere;
> For she dop men lese here londe . and here lyf bothe. (III, 133-5)

The virtue in such men is manifest. In illustrating the idea that clerics

should not have too much learning, an interesting comparison is made between clerics and stewards:

> I se ensamples my-self . and so may many an other,
> þat serununtes þat seruen lordes . selden falle in arrerage,
> But þo þat kepen þe lordes catel . clerkes and reues.
> Rigt so lewed men . & of litel knowynge,
> Selden falle þei so foule . and so fer in synne,
> As clerkes of holikirke . þat kepen crystes tresore,
> þe which is mannes soule to saue . as god seith in þe gospel:
> Ite vos in vineam mean. (X, 468-75)

The poet may not be implying that reeves appropriate some of their lords' goods, but he is at least accusing them of carelessness. A general warning (4006) states that when "þefe is maade reue,/ þenne schalt englonde mys-chewe." The tag of a poem against executors remarks: "too secuturs and an overseere make thre theves." in emulation of an old joke. (4172) In sum, then, the overseer is described as a hard judge in his lord's court, a persecutor of the poor, at least a covetous man, and perhaps a thief.

Bakers and Brewers

"A lutel soth Sermun" (1091) didactically criticizes bakers:

> Alle þeos false chapmen þe feond heom wulle habbe,
> Bakares and breowares, for alle men heo gabbe.
> Lowe heo holdeþ heore galun mid beorme heo hine filleþ,
> And euer of þe purse þat seoluer heo tulleþ.
> Bobe heo makeþ feble heore bred and heore ale;
> Habbe heo þat seoluer, ne telleþ heo neuer tale.
> Gode men for godes luue bileueþ sucche sunne,
> For at þen ende hit binymeþ heueriche wunne. (21-28)

Making short loaves and watered ale was a moral as well as a legal offense. The price of bread was fixed by an assize of Henry II to fluctuate locally with the price of grain, and by the same assize the bread was required to be of good quality. Ale was similarly priced, but at a later time.[1] Such a law is difficult to enforce; many housewives made both bread and ale and

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[1]Lunt, History, p. 190.

probably skimped on the constituents, as the wife of Avarice in Piers Plowman (1459) is described as doing by her husband:

> I bouȝte hir barly malte . she brewe it to selle,
> Peny ale and podyng ale . she poured togideres
> For laboreres and for low folke; . þat lay by hymselue.
> The best ale lay in my boure . in my bedchambre,
> And who-so bummed þer-of . bouȝte it þer-after,
> A galoun for a grote . god wote, no lesse;
> And ȝit it cam in cupmel . þis crafte my wyf vsed. (V, 219-225)

It became almost traditional to suspect bakers of debilitating their loaves. It also became traditional to threaten the pillory for bakers whose bread was found meager. In the "Satire on the People of Kildare" (1078) occur these lines:

> Hail be ȝe bakers wiþ ȝur louis smale
> Of white bred and of blake, ful mani and fale!
> ȝe pincheþ on þe riȝt white aȝens goddes law,
> To þe fair pillori, ich rede, ȝe tak hede.
> þis uers is iwrowȝte so welle,
> þat no tung iwis mai telle. ![1]

Public hatred for such a baker was consistent. The poet of Piers Plowman (1459) makes this direct recommendation:

> Meires and maceres . that menes ben bitwene
> þe kynge and þe comune . to kepe þe lawes,
> to punyschen on pilleries . and pynynge-stoles
> Brewesteres and bakesteres . bocheres and cokes;
> For þise aren men on þis molde . þat moste harme worcheth
> To þe pore peple . þat parcel-mele buggen.
> For they poysoun þe peple . priueliche and oft,
> Thei rychen þorw regraterye . and rentes hem buggen
> With þat þe pore people . shulde put in here wombe
> For toke þei on trewly . þei tymbred nouȝt so heiȝe,
> Ne bouȝte non burgages . be ȝe ful certeyne. (III, 76-86)

But Lady Mede has intervened with the mayors to allow such regraters, or merchants who corner the market. In his confession Avarice reveals some

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[1]Cheating bakers were put in the pillory with a specimen of their product hung around their necks. Brewers were forced to drink as much of their brew as they could hold and the rest was poured over their heads. Vide: Coulton, Med. Panorama, p. 303.

of the other tricks the petty tradesman uses to gull his customer, false weights and measures, stretching cloth, and using clipped coins. One should not consider these complaints trivial; they are based on moral grounds and on legal ones which in turn derive from practical reason. Bread was much more of a staple food then than now: it was the single essential of life for most men at this time, as it is for many peasants throughout the world today. One must, therefore, attribute to the complaints a greater intensity of feeling than one would superficially assign.

Brewers were criticized along with bakers in "A Lutel soth Sermun" (1091). Brewers evidently added too much yeast to the mash in hopes of a greater alcoholic content and then watered the ale, a most felonious act by any standard. The act was legally reprehensible, and the mention of the dunking stool in Piers Plowman (1459) is made with the strong feeling that such a punishment is justifiable. The same feeling is evident in the stanza from the "Satire on the People of Kildare" (1078):

> Hail be ȝe brewesters wiþ ȝur galuns,
> Potels and quartes ouer al þe tounes.
> ȝur þowmes berriþ moch awai, schame hab þe gyle;
> Beþ iwar of þe coking-stole, þe lak is dep and hori.
> Sikerlich he was a clerk
> þat so sleilich wroȝte þis werk.

Probably, the clerk loved the good brown ale as well as any man, and it is just retribution to punish brewers by dipping them in the same water with which they enfeebled their ale. Ale was, of course, almost as stable a food as bread, and to the Englishman as important a source of satisfaction as the red wines of France and Italy to the peasantry. In "The Land of Cokaygne" (762) water is used only to wash in, and one of the abundant wells flows with mead. The guileful strategems employed by "Rose þe regratere," the wife of Avarice in Piers Plowman (1459),

need not be repeated. One could, without too much sentimentality, suppose that the good brown ale, so celebrated in the song, supplied one of the few amusements and pleasures of men. Perhaps that fact explains the vicious portrait of the impenitent brewer given near the end of Piers Plowman: Conscience invites, through Piers, all men to join in the sacrament of the Eucharist:

> "ȝe, bawe !" quod a brewere . "I wil nouȝt be reuled,
> Bi ihesu ! for al ȝowre ianglynge . with spiritus iusticie.
> Ne after conscience, by cryste . whil I can selle
> Bothe dregges & draffe . and drawe it at on hole,
> þikke ale and þinne ale . for þat is my kynde,
> And nouȝte hakke after holynesse; . holde þi tonge, conscience !
> Of spiritus iusticie . þow spekest moche an ydel !" (XIX, 394-400)

Conscience rebukes the brewer, but the fact that Langland gives the brewer such an evil character may not be gratuitous.

The Peasants

The last category in the objects of complaint is comprehensive. The criticisms of the peasants, plowmen, yeomen, villeins, sheepherders, servants, in short, all those not discussed above, will now be considered. Sermons complain of the sins of men extensively, in some detail, and with a systematic fervor that follows the doctrine of the Church to reprove the guilty. Not all of these can be included because the scope of this dissertation would be immeasureably extended, but those poems consonant with the general thesis that complaints are popular rather than representative of priests and of other persons in authority will be discussed. A General Complaint on the abuses of the age (4051) alleges that the "þral is ṽn-buxsum" and the "Apeling bripeling" and the "ȝunch mon lieȝer." This idea is repeated in the prayer at the end of an "Elegy on the Death of Edward I" (205) where the poet evidently has popular

unrest in mind:

> God lete him [Edward II] ner be worse man
> Then is fader, ne lasse of myht
> To holden is pore-men to ryht,
> Ant understonde good consail.

The peasantry are portrayed as grumbling men who need a stern master.

A passage in "The Simonie" (4105) which follows the stanza on chapmen decries the falseness that prevails in the land and seems to refer to the litigiousness of the lowly:

> Ther was gamen in Engelond that durede 3er and other;
> Erliche upon the monenday uch man bishrewed other.
> So longe lastede that gamen a-mong lered and lewed,
> That nolde theih nevere stinten, or al the world were bishrewed, I-wis;
> And therfore al that helpe sholde fareth the more a-mis. (367-72)

God sent terrible weather, but men continued their sins unafraid of God's might:

> God hath ben wroth wid the world, and that is wel i-sene;
> For al that whilom was murthe is turned to treie and tene.
> He sente us plente i-nouh, suffre whiles we wolde,
> Off alle manere sustenaunce grouwende upon molde So thicke;
> And evere a-3eines his godnesse we waren i-liche wicke. (379-84)

The poet illustrates thir thesis, that men are more concerned with their own selfish interests:

> Men sholde noht sumtime finde a boy for to bere a lettre,
> That wolde eten eny mete, but it were the betre.
> For beof ne for bakoun, ne for swich stor of house,
> Unnethe wolde eny don a char, so were theih daungerouse For wlaunke;
> And siththen bicom ful reulich that thanne were so ranke. (385-90)

God sent a dearth and the price of wheat rose, and the proud cried out for hunger. Then a good year for grain came and men were proud and arrogant again; then God sent a hard winter, and cattle died, and then a dearth, but men still did not fear God. What more evidence is necessary to prove that men were evil?

The "Satire on the Retinues of the Great" (2649) attacks the

grooms and horseboys that serve the nobles when they ride around to their estates. The grooms are brutish; they gamble, quarrel, eat too much--Satan made his storehouse in their gullets--and drink before dawn. They ape the fancy clothes of their masters, and they are lazy, filthy, and fit only to eat cat dirt.

Langland (1459) has the same motive in his criticisms of the grumbling laborers who dine so well and ask high wages. The plagues of the middle of the century separated the poet of "The Simonie" from Langland, but they make the same criticism, which presages the Peasants' Revolt. The waster would not work, says the poet, but wandered about:

> Ne no begger ete bred . þat benes Inne were,
> But of coket or clerematyn . or elles of clene whete;
> Ne none halpeny ale . in none wise drynke,
> But of þe best and of þe brounest . þat in borghe is to selle.
> Laboreres þat haue no lande . to lyue on but her handes,
> Deyned nouȝt to dyne a-day . nyȝt-olde wortes.
> May no peny ale hem paye . ne no pece of bakoun,
> But if it be freech flesch other fische . fryed other bake,
> And þat chaude or plus chaud . for chillyng of here mawe.
> And but if he be heighlich huyred . ellis wil he chyde,
> And þat he was werkman wrouȝt . waille þe tyme, . . . (VI, 305-15)

He curses God and grumbles without reason and curses the king and all his counsel who made laws to grieve him. When Hunger was his master he did not moan so. The similarity between Langland's complaint and that in "The Simonie" is clear.

Piers Plowman is a well-populated poem. The rush and press of people is at times overwhelming, but it gives the poem a sense of urgency. There are a particularly large number of beggars, usually simulating infirmities, full of malice and resentment.

> Bidders and beggeres . fast aboute ȝede,
> With her bely and her bagges . of bred ful ycrammed;
> Fayteden for here fode . fouȝten atte ale;
> In glotonye, god it wote . go hij to bedde,
> And risen with ribaudye . tho roberdes knaues; (40-44)

Hermits with their wenches, and all those loose-living lubbers, dikers,

diggers, miners, tinkers who call after Dame Emma, and other laborers--all these add to the rush of the prologue. When Conscience preaches his sermon, some of the congregation are mentioned by name; Pernel should put away her fine clothes; Tom Stow should get two staves and go with Wat to get their wives at the gossips' saturday night;[1] Betty should beat lazy Betoun, her servant, and chapmen should chastise their children. The personifications of the sins bear some resemblance to the peasants; Pernel vows to wear a hair-shirt for her pride and leave her finery at home, and Lechour vows to drink water on saturday for seven years. Envy stirs up strife, backbites, and is happy only when others are unhappy. Wrath bears tales too, especially when drunk. The ale-house scene described during Glutton's confession epitomizes the crowded canvas of Langland's poem. All the humble occupations are represented in the brawling mass of unwashed humanity, guzzling and laughing and shouting until sodden. Certainly, Langland intends his poem to comment upon the highest and the lowest. After Conscience finishes granting absolution, "A thousand of men þo . thrungen togyderes;/ Criede vpward to cryst . and to his clene moder/ To haue grace to go with hem . treuthe to seke." (V, 517-19) Nobody knows the way, not even a pilgrim with all his signs of visiting afar can help them. Then Piers the Ploughman enters and introduces the first climax of the poem. The pilgrimage to Truth begins. The crowd begins the trek, except for a few; a cutpurse, an apeward, a wafer-seller. Piers is severe to the wasters, the workmen who will not work, and gets the knight's promise to chastise them; while many are

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[1]BR*32, "The Gossips' Meeting," R.L. Greene, Early English Carols (Oxford, 1935), pp. 283-4.

laboring in the fields, others are not:

> And þanne seten somme . and songen atte nale,
> And hulpen erie his half acre . with "how! trolli-lolli!"
> "Now, bi þe peril of my soule!" quod Pieres . al in pure tene,
> "But 3e arise þe rather . and rape 3ow to worche,
> Shal no greyne þat groweth . glade 3ow at nede;
> And þough 3e deye for dole . þe deuel haue þat recche th!"
> Tho were faitoures aferde . and feyned hem blynde,
> Somme leyde here legges aliri . as suche loseles conneth,
> And made her mone to pieres . and preyde hym of grace:
> "For we haue no lymes to laboure with . lorde, y-graced be 3e!
> Ac we preye for 3ow pieres . and for 3owre plow bothe. (VI, 117-27)

This whining cajolery only angers Piers more, and he promises to discover who can and who cannot work. One idler then turns on Piers vehemently:

> And þanne gan a wastoure to wrath hym . and wolde haue yfou3te,
> And to Pieres þe plowman . he profered his gloue;
> A Brytonere, a braggere . a-bosted pieres als,
> And bad hym go pissen with his plow . for-pyned schrewe!
> "Wiltow or neltow . we wil haue owre wille,
> Of þi flowre and of þi flessche . fecche whan vs liketh,
> And make vs myrie þer-myde . maugre þi chekes!" (VI, 154-60)

Piers calls the knight, but the idlers revile him also, and then Piers calls Hunger, who subdues them all.

Langland probably means to include the peasantry in his condemnation of marrying for money; no children but strife come from that kind of union:

> Many a peire sithen þe pestilence . han pli3t hem togideres;
> þe fruit þat þei brynge forth . aren foule wordes,
> In ialousye ioyeles . and ianglyng on bedde. (IX, 164-6)

Langland adds other advice and warnings to the peasants. He is particularly stringent against those who violated the Statute of Labourers, left their home fields and went forth to find the highest wages; the law was that a worker must accept the wages and the first job offered to him.

> For may no cherle chartre make . ne his catel selle,
> With-outen leue of his lorde . no lawe wil it graunte.
> Ac he may renne in arrerage . and rowme so fro home,
> And as a reneyed caityf . recchelesly gon aboute,
> Ac Reson shal rekne with hym . and rebuken hym at þe laste,
> And conscience a-counte with hym . and casten hym in arrerage,
> And putten hym after in a prisone . in purgatorie to brenne, . . (XI, 122-8

Langland, however, does not paint only in black; the poor have a natural tendency to virtue because they lack the means to sin, namely money. The poet's sympathy is clearly with the poor, but he is not blind to their faults. It is, perhaps, a creditable fact about the poem that it is so complete--there is a virtue in plenitude--and that all classes and stations, occupations, and professions are included in the poem and discussed. It is certainly not a debit; the medieval Weltanschauung was synoptic, interrelated, and comprehensive. Piers Plowman stretches toward the same completeness as The Divine Comedy, toward the same universality and plenitude. The conceptions of the two poems are almost equal in largeness although the expositions are not equal: Piers Plowman includes much of the matter of the Inferno, but less of the matter of the Purgatorio and Paradiso; the beatific vision is expressed in the Commedia but it is only suggested and reflected in Piers Plowman.

The desire to rise from the level in which one was born brings criticism upon the peasantry in Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (663) and The Plowmans Tale (3448); the reference in the former to the shoemaker's son and the beggars' brat, and in the latter the clerics are criticized in the same way:

> For to lordes they woll be liche,
> An harlots scne nat worth an hawe! (305-4)

This sentiment seems to contradict the aims of the peasants in their revolt. The conservative notion of keeping to the place in which one was born was certainly not a controlling influence in the attempt to reduce the feudal ties. The Peasants' Revolt and the Lollard movement are both reactions against authority, yet both utilize conservative ideas of authority to justify the events; the paradox is that every revolution has conservative elements.

The poet of Rum and the Sothsegger (*6) is a strong parliament man, a conservative who considers that institution the proper place for registering the commons' complaints. The poem justifies the contention that much complaining was oral in comparison with what was written. The poet has little use for the rumor-mongers who continually excite the people: "Thaire tales been so trouble þat tournen men thoughtz; / The more þat men musen or þaym, þe madder þay been after." (1392-3) The swiftness of the rumor's flight is graphically described:

> . . . þough þou ride rennynge, and reste but a lite,
> Fro London forth þe long waye to þe lond-is ende,
> And comes right fro þe king-is courte and his counseil bothe,
> Fro prelatz vnto peris in pryuete or elles,
> Yit shal tidingz bee y-tolde tenne dayes ere þou come
> That neuer was of worde spoke ne wroughte, as þou shal hire. (1396-1401)

Rumors are faster than swallows and "As falsly forgid-as þough a frere had made þaym." May rumor-mongers be punished! The poet then describes the plaintive and grumbling populace, a complaint about complainers:

> Yit wol þay carpe of þe corcune as þay of counseil were,
> And ordeyne more in con houre þan other half wintre
> Al þe king-is counseil couthe wel bringe aboute.
> Thus mellen þay with matieres to moustre þaire wittes,
> And grucchen whenne þe radryng is þat goeth for vs alle. (1408-12)

A story about the tyrannical power of Genghis Khan is then told, with this moral:

> Now by Crist þat me creed, I can not be-þenke
> A kindely cause why þe comun shuld
> Contre þe king-is wil ne construe his werkes.
> I carpe not of knightz - þat cometh for þe shires,
> That þe king clepith to cunseil with oþer;
> But hit longeth to no laborier - þe lawe is agayne þaym. (1457-62)

Lords must spent their time quieting the people, thus neglecting their estates to subdue the borders and the Marches: "Thus clappeth þe comun and knocketh þaymself, / For þe tayl of þaire talking teneth þaym ofte." (1469-70) The metaphor of the body politic is used, what hurts the head

also hurts the limbs, and vice versa; "Thay finde many fautes - and faillen moste paymself / Of deedes of deuete that pay do shuld." (1475-6) The duties are listed: they should love lords loyally and learn the lesson of their low status, so that they might rule themselves by reason and right law. They should do what they are told and not grumble: "But God of his goodnes graunt paym to amende./ To knowe what paire kinde is . . . "(1484-5) The poet manifests considerable contempt for the restless populace. The political implications of the ambiguous prophecies of Merlin and others, perhaps those in Piers Plowman[1] are discussed with indignant distaste by the poet of Mum:

> Yit is pere a poynt of prophecie how pe peuple construeth
> And museth on pe meruailles - pat Merlyn dide deuyse.
> And redith as right as pe Ram is hornyd,
> As helpe me pe high God, I holde paym halfe a-masid.
> For pere nys wight in pis world pat wot bifore eue
> How pe winde and pe wedre wol wirche on pe morowe,
> Ne noon so cunnyng a clerc pat construe wel couthe
> Ere sunneday a seuenyght what shal falle.
> Thus pay muse on pe mase on mone and on sterres
> Til heedes been hewe of and hoppe on pe grene,
> And al pe wide world wondre on paire workes. (1723-33)

The poet's criticisms certainly reveal his point of view, that of a class higher than the peasantry but lower than the nobility. He is not always so fierce in his denunciation of the commons, for he realizes the obligation the state has for them. His comments are interesting for their directness and for their information about plaintive rumors and murmurs of the populace at large that forms the subject of this chapter.

Conclusion

The complaints about the third estate are fewer than those about the Nobility and the Church. The reason for this is not clear, but it

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[1] Vide: the end of passus VI, and X, 317-322.

seems possible that the third estate was low in importance for literary material and unsuitable to a popular audience. The people gathered at the taverns and fairs more likely wished to hear jibes at others, not themselves. The general complaint probably includes everyone and the hearer is left to apply the criticisms in his own way, although he probably excluded himself from their applications. Undoubtedly, he did apply them to his neighbors. The minstrel who sang or recited the complaints would not be likely to wish to offend his audience, a fact which accounts for much of the indirectness of complaints generally, and therefore would not say, as Langland does, that many people are sinful, evil and vicious.

It is probable that the poet of complaint intended his poem for an audience different from the object of criticism. If this is so, then one can infer that the intended audience is composed of people not criticized, or least criticized in the poem, and that the poet belongs to the same group. Such inferences are not subject to proof, but the possibility that they are true exists.

Langland and the poet of Mum and the Sothsegger are trying to be comprehensive, and out of a desire to effect reform or improvement they include those who commit the faults. This is, in a way, objective criticism and cannot be gainsaid. It is not surprising, either, that bakers, brewers, usurers and physicians should be attacked, for they are in the minority of a popular audience, as are all the objects of complaint, and their faults are clear and indefensible, while the faults of people at large are not so clear and are more difficult to prove. The two poets are, however, in the minority.

The matter of the complaints would not, for the most part, antagonize the third estate, and would, with few exceptions, appeal to

them. The subordinate often revels in the criticisms of his master, and he enjoys them more if his own merit is flattered or his own plight pitied. The vast majority of the verses of complaint attacks those in authority. This fact suggests that the verse represents the point of view of the majority of men, the comune, the third estate, the populace at large. That idea cannot be proved, but it is at least consistent with the thesis that the verse represents popular opinions and would, therefore, appeal to the people.

The objects of complaint certainly seem to inform the reader of the scope of the medieval Englishman's opinions, at least those shown within the limits of this dissertation. One cannot interview the peasant and ask him his opinions in a kind of Gallup poll, and the conclusions drawn from a study of the verse must be phrased in the subjunctive mood. But the broad view of the verse of complaint does seem to indicate that it is representative of popular opinion. The moral criteria of the poems, the principles which are in operation in the poets' minds and which contrast with the realitiesthey see, are very likely similar to the moral views of the people at large. Such further analysis is, however, out of place here; it will be discussed in the concluding chapter.

The raw material of the verse of complaint is that grumbling, whining, gossiping, rumor-mongering by the people which the poet turns into verse, and which received the barbs of criticism by the poet of Mum and the Sothsegger. Such raw material is not literature; it was probably oral anyway, and it most likely formed the staple of conversation then as now over the beer and bean-cakes of the peasantry. To make that material interesting on a wider scale requires some artistic form and some artistic expression. Many of the complaints discussed in the previous

chapters have merit. "The Simonie" attracts the hearer by its stanzaic rythmn and its alliteration and rhyme. The tone of the verse adds to the spell and gives the poem an attractiveness that has been, perhaps, underestimated. Many verses of complaint are, of course, valid literature. By any standard Piers Plowman is a near-classic and so are other poems considered in this essay, but critical restraint is necessary.

Another chapter of this dissertation considers the kind and quality of the forms and devices of the verse, and the temper of complaint will be examined in order to discover the emotional qualities of the verse. The three parts of the analysis of the verse of complaint will then be completed, and a summary and conclusion will then be more pertinent; the objects of complaint are too lengthy to be discussed here any further except to note the comprehensiveness of the objects of complaint, with the significant neglect of the laboratores, and the general indirectness of the complaining.

CHAPTER SIX

THE TEMPER, DEVICES, AND FORMS OF COMPLAINT

The analysis of the objects of complaint in the preceding chapters revealed that there was much popular outcry about the world of 14th-century England. In what emotional tones were the complaints made? A brief discussion of the emotions of the verse, the devices used to convey the criticisms, and the forms in which the verse was composed will draw into focus these aspects mentioned hitherto only in passing. This chapter attempts to answer these questions about the temper (or spirit) of complaint and about the devices used in the poetry: (1) what emotional qualities are associated with the complaints, and which are best, and by what criteria? (2) what devices are used to convey the criticisms made in the complaint, which are most effective, and by what criteria? (3) what verse forms are used and which predominate?

The Temper of Complaint

One associates with the oral complaint tones of anger, self-pity, contempt, disgust, grumbling, murmuring, bitterness, whining, indignation, fear, and despair. As has been seen, some of these emotions appear in the verse discussed above. Resignation, loneliness, and despair appear in "Elde" (718), for example, in "This world fareth as a fantasy" (1402), in "Whos seith the soth he shal be shent" (3420)

and others. The vanity of life and the transitory nature of earthly existence are combined with a quiet, almost dignified belief that resignation is the only choice of a wise and religious man. The lamenting of what cannot be corrected or changed, and the belief that the world will never be as Christ would have it, lead to a chilling but impressive statement. The fear of death is combined with a compulsive, morbid attraction to it at the same time. The fear may be greater; it may be a stark terror of the ambiguous power of the universe and of God, of the unknown, of the unaccountable and inescapable mutability and evil in the world. Many of the poems give rise to this emotion, just as the Christian ideals and morals provided the religious concepts of "what should be" to contrast with the reality. Perhaps, the emotions found in the other figure of "Elde" in The Parlement of the Thre Ages (1556) are central; Elde feels that all is vanity, that Death solves all riddles and quiets all lusts. It is an emotion difficult to describe and equally difficult to define, but it is suggested by the statement, by a man who sees the errors of men and cries out, "If only things could be changed . . . . but they cannot be!" Anguished frustration and fearful despair comprise his mood.

Such a complaint is passive and has no direct object of criticism; it may be contrasted with a more active kind wherein anger, bitterness, and frustration are aroused. "Things could be changed if . . . " something would be done, if men would follow the laws of the realm, or cease to scamper after gold or rich clothes, or if they would speak the truth instead of hiding it. Something might be done, but because it is not being done, the poet becomes angry and bitter at men. In his anger, the poet shows a moral superiority to, contempt for, and

indignation at the evil-doers.[1] His rage results from his frustration that men are so addicted to wrong. "A lutel soth Sermun" (1091) has this temper and so does "Hwon holy chireche is vnder vote" (4085). Traces of this temper appear in the "Song of the Husbandman" (696); the speaker does not and cannot accept the evils done to him, and cannot endure passively the goads of adversity; he will not suffer the indignity of being crushed by taxation and persecution; better to die at once than so to live, he cries. "The Simonie" (4155) has approximately the same temper, at times despairing and at times angry; the speaker even threatens with upraised fist that men must amend or else be damned.

The poems about women, for the most part, are invectives. Yet poems about other subjects also hurl nasty, almost vicious taunts. The ribald cries of the soldiers' songs against the Scotch are strong and brutal. The Flowmans Tale (3418) bores with its insistent, continuous, and unabated hysterical shrieks of animosity against the Church. Sheer rage and anger, frustration, indignation, and bitterness are heightened in these poems. A less vicious invective, with traces of humor, is the "Song on the Battle of Lewes" (3155). Taunts, ridicule, and sarcasm produce the temper of the poem, and make it a good one. For the most part, invective and rage cannot be sustained without risking a progressively weakening effect the longer it continues.

A few poems besides the attacks on women have a humorous cast to them. The Anglo-Irish poems are foremost of these and need only be mentioned. The Englishman seems more dour than the Scotch, but the Irishmen laughs when he sees hypocrites. The poet of the "Satire on the people

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[1]The satirist and the poet of complaint have the same motive for criticism and approximately the same attitude toward the person criticized.

of Kildare" (1078) does not condemn the vanities and follies of the men and women discussed but instead catches their eyes and winks. Certainly, this treatment is humorous and it is almost satirical, too. "The Land of Cokaygne" (732) is humorous in conception; the topsy-turvy monastery in a way satirizes the popular complaints about those easy-living monks, by out-doing them. "Sir Beny" (1480) has some comedy in it, but it is the mordant kind, as is the humor in the "Satire on the Consistory Courts" (2387). The complaint has too aggrieved a tone to permit humor.

Except for a few instances the complaint never achieves the dignity and nobility of Jeremiah or the indignant and stern denunciation of Amos and Hosea. Why it does not is puzzling; one thinks of Milton's stern criticisms of Parliament, or the steady temper of the Declaration of Independence. The medieval cast of temperament is not like that, and perhaps that is the only explanation.

Some Middle English poems, however, nearly achieve the dignity and nobility of earlier and later complaints. The temper of complaint found in Piers Plowman (1450) is unquestionably superior to that, for example, of The Plowmans Tale (7448). Without being patronizing, Langland generally speaks in the tone of voice of the wise and kind father counselling an ignorant and wayward child. He is stern, to be sure, but not so stern as Jehovah. Instead, the mercy and kindliness of the New Testament flow through the poem. It is probably useless to attempt to characterize the emotional quality of such a long poem and to define its temper, but that is precisely what compels the reader to admire the poem and to return to it. Other poems have something of the same quality of even-tempered reproof, both gentle and stern. The poet of Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) earnestly seeks some answer to the cause of the evil

times and tries to find a way to amend the miserable days. "The Simonie" (4165) has the answer; it is a plausible explanation, and it is a persuasive poem. All the poems which are pervaded by a mature and sensible temperament are long, and perhaps their length explains why they have that temper. It is different to cry out when evil men or events occur, but to hear them, to meditate upon them, and to consider causes and reasons, lead to a complaint that is more than a despairing lamentation and less than an irate invective, and better than both.

Another way to approach the problem of describing and defining the temper of complaint is to examine the better poems and to attempt to define the temper of each. "A lutel soth sermun" (1041) does not suggest that the poet has a forlorn attitude. The traditional opening to the poem, "Herkneb, alle rode men and stylle sitteb adun," might mean that it was not written by a priest or friar, but by a gleeman or goliard. The catalogue is full, but the bumpkin lovers receive the strongest reproof. The poem has a hortative tone, and it contains anger against the bakers, brewers, backbiters, and all the rest who make the world miserable. The threat is damnation, and the poet is sincere; no matter how much he inveighs against careless love, he wishes to save souls.[1] The temper of the poem is a mixture of indignation, reproof, and anger.

The "Song on the Battle of Lewes" (3155) is taunting and sarcastic; the poet levels his jibes at the unhappy supporters of the king.

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[1]Such an interpretation could be false. There are moments in the poem when it seems a parody of a much longer and often repeated sermon. The juxtaposition of the charge of lechery against the priest with the same charge against the young men and girls of the village may be a humorous attack upon the hypocritical priest. The repetition of the threat of damnation may be a conscious effort to make fun of the priest's persistent refrain.

The refrain, "Richard, þah þou be euer trichard, / triechen shalt þou neuer more!" gives the poem a ringing, strident, jeering, and roundly abusive tone. The King of Almaigne is made to look a fool; look at him, he mistook a mill for his castle, and he thought the sails were manronels, yet for his delusion paid many sorry ghosts. Sir Edward, the son of Henry III, is made to seem exiled for his treachery, forced to ride to Dover, the point of embarkation for those sworn to quit the realm, and, even more humiliating, to ride there spurless on a hack. Over the campfires the gales of laughter must have rolled. It is rough and crude humor, but it still compels laughter.

The funereal air of desolate and despairing lamentation shrouds the poem "Hwon holi Chireche ys vnder vote" (4085) in severe contrast to "The Song of Lewes." It was obviously written by a cleric, perhaps one too poor to buy his benefice the way others did. His aggrieved tone is generalized and made exterior to his own personal misery; he is not cast down, rather, the Church is fallen. The nostalgic recollection of the martyrs, of Christ's injunction to Peter, upon whom the Church stood fast and was builded up, adds poignancy to present corruption. Simon, not Peter, rules the Church; all is simony, and everyone has shame for her; she is weak. The sad, slow level of voice, almost monotone, achieves a certain dignity. The recollection of the great leaders of the Church, Gregory, Clement, Archbishop Stephen Langton, Saint Edmund, and others--they held Holy Church upright, and, with a dying fall, now she is level with the dust upon which every man treads. The poem is pure in tone: "þo her wes symon . and nu is symonye." All is not, perhaps, lost, for the poet ends with a prayer to Christ and His Mother to guide and amend the clergy. The poem is not a popular

complaint,[1] but it does prepare the kind of criticism which the Lollards made into so much valuable propaganda. This poem has a purity of tone and motive that is quite effective. It is the best example of the tone of lament. There is no rescue possible without divine aid; the golden days are gone. Lo, how are the mighty fallen!

The tones of the lament appear in the "Song of the Husbandman" (696) with the very first line, "Ich herde men upe rolle rede such men." Glimmers of anger emerge from the gloom of the poem, however, when the speaker recounts the persecution of the poor, the woe of men throughout the land as the powerful proud ride about, ignoring the law. The clergy do not intervene, for they are corrupt also. As the poet proceeds to his conclusion by enumerating seriatim the ills afflicting the husbandman, the angry misery settles into despair; there is no help. The gloom of the beginning of the poem is penetrated by flashes of anger and bitterness in the middle of the poem. But at the end, the poem settles into further bitterness and gloom. The poem has a change of mood which satisfies the reader; its length can support the alternating moods easily; the note of querulousness adds to the tempo.

In contrast with the poem on the Church, the "Song" reveals a frustration and a bitterness that the former does not possess. This is due to the fact that the "Song" has objective criticisms to make, while the poem on the Church passively laments her decay. On the whole, the general complaints which lament against abstract causes such as simony have a resigned tone, whereas a poem like the "Song" which has

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[1] By "popular" is meant that the poem represents the point of view of the populace and is attractive to them; "Iwon holy chireche . . ." seems to be a complaint made by a priest addressed to other priests, or to the whole Church, who are, after all, the most concerned.

a clearer criticism to make may have the other emotions associated with complaint, bitterness, rebelliousness, frustration and anger. The "Song" is a model of the short complaint. It should be noted further that the poem is written in the first person, but that the statement and the temper of the poem would appeal to all husbandmen; the poet cleverly makes use of a General Complaint[1] to provide the familiar tone of lamentation. The use of specific details, however, gives the poem an urgency and immediacy lacking in the General Complaint, and such specificity makes the poem more personal as well.[2] The hearer would agree with the poet, for his grain is rotted, his bailiff is merciless, and his tax nettles him, too. The poet has carefully contrived a poem which echoes the feelings of his audience. Whether or not it is a poem intended to incite some kind of rebellion cannot be decided; it might be. The appeal to the "poor are oppressed" theme may be only a further effort to bring a tone of gloom, frustration, and anger into the poem, not rebelliousness.

"The Simonie" (4165) is 476 lines long and its temper cannot be discussed in detail, nor need it be, for the tones of the poems considered above can be used to describe the temper of this poem. "The Simonie" begins with the same question as the "Song of the Husbandman"; why is the land full of evil? The answer, however, differs; the poet of the "Song" is content to write a short poem listing dramatically the persecutions of the husbandman, whereas the author of "The Simonie"

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[1]"þus wil walkeþ in lond, and lawe is forlore," and "Falsshipe fatteþ and marreþ wyþ myht."

[2]There is a progression from the general complaint to the longer, more specific complaints, and by now the reader has noticed the repetition of the themes of the general complaints reappearing in the longer poems.

wishes to be more comprehensive and to find specific illustrations of the abstractions found in the general complaints. The length of the poem makes a difference in the temper of the poem. The beginning is gloomy. The speaker poses as a man who will explain why war, dearth, and high prices exist, although the subject is so distasteful that he can hardly bear to do so. Too many wrong explanations have been given, the speaker seems to say, and so he is forced to give the real explanation. Simony, is the answer. The Church is corrupt and has corrupted everyone, and everything, else. The poet moves through the three estates and shows the extent of that corruption. He speaks in tones of anger, sharpened at times by sarcasm; the contrast between what should be and what actually is disgusts him, makes him contemptuous, and he reveals his anger by calling the benefice-seeker an "horeling, a shrewe," and a "wreche," and makes plain that archbishops and bishops are fools. The poet's contempt for money-lovers is revealed in the repetition of "covetousness," "simony," "markes and poundes."[1] The temper of the poem can be summed up as sarcastic vituperation.

What gives the poem its particular quality is its length, the completeness of its details, and the variation between loud cursing and sly, sarcastic revelation of scandal. The stanzaic form breaks up the hurried meter and prevents the poem from becoming tiresome. Because the poem was either left unfinished or because the ending was lost, it cannot be decided whether the temper eventually becomes tiresome or not. The later version of the poem omits a few stanzas and makes an

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[1]The repetion of the last phrase is a device of "Hwon Holy Chireche ys vnder vote" (4085).

end after 465 lines and is the better for doing so. The pace of the earlier version flags near the end; the exclamations of outrage are not so effective as they are near the beginning of the poem. On the whole, the poem is more angry in tone than the "Song of the Husbandman," and the tones of frustration add impetus as the tones of anger add vigor. The general theme of simony is subordinated to the statement of manifold offenses against decency and order that are recounted. The organization of the poem helps to hold it together, but the central thesis is sometimes lost; the poet probably meant to start with the progressive influence of simony and covetousness and then at the end of the poem to return to his original question and answer it. The shorter version of the poem does this and ends with a warning that unless all amend, things will get worse. There is gloom in the poem but there is less despair than anger.

Wynnere and Wastoure (d1387) has the form of the debate, and its temper is that of an argument. The poem has two levels of meaning, one of which is the direct criticism by the two debaters against each other, and the other is the indirect criticism of the economic policies of the king and the war. The debate is primarily sarcastic, angry, bitter, and indignant invective; the listener clearly understands on the second level that the poet means him to consider both the pot and the kettle black. The criticisms each makes of the other apply to the ranks and files of their respective armies; the temper of these criticisms applies to them undiminished. Both Wynnere and Wastoure are attacked on moral grounds and on practical grounds. Some of the feeling of religious principles, and of the "poor are oppressed" theme add to this temper of the direct criticisms.

The indirect criticisms of the war and of the king's economic policies are, however, sane, reasonable, and intelligent, and they have a correspondingly constructive temper or spirit. If Gollancz is correct, and his interpretation of the poem seems correct, then the audience of the poem, would include the middle-class burghers and bourgeoisie who would profit most by the constructive criticism offered. It has been argued earlier that the audience was the people who suffered most from the depradations of Wynnere and Wastoure. Certainly the commons would agree to the direct criticisms of the debaters. The minstrel may not represent any particular group at all, and his criticisms may be his own. The poet is deft enough to recite the poem either in an ale-house, or in the Royal Presence itself. The temper of the poem is a combination of vehement denunciation and sober advice, yet the glory of the pageantry and the drama of the conflict also share in forming the effect of the poem. The predominant emotion is of calm criticism or constructive practical advice to the king. It seems correct to assume that only the more intelligent listeners would understand the criticism of the king, but the mass of men would approve the sentiments Wynnere expresses of Wastoure and those of Wastoure about Wynnere. Even though the poem begins with a general complaint on the degenerate times[1], it is a criticism with more subtlety to it than most complaints. The criticism is not made on purely moral grounds, but for the practical good of the realm.

Piers the Plowman (1459) has a temper different from any of

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[1]The introductory matter of the poem uses the general complaint form, temper, and matter, similar in some respects to the prophecies; compare with "Prophecies on the Battle of Bannockburn, 1314" printed in Brandl, Middle English Literature, p. 133. The sense of gloom of the beginning of the poem rapidly changes once the vision commences to unfold.

the poems considered. To be sure, it is a long poem, a diffuse poem, of many textures, colors, and sonorities. In a way, all the shades of emotion belonging to complaint can be found in the poem; many other emotions can also be perceived, the most important of which is the clear and pure vision of man conquering sin. Complaints occur throughout the poem, but the first seven passus consist primarily of criticism. Even there, however, there is positive hope for the truly penitent, and the tone of lamentation found in earlier poems is almost entirely absent. The rest of the poem, passus VIII to XX, is more concerned with stating the positive approach to Truth and Salvation. The later passus are more didactic in tone but still quite different from the tone of the sermon. This tone seems to be due to the humility with which Langland offers his advice. Piers the Plowman often arms himself with anger and indignation to attack the beggars, sluggards, and do-nothings, and the poet himself resorts to quips and sarcasm, as in the dispute with Clergy over learning in passus X. Nevertheless, the poem as a whole views with a calm, gentle, serene, and clear hope of faith in God.

Passus I to VII tell the story of Lady Lede. This is Langland's dramatic way of making the complaint that men are covetous and that the land is harmed because of it. "The Simonie" is a direct and angry statement, but Piers Plowman is a complex allegory within a vision and it is not angry in tone at all. The poet makes his survey calmly, almost dispassionately, leaving the reader to judge Lady Lede and her worldly entourage. A vast variety of specific evils are pointed out and criticized, but the effect of the first four passus is less intense than that of "The Simonie." Both poems are comprehensive in statement, but Langland views the evils dispassionately because he believes they

can be amended. The poet of "The Simonie" would have the culprits branded, unfrocked, put in the pillory, or hanged but Langland would have them repent. This even tone is continued in passus V to VII, which include the confessions of the Seven Deadly Sins and their penitence. At the end of passus VII there is a dispute that gradually becomes violent between Piers and a priest over the pardon from Truth; when the argument reaches its peak, the dreamer awakens, and then considers calmly and forthrightly the value of papal pardons. Langland states quite simply that to trust in such pardons is dangerous. He was probably repeating popular opinion, but to say so at all required courage and conviction. Much of the poem is similar in tone, a variety of moods in a variety of passages.

The temper of the poem upon reflection is one of serenity and wisdom. One would think that the pall of gloom would settle over such a combination of moods, but it does not, because Langland always has hope. It should be remarked that his hopefulness is not of the Lollard variety, a kind of evangelical vision of the blessed land, but is, rather, steady and calm.

Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (1553) is a good example of the Lollard propagandist's best efforts to persuade the people to condemn the friars. The poem is cleverly organized to this end. The first-person speaker reveals himself as a poor man who must learn his Creed, and his humble personality, derived in part from Langland's poor peasant, gives the poem an atmosphere of piety, simplicity, and naiveté. As the poem progresses, as the friars brow-beat and turn the poor peasant away time after time, the "poor are oppressed" theme emerges and adds to the temper. The temper of the poem is due mainly to the revelation of character, the contrast between the soft-speaking peasant

and the boasting, backbiting, covetous, richly-dressed friars. Some skill is shown by the poet, for the friars in effect describe themselves. The friars become angry; the peasant becomes frustrated and gloomy. Finally, Pierce the ploughman, in a kind of recapitulation and summary, attacks all the orders of friars at once, at great length and with hearty, vituperative and angry invective, full of the sense of persecution and frustration.

The poet's skill is shown by the sudden change of mood at the end of the poem. It is done simply: Pierce recites the Creed in English. The sudden change is as effective as the Annunciation scene after the hurry-scurry of the farce in the Second Shepherd's Play. In this change of temper, the argument is resolved: the hearer is compelled to realize the disparity between what the friars are and what they should be, and is led to review the whole poem with this new attitude, different from what he originally heard, and different in a sense from the way Pierce views the friars. The piety of the ploughman's simple recitation of the Creed undoubtedly leads the hearer to feel that emotion associated with it.

The temper of the whole poem is unlike many of the other poems; it is harsher than "The Simonie" and more like the "Song of Lewes" in intensity. The poem does not reflect public opinion so much as it tries to capitalize on popular feeling against the friars, to increase it, and to lead it into action. In short, it is a propaganda poem, but of the first quality, and at least twice as good as The Plowmans Tale (3448).

Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) is similar to Piers Plowman (1459) in that the author is intelligent, sane, and hopeful, and it is similar

to Wynnere and Wastoure (3137) in that the problem considered by the poet is a practical one, how to bring the realm to peace after the deposition of Richard II and the accession of Henry IV. The criticisms of Richard II are strong, but not sarcastic, nor vituperative. The critic is surgically neat and has a rather clear historical sense. The poet does not mean to be popular, but many of his opinions were so, and he seems to have understood the popular antagonism toward the deposed king, while not necessarily sharing that antagonism. To attack the king, even a deposed king and even by only calling him "redeles"[1] requires a considerable amount of courage. The whole poem is, of course, couched in the moral dilemma of choosing between the two personifications, but for the most part there is none of the moral searching for Truth, Faith, and God that forms the second half of Piers Plowman. The moral quest is a device to enable comment upon the realm, to which the preceding chapters bounteously testify. Indeed, the point of view represented by the poet seems to be that of the bourgeoisie, whose attacks on the king's expensive household echo down the centuries. The criterion for this poet is "good sense" not the Seven Deadly Sins. Sometimes the temper is raspish, but the total effect of the poem is that of direct and open criticism, with practical and realistic proposals.

The brief survey of the temper of the poems of complaint serves to emphasize and to clarify the temper of complaint in the 14th century. The temper of the poems ranges from deep and forlorn despair to abiding hope, from bitterness and frustration to anger and rage. There seem to be

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[1] It is interesting to note the repetition of the motif of the counsel-less king in the earliest and last poem studied. See 1820, inter alia.

two basic emotions involved, despair and anger: the basic emotion of the lamentation is despair; the basic emotion of the invective is anger. The complaint encompasses both and often finds them mixed with other emotions, but the basic definition of the temper of complaint still is valid; it is composed of the emotions aroused by the incongruity of the Ideal with the Real. If the perceiver is crushed by his perception, cannot find hope for the improvement of the real world, nor any escape from it except death, then the emotions aroused clearly fall into the category of lamentation. If the perceiver can find hope for improvement, does believe the situation can be ameliorated, then he moves to bring such advances about, and his expostulation is more likely to be in anger against specific abuses.

"panne is do-best to be bold . to blame be gylty," says Langland. (1459) The temper of complaint reflects the long arm of traditional reproof from the pulpit. The Ideal is for the most part conceived in religious and dogmatic terms. But the writer of complaint seeks to evade the authoritarian attitude in his poem, just as the preacher sought to express his moral in homily or exemplum. The moral authority of the writer of complaint depends upon how much he assumes, but very rarely is his assumed authority the right of profession, as is the priest's. It is, rather because he has a particular insight into the world's affairs or men, not because he has read Handlyng Synne (778) or Instructions to Parish Priests (961). The writer of complaint seeks to avoid the tones of the pulpit even though what he has to say has been formed and suggested by the sermons he has heard. The motive impelling a man to complain is a desire to remake the world into the more perfect image of the New Jerusalem.

Certainly, Langland has such a vision. His poem can be divided into the two parts described by Skeat,[1] but the importance of this division is that the poet first states the evils in the world, and then shows how they might be removed. The important difference between Langland's temperament and the didactic temper of the preacher, however, is the former's gentle humility, the kindly yet earnest exhortation, which contrasts with the priest's ironing and authoritarian ritual. One of the differences between prophet and priest is suggested by this distinction. It is the sincere and moreful humility in the temper of the poem which made it, and makes it new, appealing and effective.

One other conclusion may be drawn from this brief study of the temper of complaint, and that concerns the temper of Wynnere and Wastoure and Hum and the Bothsegger. Both are alike in that they deal with practical, social and political problems in a less moralistic way than other complaints do; the emphasis is on common sense and the improvement of economic conditions rather than on the moral improvement of men's souls and acts. The two poems are, in a way, "White Papers," the kind of document that The Libelle of Englishe Policye is in the 15th century, and More's Utopia is in the 16th century. The moral complaint continues through the ages, of course, but one branch of it becomes satire; a convenient example is Erasmus' Praise of Folly. More and Erasmus make the same criticisms but in a different way and from a different point of view, and their criticisms are not very different from those found in the verse of complaint. More is interested in institutions and the effect such institutions have upon improving the morals of

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[1]The "Vision of Piers the Plowman," and the "Vision of Do-well, Do-bet, and Do-best." Preface, p. xlviii.

men. Erasmus is concerned with men's souls and acts and with morals, and tries to make men improve their own souls and acts. Both are concerned with improving the world, both criticize, both are sincere, both are nonprofessional authorities, neither preaches. The tones of lamentation and anger are absent from their works; these tones are replaced by sanity, reasonableness, and intelligence. (And, one might add, sophistication.) The distinction drawn between them is one of emphasis, of course, for both men were moralists, and both were practical men. One of the grandfathers of Encomium Moriae is Dame Folly, and one of the ancestors of the utopia is The Land of the Unknown.

The Devices of Complaint

The poet of complaint sees his poem as a lament or a criticism of the times, but it is also an explanation of evil, a fact that should be considered contributory to the temper of complaint. As an explanation of evil, the complaint tends to be broad in scope and general in nature and indirect in statement. The indirectness of the complaint has been noted before, but it is in effect a device by which the poet makes his poem applicable to many particular situations without having to go to great lengths to be specific. His audience is easy and familiar in this harness of generalities, of which the General Complaint is the most obvious example, and was used to such statements half-way between heaven and hell. The verses discussed under "Specific Complaints" are but little more specific than the General Complaints. The answer to the question why this should be is, perhaps, that the poet of complaint wishes the widest possible audience and the widest possible application of what he has to say. These two wishes conflict. The result is indirectness,

an easy and habitual device of the pulpit.

The poet is indirect also because it protects him from retaliation; Langland (1450) refuses to interpret the fable of belling the cat for fear that John of Gaunt would find out the author and throw him in a dungeon far away and highly secret. By indirectness more is meant, however, than that. This portion of the chapter will illustrate completely what is meant, but to take an example of indirection in a slightly expanded sense, consider the indirect way that criticism is made in "The Land of Cokaygne" (762). What is bad is praised, and what is good is condemned. Some such topsy-turviness is found in other examples of satire as well. In Erasmus, Folly is praised, and in Swift the heartless butcher of children is given mock respect. The same indirection is used in the complaint also. Lady Mede seems fair and good, and her adherents genial, but in reality she is evil, and by extension so are her loyal followers. The same is true of the men who follow Wynnere and Wastoure and Mum; they are guilty, even though their guilt is not stated directly. It can be seen that such indirection moves the poem farther from didatic denunciation and farther from the temper and method of the pulpit.

The contrast between the Ideal and the Real in the mind of the poet of complaint takes a number of objective forms. The poet may use "the past was better" theme with its nostalgic sense of vanished goodness, a device which is connected quite directly with a statement of what was perfect in the past and now exists no longer. "Hwon Holy Chireche is vnder vote" (4085) is a good example of this kind of device, but so many examples exist in the earlier chapters that no reference is needed; undoubtedly the reader has noticed how often the principal contrast between "then and now" and between the ideal and the real have

been illustrated.[1] The complaint is indirect because the limitations of the ideal force equal limitations upon the real in the comparison.[2]

Another device is personification of an abstraction, a device used so frequently in sermons and other literature that it is no surprise to find it used often in the verse of complaint. The indirectness of such a device is obvious; Sir Peny, Rum, Sothsegger, the Pelican and Griffin in The Plowmans Tale, Wynnere, Wastoure, Lady Mede, and others in Piers Plowman, Conscience and Wrong, to name but a few. The General Complaints contain personifications of Law, Charity, Truth, Love, Pride, Covetousness, Trickery, and Falseness. Such a device needs little justification, but it should be noted that personification undoubtedly had more force and appeal to the medieval audience than it has today. Langland's parade of Vices at Confession seems like a morality play; to the modern reader personifications seem stilted and awkward, but the device of personification had at least two hundred years of sermonizing behind it to characterize the sins in detail. One must assume that the medieval Englishman's reaction to personifications was much more vivid than our own. The device of personification is used for the purpose of widening the application of the complaint and for making the complaint indirect.

Similar to personification is the device of representation; when a chapman, or physician, or lawyer, or friar, or king, or priest appears in a complaint, the implication is that the criticism is applied

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[1]The version of the general complaint which ends in "-les" shows both the evil and the means to correct the evil.

[2]That is, the reference to an ideal must be general and abstract, and it poses a difficult problem for the poet to find specific illustrations of particular evils and to describe them in such a way as to make the reference to the ideal clear.

to all charmen, physicians, lawyers, friars, and priests. One notices the tendency to divide people into good and bad groups, with the larger number in the latter category. Representation does this also. Again, the complaint is made indirectly; if one friar is gluttonous, then it follows that other friars are thus impugned. This is not logic; it is argumentum ad populum, but such is the effect of the device in the poetry. Only Langland and the author of Pum, are sensible enough not to overwork this device. When the poet of Pum attacks the priests, he does not say that all priests are jealous keepers of arcanae, but only some are. Personification and representation are sometimes joined, as in Langland's Haukyn, the wafer-seller representative who also personifies "activa-vita." Langland combines the devices in the parade of vices at confession: Avarice was a charman, Sloth was a priest, and Wrath was a cook. Other examples of representation will occur to the reader.

In the opinion of this writer, the examples of representation and personification as used by the poets of complaint do not very often produce good allegory. By far the best allegory is found in the first four passus of Piers Plowman, and the worst example is at the end of the same poem. Interaction of personifications must be dramatic on the level of character and meaningful on the level of abstraction. The mixture of representation and personification does not lead to drama or meaning. Consider the confusion that results when the poet dreams in the last passus: Life takes Fortune to wife and they have a child named Sloth who marries Despair. Sloth fights Conscience. Old Age fights Life, and Life flees to the physicians, but Old Age kills a physician. Life is careless and rides to Revel. Old Age then attacks the poet, carrying the banner of Death, who came in person to the poet, who begs Nature to

release him. Nature tells the poet to dwell in Unity. The castle of Unity is beseiged by the Seven Giants of Sin led by Avarice. How much more dramatic and effective is the story of Lady Mede, her interrupted marriage, and trial! Probably the medieval reader understood the allegory better than the modern reader does, but even allowing for that, the allegory is still neither pristinely clear nor dramatic.

The devices of personification and representation have two important effects upon the temper of complaint. First, the application of the criticism to a wide group of people and the generalization of the criticism make the poem more convincing, and, secondly, the condensation of the wide applications into a single character or idea adds the quality of intensity to the poem. In other words, the single personification or representative has a number of ideas condensed into it; in the mind of the reader or hearer, these ideas spring forth into life, a mental response that is pleasing.

Another device which produces the effect of indirection is the beast-fable. The rats and mice in the Prologue to Piers Plowman represent parliament, the cat is John of Gaunt, and belling the cat means to lessen John of Gaunt's influence in governing the realm during the declining years of Edward III. In Mum and the Sothsegger there is a vision in which a bee-keeper is killing the drones who do no work but rob the hive. The most important and effective use of the beast-fable is in a "Song on the Times" (4144) with the fable of the Lion, Ass, Fox, and Wolf. The "Song" is a general complaint that the law is being misused by the powerful; the fable illustrates the theme. The Lion, representative of the king or justice, is hoodwinked by the guileful perjury of the Fox (Clergy) and the Wolf (Nobility) to convict the Ass

[illegible] the Ass palpably could not have done, namely [illegible] an excellent device to provide the [illegible] protect the poet. The "Song" has a dramatic [illegible] "Prophecy of the Six Kings to follow King John" [illegible] attributes; the animals in the prophecy stand for [illegible] important people, but the identity is readily [illegible] the norms [illegible].[2]

[illegible] words in names of objects are used to conceal, [illegible] particular people is in the poem on Richard [illegible], Bear, Parot, [illegible], et al, where grass, bushes, [illegible] with swans, bears, horses, herons, and peacocks. [illegible] figure [137] heraldic devices are used to represent [illegible] in the ranks of their armies. The ship of state [illegible] an elegy "On the Death of Edward III" is an [illegible] to parliament in Pum ar i the Detheggar [illegible] while this kind of indirection serves to pro- [illegible], it is a facile kind of ornamentation. The animal [illegible] bestiaries is become applied to the thing signified, [illegible] this indirectness is often skilfully used.

[illegible] of the debate is admirably suited to present the [illegible] the ideal and the real, right and wrong. The fable [illegible], Fox, Wolf, and Ass takes one form of the debate, the trial. [illegible] used in Piers Plowman at the trial of Lady Mede, where

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[illegible] Wright, The Poems of Lawrence Minot (Oxford, 1887), pp.

[illegible] Rupert Taylor, The Political Prophecy in England (New [illegible], p. 46. See also 374 and 3328, "The False Fox" may re- [illegible] Flemish, but the identification is not clear.

Conscience and Lady Mede exchange arguments. Another debate is found in the dialogue between the soldier and the courtier (1475). The dialogue between the Pelican and the Griffin in The Plowmans Tale (3448) is not a debate, although it has the form of one; the Pelican speaks most of the time. (Incidentally, the Pelican and the Griffin are beast-personifications, standing for the Lollards and the Clergy respectively.) Wynnere and Wastoure (3137) debate, of course, but in that example both are right and both are wrong; Edward III and the Black Prince judge the debate, so it is also a kind of trial; the king gives a judgment at the end. There are many such arguments and debates in Piers Plowman (1459); between Clergy and Piers, between Piers and the lazy beggars, between Piers and a priest, and between various personifications occur many struggles. Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) contains a few informal debates also. Indeed, the device of the debate and the device of the trial have many illustrations to show how the indirect criticism is made.[1]

The device is dramatic, particularly if the debaters are evenly matched, or if the one who is right and receives our sympathy is threatened yet ultimately wins. Wynnere and Wastoure, Lady Mede and Conscience are good examples of the use of this device, but the Pelican and Griffin debate is not. It should be noted that the didactic attitude is given to the character who is right, but that the author himself appears to be disinterested and not to be preaching; this indirection of the didactic attitude is a characteristic device of the complaint and accounts in large measure for the non-didactic temper of the verse. The writer of

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[1] The Parlement of the Thre Ages (1556) is a kind of three-cornered debate, but the poem exists primarily for Elde's diatribe. The "Satire on the Consistory Courts" (2287) is a description of a trial, but it does not contain a debate, nor is the contrast between what is good and what is evil made clear.

complaint makes continual and valiant efforts to evade the attitude of moral indignation and didactic preaching, for the simple reason that sermons have never been very interesting.

Another advantage of the device of the debate is that the poet can bring together in one place many disparate elements which ordinarily could not be collected, and he can make dramatic what otherwise would be a general statement. The "Good short refreyte betwixt Wynnere and Wastoure" (3137) concentrates its energy on the argument, but even the simplest reader or hearer of the 14th century would apply the criticisms to the respective armies and to even more specific members of the ranks and files. It seems to be a fact that the personages of the debate or trial are personifications or representations and that the criticisms are meant to be applied to the classes or groups so represented. In so doing, however, the poet can gather the objects of criticism into one place and treat the problems dramatically.

If the poet of complaint cannot bring the objects of complaint into some central focus, he resorts frequently to another device; he goes to them. It is not hard to imagine the poet of Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (663) using the debate device, but instead he chose to have his representative, really himself at one remove and disguised as a poor peasant, visit the four orders and finally find Pierce. There are a number of variations on the poet-wanderer device. The poet may seek the answer to a question, as in Mum and the Sothsegger (*6), or to learn something, as in the Crede.[1] In both instances the effect is a kind of lay visitation into the world to see the faults of men, classes, and

[1] It is never made clear why the poet's own priest does not teach him his Creed; nevertheless, the device is handled in such a way that motive is not inspected carefully.

occupations and to pass judgment on them.

Another variation of the poet-wanderer device is the pilgrimage. In the pilgrimage, the poet-wanderer is cloaked in humility and piety, and his authority is thereby increased. The poet-wanderer device is often a first-person account and by being an eye-witness to things his audience has not seen, he bolsters his authority. Langland is in effect a pilgrim as well as a hermit, and the pilgrimages to Truth, to Do-Wel, Do-Bet, and Do-Best enable the poet to move around and to give a sense of progress to his poem. The effect of the device is clear: the poet can bring to his poem that plentiful and abundant dramatis personae in a scope of inquiry fitting to his main purpose, an examination of all society, ideas, and the faults thereof, and in a convincing way explain why things are the way they are. Langland puts the pilgrimages in visions to elevate the seriousness and the religous tone of the whole poem; the poet remains as a hermit in meditation behind the poem, almost exterior to it, in the finest and most respected tradition of Christianity. It should be noted, however, that his visions are not of God, but of sinful man seeking God.

A pilgrimage allows the poet to give a more convincing description of the faults of the world because he has seen them; his audience accepts his evidence. As has been mentioned, Piers Plowman is crowded with all kinds of people going about their worldly affairs. The poet-wanderer device is useful and effective because it enlarges the limitations of subject matter, time, and place. It should be noted further that the advantages of the picaresque device were seized by later writers; the Utopia is somewhat similar in that the narrator has travelled around, and Nashe's Unfortunate Traveller makes his witty

criticisms as he goes, and Bunyan's The Pilgrim's Progress utilizes the device to perfection and should be compared with the second part of Piers Plowman.[1] The device is not limited to complaint, but it reflects the encyclopedic scope desired by the poet of complaint.

The device of the vision is admirably suited to the same encyclopedic aim of complaint, for not only physical events and evil men can be held up for criticism, but the theoretical and moral principles and abstractions can be placed side by side with them for contrast. Furthermore, the difficulties of time and place are overcome in a vision or a dream. The vision also, as has been mentioned, enables the poet to put his criticisms at one remove and to protect himself from retaliation. In fact, one might argue that personification and representation can exist with greatest dramatic intensity only in conjunction with the vision, such as the betrothal and trial of Lady Mede. No matter how unreasonable and contrary to fact something may be, it attains some palpability within a vision, but for the most part the vision has a perceptible relationship with reality in the same way that the general complaint has, namely, the mental applications by the audience to the real world. This mental activity is pleasant and exciting, and the poet does not have to do all the work of interpretation that the sermonizing priest does. The vision also has a sense of the marvelous and wonderful in it. Dreams and dream interpretation, like the prophecy, received the imprecations of priests, but Langland defends dreams and their interpretation (in his Visions) as in some sense true. The visions of hermits

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[1] The Praise of Folly uses the static rather than the peripatetic method; Folly speaks as a god from the mountain, roughly as the king in council, but the dramatic effect is similar to that of the debate or trial.

have a sanctity and authority that cannot be easily gainsaid. The religious overtones of the device of the vision contribute to the temper of complaint.

The debate, the peripatetic complainer, and the vision are devices which provide a considerable degree of organization to the large and long complaint and should not be underestimated in this regard. The specificity of time, place, and action viewed by the poet-wanderer is coherent, just as the condensation of time within the vision gives it unity; both devices unify the criticisms into the person of the viewer or dreamer. It can easily be seen also that the temper of complaint unifies a poem; this is more obvious in the short, general complaint than in the longer poem. The quest or pilgrimage gains unity by repetition of the motif of the quest or the goal of the pilgrimage, just as in the short poems words and phrases are repeated to emphasize the theme. The explanation of evil has a natural organization; the problem is stated and the solution is given. This pattern occurs in "The Simonie," "The Song of the Husbandman," and Piers Plowman, where the two visions are connected by the device of the pilgrimage to Truth after the problem of Lady Mede is considered. The pattern varies in Mum and the Sothsegger where the quest is not very important; all right-thinking men know the answer, and those who side with Mum are automatically indicted. The devices of complaint, then, have a unifying effect upon the organization of the verse.

Forms of the Verse

The distribution of the forms of the verse considered in this dissertation is curious. Almost all of the poems are rhymed, and half

of these, approximately, are in stanzas. Nine poems are in alliterative long lines, and four of these are composed in rhymed stanzas. Clearly, the forms of the verse are not criteria for deciding whether or not a poem belongs to the verse of complaint. There is no correlation between the form of the poem and its content, as there seems to be with the temper and devices of the verse. Four main groupings of the verse will be considered: alliterative, alliterative and rhymed, stanzaic verse, and rhyme verse.

Alliterative Verse

The five alliterative poems are among the longest poems considered. They contain a total of 11,[illegible] lines. Piers Plowman 1459 and Pearl and the Pathsayer [illegible] are the longest, with 7,[illegible]5 and 1,[illegible]01 lines respectively. Wynnere and Wastoure [illegible]13] has about 470 lines, and although its ending is lost, the poem is approaching completion at the end. The whole poem is divided into fairly large sections, evidently meant to be pauses in the recitation, for it is a poem that is meant to be recited by a professional minstrel. "Hall a frendly and fast," says the poet, "for here a fit ends." It is highly competent verse and the alliterative scheme is handled well to vary in a variety of emotions and to produce various effects. The poet can curse, as in "Let be thy vengynce of thi wrathe, for Cristis luffe of heuen! / Late the perle and the pere late part of thi siluere;" or he can express resignation: "Take be wrange as it comes, be game as it falles." The poem does not flag or become monotonous, and the poet varies the

normal alliterative pattern, aa/ax, sufficiently.[1] The varying patterns are expected after the poet's boasting in the prologue to the poem.[2] The poem is a splendid example of alliterative verse, which can be recited for a considerable length of time without becoming tiresome.

The Parlement of the Thre Ages (1556) has 668 alliterative lines. The poem is as effective as Wynnere and Wastoure (2147); both poems may have been written by the same person. Both poems have excellent descriptions, good pacing, and eloquent phrasing, and both could be recited with great effect.

Piers Plowman (1459) was probably divided up for recitation. Some of it seems meant to be read silently, but the first seven passus could very easily have been read aloud. In many ways it is difficult to imagine the poem recited because it seems intended for such a large audience. All the poems with alliteration contain a large amount of dialogue. Skeat remarks: "We may, however, feel confident that his conversation is more that of the lower and less educated classes than

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[1]For example, aa/aa, "Croked full craftyly, and kembid in the nekke;" and "I pryke and I pryne, and he the purse opynes." The poet occasionaly will continue an alliterating sound into the following line; the following example also illustrates a peculiar pattern aabb/aab in the first line:

> "Thies are Sayn Franceys folke, þat sayen alle schal fey worthe;
> They aren so ferse and so fresche, þay feghtyn bot seldom.
> I wote wele for wynnynge they wenten fro home;
> His purse reghethe full wele that wanne thayme all hedire."

The closing line of each "fitt" is patterned aaa/aa.

[2]The repetition of the alliterative sound into the following line or lines is rare in Piers Plowman (1459) but fairly common in Morte Arture and Mum and the Gothsegger (*6). Vide: Day and Steele, Mum, p. xliii.

of the upper classes." (xlv) Skeat's evidence for this statement is that Langland was not concerned with grammar, hardly substantial proof. Langland himself, however, felt his Latin to be shaky, and his mistakes, according to Skeat (who certainly knew), bear this fact out. (I, 139-40) Langland expected great knowledge of the priest, as his criteria show, (XV, 365-372), and he probably found many priests who knew less than he did, and he expected more.

He attacked the esoteric argumentation of the masters of divinity, and perhaps felt himself both inferior and superior to the learned men. The verse is good; the poet learned the craft well although he probably was not by profession a minstrel.

Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (662) has 955 alliterative lines and is short enough to be recited upon a single occasion; it has good descriptions, considerable dialogue, and produces a variety of effects. Besides the careful organization of the poem, there are good characterizations of the friars and of Pierce, and while much of the verse is bombastic denunciation, there are quietly-toned passages whenever the poet speaks in the first-person, designed to contrast with the utterances of the friars.

Mum and the Sothsegger (*6) contains 2,521 lines, of which the R fragment has 770. The poem seems meant both to be recited and read silently. The R fragment addresses Richard II, but he has already been deposed, and the poem is likely intended for the hearing of the people. The poem is also a tacit warning to Henry V. Some elements of the poem have the professional touches noted in Wynnere and Wastoure (3137) and the Parlement of the Thre Ages (1556), the descriptions, the wandering about, the visions, the dialogue, and the smoothness of the verse.

The alliterative line is fitting to the longer poems and gives them a strength which rhymed or stanzaic verse on the whole would not provide. The size of the poems and the alliteration give the poems some of the qualities of the epic, breadth, grandeur, and a quiet nobility, treating in a comprehensive way a wide variety of subjects suitable to a large theme.

Rhymed and Alliterative Verse

In a poem "On the Follies of Fashion" [?] the alliteration supplies emphasis to the pronunciation, but it is clearly subordinate to the rhymed pattern:

> [illegible] bot 'lenest vs lyf vnd[illegible] vch-on[illegible]
> [illegible]forte [illegible] wip knyf nost pe[illegible]re r[illegible],
> bobe [illegible]eymen & wyf [illegible]ere [illegible]
> [illegible]ost be [illegible]-sturred wip strif for [illegible]me bot pou [illegible]
> In vuune
> bot monkune
> [illegible]ille [illegible]

The first line is xxaxa/xaax, and the second xaxa/[illegible]. The stanza pattern is four tone-rhymed lines followed by [illegible] tone-rhyming lines. The alliteration of the other stanzas is equally irregular. The poet keeps upon the rhymes. The "Satire on the Walking Stick" (228), has been quoted in full in the chapter on the Church. The alliteration is just an addition rather than a formal part of the construction. It is quite irregular: xxa/aa, xxa/aa, xa/xa, xa/aax, xaxa/xixi, xax xa and so on. The stanza is quite complicated in pattern: a a b [illegible] b c d b [illegible] f f [illegible] f. Every third line of the first twelve lines is short, and the last six lines are also short. The last six lines are a kind of commentary on the descriptions in the first twelve lines, and in three stanzas the thirteenth line is a question, as if the speaker

were talking to himself.

The "Satire on the Retinue of the Great" (2649) has many irregular alliterative lines, but the rhyme scheme is fairly regular. The alliteration is patterned, for example, in the first stanza:

xaxa/xaxa
xaxa/xbxb
axax/xbxb
xxxx/xaxa

The rhyme scheme is four mono-rhymes. The alliteration is clearly subordinated to the rhyming stanza. The "Song of the Husbandman" (600) has a great amount of irregular alliteration, but the rhyme scheme is very strict; the poem alternates eight-line stanzas with four-line stanzas, rhyming thus: a b a b a b a b c d c d. The alliteration of the first two stanzas is:

I	II
aa/aaa	abx/bab
xa/xa	axa/xax
xx/aax	aaa/aa
xa/aa	aax/bbx
axa/xxa	aaa/xx
xaa/xxa	xaa/aa
xa/aa	xaa/xa
axa/xx	xaa/axa
xaa/aa	xab/aab
xxa/xxa	aab/bbb
aax/axa	aab/bxb
xxa/xaa	xaa/aa

One very interesting effect of the verse depends upon the repetition of words and phrases and ideas throughout the poem. The repetition draws the poem together and increases the tone of despair by the harping upon the evils. "þus" occurs ten times, introducing a conclusion to a description of the evils; "þus we carpeþ for þe kyng, and carieþ ful colde" near the beginning is repeated near the end as "þus y kippe and cacche cares ful colde." "þus me pileþ þe pore" is echoed in "And

al haþ piked of þe pore þe prikyares prude" and both are combined in the line following which links the stanzas: "þus me pileþ þe pore and pykeþ ful clene." Many stanzas are thus linked together by repetition: the last line of the first stanza reads: "bote over þe levest we leoseþ a-last," and the first line of the second stanza reads: "Luþer is to leosen þer ase lutel ys." The effect of this linking is condensation of the whole poem; it is tied together so thoroughly.[1] The poem has heavy alliteration which governs the meter of the verse. The combination of alliteration and the stanzaic scheme is a difficult form. Lapses of rhyme and alliteration can be excused somewhat on the grounds of the difficulty of the form but not completely. Pearl is much more skillfully composed within its form than the four poems discussed above, with the possible exception of the "Song of the Husbandman" (696). It should be noted that the four poems containing both alliteration and stanzaic schemes were written before the middle of the 14th century. A number of other stanzaic poems contain irregular alliteration: "A Defence and a Warning" (1504) to women written in the first half of the 14th century has some alliteration: xaxa/xxx, aa/xx, aax/xxa, for example. Laurence Minot's poems contain some irregular alliteration: xx/aa, xa/xbb, axa/xa (709); "The Siege of Calais" (585) is slightly more regular: ab/bxa, xaax/xa, axa/xa; "The Defeat of the Spaniards" (1401) is the most heavily alliterative: xaa/xa, axa/aa, xaa/axa, aaxa/axxa. Many of the poems in the Vernon series contain two alliterating words in a line; by the end of the century, alliterative verse and

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[1]Stanza linking by repetition of a key word or phrase, "concatenation," is common in Middle English verse. For example, Laurence Minot "The Battle of Crecy" (2149). Pearl (2714) has linking words also, and is alliterative and stanzaic as well. Vide: E. V. Gordon, ed., Pearl (Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 87-89.

stanzaic verse are less commingled.

Stanzaic Verse

A brief survey of some thirty poems written in stanzas reveals that, exclusive of the Plowmans Tale (3448) and the tale of King Edward and the Shepherd (988), stanzaic poems contain about one quarter the number of lines (3,012) of the alliterative poems (12,030). Six-line, eight-line, and twelve-line stanzas are found, and each has a variety of rhyme schemes. The rhyme schemes for each length of stanza and frequency of each rhyme pattern are shown:

Six-line Stanza	8-line Stanza	12-line Stanza
(3) aabccb	(6) ababbcbc	(2) aabccbddbeeb
(3) aaaabb	(3) ababahab	(2) ababahabbcbc
(2) aabbcc	(1) aaaabccb	(1) aaabcccbdede
(1) aabcdd	(1) ababcbcb	

The 8-line stanza seems to be most used, but the 6-line stanza is almost as frequently found. A fairly typical six-line stanza is this one from a Lollard poem "On the Minorite Friars" (2663):

> Thai have done him on a croys fer up in the skye,
> And festned on hym wyenges, as he shuld flie,
> This fals feyned byleve shal thai soure bye,
> On that lovelych Lord so for to lye.
> With an O and an I, one sayd ful stille,
> Armachan distroy han, if it is Goddes wille.

The "O and I" refrain is a popular one. The whole poem is directed against the friars' popularization of religion, particularly the dramatized Biblical scenes. "The Simonie" (4165) has the traditional call for attention by the minstrel, "ze that wolen a-bide, listneth and ze

muwen here / The skille; / I nelle ligen for nc man, nerkne whose wile." The short fifth line of the stanza, rhyming a a b b c c, sets the last line off and makes it a place for emphasis and repetition. Each stanza is a separate statement, but the stanzas are connected by the progression through the three estates.[1] The poet pauses in his exposition to summarize or to iterate his general theme in his last line; the short fifth line signals the break.

An example of the 8-line stanza is quoted from "Verses on the Earthquake of 1382" (4368) from the Vernon manuscript:

> þe Rysing of þe sonnynes in lenne,
> þe iestilens, and þe eorþe-quake--
> þeose þree þinges, I vnderstonde,
> Bee-tokenes þe grete vengaunce & wrake
> þat schulde falle for synnes sake,
> As þis clerkes conne de-clare.
> Nou may we cheose to leue or take,
> for warnyng haue we to ben ware.

The last line of each stanza contains the words "warnyng to be ware," the repetition has the effect of drawing the discussion to a conclusion in each stanza and of unifying the whole poem. The poet is expert in making the complicated stanza serve his purpose of lamentation and warning; the last two lines have a fall in tone which set them off and signal that they are meant to refer back to the earlier lines. The first four lines of the last stanza begin with "Be war" and connects all the stanzas tothis theme in the refrain. Another example of the 8-line stanza using three rhymes in eight lines, and one rhyme four times, is from a "Sonr on the Times" (4144) with the fable of the Lion,

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[1]For example, "If symonie may mete wid him, he wole shaken his berd," of stanza 3; "Or he shal singe 'Bi dedero', or al geineth him noht," of stanza 4; "For coveytise and symonie han the world to wille" of stanza 5; "Therefore in holi churche hit fareth the more a-mis" of stanza 7.

Fox, Wolf, and Ass:

> Fals and liper is þis lond,
> As al dai we mai i-se;
> þerin is hope hate and onde,
> Is wene þat ever so wol be.
> Coveitise haþ þe law an honde,
> þat þe trewþe he ne mai i-se.
> Nou is maister prude and onde;
> Alas! Loverde, whi suffriþ he?

The poet varies the stanza to rhyme a b a b c d c d. The main part of the poem is the fable wherein the animals speak; the dialogue is handled well. The poem could easily have been recited, and the use of the General Complaint suggests that it was a popular poem.

While many of the poems in the Vernon manuscript have the 8-line stanza given above, occasionally there is a poem in 12-line stanzas. It is a difficult stanza to work in, but the poet shows considerable skill; he frequently gives a broad and inclusive statement smooth expression by virtue of the size of the stanza: the following is from "Who says the Sooth, He shall be Shent" (3420); it has the same rhyme scheme as Pearl(2744):

> þe mon þat luste to liuen in ese,
> Or eny worschupe her to atteyne,
> His purpos I counte not worþ a pese,
> Fitterlie, but he ordeyne
> þis wikked world hou he schal plese
> Wiþ al his pouwer and his peyne:
> 3if he schal kepe him from disese,
> He mot lerne to flatere and feyne;
> Herte & mouþ loke þei ben tweyne,
> þei mowe not ben of on assent;
> And 3it his tonge he mot restreyne,
> For hos seiþ þe sope, he schal be schent.

The rest of the poem provides illustration of the general theme and ends with another general statement. Each stanza ends with the last line quoted above. The careful limiting of the theme, the repetition of the refrain, and the smooth, swift meter draws each stanza and the whole

poem together.

Stanzaic verse seems to be difficult to use for long poems; at least the alliterative verse seems to have been easier than stanzaic verse for large subjects. The Clowmans Tale (3148) depends upon the repetition of the last line in each stanza to draw it together, but in spite of that repetition, the organization of the poem suffers, and the stanzaic pattern finally grows wearisome and cuts the poem into meaningless parts. Most stanzaic verse depends upon some repetition, but all of it to be effective must be of a length appropriate to a small subject. Most poems in stanzas are near 1[illegible] lines long; there are longer poems, of 192 lines (4144), 474 lines (4165), and 385 lines (2587) but most stanzaic poems are relatively short. There seems to be no reason why the stanzaic poems could not be recited as easily as the alliterative poems, but it seems clear that for longer poems, the alliterative line is superior.

Rhymed Verse

On the whole, poems written in rhymed couplets are shorter than the poems written in stanzas. For example, 26 stanzaic poems contained 3,000 lines, but 27 poems in couplets contain only 338 lines. On the other hand, many of the chronicles referred to in this dissertation were composed in rhymed couplets, and Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle (727) contains some 12,000 lines. Robert of Brunne's Handlyng Synne is written as indefatigably in couplets as Pope's Homer, 12,630 lines in all. For the most part, however, the rhymed couplet was suitable for short poems, many of them General Complaints, and all less than 54 lines long. Enough examples of the couplets found in the verse have

been given to provide the reader with sufficient illustrations.

There are three or four poems written in quatrains, for example, the later version of "Sir Beny" (2747) and there are a number of macaronic poems (3113, 2787, for example) which have alternate English and Latin lines, rhyming four times in English and four times in Latin. "King Conseilles" (1820) has eight mono-rhyming lines (and so do 1917, and 2369). There are a few irregular poems, among them Jack Trewman's epistle (1655) and John Ball's letter (1791), where there are three rhyming words and a couplet, or sentences of prose inserted which have no rhymes at all.

The couplet has great versatility and it is easy to use, and it can be used quite skillfully, as in The Land of Cokaygne (762) and "A lutel soth Sermun." (1091) It is not suited for long poems meant for recitation, however, but most of the verses of a dozen lines or so in length could easily be recited with great effectiveness.

The forms of the verse of complaint do not help to define the verse. Most of the verse was composed in forms that could be recited, and more lines of alliterative verse, especially in the comprehensive poems, suggests that they were composed for recitation. Some of the short poems are crude and rough, but many of the poems reveal careful composition indicative of some skill by a professional minstrel or amateur priest, who had, after all, known some of the rules of rhetoric applicable to verse in Latin. It is more significant, however, that complaints were voiced in such a wide variety of forms, for it means that the complaints were felt to be suitable for verse. The variety of forms perhaps indicates how widespread and how various the audience of complaint really was, and reveals something of the development the

complaint underwent from the simple, short General Complaint to a document such as Piers Plowman.

Conclusion

The causal qualities of the devices upon the temper, upon the organization of the complaint, and upon the shape or form of the poem can, in turn, be seen as effects of the poet's desire to complain. The poet wishes to criticize something, and to make the poem indirect and general, to avoid the didactic temper, chooses the devices which give wide application to his criticisms; he chooses the events and personages to fit his purposes and to suggest some solution to the problem of evil that caused the criticism to be made, and he sets the tone of the poem to avoid the whining, grumbling, and thundering invective which would not be attractive to his audience.

The contrast between right and wrong, sin and virtue, good and bad, the ideal and the real stimulates the complaint in the poet's mind. He takes with him on his pilgrimage or quest the vision of the ideal world and compares it in his poem with what he sees in the real world. His poem must make clear to his audience what the contrast is like, and the devices enable him to do so. The criticisms must be indirect because the poet cannot antagonize his audience and because the application of the criticisms must be broad in scope. The temper and the devices of complaint unify the verse and provide its appeal and interest. The problem of the poet is to describe the evils in terms which make clear why men and events are evil, and to do this he brings the orderly system of Christian morality to bear upon the shapeless stuff of daily evils.

The temper or spirit of complaint gives the verse a quality which

perhaps strikes the modern reader as despairing, hopeless, and grumbling, but there are other emotions in the poetry as well, a humility, a sincere desire and hope that the world might be transformed into orderly and Christian goodness. Some of the verse is programmed by special interest groups, but much of it is broad, gentle, and humane, an outcry against abuse, a human cry with a human voice. Reflected in their voices is the human hope for a more perfect world.

The devices of the poems unify and shape the verse and give it strength and power. The poems are not haphazard in design but are planned expressions of the most sincere emotions of men, and as poetic at times as those of mysticism. The devices enable the poet to make the temper and the criticisms effective and meaningful. The three parts of the analysis of the verse of complaint, the criticisms, the temper, and the devices, are parts of a whole, but some of the relationships between the parts have been shown. It now remains to draw the separate analyses together, to summarize, to refine the definition of the complaint and the "kind" of complaint, and then to conclude.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Many of the questions posed in Chapter I, Introduction, of this dissertation have been considered and answered, but some have been mentioned briefly and passed over because they would have diverted attention from the subjects then under discussion. This concluding chapter will sum up and answer the questions posed earlier and draw the conclusions suggested throughout this discussion.

I

The General Complaint is for the most part a lamentation and an explanation of the corruptions and abuses of the age. The poet seems full of despair, and he couches his explanation in terms of abstract evils. It is an expression of pathos and nostalgic regret for the golden past. Even if the poem is short, it is able to include a number of evils by means, usually, of a comprehensive list. The moral themes are readily apparent in the General Complaints: covetousness is a predominant one, but falsehood, guile, pride, wilfullness, and the lack of Caritas, are also mentioned. These moral themes appear in the Specific Complaints as well.

The Specific Complaints are criticisms of those who commit the evils or allow the abuses. The predominant moral theme is covetousness and the persons attacked, the rich of the nobility and of the clergy or

the bourgeoisie, are treated angrily. Because the Specific Complaint contains criticisms as well as lamentations, it is usually longer, unless the criticism is made of a small group. The Specific Complaint is more comprehensive in its explanation and illustration of evil than the General Complaint, but both use the devices of personification, representation, and survey of the world. The Specific Complaint is usually more hopeful of reform.

The verse of complaint makes a contrast, implicit or direct, between the real world of men and events and the ideal world suggested by Christian doctrine and by the visions of the New Jerusalem and the Civitas Dei. Some qualities of the visions derive from the mystical interpretations of Christian doctrine and faith by men like Richard Rolle. Mysticism was an important force in 14th-century England and it very likely was a widespread force. Even unlettered members of the third estate, like Margery Kempe, were affected. Traces of mysticism appear in Lollard doctrine, primarily because mysticism affords a way to religious knowledge and faith without the mediation of the Church. From mysticism comes one very important theme, the emphasis on charity, that full and rich caritas, which suffuses Piers Plowman (1459). Indeed, it might be argued that charity is also a motive for complaint. The sympathetic understanding stimulates the poet to complain as he views the plight of his fellow man.

Most of the moral themes of complaint, however, are derived from Christian dogma, themes that are current and popular, in the air so to speak. The countless sermons by priests and preaching friars heard by the medieval Englishmen very likely made them very familiar with the Seven Deadly Sins. The effect of this is to make a bond among men of a

commonly held knowledge and belief. When the poet of complaint refers to, or personifies, covetousness or pride, or suggests the whole ideal of the perfect society and the perfect man, he is appealing to that common knowledge. The sermons established the moral distinctions between right and wrong, and the poet applies them to men and situations and shows the difference between the ideal and the real. There is irony in the fact that the preacher is condemned by the very same moral criteria which he himself had given from the pulpit, and he is criticized by the still imperfect believers, the grumbling peasantry he erstwhile attacked himself.

The General Complaint derives its statements from the sermons, but the sermons derived their statements from the Latin complaints and invectives, and from all the arguments within the pale of the Church. The origins of these condemnations and reproofs can be traced to St. Jerome; they are continuously made throughout the history of the Church. Indeed, popular condemnations in the vernacular are mild when compared with the Latin vituperations expressed throughout the whole history of the Church. The ideas are derived from the Bible, and some of the use of the Bible may be seen in Piers Plowman (1459), and more particularly in the Lollard poems, which are closer to the Latin invectives than to the less severe complaints. The themes of the Latin reproofs are used in the sermons and thence become popular property, forming the values of good and evil, right and wrong, with which the contrast with the real world is seen in the verse of complaint.

The motive of complaint can be seen from another point of view. In the tenth passus of Piers Plowman occurs a disquisition on the text, "þanne is dobest to be holde . to blame þe gylty" (X, 256). This idea

introduces the central motive of complaint, for in it can be seen the idea of Christian humility, that all men are born in sin and each has little right to criticize his neighbor. But the difference among men in sin may be great, and it is also Christian duty to lead the greater sinners to repentance. But who shall lead them? The verse of complaint in English indicates that the institution established to reprove the guilty, the Church, had become ineffective, as the complaints about the Church testify in plenty. "Do-best" will lead the sheep, comes Langland's answer, and "do-best" can be found in any class or estate. The verse of complaint reflects the assumption of moral authority by laymen who are compelled to complain when the Christian duty of humility is overborne by the Christian duty to reprove great sinners. Thus, the origins of complaint furnish the moral themes found in the verse.

II

The 14th-century Englishman did not make a distinction between moral and practical criticisms, but for convenience's sake, another source and motive of complaint will be discussed separately. They are the corruption and abuses found in the history of the times which arise in part from the economic changes and the political turmoil of the period. The history books discuss the plagues, the economic discontent, the Peasants' Revolt, the expansion of trade, especially the wool and cloth trade, the rise of towns, the increase in fairs and the opening of markets. But how did these events affect the mass of men? Consider for a moment the plight of the workers in the 14th century. The commutation of feudal services into money rents was hastened by the plagues and the shortage of labor. The feudal system was changing from a barter economy to a

money economy. Despite the Statute of Labourers, wages and prices slowly spiraled upwards. More and more men were no longer bound to the land or to the lord who should protect them. They were day-workers who must find work in order to buy their bread. Where once the peasant had a measure of security, he now had less. The expenses of the wars, the Hundred Years' War, wars against the Scotch, the Barons' War, the taxes levied to support them, the increase in commercial activity caused an increase in the amount of money in circulation. "Now," puns Langland, "the red noble [which had a cross on one side] is more worshipped than the Cross." The red noble had become more important, and men were more dependent upon money and money exchange.

The economic insecurity of the peasant made him fearful and aggressive. He was confused and he sought to understand the new kind of world in which he found himself. He had to scramble after money, and he saw others doing so too. He came to resent and then to hate the rich noble and the rich cleric who did not practise the charity both had been taught. His anxiety and fear is reflected in the General Complaint lamenting the corruptions he noticed about him. For there were evils, abuses, and corruptions enough to warrant complaint. Most historians agree that the use of retainers by the nobility was a grievous oppression of the people, and that the government did not keep them under control and indeed had difficulty enough to raise taxes and wage war (sometimes not very effectively). All the abuses discussed under Specific Complaints need not be repeated here. The point is that any man of the 14th century could see around him every day men and events which he had been told numerous times were wrong and sinful. Furthermore, the morally evil corruptions inflicted grievous harm upon him. It is that

disparity between the corrupt times, the uneasiness and discontent of the populace, and the teachings of Christianity that produces the verse of complaint.

The Peasants' Revolt is historical confirmation of the economic distress of the peasantry and reflects the rumbling of discontent. While it did not have the razing of the institution of the crown as an aim, it did seek the correction of abuses brought about by the changes in the feudal contract, particularly the economic problems caused by those changes. The essential conservatism of the Revolt of 1381 can be seen in Piers Plowman (1459). Langland lectures the knight, the king and his council, and the clergy in their obligations, but those obligations are part of the old feudal contract. When Piers admonishes the laborers, he orders them to fulfill their part of the feudal contract. The reply of the hot-headed worker shows his discontent with both the feudal system and his uneasiness about the economic turmoil of the times.

The Lollard movement is historical confirmation of the hate and resentment of the Church, the corruption of the clergy through simony, which is another word for covetousness. The clergy were not fulfilling their part in the feudal contract, and popular antagonism had increased. The clergy did not do the physical work which the peasant was forced to do, and perhaps the popular resentment of the religious is due to that fact. "I wot non eysiere lyf þan is religioun," says the author of "The Simonie" (4165), and his opinion was very likely that of many others. The mass of men could find on every side a clergy corrupted from the high standards of Christian faith; there could have been no other reaction by the peasantry but anger, cynicism, and disgust.

III

The origins of the verse of complaint are the moral teachings of Christianity, and the application of those teachings to the contemporary situation. But there is another step in the development of the verse of complaint, the raw materials which the poet of complaint found about him, namely the oral grumbling of men, the oral complaints. There is nothing more natural than the complaints of men as they met on the high roads looking for work, or on the edges of fields they had been hired to plow, or in the taverns over the bean-cakes and ale. Their conversations must have been similar to those of the present, to be met in barber-shops, bars, or on the assembly-lines in factories. The problems and difficulties of the 14th century were probably as great as those of the present, and probably there was as much grumbling, whining, rumor-mongering, and bitter complaining then as now. Hard times cause discontent, and often this discontent is caught in literature. The Depression Years of the 1930's in America are mirrored in Steinbeck, Dos Passos, and Farrell. The times of 14th-century England are reflected in the dark mirror of the verse of complaint.

What were the oral complaints like? How was the discontent of the people expressed? The spoken words have long since disappeared with the winds, but some evidence remains in the verse, even though most of the verses of complaint have passed through the shaping hands of the minstrel or poor priest. What did the poet hear in the taverns, or from his travelling companions, or from other minstrels? Langland describes the grumbling men, although his moral condemnation of them receives the emphasis. In the same sixth passus mentioned before, Piers puts everyone to work. But there are some who will not work, beggars who feign

infirmities, lazy laborers who watch Piers plow. Piers reprimands them severly, for they have been drinking and singing. They reply with whining: "For we haue no lymes to laboure with . lorde, y-graced be 3e! / . . .

> Ac we preye for 3ow pieres . and for 3owre plow bothe,
> þat god of his grace . 3owre grayne multiplye,
> And 3elde 3ow of 3owre almesse . þat 3e 3iue vs here;
> For we may nou3te swynke ne swete . suche sikeness vs eyleth."
> (VI, 126-30)

Piers lectures them at length, and their whining turns to abuse and they offer to fight Piers. The episode has been discussed in Chapter V and need not be explored further. It is important, however, to note the anger expressed by these laborers. The whining and anger, and probably contempt and disgust as well, mixed with bitterness and truculence, are characteristics of the oral complaining.

Mum and the Sothsegger (•6) contains comments upon the rumor-mongering, discontented mutterings of the people, also discussed in Chapter V, and Gower (2662) remarks about the complaining men do, referred to in Chapter I, and so does the poet of "The Simonie" (4165). The songs of the soldiers against the Scotch reveal abusiveness, taunting meanness, crude ridicule, and profane derisiveness. The "Song of Lewes" (3155) is built upon a refrain probably made by some victory-happy soldier. Oral complaining was probably very much like that. At the end of the prologue to Piers Plowman (1459), Langland describes a motley crew of dikers and delvers, who call out after women, "Dieu vous sauve, Dame Emme!" The question now is, what would these men call out after the fat friar, the natty priest, the foppish courtier, the cardinal? They probably did not call out anything, but it can easily be imagined what they thought, and what they muttered under their breath, perhaps audibly.

The resentment and antagonism toward the rich is excellently illustrated in one of the exchanges between Wynnere and Wastoure (3137). Wynnere condemns Wastoure's fine clothes and rich food, and the latter's reply shows the haughtiness of the nobility, of the riders as it is phrased in the complaints. "What!" explodes Wastoure, "Should lords live as lads on foot, and prelates as parsons!" Wynnere's reply is quiet, of that sharp realism that emanates from folk-logic: "But once I heard in a hall in a herdsman's tongue, 'Better were meals many than a merry night'". The mother of popular discontent and popular complaining is necessity; Langland's grim Hunger is the cause of the Peasants' Revolt. The conclusion seems obvious; there was much oral complaining by the Third Estate. It is probable that the peasants complained about many things, from the hayward to the king, but among themselves, and with an eye out for the bailiff or the summoner. Their grumblings and laments are the stuff which the minstrel or poor parson heard and made into verse.

IV

There were very likely many verses of complaint which have not survived. Wilson, in The Lost Literature of Medieval England, tells the story of a song made by students at Oxford derisive of the king, Richard II, and sung through a window of the king's messenger and followed by a flight of arrows. Wilson tells of other lost songs, references to which he has found in the chronicles and accounts. As a measure of the power of the crown to retaliate, Wilson finds that the Chancellor was forced to resign, and the vice-chancellor was thrown into prison. Who were the men who composed the verses of complaint? They are shadowy, indeed, but one fact seems highly probable: they were probably members

of the Third Estate. This is dramatically expressed in the Prologue of Wynnere and Wastoure (3137), where the poet, clearly a professional minstrel, laments the low condition of his trade. Once, he says, lords loved in their hearts to hear makers of mirth, minstrels who could find wise words that were never written nor read in a romance,

> Bot now a childe appon chere, with-owtten chyn-wedys,
> þat neuer wroghte thurgh witt three wordes to-gedire,
> For he can jangle als a jaye, and japes can telle,
> He schall be leuede and louede and lett of a while
> Wele more þan þe man that makes hym-seluen. (24-28)

The lament is a professional plea for sympathy and tips, but it is not difficult to imagine the poet speaking through the smoky haze of a tavern or of a hall; "Fill up freshly and fast," he says, "for here a fit ends."

Robert of Brunne (778) warns men to stay away from minstrels, for they do not respect God, the priest, or God's house. The wandering minstrels and the goliards did not have a good reputation, but they must have varied their glees from time to time with a lamentation and a political song. Langland may have been a wandering scholar, according to Coulton,[1] and he is kinder than most toward the minstrels; in the field full of folk are:

> . . . somme murthes to make . as mynstralles conneth,
> and geten gold with here glee . synneles, I leue.
> Ac iapers & iangelers . Iudas chylderen,
> Feynen hem fantasies . and feles hem maketh,
> And han here witte at wille . to worche 3if þei sholde. (33-37)

St. Paul, says Langland, preached about those "qui turpiloquium loquitur." Skeat glosses "jesters and slanderers," and it seems likely that these men are the poets of complaint. Langland condemns them in many other places in his poem.

The poet of Pierce the Ploughman's Crede (663), who may have been

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[1] Med. Pan., p. 102.

the author of The Plowmans Tale (3448), was probably a cleric. John Ball was once a priest, and many poor priests were suspected of Lollardy--simply because they were poor and probably envious--and the Lollard poems sound like the denunciations and invectives of the sermons. In The Plowmans Tale there is a derogatory reference to priests, the same kind of reference that Langland makes: "Priests are like minstrels; they tell jokes in the pulpit instead of preaching God's word!" Cardinals wear red hats, just like minstrels, the poet remarks in another place. The professional minstrel and the Lollard priest composed some of the verses of complaints; it is likely that there were other verses that were never written down, or if written down, the manuscripts have been lost.

These verses may have been coarser, ruder, more bawdy, and defamatory than the ones which survive, as Langland describes them at any rate. There may have been a number of them in circulation among the peasantry. Some of the poets may even have been peasants themselves. The point is that there were probably many versifiers of complaint of which no account can be given, but that their productions had some effect upon the verse which has survived.

The poets of complaint cannot be identified. While students and scholars regret this--who, for example, wrote Mum and the Sothsegger (*G)--the blunt fact of anonymity remains. The poets of complaint probably wished to be anonymous in their own time in order to avoid the public executioner and possible maiming. In any case, the poet of complaint found a number of verses which criticized in a rough, angry, slanderous way the men in authority, and he found that people would listen to them. The raw materials of the verse of complaint considered

in this dissertation are the grumblings, whining, and cursings of the discontented. The very nature of these grumblings posed problems for the poet; he must be indirect and remain anonymous, and he must soften the cursings in his verse so as not to draw instant retaliation. But there are other problems he had to face.

First of all, whining and grumbling do not make good poetry; the tone of lamentation is effective, because it is familiar to the people from the sermons, and it is comforting to them in their misery and expresses sympathy of the poet with the oppressed to whom he speaks. Cursing and invective must be changed somewhat, or varied, because they cannot be long sustained with any effect. The professional minstrel took the materials he found and made his poem, of lamentation and anger, in such a way as to satisfy the standards of his craft. Secondly, in order to make his poem effective, he must criticize someone or something, almost always a person or class in authority. He could solve this problem in a number of ways. He could sing or recite the poems to a sympathetic audience, that is,an audience which was not composed of the objects of complaint, an audience which would agree with the criticisms. If his poem was long or comprehensive, he could leave out parts of it that would offend part of his audience. He could sing only those songs which his audience would like. There was very probably a number of minstrels who did just these things; it is easy to understand why their criticisms were not written down; they wished no incriminating evidence to be found.

The problem was solved in a different way in the verse which has survived, namely by the uses of the devices of indirection discussed in Chapter VI. The poet could then make his criticisms in such a way

that the audience would understand him, but he would not be so liable to prosecution as he would be if he had been direct. He would also be able to make his criticism to an audience which included the persons criticized. The economic complaints in Wynnere and Wastoure (3137), for example, are so well hidden that the poet could recite his poem in the royal presence itself with impunity. This is not true of the Lollard poems, for the audience there consists of the people whom the Lollard wishes to convert, but many complaints are addressed to the whole nation, such as Piers Plowman (1459) and Mum and the Sothsegger (*6). The audience would understand his references well enough, probably better than the modern reader does; they would be sympathetic with the ideas and attitudes in the verse, and would draw satisfaction from the criticisms of those whom he too hated. Revenge is sweet ever if only in words.

The poet found a ready-made audience for the verses of complaint. He could express their dissatisfaction better than they could; he could contrast the moral themes of Christianity with the men and events that the people hated; he could display his wit in making criticisms obscure so that his audience, exclusive of those being criticized, would understand him, he could put his complaint in such a way that the person criticized would be aware of the criticism but would not apply it to himself or would not wish to prosecute the poet. He could disguise popular feelings and attitudes and beliefs in such a way that the people would understand his obscure references and the bailiff could not take offense.

That is why the verse of complaint is not so abusive, rough, coarse, angry, and bitter as the oral complaints are suspected to have been. The poet simply could not make them that way. That is why he is so careful

not to mention names nor to interpret too clearly. Langland says of the episode of belling the cat, "What this means, I leave to you merry men, for I do not dare to explain." Gower disdained a popular audience and hid his most virulent strictures in Latin. Within the confines and limitations imposed upon the poet, he was very well able to express the lamentation and the anger associated with complaint and to make his criticisms clear.

V

The preceding discussion is a contention that the origins, motives, and authors of the verse of complaint are popular. What is the audience of the verses of complaint, or are there different audiences? The nature of the audience has been discussed in part, for it was inextricably connected with the authorship of the poems. One answer seems clear: many of the complaints are intended for a popular audience in which the persons criticized are not included. The poet derives his lamentations and criticisms from the people and speaks for them but not at them. Complaints are not addressed to the objects of criticisms, but are about them. The verses express criticisms, but they are also statements of sympathy; the poet joins his audience, speaks for them, as it were, but not to anyone. That explains why the lament is such an important element of the verse of complaint; its pathos is meant to be shared with the audience.

There are verses addressed by authors who are not minstrels to non-popular audiences, to a small audience. "The Song of Nego" (1638) is one of these, and perhaps "The Land of Cokaygne" (762) is another; in both, the audience includes the sinners. Other poems, however, like

"The Song of the Husbandman" (696), "A lutel soth Sermun" (1091), The Parlement of the Thre Ages (1556), and Wynnere and Wastoure (3137), are complaints about groups or classes but not directed to them, a difference between the accusative and the dative cases. "Hyen Holy Chireche ys vnder vote" (4085) seems to be directed to the clergy, is about them, and probably written by a cleric.

However, most of the verses of complaint are directed toward a popular audience, and this fact suggests that the audience of a given poem can be discovered by finding out who are not criticized in the poem. There are poems on the other hand, which seem to have a widened audience which includes the persons criticized, if only because the poems are so broad and comprehensive that no one is omitted. Piers Plowman (1459) is an example, perhaps the example. The exception in this instance transcends the rule, for the poem represents a development within the verse of complaint. Just as the popular poet improved upon the oral complainings of the peasantry, so does Langland improve upon the popular poem of complaint. For this reason: an expression of sympathy, lamentation, frustration, and angry criticism may suffice the professional minstrel and his audience, but it does not satisfy the idealist who wishes to see the reformation of morals and the correction of abuses. The widening of the audience is an indication of the inclusion of a large constructive element in the complaint. The development of the complaint comes around full circle: the didactic criticism becomes the popular complaint wherein the preacher is preached about, and then it becomes a statement wherein the preacher is preached about and preached at. The priest criticizes the congregation, the congregation criticizes the priest, and Langland criticizes both. The origin and development of the verse of complaint is a long conversation

in which each speaker gives his description and his explanation of the evils in the land, and the next speaker corrects him and gives another. The culmination of the conversation is Piers Plowman (1459) and Hum and the Sothsegger (*6).

The widening of the audience to include the persons criticized and the interpolation of a statement about the means to reform are extremely important developments. Piers Plowman thereby becomes a poem of more than parochial interest; it is of universal significance. No matter how righteous the complaint, the very fact of complaining itself smacks of self-interest. The transcending of self-interest in the complaint is of itself a fact of importance to all times and places. Of more importance is the message Langland gives, for his message of self-discipline mingled with the abounding caritas is the essence of Christian protestantism at any time and place.

Yet, one of the qualities of the verse of complaint is the avoidance of the didactic tone and the imperative verb. Langland, by including the persons and institutions he means to reform in his poem, is faced with the problem of avoiding the didactic stance. That he does so, and does so superbly, indicates his great skill. He had, however, the examples of other complaints to follow, for he built upon the earlier complaints; he drew from them and from his own knowledge of the Bible and Christian doctrine the elements of his great poem. Avarice is a sin often discussed in the sermons; "Sir Peny" (1480) is a popular complaint on the same subject; "Wynnere" (3137) is a better treatment, but Lady Mede (1459) is, however, a powerful and impressive characterization. She is not "round," of course, but she is clear and she is effective. The Confession of the Seven Sins reflects the emphasis of the popular

complaints. Pride is given nine lines; lechery has four; envy has 57; wrath has 53; avarice, however, has 115 lines; gluttony 87; sloth 77. Langland attacks the friars in the way other complaints do, and on other topics he makes the same criticisms, but he also attacks the Third Estate, a fact of considerable importance. A review of the objects of complaint is not necessary here, but the fact is clear that Langland repeats the complaints of other poems; the greatest addition to the verse of complaint in Piers Plowman (1459) is the mystical and evangelical caritas and the inclusion of all society as the object of complaint.

VI

A number of definitions of the term "complaint" were suggested in Chapter I, Introduction, and it is convenient now to review them and to refine the preliminary definition provided in this thesis and to differentiate among the various definitions. The preliminary definition of "complaint" was that it was a criticism. The literature of complaint is that literature composed primarily of criticisms. One kind of criticism is very indirect, namely the lamentation of the corruptions of the times. Many verses of complaint criticize more directly the particular classes or occupations of men and criticize particular events. Usually, men of responsibility, of the upper two estates and who caused the evils, receive the criticisms.

A complaint derives its criticisms from a number of sources; the sermons and popular grumbling and discontent are the two most important. The motive of complaint is a perception of the disparity between the ideal and the real, or as Hazlitt comments: "Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps, for he is the only animal that is struck by the

difference between what things are and what they ought to be." Much of the verse of complaint does not have moral reform or the reform of institutions in mind but is an expression of sympathy between the poet and his audience. The widening of that audience in later complaints to include the persons criticized is an indication that moral reform and the reform of institutions does become part of the motive of complaint.

The poet of complaint speaks with a moral authority which he has assumed and which is not his by right of class or occupation; he is generally a member of the Third Estate and has no right to speak. Much of the verse of complaint has a temper composed of lamentation, frustration, and anger which reflects the inability of the Third Estate to right the wrongs they see around them. The moral authority of the complaint is derived from the Bible and the common law, and the complaint uses these authorities to convict the clergy and the nobility by their own criteria. The main device of the verse of complaint is a contrast, direct or indirect, between what is accepted as good and what is seen as bad. The verse of complaint strives to achieve its emotional effect of expressing sympathy, lamentation, and anger, by a comprehensive list of evils, the accumulation of which produces heavy pathos.

The definitions discussed in Chapter I vary from the definition just given, but there is some agreement. It would be best if the comparison and contrast were given in some detail, so as to provide the clearest possible definition. One point of contention is whether or not the verse of complaint aims to correct abuses. Didactic literature and satirical literature differ in this respect; clearly, didactic

literature has this aim and no other. Satire has a broader aim, for it seeks to correct the person guilty of folly and to prevent others from committing like folly. The persons criticized are clearly among the audiences of didactic literature and satire, and both forms aim at their correction, although satire is not so much concerned with correction as is didactic literature.

The audience of the verse of complaint often does not include the persons criticized. Some complaints are expressions of commiseration rather than criticisms. Davidson remarks that the complaint does not aim to correct but does "cry out for a reaffirmation of moral values." Those verses, however, which are addressed to the persons criticized or to an audience which includes them certainly aim to correct the offenders. There are some poems which attack men not to correct them, such as the Lollard poems, but for other,more ulterior reasons. All verses of complaint imply in a vague and indirect way the means to reform, and the degree in which the constructive element can be found in the verse can be estimated; "king conseilles" (1820) certainly has less than Piers Plowman (1459).

The differences among didactic, complaint, and satirical literature based on the relationship of poet and audience are related to the degree of correction implied. The person in authority aims at and has a greater expectation of correction than the poet not in authority. Generally speaking, didactic literature addresses those whom it attacks, and the verse of complaint does not; it attacks those in authority but is addressed to the Third Estate. One of Peter's distinctions between satire and complaint is not valid: Peter holds that satire attacks a third party, not the writer nor the reader, and that complaint is sober,

corrective, and attacks everyone. This is partly true of Piers Plowman (1459), but even in that poem the Third Estate is not so much attacked as the nobility and the clergy, those in authority. The complaint is sober but it is not as corrective as Peter says it is. That is because of the audience to which complaints are addressed.

Of the three forms, didactic literature has the greatest corrective aim, complaint has less, and satire has least. What caused Tucker, Davidson, and Peter to vary in their definitions is the significant fact that the verse of complaint evolves, and as it evolves and as it includes the persons criticized in his audience, and as the poet of complaint assumes a greater moral authority, the aim of correction increases in importance. Consider the difference in corrective aim between "The Simonie" (4165) and Pum and the Bothseggar (*6); it is more important in the latter. The verse of complaint was written with two audiences in mind; one audience does not include the persons criticized, and the other does. Otherwise, Peter is correct that satire is directed toward someone other than the reader or the writer, but then it follows that the object of correction is not an aim of satire, for then the persons who must be corrected or reformed are not reached. That is precisely the advantage that the large comprehensive statement of Piers Plowman (1459) has; it reaches many men and speaks of their vices in such a way as to lead them to reform.

Peter continues by remarking that satire is often sophisticated while complaint is frequently naive: complaint is sometimes shrewd but it is rarely witty. One other distinction made by Peter is that complaint deals with the abuse rather than the abuser, whereas satire deals with individuals. This is true enough, but the exceptions are numerous.

The varying definitions and distinctions cannot, of course, be completely resolved. The survey of the verse of complaint does not include prose and it does not emphasize didactic literature, but the survey does include those verses which contain criticisms or lamentations, the basic definition of the term "complaint." Furthermore, the description and analysis of the verse in chapters II through VI include a far larger number of poems than are used by Wells, Tucker, Davidson, and Peter. The description and analysis cannot be summarized and generalized with all the precision that the discussion in chapters II through VI itself affords, but the definition of "complaint" and the "verse of complaint" should by now be as clear as it can be, after the refined definition was stated and then compared and contrasted with the definitions of other scholars.

VII

Another question that needs further discussion concerns the complaint as a "kind" of literature. The basic distinction to be made between "kind" and "genre" is that the latter refers to literature that has a fixed definition, or a narrow range of definition, that writers imitated in part or in whole a previous model. The epic is a genre, and Vergil composed with Homer in mind. A "kind" on the other hand is a grouping of literature of a certain period or time which had no known antecedents to be followed and very likely was not taken as a model by later writers. A "kind" is an autocthonous form of literature, whereas a "genre" implies permanence. A "kind" is, in a way, a lower order of "genre" and it might be distinguished as a more natural and less literary form.

Terms like "kind" and "genre" are used in scholarship to show the similarity of a body of literature and to show particularly the historical development of a form. Peter, for example, uses the term "complaint" to mean a primitive and undeveloped form of "satire." Complaint seems to grow like a native weed. It changes during the 15th and 16th century into the "white paper," the moral satire, broadsides, tracts, and letters to the editor of a newspaper. Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" is another example of the complaint, and Philip Wylie's Generation of Vipers has the iconoclastic invective of the Lollard diatribes. But of poems which present popular lamentation of corruption and abuses and criticisms of those in authority there are very few after the 15th century.

While a "kind" of literature may be important for studies in literary history, other justifications exist for grouping a body of literature under one term. The primary justification is its description under an accurate identifying term. A collection of literature of a fairly close degree of similarity thus identified becomes a valuable unit for comparison and contrast with other units or "kinds." Is the verse of complaint, the body of literature considered in this dissertation, a "kind"? Is the verse of such a similarity that it may be collected and studied as a "kind"? The answer is that it is and that it can. The origins, motives, themes, objects, temper, devices and audience are similar enough to call it a "kind." All these characteristics fit the definition of "complaint" made in this dissertation.

Is the verse of complaint sufficiently different from "didactic" literature and "satire" to set off the literature as a "kind" by itself? The distinctions between the three indicated above support the

differentiation. It is, in effect, misleading to call 14th-century verse of complaint "didactic" or "satirical" literature as many editors and historians have done, because those terms do not do justice to the uniqueness of the verse and its time. "Complaint" is a more proper designation because it denotes and connotes the verse and its nature more accurately than the other terms. The distinction between the three based on the relationship of the poet and his audience makes this clear. Didactic literature is written by a person in authority in order to instruct. The literature of complaint is composed by a person who wishes to criticize those in authority but addresses his lamentation and criticisms to those who share his attitude and beliefs. The satirist is not a person in authority, but he criticizes everyone and usually addresses his satire to an audience of familiars, just as Erasmus addressed The Praise of Folly to Sir Thomas More, and Swift wrote to the Scriblerus Club.

Once the literature of complaint is thus distinguished as a unit, it can be compared and contrasted with other units, for example, in the comparison above with didactic and satirical literature. Once the literature of complaint is considered as a "kind," the study of its origin and evolution can be made. It can be examined as part of the literature of a period, as part of the historical materials of the period, and it can be studied for its own intrinsic worth.

VIII

The justifications for calling the verse of complaint a "kind" are the same justifications for studying the body of verse. First, the poems of complaint reveal the beliefs of the people about good and evil

and the attitudes of the Third Estate about the clergy and the nobility. The verses suggest the feelings of the people about the political and economic changes of the 14th century. The poor are oppressed, say the poets, and the rich are evil, because they are covetous and lack charity. The clergy are also covetous and neglect their spiritual duties to correct the nobility and to comfort the poor. The verse shows the despair of the peasantry, their frustration, and their anger; so little could be done. When the ills could no longer be borne, they rebelled or listened to the Lollards with their messages of faith and charity. The first reason, then, for studying the verse of complaint is that it provides insights into history, into the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes of a class of people usually voiceless. In the whole, Chaucer does not reflect the voices of the people, but of the aristocracy.

The second justification for calling the literature of complaint a "kind" and for studying it is that it is part of the whole literature of the period. The verse of complaint has important relationships with other literature. The importance of the verse of complaint in studying Langland has been clearly shown in the main part of this dissertation. The reader has undoubtedly seen for himself the relationships of the verse of complaint with Chaucer. The verse of complaint is an important consideration in a study of Gower as well. The mystical lyrics of Rolle and Pearl reflect the turning away from the world and from the mediation of the Church in the desire for knowledge of God and spiritual comfort that are found in the verse of complaint. The temper of complaint, the sober pathos, the anger and frustration and lamentation, can be seen in other non-courtly literature.

But it is the revelation of the feelings and attitudes of the

Third Estate toward the clergy and nobility, given for the first time in English, that makes the verse important. Chaucer provides a description of the point of view of the aristocracy toward the men and events of the times. Some of these attitudes are similar to and some different from those of the Third Estate. Consider, for example, the friar in Chaucer and in the verse of complaint. Chaucer views him with detached amusement, but the poets of complaint see him as one of many men who live off the bounty of the poor. Consider, too, the impression of Chaucer's description of the knight, the pardoner, the poor parson and his brother the ploughman upon the courtly audience who, as they listened to Chaucer, remembered the attitudes and opinions and feelings voiced in the complaints. The nobility and the clergy knew what the Third Estate thought of them. Chaucer probably heard some of the verses of complaint as he collected the customs, and he had read Jean de Meung's portion of the Romance of the Rose, but his treatment of the reeve, the miller, the pardoner, and others suggests that he also knew the attitudes of the Third Estate toward these men, whether from his association with them on the docks of London or from the verse of complaint, perhaps from both sources.

Gower has written that he knew of the popular "compleintes." And while he condemned them severely, many of his criticisms are similar to popular attitudes. There are many possible comparisons and contrasts between the verse of complaint and other literature of the 14th century, and the justification of this dissertation, its method and organization, is to provide the coherent study to enable the comparisons and contrasts to be made.

Another justification of the study of the verse of complaint is

its intrinsic literary worth. Some of the qualities of the poems have been discussed in passing, but there are numerous passages which compel respect. The poems seem less artificial than many 14th-century lyrics, more expressive of human feelings, more earnest and sincere. Many of the poems create a profound feeling of pathos and sympathy, and a powerful nostalgia for the serene and untroubled past. The poets indicate their skill and craft in surmounting the problems of raising the rough, crude, raw materials of popular discontent into verse, of finding the devices which show the contrast between what the world is and what it should be, of creating a temper that is powerful and effective.

Some poems are rough and uneven, but some of them achieve a lyric cry. Some poems cannot sustain the heavy burden of continuous invective, but others vary the emotions skillfully. While characterization is still undeveloped, many poems create excellent dramatic scenes, and while the moral themes are more prominently displayed in the verse of complaint than in satire, the verse cannot be considered a tedious paradigm of the Seven Deadly Sins. The use of the moral themes is skillful. The complaint is not so much concerned with theoretical definitions of ethics as the sermon; its emphasis is upon the application of these definitions to reality. The cry of regret for the impossibility of moral perfection is religious in origin, but it is also human. Some verses of complaint are among the best of the period.

The verse combines the two views of the world that are separated today, the moral criticism and the practical criticism. It is a credit to the literature and to the temper of the 14th-century Englishman. Nevertheless, much of what the verse has to say is applicable to later times, and to the present, for Christian ideals have not much changed.

Modern men may not fear so much the damnation of their souls, perhaps, as did the medieval men, and the motive for reform may not today be an urgent necessity, but the human temper to complain and to reprove is still deserving of respect.

The development of the verse from the General Complaint to the comprehensive Piers Plowman (1450) shows how the poets improved the verse for great literary purposes. Langland's statement, "þanne is dobest to be bolde . to blame þe gylty," describes the aim of his poem and all the rest of the verse of complaint. It reflects the temper of the poems and it reveals part of the temper of medieval men, namely their passion for lamentation and reproof, their discontent, uneasiness, fear, and anger. The verse of complaint speaks to present times and discusses the concerns of modern men, both for the salvation of the soul and for the improvement of the physical world in which the soul must pass its fleshly travail.

INDEX TO THE POEMS

The following index is arranged by the Brown and Robbins Index number; acephalous poems (marked by *) follow the complete poems. The Index number is followed by the title of the poem. Short poems have their titles in quotation marks, and long poems or poems published separately are underlined. The titles follow Brown and Robbins designations or the editors of the particular poem. Some poems have no title; a short description follows the Index number.

After the title or description a date of the poem is given. The style of the dates follows the style of the "Plan and Bibliography" found in the Middle English Dictionary: manuscript dates are not in square brackets, but composite dates are enclosed. The letters and abbreviations prefixed to some dates have the following significance:

> Unless a precise date can be given to a MS, the MED assigns it to a quarter century, prefixing c = circa, a = ante, p = post, ? = doubtful to the date in accordance with the available evidence or opinion(s).
>
> The quarter-century dates should be read as follows:
>
> c1350 = 1350, or up to a quarter century earlier or later;
>
> a1350 = before 1350, but probably not earlier than 1325;
>
> ?a1350 = a1350, but less securely established (and possibly later than 1350). (MED, "Plan and Bibliography," p. 18.)

If a poem has not been assigned a date by the Middle English

Dictionary, the authority for the date is given; when there is no evidence for a date, ND is typed.

Following the date of the poem, the edition of the poem used in this dissertation is given in an abbreviated form; full citations can be found in the Bibliography under the editor's name.

Following the edition citation are the page numbers of this dissertation upon which quotation or reference to the particular poem is made.

Poems with well-known titles are also included in the Bibliography and the Index number is provided in that place to enable the reader to find references to the poems with titles.

5 "Elegy on the Death of Edward III."
c1390 (1377).
Wright, Pol. Poems I, 215-8.
27, 74, 286.

79 The backbiting monk, in the North Homily Cycle.
c1390.
Horstmann, Archiv LVII, 310.
40.

205 "Elegy on the Death of Edward I."
a1325 (c1307).
Wright, Pol. Songs, 246-50.
68, 253, 254.

306 The Devil as physician, in the North Homily Cycle.
a1400 (c1300).
Horstmann, Archiv LVII, 255-6.
245.

379 A ballad on the Scottish Wars.
?c1350.
Brandl & Zippel, Middle English Literature, 137.
286.

549 "Bring us in good ale."
a1500.
Robbins, Sec. Lyr. XIV & XV Cents., 9.
47.

585 "The Siege of Calais" by Laurence Minot.
a1425 (c1333-52). Hall dates the poem 1346.
Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 80-3.
143, 297.

592 The Evils of the Times.
a1400.
Furnivall, EETS 15, 264.
22, 27.

663 Pierce the Ploughman's Crede.
c1600 (?c1395).
Skeat, Oxford, 1906.
73, 137, 141, 149, 154, 163, 169, 171, 175, 176, 181, 183, 184, 191, 196, 199, 203, 204, 208, 209, 210, 212, 213, 216, 217, 218, 222, 226, 238, 242, 243, 258, 276, 277, 288, 294, 314.

685 "Too secutors and an overseere make thre theves."
?a1500.
Rel. Ant., I, 314.
129.

695 Three Sorrowful Things.
a1250.
Brown, Eng. Lyr. XIII C., 18, 19, 172.
48.

696 "The Song of the Husbandman."
a1325.
Wright, Pol. Songs, 149-52. Brandl and Zippel, Middle English Literature, 134-5.
4, 70, 71, 90, 105, 108, 119, 127, 166, 248, 266, 270, 271, 273, 291, 296, 297, 319.

709 "First Invasion of France" by Laurence Minot.
a1425 (1333-52).
Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 66-9.
88, 297.

710 John Hardyng's Metrical Chronicle.
1543 (1464).
Ellis, 1812.
63, 67, 75, 95, 182.

718 "Elde."
?a1325.
Heuser, Bonn. Beiträge XIV, 170-72.
48, 49, 264.

727 Robert of Gloucester's Chronicle.
c1325 (c1300).
Wright, Rolls Series, 2 vols., 1887.
62, 63, 66, 67, 172, 301.

759 "De falsitate."
a1400.
Brown, Rel. Lyr. XIV C., 54.
37.

702 The Land of Cokayne.
?a1325 (a1300).
Heuser, Bonn. Beiträge XIV, 145-50.
4, 206, 207, 214, 215, 224, 250, 264, 267, 282, 302, 318.

778 Robert of Brunne's Handlyng Synne.
a1400 (c1303).
Furnivall, EETS 119 and 123.
8, 50, 53, 57, 104, 108, 117, 119, 123, 128, 129, 151, 196, 197, 202, 210, 219, 222, 224, 231, 240, 246, 248, 279, 301, 314.

839 The punishments of the adulterer.
1st quarter of XIV cent., Borland.
Borland, Catalogue, 332.
46.

901 Instructions for Parish Priests by John Mirk.
c1450 (a1425).
Peacock EETS 31.
129, 205, 214, 223, 224, 231, 236, 237, 279.

949 King Edward and the Shepherd.
a1500 (?a1400).
French and Hale, Met. Rom., 950 ff.
112, 236.

995 On bequeathing worldly possessions.
c1250.
James, Catalogue, I, 441.
130.

1076 "Satire on the People of Kildare."
?a1325 (c1305).
Heuser, Bonn. Beiträge XIV, 154-8.
197, 198, 206, 214, 224, 234, 235, 251, 252, 266, 267.

1091 "A Lytel soth Sermun."
Morris dates ms. before 1250; Wells dates ms. c1275, composition not later than 1230.
Morris, EETS 49, 186-91.
23, 51, 250, 252, 266, 268, 302.

1105 The Anonymous Short Metrical Chronicle of England.
Various mss. 1307-1328.
Zettl, EETS 196.
61, 62, 63, 67, 71.

1112 The prophecy of the six kings to follow King John.
a1425.
Hall, Poems of Laurence Minot, 97-105.
274, 286.

1156 Against extravagence.
Some items in ms. belong to 13th. centur[illegible].
Rel. Ant., II, 67.
[illegible].

1401 "The Defeat of the Spanish[illegible]" by Laurence Minot.
a1425 (c1333-52); the battle took place in 135[illegible].
Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 37-[illegible].
89, 39[illegible].

1402 "This World fareb as a ffantasy."
c1390.
Brown, Rel. Lyr. XIV C., 100-04.
69, 10[illegible], 179, 181, 204.

1459 Langland's Vision of Piers Plowman.
c1400 (c1378); Skeat dates B text 1376-7.
Skeat, EETS 38.
1, 5, 7, 8, 1[illegible], 24, 27, 2[illegible], 3[illegible], 40, 41, 42, 43, 4[illegible], 4[illegible],
4[illegible], 4[illegible], 49, 54, 5[illegible], 58, 72, 73, 80, 83, 85, 89, 9[illegible], 94,
101, 102, 103, 106, 10[illegible], 109, 11[illegible], 11[illegible], 11[illegible], 116, 117,
12[illegible], 12[illegible], 125, 126, 127, 130, 133, 134, 137, 139, 140,
14[illegible], 14[illegible], 14[illegible], 15[illegible], 15[illegible], 15[illegible], 158, 159, 160, 167, 168,
17[illegible], 17[illegible], 17[illegible], 180, 181, 18[illegible], 184, 189, 190, 191, 196,
19[illegible], 20[illegible], 20[illegible], 21[illegible], 21[illegible], 21[illegible], 21[illegible], 22[illegible], 22[illegible], 22[illegible],
232, 23[illegible], 23[illegible], 23[illegible], 238, 240, 243, 244, 246, 247, 24[illegible],
250, 251, 252, 253, 255, 25[illegible], 25[illegible], 258, 259, 260, 261, 263,
26[illegible], 27[illegible], 27[illegible], 27[illegible], 27[illegible], 27[illegible], 279, 280, 281, 282, 28[illegible],
28[illegible], 28[illegible], 28[illegible], 28[illegible], 28[illegible], 289, 290, 291, 29[illegible], 293, 294, 30[illegible],
30[illegible], 30[illegible], 308, 309, 31[illegible], 311, 312, 314, 31[illegible], 31[illegible], 319,
32[illegible], 32[illegible], 32[illegible], 32[illegible], 331.

1475 "Hede and muche thank."
a1450 (?1400).
Kail, EETS 12[illegible], 6-9.
3[illegible], 37, 39, 78, 101, 114, 287.

1480 "Sir Peny."
a1[illegible]5 (?a1400).
Robbins, Secular Lyr. XIV & XV C., 51-55.
30, 5[illegible], 97, 123, 14[illegible], 15[illegible], 207, 283, 320.

1504 On women: a defense and a warning.
c1375.
Brook, Harley Lyrics, 44.
55, 297.

1556 The Parlement of the Thre Ages.
c1450 (?a1400); Gollancz dates the poem about 1360.
Gollancz, Select Early English Poems, II, 1915.
[illegible], 34, 36, 44, 48, 235, 238, 241, 265, 287, 293, 294, 319.

1580 On the times.
c1400; follows "Elegy on Edward I" in ms., perhaps near 1307.
Skeat, Modern Language Review, VII, 150.
49.

1638 "The Song of Lewes."
?a1327.
Wright, Pol. Songs, 210-11.
178, 318.

1649 "The Complaint of Jubbe."
c1350.
Brown, Eng. Lyr. XIII C., 38-9.
57.

1655 Jack Trueman's "Epistle on the Abuses of the Age."
Probably written c. 1380.
Macaulay, Verse Soc. I, 2.
38, 94, 144, 150, 3[illegible].

1791 Signs of the degeneracy of the age, by John Ball.
Probably written c. 1380.
Macaulay, Verse Soc., I, 2.
21, 23, 46, 94, 3[illegible].

1796 Moralizing verses by John Ball in a letter to the peasants of Essex, 1381.
Probably written c. 1380-81.
Sisam, XIV C. Verse & Prose, 101.
94, 95.

1820 "King Conseilles."
a1330.
Rel. Ant., I, 310; II, 15.
19, 61, 79, 97, 278, 283, 302, 303.

1857 The abuses of the age: "On the King's Breaking the Magna Charta."
c1330.
Wright, Pol. Songs, 253-55.
35, 68, 101, 114.

1889 "On the Execution of Sir Simon Fraser."
a1325 (1307).
Wright, Pol. Songs, 212-23.
87, 88.

1898 "pe visiouns of seynt poul."
c1350.
Horstmann, EETS 98, 291-310.
49.

1912 The Lover's Tale of Amelyn.
c1410 (1350).
Chalmers, Br. Poets, I, 607-37.
131.

1917 Sins of Lechery.
a1300.
Förster, Archiv CIV, 304.
50, 51.

1974 On the follies of fashion.
a1325.
Wright, Pol. Songs, 153.
51, 295.

2008 On the evils of the time.
a1400.
Furnivall, EETS 15, 257.
71, 72, 43.

2025 A lullaby warning against the evils of this world.
?a1325.
Brown, Rel. Lyr. XIV C., 35-6.
52.

2060 "The Man in the Moon."
c1325.
Brown, Rel. Lyr., XIII C., 140-41.
248, 249.

2071 On the vanity of wealth.
a1200; 14th century collection of mss of Latin stories for use by preachers.
Wright, Percy Soc., VIII, 83.
129.

2145 On the degeneracy of the times.
a1400.
Brown, Rel. Lyr. XIV C., 54.
20, 43.

2146 On the degeneracy of the times.
a1325.
Brown, Register, I, 71.
19, 20.

?149 "The Battle of Crecy" by Laurence Minot.
(1[illegible]).
Ermal & Kippel, Middle English Literature, 12[illegible].
89, 297.

?285 On the vanity of fashions.
ND.
Rel. Ant., II, 1[illegible].
[illegible], 11.

?[illegible] "A Satire on the Scholastic Sports."
a1325.
Wright, Pol. Songs, 15[illegible]9.
1[illegible], 1[illegible], 1[illegible], [illegible], [illegible], [illegible].

?[illegible] "Over the Lies of the Worldlings."
c1[illegible]50.
[illegible], Eng. Lyr. XIII C., [illegible].
1[illegible].

?5[illegible] "The Praise of Peace" by John Gower.
c1[illegible]; Skeat puts the poem end of 139[illegible].
Skeat, Oxford Chaucer, VII, 205-16.
60, 87, 145, 301.

2649 "Satire on the Retinues of the Great."
a1325.
Wright, Pol. Songs, 237-40.
36, 105, 108, 111, 112, 254, 255, 296.

2661 "The Blind eat many a fly."
ND, probably early 15th Cent.
Chalmers, English Poets, I, 500.
54.

2662 Confessio Amantis by John Gower.
(a1393).
Macaulay, EETS LXXXI and LXXXII.
10, 25, 28, 34, 41, 47, 58, 59, 60, 73, 76, 80, 113, 117, 125, 138, 140, 145, 147, 218, 227, 231, 234, 312, 318, 329.

2663 Against the Minorite Friars.
a1400.
Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 268-70.
188, 189, 202, 298.

2744 Pearl.
c1400 (?c1380).
E. V. Gordon, ed., Oxford, University Press, 1953.
228, 297, 300.

2747 "Sir Peny."
c1450.
Robbins, Sec. Lyr. XIV & XV C., 50-1.
30, 126, 302.

2754 A song of the Scots at the Siege of Berwick by Edward I inserted in Peter Langtoft's Chronicle.
Berwick was besieged in 1296.
Wright, Pol. Songs, 28.
87.

2777 Against the friars.
al400.
Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 263-68.
170, 187, 188, 207, 209, 211, 221.

2787 On the evils of the times.
c1330.
Wright, Pol. Songs, 251-?.
?3, 109, 322.

2800 On the evils of prosperity.
c1450 (1410).
Skeat, Oxford Chaucer, VII, lxxxi.
?9.

3078 "Tell me, Wight in the Broom."
c1250.
Brown, Eng. Lyr. XIII C., 30.
54, ?.

3113 Macaronic verses lamenting the evils of the age.
al500 (?13c8).
Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 270-?8.
23, ?, 40, 54, 104, 114, 137, 231, 302.

3123 On the degeneracy of the times. A tag in the Speculum Vorum, Foster no. 30.
c1325.
Little, English Studies in Honour of Victor, Sn. 3, 155.
?0, 41.

3137 Manere and Mastoure.
c1450 (c1353).
Gollancz, Select Early English Poems, III (1920).
4, 31, 35, 58, 90, 96, 97, 98, 1?, 102, 104, 117,
11?, 113, 115, 127, 130, 131, 132, 137, 140, 141,
201, 202, 205, 209, 231, 232, 233, 274, 278, 280,
?8?, 286, 287, 290, 296, 299, 300, 311, 312, 319, 322.

3155 "Song on the Battle of Lewes."
(1265).
Wright, Pol. Songs, 69-71; Brown, Eng. Lyr. XIII C., 131-?.
64, 65, 204, 208, 209, 227.

3247 "A disoutison betwene a old man and be deuel."
c1390.
Horstmann, EETS 98, 329-54.
34, 36, 39.

3260 "On the Rebellion of Jack Straw."
al400 (?1381).
Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 224-6.
91, 94.

3306 A couplet on the year 1391.
(1391).
Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 278.
74.

3328 "The False Fox."
c1500 (1342).
Robbins, Sec. Lyr. XIV & XV C., 44.
195, 286.

3352 Song on the victory of the English at Dunbar, inserted in Peter Langtoft's Chronicle.
(1294).
Wright, Pol. Songs, 295-6.
87.

3365 "A Sarmun."
?al325.
Heuser, Bonn. Beiträge XIV, 89-97.
97.

3420 "Who says þe Sooth, he shall be shent."
c1390.
Brown, Rel. Lyr. XIV C., 152-4.
38, 39, 264-5, 300.

3448 The Plowmans Tale.
Skeat dates the poem 1395.
Skeat, Oxford Chaucer, VII, 147-90.
43, 137, 141, 142, 143, 144, 146, 419, 150, 152, 153, 156, 158, 163, 168, 169, 170, 182, 185, 191, 192, 196, 200, 210, 211, 213, 215, 217, 218, 223, 226, 258, 266, 267, 277, 283, 287, 298, 301, 315.

3491 The Libelle of Englyshe Polycye.
al450-al500 (1436).
Wright, Pol. Poems, II, 157-205.
13, 280.

3529 Against King Richard's ministers.
(1399).
Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 363-6.
78, 79, 133, 286.

3621 Lines addressed to a judge.
al400.
Rel. Ant., II, 120.
124.

3812 On chattering in church.
a1500.
Brown, Rel. Lyr. XV C., 277.
224.

3818 "No Accord!"
c1400.
Rel. Ant., I, 233.
53.

3899 "The Castle of Guines" by Laurence Minot.
a1400 (c1333-52).
Wright, Pol. Poems, I, 89.
89.

3922 A proverbial saying employed by John Ball in the Wat Tyler insurrection (1381).
(1381).
Sisam, XIV C. Verse & Prose, 152.
93.

4006 On the abuses of the age.
ND.
Furnivall, EETS VIII, 85.
21, 22, 250.

4051 The abuses of the age.
c1250.
Morris, EETS 49, 184-5.
20, 46, 61, 162, 194, 214, 253.

4079 Through drunkenness came sin.
a1400.
Brown, Register, I, 329.
47.

4085 "Hwon holy chireche is vnder vote."
a1300; Morris dates the poem c.1250.
Morris, EETS 49, 89.
138, 139, 145, 148, 266, 269, 270, 272, 282, 319.

4093 "Contra mulieres ornantes."
James places the poem in the 13th century.
James, Catalogue, II, 476.
51.

4144 "A Song on the Times, with a fable of the Lion, Wolf, Fox, and Ass."
?a1325.
Wright, Pol. Songs, 195-205. Brandl & Zippel, Middle English Literature, 182.
31, 42, 43, 77, 78, 104, 105, 120, 285, 286, 299, 300, 301.

4157 "Whon charite is no lengor Cheere."
c1390.
Brown, Rel. Lyr. XIV C., 170-3.
43.

4165 "The Simonie" or "On the Evil Times of Edward II."
c1330: Wright dates composition of the poem 1321.
Wright, Pol. Songs, 323-45. Brandl & Zippel, Middle English Literature, 184-202.
36, 42, 58, 71, 86, 90, 92, 105, 106, 120, 123, 124, 126, 137, 148, 149, 151, 153, 154, 156, 157, 158, 162, 163, 167, 170, 183, 184, 195, 198, 199, 201, 204, 207, 212, 215, 220, 223, 225, 231, 234, 236, 245, 246, 254, 263, 266, 268, 271, 272, 275, 277, 291, 298, 299, 301, 310, 324.

4179 On executors.
?a1500.
Rel. Ant., I, 314.
129.

4235 The government of Edward II criticized.
Zettl suggests composition about 1307.
Zettl, EETS 196, 107.
69, 183.

4268 Moralizing verses on the Earthquake of 1382.
c1390.
Brown, Rel. Lyr. XIV C., 186-8.
96, 299.

4273 The reply of the oracle on the sins of the times.
a1400.
Furnivall, EETS 15, 251.
21, 43.

*6 Mum and the Sothsegger.
Cambridge, c1475 (c1399).
British Museum Additional ms., 1450 (c1405).
Day and Steele, EETS 199.
39, 58, 74, 75, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 103, 104, 106, 107, 109, 110, 113, 115, 116, 120, 121, 122, 125, 128, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 147, 148, 150, 153, 158, 163, 171, 176, 177, 181, 185, 192, 196, 200, 204, 205, 211, 213, 218, 223, 227, 231, 259, 260, 261, 262, 267, 277, 278, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 291, 292, 293, 294, 312, 315, 320, 324.

*24 A monologue by a drunkard.
a1350.
Robbins, Sec. Lyr. XIV & XV C., 106.
47.

*32 "The Gossips' Meeting."
a1500.
Greene, Early English Carols, 283-4.
256.

*63 Against women.
ND. probably 15th cent.
Rel. Ant., II, 113.
53.

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