

The Text of "Piers Plowman." I. The A-Text

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## THE TEXT OF 'PIERS PLOWMAN.'

### I. THE A-TEXT.

THE question of the authorship of the different versions of *Piers Plowman* has recently been discussed at some length by many critics<sup>1</sup>, and is likely to give rise to much further discussion before opinion settles down definitely in favour of either 'one author or five.' It is not our purpose here to enter into that controversy, but to draw attention to certain textual problems which seem hitherto to have been overlooked, but which nevertheless affect, to a very considerable degree, the arguments which have been put forward upon either side.

Professor Manly has called attention to the fact that many of the minor alterations, generally supposed to have been made when the work was recast into what Professor Skeat has named the B-text, are really to be found in certain MSS. of the A-text: 'In his reworking of the poems he [the author of the B-text] practically disregarded passus XII and changed the preceding eleven passus by insertions and expansions. Minor verbal alterations he also made, but far fewer than is usually supposed. Many of those credited to him are to be found among the variant readings of the A-text, and were merely taken over unchanged from the MS. of A used as the basis<sup>2</sup>.' This would seem to clench finally the argument in favour of multiple authorship. For these variants are exceedingly numerous: they often involve serious differences of sense and of metre. It is hardly conceivable that the reviser, had he been the original author, would have used as the basis of his B-text a vicious transcript which had travelled, by successive corruptions, so far from his original work.

<sup>1</sup> J. M. Manly in *Modern Philology*, January, 1906; H. Bradley in *The Athenæum*, April 21, 1906; J. M. Manly in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. II, 1908; Th. Hall in *The Modern Language Review*, October, 1908; J. J. Jusserand in *Modern Philology*, January, 1909.

<sup>2</sup> *Cambridge History of English Literature*, II, p. 23.

But an interpretation of the phenomena of the text, quite different from that assumed by Professor Manly, is possible. Do these so-called 'variants' preserve the real reading of the original A-text, as it left the author's hands, whilst the alternative readings, which have been adopted in the received A-text, represent the variants of an individual MS. or class of MSS.?

It has not been recognized that the received A-text is not an attempt to reconstruct the original text, as written by the poet. It is a reprint with some corrections of a single MS.—the Vernon (V)—which Prof. Skeat selected, believing that its readings were, 'on the whole, better than those of any other.' Having selected this MS., the editor's object was to print it *with as few corrections as might be*. With this object, readings admittedly inferior were retained in the text, and have been reproduced alike in the Early English Text and in the Oxford editions<sup>1</sup>. Nevertheless, in some two hundred cases<sup>2</sup>, that is approximately once in every dozen lines, the reading of the Vernon MS. had to be corrected from the other MSS.: in the first place from MS. Harleian 875 (H), which of all the A-MSS. agrees most closely with V: from other MSS. where, as not infrequently, V and H agree in an impossible reading.

It is, then, a grave misapprehension for critics to speak and argue as if the received text of A reproduced, or had been intended to reproduce, the author's exact words, and could thus be taken as a criterion of his vocabulary and metrical usage. If, in two hundred places, the Vernon MS. is so erroneous that an editor, determined to make no alteration unless it be absolutely necessary, is yet compelled to fall back upon the other MSS., then it may well contain a thousand or more uncorrected alterations and corruptions. For, to every one instance in which we can detect a scribal alteration by reason of its intrinsic absurdity, there may well be half a dozen in which the variant is not so seriously inferior as to be quite untenable. Hence it is, and has long been, a recognized principle in the textual criticism of the Greek and Latin classics, that a text, which adheres to one MS. in every case except where the reading of that one MS. is untenable, cannot arrive at a reconstruction of the original. In so many of the most interesting old and middle English texts, preserved as they have been in unique MSS., we are, then, entirely at the mercy of the scribe, and can only resign ourselves to the certainty

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the critical notes in the E.E.T.S. edition of the A-text, to Pro., 14, 75; i, 39, 79, 87, 135; ii, 9, 118, 129, 206; iii, 32, 174, 266—9; and especially v, 125 where Skeat states 'My object is to avoid alteration as much as possible.'

<sup>2</sup> Excluding cases where a whole line or passage is inserted from other MSS.

that, whilst that scribe has made many alterations which we can detect, he has as certainly made many others which we cannot, and that therefore we must give up all hope of getting the author's exact words in every case. But where, on the other hand, we have a peculiarly rich supply of MSS., as we have in the case of *Piers Plowman*, we may well hope to correct even the minor errors of the one by comparison with the others.

There are fourteen MSS. of the A-text of *Piers Plowman*. A complete collation of these has never been issued. Professor Skeat appended to his reprint of the Vernon text complete collations of three MSS., and partial collations of two others. There remain eight MSS. scattered throughout the kingdom, collations of which have not been published; in some cases because Professor Skeat thought them of only secondary importance, but in others<sup>1</sup> because, at the time the Vernon text was being printed, they were unknown. And indeed, so long as the A-text was regarded as merely the first rough draft of a poem, afterwards reissued authoritatively by its author in complete form as the B-text, it might well seem an effort of needless curiosity to strive to fix, to an *Ac* or a *But* the precise wording of such a superseded draft. But now that it is being argued from the 'diction, metre and sentence structure' of this A-text, that its author cannot have been the reviser of the B-text, it becomes important to fix, with the utmost possible precision, the exact text of the original A-version. We therefore submit the following notes, which are founded upon our own transcripts and collations of every known MS. of the A-text<sup>2</sup>, whether good or bad.

The impression created when the A- and B-texts are read side by side is generally that the A-text is inferior in both metre and style. Many passages, vigorous, energetic and metrically correct in B, are feeble and tentative in A. Yet this impression is erroneous; for if we take some typical instances where B seems most clearly to have improved upon A, we shall find that the received reading of A is found only in a small minority of the A-MSS., and that the bulk of the A-MSS. have the so-called B-reading. Here are some examples:

(A Pro. 76.) Of the pardoner who makes a trade of absolving men from their vows:

Weore þe Bisschop I-blesset · and worþ boþe his Eres  
Heo scholde not beo so hardi · to deceyue so þe peple.

<sup>1</sup> E.g., Westminster, Ingilby, Rawlinson, Dublin.

<sup>2</sup> For a description of these A-MSS., and an explanation of the symbols used in the footnotes, see below, pp. 373 *seq.*, 384. In the notes orthographic variations are not recorded: the spelling followed is that of the MS. first quoted of each group.

The plural *heo* is strange, for the author is speaking only of one pardoner. His confederate, the parish priest, has not yet been mentioned. The reading of the B-text is at once more lucid and more vigorous: 'If the bishop were worth his ears'—

His seel shulde nouȝt be sent · to deceyue þe peple (B Pro. 79).

And this is also the reading of nine<sup>1</sup> out of eleven A-MSS.

(A I, 17—21.) The gifts given by Truth to man:

And for he hihte þe eorþe · to seruen ow vchone...  
And Comaundet of his Cortesye · In Comune þreo þinges;  
Heore nomes beþ needful.

Yet it is not the names of the things, but the things themselves which are needful: *serue* does not alliterate: *therefore* would give better sense than *for*. All these are found improved in the B-text, and in the overwhelming majority of the A-MSS.<sup>2</sup>:

And þerfore he hyȝte þe erthe · to help ȝow vchone...  
And comaunded of his curteisye · in comune þree þinges;  
Arne none nedful but þo....

(A I, 34.)

Al nis not good to þe gost · þat þe bodi lykeþ.

Instead of *that the bodi lyketh*, the B-text, and nine out of eleven A-MSS.<sup>3</sup> give *that the gutte(s) axeth (lyketh)*, which is metrically superior.

(A I, 86.)

For hose is trewe of his tonge · telleþ not elles,  
Doþ his werkes þer-with · and doþ no mon ille,  
He is a-counted to þe gospel · on grounde and on lofte,  
And eke I-liknet to vr lord · bi seint Lucas wordes.  
Clerkes þat knowen hit · scholde techen hit aboute,  
For Cristene and vn-cristene · him cleymeth vchone.

The repetition of *doth* in the second line is unsatisfactory, with regard alike to sense, style and alliteration. *He is accounted to the gospel* is barely intelligible, and *him cleymeth* is, as we choose to interpret it, either syntactically wrong or an anti-climax: *techen* does

<sup>1</sup> RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDL; As is here defective; Dig also reads seale; but Dig is here rather a C than an A-text; V and H alone have the received reading.

<sup>2</sup> therefore RUEITH<sub>2</sub>DLDigH; for V; As defective; helpe(n) RUEITH<sub>2</sub>DLDig; serue VHW. U is corrupt here.

(n)ar(n) non nedful but þo (þei) RUEITH<sub>2</sub>DL; E has medful miswritten for nedful; so nedful as þo W; Ther ar none so nedefull, Dig; As missing; the received reading is given by VH only.

<sup>3</sup> gut REITH<sub>2</sub>WD, guttes Dig; L transposes gost and gotte, but his original had obviously the same reading as the rest; U and As defective; bodi VH.

not alliterate. But all this is given rightly in the B-text, and in the great majority of the A-MSS.<sup>1</sup>:

Who-so is trewe of his tonge · & telleth none other,  
And doth þe werkis þer-with · and wilneth no man ille,  
He is a god bi þe gospel · agrounde and aloft,  
And ylike to owre lorde · bi seynte lukes wordes.  
þe clerkes þat knoweþ þis · shulde kenne it aboute  
For cristene and vnristne · clameþ it vchone.

(A I, 159—63.)

For Iames þe gentel · bond hit in his Book,  
That [Fey] withouten [fait] · Is febelore þen nouȝt,  
And ded as a dore nayl · but þe deede folewe.  
Chastite withouten Charite · (wite þou forsoþe)  
Is as lewed as a Laumpe · that no liht is Inne.

The alliteration of the first line is improved in the B-text:

For Iames þe gentil · iugged in his bokes.

and the last sentence is much more powerful:

For-thi chastite with-oute charite · worth cheyned in helle;  
It is as lewed as a laumpe · that no lyte is Inne.

But both these readings are found in many A-MSS., whilst those of the received A-text are only found in two<sup>2</sup>, the former indeed only in one.

(A II, 5—6.) The words of Holy Church to the poet's question how he may know Falsehood:

'Loke on þe lufthond' quod heo · 'and seo wher [he] stondeþ,  
Bope Fals and Fauuel · and al his hole Meyne.'

Neither line alliterates satisfactorily: as in the preceding example the received text of A seems to be satisfied with separate alliteration within each half line. More correctly, the B-text has:

Loke vpon þi left half · and lo where he standeth,  
Bothe fals and fauel · and here feres manye.

But this is also the reading of the bulk of the A-MSS.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> wilneth, willeth or will REITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDig; doth VH. *Skeat, though reading doth, prefers willeth (see p. 139).*

a god by þe gospel(es) RETWDLDig; in god be ye gospell I; good be gospel H<sub>2</sub>; a-counted to þe gospel VH. kenne REITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDig; techen VH.

cleymeth hit, clayme(n) hit EITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDigH; him cleymeth V. cleymeth R. U and As are defective here.

<sup>2</sup> jugyd, jugyth RUIWLDIGAs; demys E (*written for jugys by the common interchange of synonyms*); ioynide TH<sub>2</sub>; hath wryten D; bond hit V; H has seyth in later hand over erasure: the last three letters ide of the original are just perceptible.

chenyd in hell EITH<sub>2</sub>WDig, but it may be doubted whether the right A reading in spite of inferior alliteration is not schryned in Helle RUL; shewed in helle D; tenyd in helle As; wite þou forsoþe VH. *There was evidently some corruption in the early copies, and the scribe of the MS. from which V and H alike derive altered, according to his custom, a word which appeared to him obscure into the colourless and unmetrical wite thou forsothe. In helle is added in T in a later hand.*

<sup>3</sup> quod heo (he, sche) omitted RUTDLDig; inserted VHH<sub>2</sub>UWI; EAs corrupt here. Lo ETH<sub>2</sub>WLAs; seo, se VHUUDIDig; loke R.

his (her) feres alle (many) RUUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLAs; Dig omits line; al his hole Meyne VH.

After Mede's wedding has been forbidden by Theology, Favel rides with the rest to London, according to the received A-text *feyntly a-tyred* (A II, 140). B has *fetislich* (B II, 165) which is much more appropriate to the attire of one who was to give the bride away. And this is the reading of seven out of twelve A-MSS.<sup>1</sup>

When Liar escaped to the friars, they, to prevent his being known by all comers, according to the received A-text *Kepten him as a Frere* (A II, 206); B has the much more appropriate *coped* (B II, 230) which is also the reading of twelve out of thirteen A-MSS.<sup>2</sup>

(A III, 32.) Mede promises to the clerks who comfort her :

in Constorie at Court · to tellen heore names.

In B the alliteration is rectified by the reading *do calle* for *tellen*. *Calle* is also the reading of nine out of twelve A-MSS.<sup>3</sup>

(A III, 35.) Those clerks whom Mede loves shall, she boasts, be advanced, where cunning clerks shall 'couche behynde.' *Couche* Skeat interprets 'lie down apart, be left in the lurch,' a somewhat forced use of the word. A much better reading is *cllokke*, i.e. 'limp' (Fr. *cloquer*) the reading of B and of nine out of eleven A-MSS.<sup>4</sup>

(A III, 231.) Describing the two kinds of Mede, Conscience contrasts with the true Mede, which God will give, the False Mede beyond Measure :

Bote þer is a Meede Mesureles · þat Maystrie desyret  
To Meyntene Misdoers · Meede þei taken.

The king above has just said that Mede is worthy 'muche maystrie to haue' but it is difficult to see how Mede Measureless desires mastery, or to whom 'thei' in the next line refers.

The B-text reads :

There is an-other Mede mesureles · þat maistres desireth  
To meyntene mysdoers · Mede þei take.

'Another Meed which magistrates covet' (for *masters* = magistrates cf. A III, 67). The context shows the B reading to be right. It is also that of ten out of twelve A-MSS.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> fetisliche TWULDig; fetelych I; fetyssy R; fastlyche D; H<sub>2</sub> has queyntliche, *having used fetliche above*. Feyntliche VHE. As is *wanting here*.

<sup>2</sup> copyd, copide, copeden, capyd RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDHLDigAs; V alone kepten. See also Skeat's note, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> calle, callen, etc. RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WLDig; As *wanting here*. tellen VH; telleþ D. See Skeat, p. 142.

<sup>4</sup> clocke, clockyn, etc. RUIITH<sub>2</sub>WLDDig; EAs *defective here*; couche VH.

<sup>5</sup> maysteres RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WLDDig; maystrie VH; As *wanting*.

Instances where the imperfect alliteration of the received A-text is corrected in B are very numerous. Here are some:

pow hast honged on my Nekke · Enleue tymes (A III, 174).

*halfe* (or *halse*) for *Nekke* is found in B and in ten out of twelve A-MSS.<sup>1</sup>

Among þis Riche Rayes · lernde I a Lessun (A v, 125).

B has *I rendred*, as have eleven out of thirteen A-MSS.<sup>2</sup>

For his wikkede lyf · that he i-liued hedde (A v, 217).

B has *lither life*, as have eleven out of thirteen A-MSS.<sup>3</sup>

For nis no gult her so gret · his Merci nis wel more (A v, 228).

B has *his goodnesse*, as have eight out of eleven A-MSS.<sup>4</sup>

Treuje wolde loue me þe lasse · a gret while after (A vi, 49).

B has *a longe tyme*, and *long* is also the reading of eleven out of thirteen A-MSS.<sup>5</sup>

Bolde Bidders and Beggers · þat mowen her mete biswinke (A vii, 202).

B has *her bred biswynke*, as have five out of ten A-MSS.<sup>6</sup>

In all the instances given above there is a strong presumption that the difference between the reading of the received text of A and that of the received text of B is not due to corruptions in the MS which the B-reviser used, but rather to corruptions in the Vernon MS. upon which the received A-text rests.

It is not merely that, of the twelve or thirteen A-MSS. available, all but two in most cases favour the B-reading. For numbers in this matter do not count for all. 'MSS. must be weighed as well as counted,' and it is quite conceivable that the two MSS. might preserve the correct reading, and the ten agree in a corruption. Until we have weighed the MSS. we have no right to argue from the numerical superiority of either group. But we have a right to argue that the reading of the ten is vigorous, picturesque, and metrically accurate, that of the two commonplace and metrically defective. Anyone, therefore, who believes that the received text of A reproduces in these passages the original author's

<sup>1</sup> half RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDig. In many of these instances the reading is indisputably halfe; in one or two it might be either halfe or halse; As is wanting; Nekke VH.

<sup>2</sup> rendred RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDigAs; lernde VH.

<sup>3</sup> lethy, liþer RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDigAs; wikkede VH.

<sup>4</sup> godenesse ITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDigAs; grace E; Merci VH; RU omit the line.

<sup>5</sup> long RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDigAs; gret VH.

<sup>6</sup> bred RTLDigAs; mete VHUI; EH<sub>2</sub> wanting; D corrupted.



words, will have to admit that that text received material improvements at the hands of a scribe, whose phrasing was more effective, and whose ideas of metre were more strict, than were those of the original author.

Let us now consider some cases in which the reading of the majority of the A-MSS., which is followed by B, *must* clearly be the original reading. For in these cases the reading of the received text of A (i.e., generally that of V and H) is unintelligible till we see it to be a corruption of the reading which we find in the bulk of the A-MSS., and in the received text of B.

(A I, 54.)

For Rihtfoliche Resoun · schulde rulen ou alle,  
And kuynde wit be wardeyn · owre weolpe to kepe,  
And tour of vr tresour · to take hit [30w] at nede.

A tower may keep treasure, but it cannot possibly hand it to you at need. The right reading is obviously *tutour*, as given by eight out of ten A-MSS.<sup>1</sup> and as followed in the B-text.

(A I, 104.)

[For crist, kyngene kyng · knyhtide tene]  
Cherubin *and* Seraphin · an al þe foure ordres—

There are either nine or ten angelic orders, according as the lost angels are, or are not, counted as a separate class.

The reading *an al the foure ordres* can only be the careless writing of a scribe, whose mind was running upon the four orders of friars. The right reading is obviously that of the B-text:

Cherubyn and seraphin · suche seuene and an othre

thus making nine orders of angels, in addition to the tenth order, which fell. And this reading, or a corruption of it, is found in the majority of the A-MSS.<sup>2</sup>

(A III, 41.) The corrupt Friar offers to shrive Mede:

I schal asoyle þe my-self · for a summe of whete.

*summe* is a manifest miswriting for *seem*, a load, which is the reading of eleven out of thirteen A-MSS.<sup>3</sup> and of the B-text.

(A III, 73.) Of the 'Brewsters, Bakers, Butchers and Cooks' who adulterate food:

þei punisschen þe peple priueliche....

<sup>1</sup> RITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDig. U and As are here defective, E omits the word; V and H read tour(e).

<sup>2</sup> such seuene & a noþer, TH<sub>2</sub>W; suche seuene & oþer D; and such seuene oþer RE; and siche mo oþere U; & seuene moo oþere I; As wanting; L also makes nine orders. The only MSS. giving four orders are V, H and Dig.

<sup>3</sup> summe VH; sem RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLAsDig.

The right reading is obviously *poison*, as B and nine A-MSS., against one which reads *punisschen*; *punish* has come in from four lines above<sup>1</sup>.

(A III, 122.) Conscience says, accusing Mede before the king

Vr Fader Adam heo falde · wip Feire biheste.

It is difficult to see how Conscience can accuse Mede of this evil act, which was the deed of the enemy in person. Whatever sins may have contributed to Adam's fall, Bribery can hardly be said to have played any part. The true reading is clearly:

Your fadir sche fellide · þurw false byhestes

and 'Your father' is the reading of nine out of twelve A-MSS., followed by B. The reference is to the death of Edward II, for it is abundantly clear from the allusions to the French campaign that the king of the allegory is Edward III. But that several scribes did not understand the passage as a reference to Edward II is certain: one boldly alters 'your father she felled' into 'many men she fells.' The scribe of the Vernon MS. is however alone in his attempt to explain the allusion as a reference to Adam's fall<sup>2</sup>.

That the reference is to Edward II rather than to Adam is clear also from Mede's defence; for she understands 'Your father' as referring, not to Adam, but to a king:

(A III, 180.)

For Culde I neuere no kyng · ne counseilede þer-after;  
Ne dude i neuere as þou dust · I do hit on þe kyng.

But here there is a further corruption: *I never did as thou dost* or *didst* gives no meaning, we want *as thou judgest*: and this is the reading of nine out of twelve A-MSS., and of the B-text:

Ne dide as þou demist · I do hit on þe kyng<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> poysone RUEITH<sub>2</sub>DLDig; perrechyn As *through the scribe's eye catching* rechyn *in the line below*; appose *altered* to appresse W. pylen H; punisschen V only.

<sup>2</sup> your fadir sche fellide UREIH<sub>2</sub>WDL; As *is missing here*; T has your fadir he fellide; H fele men heo fallip; Dig our Fader sche fylid; V *alone has* Vr Fader Adam heo falde. Skeat points out (Clarendon Press edition, vol. II, p. 45) that the reading of the received A-text must here be erroneous. Cf. too on this point a most valuable article by E. Teichmann in *Anglia*, xv, 224—5. Teichmann obviously doubted whether the Vernon MS. justifies the confidence which has been placed in its text of *Piers Plowman*.

<sup>3</sup> demest UEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDig; dost RV; didest H; As *wtg*.

The conclusion of the indictment of Mede by Conscience in the received A-text is hardly intelligible (III, 264):

þe Culorum of þis [clause] · kepe I not to schewe,  
 In Auenture hit [nuyzed] me · an ende wol I make:  
 ¶ And riht as Agag hedde · hapne schulle summe;  
 Samuel schal slen him · and Saul schal be blamet,  
 Daudid schal ben Dyademed · and daunten hem alle,  
 And on cristene kyng · kepen vs vchone.  
 Conscience knoweþ þis; for kuynde wit me tauzte  
 þat Resun schal regne · and Reames gouerne.

Lines have been misplaced: the passage should run as it does in the B-text, and in eleven out of thirteen A-MSS.

The culorum of þis cas · kepe I nouzte to shewe;  
 An auenture it noyed men · none ende wil I make....  
 I Conscience knowe þis · for kynde witt me it tauzte  
 That resoun schal regne · and rewmes gouerne;  
 And rihte as agag hadde · happe shul somme  
 Samuel schal sleen hym · and Saul schal be blamed  
 And dauid schal be diademed · and daunten hem alle,  
 And one cristene kynge · kepen hem alle<sup>1</sup>.

Among the disreputable company in the Alehouse is given

(A v, 164.)

Dauwe þe disschere.

But this is clearly wrong, for we have 'Rose þe disschere' only two lines below. The scribe's eye has caught the second word and he has miswritten Dawe's occupation. Dawe is a ditcher, not a dish-seller: he is mentioned subsequently ('Dawe þe dyker' B vi, 331 'Dawe þe deluere' C ix, 354). And *dykere* is the reading of the B-text and of eight out of thirteen A-MSS.<sup>2</sup>

(A viii, 29—35.) Among the works of public munificence by which merchants may make friends of mammon, are mentioned, together with the building of hospitals and bridges, and the endowing of nuns, widows and scholars:

And wikkede wones · wihtly to amende...  
 Rule Religion · and Rente hem betere.

<sup>1</sup> RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLADig; VH alone have wrong order.

Some confusion was caused by the scribes forgetting that Conscience is speaking: I consciens is found only in IWLHAs. D reads yf concience. Elsewhere it is generally corrupted to 'In conciens knowe I' RTH<sub>2</sub>UDig; E omits the second I.

<sup>2</sup> dykere RUIH<sub>2</sub>WDDig; L is corrupt here, AsE have drynkere, which no doubt describes Dawe accurately enough, but would not sufficiently differentiate him from his fellows in the tavern; VH alone disschere. Here again, cf. Skeat's note, (Cl. Press), p. 91, and Teichmann in *Anglia* xv, p. 226.

*Wones* cannot be right. To keep one's property in repair is only an act of common sense. The right reading must be *wikked wayes*, as in B and eleven out of twelve A-MSS.<sup>1</sup>

Merchants obviously do not rule, but relieve, religious houses, as in B and eight out of eleven A-MSS.<sup>2</sup>

(A VIII, 79.) Beggars mutilate their children, in order that they may beg the better, for

*Per ben mo mis-happes amongus hem · hose takeþ heede  
þen of alle opure men · þat on Molde wandren.*

Skeat explains 'they are always meeting with accidents' which hardly agrees with the context. The B-text has *There is moo mysshape peple*—that there are more deformed among them than among other folk is a proof that they mutilate their children. And this is the reading of eight out of eleven A-MSS.<sup>3</sup>

Notwithstanding these and similar blemishes, the merits of the Vernon text are undeniable. Yet the very goodness of the Vernon MS., when regarded as an isolated version, sometimes diminishes its value as a means of restoring the original text of the poem. For the intelligibility of Vernon is often the result of the scribe or his predecessor having deliberately smoothed away the difficulties he found in his original. It is natural that a scribe, engaged in copying and turning into his own speech poems often written in widely differing dialects, should become something of an editor. Sometimes he makes a slip, and we can detect him at work. We have seen how, not understanding the reference to Mede having slain King Edward II, he made her slay father Adam<sup>4</sup>.

Again, turn to VIII, 106, where the author obviously wrote:

*þe prophete his payn eet · in penauns and wepyng....  
Fuerunt michi lacrimae panes*

a reading which is kept in MSS. U, I, L.

But the word *payn* was evidently not understood, and most of the scribes bungled over it. T has nonsense, *the prophet his peyned*, R has only very halting sense, *the prophete his peyne hath*<sup>5</sup>. Alone among the

<sup>1</sup> wykede weyes RUIITH<sub>2</sub>WDLADigH; wones V; E *wanting here*.

<sup>2</sup> releyue RITH<sub>2</sub>DLDigH; rule UWV; EAs *wanting here*.

<sup>3</sup> mysshape, myschapyn RUITWDL; mishappes VH; myschapmen H<sub>2</sub>; EAs *wanting*; mischefes Dig.

<sup>4</sup> That this is the work of the V, and not of the common original of V and H is clear: for H, equally puzzled, has edited the passage in another and even more violent way 'many men she fells.' H goes further, and also smoothes away the subsequent passage where Mede defends herself from the charge of having killed the king. V, more honest than his fellow H, has abstained from telling a second lie to cover up the tracks of his first.

<sup>5</sup> Over an erasure. Probably the scribe first wrote *penaunce*.

MSS. of the first class V and H have not only 'sophisticated' the passage, but have done so cleverly. V has 'The prophetes peyneden hem · in penaunce and wepyng.' H has, still more ingeniously 'Ther is profyt in peyne' etc.

It is the very cleverness of these plausible corruptions which makes their danger. A scribe who is intelligent enough to do this kind of thing, is likely to mislead us more than a bungler who copies, more or less incorrectly, the text before him. What Dr Moore has remarked of the early MSS. of the *Divine Comedy* is equally true of the MSS. of *Piers Plowman*: their writers are not exact copyists, but editors, although working without an editor's sense of responsibility. But whilst this applies, to some extent, to all the MSS., it is particularly applicable to Vernon, and to one or two others, including Vernon's nearest relative, Harleian 875 (H), which is perhaps more given to editing than even V, though there is not space to quote instances here.

Had this been all, it might have been possible to correct V and H, the one from the other. But unfortunately it is clear from the instances quoted above, where V and H so often agree in one and the same variant, that the common ancestor of V and H was also an 'edited' MS., whose scribe was ready to replace a difficult or perhaps corrupt word by a commonplace tag. Many further examples of this might be quoted. Theology forbids the marriage between Mede and False; for Mede is a lady, the daughter of Amends—just compensation—and God's will is that she should be wedded to Truth. The passage runs in B, as it probably ran in the original A:

For Mede is moylere · of Amendes engendred,  
And god graunteth to gyf · Mede to Treuthe. (B II, 119.)

But, though a very early corruption, which all but one or two A-MSS. share, (*A*)*mendes* was altered to the senseless *Frendes*<sup>1</sup>. The scribe whose work underlies VH, tried to make sense by a reckless alteration of the passage. At the same time he corrupted the word *moylere*, which apparently he did not understand. So the passage ran in the archetype of V and H:

For Mede is a Medeler · a Mayden of goode,  
God graunte us to giue her · ther treuthe wol asigne [or assente].

The Vernon scribe did not understand *Medeler*, and so altered to *Iuweler*, i.e., one bedecked with or owning jewels, a word appropriate

<sup>1</sup> For *mede* is (a) *muliere* of *frendis engendryt* RUTH<sub>2</sub>D: E tries to improve the sense by altering *frendis* to *fendes*. LiDig give the right reading *Mendes*, but almost certainly in Dig, possibly in I, this may be regarded as the correction of a scribe who supplied the right word from his knowledge of a B or C text. Ashmole is defective here.

enough to Mede in general, though certainly not in this context. Hence we get the reading of the received A-text:

For Meede is a Iuweler · A Mayden of goode,  
God graunte vs to ȝiue hire · ther treuþe wol asigne.

Or again, in v, 129, the poet seems to have written

My wyf was a wynnestre and wollen cloþ made (so RETDL),

*wynster* meaning a woman making money. We have not met the word elsewhere, but it seems a quite possible one, and is supported by the use of *winner* meaning a workman ('winners with handen' C i, 222) and *win* meaning to earn one's living (A i, 153). Yet we can understand the scribes being puzzled by the word, and altering it. U changes to the senseless, but graphically very close *breustere*: more intelligently IH<sub>2</sub>WDigAs have *webstere*, *webbere*<sup>1</sup> etc. But the scribe whose work underlies V and H, was not satisfied with so simple an alteration. He wrote:

And my wyf at Westmunstre · that wollene cloth made.

Most of the scribes were puzzled by the name of *one Waryn Wisdom*, who, with Witty, rides to court (iv, 24 etc.). *Waryn* was not understood as a proper name, and corrupted to *were*, *warned*, *wary*. The ancestor of V and H remedied the passage by making Wisdom and Witty ride to court on a *wayn*.

Many other instances of this 'editing' might be quoted: the most striking, however, is in Passus x, 188, etc., where the poet speaks of the ill-assorted marriages of folk who will never win the Dunmow flich without perjury:

Þeiȝ þei don hem to dunmowe but ȝif þe deuil helpe  
To folewe aftir þe ficche fecche þei it neuere  
But ȝif þei boþe be forsworn þat bacoun þei tyne.  
For þi I counseile alle cristene couette not be weddid  
ffor coueitise of catel or of kynrede riche;  
But maidenis and maidenis macche ȝow ysamme  
Wydeweris & wydewis werchip riȝt also  
And glade ȝe god þat al good sendiþ<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> This seems simpler than the alternative supposition that RETDL independently agreed in corrupting the familiar *webster* into the unfamiliar *winster*. Also, if the original reading were *webster*, we should have no reason for the variants of U and VH. The confusion of the MSS. shows that the original reading must have been a difficult and puzzling one. Had *winster* been found only in one group of MSS. and *webster* in the others, we might have supposed that *webster* had been corrupted to *winster* through the scribe's eye catching *spinster* immediately below. But RETDL are no single group.

<sup>2</sup> þeiȝ] om. RUDAsW. don hem] hidden hem RU; be don D; hien hym welfast W. dunmowe] don now I. but...helpe] om. W. ȝif] om. UI. þe deuil] dowel As. folewe aftir] fechen W. ficche] flesche R, flysh W. fecche] fatte As cache W. ȝif] om. UAsW. þei] om. As. forsworn] forswon R.

So the passage runs in the MS. of Trinity College, Cambridge: the variants of the other MSS.—except V—are given below. The variants of the Ingilby scribe show that he or his original did not understand the allusion to Dunmow, and objected to applying the word maiden to a bachelor. Ingilby therefore corrupts (probably unintentionally) *dunmow* to *don now*, and (intentionally) *maidenis* to *sengil*.

But the Vernon text represents the version of a scribe who was not content to copy faithfully an unintelligible passage. He makes it bear a superficial appearance of sense.

þauȝ þei don hem to done · al þat þei mowen  
 To folewen aftur þe Flucchen · fecche þei hit neuere  
 Bote ȝif þei boþe ben forswore · and Cursen þat tyme.  
 Forþi I Counseile alle Cristene · coueite not ben I-weddet  
 For Couetyse of Catel · ne of kun Riche,  
 Bote Maydens and vn-Maydens · clene ow saue  
 Widewers and widewes · worschuþe also  
 And þenne glade ȝe god · þat alle goodes sendeþ.

We cannot be certain if this last piece of editing is due to V or to the common source of VH, for H is here wanting. In view of the other instances quoted, however, it is most likely that, if we had H, we should find him erring with V.

But not only does this common source edit corrupt passages: the scribe has another serious fault, that of substituting one synonym for another, more particularly with a view to excluding a word which he does not like, even at the expense of ruining the alliteration. This is a common fault, but the VH scribe seems to have possessed it to an uncommon degree<sup>1</sup>. The most characteristic instance is the systematic substitution of *teach* for *ken*.

for þi] þer for I, om. As.  
 couette] þei couyte R. be] to be RUAsDigW; *wedded begins next line in W*; to wedde D.  
 or of] or for RU; ne of IDigW; and of As. *kynrede]* kyn IW.  
 maidenis and maidenis] sengil and madenys I; maydenis As.  
 macche ȝow ysamme] ȝow to same takyn RU; marie ȝou togyderis H<sub>2</sub>; makkyth ȝou  
 same I; mache ȝou þe same D; matche you togeders Dig W; meke ȝou to gederis As.  
 wydeveris & wydewis] transposed I. *riȝt also]* ȝe al so RU; the same H<sub>2</sub>; riȝt so  
 Dig; ȝe þe same AsW. *And]* þanne RU; and þan I, DigW.  
 þat al good sendeþ] and alle goode saintz W. *good]* godes RUI. As omits the last line.

<sup>1</sup> Pro. 14 tryly, trizely RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDig. *The word was a difficult one, for IDL alter to trulyche, treoweliche, etc.; wonderliche VH. As is wanting in the Prologue.*

Pro. 41 bratful bredful RUTH<sub>2</sub>DL. *This again was clearly a difficult word, for E reads with bred full and WIDig ful, fully; faste VH. Of bred ful is also the reading of the received text of the B version: brefful reappears in the C-text.*

Sometimes the alteration of the VH scribe appears quite wanton, as when he changes *hold to give* (I, 9, hold þei no tale RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDig: ȝeueþ þei no tale VH; As wanting) or *wise to teach* (I, 72 wyssed etc. REITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDig; techeþ V tawȝht H; UAs wanting) or *tie to bind* (I, 94 teiȝe hem faste REITH<sub>2</sub>DLDig; bynde(n) VHW; UAs wanting) or *catel to meed* (IV, 69 catel RUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDigAs; meede VH). Whilst the interchange of

These, and other instances too numerous to quote, throw suspicion upon V, H, and their common source. However plausible be the text presented by V and, in the main, supported by H, we cannot accept it without demur when we see that the scribes of these MSS. were improvers, who took such great liberties with their originals. And the support which V receives from H, and in virtue of which Skeat often allows a doubtful V-reading to stand, is invalidated when we see that V and H alike go back to a somewhat corrupt original.

But, further, it may be doubted whether V has even the character which we have hitherto allowed it, of presenting a text better in itself—or at least more plausible—than that of the other MSS. Here it is difficult to avoid arguing in a circle. The best MSS. are clearly those which give the best readings: and in deciding what are the best readings we shall ultimately have to place much, though not all, our reliance upon the evidence of what we have decided to be the best MSS. The four MSS. which Skeat selected, with justice, as being the four best available when he printed the A-text were:

V. The Vernon MS. in the Bodleian, wanting after XI, 180 (see Skeat, pp. xv—xvii).

H. Harl. 875 in the British Museum, wanting after VIII, 144 (see Skeat, pp. xvii—xviii).

T. Trinity College, Cambridge, R. 3. 14 (see Skeat, pp. xviii—xix).

U. University College, Oxford (see Skeat, pp. xix—xx).

Let us examine the individual readings of each of these MSS. *on their own merits*, trying not to allow ourselves to be influenced by considerations drawn from the number of MSS. which agree or disagree in each case. The results will, of course, be quite provisional, for

synonyms is a general fault, the source of VH was peculiarly addicted to it, as is shown by the following examples, in all of which the alliteration demands *ken* not *teach*:

- i, 79 *kenne* EITH<sub>2</sub>WLDig; *teche* VHRD; UAs *wanting*.
- i, 90 *kenne* REITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDig; VH *teche*; UAs *wtg*.
- i, 127 *kenne* UITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDig; *teche* VHR; *lere* E; As *wtg*.
- ii, 4 *ken* RUUEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDigAs; *teche* VH.
- vi, 30 *kennyd*, etc. RUETH<sub>2</sub>WDLDigAs; *taũte* VHI.
- vii, 23 *kennest* RUEILDigAsH; *techest* VTH<sub>2</sub>WD.
- vii, 25 *kenne* UEITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDigAs; *kene* R; *teche* V; H *wtg*.
- viii, 120 *kennyd* UITH<sub>2</sub>WDLDig; *taũte* VHRAs; E *wtg*.
- ix, 50 *bekenne* RUITH<sub>2</sub>WDigAs; *beotake* V; ELH *wtg*.

Skeat points out in his critical notes (A-text *E.E.T.S.*, p. 139) that in i, 79, 90, 127 we might with advantage read *kenne*, but adds 'I have preferred leaving the text intact to making three alterations.' Yet in point of fact there is less violence in making three alterations than in making one. The case for alteration is strengthened with each succeeding instance in which we find Vernon reading *teach* and the alliteration demanding *ken*: in the later passus Skeat, in fact, usually abandons the Vernon reading in these cases.



subsequently MS. authority may—and indeed will—lead us to think that in some cases what we have condemned as the inferior reading, must be the actual words of the original writer, and that what we have regarded as the better reading, is only the felicitous corruption of an isolated scribe. But we cannot invoke MS. authority yet: we have still to decide where it lies.

If, up to the point where Vernon breaks off, we compare it with the other three MSS. which Skeat collated with it, we get the following results:

	In V.	In H, <i>up to</i> viii, 144 <sup>1</sup> .	In T.	In U.
1. Necessary lines or words omitted	32	16	17	34
2. Good lines or words omitted	33	20	18	29
3. Reading distinctly inferior	208	194	131	217
4. Reading somewhat inferior	44	42	42	47

From classes 2 and 4 we cannot with safety argue; for a quite good line or word may be due to interpolation in a certain group of MSS. rather than to deficiency in the others. When the sense or the alliteration appears to *demand* a word or a reading, we can argue with greater approximation to certainty; thus adding together classes 1 and 3 we get:

Against V	240 errors
„ H	210 „
„ T	148 „
„ U	251 „

But U has gaps of some 120 lines, and H of some 630. If we allow U an average of 13 blunders for these lost passages and H an average of 77, we get the following results, grouping the MSS. in order of merit on the strength of our rough test.

T	148 errors
V	240 „
U	264 „
H	287 „

Of course no exact value can be claimed for these figures, but this examination has satisfied us that V has no extraordinary value, above TU and H.

But the real question is not the value of any individual MS., but of

<sup>1</sup> Where H breaks off.

each group. There is no necessity to argue, what has been recognized by all students of the subject, that V and H form one group and T and U another. If anyone wishes to satisfy himself of this afresh, five minutes' study of Skeat's footnotes, taken at random anywhere, would prove it. By a comparison of V with H and of T with U we can eliminate the more obvious blunders peculiar to the later scribes, and get a good idea of the original MSS. from which each pair, VH and TU, ultimately derive.

But in the VH group this comparison can only go as far as Passus VIII, 144, where H breaks off suddenly, leaving V for the rest of the poem unsupported. Examining the blunders up to this point charged against V and H, we find that 63 were common to both, and were therefore presumably inherited from the common ancestor, which we will call  $\mathfrak{f}$ .

Of the blunders made up to this point by T and U, only 22 are common to both, and therefore presumably inherited from their common original, which we will call  $\tau$ .

We can therefore correct  $\mathfrak{f}$  from  $\tau$  some three times as often as we can correct  $\tau$  from  $\mathfrak{f}$ .  $\tau$ , having fewer blunders is, then, presumably nearer to the original archetype of the A-text.

On the evidence, then, of the four MSS. of which full collations have been published, we are led to suspect that, whilst neither the TU tradition nor the VH tradition is to be despised in our search after the original A-text, the greater weight is to be placed upon the TU tradition.

Yet this tradition has hitherto been quite neglected, except in those few cases where the reading of VH was so obviously wrong as to compel recourse to it<sup>1</sup>.

A survey of the MSS. which have hitherto been only partially or not at all collated will, we think, strengthen the impression already gained, of the weight of the TU tradition<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Passages where there appears to be a corruption or confusion common to both VH and TU are, *for the present*, left out of consideration.

<sup>2</sup> Current knowledge of these MSS. rests upon the examination of them made by Skeat at different times, the results of which were published, some in his A-text (*E.E.T.S.*), and some in his *Parallel Extracts*. These results are necessarily tentative, but cautious, and, so far as they attempt to go, exceedingly valuable. An elaborate tree, showing the interdependence of the fourteen A-MSS., has been published by Dr Kron in his *William Langleys Buch von Peter dem Pflüger*, 1885. This has been accepted as authoritative by Brandl (*D.L.Z.*, 1886, p. 518), and even by Skeat, who says 'Dr Kron...has examined the less important MSS. with greater care than I gave to them.... I therefore follow his classification.'

Dr Kron appears to have seen most of the MSS.; but he has not recorded a single reading of a single A-MS. which he has not derived from Skeat. Indeed he admits (p. 20)

Some of these uncollated MSS. are merely descendants of  $\tau$ , and therefore only prove that  $\tau$  was more prolific than, not necessarily superior to,  $\text{r}$ . Yet these MSS. are worth examining; for they all help us to fix more exactly the text of the original  $\tau$ . Three of them seem to be related by a remarkable characteristic to T. These are:

(Brit. Mus.) MS. Harl. 6041 [ $H_2$ ] (see Skeat's A-text, *E.E.T.S.* pp. xx, xxi).

(Bodleian) MS. Digby 145 [Dig] (see Skeat's A-text, p. xxiv).

The Duke of Westminster's MS. [W] (see Skeat's *Parallel Extracts*, p. 25).

Now these MSS., TH<sub>2</sub>DigW, instead of ending, as many other MSS. do, with Passus XI, continue from that point with the C-text. This joining on of C to A *might* of course have been done independently, but in one case at least it is certain, and in the others it seems most likely, that this common characteristic is due to the MSS. having been copied ultimately from one MS. 't', which had had the C-text appended to it in this way. When 't' is spoken of as a combination of A and C, it does not mean that the scribe has attempted to amalgamate a C and an A text by splicing the two together throughout: he has merely added to a pure A-text the later passus of the C-text. Such 'combined texts' must then be carefully distinguished from the 'combined texts' with which we shall have to deal later: texts produced apparently by a scribe who had before him two MSS. and systematically contaminated both.

That  $H_2$  is closely allied to T, does not need demonstration. Skeat says 'After collating it closely with the text from the beginning down to l. 146 of Passus II I ceased doing so; finding that it is, practically, little else than an inferior duplicate of T, and may be neglected without much loss.' And, indeed, for fifty or a hundred lines together  $H_2$  sometimes reads as if it were a mere transcript of T. Yet it is not, for, of 126 blunders made by T in those passages common to T and  $H_2$ —for  $H_2$  is defective—nineteen are not shared by  $H_2$ . And even when  $H_2$  blunders together with T, it is sometimes with a difference which helps us to see what the reading of T's original was, and why T went wrong.

that his examination of the MSS. was quite perfunctory. Whatever, therefore, may be the value of his work in other directions, it is not only useless but misleading with reference to the relationship of the A-MSS. Dr Kron has only restated dogmatically Skeat's tentative results. He has added a large number of serious errors; as when (p. 23) he quotes eleven instances between Pass. i, 34 and i, 90 in which he asserts that U agrees with VH as against T and T's cognates. Such an agreement would be most abnormal. As a matter of fact a leaf is here missing from U. U consequently does not appear in Skeat's footnotes as differing from VH, and Dr Kron, overlooking Skeat's repeated entry as to U's deficiency, has assumed that U agrees with VH.

On the other hand,  $H_2$  has a large number of mistakes peculiar to itself. Its chief value is that it enables us to eliminate the worst blunders of the last scribe of T, and to restore to some extent the text of his original.

From another point of view  $H_2$  is interesting. It has had corrections written in by a later hand. These corrections seem to have been made on no very clearly intelligible principle. Three or four of them, however, could only have been made by a man who was familiar with the earlier passus of the poem in the B or C version. Had  $H_2$  been copied again, we should have had in the copy a characteristic A-text of the T-type with a few puzzling and sporadic B-readings.

Much more puzzling is the problem presented by the Digby MS. (Dig). This MS. must have been copied from *two* originals: the one an A-MS, with or without the C continuation; the other a C-MS. The scribe began with an attempt to combine the two systematically. The first five lines have the typical C peculiarities; then follow eight lines as they occur in the A and B texts, these lines being for the most part wanting in the C-text; then four C lines; then two lines as in A; a line and a half as in C; then A again. After two hundred lines or so of this laborious contamination, the scribe grew tired, and threw down his pen. When the copying is resumed, in a slightly altered hand, the A version is followed fairly consistently<sup>1</sup>, and only rarely contaminated<sup>2</sup>. W likewise has been contaminated by interpolations from a B type, and apparently also from a C type. It is unnecessary to enumerate these interpolations, as the most important instances in the earlier passus will be found in Skeat's *Parallel Passages*<sup>3</sup>.

T, then, is not very efficiently backed up by the MSS. most closely related to it.  $H_2$  is so close as to afford comparatively little check; and the fact that Dig and W have been thus contaminated greatly invalidates their evidence. In many places their reading will not be a

<sup>1</sup> E.g. in the following passages, where B makes additions, alterations or omissions, the Digby scribe adheres to A. A i, 1, 4, 31 (where however one line of the B-C addition has been afterwards added between the lines), 110 etc., 119 etc., 129 etc., 136 etc., 174; ii, 11 etc., 17, 19 etc., 33, 40 etc., 64 etc., 84, 178—9; iii, 90, 173, 228 etc., 249, 282 etc.; iv, 18, 116, 133 etc., 138, 141 etc., 146 etc.; v, 10, 28; vii, 10 etc., 38 etc., 45 etc., 66 etc., 110, 134 etc., 166 etc., 180 etc., 212 etc., 301 etc., 311 etc.; viii, 8, 13 etc., 39 etc., 43 etc., 49 etc., 58, 72 etc., 99 etc., 105, 122.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. v, 42. There is some contamination also among the Seven Deadly Sins. Glutton makes his confession according to the A version: he is then made to fall into a swoon from which he is aroused by vigilate the weyle—this passage being borrowed from the subsequent confession of Sloth. On recovering he makes a second confession according to the B-text. The B-additions to Sloth are also given. Cf. also vi, 82 etc.; 96 etc.

<sup>3</sup> pp. 25, 26.

genuine A-reading at all, but a reading reflected back from the B-C-recensions. Except in those passages where the B-text has departed entirely from the A-text, we shall not then be able to use the evidence of Dig and W; or at any rate we shall have to use it only with the utmost caution.

Much more helpful is the support afforded to U by its nearest cognates. These are:

(Bodleian) MS. Rawlinson Poet. 137 (R), see Skeat's A-text 142\*; Trinity College, Dublin D. 4. 12 (E), see Skeat's B-text, p. vi, footnote.

Both these were discovered during the publication of Prof. Skeat's monumental edition in the *E.E.T.S.*, but too late to be used in the formation of the A-text, except quite at the end. Consequently no collations of these MSS. have been published. Yet they are of great importance: R is in some respects equal, in one at least superior to U. RUE are descended from one original. In this original apparently two leaves had got misplaced; for alike in R, U and E we find ll. 71—213 or 216 of Passus VII inserted after l. 182 of Passus I<sup>1</sup>. E, apparently, was not copied directly from this source. There are signs that the most immediate original of E was a transcript which had been corrected and interpolated from a copy of the B-text. This would account for the B-lines which occur sporadically in E. We shall therefore have to be careful not to take the evidence of E in any case where the true reading could have been ascertained from a B-text, unless that reading is supported also by E's uncontaminated fellows. E, however, still has value, as it will enable us to decide between its nearest relatives U and R when they differ.

The existence of these MSS., Digby, Dublin, Westminster (and, we may add, Harleian 3954), all showing a greater or less amount of features characteristic of the B or C versions, raises a question of great importance as to the manner in which the author, or authors, issued his, or their work, a question, too, which must be settled before we can get any further in our study of MS. relationships. Did the author issue

<sup>1</sup> Another peculiarity of this group is the protest against Love-Days:

Vicars on fele halue · fonden hem to done  
Leders þei be of louedays · and with þe lawe medle.

The lines are found, with two others, in E. They are also found in R, but a blank space is left where the word *Vicars* should occur. By reason probably of this undecipherable word, the whole passage is omitted in U.

from time to time additions to his work, so as to give rise to series of transitional texts, between A and B? This last explanation was that adopted by Prof. Skeat, and it has been lately fully and persuasively stated by M. Jusserand. Jusserand supposes that Langland, like Montaigne, kept his work by him and was ever making additions in the margin, or on slips of parchment: 'Tentative additions, written by the author on the margin or on scraps, to be later definitely admitted or not into the text, were inserted haphazard anywhere by some copyists, and let alone by others<sup>1</sup>. In his next revision the poet never failed to remove a number of errors left in the previous text, always, however, forgetting a few. As shown by the condition of MSS., the poet let copyists transcribe his work at various moments, when it was in the making (it was indeed ever in the making) and was in a far from complete and perfect state; sometimes when part or the whole of an episode was lacking, or when it ended with a canto or passus merely sketched and left unfinished. The scribes who copied the MS. Harl. 875 and the Lincoln's Inn MS. had apparently before them an original of version A, containing only the first eight passus, that is, the episodes of Meed and Piers.'

Now it may be that, when the evidence of the MSS. has been finally sifted, there will be left over certain passages supporting this theory. But certainly the bulk of the phenomena which might seem at first sight to support it, on further examination do not do so. Thus, the fact that Harleian 875 and the Lincoln's Inn MS. go no further than Passus VIII, is a sheer accident. Both MSS. have been mutilated; and whether in each case a few lines or three passus have been torn away from the end, there is no evidence in the MS. itself to show. But Harleian 875 is copied, beyond doubt, from the same original as Vernon; and Vernon goes to Passus XI. There is no evidence whatever, then, that the Lincoln's Inn MS. was copied from an original version of A containing only the first eight passus; whilst there is strong evidence that Harleian 875 was copied from an original containing at least some eleven passus.

Again, with regard to the lines found in Harleian 875 alone, M. Jusserand's theory apparently is that they were added as an after-thought by the writer, and therefore are wanting in other A-texts; whilst they were subsequently either lost or cancelled, and are therefore

<sup>1</sup> 'Of this sort are, to all appearances, the additional lines in the MS. Harl. 875 of A, not to be found elsewhere, especially the two passages giving, as in a parenthesis, some supplementary touches, on Fals and on Favel, one of four and the other of three lines.'—(Jusserand.)

wanting in the B and C texts. And this would be a very possible theory, if the lines were found both in Vernon and Harleian 875. But they are found in Harleian 875 alone. If the lines are genuine, not the additions of H, but copied from his original, how comes it that they are not to be found in Vernon, copied from the same original?

Precisely the same line of argument leads us to suppose that the B-lines in E cannot be derived from the archetype of E, but are the independent additions of a scribe, made from his knowledge of a B or C text. For, that E is ultimately a copy of the same original as U and R, is certain. Innumerable peculiarities, and above all the odd transposition of some of the matter, prove this. Yet these B-lines do not occur in RU.

In like manner, the peculiarities of the Digby MS. cannot be explained as due to that MS. being copied from a first draft of the B-text, in which only a few of the B-additions, such as the rat-fable, as yet appear. On the contrary, minute examination shows that the MS. is compounded from at least two others; and we can almost see the scribe at work, writing now a few lines from his A-text original, now a few from his C-text.

We are compelled therefore, however reluctantly, to believe that this B-element in A-MSS. is due to the 'sophistication' of later scribes, and accordingly to doubt the evidence of these 'sophisticated' MSS.

We have found the MSS. so far considered, to fall into two great classes; one represented by V and H, derived from an original *F*. This *F* we cannot reconstruct with any degree of certainty. For where V and H differ, and they differ frequently, it will be very difficult to decide between them. In many cases, it is true, the reading of V, and still more often that of H, is obviously unmetrical or nonsensical. But often the differences are of such a character as to make it difficult to choose. Since we do not yet know exactly what laws of alliteration the author of the A-text observed, we shall often hesitate, even when one reading seems metrically superior. We shall be driven in reconstructing our theoretical *F*, to the rather desperate course of following V, which is on the whole a much surer guide than H, except in those cases where H offers a clearly better reading. We cannot by this means hope to reconstruct exactly the original *F*; but we get something nearer than we should if we adopted either of the other courses open to us (1) that of following H, except where V is clearly better, or (2) tossing a penny in all doubtful cases.

Our reconstructed  $\mathcal{F}$  is then, after all, a somewhat doubtful quantity.

Our second group of MSS. consists of TH<sub>2</sub>WDigRUE, and we have seen that these subdivide into two sub-groups, distinguished each by a remarkable characteristic: TH<sub>2</sub>WDig (the T group) and URE (the U group). Although, as we have seen, the MS. T is much better than MS. U, there is nevertheless not much to choose between these two sub-groups. For the MSS. we have classed with T do not help us much: H<sub>2</sub> is too close to T to be of more than secondary value as a check; W and Dig are suspect by reason of B-contamination. Indeed, owing to this cross relationship, it becomes exceedingly difficult to make out what the real affinities of W and Dig are. Much more efficient is the checking and support which U derives from R and E; for E is not affected by B-influence to the same extent as are Dig and W.

The T group and the U group fortunately do not differ very much: when they do they are of so nearly equal value that in many cases there is little to choose. Here we want an arbitrator; unless in all readings where there is no clear superiority, we are to be again at the mercy of chance.

Here we may perhaps be helped by the partially collated D—Douce 323 in the Bodleian. 'This MS.,' says Skeat, 'follows T rather closely, but is full of gross blunders. On this account, after collating with Passus I—IV I desisted, finding that it only tended to choke the footnotes with inferior readings.'

Yet Douce might repay careful collation throughout. It belongs clearly, like H<sub>2</sub>R and E, to the TU group; yet it seems, within that group, not to fall very clearly either into the TH<sub>2</sub> section or into the RUE section, though in many cases it goes with TH<sub>2</sub> against RUE. Indeed, with all its many and serious corruptions, Douce has sometimes preserved the right reading where both T and U are obviously wrong. Of course Douce is constantly straying independently. But with such good guides as TRU, we shall hardly be misled into any of D's corruptions; whilst D will help us considerably in reconstructing the common original. Here and there, though rarely, D will enable us to get a better reading than either T or RU supply; but D's chief function will be to decide the balance between the readings of T and of RU, where these differ without a clear advantage on either side.

We have seen that the TU tradition is apparently more correct than the VH tradition, in so far as it gives us fewer common blunders. We are therefore fortunate in having eight MSS. of this class TH<sub>2</sub>DigWRUED to help us to establish the text of the original



MS. of this type, and to reduce the number of common blunders to a somewhat smaller figure. At the same time the more uncertain VH tradition cannot be neglected, since, as we have seen, it preserves what appears to be the right reading in some twenty-two instances where the T group and the RU group both seem to be wrong, and where, in all but two cases, D is also wrong.

And we may be certain that for one instance where the correctness of VH can be proved, there are many where VH are right though we cannot prove it; for only in a minority of the cases in which the two traditions vary, can we definitely declare either tradition right in virtue of intrinsic superiority alone.

What we therefore need is a MS. independent alike of the VH and of the TU group. Such a MS. would not be useless, even were it very corrupt; for, as Dr Johnson charitably observed, even the greatest liar may speak more truth in his lifetime than untruth. The important thing is that we should be certain of this MS. being independent of either family.

Let us now examine the Lincoln's Inn MS. [L], which is thus described by Skeat: 'On comparing a transcript of a considerable number of lines kindly made for me by Dr Furnivall, I found that the text had been much corrupted by the scribe, and that to collate it would only fill the footnotes with false readings, except in places where the text is sufficiently ascertained without it. The corruptions are due to an inordinate love of alliteration....Careful examination of the MS. shows, in fact, that it is best dismissed.' Indeed the corruptions of L are so numerous and so violent that to use it as the basis of a text would be absurd. Yet it may be of value in helping us to decide between the conflicting readings of our two good traditions VH and TU, especially as the corruptions of L are, as Skeat states, due to an excessive love of alliteration, whilst those of VH and TU often involve a disregard of it. It is exceedingly unlikely that VH and L, or TU and L, will often agree in making the same change, unless there is a relationship between them. That L is independent of both the VH and the TU group seems however clear. We have seen that V and H are characterized by 63 common blunders, in places where T or U or both give the correct reading. In 53 cases L gives the right reading in agreement with T or U: in seven L is corrupt or illegible, differing alike from VH and from TU; though indeed, in many cases the corruption is evidently a miswriting of the reading of TU. In three

instances only does L go wrong with VH, and these three are of such a character that the resemblance may well be accidental. That L does not belong to the VH group seems then fairly clear. T and U, we have seen, agree in offering a reading inferior to that of V in twenty-two instances: (if we include D, TUD offer an inferior reading in only twenty instances). Of the twenty-two cases where we have judged TU inferior to VH, L agrees with VH in fifteen, is wanting in one, and agrees with TU in six. Six cases of common blundering would be enough to prove some connection, though slight, between TU and L. But on scrutinizing these six instances we find that in each case the inferiority of the TUL reading consists only in the line not running or alliterating as well as that offered by VH. In no case, however, is the TUL reading an impossible one; and in each case the TUL reading is backed up by all the extant MSS., except VH. In two cases even H deserts V, and goes with TUL and the rest. There seems then a strong presumption that in these six cases TU and L do, after all, give the original reading, and that the variant given, sometimes by V alone, sometimes by V and H, is only an example of the desire so frequently shown by scribes, of improving the alliteration.

The agreement in these six cases of TU and L does not therefore prove any connection between L and the TU group; and we have seen that there is no connection between L and the VH group.

Further, there are passages where a very early corruption has crept in, which is common to both the VH group and the TU group. Here L sometimes shows a reading superior to that of either group.

An example is the line referred to above, p. 368:

For Mede is moylere of Amendes engendred.

We saw that in TU and their fellows, Amendes had been corrupted to a senseless 'frendis.' In VH the passage had been altered, evidently because the scribe had in his original some reading which he could not understand. L however retains the right reading 'of Mendes engendred.'

Again, in iv, 141, where both the VH and the TU group go wrong over the name of Warren Wisdom, L has it correctly:

Waryn Wisdom þo ny Witty his fere<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> In II, 87 I and Dig also have the right reading, whilst W and As are wanting. In iv, 141, I, Dig and W also have the right reading. But, almost certainly in the case of Dig and W, and possibly in the case of I, this is a correction due to the influence of the B-text.

L then is a garbled copy of a good MS., independent of both the other groups. It is a pity that this type of MS. should be represented only by this garbled copy, just as it would have been a pity had it been represented only by a MS. of which the rats had gnawed every page. But neither of these mishaps would entirely vitiate the MS. For we have such good evidence from VHTU, that we can put our fingers with certainty upon the lines of L which are garbled. Of other passages we can say with equal certainty 'Here the scribe is following his copy accurately: and the fact that he agrees with TU against VH (or the contrary) is a strong argument that it is VH and not TU which has here wandered away from the original.' The very ignorance of the scribe who corrupted the L version, is, in fact, in his favour. Had he been a man who knew the poem in some other version, and who corrected his copy from his knowledge of that version, he would have produced a text much more accurate than that now preserved at Lincoln's Inn; but one for our purpose comparatively worthless. On the contrary, however, L's tradition seems to be a peculiarly uncontaminated one; and his corruptions are his own. Hence his worth; much as in certain cases an ignorant and illiterate witness may give evidence, the value of which is enhanced by his ignorance<sup>1</sup>.

In the Ingilby MS. [I] (see Skeat, *Parallel Extracts*, 28—31) we have another MS. which is related only distantly to either the VH or the TU groups: of the two it stands nearer to TU. I's independence becomes manifest if we compare its behaviour in the places where V and H, or T and U, go wrong together.

Of the sixty-three places where V and H agree in what seemed to be a departure from the true reading as preserved in T or U, I agrees with T or U in fifty. In six cases I is corrupt or missing. In seven, however, I agrees with VH. But, on scrutinizing these seven, we find that four of them are cases where, on weighing all the MS. evidence, it is quite possible that the agreement of VH and I is due, after all, to their reading being the original one; and that the better alliteration given, for example, by U, is due to a scribe's attempt at improving his original. In two other cases the reading of VH and I, though indis-

<sup>1</sup> The corruptions of the garbler are in themselves interesting. He had a good alliterative vocabulary, and rejoiced in good old words like *weoued*, *altar*. He probably wrote in the late 14th or very early 15th century: for he has altered 'That heore Parisch hap ben pore seppe the Pestilence tyme' P. 81, to 'pat sen þe furste pestilence heore parysch weore' [pore *illegible*]. This alteration would be natural if made by a contemporary not long after the last pestilence. It would hardly have been made late in the 15th century, when the distinction between the different pestilences must have been largely obliterated in popular memory.

putably a departure from the original text, might well have been made independently. Only in one instance out of the sixty-three does I accompany VH in what is pretty clearly an error, and yet one not very likely to have been made independently. That there should be only one such instance in eight passus, is strong evidence that I belongs to a type quite distinct from the VH group.

As to any possible relation between I and the TU group: we have seen that of the twenty-two passages where T and U seem to go astray together, six are possibly not errors after all. Of these twenty-two passages, I goes with TU in eleven; including the six doubtful cases, which ought to be dismissed as inconclusive. The five remaining cases are not very conclusive either; but they serve to suggest the possibility of some slight connection between I and the TU group.

The Ingilby MS. then, is not connected with the VH group: it may be very slightly connected with the TU group. It is a much less corrupt MS. than is the one at Lincoln's Inn; but for our purpose it is much less useful. For there are some signs that it has passed through the hands of a scribe or of a corrector who knew the text in the C-version: hence, when I corrects VH or TU, we cannot be certain, without careful scrutiny, that we have a genuine unpolluted tradition. But the traces of B or C influence upon I are, after all, very small; so that the evidence of I is still of great value, though we must receive it with caution.

Two other MS. need mention. Ashmole 1468 [As] combines all possible faults. It is imperfect, corrupt, and contaminated by B or C-influence. Harleian 3954 [H<sub>3</sub>] is, up to Passus v, not an A MS. at all, but a B-type. From Passus v onwards it is a contaminated A-MS. As however most of our examples have been drawn from the earlier passus, it seemed best not to quote H<sub>3</sub>.

The Ilchester MS., though mainly a C-text, contains a passage derived from an A-MS., apparently of the TU type.

Many of the above suggestions are put forth only tentatively; for we have not yet had time to sift thoroughly our transcripts and collations. The following statements, however, are advanced with some confidence:

1. That a nearer approximation to the original A-text can be drawn from the MSS. of the TU group than from the Vernon MS.
2. That any text which is to reproduce closely the original poem, must be founded both upon the TU group and also, although to a less

degree, upon the VH group; the MSS. which belong to neither tradition must be used to turn the scale in doubtful cases; whilst the danger of introducing readings which may themselves be the result of correction from a B- or C-text, must be borne in mind.

3. That a text so formed will be found to approximate much more closely to the received B-text than the received A-text does.

4. That only when we know what is the 'diction, metre and sentence structure' of the original A-text, can we argue with certainty whether these are, or are not, materially different from those of the B-additions, or decide whether B's treatment of the A-text is really inconsistent with unity of authorship.

It is impossible to do any work at the text of *Piers Plowman* without troubling a large number of persons: and thanks are more particularly due to Sir Henry Ingilby for the long loan of his MS.: to Professor R. A. Williams for a preliminary inspection of the Dublin MS., and to the authorities of Trinity College, Dublin, for a three months loan of that MS.: to the Earl of Ilchester for kindly placing his MS. at the British Museum: to the Duke of Westminster for allowing us to consult his MS. at Eaton Hall: and to the librarians, of the British Museum, of the Bodleian, of Trinity College Cambridge, and of Lincoln's Inn for their unfailing courtesy and consideration. It goes without saying that every student of *Piers Plowman* is under heavy obligations to Prof. Skeat, upon whose work all later research must be based: we have also to thank him personally for the interest he has taken in our work.

The writers hope, later in the year, to print either MS. T or R, with collations of all the other MSS. Meantime, in illustration of what has been said above, Passus v, 43—106 is given from T, with collations from R(awlinson), U(niv. Coll., Oxford), E (Trin. Coll., Dub.), H<sub>2</sub> (Harl. 6041), D(ouce), Dg (Digby), W (The Duke of Westminster's MS.), L(incoln's Inn MS.), I (Sir Henry Ingilby's MS.), A(shmole), V(ernon), H(arl. 875). As the sole object is to illustrate the relationship of the MSS., mere orthographic variations are omitted.

## PIERS PLOWMAN.

Passus v, 43—106.

- þanne repentaunce reherside his teme  
 And made wil to wepe watir wiþ his eizen  
 45 Pernel proud herte plat hire to þe erþe  
 And lay longe er heo lokide vp & lord mercy criede  
 And behihte to hym þat vs alle made  
 Heo shulde vnsewe hire serke & sette þere an heire  
 For to affaiten hire flessch þat fers was to synne  
 50 Shal neuere heiȝ herte me hente but holde me lowe  
 And suffre to be misseid & so dide I neuere  
 But now wile I meke me & mercy beseke  
 Of alle þat I haue had enuye in myn herte  
 Lecchour seide allas & to oure lady criede  
 55 To make mercy for his mysdede betwyn god & hym  
 57 With þat he þe satirday seue ȝer þer aftir  
 Shulde drinke but wiþ þe doke & dyne but ones  
 Enuye wiþ heuy herte askide aftir shrift

43. þanne] And þan W; þan ran EDgLIAVH. reherside] & rehersyd DgLIAVH; to reherce W. his] þis V. 44. made] gart A; omitted D. wil] wykiam H<sub>2</sub>; William VH. to wepe] wepen W. wiþ] of E; riht at bothe I; with bope AV. eizen] eye R; here a hole in H. 45. proudherte] þe proud A. plat hire] fel plat W; plat doun A. þe erþe] grounde AVH. 46. vp] om. RUDDgLIAVH. lord mercy] mercy sho E; lord merci heo H<sub>2</sub>; oure lord mercy L; mercy A; to vr ladi V. criede] gan crie A. And lay—criede] She sighed sorryfu & saide lord mercy W.

47. I omits this line. behihte] sho hight E; hight W. made] maked with his myght L. 48. Heo] Yat sho EA; he L. shulde] wolde LAVH. serke] schorte L; shert H; smok DgV. pere] yerin EA; on added, later hand H<sub>2</sub>. 49. For to] To RUWA. affaiten] afauten R; fiete EVH; afeyntyn A; dawntyn I. fers] fresch RULH; frele AV. 50. heiȝ] liht VH. hente] hende U; hente quop heo H; haunte D; hold A. heiȝ—hente] my hert be so heigh W. holde me] euer holdyn it A. 52. But] And IV; omitted H. wil I] I wil RI; wil omitted A; I con wel V. me] myself H. 53. alle] om. L; alle ying I. haue] om. D. enuye] of enuye RA; pride WI. 54. Lecchour] Lechery DgW; þe lechoure L; þe lechours H. seide] yo seyð I. to] on RUEDDgWLI. to—lady] lord mercy H. criede] gradde L; bad H. 55. mercy] amendes U. To—mercy] om. H. for] of L. misdede] misdedis IH; sowle A. him] hys soaule EDgL; hym of mysdede A; hym siluen H. I omits betwyn hym and inserts mene after mercy, above the line. In W the line reads: To gete mercy of god in helpe of his soule. V expands into two lines: To maken him han Merci for his misdede, Bitwene god almihti and his pore soule.

After l. 55 H<sub>2</sub> inserts four ll.: And chastite to seke as a chylð clene, The lust of his likam to leten for euere, And fle fro felyschipe there folȝ may arise, For that makith many man mysdo ful ofte. 57. With] and A. he] he schulde RUEDgWLIAVH. þe satirday] saterday W; satourdayes RU; om. I. ȝer] ȝere sykerly I. þer] om. REDAV. Shulde] om. RUEDDgWLIAVH. but] om. EH<sub>2</sub>DgWA. doke] doge L; goos RU. dyne] eten VH. 59. heuy] hiȝe H.

- 60 And carfulliche his cope begynneþ he to shewe  
 He was as pale as a palet & on þe palesie he semide  
 He was clopid in a caury maury I can it nouȝt descryue  
 A kertil & a courtepy a knyf be his side  
 Of a Freris frokke were þe fore sleuys
- 65 As a lek þat hadde leyn longe in þe sonne  
 So lokide he wiþ lene chekis lourande foule  
 His body was bolnid for wroþ þat he bot his lippe  
 And wroþliche he wroþ his fest to wreke hym he þouȝte  
 Wiþ werkis & wordis whanne he saiȝ his tyme
- 70 Venym & verious or vynegre I trowe  
 Walewiþ in my wombe & waxiþ as I wene  
 I miȝte not many day do as a man miȝte  
 Such wynd in my wombe wexiþ er I dyne

60. *And*] *om.* W. *carfulliche*] *gretliche* V. *cope*] *coupe* UED; *culpe* Dg; *coupe* W; *compte* R; *counte* A; *gult* LI; *gultus* VH. *begynneþ he*] *he gynnyþ* RU; *biginneþ* DVH; *begynnyth* for I; *he couettes* E; *com* for A. 61. *He was*] *om.* WVH. *as pale*] *pale* RDg; *om.* E. *a palet*] *a pelet* R<sub>2</sub>DgLA; *a pelat* U; *a piller* E; *erthe* I. *He—palet*] *þe pelour* was pelled H. *and*] *om.* DLAVH. *on*] in EDgWLIIVH. *þe*] a DgWV; *om.* D1. *palesie*] *perlesy* E. *on þe palesie*] *paltyk* R; *palatik* U. *semide*] *semeth* L. 62. *was*] E *omits.* *He was*] *om.* H; and L. *a*] *om.* H. *I can*] I coude RUEDgWLIIVH; *coude* y L. *it*] *om.* EA; *hym* UVH. *it nouȝt*] not it D. *descryue*] *discrie* RUELA; *deserue* Dg; *deuisse* W.

63, 64. *Wanting* in V. 63. *knyf*] *kneuet* A. 64. *Of*] As A. *freres*] *frere* DLL. *frokke*] *frog* RA; *frogge* U; *freyke* I. *þe*] *hys* ELDgWAH. *fore*] *forne* DgI; *forme* UA; *two* H. 65. *As—þat*] *Like as* he H. *þat*] *om.* W. *þat—þe*] *longe leyen* in the hote L. 66. *he*] E *omits.* *lene*] *his lene* H. *lourande*] *lowrynge* RUDDgWLIIVH; *lourede* he V. *foule*] *full foul* EDg; *ful lowe* H. 67. *bolnid*] *bolled* VH. *His—bolnid*] *Al forbolne* W. *for*] *with* DgA. *wroþ*] *angre* W. *þat he bot*] *bote* he on A; *he bot* V; *he bot boþe* H. *lippe*] *lippes* EDgWLIIVH.

68, 69. *One line* in A: He lokyd vndur his browis as a bond dogge. *And*] *om.* VH. *he*] *om.* E. *wroþ*] *wrong* REDgLVH; *wroþ* *corr.* *later hand* to *wrong* W. *fest*] *handes* E. *hym*] *hem* DgW. *he*] *om.* D. *to—þouȝte*] *he þouȝte him awreke* V; *he þouȝte hym* to wreke H. 69. *werkis & wordis*] *werkes* and *with wordes* R; *werk* or *wiþ word* UE; *werkes* or *wordes* DL; *werk & woord* W; *workes* or *with wordes* DgVH. *whanne*] *than* H<sub>2</sub>. *saiȝ*] *sey* RUDI; *say* H<sub>2</sub>; *seeȝ* Dg; *seiȝ* V; *sawe* ELH.

*After l. 69 W inserts seven B lines (87—93; not 84—93 cf. Skeat, Par. Extracts, p. 26).* 70. *&*] or RUEDAVH; *than* Dg; *om.* I. *verious*] *vergeous* UD; *Vernish* DgWV; *vernychith* I; *verdegrese* H. *Venym—vynegre*] *Wormes* (or *Wernies—first two letters over erasure*) or *wynagre* or *wenom* E; *Wyrmys* or *vermyyn* or *vinegre* or *wyriuis* A. *Instead of this line L reads:* Of leosardes or of lobbes *venym* hath me laghte. 71. *Walewiþ*] *And walweth* L; *walles* EVH; *waldeþ* W; *Walkyn* A. *wombe*] *wombe* quoþ he H. *&*] or VH. *as*] *om.* RDVH. *wene*] *trowe* W. *waxiþ—wene*] *worcheth* me *wrathe* L.

71, 72, 73 *form one line* in A: *Walkyn* in my wombe, *werkyn* or I *dyne*. 72. *I miȝte*] *Myght* I W; *I ne mihte* V; *þat* I *myghte* L. *many*] *many* a RDgH. *many—don*] *leve mony ȝeres* E. *a man miȝte*]; *a man suld* EW; *a man owghte* DgLVH. 73. *wynd*] *a wynde* W. *wexiþ*] *waxed* D. *dyne*] *dye* V. *er I dyne*] *alway* W.

- I haue a neiȝebour neiȝ me I haue noiȝed hym ofte  
 75 And blamide hym behynde his bak to bringe hym in fame  
 To apeire hym be my power I pursuide wel ofte  
 And belowen hym to lordis to don hym lese siluer  
 And don hise frendis ben hise fon þoruȝ my false tunge  
 His grace & hise gode happis greuide me wel sore  
 80 Betwyn hym & his meyne I haue mad wrappe  
 Boȝe his lyme & his lif was lost þoruȝ my tunge  
 Whanne I mette hym in a market þat I most hatide  
 I hailside hym as hendely as I his frend were  
 He is douȝtiere þanne I I dar non harm don hym  
 85 Ac hadde I maistrie & miȝt I wolde murdre hym for euere  
 Whanne I come to þe chirche & knelide to þe rode  
 To preye for þe peple as þe prest techip

74. *a neiȝebour*] a nextbur E; neȝeboris H. *neiȝ me*] nere me EDg; by me W; me neiȝ V; many H. *I haue noiȝed*] I noyed RE; Yat I haue noȝed I; hath noyd A. *hym*] hem WH; me A; *om.* I. *ofte*] wel ofte RU; full ofte E. 75. *And blamide*] I blamed E; Ablamed V. *hym—his*] hem—here H. *his bak*] W *omits.* *to bringe*] to putte W; & brouht I. *hym*] hem HW. *in fame*] to defame L; in default WH; in disclaundre V.

A *omits* ll. 75 and 76; H *puts them after* l. 77. 76. *To apeire*] To pare EW; And peired V. *hym*] *om.* W; hem H. *be*] with UI; in E. *I pursuide*] I persewed hym E, hem W; I haue pursued L; y preued (*error for per[s]ued* ?) H; I-punissched him V. *wel ofte*] ful ofte DVH; ofte UEIW; feole sithes L. 77. *And*] and als E; and eke Dg LH; *om.* WV; I haue A. *belowen*] yley on U; misloued E; apayryd I; ybulled H. *hym*] *om.* A; hem H. *lordis*] þe lord H. *don*] gar E; make VH. *hym*] hem H. *hym lese*] losse hys E. 78. *And*] To E; Tho A; *om.* WV; I H. *don*] gar E; mad L; I-don V; made H. *hise—hise*] here—here H. *ben*] to ben R. *þoruȝ*] with DAVH. *my*] his U. *tunge*] wordes L; talys EA.

79, 80. *Misplaced after* l. 83 in I. 79, 80, 81. *Misplaced after* l. 85 D; omitted LH. 81. *Omitted* I.

79. *gode happis*] godnes EA. *happis*] happ Dg WV. *greuide*] greuyth AV; greuen WI. *wel*] *om.* UIA; full EDWV. *sore*] ofte A. 80. *hym—meyne*] man & his meyne I; men & here mene A; him & his wyf W; men & yair wyffes E. *I haue*] *om.* R; haue I W. *mad wrappe*] wratthe made ofte R; mad ofte wratthe U; made striffe ofte E; maked wreche A. 81. *his—lif*] lymme & life Dg W; lyme & lith E; lyfe & leme A; his lyf and his leome V. *tunge*] wikkyd tonge A. 82. *Whanne*] And whan W; but when H. *mette*] mete I. *hym*] *om.* DW. *a*] *om.* RUDDg WLI; þe EAVH. *most*] so muche L. *hatide*] hate IVW. 83. *hailside*] heyld AV; hals W. *hym*] *om.* W. *as hendely*] so hendeliche L; hendely I; als frendly EWA. *Here* H *has a hole* (*roughly an inch in diameter*), *which breaks into four lines.* *as I*] so I L. *as—frend*] his frend as I V. 84. *He is*] He was A; But he was H. *He—þanne I*] Bot he yat is doghtyer E. *douȝtiere þanne I*] *hole in* H. *I dar*] durste R; I durste H. *no*] do W. *don hym*] him done L. *non—hym*] bede hym none harm H. 85. *Ac*] But Dg WLV; And E; *om.* A; ȝif H. *hadde I*] I hed E; y had had H. *maistrie*] þe maystrie W. *ȝ*] or REDg; opir U. *ȝ mist*] *om.* WI. *maistrie & miȝt*] *hole in* H. *wolde—hym*] wolde him mayme L; wold a dystroyed hym A; Morȝerde him V; hadde maymed hym H. 86. *come*] came DgA. *-e to þe chir-*] *hole in* H. *ȝ*] to WH. *knelide*] knele RUH<sub>2</sub>WLIVH; suld knele E. *to*] before RAV; afore U. 87. *To*] I LIA; And scholde V. *preye*] preyd A. *techip*] me techys RU; vs techep V; prechip H.



- Aftir þanne I criȝe on my knes þat crist gyue hym sorewe  
 þat bar a wey my bolle & my broken shete  
 Fro þe auter myn eiȝe I turne & beholde  
 91, 92 How heyne haþ a newe cote I wysshe it were myn howne  
 And of his lesinges I lauȝe þerof in myn herte  
 Ac of his wynnyng I wepe and weile þe tyme  
 95 I deme men þere þei don ille & ȝet I do wers  
 I wolde þat iche wiȝt were my knaue  
 And who so haþ more þanne I þat angriþ myn herte  
 þus I lyue loueles as a lyþer dogge  
 And al my brest bolniþ for bittir of my galle

*Between ll. 87 and 88 three MSS. insert a line:* For pilgrames for palmers for all  
 ye peple eftir EW; for all] & for A. 88. Aftir þanne] Aftir þat UW; Than  
 ELAVH; After D; & aftir I. I criȝe] crie I L; I prey U; bidde I H. Aftir—  
 knes] On my knes þan I cryed A. on] vppon V. on my knes] on mekely Dg; as  
 cof W; wiþ my mouþ H. I—knes] knelyd I vpon my knyȝs & praed E. þat] om.  
 RUE. crist] god·WA; oure lady RU. hym] hem RWLAVH; yaim E. 89. bar]  
 haþ I·bore V. bolle] blake bolle H<sub>2</sub>; bolles L. broken] brode RUV. shete] schetes  
 L. A reads: That brokyn my bolle & borne away my schete.

90. L omits this line. Fro] Than fro W; And also from E; Also to forne A.  
 myn—turne] y turne myn eiȝe UV; myn eyen down than I turne Dg; I turne me  
 H; my ene I turned E; ȝit myne eyne I turnyd A; I myn eien cast W. & beholde]  
 begins next line in EDgWLA; And beholdith Dg; and byholde heyne H; and  
 byhelde REA.

91, 92. Here are two lines in all MSS. but TH<sub>2</sub>D. howne] om. D. 91. heyne]  
 Hyk Dg; hoge I; haue W; he H; mony E. haþ] hed EA. a newe cote] new coteȝ E.  
 How—howne] And—cote DgEWA; y byholde byholde byhynde me on a newe  
 kote haue L; How—cote & his wyf anoyer IVH. 92. RU have: and al þe wele  
 þat he haþ greueþ me wel sore. In the eight remaining MSS. the following line, with  
 slight variations, occurs: Than I wische it war myn and al the webbe after DgIV.  
 Than] Anon W. I wische] wische y HL; I wissyd yat E; I wyschid A. it] yai E.  
 and] with E. webbe] webbeȝ E; his wele H. 93. And of] Of RUDgWLI AVH;  
 At E; And alwey after D. his] om. H<sub>2</sub>; yair E. lauȝe] smyle RU. þerof in] and  
 þerof lauȝeth RU; & light was E; it liketh DgIH; hit lightenes LW; a lytil in A;  
 hit likeþ me in V. myn] om. E. 94. Ac] And RH; om. EA; But DgWL. of  
 his] For yair E; for his WIVH. wepe] wepyd EA. weile] weylid A; werys E.  
 tyme] while LA. 95. men] om. W. þere þei] þere y U; þey LH; þat he W;  
 þat VIDg. ille] euylþ EDLH. I do] do y L. wers] wel worse VE. EA have two  
 lines here: And I deme in my hert at mony doys euyll, And ȝit I do me wel wers I  
 do me on my seluen E; I deme men in myne hert yat yai don ille, But ȝit I do  
 werse be dom of my selfe A.

96. DW omit. I] For I EVH. þat] om. L. iche] euerilke E; alle H. wiȝt]  
 wyȝe L; a wythe A; a wiht V; wiȝtes H. wolde—wiȝt] couet yat eueryman I. were]  
 wer becomon EI; in þis world were V; in world were H. knaue] knaues H. L  
 reads: weore my knaue in þis world wonyng. 97. And who so] And whas þat L;  
 And qwo yat I; Who þat W. haþ] haue A. þat] he L; it WAH; gretly E. angriþ]  
 greuyth A. 98. þus] Bot yus E; And þus WA. loueles] lawles E. as] lyk  
 RUEDdgWLI AVH. lyþer] luper V; lether EH; leother L; ledur A. 99. And]  
 þat RUEDgLI VH; Than W. al] om. I. bolniþ] Bolleþ VH. my—bolniþ] bolnyth  
 my breste U. bitter] bitternes E.

*Between ll. 99 and 100 W inserts two B lines:* I might not ete many ȝere as a man  
 sholde, For enue & euel will is ill to defe.

- 100 May no sugre ne swet þing swage it an vnche  
 Ne no dyapendyon dryue it fro myn herte  
 3if þat shrift shulde it shop a gret wondire  
 3is redily quaþ repentaunce & redde hym to goode  
 Sorewe for synne sauþ wel manye  
 105 I am sory quaþ enuye I am but selde opere  
 And þat makþ me so mad for I ne may me venge

100, 101. *The second halves of these lines have been transposed in VH, spoiling the metre; thus:* May—swete, dryue &c.: Ne no Diopendion aswagen &c.  
 100. *May]* yer may I; Ther is W. *ne]* ne no DA; no L. *ne—þing]* so swete WV. *swage]* may swage W; asswage DgIVH; swete R. *it]* me E. *an vnche]* on ynche E; vnneþe VH. 101. *dyapendyon]* diapendion REDgLI; dyapendron A; Diopendion V; diapenydion UW; dyapenidioun H<sub>2</sub>; diapenydyon D. *dryue]* drawe A. 102. *3if þat]* And 3if þat W; 3if RDIVH; And if EDgA; And þanne 3ef any L. *shrift]* schrit V. *it]* me I. *shop]* schepe D; stoppe EH<sub>2</sub>A; saue LI; þenne swopen out V; aswage H. *it shop]* om. RUW; aswage it H. *a—wondir]* hit were gret wonder REA; it were a gret wondir U; a gret wonder hit were V; nowe a wonder it were W; semed hit a gret wondur L; me thingith it were wondere I; wonder me þinkeþ H. 103. *3is]* A 3is A. *redily]* rede I E. *redde]* rede H<sub>2</sub>. *him]* hem W. *to goode]* to þe best H; ye best EA. 104. *Sorewe]* Oft sorwe W; And saide sorwe L. *for]* of her I; for his D; for heore VH. *synne]* synnes EDgIAV; synneþ H. *sauþ]* saue D. *wel]* ofte wel L; full EH; men ful V; om. A. *manye]* many on A. 105. *I]* And I Dg. *am but]* am Dg; nam but WH; ne am but V. *selde]* seldom UEWA; seldom Dg; seilden L; seldyn I; seldene V. *opere]* yer E. *Between ll. 105 and 106 A inserts:* Also wilde in hert & pensyue in hert & thouth. 106. *And]* om. U. *þat]* om. L. *so]* om. EW. *mad]* mate DgI. *for]* om. W; þat LA. *ne may me]* no may me L; may me not W; may not A. *venge]* avengyn I.

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