

If we inquire more closely as to the leading forms of satire which this interesting poem embodies, we may note them as political, social and religious, with special emphasis upon the last form. The author was living in the time of the French and English wars. John, Duke of Lancaster, was in conflict with the Commons. The Wars of Normandy, the murder of Edward II., the imprisonment and deposition of Richard II., the death of Edward III., and the famous Wat Tyler's Rebellion were matters of contemporaneous history. In a word, it was the old struggle between the aristocracy and the commonalty; between the tyranny of kings and classes and the natural rights of man as man. Langlande's poem bristles with satirical allusions to these great events, never failing to champion the cause of the people and to insist that the next best government to theocracy is a true democracy.

So, in the line of social sarcasm, this humble dreamer is quick to see and rebuke every form of caste and rank and "high degree." From his innermost English soul he abhorred all parade of birth and wealth and even learning, and enjoyed nothing more keenly than to expose to ridicule all self-assumed importance. He would say no "God save you" to any one who demanded it on the ground of a supposed superiority. While, as a loyal citizen and subject, he kept safely within the pale of English law, he called no man master and bowed the knee to God only.

It was, however, within the sphere of moral and religious life that his satire was the sharpest and the most effective, as it was most needed and most frequently provoked. Hence, his insistence upon truth and purity, upon solid worth against all pretense; upon honesty of method and aim; upon justice to the poor and friendless. Especially in the domain of theology and ecclesiastical life, did he vent his indignation against haughty prelates and time-serving officials; against superstition and blatant error, against a worldly-minded clergy, forgetful of their curacies; most of all, against the revolting friars of his day who, for the sake of a few florins, would explain away any article of the creed. Nothing within the scope of English irony is more pointed and trenchant than his well-deserved allusions to these well-fed and indolent hirelings, who sought to fleece the flock over which they were appointed, and thought more of "bely-joye" than of aught else. Some of these references it may not be amiss to cite:

"Pilgrymes and palmers, pihted hem to gidere
To seke seynt James,
And hadden leve to lye, al here lyf after."

"I fonde there Freris, alle the foure ordres
Preched the peple, for profit of hem-selven
Glosed the gospel, as hem good lyked."

Of the civil and ecclesiastical lawyers, he writes in the bitterest terms.