

**TWENTY-SIX POLITICAL AND  
OTHER POEMS (INCLUDING  
'PETTY JOB'); FROM THE OXFORD  
MSS. DIGBY 102 AND DOUCE  
322. PART I**

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Twenty-Six Political and other Poems (including 'Petty Job'); from the Oxford mss. Digby 102 and Douce 322. Part I by J. Kail

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**J. KAIL**

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PART I.

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DIGBY 102 AND DOUCE 322.

EDITED,  
WITH INTRODUCTION AND GLOSSARIAL INDEX,  
By DR. J. KAIL.

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## INTRODUCTION.

THE first twenty-four poems of the present volume are preserved in the Digby MS. 102, of the Bodleian. This MS., a parchment codex of the 15th century, contains: 1. W. Langland's Vision concerning Piers the Ploughman and concerning Dowel, Dobet, and Dobest, leaves 1-97, imperfect at the beginning, commencing in the middle of *passus* III. The text agrees with the C-text printed by the Rev. W. Skeat. 2. The present poems, composed in the first quarter of the 15th century, leaves 98-127. 3. A metrical paraphrase of the seven Penitential Psalms by Richard of Maydestone, leaves 128-135. 4. The debate of the Body and the Soul, leaves 136-139. The present pieces are written across the page like prose, the divisions of the lines being only marked by little strokes. The titles in red were added at a later time, but probably by the same copyist; the same is the case with the paragraph-marks, alternately red and blue, at the beginning of every stanza, and with the Latin marginal notes which occur on some pages. Leaf 119 was turned over together with leaf 120, and so the titles and the coloured paragraph-marks are missing in the 19th and 20th poems, which stand on leaf 119, back, and on leaf 120.

All twenty-four poems are most probably by the same author. Almost all of them have one and the same religious character. They warn against worldly folly, and praise virtue, always setting a great value on the works of a man, but none on his words. They frequently recommend righteousness for practical reasons. During the turbulent reign of Henry IV., and in the beginning of the French war under Henry V., the poems promise the virtuous, besides the bliss of heaven, success in worldly affairs, riches, power, and good advice. In time of war, the pious may rely on God, for He fights for them, He gives them courage and victory, and beats their enemies with illness, fear, and woe. (II 75; III 76, 85, 95, 109 *et seq.*; IX 141 *et seq.*; X 180 *et seq.*; XI 53 *et seq.*, 81 *et seq.*, 91 *et seq.*; XVII 127.) The wicked are threatened with cowardice,

viii *The Poems are democratic, and denounce all Wrong-doing.*

dread, strife, and defeat (II 73 *et seq.*; III 75, 77; IV 195 *et seq.*; XI 84; XIII 86).

Further, the pieces show one and the same democratic tendency. They declare the Commons to be the most important of all estates; the Commons make a kingdom (III 99 *et seq.*), they support the honour of the lords and of the church, they are the ornament of the king's crown (XII 141 *et seq.*); to stand with them, is the highest charity, which God alone can reward (XIII 33 *et seq.*). The poems strive also to protect the lower ranks against the encroachments of the lords and officers, especially against the injustice of the judges. The laws had already been very badly executed in the last years of Edward III.; under Richard II. they lost the rest of their power; and it was long before Henry IV. succeeded in restoring them to their former authority. In his reign, too, the judges, instead of binding themselves to the old laws and statutes, took bribes, and were led by favour and self-interest; and the nobility often used oppression against the inferior classes, and took their property with wrong. The present pieces call upon the judges to be just, and not to sell their judgments for money (I 153 *et seq.*; III 12; IX 57 *et seq.*; XVIII 180). Officers are warned that the people belong to God, and that He has ordered them to govern it after right and reason, and without selfishness (I 17 *et seq.*; III 129 *et seq.*; XIII 51 *et seq.*). The nobility are reminded that they will have to account for everything they possess, and for the means by which they got it; therefore, they are exhorted to let everybody have his due, and to restore to the poor the goods of which they have robbed them surreptitiously (I 25 *et seq.*, 33, 117; VII 81 *et seq.*; VIII 3 *et seq.*; X 197 *et seq.*; XI 42; XIV 59, 66; XVII 83 *et seq.*; XIX 37, 58 *et seq.*; 149 *et seq.*).

The poems aim also at such persons as injure the people indirectly by defacing truth, by flattering the king and the lords, and by misleading them, by their counsel, to bad actions. They contain many a line in defence of truth, and to the suppression of falsehood. They like to represent Truth and Falsehood as persons always persecuting and fighting each other (IV 12, 113; XII 67 *et seq.* 73; XIII 30, 100, 103 *et seq.*). Truth never retires cowardly (III 5; IV 157; XII 74), for God sends His champion Vengeance to his help (IV 115, 117 *et seq.*; XII 77 *et seq.*; XIII 85 *et seq.*). Truth cannot be entirely subdued; he always appears again, and speaks before the whole people (IV 97-104; XII 76; XIII 59). Many of these pieces caution against those who, practising sycophancy, sow discord between the