

**PIERCE THE
PLOUGHMANS CREDE
(ABOUT 1394 A.D.)**

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Pierce the Ploughmans Crede (About 1394 A.D.) by Walter W. Skeat

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WALTER W. SKEAT

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PLOUGHMANS CREDE
(ABOUT 1394 A.D.)**

Pierce the Ploughmans Crede

(ABOUT 1384 A.D.)

TRANSCRIBED AND EDITED FROM MS. TRIN. COLL., CAM., R. S. 15,
COLLATED WITH MS. BIBL. REG. 18. B. XVII IN THE BRITISH
MUSEUM, AND WITH THE OLD PRINTED TEXT OF 1855;

TO WHICH IS APPENDED

God spede the Plough

(ABOUT 1500 A.D.)

FROM MS. LANSDOWNE 702:

BY THE

REV. WALTER W. SKEAT, M.A.,

LATE FELLOW OF CHRIST'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE; AND EDITOR OF "LANGLAND'S VISION
OF PIERCE PLOWMAN," "LANCELOT OF THE LAKE," AND "THE ROMANCE OF PARTENAY."

LONDON:

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MDCCLXXVII.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE.
<p>PREFACE. § 1. The present a <i>new</i> edition. § 2. Description of the editions. I. By Wolfe (1553); II. By Owen Rogers (1561); III. By Dr Whitaker (1814); IV. By Mr Wright (1832); reprinted in 1856. § 3. Investigation of the MS. in the Brit. Museum. § 4. The Trinity MS. § 5. Results. § 6. Restoration of the original text. § 7. Printed in long lines. § 8. Some account of the poem. § 9. Books for consultation. § 10. The rise of the Mendicant Orders. § 11. Date of the poem. § 12. The author. § 13. The "Complaint of the Ploughman," or "Plowman's Tale." § 14. Dates of both poems. § 15. Fine passages in the poem. § 16. The five new lines now first printed. § 17. Glossary to the edition of 1553</p>	i—xix
<p>PIERCE THE PLOUGHMANS CREDE</p>	1
<p>Notes to the "Crede"</p>	33
<p>Glossarial Index</p>	56
<p>Index of Names</p>	68
<p>GOD SPEDE THE PLOUGH</p>	69
<p>Notes to "God spede the plough"</p>	73
<p>Glossarial Index</p>	75

Vertical line of text, possibly a page number or header, located on the left side of the page.

PREFACE.

DESCRIPTION OF FORMER EDITIONS, AND OF THE MSS.

§ 1. THE present edition of "Pierce the Ploughmans Crede" may fairly be said to be almost entirely a *new* one; the *Text* being new throughout, as is also a large part both of the Notes and Glossary. In order to explain whence this new text is derived, it will be proper to give, first of all, an account of former editions.

§ 2. I. The *first* edition, and the most important, is that of 1553. The title-page contains solely the words "Pierce the Ploughmans Crede" within a square space in the midst of a wood-cut illustrating the story of Pyramus and Thisbe; the picture being by no means unsuitable for Chaucer's version of the poem. The wood-cut is clearly of continental workmanship, and a copy of the lower part of it, not very well executed, may be seen at p. 96 of "A book of Roxburghe Ballads," edited by J. P. Collier; 1847. The colophon, on a separate leaf, is—IMPRINTED AT LONDON BY REYNOLD WOLFE, ANNO DOMINI M.D.LIII. It was no doubt issued owing to the success of "The Vision of Piers Ploughman," which had been printed by Robert Crowley, in 1550; and considering the tone of the poem, we may safely conclude that it was issued in the early part of the year 1553, while Edward VI. was still alive; for he died on the 6th of July in that year. The reign of Mary was not favourable to its existence, and copies are now very scarce.¹ I have made use of a copy preserved in the Cambridge University Library, and readings

¹ See account of the *third* edition.

from this are denoted in the foot-notes by the letter C. It contains only 16 leaves, 4to.

II. Elizabeth having succeeded Mary, the poem was at her request. The title-page of the *second* edition has on it the words "Pierce the Ploughmans Crede," and no more, the words having disappeared. It was printed at the same time as "The Tale of Pierce Plowman," and often bound up with it; and we learn from the title-page of the longer poem that it was "Imprinted at London by Owen Rogers, dwelling neare unto great Saint Bartelmew at the sygne of the spred Egle. ¶ The yere of our Lorde thousand, fyue hundred, threscore and one. The .xxi. daye Moneth of Februarye."¹ This edition of 1561 is simply a reprint of that of 1553, and clearly not copied from the MS. It repeats the misprints of the first edition, and adds more to the number and is therefore considerably inferior to it.

III. In 1814, Dr Whitaker reprinted the first edition of the poem. His object was clearly to produce an *exact* copy of it, and he accordingly used black-letter type and such various marks of contrast as appeared in the old book. It may be considered as a great improvement as it accurately reproduces every peculiarity, every misprint, every stop and mark; so that any one who wishes to have a good copy of the first edition may safely buy this instead, at a lower price.² I have carefully collated these two, and here are the few corrections which any one who buys Whitaker's should make.

In the address "to the Reader," last line, the *J* should be *I*.
Fol. C ij, l. 5 from bottom, the words "more money" are the oldest edition, run together into one.

Fol. D ij, l. 15; for "swich" read "swhich."

Fol. D ij, *back*, l. 7; for "swich" read "swhich."

Id. l. 21; for "And" read "Any."

¹ The "Crede" has also a colophon, agreeing with this, but which I do not give the date.

² The title-page bears—"Pierce the Ploughman's Crede. London. 1814. by T. Bensley, Bolt Court, Fleet Street, for Lackington, Allen and Co., Strand; and Robert Triphook, St James's Street. 1814.

Fol. D iij, l. 10; for "laiche" read "latche;" though the *t* in the old edition is very indistinct.

Fol. E j, l. 13; for "feid" read "feid."

Fol. E ij, *back*, l. 3 from bottom; for "Abbots" read "Abbottes."

Fol. E iij, l. 13, read "hōly;" in Whitaker's edition the stroke is shifted, and appears above the *l*.

These corrections made, the sole points of difference are, (1.) that the folios do not correspond; (2.) that the words printed in the *margin* of the old edition are printed by Dr Whitaker in large red letters, to receive which he has made breaks in the continuous text; and (3.) that Dr Whitaker employs *red* letters for the proper names. I should add, that all three editions have a short glossary at the end, made apparently by Reynold Wolfe, for which see p. xix.

IV. Mr Wright, in 1832, reprinted the "Crede" at the end of his excellent and handy edition of the "Vision," the publisher being William Pickering; of which a second and revised edition appeared in 1856, published by J. R. Smith, at a very moderate price. Mr Wright corrected most of the more obvious mistakes, so that his edition is very good and useful, and has been of very great service to me, and I here express the obligations to him which I thus lie under. It is therefore with no wish to detract from it, but only for the reader's information, that I here state that I have observed several misprints in it which are mere printer's errors, but where the edition of 1553 is quite correct. Thus at p. 456, l. 182, "Slaughte *in* her ende" should be "Slaughte *is* her ende;" ten lines lower, "Put" should be "But;" and fourteen lines lower still, "Minorities" should be "Minorites." I am of course speaking of his revised edition, and I am induced to believe that the revision of the "Crede" may have been somewhat hurried, as I have observed no such traces of haste in the "Vision."

§ 3. Besides the help thus afforded, we are much indebted to Mr Wright for the following sentence in his Introduction. He says, "I know only of two MSS. of the Creed of Piers Ploughman, one in the British Museum (MS. Reg. 18 B. xvii.), the other in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge, both on paper, and written long after the date of the printed editions, from which they appear to have been