

UCSD Library receives half-millionth volume

May 24, 1968

The goal of a multi-million volume library is closer to reality for the University of California, San Diego, now that the library has reached the 500,000-volume step.

The half-millionth book, *The Vision of Pierce Plowman*, was purchased by the Friends of the Library. It will be presented to Chancellor John S. Galbraith and University Librarian Melvin J. Voigt by Elliott L. Cushman, president of the Friends, and Dr. Francis M. Smith, chairman of the Friends' Acquisitions Committee, at a special ceremony at 4:00 p.m. on Monday, June 3, in the Central Library. All interested persons are invited to attend.

This copy of *The Vision of Pierce Plowman* (usually known as *Piers Plowman*), printed in London by Roberte Crowlye in 1550, is a first edition. It is listed by the Grolier Club of New York as one of the 100 most important books in English literature.

Piers Plowman is an English allegorical poem of the 14th century, written in unrhymed verse, and commonly ascribed by scholars to William Langland. The poem belongs to a common medieval literary type, the dream-vision, and tells of a series of visions or dreams of the hero, Piers Plowman, sincere follower of truth.

The main value of this work is that it contains a detailed and trustworthy picture of the life and social conditions of England in the second half of the 14th century.

William Langland (1332-1400?), the probable author, was born at Ledbury in the western Midlands near the Welsh Marches. He was a contemporary of Chaucer, though virtually unknown during his own time. Legend has it that he worked for more than 30 years on his *Plowman*, which was his one great joy in life.

The printer, Roberte Crowlye (1518?-1588), was known as both a printer and reformer. As a typographer, he is best known for his three impressions of *Pierce Plowman* and the early printing of Welsh books. He was also the author of two popular books.

There are three distinct states of impressions of the first edition of *Pierce Plowman*. The first had the wrong date of 1505 and so it was quickly "nowe the seconde tyme imprinted" in the same year of 1550. Not long thereafter, the spelling was modernized and the third state appeared. All three states of the first edition are extremely rare, but the second state appears to be the most rare of all, with only two copies known in England and two in the Americas—one at the Newberry Library in Chicago and the copy given to the UCSD Library.

The Friends of the Library has presented the library, from time to time, with very fine volumes and sets which cannot be normally purchased with public funds but which are needed in a well-rounded research library. As individuals, many Friends have donated collections, volumes, money, time and their membership dues which make purchases like *The Vision of Pierce Plowman* possible.