Shelved in the Royal Collection of the British Library is a massive, four volume encyclopedia, which titles itself immodestly but only slightly inaccurately *Omne Bonum*.

KICKING THE HABIT:  
THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE FRIARS IN A  
FOURTEENTH-CENTURY ENCYCLOPEDIA  

Penn Szittya

Written in England between 1360 and 1375, in the generation of Geoffrey Chaucer and William Langland, its four volumes contain over one thousand three hundred and fifty articles. They are written on over 1100 parchment folios, 2200 pages, each measuring 18 by 12 inches, that is, large enough so that each octavo gathering constitutes the skin of a single sheep. It would have taken 140 head of sheep to provide the skins for this ambitious and ostentatiously expensive project.

Some of the illuminations in this encyclopedia are quite spectacular. The book begins with a series of three sumptuous paintings connected with the Beatific Vision of God. The first illustrates the Instruments of the Passion, the *Arma Christi*, such as the spear, sponge, crown of thorns, dice, forceps, flails, wounds (Fig. 1).

In that respect, this painting is only a preface to the next page, which shows the vision of God experienced by Saints Benedict and Paul, who in turn are adored by a secular man and woman in the panel below (Fig. 2).

1. British Library Royal 6 E VI and 6 E VII.
2. BL Royal 6 E VI, fol. 15, reproduced by courtesy of the British Library.
3. BL Royal 6 E VI, fol. 16, reproduced by courtesy of the British Library.
Fig. 1. The Instruments of the Passion, the *Arma Christi*. 