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# JOHN WICKLIF



BY

W. L. WATKINSON.



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JOHN WICKLIF.

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*Engraved by H. Cook*

JOHN WICKLIF.

# JOHN WICKLIF.

BY THE

REV. W. L. WATKINSON,

AUTHOR OF "MISTAKEN SIGNS," ETC.



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## PREFACE.



THE principal authorities in Wickliffe literature have been duly consulted in the preparation of this sketch of the great Reformer's life and labours, but the writer's debt to Vaughan, and especially to Lechler, is manifest on every page. It is pleasing to know that Vaughan's work on this subject, after long neglect, is being so warmly appreciated by competent critics. All with leisure ought, at once, to make themselves familiar with Lechler's masterly and suggestive biography.







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# JOHN WICKLIF.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE ENGLISH CHURCH PRIOR TO WICKLIF.

URING the Roman occupation of our island the British inhabitants first received the Gospel. The greatest uncertainty prevails as to the beginnings of that Christianity among our forefathers which has since flourished so vigorously and so gloriously. All the dahlias in Europe are the descendants of a few seeds which Humboldt gathered on the table-land of Mexico and sent in a letter to Lady Holland, from whose gardens they have been so widely distributed that there is now scarcely a garden unadorned with them. So the immortal seed of Gospel truth sown in the unpromising soil of Britain quickly took root and spread; for when the Roman domination of the island came to an end the Britons had already for the most part been converted to Christianity, but what hand sowed

the first golden germs of the world-filling harvest is altogether unknown.

In the middle of the fifth century, the Angles, Jutes, and Saxons, all sea-going tribes of lower Germany, effected a conquest of the land, and drove back the Celtic inhabitants to its western borders. These German races, when they established themselves in the country, were entirely ignorant of the Gospel. They brought with them the old German Paganism, they drove back the British population and Christianity along with it, and stamped again upon the land, as far as they might, a heathen impress. At the end of the sixth century, at the instance of Gregory the Great, a completely organized Christian mission arrived in the island; and within the comparatively brief period of less than a hundred years this mission accomplished the result of carrying over to Christianity the whole of the related kingdoms of the Saxon heptarchy.

This mission to the Saxons had been sent forth from Rome, and the Anglo-Saxon Church was, so to speak, a Roman colony; its whole Church order received the impress of the Church of Rome, and in particular the government of the Church was placed in the hands of the Bishops, who in their turn were dependent upon the See of Rome. The old British Church, which was under no subjection to the Bishops of Rome and whose spirit was entirely independent and national, had, however, never ceased to exist in certain remote parts of the land, and although the missionaries of Gregory soon attained ascendancy over the native Church, the exclusive domination of

the Romish See was never established. The British Church made its influence felt in the Anglo-Saxon, and a certain spirit of Church independence developed itself at an early period among the Anglo-Saxon people. The connection of Saxon England with Rome throughout was friendly but not servile; English kings went on pilgrimage to Rome, but did not sink into Papal thralls; the best and greatest of all the Heptarchical monarchs, Oswald of Northumberland, was the convert not of missionaries from Rome, but of evangelists from Iona. The great Alfred and his congenial successors, Edward, Athelstan and Edgar, though on friendly terms with the Roman See, upheld the English Church in much independence. The free, insular, national spirit of the old British ecclesiastical constitution was never quenched during the Saxon period, neither indeed has it ever been quenched since. The Icelandic proverb says: "The stepmother never takes the child so entirely to her bosom but its feet hang out." England has never been more than stepmother to the Roman Church; the genius of the two is profoundly contradictory; and although Rome has clung closely to us and the country at times has pressed the alien to its breast, yet the feet have ever hung out, the warmest embrace has not been altogether full and genuine. As the historian writes: "Through England's whole course there has not been wanting a certain harmony of feeling and a certain unity of action with regard to the Papacy. All along she has been in a measure anti-papal. During her connection with the Roman Church, she showed herself

the resentful victim, the impatient tributary and the resolute combatant of the Roman See. While acknowledging the authority of the chief of Christendom, she abhorred the arrogance, resisted the exactions, and restrained the usurpations of the foreign potentate. English rulers sometimes crouched before Rome ; an English king degraded his crown beneath the triple crown. But the English nation never partook the degradation, ever disdained the Roman livery ; and English Parliaments embodied the anti-papal jealousy of the English people in trenchant and restraining statutes.”\*

The Norman Conquest immensely increased the Papal influence in our land. The comparative independence of Saxon England was not pleasing to Rome, and the Norman invasion was a Papal invasion. The Pope Alexander II. sent Duke William, for use in his enterprise, a consecrated banner of St. Peter. The Duke was to carry it on board his own ship. With the conquest of England by the Normans, Rome hoped to make a conquest for herself, and not without reason. The Normans were enthusiastically devoted to the Church and the Pope, and from the moment of the conquest the bond between Rome and the English Church was drawn incomparably closer than it had ever been under the Saxon dynasty. The Papacy shared the spoils of vanquished England with its Norman confederate, and fixed upon the English Church a yoke more disastrous than the yoke which William fastened

\* Gill, *The Papal Drama*.



JOHN AND THE POPE'S LEGATE.





upon the English nation. The Roman See continued to push its influence in the subjugated land until its power culminated in the reign of John. On May 15, 1213, King John surrendered his kingdom, in favour of the Apostles Peter and Paul and the Church of Rome, into the hands of Innocent III. and his successors. The surrendered crown was immediately restored by the Pope's legate, but not before the base King had taken for himself and his successors in all due form the oath of fealty to the Pope as his liege lord, and bound himself to pay an annual tribute of 1,000 marks sterling, in addition to the usual Peter's pence. Thereby England became literally a portion of the Church-State, the King a vassal of the Pope, and the Pope liege lord and sovereign of England.

But from the moment when King John made over to the Papal See a feudal supremacy in England, the moral influence of the Papacy began to decline. The English nobility, feeling keenly the humiliation, flew to arms, and wrested from the miserable King the Great Charter of the nation's liberties. The poet reminds us: "In the heart of the darkest midnight is a budding to-morrow;" and out of the deep night of John's ignoble reign broke forth the fair dawn of a golden day. The nation at large felt bitterly the extortionate and unscrupulous conduct of Rome, and a vigorous warfare was inaugurated against the Papal extortions and encroachments. The spirit of the people was deeply religious, and there existed a true loyalty to the Church; but the nation with ever-increasing

determination resisted the pride and covetousness of the Romish Court, and more and more freed itself from that debasing and exhaustive domination.

Great magnetic storms periodically sweep through the earth, and the telegraphic wires register the power and direction of these electrical waves ; so ever and anon great movements take place in the heart of nations, and in men of a peculiar quality and character these profound yet subtle agitations find expression and registration. From time to time in the period now under consideration representative men arose, who at once expressed and intensified the spirit of the times, and accelerated the movement against Rome. One of the most remarkable of these precursors of Wicklif was Robert Grossetête, Bishop of Lincoln. This famous churchman was born in 1175 and studied in Oxford, in which city he resided for many years. In 1235 he was advanced to the bishopric of Lincoln. Grossetête was a richly gifted, many-sided man. It is an accepted opinion in some quarters that religion is unfriendly to science, and that science has been cultivated only without the Church ; but some of the earliest, as many of the noblest, students of nature prosecuted their delightful task within the shadow of the altar. Grossetête was one of these consecrated scientists. Roger Bacon said of him : " The Bishop of Lincoln was the only man living who was in possession of all the sciences." But science and scholarship were not the highest characteristics of this prelate—his

crowning distinction was his godly solicitude and care for souls. He could not brook the many ecclesiastical evils of his day, and his episcopal career was an almost unbroken succession of collisions and conflicts with the Papacy. His conflicts with the hierarchy arose from his uprightness of spirit. He might have said with the dramatist,

“Who can behold such prodigies as these,  
And have his lips seal'd up? Not I; my soul  
Was never ground into such oily colours,  
To flatter vice and daub iniquity.”

His last and highest aim was the good of souls, and with great conscientiousness and courage did he pursue his sublime convictions, contending with Abbot, Pope or King.

Grossetête's whole views, religious and ecclesiastical, are to be seen in their purest and truest expression in a Memorial, in which he set down all his complaints concerning the disorders of the Church of his time, and which he submitted in a personal audience to the Pope. The occasion of the memorial was this. The practice of transferring Church revenues into the possession of monasteries, &c., had been carried so far that the parochial churches were seriously impoverished. The parish lands were no longer in a condition to secure a living to the parish priest. The consequence was that a priest could no longer reside on the spot—the parish was spiritually orphanized. In his later years, Bishop Grossetête observed in his visitations that this evil was always on the increase, and he

set himself to resist it. He fought with monks and monasteries for the maintenance of the Church lands in their integrity, and, regardless of his advanced age, made a journey to Lyons to lay the matter before the Pope.

The Memorial he laid before the Pope gave expression to all that was in his heart. It is full of earnest moral zeal, and of fearless frankness of speech. Grossetête begins with the observation that "zeal for the salvation of souls—the sacrifice most well-pleasing to God—had brought down to earth and humiliation the eternal Son of God, the Lord of Glory. By the ministry of His Apostles and the pastors appointed by them, among whom, above all others, the Pope bears the image of Christ, and acts as His representative, the kingdom of God came, and the house of God was made full. But at the present day, alas! the Church of Christ is sorely diminished and narrowed; unbelief prevails in the greatest part of the world; Christ has had for ages to complain, 'Woe is me, for I am as when they have gathered the summer fruits, as the grape-gleanings of the vintage. There is no cluster to eat; my soul desired the first ripe fruit. The good man is perished out of the earth, and there is none upright among men.'

"But what is the cause of this hopeless fall of the Church? Unquestionably the diminution in the number of good shepherds, and the circumscription of the pastoral authority and power. Bad pastors are everywhere the cause of unbelief, division, heresy, and vice. It is they who scatter the flock

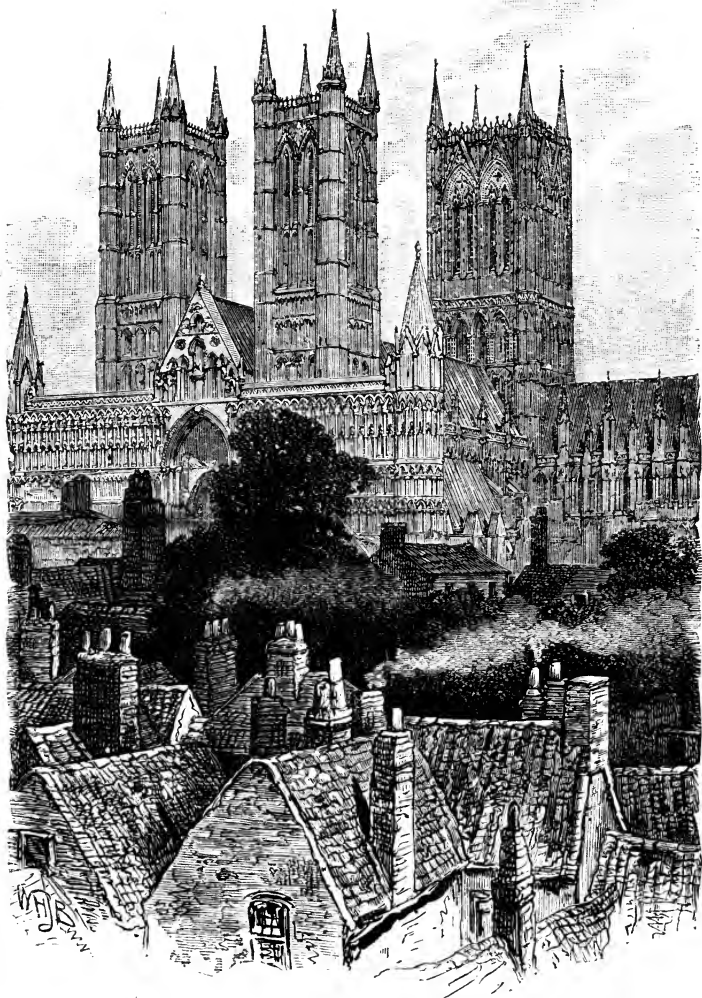
of Christ, who lay waste the vineyard of the Lord, and desecrate the earth. No wonder, for they preach not the Gospel of Christ with that living word which comes forth from living zeal for the salvation of souls, and is confirmed by an example worthy of Jesus Christ ; and to this they add every possible form of transgression,—their pride is ever on the increase ; and so are their avarice, luxury, and extravagance ; and because the life of the shepherds is a lesson to the laity, they become thus the teachers of all error and all evil. Instead of being a light of the world, they spread around, by their godless example, the thickest darkness and the icy coldness of death.

“But what, again, is the cause of this evil? I tremble to speak of it, and yet I dare not keep silence. The cause and source of it is the Roman See itself! Not only because it fails to put a stop to these evils as it can and should, but still more because, by its dispensations, provisions, and collations, it appoints evil shepherds, thinking therein only of the living which it is able to provide for a man, and, for the sake of that, handing over many thousands of souls to eternal death. He who commits the care of a flock to a man in order that the latter may get the milk and the wool, while he is unable or unwilling to guide, to feed, and protect the flock, such an one gives over the flock itself to death as a prey. That be far from him who is the representative of Christ! He who so sacrifices the pastoral office is a persecutor of Christ in His members. And let no one say that such

pastors can still save the flock by the ministry of middlemen. For among these middlemen many are themselves hirelings who flee when the wolf cometh.

“Besides, the cure of souls consists not only in the dispensation of the sacraments and in the reading of masses, but in the true teaching of the word of life, in rebuking and correcting vice; and besides all this, in feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, lodging the strangers, visiting the sick and the prisoners—especially among the parish priest’s own parishioners—in order, by such deeds of charity, to instruct the people in the holy exercises of active life; and to do such deeds is not at all in the power of these middlemen, for they get so small a portion of the Church’s goods that they have scarcely enough to live upon. In the midst of such evils men might still have the consolation of hoping that possibly successors might follow who would better fulfil the pastor’s calling. But when parish churches are made over to monasteries, these evils are made perpetual. All such things end not in the up-building, but the destruction of the Church. God defend that even the Holy See and its possessor should act against Christ, and thereby incur the guilt of apostasy and division.”

In conclusion, Grossetête invokes the Holy See to put a stop to all disorders of this character, and especially to put a check upon the excesses of its own courtiers, of which there were loud enough complaints, to leave off the unevangelical practice



LINCOLN CATHEDRAL.





of using the interposition of the sword, and to root out the notorious corruption of the Papal Court. It was to be feared that the Holy See, unless it reformed itself without delay, would draw upon itself the heaviest judgments — yea, destruction itself. The Holy Father would not interpret as presumption what the author of this Memorial had ventured to lay before him in all devotion and humility, under many misgivings and tears, and out of a longing desire to see a better state of things.

This noble protest against the wickedness of the age was not favourably received at the Papal Court, and Grossetête returned home greatly disheartened. The Bishop, however, soon recovered himself, and from that day forward acted only with all the more emphasis, and with all the less reference to the Pope and the Crown. His visitation of convents and parish churches was taken up again with, if possible, still greater strictness than before. Unworthy pastors were set aside, and in all places where there was need for it he appointed vicars in their room. In Parliament his voice carried with it decisive weight. In a letter of 1252, which he addressed to the nobles of the realm, to the citizens of London, and to the “community” of England, he expressed himself strongly enough on the subject of the illegal encroachments of the Apostolic See, by which the country was drained.

But in the year of his death there occurred an incident which raised the name of the Bishop of Lincoln to the highest celebrity. Pope Innocent IV. had conferred upon one of his grandsons, Frederick

of Lavagna, a canonry in the Cathedral of Lincoln, and taken steps to have him immediately invested with it by a cardinal. From Perugia, on January 26, 1253, an apostolic brief was addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury, with the distinct injunction to put the young man before named, in the person of his proxy, into actual possession of that dignity and living. In case any one should oppose himself to the carrying out of this injunction, either by word or deed, the Pope authorized his agents to call any such person immediately before them, so as within two months he should appear in person before the Pope and answer for himself. Of course it was not intended that this young Italian should reside in England, and accomplish duty in Lincoln Cathedral; he was to remain on the Continent invested with the dignity and receiving the salary of the canonry in Lincoln. The Bishop of Lincoln, now eighty years of age, with all the energy which a sense of right springing from the holy feeling of duty inspires, stood forward to object to the proceeding, and to withstand it; and the document in which he couched his opposition had not only an electric effect upon the English nation at the time, but its influence continued to be felt for centuries afterwards, and more than all his learning—more than all the services of his long, active, and fruitful life—it made the name of the God-fearing, upright, and inflexible man popular and illustrious. “He declared the command to instal this grandson of the Pope was not an apostolical one, inasmuch as it

was in contradiction to the teaching of the Apostles and of Christ Himself. It was also totally irreconcilable with apostolic holiness. It was also a thing entirely unapostolic and unevangelical, abhorred by Christ Himself, and in the eyes of men nothing less than a sin of murder, when men's souls, which should be brought unto life and salvation by means of the pastoral office, are destroyed by being deceived and defrauded in the matter of that very office. And this is what is done, when those who are appointed to a pastoral charge only use the milk and the wool of the sheep to satisfy their own bodily necessities, but have no wish or purpose to fulfil the ministry of their office for the eternal salvation of the sheep of Christ." The installation of the Pope's grandson into the canonry and prebend of Lincoln came to nothing.

Lechler thus assigns to Grossetête a place in history: "As Protestants, we have both a right and a duty to hold in honour the memory of a man like Grossetête. His creed, indeed, was not the pure confession of the Evangelical Churches; but his fear of God was so earnest and upright, his zeal for the glory of God was so glowing, his care for the salvation of his own soul and of the souls committed to him by virtue of his office was so conscientious, his faithfulness so approved, his will so energetic, his mind so free from man-fearing and man-pleasing, his bearing so inflexible and beyond the power of corruption, that his whole character constrains us to the sincerest and deepest veneration. When, in addition, we take into view how

high a place he assigned to the Holy Scriptures, to the study of which, in the University of Oxford, he assigned the first place as the most fundamental of all studies, and which he recognizes as the only infallible guiding-star of the Church ; when we remember with what power and persistency, and without any respect of persons, he stood forward against so many abuses in the Church, and against every defection from the true ideal of Church-life ; when we reflect that he finds the highest wisdom to stand in this—‘to know Jesus Christ, and Him crucified’—it is certainly not saying too much when we signalize him as a venerable witness to the truth, as a churchman who fulfilled the duty which he owed to his own age, and in so doing lived for all ages ; and who, through his whole career, gave proofs of his zeal for a sound reformation of the Church’s life.”

A man of kindred spirit to Grossetête, though differing from him in important points, was Henry of Bracton, a younger contemporary of the celebrated Bishop of Lincoln ; and just as Grossetête as a practical churchman resisted the encroachments of the Roman Court, so Bracton, the greatest English lawyer in the Middle Ages, resisted the same innovations. As we have already remarked, the sentiment of popular freedom at this period grew fast in the nation, the action of the Italian hierarchy was regarded with jealousy, and legislation was steadily directed against the undue influence of foreigners upon public affairs. The deepening sentiment of national unity and freedom immediately

expressed itself when Boniface VIII. attempted to interfere with the measures of the King, Edward I., against Scotland, as he had done a few years before in the transactions between England and France. In a bull, dated June 27, 1299, Boniface not only asserted his direct supremacy over the Scottish Church as a Church independent of England, but also put himself forward, without ceremony, as arbiter of the claims which Edward I. was then advancing to the Scottish Crown. "If Edward asserted any right whatever to the kingdom of Scotland, or any part thereof, let him send his plenipotentiaries with the necessary documents to the Apostolic See; the matter will be decided there in a manner agreeable to right."

These assumptions the King resisted, and in so doing found the most determined assistance in the spirit of the country itself. He laid the matter, with the necessary papers, before his Parliament, which met in Lincoln on January 20, 1301, and the representatives of the kingdom took the side of their King without reserve. The nobles of the realm sent, February 12, 1301, a reply to that demand of Boniface VIII., in which they repelled, in the most emphatic manner, the attempted encroachment. No fewer than 104 earls and barons, who all gave their names at the beginning of the document, and sealed it with their seals at the end, declared in it, not only in their own name, but also for the whole community of England, "that they could feel nothing but astonishment at the unheard-of pretensions contained in the Papal brief. The

kingdom of Scotland had never been a fief of the Pope, but from time immemorial of the English Crown; they had, therefore, after mature consideration, with one voice resolved that the King should in no way acknowledge the Papal jurisdiction in this affair; yea, they would not even allow the King to acknowledge it if he were himself disposed to do so." And, in the end, Edward went forward in his measures affecting Scotland without troubling himself further in any way about the claims of the Papal Court. The Parliament of England was anti-papal in its origin, and continued consistently to check clerical and pontifical tyranny, whilst men like Henry of Bracton, who wrote the foremost scientific treatment of English law in the Middle Age, justified and stimulated the national spirit.

History shows us again and again how craftily, as in this instance, Rome sought to fasten its authority on our nation, and we cannot be too thankful to those of our noble ancestors who at critical periods divined the disastrous genius of the Papacy and frustrated its knavish tricks. One of the very saddest aspects of nature is that in which we witness creatures of quite inferior grade fasten upon those of markedly superior organization, and slowly devour them; the larva of the superior creature becomes smaller and smaller in consequence of being continually sucked, until at length it miserably perishes, and the parasite very probably takes up its residence, for a while at least, in the empty skin of its victim. History finds the analogue to this naturalistic horror in the action of the Romish See.

The Papacy draws its nourishment from the living tissues of the nations, and wherever it has succeeded in gaining entire possession and authority, the greatness of the unhappy nation has gradually dwindled and its glory departed, until the merest wreck of the ancient grandeur survives, as we see in Austria, Italy and Spain. We cannot be too grateful to our patriotic forefathers who resisted the deadly ecclesiastical parasite when it made its first desperate essays to fasten upon the vitals of our nation.

Another strenuous leader of the opposition against the absolutism of the Papacy was the scholar and philosopher, William of Occam. Occam was a keen and independent thinker on matters of the Church, as well as on questions of philosophy. His opposition to Rome arose in this wise. The Franciscan fraternity maintained that neither Christ nor His Apostles had ever, either as individuals or as a society, been in possession of property; the Dominican fraternity, on the contrary, held the position of the Franciscans to be heretical. Hence arose a fierce controversy between the two great Mendicant Orders. On an appeal being carried to the Papal See, a decision was given on the side of the Dominicans. Pope John XXII. (1316-1334), in truth, was as far removed from apostolic poverty as the east is from the west. Cortes told the Mexican governor, in explanation of his eagerness for gold, "that the Spaniards were troubled with a disease of the heart, for which gold was a specific remedy." John XXII., in common with some other of his peers, was seriously troubled with the Spanish

malady, and a large quantity of precious medicine had failed to cure him. He kept his eye so steadily upon the interest of the Papal treasury, that twenty-five millions of gold crowns in coin and jewels were found in it after his death. Of course, such a chief of the Church could not be suspected to look upon absolute poverty as a requirement of Christian perfection. In the years 1322-1324, the Pope pronounced against the Franciscans in a series of bulls.

The majority of the Franciscan Order now bowed to the decision, and after some years elected another general. But those who had stood forth as the firmest defenders of the doctrine of apostolic poverty withheld their submission, and amongst these was William of Occam, a dignitary of the Franciscan order. No doubt in this controversy the Pope was technically correct, and gave judgment consistently with Scriptural truth; the deepest ground, however, of the unsparing antagonism of the Roman Court to the stringent principles of the Franciscans was, in truth, no other than this—that the Pope felt that the spirit of world-abnegation which animated these men, was a tacit censure of his own spirit and habit of life.

Of all the polemical writings produced by the repulsed and banished Franciscans, those of Occam were by far the richest in substance and most abidingly influential. From the consideration of the particular question at issue between the two Mendicant Orders, Occam was led to consider other and far profounder principles, and in so doing came



in sight of many great and free ideas. He declares the kingdom of Christ to be not an earthly, but a heavenly and eternal kingdom—that Christ is indeed, as to His Godhead, King and Lord over all, but, as God-man, only King of His believing people, and in no respect the administrator of a worldly government. He declares it to be totally erroneous, heretical, and dangerous to souls, to maintain that the Pope, by the ordinance of Christ, possesses unlimited power, both spiritual and temporal. For if this were so, he might depose princes at his pleasure—might, at his pleasure, dispose of the possessions and goods of all men. We should all be the Pope's slaves; and in spiritual things the position would be the same. In this connection Occam opposes, in the most emphatic manner, the assertion of some flatterers of the Roman Court, that the Pope has power to make new articles of faith; that he is infallible; that into no error, no sin of simony, can he possibly fall. He starts from the general principle that the whole hierarchy, including the Papal Primacy, is not an immediately Divine, but only a human order.

Occam further taught—In the event of a Pope becoming heretical, every man must have the competency to be his judge, but his ordinary judge is the Emperor. But the Church at large also has jurisdiction over the Pope in such an event, and hence also a General Council, as the representative of the whole Church; the Bishops, in case of need, may even depose him. The truth may not rest with the General Council. Although all the mem-

bers of a General Council should fall into error, the hope would not need, on that account, to be surrendered, that God would reveal His truth unto babes, or would inspire men who already knew the truth to stand forth in its defence. And such an occurrence must issue in glory to God, for thereby He would show that our faith does not rest upon the wisdom of men, such as are called to a General Council, but upon the Power Who has sometimes chosen "the foolish things of the world to confound the wise." In another place Occam expresses the thought that it is even possible that on some occasion the whole male sex, clergy as well as laity, might err from the faith, and that the true faith might maintain itself only among pious women. High above the Pope, and high above the Church itself, in Occam's view, stands Christ the Lord. "The Head of the Church and its foundation is one—Christ alone." The great Christian scholar rose above the ecclesiastical conventionalism and superstitions of his day, and beheld God's free royal Spirit acting with sovereign power and freedom. It was the truth Luther seized and worked to such inspiring issues: "They shall all be taught of God."

As Lechler says, it makes a touching and deeply mournful impression to look into Occam's heart, as he opens it in the following confession: "The prophecy of the Apostle; 2 Tim. iv. 3, is now being fulfilled. Chief Priests and Elders, Scribes and Pharisees, are acting now-a-days exactly as they did then when they put Jesus on the cross. They have

banished me and other honourers of Christ to Patmos. Yet we are not without hope. The hand of the Lord is not shortened yet. We live in trust in the Most High that we shall yet one day return with honour to Ephesus. But should the will of God be otherwise, still I am sure that neither death nor life, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, or draw us away from the defence of the Christian faith." We are perhaps less impressed with the work of Reformers of Occam's type than with the more tangible services of those considered practical men. He lived the life of a thinker, simply sowed ideas, and went his way leaving the faintest footstep on the sands of actual life. Yet ideas rule the world, the pen is the sceptre of sceptres, the quiet philosophers who dominate the kingdom of the mind determine all other kingdoms. All true lasting freedom, political or ecclesiastical, is intellectual in its origin and guarantee.

"The steel of Brutus burst the grosser bonds  
By Cæsar cast o'er Rome; but still remain'd  
The soft-enchancing fetters of the mind,  
And other Cæsars rose."

Warriors, statesmen, reformers burst the "grosser bonds" which are very probably soon imposed again by some other tyrant if the silken fetter on the mind be not also burst. All true independence is based on the soul. Thinkers like Occam break the fetters of the mind and furnish the logical reason for universal liberty. It is often long before the thoughts of solitary thinkers come to fruition in the

world of affairs, and Occam's profound, rich speculations did not bear fruit at once, but they bore fruit at last. Coleridge speaks of "a bedridden truth," and great truths often remain long barren ; but the time comes when the truth arises, takes up its bed and walks in streets, palaces, and temples. Men of action like Wicklif and Luther found direction and inspiration in the bright broad pages of Occam, and kindred spirits. Seeds will often lie dormant in the earth for long spaces and germinate at last, and gardeners believe that the production of double flowers is the result of this long sleep of seeds underground ; the germs of immortal truth lie long dormant in despised and forgotten books, but they blossom at length, blossom all the brighter it would seem for their long neglect, and we who see the beauty and taste the fruit must not forget the noble sowers who sowed in tears.

Another important man in whom the Reformation spirit had a vigorous vitality, was Archbishop Richard, of Armagh, Primate of Ireland, to which position he was elected in 1347. In his own age and in following times he was held in high honour as a master of theological science, but he is best known at the present day in connection with his opposition to the encroachments of the Mendicant Orders. A century before this we find Grossetête patronizing these Orders, and speaking most warmly of their preaching and labours. But at that time the Friars were in their first period, and were animated by their first love ; they numbered among them many men who were zealous and active for the

good of souls. The Bishop of Lincoln rejoiced to find in them instruments and fellow-workers, full of insight and power. A century passed away, and Richard of Armagh had experiences of the Order of quite another kind. The early Fathers used to speak of Christ's threefold cross: the cross of chastisement, the cross of temptation, the cross of honour; and the last was the hardest to bear. The Friars had found the last test too severe for them. They were caressed until they were spoiled. Distinguished by privileges, they became more and more pretentious and encroaching; the Order and its honour, its interests, and its revenues, became now the chief objects of their aims, instead of the honour of God, the good of the Church, and the salvation of souls. Degeneracy, the moral corruption of both the Mendicant Orders, was an accomplished fact.

Being in London on the business of his archbishopric, Richard found that learned men there were engaged in animated discussions upon the question of the poverty of the life of Jesus, and whether He had ever begged. The Archbishop was repeatedly asked to preach in London upon the subject, and in St. Paul's he delivered seven or eight sermons, in which he set forth and maintained the following, amongst other propositions:—

1. Jesus Christ, during His sojourn upon earth, was indeed always a poor man; but
2. He never practised begging as His own spontaneous choice.
3. He never taught any one to beg.

4. On the contrary, Jesus taught that no man should practise voluntary begging.

5. No man can either prudently or holily determine to follow a life of mendicancy.

6. For the purposes of confession, the parish church is always more suitable for the parishioner than any church or chapel of the begging monks.

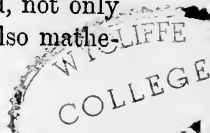
7. For hearing confessions the parish priest is always preferable to the begging monk.

In consequence of this opposition to their principles and to their privileges, the Mendicant Orders raised accusations against the Archbishop at the Papal Court, and he found himself obliged to undertake a journey to Avignon in 1357, and to prosecute his defence in person before Innocent VI. His contention was simply one for the rights of the pastoral office as against the privileges of the Begging Orders. He lays the main stress of his argument against mendicancy upon the fact, which he proves in a very convincing manner, that the Redeemer, during His life on earth, was neither a mendicant Himself nor ever taught His disciples to be such. And he contends at length that the privileges of these Orders are fatal alike to themselves and the people, the State and the Church.

We, whose streets to-day are free from these frowsy Mendicants, owe a great debt of gratitude to men like Richard of Armagh, who energetically protested against the parasitical monks. The snow which comes down from heaven white and beautiful soon becomes discoloured and disagreeable, and yet duly fertilizes the earth ; so religious institutions and

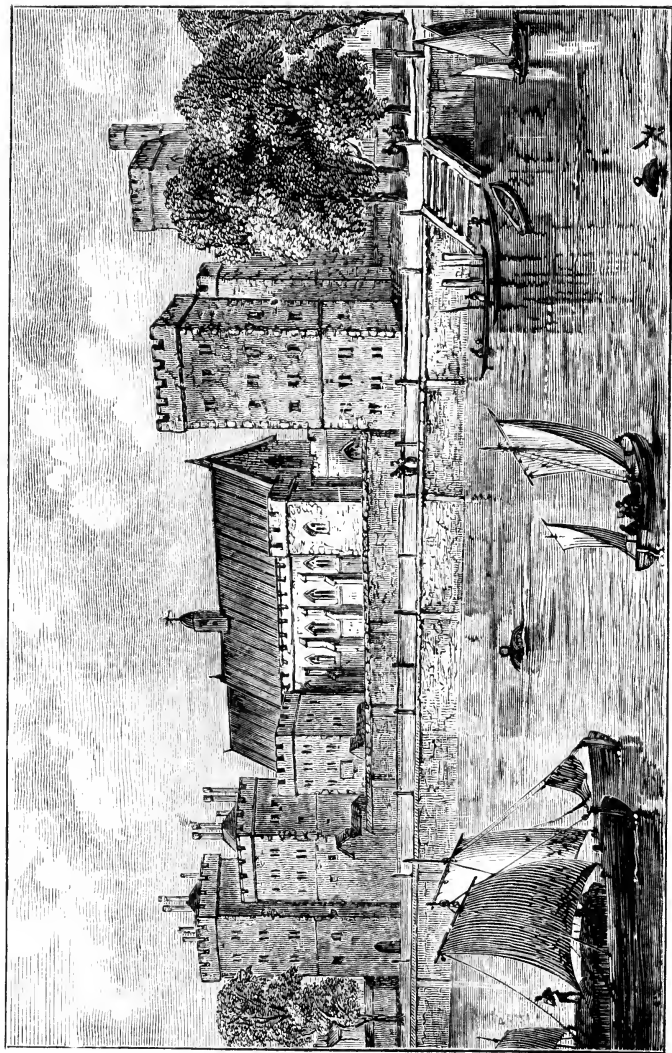
movements come forth one after the other pure in their origin and fair in their advent, only to disappoint in some measure the high hopes and prophesyings inspired by their first bright colours, and yet in their passage adding something to the vitality and fruitfulness of the nations. The Mendicant Orders in their genesis were worthy and they started with a lofty ideal, but Richard of Armagh, Wicklif and Luther found them corrupt and mischievous, and we owe much to all those patriots and reformers who have cleansed the earth of rotted institutions. The historian to whom we are so largely indebted, thus sums up the character and service of the Archbishop : "The good man spoke out with frankness and courage. He displays in his sermons much dialectical skill and culture, and a solid and ripe theological erudition. But more than all, he is penetrated by a spirit of intense moral earnestness and of true manhood. Richard of Armagh has the spirit of a Reformer, in the noblest sense ; he is a man who fights against modern degeneracy and ecclesiastical abuses with combined wisdom and zeal ; with eye uplifted to Christ, and with the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God."

Another in this line of witnesses to the truth was Thomas of Bradwardine, born in 1290, and whose special work it was to bring into recognition the free and unmerited grace of God as the one only source of salvation, in the face of an age whose strong leaning, on the contrary, was to build its salvation upon human merit. He studied at Oxford, not only scholastic philosophy and theology, but also mathe-



matics and astronomy, with such success as to obtain the highest reputation in all these branches of learning. Originally inclined to Pelagianism, he yet, while still a student, experienced a spiritual awakening which brought him off from the Pelagian way of thinking, and led him to the conviction that the grace of God is prevenient to all God-pleasing action, instead of being acquired by such action preceding. Bradwardine's theological views are exhibited in a systematic form in his great work entitled, *Of the Cause of God*, where the author stands forward to oppose Pelagianism, and to exalt the agency of God's free and unmerited grace in the conversion and salvation of man. His drift is to exhibit grace as a free and unmerited gift of God, and to strike down every imagination of human merit in the work of conversion. To acquire merit before God, Bradwardine holds to be impossible for man in any sense whatever. He who affirms the contrary turns God, in effect, into a poor trafficker; for he who receives grace on the footing of any kind of merit has purchased the grace and not received it as a free gift. Bradwardine was an extoller and champion of the grace of God in opposition to the Pelagian and self-righteous spirit which prevailed in his time. We should dissent from some of the Doctor's dogmas on the bondage of the will, but the all-determining power of grace, the central truth of his Christian thinking, we recognize as the central truth of Protestantism; as the delusion that salvation can be earned by human merit is the central error of Popery.





LAMBETH PALACE.



We have seen in the case of other Reformers that they soon became obnoxious to the Roman Court, they struck at obvious abuses, and attention was immediately called to their spirit and design. Luther said : " I have bitten a big hole in the Pope's pocket ;" he had, and the rattle of the lost coin called instantly the Pope's attention, and kindled his wrath ; and it was thus with many Reformers—they threatened the political and financial interests of the Papacy. Bradwardine, with his doctrine of free grace, struck indeed at the very foundation and life of Popery, but it did not seem so ; the authorities did not apprehend where his doctrines led to ; and whilst other Reformers were degraded, Bradwardine enjoyed much popularity. He was nominated Archbishop of Canterbury by King and Pope, but only a few weeks after his consecration he died, August 26, 1349, in the Palace of Lambeth. Bradwardine anticipated as a herald of grace the Reformers of Germany. His doctrine did not agitate society as did the Reformers in the sixteenth century, perhaps because it was set forth philosophically rather than popularly ; more perhaps because the earlier age was not wholly ripe for the teaching, and certain concurrent conditions of the later period were wanting ; but it was identically the doctrine of Luther. A century before Luther's evangelical forerunners taught the saving grace, Bradwardine had set forth systematically and eloquently the doctrine of a free salvation. Kant, in distributing the Tree of Knowledge among the four polished nations of Europe, assigned the blossom to the French, the

crown to the Italians, the fruit to the English, and the root to the Germans. But the Tree of Life requires another distribution; the blossom and fruit of that tree, after it had seemed long dead, came forth to the world from Germany, but its root lay further back in the deep and gracious theology of the holy Bradwardine. Wicklif was full of esteem for Bradwardine, and was much influenced by the Doctor's teaching; and it is well known how this evangelical doctrine was diffused hence on the Continent, determining and colouring the theology of subsequent periods.

There has never been a great movement but in which popular poetry has played a conspicuous part, and a great poem now gave voice to the national aspiration for truth and liberty. The poem entitled *The Vision of Piers Plowman* reveals to us the deep ferment which at that time was spreading through the lowest and broadest stratum of the English people. Chaucer was a contemporary of Robert Longland, the author of *The Vision*, but the spirit and aim of the poets was quite diverse. Chaucer was the poet of the Court, and moved in gay, brilliant scenes, attending jousts and pageants. His poems were mostly of the fancy, full of rich and dainty imagery, celebrating love and beauty and chivalry, but for the most part having no distinctly serious purpose. He was a genius who did much to fashion and enrich the national speech, but his merit is rather intellectual than moral. On the other hand, Longland was the poet of the people, and his inspiration was altogether serious. From

the first appearance of his poem, the figure of Piers Plowman became, and long continued to be, a favourite one with the friends of moral and religious reform.

The whole drift of the poem is to recommend practical Christianity. The kernel of its moral teaching is the pure Christian love of our neighbour—love especially to the poor and lowly; a love of our neighbour reaching its highest point in patient forbearance, and love towards enemies—a love inspired by the voluntary passion of Christ for us. The poet lays bare, on the one hand, the evil works and ways of all ranks and conditions of men, dealing castigation round among all classes with the lash of his satire; while, on the other hand, he commends the good wherever he finds it. That none come into the kingdom of God sooner than the poor and lowly is a thought which he dwells upon in several parts of the poem. For the Church the poet cherishes deep veneration, but this by no means prevents him from speaking openly of her faults. What he has chiefly to censure in the priesthood of his time is their worldliness, their sins of selfishness and of simony. Hardest and bitterest of all are his complaints of the self-seeking and avarice which prevail in the Church.

Dean Milman writes thus of this famous poem: "In Chaucer is heard a voice from the Court, from the castle, from the city, from universal England. In Wiclif is heard a voice from the University, from the seat of theology and scholastic philosophy, from the centre and stronghold of the hierarchy—

a voice of revolt and defiance, taken up and echoed in the pulpit throughout the land, against the sacerdotal domination. In the *Vision of Piers Plowman* is heard a voice from the wild Malvern hills, the voice, it would seem, of an humble parson, a secular priest. He has passed some years in London, but his home, his heart, is among the poor rural population of central mercantile England. . . . The visionary is no disciple, no precursor of Wiclif in his broader religious views. The Loller of *Piers Plowman* is no Lollard—he applies the name as a term of reproach for a lazy, indolent vagrant. The poet is no dreamy, speculative theologian—he acquiesces, seemingly with unquestioning faith, in the Creed and in the usages of the Church. It is in his intense, absorbing, moral feeling that he is beyond his age. With him outward observances are but hollow shows, mockeries, hypocrisies, without the inward power of religion. It is not so much in his keen, cutting satire on all matters of the Church, as his solemn installation of Reason and Conscience as the guides of the self-directed soul, that he is breaking the yoke of sacerdotal domination. In his constant appeal to the plainest, simplest, scriptural truths, as in themselves the whole of religion, he is a stern Reformer. The sad, serious satirist, in his contemplation of the world around him, the wealth of the world and the woe, sees no hope but in a new order of things, in which, if the hierarchy shall subsist, it shall subsist in a form, with power, in a spirit totally opposite to that which now rules mankind. . . . The

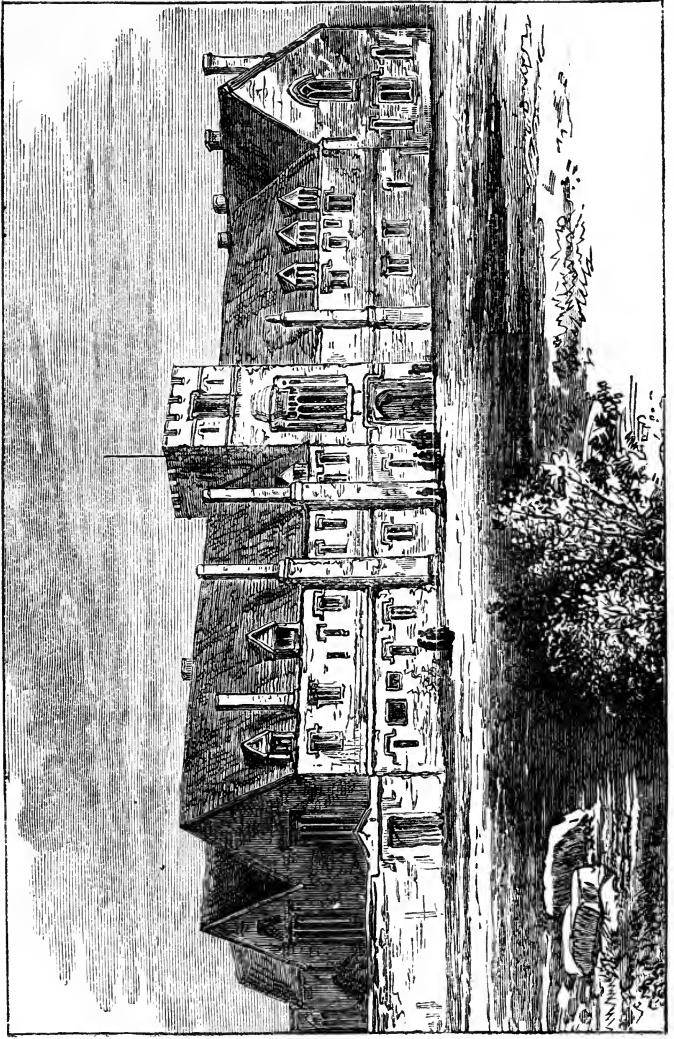
poet who could address such opinions, though wrapt up in prudent allegory, to the popular ear, to the ear of the peasantry of England ; the people who could listen with delight to such strains, were far advanced towards a revolt from Latin Christianity. Truth, true religion was not to be found with, it was not known by Pope, cardinals, bishops, clergy, monks, friars. It was to be sought by man himself, by the individual man, by the poorest man, under the sole guidance of Reason, Conscience, and the Grace of God vouchsafed directly, not through any intermediate human being or even sacrament, to the self-directing soul. If it yet respected all existing doctrines, it respected them not as resting on traditional or sacerdotal authority. There is a manifest appeal throughout, an unconscious installation of Scripture alone, as the ultimate judge. The test of everything is a moral and purely religious one—its agreement with holiness and charity.”\*

We thus see how the Spirit of Truth was working in the heart of the English nation. It reveals itself alike in ecclesiastic, statesman, philosopher, poet and ploughman. The great kings of the period disdained the Roman yoke. Parliament regarded with a real hatred the Papal Court. The Universities claimed independence and carefully guarded their prerogative. Literature breathed out an eloquent plea for freedom, truth and purity. In the Church itself the Pope found the most resolute opponents of his pride and acquisitiveness. And the people were

\* *History of Latin Christianity.*

alive to the establishment and defence of popular rights. There is a time when nations are compelled to choose between good and evil as individuals are, and happily the nation at this momentous crisis chose that better part which shall not be taken away from her. We are assured, if a garden pot be divided by a vertical partition, and one half filled with a poor sterile earth, and the other moiety with a rich fertile soil, a geranium or other plant placed in this pot, with some of its roots over the sterile soil, and the rest of the roots over the fertile soil, those over the sterile soil will gradually change their direction until they can also get into the richer pasturage. Communities with an option of the best have not always the instinct of the plant; but, in contact at once with that sterile soil of Rome which has starved everything planted in it, and that rich ground of Reason, Conscience and Grace, which makes the leaf to be green of everything that strikes from them, the English nation sent forth its roots into the vital depths, and after five centuries lifts highest among the nations its vernal crown.









## CHAPTER II.

### WICKLIF'S EARLIER LIFE.

**V**ERY little indeed is known with certainty about the great Reformer's early history. Historians are about agreed that Wicklif was born at Spresswell, a village or hamlet which has now disappeared, but which was then situated not far from Old Richmond in Yorkshire. He was born in the year 1324, or perhaps several years earlier, but we have no positive data for fixing with precision the date of his birth. The boy, no doubt, received the first elements of instruction at the hand of some member of the clergy, and probably when about sixteen years old he went to Oxford. Into what college he was received when he first came to Oxford is also not known with certainty.

The nature and direction of the studies of the fourteenth century are, however, very well known. The Middle Ages made exclusive use of the Latin tongue as their scientific organ; the Greek language and literature being rarely studied and

little known. Wicklif was, of course, familiar with Latin, but totally ignorant of Greek, as we shall have occasion to observe when we come to speak of his work as a translator. Logical and dialectical studies were in great repute in the Middle Ages, and in the art of disputation Wicklif acquired considerable renown. The mathematical sciences had also an extraordinary attraction for him. As Lechler says: "It is worthy of all consideration how often in his writings, and with how much love, he refers precisely to this department of science. At one time it is arithmetic or geometry which must do him service in illustrating certain truths and relations; at another time it is physical and chemical laws, or facts of optics or acoustics, which he applies to illuminate moral and religious truths. And not only in scientific essays is that the case, or only in sermons preached before the University, but even in his English sermons he makes unhesitating use of such illustrations. But it was not in his riper years that Wicklif first began to apply himself to such natural studies; he had begun to do so in his youth, while he was still a student in Oxford. . . . In the first half of the fourteenth century there prevailed in that University a special zeal for mathematical and physical studies, which also laid hold of Wicklif." That he was perfectly familiar with the rules of rhetoric, then so sedulously taught, is certain, from his known acquaintance with authors who had treated on them, and with others in whose style they were most laboriously exemplified.

But Wicklif passed over from the seven liberal

arts—grammar, rhetoric, logic, music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy—to theology. “This was, no doubt, the design with which his parents had from the first determined him for a life of study. He was to become a cleric, for the priestly calling was still, in the public opinion of that age, the highest in human society; and if the Wicklif family cherished perhaps some ambitious wishes for the talented scion of their house, it was a course of theological education and the standing of priesthood which, in that age, and especially in England, formed the surest stepping-stones to the highest dignities of the State. But we find no warrant either in his life or in his writings to attribute such ambitious designs to himself. It rather appears to us, in so far as the personal self-revelations scattered here and there in his writings justify a retrospective inference touching his student life, that the motive which impelled him, apart from all external considerations, to devote himself to theology, was entirely of an intellectual and scientific character. His passion for knowledge and his thirst for truth drew him to theology with all the more zeal, the more it was still regarded as the highest science of all, or the queen of the sciences. His industry as a student of divinity was assured by the general studies which he had already passed through, and he devoted himself with indefatigable diligence to all the different branches into which theology was then divided, as is evident from the contents of his own writings.” (Lechler.) This theological course consisted, to some extent, in the reading and interpretation of the Old and New

Testaments, but the Biblical course was looked upon, not as that which laid the foundation of, and gave law to, all the rest, but rather as an entirely subordinate preliminary discipline to theology properly so called. Bachelors of theology of the lowest degree were allowed to deliver lectures on the Bible; the "doctors" would have thought it beneath their dignity to lecture on the Biblical books. Wicklif, it is probable, gave six years to the study of theology, and his whole term of study would cover about ten years.

Wicklif's student life completed, he entered upon quiet work in Oxford, and for twenty years in no way appeared upon the stage of public life, either in Church or State. Oxford was the exclusive field of his work during all these twenty years. During these years, Wicklif's work in Oxford was twofold: partly scientific, as a man of scholastic learning, and partly practical, as a member, and for some time president, of a college. With respect to his scientific labours, he commenced while yet only a Master in the faculty of Arts by giving disputations and lectures on philosophical subjects, particularly in logic. From many passages of his extant manuscript works, it appears that he gave courses of such lectures with zeal and success. And the Biblical lectures which he delivered, it may be conjectured, proved of the greatest use to himself, for, in teaching the Scriptures to others, he first learned the true meaning of them himself; so that these lectures unconsciously served as a preparation for his later labours as a Reformer.

Wicklif's life in Oxford was not altogether free from excitement and trial. Simon Islip, Archbishop of Canterbury, founded a Hall in Oxford which should bear the name of the Archiepiscopal See. Its first warden was a monk of violent character, named Woodhall, under whom there was no end of contention among the members; to remedy which the Archbishop removed Woodhall from the headship, and replaced three other members, who were monks, by secular priests. In 1365 he appointed John of Wicklif to be second warden, and entrusted to him the oversight of the eleven scholars, who were now all seculars. But in the following spring (April 26, 1366), the active Archbishop Islip deceased, and was succeeded, as Primate of England, in 1367, by Simon Langham, a man who had previously been a monk, and continued to cherish a thoroughly monastic spirit. By him Wicklif was deposed from his wardenship, and the three members who had been introduced along with him were removed from the college. Langham restored Woodhall to the headship, and the three monks who had been deprived along with him were once more made members. Wicklif and the three Fellows appealed from the Archbishop to the Pope, but the process proved a protracted one, and ended in 1370 with the rejection of Wicklif and his fellow appellants, and with the confirmation of their opponents in their several places.

Hostile historians have alleged that the position of antagonism taken up by Wicklif against the Church, and especially against prelates and monastic

orders, took its rise in injury done to his own private interests, and was thus inspired by low motives and personal revenge. But candid and painstaking historians like Lechler, from a full investigation of all the accessible facts, are persuaded that Wicklif's painful experiences in this matter had no considerable determining influence upon his ecclesiastical views and work. Yet during these years of comparative solitude we may well believe that Wicklif's deep and serious nature ripened for great action. The theological studies commenced simply in the love of intellectual truth would lead him farther and deeper than he thought. And memorable contemporary events must have greatly affected his large earnest mind. The years of his minority had scarcely terminated when the great pestilence, having ravaged various kingdoms of Asia, passed along the shores of the Mediterranean and finally filled England with distress. The infected generally perished within a few hours ; the strongest failed after the second or third day. Wicklif was now in the twenty-fifth year of his age. He saw the distemper passing from men to the brute creation, covering the land with putrid flesh ; the labours of husbandry suspended ; the courts of justice closed ; and more than a third part of the inhabitants of the land swept away. For five months the pestilence hung in the atmosphere of England like a hot and fœtid vapour ; and thousands of purple-spotted corpses lay putrefying in fields and houses.

Boccaccio, in the introduction to his famous work, permits us to see how men of light hearts



passed through the great plague of 1348. The poet there describes himself as forming one of a party of ladies and gentlemen who, while the plague was at its height in Florence, retired to a beautiful villa in the neighbourhood of the city, and there, "their ears entertained with the warbling of birds, and their eyes with the verdure of the hills and valleys, with the waving of corn-fields like the sea itself, with trees of a thousand different kinds, and with a more serene and open sky," amused themselves talking over a thousand merry things, singing love-songs, weaving garlands of flowers, and telling pleasant stories. With very different eyes would Wicklif view the terrible desolation; and Vaughan remarks, "From the Reformer's frequent references to the plague in after-life, we learn that its impression on his mind was not to be effaced." This event unquestionably gave a more solemn and spiritual tone to Wicklif, and the next twenty-five years witnessed his constant growth in knowledge and power.

About the year 1366 Wicklif reached the highest degree of academic dignity, that of Doctor in the Theological Faculty. From that chair many of his scholastic pieces, still extant, were doubtless read, and theological lectures delivered. Vaughan considers that an extended exposition of the Decalogue, still extant, was produced about this time, and it reveals well the loftiness and spirituality of Wicklif as a teacher; it enables us to judge of the theological opinions, and of the devotional feeling, which the Reformer brought to the discharge of his duties as

Divinity Professor. "We should be diligent," he observes, "to learn the love of God, and to fear Him, and to worship Him, passing all things in this world. But this may we not do, without seriously learning the law of God, and His commandments. Hence, there is full great need to hear the commandments of God read, and preached, and taught ; and so to learn them, and do after them, as God hath bidden on pain of damnation. But what man is there now-a-days who feareth to break God's commandments, or setteth any prize by the sweetest word in all God's law ? Dear God ! it is a wonder of all the wonders on earth, that from the beginning of our life, even to our last end, we are never weary, either night or day, in labouring for worldly goods, pleasing to our wretched body, which shall here last but a little season ; while about the learning of God's law, which shall be food and nourishment for our souls, that either in bliss or pain shall ever last—about such things may we not labour truly to the end, for one hour of the day." This thoughtlessness with respect to religion he deploras as observable "for the most part through all the world," not excepting "lord bishops, parsons, vicars, priests, and friars."

In his explanation of the first precept, sensuality, covetousness, and pride are particularly noticed, as opposed to the homage and the love so justly demanded by the Creator. It then follows : "If a man will keep this commandment, he must believe steadfastly that Almighty God in Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three Persons in one God, are the noblest object that may have being—

all power, all wit, all wisdom, all mercy, all charity, and all goodness, being in Him, and coming of Him. Also, thou must fear God above all things in this world, and break His commandments for the sake of no worldly good ; also, thou must love God above all things, and thy neighbour as thyself ; labouring diligently to understand the law of God, especially His Ten Commandments, and watching that thy will be so regulated that it may accord with God's will. Have a remembrance, too, of the goodness of God, how He made thee in His own likeness, and how Jesus Christ, both God and man, died so painful a death upon the cross to buy man's soul out of hell, even with His own heart's blood, and to bring it to the bliss of heaven !”

While such are the motives by which the love of God is enforced, on the second Commandment he remarks, that “ all who would be called Christians, while they live contrary to the living and teaching of Christ and His Apostles, take God's name in vain ; for it is vain, that a man say he is a Christian man, and do nothing of the works of Christ.” It is admitted that God is merciful, but when it is inferred that “ He will not therefore damn men for a light oath,” the partial view of the Divine attributes and government which the conclusion implies, is thus solemnly exposed : “ Since God is so great a Lord, and commandeth His liege man, on pain of hell without end, to keep so easy a command as refraining his tongue from vain and false swearing, is he not worthy to be damned the deeper, if he break it ? It was little in Adam to eat an apple in Paradise, considered

apart from the bidding of God. Nevertheless, for the eating it against the forbidding of God, he and all mankind were justly condemned, until Christ bought them again, with His precious blood and hard death upon the cross !”

Dwelling on the third Commandment, his instructions in relation to public worship require the most humiliating acknowledgments of guilt and of spiritual helplessness, and urge the worshipper, in his approaches to God, “to cry heartily unto Him for grace and succour.” His reader is then admonished, that the Sabbath is not so much commemorative of the work of creation, as of the resurrection of Christ, and of the gift of the Spirit ; and it is then added : “ Bethink thee heartily of the wonderful kindness of God, who was so high and so worshipful in heaven, that He should come down so low, and be born of the maiden, and become our Brother, to bring us again, by His hard passion, from our thralldom to Satan. He was beaten and buffeted and scourged, so that there was not left a whole spot of His skin, but all His body was as one stream of blood. He was crowned with a crown of thorns for despite ; and when the crown, as some writers say, would not set fast down to His head for the long thorns, they took staves and beat them down until the thorns pierced the place of the brain. He was then nailed, hand and foot, with sharp nails and rugged, that His pain might be the more ; and so at last He suffered a painful death, hanging full shamefully on the hard tree ! And all this He did and suffered of His own kindness, without any sin of Himself, that He might deliver us from sin and pain,

and bring us to everlasting bliss. Thou shouldst also think constantly, how, when He had made thee of nought, thou hadst forsaken Him, and all His kindness, through sin, and hadst taken thee to Satan and his service, world without end, had not Christ, God and man, suffered this hard death to save us. And thus see the great kindness, and all other goodness, which God hath shown for thee ; and thereby learn thy own great unkindness ; and thus, thou shalt see, that man is the most fallen of creatures, and the unkindest of all the creatures that ever God made ! It should be full sweet and delightful to us to think thus on this great kindness, and this great love of Jesus Christ !” It is under the influence of such reflections, that Wicklif calls on men to become active “on the Sabbath about the soul, as on other days about the body ;” requiring of each, that he “should evermore think on his own sin, and on the shortness and falseness of this wicked world.”

The observations at the close of the treatise are too characteristic to be omitted : “Therefore covet not thy neighbour’s goods, despise him not, slander him not, deceive him not, belie him not, backbite him not—the which is a common custom now-a-days—and so in all other things do no otherwise than thou wouldst reasonably that he did to thee. But many think if they give a penny to a pardoner, they shall be forgiven the breaking of all the commandments of God, and, therefore, they take no heed how they keep them. But, I say thee, for certain, though thou have priests and friars to sing for thee, and though thou each day hear many masses,

and found chauntries and colleges, and go on pilgrimages all thy life, and give all thy goods to pardoners, all this shall not bring thy soul to heaven. While, if the commandments of God are revered to the end, though neither penny nor halfpenny be possessed, there shall be everlasting pardon, and the bliss of heaven!" The reader is, in conclusion, admonished, that to suffer for Christ can be no hard requirement, since He has so greatly suffered for us; and an appeal is made to the scenes through which Apostles, and confessors, and martyrs have passed to their present exaltation, as an inducement to bear the evils of time with resignation, and to count them no small honour, if endured in the cause of the Gospel.\*

Wicklif, it will be thus seen, had already gained scriptural views on the deepest questions, and taught these views with a fervour far removed from the coldness of mere speculation. He was a true-hearted, God-fearing man, who felt acutely the evils of his time, and set himself zealously to their removal. As yet the sincere, deep-thoughted man had entered into no contest with the corrupt ecclesiasticism of his day, but that contest was inevitable. It has been well said: "Principles are wont to assert themselves, in thought as in action, before they are distinctly apprehended." Wicklif had not yet formulated, or perhaps exactly perceived, the distinct principles of antagonism to Rome which his evangelical creed implied; but the principles were there, and asserted themselves, and time only was wanted for their full development and manifestation.

\* Vaughan.



### CHAPTER III.

#### WICKLIF AS A PATRIOT.

**S**LOWLY is the avalanche formed high up in the blue silence, one white flake after another being added to the growing crystal mass, until at length the moment comes when a stir in the air brings it down, sweeping away obstructions and scattering in the valleys its fertilizing treasures. Hitherto we have known Wicklif only as a quiet scholar and teacher in Oxford, but now he suddenly comes personally forward to take an active part in the public business of Church and State. At this moment it is Wicklif the patriot whom we have to consider. Lechler says: "The national spirit lives in Wicklif with extraordinary force. His great works, still unprinted—*e.g.*, the three books *De Civili Dominio*, his work *De Ecclesia*, and others—leave upon the reader the strongest impression of a warm patriotism—of a heart glowing with zeal for the dignity of the Crown, for the honour and weal of his native land, for the rights and the constitu-

tional liberty of the people." It is indeed not wonderful that such a man should have been drawn into the career of the statesman and the diplomatist.

In the year 1365, Pope Urban V. had renewed his claim upon Edward III. for the annual payment of 1,000 marks, in name of *Feudatory Tribute*; he had even demanded the payment of arrears extending over a period of no less than thirty-three years. The payment in question was imposed in 1213, by Innocent III., upon King John, for himself and his successors, but in point of fact it had been paid from the first with the greatest irregularity; and King Edward III., from the time of reaching his majority, had never allowed it, as a matter of principle, to be paid at all. Urban V. now demanded the tribute and all arrears; and it was unfortunate for him that he did. The infallibility of the Popedom is not discredited in any direction more than in the stupid mistakes by which they have frightened away and struck with sterility the goose that laid the golden eggs. Edward laid the Papal demand before the Parliament which assembled in May, 1366. In the end the Lords spiritual and temporal, along with the Commons, arrived at a unanimous decision to the effect that King John had acted entirely beyond his right in subjecting his country and people to such a feudal superiority without their own consent, and besides that this whole compact was a violation of his coronation oath. Further, the Lords and Commons declared that in case the Pope should carry out



his threatened procedure against the King, they would place the whole powers and resources of the nation at the disposal of the King for the defence of his crown and dignity. This language was intelligible ; Urban quickly gave in ; and since that day, in fact, not one word more has ever been said on the part of Rome of her feudal superiority over England, to say nothing of a payment of feudal tribute, except, perhaps, on one occasion, when the claim was finally dismissed with contempt.

No sooner had the judgment of the Parliament become known, than an anonymous monk published a defence of the pontifical claim, entering warmly into the discussion of the questions so long at issue between the secular and the spiritual powers. He maintained the absolute indefeasible right of the priesthood. In his view the Pope had given the King the fief of the government of England, under condition that England should pay the yearly tribute of 700 marks to the Papal Court ; but now this condition had remained for a time unfulfilled, and therefore the King of England had forfeited his right of monarchy. The anonymous author of this tract in defence of the claims of the Papacy challenged Wicklif by name to prove the fallacy of these opinions.

As Vaughan writes : " The Reformer had recently numbered the fortieth year of his age ; and the fact of his being challenged to refute the positions assumed, plainly suggests that, previous to this period, the leading features of his character, as it has descended to us, were not only formed, but generally

known. There could be no meaning in such an appeal, except to a man who had become conspicuous as the opponent of undue ecclesiastic pretension." The style of Wicklif's reply is somewhat singular. He purports to give a report of the speeches of seven members of the Council of temporal lords on the question of these Papal claims. The *first* lord, a valiant soldier, had expressed himself thus: "The kingdom of England was of old conquered by the sword of its nobles, and with the same sword has it ever been defended against hostile attacks. And even so does the matter stand in regard to Rome. Therefore my counsel is, let this demand of the Pope be absolutely refused, unless he is able to compel payment by force. Should he attempt that, it will be my business to withstand him in defence of our right." The *second* lord had made use of the following argument: "A tax or a tribute may only be paid to a person authorized to receive it; now the Pope has no authority to be the receiver of this payment, and therefore any such claim coming from him must be repudiated. For it is the duty of the Pope to be a prominent follower of Christ; but Christ refused to be a possessor of worldly dominion. The Pope, therefore, is bound to make the same refusal. As, therefore, we should hold the Pope to the observance of his holy duty, it follows that it is incumbent upon us to withstand him in his present demand." The *third* lord observed: "It seems to me that the ground upon which this demand is rested admits of being turned against the Pope; for as the Pope is the servant of the servants

of God, it follows that he should take no tribute from England except for services rendered. But now he builds up our land in no sense whatever, either spiritual or corporeal, but his whole aim is to turn its temporalities to his own personal use and that of his courtiers, while assisting the enemies of the country with gold and counsel. We must, therefore, as a matter of common prudence, refuse his demand. That Pope and cardinals leave us without any help either in body or soul, is a fact which we know by experience well enough." The *fourth* lord applies to the question the standard of the feudal law. The *fifth* speaker condemns the Concordat entered into with King John as an usurpation which, for England was insufferable. The *sixth* speaker takes the feudal law for his starting-point, and seeks to prove that not the Pope, but Christ alone is to be regarded as Lord Paramount of the country. Last of all, the *seventh* lord applies to the question the standard of the constitution of the kingdom, and arrives at the conclusion that the Concordat between King John and Innocent III. was invalid from the very first, by reason of its lacking the consent of the country in the persons of its representatives in Parliament.

By some it is believed these speeches were actually delivered in Parliament; Lechler is strongly inclined to believe that Wicklif was a Member of Parliament, and listened to these speeches as he sat in his place. It is, however, little more than a supposition that Wicklif was a Member of the House; and if these speeches were actually delivered by several lords, all we can say is, the speeches of olden days were far

more brief and suggestive than the parliamentary oratory of modern times. It is more likely, however, that Wicklif adopted this particular style of stating his argument for the suggestion it carried, that these were indeed not the views of an abstruse Doctor, but the positions of great men of the nation who would know how to defend them. Here Wicklif boldly opposed himself to the claims of the Court of Rome, and gave proof of sturdy patriotism.

The year 1363 was observed as a jubilee in honour of the completion of Edward's fiftieth year of kingship; at which period the country was covered with martial splendour. But from this time a period of rapid decline set in. In 1369 France declared war, and things went ill with England. The treasury was exhausted, and the people had reached the utmost limit of taxation, whilst the war was demanding greater exertions than ever. A Parliament met during Lent of 1371, and when Edward III. laid before it a demand for a subsidy in aid of the war of 50,000 silver marks, it was eventually resolved that the richly endowed Church should be included, to a substantial sum, in the incidence of the new tax. The prelates filled the chief offices of the Government, the Church was opulent in the midst of universal distress, and her religious Orders, ever in the vanguard of ecclesiastical pretension, were openly aspiring to a total immunity from national taxation. It was then resolved by Parliament that the Church should bear the chief burden of the next campaign.\*

\* Shirley.

It was very probably in that Parliament, says Lechler, that one of the lords replied to the representations of some members of the endowed Orders in the form which Wicklif has preserved in one of his unpublished works. The far-seeing peer, in the course of the discussion, told the following fable: "Once upon a time there was a meeting of many birds. Among them was an owl, but the owl had lost her feathers, and made as though she suffered much from the frost. She begged the other birds, with a trembling voice, to give her some of their feathers. They sympathized with her, and every bird gave the owl a feather, till she was overladen with strange feathers in no very lovely fashion. Scarcely was this done when a hawk came in sight in quest of prey. Then the birds, to escape from the attacks of the hawk, by self-defence or by flight, demanded their feathers back again from the owl; and on her refusal each of them took back his own feather by force, and so escaped the danger, while the owl remained more miserably unfledged than before." "Even so," said the peer, "when war breaks out we must take from the endowed clergy a portion of their temporal possessions, as property which belongs to us and the kingdom in common, and we must wisely defend the country with property which is our own, and exists among us in superfluity." As Shirley remarks: "Wicklif alone, perhaps, of the clergy defended the course adopted by Parliament."

Another example of Wicklif's patriotism has been brought to light by his great German

biographer. In February, 1372, appeared in England an agent of the Papal See, Arnold Garnier by name, Canon of Chalons in Campaign, and licentiate of laws. He bore written credentials from Gregory XI., who had ascended the Papal chair in 1370, as Papal nuncio and receiver of dues for the apostolic chamber. The man travelled with a train of servants and half a dozen horses. He was the English Tetzl. He remained for two years and a half in the country without a break, and, no doubt, collected considerable sums. In July, 1374, he made a journey to Rome, and in due time returned to England once more to carry forward his work as nuncio and receiver.

Wicklif wrote a tract against Garnier, who thus collected in England a large amount of gold and carried it out of the kingdom. In this remarkable tract "Wicklif stands before us chiefly in the light of a patriot, who has the honour and the best interests of the country very deeply at heart. . . . We learn to recognise him as a Christian patriot; we see in the patriotic defender of his country's interests the ecclesiastical Reformer already beginning to be moulded into shape; and we discern in him the vigorous germs of a coming development. . . . To elucidate more exactly the peculiar character of the tract at present before us, we bring into view, before everything else, this feature of it—that it recognises the domestic prosperity of the country, and the wealth of the public purse, and the military strength of England in relation to foreign enemies, as valuable blessings

which must not be allowed to suffer damage. . . . A second characteristic feature which strikes the eye in the reading of these pages is the decidedly *constitutional* spirit which is conspicuous in them. The Parliament occupies in them an important position as the representative of the nation, having authority to sit in judgment upon the question of what is injurious to the national interests. But equally strong, and still more important than the national and patriotic spirit of the author, is the religious and moral, and even the evangelical spirit which he manifests in the way in which he handles the matter with which he is occupied. But more characteristic than all else is what Wicklif gave expression to in this tract respecting the Pope and the pastoral office. That the Pope may commit sin was expressed before in an earlier piece of Wicklif's ; but in the present tract that proposition is repeated more strongly still. Wicklif also declares himself opposed to the theory which maintains that absolutely everything which the Pope thinks fit to do must be right, and have the force of law, simply because he does it. In other words, we find Wicklif already in opposition here to the absolutism of the Roman See. He is far removed, however, from a merely negative opposition. On the contrary, he puts forward a positive idea of the Papacy, according to which the Pope is bound to be pre-eminently the follower of Christ in all moral virtues—especially in humility and patience and brotherly love. The Papal collectors are also severely censured for obtaining the payments in

question to the Court of Rome by begging in a manner contrary to the Gospel.”\*

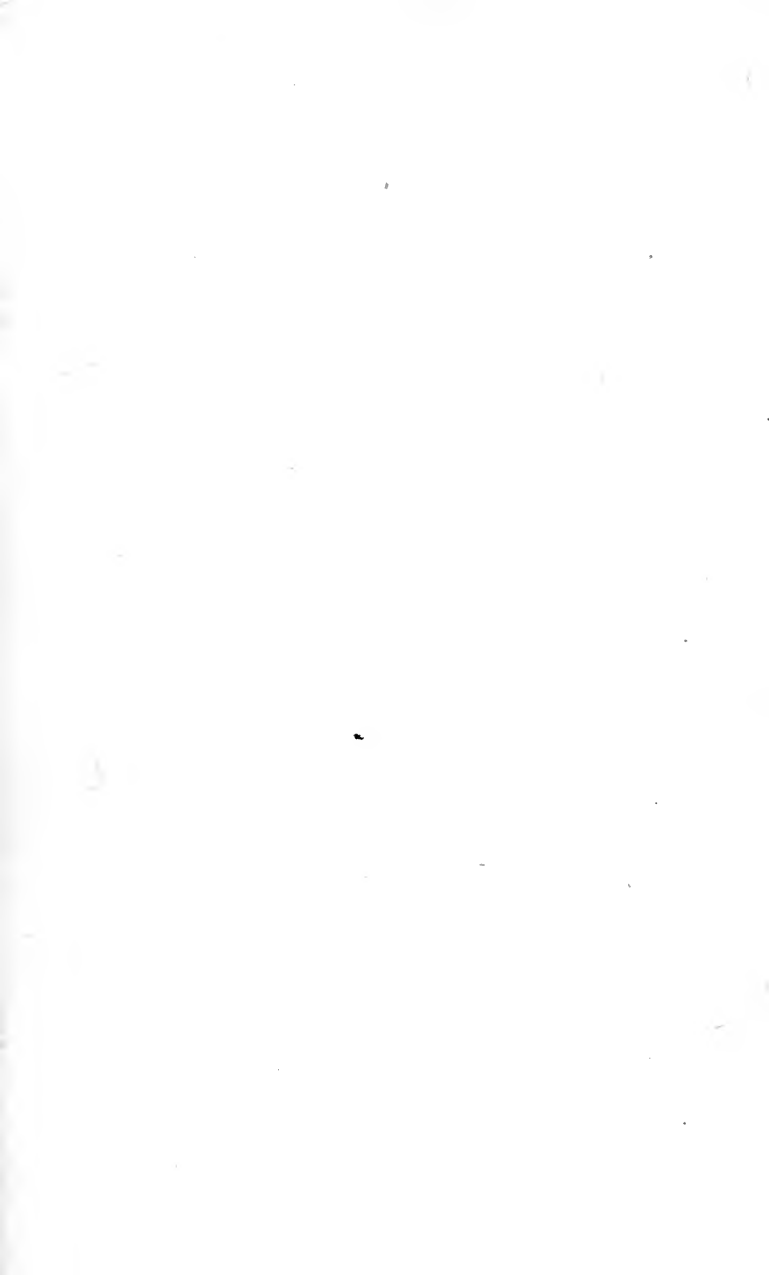
In the year 1373 Parliament had raised again loud complaints touching the manner in which the Papal See filled English Church offices, and thus possessed itself unjustly of the ecclesiastical revenue. In 1374, conferences for the establishment of peace were going on in Bruges between England and France. At the head of the peace embassy stood a prince of the blood, John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, third son of Edward III., with the Bishop of London, Simon Sudbury. For treating with the commissaries of the Pope on the pending ecclesiastical questions, Parliament gave a commission to several ecclesiastics and commoners to join this peace embassy in Bruges. John Gilbert, Bishop of Bangor, John Wicklif, Doctor of Theology, with five others, composed the deputation. They were invested with plenary powers to conclude such a treaty with the Papal nuncios on the pending points as should at once secure the honour of the Church, and uphold the rights of the English Crown and realm. We see in Wicklif's appointment as a royal commissioner for these diplomatic transactions with the Roman Court, what confidence was felt in his spirit and insight, in his courage and power of action, on the part both of the Government and the country. Bruges was at that time a great rich city of 200,000 inhabitants, and at this particular crisis filled with men in high place and of great political

\* Lechler.





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and ecclesiastical importance. Here Wicklif had a fine opportunity of studying the spirit and manners of Italian, Spanish, and French dignitaries of the Church; and certainly the result of the study was no new enthusiasm for Rome. It is well known how Luther's sojourn in Rome in 1510 opened his eyes to the monstrousness of the Papacy. When Livingstone penetrated the cave in which the Bakwains protested their god resided, the great traveller found that the only inhabitants it seemed to have were baboons. Luther expected to find Rome full of divinity, but was terribly disenchanted. Says Michelet: "The only thing to be done was to flee, veiling the head, and shaking off the dust from the feet. Luther quitted Rome at the end of a fortnight. He carried back with him into Germany the condemnation of Italy, and of the Roman Church." We are not informed what precise effect the visit to Bruges had on Wicklif, but his first contact with the Papacy of the Continent and his intercourse with foreign Catholics did not in the least abate his antagonism to the Roman system. The result of the Convention was by no means satisfactory. England undoubtedly fared the worst in the arrangements arrived at, although the Pope made some concessions upon single points; for these concessions were more apparent than real, and consisted more in matters of detail than in general principles. No country has ever gained much by diplomatic transactions with the Papal Court; they have to achieve their right by summary practical methods.

In 1376 assembled the Parliament which lived

long afterwards in the grateful memory of the nation, by the name of the Good Parliament. The Parliament represented to the King, in a lengthened memorial, how oppressively and perniciously the encroachments of the Roman See operated; the aggressions of the Pope were to blame for the impoverishment of the kingdom. In the substance of their petition, as given by Sir Robert Cotton, they state that the taxes paid to the Court of Rome for ecclesiastical dignities amounted to five times more than those obtained by the King from the whole produce of the realm. "For some one bishopric, or other dignity," the Pope is said to receive, "by way of translation and death, three, four, or five several taxes; and while for money the brokers of that sinful city (Rome) promote many caitiffs, being altogether unlearned and unworthy, to a thousand marks' living yearly, the learned and worthy can hardly obtain twenty marks, whereby learning decayeth; aliens," they proceed, "and enemies to this land, who never saw, nor care to see, their parishioners, have those livings; whereby they despise God's service, and convey away the treasure of the realm, and are worse than Jews or Saracens." They fear not to add, that "God has given His sheep to the Pope to be pastured, and not shorn or shaven; and that lay patrons, perceiving the simony and covetousness of the Pope, do thereby learn to sell their benefices to mere brutes, no otherwise than Christ was sold to the Jews." By such means the Pontiff is said to derive a revenue from England alone, exceeding that of any prince in Christendom.

It is therefore stated, "that the Pope's collector, and other strangers, the King's enemies, and only lieger spies for English dignities, and disclosing the secrets of the realm, ought to be discharged."

It is also added: "That the same collector, being also receiver of the Pope's pence, keepeth a house in London, with clerks and officers thereunto belonging, as if it were one of the King's solemn courts, transporting yearly to the Pope 20,000 marks, and most commonly more: that cardinals and other aliens, remaining at the Court of Rome—whereof one cardinal is a Dean of York, another of Salisbury, another of Lincoln, another Archdeacon of Canterbury, another Archdeacon of Durham, another Archdeacon of Suffolk, and another Archdeacon of York, another Prebendary of Thane and Nassingdon, another Prebendary of York, in the diocese of York—have divers others, the best dignities in England, and have sent over yearly unto them 20,000 marks, over and above that which English brokers lying here have: that the Pope, to ransom Frenchmen, the King's enemies, who defend Lombardy for him, doth always, at his pleasure, levy a subsidy of the whole clergy of England: that the Pope, for mere gain, maketh sundry translations of all the bishoprics and other dignities within the realm; and that the Pope's collector hath this year taken to his use the first-fruits of all benefices: that it would be good, therefore, to renew all the statutes against provisions from Rome, since the Pope reserveth all the benefices of the world for his own proper gift, and hath within this year created twelve

new cardinals—so that now there are thirty, whereas there were wont to be but twelve in all; and all the said thirty cardinals, except two or three, are the King's enemies." To protect the country from practices which threatened to render its present embarrassments perpetual, and, by depriving the native clergy of nearly every stimulus to improvement, to reduce it to barbarism, it was required that the agents of the Popes should be strenuously resisted, and that no Papal "collector or proctor should remain in England, upon pain of life and limb; and that no Englishman, on the like pain, should become such collector or proctor, or remain at the Court of Rome."\*

The Parliament which met in the following year, January, 1377, renewed their protest to the King against the cupidity of the Romans and their complaints against the Pope's collectors. It was Englishmen who had always been wont to hold that office, but now it was a Frenchman, who lived in London and kept a large office, which cost the clergy £300 a year; and this man sends every year to the Pope 20,000 marks, or £200,000. We are often told how much there was that was good in the Papacy of the Middle Ages, but these historical records are utterly fatal to her credit. As Carlyle said of the France of Louis XVI.: "There was life in it, or it could not have rotted," so we may say of the Papacy of the Middle Ages, it had only enough vitality in it to create corruption, the strangest, saddest corruption the world has ever seen. The

\* Cotton's Abridgment, quoted by Vaughan.

chief shepherd of Christendom only reminds us of the beast in Dante—

“With a nature so malign and ruthless,  
That never doth she glut her greedy will,  
And after food is hungrier than before.”

Lechler is strongly of opinion that Wicklif was a member of the Good Parliament of 1376. There can be no doubt, however, that “he was one of the most influential personalities in the mixed affairs of Church and State, which formed so conspicuous a part of the business of that Parliament. If, at an earlier period, he had shared strongly in the outburst of national feeling, and of the constitutional spirit which was so characteristic of England in the fourteenth century; still more had he become, in the course of years, one of the leaders of the nation in the path of ecclesiastical progress. This Parliament, indeed, was the culminating point of the influence of Wicklif upon the nation. From that date his influence upon it rather declined, at least in extent of surface, or, so to say, in breadth. On the other hand, the effects which he produced from that time went deeper down into the heart of the English people than they had ever done before.”\*

An eloquent historian has observed: “In active benevolence, in the spirit of reverence, in loyalty, in co-operative habits, the dark ages far transcend the noblest ages of Pagan antiquity, while in that humanity which shrinks from the infliction of suf-

\* Lechler.

fering, they were superior to Roman, and in their respect for chastity, to Greek civilization. On the other hand, they rank immeasurably below the best Pagan civilizations in civic and patriotic virtues, in the love of liberty, in the number and splendour of the great characters they produced, in the dignity and beauty of the type of character they formed."\* Again: "Political liberty is almost impossible where the monastic system is supreme, not merely because the monasteries divert the energies of the nation from civic to ecclesiastical channels, but also because the monastic ideal is the very apotheosis of servitude. When men have learnt to reverence a life of passive, unreasoning obedience as the highest type of perfection, the enthusiasm and passion of freedom necessarily decline."† There can be little question of the truth of this representation touching the paucity of patriots in the dark ages, and as little question about the cause of the decline of the patriotic sentiment. The monastic system, which well represented the genius of the Papacy as a whole, was exquisitely calculated to crush out of men the sentiment of independence. But Christianity itself is open to no reproach on this score. We find in those who rejected the Papal system and permitted the Christian faith to act freely on the instinct for freedom planted in every breast, patriots of the very highest and purest types. The inspirations of Christianity will create a patriotism which transcends the noblest ages of Pagan antiquity, as certainly as it secures a humanity beyond that of the Roman, a chastity

\* Lecky, *History of Morals*, vol. ii. p. 16. † *Ibid.* p. 198.



beyond that of the Greek. This is demonstrated in such men as Grossetête, Wicklif, and Luther. Their sympathy with the race did not destroy their national spirit ; nor their sympathy with the highest interests of their countrymen make them insensible to the political rights of the people. Their patriotism was not illustrated on fields of battle, but it expressed the sublimest quality.

“To dare in fields is valour ; but how few  
Dare be so thoroughly valiant—to be true !”

They proved themselves full of resolution, loyalty, and courage ; living for their country and prepared to die for it. And the patriotic services of these Christian heroes left the most abiding results. It would be difficult indeed to say what pure and lasting good has come to us from Crecy and Poitiers, with all their brilliant fame ; but the nation is consciously the stronger and safer for the intellectual patriotism which placed its liberties on the high grounds of truth and righteousness. England never produced a greater patriot than Wicklif, as Germany boasts no greater patriot than Luther ; and in this, as in all other virtues, Christianity rejoices in the brightest fruition.

It is not to be supposed that Wicklif's action against the hierarchy would escape censure. Fable tells us that when Solomon bestowed gifts upon the birds, the hoopoes received golden crowns, and flew away well satisfied with the distinction. But the gift brought them into such trouble that in time they returned to their would-be benefactor, and prayed him to take away the possession which had

become so dangerous. The king listened to their supplication, deprived them of the glittering crowns with which he had before adorned them, gave them instead crests of buff feathers tipped with black, and so sent them away rejoicing. Worldly wealth and dominion were the curses of the Catholic Church, but the ecclesiastical authorities ever stoutly resisted any attempt to relieve them of the glittering embarrassment. Wicklif soon proved their resentment.

The rectory of Lutterworth was bestowed on Wicklif by Edward III., in April, 1374. Wicklif was not permitted, however, to pursue a path of meditation and pastoral usefulness. In the course of a single year (1377) he was twice summoned to appear before the spiritual tribunals: in the first instance, before Convocation; and in the second, before several prelates as commissioners of the Pope himself. The Parliament opened on January 27, 1377. On February 3, the Convocation—the clerical parliament—also met, and the Convocation summoned Wicklif before its tribunal. The Bishop of London, William Courtenay, an imperious churchman, would seem to have been the instigator of this proceeding. It is not known what were the exact charges to be preferred against the Reformer. The greatest figure in this trial, however, proved to be John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. We have already referred to this eminent personage as principal member of the Council of Bruges, which sought the re-establishment of peace with France, and of which Council in some sort Wicklif was also a member. Before the visit to Bruges, Lancaster, who was most

friendly with Chaucer, was interested in Wicklif, and since that visit more fully became his patron. There is much obscurity in the relations of political parties at the period, but Lancaster was entirely opposed to the hierarchy. Shirley represents Lancaster as corrupt in life, narrow and unscrupulous in policy, and in the interests of his political ambition bent on humbling the priesthood. Lancaster resented the official arrogance of the prelates, and the large share which they drew to themselves of the temporal power; Wicklif dreamt of restoring, by apostolical poverty, its long-lost apostolical purity to the clergy. The object of Lancaster was to humiliate, the aim of Wicklif to purify, the Church. "From points so opposite," concludes Shirley, "and with aims so contradictory, were they united to reduce the wealth and humble the pride of the English hierarchy." Whether this represents the whole situation may be doubted, but we may feel sure that the prince and the preacher in their common action against the Church were governed by widely different reasons. There are few things in history more strange than the combinations by which great movements have been furthered, the equivocal instruments by which the worthiest ends have been achieved. God plays off one political party or force against another, one political programme or movement against another, to lofty ends of His own, which are not contemplated by any political party whatever.

Whatever might be the purity of his purpose, the Duke of Lancaster saw in Wicklif an able ally in putting down the political influence of the prelates,

and resolved to afford him his powerful protection in his approaching trial. On Thursday, February 19, 1377, the Convocation assembled in St. Paul's, and at Wicklif's side appeared the Duke of Lancaster and Lord Henry Percy, the Grand Marshal of England, followed by a band of armed men, and attended by several friends of the learned divine, in particular by five Bachelors of Divinity of the five Mendicant Orders, who, by the Duke's desire, were to stand forward in case of need as the advocates of Wicklif. So great was the crowd on this occasion, that the authority of Lord Percy, the Earl Marshal, and that of the Duke himself, were scarcely sufficient to procure the accused an avenue of approach to the place of his judges. Some disturbance, arising from this difficulty, attracted the notice of Courtenay, who was about to conduct the prosecution ; and we may presume that his displeasure was not at all diminished on perceiving the two most powerful subjects of the Crown prepared to shield the Rector of Lutterworth from the meditated vengeance of his enemies. The prelate hastily accosted these noblemen with the language of reproof, proceeding so far as to express his regret that he had not adopted measures to prevent their admission to the court. Here an angry discussion arose between the Bishop of London and the Duke. The Grand Marshal now turned to Wicklif and requested him to be seated. "No!" exclaimed the Bishop of London, beside himself with rage, "Wicklif must not be seated there; it was neither lawful nor becoming that when summoned to answer before his judges he should sit during his examina-



WICKLIF LEAVING ST. PAUL'S.



tion—he must stand.” The dispute between them on this point became so violent as to end in the use of abusive language on both sides, by which the multitude of people who witnessed the scene were much disturbed. The Duke threatening the Bishop, the Bishop reviling the Duke, the assembly broke up in disorder. The Duke and the Lord Marshal withdrew with Wicklif, without the latter having spoken a single word.

At that moment the Duke of Lancaster was exceedingly unpopular with the people, as the idea prevailed that he was aiming at the Crown, and designed to limit the privileges of the people. And in the political complications of the crisis the prelates were in alliance with the citizens of London. Consequently, the tumult arising in the trial at St. Paul’s was directed against Lancaster. And as on the same day a motion was made in Parliament that the government of the City should no longer be left in the hands of the Mayor, but should be handed over to a royal commissioner, the wrath of the citizens found vent for itself in action as well as in word. The crowd pulled down the armorial coat of the Duke from his palace in the Savoy, and hung it up in a public place of the City, reversed, in token that the Duke was a traitor. They had even a design to demolish the Duke’s palace, but Bishop Courtenay himself interposed, and entreated them to return to quietness and good order. The citation of Wicklif before Convocation had thus ended in a manner quite unexpected. In citing Wicklif before Convocation, the prelates wished to

strike a blow, in his person, at the Duke, and really the prosecution ended in the humiliation of Lancaster. There is no reason, however, to suppose that Wicklif shared at all in the resentment of the citizens. On the contrary, it is evident that his opinions were not less acceptable to the inhabitants of London than to the students of Oxford. The wrath of the hierarchy was hot against Wicklif, but on this occasion the unpopular patron of the popular Reformer proved the lightning rod to convey the fire of priestly indignation away from the head of Wicklif.

As the political friends and patrons of Wicklif were too powerful to allow of the prelates carrying out their wishes for his humiliation, they had recourse, therefore, to the Papal Court, in order to put him down by the right of the highest authority which existed in the Catholic Church. It seems most probable that the English bishops collected articles of his and sent them to Rome, pressing for a condemnation of them as heresy. On May 22, 1377, Gregory XI., who had shortly before removed from Avignon to Italy, put his hand to five Bulls against Wicklif in the magnificent church of St. Maria Maggiore. One of the five is addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London. They are to ascertain, by private inquiry, whether the propositions contained in a schedule appended to the Bull had actually been put forth by John Wicklif; and if this should be the case, then to cause him to be put in prison, and to be kept there until such time as they should receive further instructions from the Pope. A second



Bull, directed also to the Primate and the Bishop of London, appoints what course should be taken in case Wicklif should get secret intelligence of the process with which he is threatened, and should save himself by flight from impending imprisonment. A third Bull, also addressed to the same prelates, requires them, either personally or by theologians of unsuspected orthodoxy, to bring the condemned doctrines of Wicklif to the notice of King Edward and his sons, the Princes, as also the Princess of Wales, Johanna, the widow of the Black Prince, and other great personages of the realm and privy counsellors, to satisfy them of the erroneous character of these doctrines, and of the dangers which they threatened to the interests of the State; and thus to engage them to assist with all their might in rooting out these errors from the kingdom. The fourth Bull, directed to the King himself, while warmly commending the zeal which he and his predecessors upon the throne had displayed for the Catholic faith, earnestly entreated and required him to extend his royal grace and assistance to the Archbishop and Bishop in the execution of their commission. Last of all, the fifth Bull is addressed to the Chancellor and the University of Oxford, to require of them, in the most emphatic manner, and even upon pain of the loss of their privileges, not only to guard against the setting forth and maintaining of erroneous doctrines, but to commit Wicklif and his obstinate followers to prison, and to deliver them over to the Pope's commissioners, the Archbishop and the Bishop of London.

The Papal Bulls were signed in Rome by Gregory XI., as before stated, on May 22, 1377; but seven months elapsed before they were made public in England. It is not difficult to understand the reason why. On June 21, 1377, Edward III. breathed his last, so the Bull addressed to the King became inept. In October the first Parliament of Richard II. assembled, and in the House of Commons, at least, there prevailed so outspoken a feeling of antagonism to Rome, that it appeared every way advisable to wait for the prorogation of Parliament. At length it seemed to the prelates high time to carry out the Pope's commission. Accordingly, under date December 18, the Bull addressed to the University of Oxford was issued to the Chancellor. The University with great reluctance took action against Wicklif, and showed itself throughout quite indisposed to prosecute its brightest ornament. Early in the ensuing year (1378) Wicklif appeared before a Synod in the Archbishop's palace at Lambeth. He presented himself before the Archbishop, Simon Sudbury, and the Bishop of London, William Courtenay. In defence of the nineteen Theses, condemned by the Roman See as erroneous, he put in a written answer, in which he set forth the point of view from which he had proceeded in these Theses, and at once expounded and justified the sense of them, one by one. This answer was meant to be communicated to the Pope himself. He explains his sentiments on the limits of the Papal authority; on the power of the Crown over the revenues of the clergy; and on

the power of the clergy over the souls of the people ; on all of which topics Wicklif's opinions were such as to provoke the serious displeasure of the ecclesiastical orders.

In this trial Wicklif had no longer John of Gaunt to stand by him, but he had become strong in the sympathy of the people, and was not without the sympathy of nobles. Sir Henry Clifford, an officer in the Court of the widowed Princess of Wales, appeared in the session, and demanded of the commissaries, in the name of the Princess, that they should abstain from pronouncing any final judgment respecting the accused. Citizens of London, too, forced a passage into the chapel, and loudly and menacingly took part with the theologian, who was a patriot so much beloved and honoured. This double intimidation, from above and from beneath, the spiritual tribunal was unable to withstand. Wicklif was allowed to leave the tribunal as free as he had appeared before it, quite contrary to the intentions which had been conceived in Rome, and directly in the teeth of the instructions which had been given to the commissaries. The monkish historian, Walsingham, in relating the issue of this trial, evinces his deep displeasure : " The delegates, shaken as a reed with the wind, became soft as oil in their speech, to the open forfeiture of their own dignity, and the injury of the whole Church. With such fear were they struck, that you would think them a man who hears not, or one in whose mouth are no reproofs." Dean Hook, with his strong sacerdotal bias, has but a qualified sympathy

with our Reformer, and because of the meekness and moderation displayed by Wicklif on this trial and other occasions, speaks of his "physical timidity;" but, the monkish historian being the judge, the timidity was elsewhere.

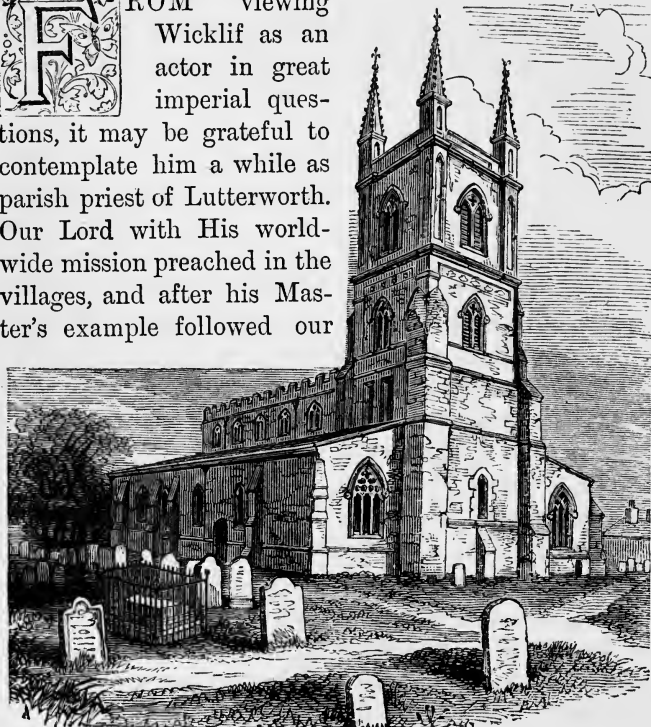
"Thus, then," to use the words of Lechler, "was a second attack upon Wicklif happily repelled. The first had been an independent attempt of the English Episcopate; the second had proceeded from the central power of Rome itself, whose organs for this occasion were two English prelates. But on the first occasion a prince of the blood had made use of his influence in the Government to thwart, in a violent way, the design of the prelates. On the second occasion, a powerful sympathy from different circles in the country served as a shield to cover the bold Reformer; the learned Corporation of Oxford bestirred themselves to guard in his person their own self-government; the mother of the young King put in a powerful word for him; and the burghers of London, in a tumultuary manner, manifested their sympathy with the honoured patriot. We see how widely among the higher and lower strata of the population, esteem for Wicklif and the influence of his spirit were then diffused." We may wonder how Wicklif escaped the bitter and unscrupulous opposition of his adversaries, and in such an age succeeded in gaining attention to free rich ideas of human life and government; but the hour was singularly propitious for the man, as the man was for the hour. The temper of the age was favourable. There was the

stirring and expanding of a national intellectual life which found its highest expression and stimulation in a poet like Chaucer, in a scientist like Roger Bacon, in a thinker like Occam, in a theologian like Wicklif. And the events of the age were favourable. There existed in the country a strong antipathy to the French, and the long residence of the Popes at Avignon had fused the Roman Court with the French empire and its policy; thus the Papal Court came in for its share of the national hatred of the French. And the national disasters by land and sea which marked the last years of Edward III., laid great burdens upon the people, and made them keenly alive to the unseasonable exactions of the Pope and priesthood. We have read of a poor man in Ireland who got a comfortable subsistence for himself and family out of an eagle's nest by robbing the eaglets of food which the old ones supplied, and clipping the eaglets' wings to keep up the ruse. So has the Papacy in all ages crippled the powers of the people whilst it has consumed their treasures; and in the epoch before us the nation was conscious of the wrong it thus suffered, and struck the intruder with its royal wing. This remarkable conjuncture of circumstances gave to a Reformer like Wicklif a certain immunity. Well did the brave Christian patriot improve the auspicious occasion by sowing in the public mind large ideas of liberty and progress which were never rooted out, and which bear their bright precious fruits at this hour.

## CHAPTER IV.

### WICKLIF AS A PREACHER.

**F**ROM viewing  
Wicklif as an  
actor in great  
imperial ques-  
tions, it may be grateful to  
contemplate him a while as  
parish priest of Lutterworth.  
Our Lord with His world-  
wide mission preached in the  
villages, and after his Mas-  
ter's example followed our



Reformer. Wicklif was truly a great preacher who largely availed himself of preaching as a means of battling with the evils of his time. Many of his sermons have come down to us, some of which are in Latin, and others in English. The Latin sermons were, most probably, delivered in Oxford before the University, perhaps in St. Mary's. Most of the English sermons would be preached to his congregation in Lutterworth. Wicklif had seen what a mighty instrument preaching had been in the purest days of the friars, and he ever attached the greatest importance to it as the means of diffusing knowledge and life. "The highest service that men may attain to on earth," said he, "is to preach the Word of God. The service falls peculiarly to priests, and therefore God more straitly demands it of them. Hereby should they produce children to God, and that is the end for which God has wedded the Church. . . . And for this cause Jesus Christ left other works, and occupied Himself mostly in preaching; and thus did His Apostles, and for this God loved them. . . . Idleness in this office is to the Church its greatest injury, producing most the children of the fiend, and sending them to his court. Jesus Christ, when He ascended into heaven, commanded it especially to all His Apostles, to preach the Gospel freely to every man. So also, when Christ spoke last to Peter, He bade him thrice, as he loved Him, to feed His sheep; and this would not a wise shepherd have done, had he not himself loved it well. In this stands the office of the spiritual shepherd. As the bishop of the temple

hindered Christ, so is He hindered by the hindering of this deed. Therefore Christ told them that at the day of doom Sodom and Gomorrah should better fare than they. And thus, if our bishops preach not in their own persons, and hinder true priests from preaching, they are in the sin of the bishops who killed the Lord Jesus Christ."

The inmates of convents might affect to be astonished at the enthusiasm of Wicklif for preaching, and insist that a studious contemplative life was best. To these Wicklif powerfully addresses himself: "When true men teach, that by the law of God, and wit, and reason, each priest is bound to do his utmost to preach the Gospel of Christ; the fiend beguileth hypocrites to excuse him from this service by teaching a feigned contemplative life, and urging, that since that is the best, and they may not do both, they are needed, from their love of God, to leave the preaching of the Gospel to live in contemplation. But see now the hypocrisy and falsehood of this. Our faith teaches us that since Christ was God, and might not err, He taught and did the best life for priests; yet Christ preached the Gospel, and charged all His Apostles and disciples to go and preach the Gospel to all men. The best life then for priests in this world, is to teach and preach the Gospel. God also teacheth in the old law, that the office of a priest is to show to the people their sins. But as each priest is a prophet by his order, according to St. Gregory on the Gospels, it is then the office of each to preach and to proclaim the sins of the people; and in this manner



shall each priest be an angel of God, as Holy Writ affirms. Also Christ, and John the Baptist, left the desert, and preached the Gospel to their death. To do this, therefore, is the greatest charity, or else they were out of charity, or at least imperfect in it; and that may hardly be, since the one was God; and since no man, after Christ, hath been holier than the Baptist. Also, the holy prophet, Jeremiah, hallowed in his mother's womb, might not be excused from preaching by his love of contemplation, but was charged of God to proclaim the sins of the people, and to suffer hard pain for doing so; and so were all the prophets of God. Ah! Lord, since Christ and John, and all the prophets, were compelled by charity to come out of the desert to preach to the people, and to leave their solitary prayers, how dare these pretending heretics say it is better to be still, and to pray over their own feigned ordinances, than to preach the Gospel of Christ? Lord! what cursed spirit of falsehood moveth priests to close themselves within stone walls for all their life, since Christ commanded all His Apostles and priests to go into all the world, and to preach the Gospel? Certainly they are open fools, and do plainly against the Gospel; and, if they continue in this error, are accursed of God, as perilous deceivers and heretics. For in the best part of the Pope's law it is said, that each man who cometh to the priesthood, taketh on him the office of a beadle, or a crier, to go before doomsday, and to cry to the people their sins, and the vengeance of God; and since men are holden heretics who do against the

Pope's law, are not those priests heretics who refuse to preach the Gospel of Christ, and compel other true men to leave the preaching of it? All laws opposed to this service are opposed to God's law, and reason, and charity, and for the maintenance of pride and covetousness in Antichrist's worldly clerks."

In one of his sermons Wicklif supplies us with important information as to his views on preaching. As Lechler points out, before everything else Wicklif holds up the truth that the preaching of the Word of God is that function which subserves, in a degree quite peculiar to itself, the edification of the Church; and this is so, because the Word of God is a seed (Luke viii. 11: "The seed is the Word of God"). In reflecting upon this truth, he is filled with wonder, and exclaims, "O marvellous power of the Divine Seed! which overpowers strong men in arms, softens hard hearts, and renews and changes into Divine men who had been brutalized by sins, and departed infinitely far from God. Obviously such a high morality could never be worked by the word of a priest, if the Spirit of Life and the Eternal Word did not, above all things else, work with it." Wicklif again and again censures the evil practice of not preaching God's Word, but setting forth stories, fables, or poems, which were altogether foreign to the Bible. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries it had become almost a prevailing pulpit fashion, instead of opening up Bible thoughts, and applying them to life, to draw the materials of sermons from civil and natural history, from the

legendary stories of the Church, and even from the fable-world of the Middle Ages, and the mythology of the heathen gods. Wicklif, whose judgment had been enlightened and sharpened by the Word of God, set himself against this fatal pulpit fashion.

And Wicklif was not only anxious that the Word of God should be preached, but that this should be done in the right way. He objected to the piecemeal style of preaching God's Word; the preacher was not to content himself with a scriptural motto, but the fulness of the Word was to be brought out in the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth. He disapproved also of the scholastic form of preaching—the habit of frequent definitions, hair-splitting divisions and subdivisions, and endless syllogistic processes of proof. And he is severe upon the rhetorical and poetical style. Some flowers are said to be so sweet the bees will not light upon them, and some sermons are so gorgeous and odorous as to be of little practical service. For this style the Reformer has no toleration. In some churches we see the Ten Commandments painted in such involved strange characters it is impossible the common people should decipher them: and preachers in all ages have fallen into the same temptation, and made Law and Gospel unintelligible by making them grand. Wicklif was an earnest man set upon saving men, and profoundly conscious that salvation was in the Word: so was he impatient of anything that lost sight of these great points; mere philosophy and eloquence were im-

pertinences. He truly teaches: "In every proclamation of the Gospel the true teacher must address himself to the heart, so as to flash the light into the spirit of the hearer, and to bend his will into obedience to the truth."

Wicklif himself preached God's Word, not man's. His sermons are full of Scripture. "In all cases where he pronounces a judgment upon any doctrine which is before him, or upon any ecclesiastical custom and institution, it is always the Bible which he employs as the standard. He goes back to the teaching of the Redeemer; he points to the Apostles and their procedure; the authority of the primitive Church is everywhere appealed to. To bring out the doctrine of the Scriptures as of supreme authority, is his highest aim."\* The style of Wicklif as a preacher is, of course, somewhat peculiar to us, but his sermons are even now most admirable and deeply interesting. "The style is very often simple and clear, the mode of expression not without vividness, sometimes picturesque and apposite to popular taste, and here and there, too, especially in polemical passages, not without a touch even of banter and raillery." Shirley, speaking of the more literary aspects of Wicklif as writer and preacher, observes: "It is in his original tracts that the exquisite pathos, the keen delicate irony, the manly passion of his short, nervous sentences, fairly overmasters the weakness of the unformed language, and gives us English which cannot be read without a feeling of its beauty to this hour."

\* Lechler.



WAYSIDE PREACHING.



We will, however, give a few examples of his method of teaching. He thus dwells on the obligation of priests to extend their services as preachers to the most scattered portions of the community: "The Gospel telleth us the duty which falls to all the disciples of Christ, and also telleth us how priests, both high and low, should occupy themselves in the Church of God, and in serving Him. And first, Jesus Himself did indeed the lessons which He taught. The Gospel relates how Jesus went about in the places of the country, both great and small, as in cities and castles, or small towns, thus to teach us to profit generally unto men, and not to forbear to preach to a people because they are few, and our name may not, in consequence, be great. For we should labour for God, and from Him hope for our reward. There is no doubt that Christ went into small uplandish towns—as to Bethphage, and Cana in Galilee; for Christ went to all those places where He wished to do good. And He laboured not thus for gain, for He was not smitten with pride or with covetousness."

In an exposition of the Epistle read on the third Sunday after Advent, he thus proceeds: "Let a man so guess of us, as of the ministers of God, and as dispensers of His services. And if each man should be found true in this matter, priests, both high and low, should be found more true. But most foul is the failure and the sin of priests in this respect. As if ashamed to appear as the servants of Christ, the Pope and his bishops show the life of emperors and of the lordly in the world, and not the living of

Christ. But since Christ hated such things, they give us no room to guess them to be the ministers of Christ. And so they fail in the first lesson which Paul teacheth in this Scripture. Lord ! what good doth the idle talk of the Pope, who must be called of men ‘most blessed father,’ and bishops ‘most reverend men,’ while their life is discordant from that of Christ ? In so taking of these names, they show that they are on the fiend’s side, and children of the father of falsehood. After St. Gregory, the Pope may say that he is the servant of the servants of God, but his life reverseth his name ; for he faileth to follow Christ, and is not the dispenser of the services which God hath bidden, but departeth from this service to that lordship which emperors have bestowed. And thus, all the services of the Church which Christ hath appointed to his priests are turned aside, so that if men will take heed to that service which Christ hath thus limited, it is all turned upside down, and hypocrites are become rulers.”

Wicklif shows his people that clerical displeasure is not a thing they need greatly fear : “The Apostle held that in his case it was a small thing to be judged of man’s judgment : so men should not suppose themselves injured by the blind judgment of men, since God will judge all things, whether to good or evil. Paul therefore taketh little heed to the judgment that man judgeth, for he knew well, from the Scriptures, that if God judgeth thus, then man’s judgment must stand, and not else. Thus there are two days of judgment, the day of the Lord, and man’s day. The day of the Lord is the day of doom,



when He shall judge all manner of men; the day of man is now present, when man judgeth, and by the law of man. Now every present judgment must be reversed, if it aught reverseth reason. But at the day of doom all shall stand according to the judgment of God. That is the day of the Lord, because then all shall be as He will, and nothing shall reverse His judgment; and St. Paul therefore saith: 'Judge nothing before the time, until the time of the Lord come, the which shall light the hidden things of darkness, and shall make known the counsels of the heart.' And this moveth many men to think day and night upon the law of God, for that leadeth to a knowledge of what is God's will, and without a knowledge of this should man do nothing, and this also moveth men to forsake the judgment of man. To St. Paul the truth of Holy Writ, which is the will of the first Judge, was enough until doomsday. Stewards of the Church, therefore, should not judge merely according to their own will, but always according to the law of God, and in things of which they are certain. But the laws and judgments which Antichrist has brought in, and added to the law of God, mar too much the Church of Christ. For with the stewards of the Church, the laws of Antichrist are the rules by which they make officers therein; and to deceive the laity, Antichrist challengeth to be, in such things, fully God's fellow; for he affirms that, if he judgeth thus, his will should be taken for reason, whereas this is the highest point that falleth to the Godhead. Popes and kings, therefore, should seek a reason above their own will, for such blasphemy

often bringeth to men more than the pride of Lucifer. He said he would ascend and be like the Most High, but he challenged not to be the fellow of God, even with Him or passing Him ! May God bring down this pride, and help that His word may reverse that of the fiend ! Well indeed I know, that when it is at the highest, this smoke shall disappear." The advice of the preacher in conclusion is, that his hearers should study the will of God, and thus learn to cherish an independence of the judgments pronounced upon them by "Popes or prelates," inasmuch as such decisions "stretch not to doomsday"—the period when the will of God shall be felt as supreme and unalterable.

One more extract must be sufficient to illustrate the manner in which the Reformer was accustomed to notice the disorders of the hierarchy from the pulpit. "Freedom," it is remarked, "is much coveted, as men know by nature, but much more should Christian men covet the better freedom of Christ. It is known, however, that Antichrist hath enthralled the Church more than it was under the old law, though then the service was not to be borne. New laws are now made by Antichrist, and such as are not founded on the laws of the Saviour. More ceremonies, too, are now brought in than were in the old law, and more do they tarry men in coming to heaven than did the traditions of the Scribes and Pharisees. One cord of this thralldom is the lordship claimed by Antichrist, as being full lord both of spirituals and temporals. Thus he turneth Christian men aside from serving Christ in

Christian freedom ; so much so that they might well say as the poet saith in his fable the frogs said to the harrow, ‘ Cursed be so many masters.’ For in this day Christian men are oppressed, now with popes, and now with bishops ; now with cardinals under popes, and now with prelates under bishops ; and now their head is assailed with censures—in short, buffeted are they as men would serve a football. But certainly, if the Baptist were not worthy to loose the latchet of the shoe of Christ, Antichrist hath no power thus to impede the freedom which Christ hath bought. Christ gave this freedom to men, that they might come to the bliss of heaven with less difficulty ; but Antichrist burdens them, that they may give him money. Foul therefore is this doing, with respect both to God and His law. Ever also do these hypocrites dread lest God’s law should be shown, and they should thus be convicted of their falsehood. For God and His law are most powerful ; and for a time, only, may these deceivers hold men in the thraldom of Satan.”

The following excerpt will give another specimen of his preaching aside from controversy. It is the substance of a sermon delivered by him on a Christmas Day, and upon the passage in Isaiah, beginning with the words, “ Unto us a child is born.”—“ On this day we may affirm that a Child is born to us, since Jesus, according to our belief, was this day born. Both in figure, and in letter, God spake of old to this intent, that to us a Child should be born, in Whom we should have joy. From this speech of Isaiah three short lessons are

to be delivered, that men may rejoice in the after-services of this Child. First, we hold it as a part of our faith, that as our first parents had sinned, there must be atonement made for it, according to the righteousness of God. For as God is merciful, so He is full of righteousness. But except He keep His righteousness in this point, how may He judge all the world? There is no sin done but what is against God, but this sin was done directly against the Lord Almighty and All Rightful. The greater also the Lord is, against whom any sin is done, the greater always is the sin—just as to do against the king's bidding is deemed the greatest of offences. But the sin which is done against God's bidding is greater without measure. God then, according to our belief, bid Adam that he should not eat of the apple. Yet he broke God's command; nor was he to be excused therein by his own weakness, by Eve, nor by the serpent; and hence, according to the righteousness of God, this sin must always be punished. It is to speak lightly, to say that God might of His mere power forgive this sin, without the atonement which was made for it, since the justice of God would not suffer this, but requires that every trespass be punished either in earth or in hell. God may not accept a person, to forgive him his sin without an atonement, else He must give free licence to sin, both in angels and men, and then sin were no sin, and our God were no God! Such is the first lesson we take as a part of our faith; the second is, that the person who may make atonement for the sin of our first father must

needs be God and man. For as man's nature trespassed, so must man's nature render atonement. An angel, therefore, would attempt in vain to make atonement for man, for he has not the power to do it, nor was his the nature that here sinned. But since all men form one person, if any member of this person maketh atonement, the whole person maketh it. But we may see that if God made a man of nought, or strictly anew, after the manner of Adam, yet he were bound to God to the extent of his power for himself, having nothing wherewith to make atonement for his own, or for Adam's sin. Since, then, atonement must be made for the sin of Adam, as we have shown, the person to make the atonement must be God and man, for then the worthiness of this person's deeds were even with the unworthiness of the sin. . . . And we suppose that this Child is only born *to* the men who follow Him in His manner of life, for He was born *against* others. The men who are unjust and proud, and who rebel against God, may read their judgment in the person of Christ. By Him, they must needs be condemned, and most certainly if they continue wicked toward His Spirit to their death." \*

We now present a few extracts gathered from the volumes of Wicklif's Sermons published by the Oxford University, and edited by Arnold. Such extracts, however, give but a slight idea of the real wealth and beauty of the discourses as a whole.

\* Quoted by Vaughan.

*Extract from the Sermon on the Gospel for the Fourth  
Sunday after Trinity.*

“Be ye therefore merciful,” &c.—LUKE vi. 36.

“This Gospel moveth men to mercy against the hypocrisy of these false Pharisees. There be many fathers, as father of kind (kin), and father of love, but the most proper father is He that maketh men out of nothing, for He is father of men’s bodies, and father of their souls, and in virtue of Him work all other fathers. And this father should we cue (follow) in all our works, for even if we may not attain to this father, nevertheless those deeds are nought that are not ensampled and wrought by this father. The mercy of this father can we not tell fully, for He is the greatest worker that can be in this world, and He cannot work without mixing mercy with His work, for He wrought by mercy when He made this world, since He did good to angels, and made them perfect, and brought them to a higher state without any desert of theirs. And so when He doth good to any creature, He maketh it perfect of His pure grace, since God Almighty, all-witty,\* and all-good, cannot work unless He work by mercy. Be we then merciful because of God’s goodness. The least mercy of God is among clerks (i.e., the clergy) that will not give the good things of grace without selling them, and therefore this sin is heresy before God, the greatest and the first that parteth men from God, for they weigh their winnings more than their God.”

*Extract from the Sermon on the Gospel for the Fourteenth  
Sunday after Trinity.*

THE HEALING OF THE TEN LEPERS.—LUKE xvii. 11.

“Christ taught by this deed that absolving of men is nought unless God absolve beforehand, as God Himself absolved these lepers. And so priests absolve as God’s

\* In Wicklif’s time the word “wit” meant “wisdom,” so that “all-witty” signifies “all-wise.”

vicars, according to God's absolutions, and else they absolve no more than priests of the old law healed men of their leprosy, and that could they not do. This alien that came again to thank God for His help betokeneth true Christian men that abide in this belief; these nine that are many more betoken men who have forsaken the truth, that imagine that it is enough that their priest absolve them, and especially the high priest, however he err in judgment, and no matter how these men that are thus absolved live before or after. And against this heresy should true priests cry fast, for by this sin is sin hid, and absolution bought and sold, as if men were buying an ox, or a cow, and much more falsely. We should come again to Christ, and both confess His kindness, and make covenant with Him to leave our sin from henceforth, and think how Christ bade the woman go, and resolve to do no more sin. For this covenant, kept with sorrow for sin and God's grace, is enough, even if men speak no more with priests; but speech with them is needful in that they teach men this truth, and men's ordinance cannot reverse this sentence; and thus we grant that everything that Peter bound or absolved on earth, or any vicar of Peter, in as far as they accord with God, is bound or loosed in heaven, and else not, for else they are false."

*Extract from the Sermon on the Gospel for the Sixth  
Sunday after Easter.*

THE MISSION OF THE COMFORTER.

"Christ telleth His disciples of the coming of the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, and what life they shall lead afterwards. And every man should learn this love, for then he may be a physician of the soul, and know by signs of his life whether his soul be sick or whole. Lord! since a physician learneth diligently his signs in the pulse and other things, whether a man's body be whole; how much more should he know the symptoms that express the health of man's soul, and how he stands in relation to God. Although such things are secret, and pass the worldly wit of men,

nevertheless the Holy Ghost telleth men of such signs and maketh them more certain than men can judge of bodily health. And, because he should naturally desire to know the soul's state, therefore the Holy Ghost, that teacheth us to know these signs, is called a Comforter of men, passing other comforters. And as a man's soul is better than the body, and endless good passeth temporal good, so this knowing of the soul passeth other men's cunning (*i.e.*, knowledge)."

*Extract from Sermon on LUKE xi. 33.*

"No man, when he hath lighted a candle, putteth it in a secret place," &c.

"This Gospel teacheth how each confessor should keep himself, and especially abbots, and these new religious orders. First speaketh Christ in figurative speech, and saith that *no man lighteth a lantern in darkness, and putteth it in one of these two infamous places, neither in hid place, nor under a bushel*. Every man should be a lantern lighted of God. The body of this lantern is man's body. The light in this lantern is man's soul, and the illumination therein is the wit that God giveth man. That man putteth his lantern in a hid place or under a bushel that liveth in worldly business, and is of no profit to the Church. For God hath given him soul, and wit, to light men here in earth that are in the darkness of sin, as every man should give light to others; for every man hath some knowledge that another lacketh, and so every man should be a lantern to light some men of God's house; and therefore God giveth this light to light some men in this world. And then the light faileth in this lantern when the man is dead in body. And if he be dead in good works, this lantern is dead in a man. But just as a lantern has no light of itself to shine within or without, so man's body has no light of itself either of life or of wit.

"And so God biddeth this lantern to be put *on high on a candlestick to give men light in God's house*, and to light this house in every direction. And so this candlestick may



be a state that God approveth to this end, as seven candlesticks of gold are seven states of bishops. And, as many men think, all these new religious orders are hid by man's ordinance to bear light to Christ's Church; for if a man be closed in a cloister, what profiteth he by Christ's ordinance, to make light to his brother, that feeleth not of his profit? And thus closing of these cloisters, or high houses that men have founded, is beside Christ's law, founded by the prince of this earth. And so all these are ill hid from the profit of holy Church.

“ And thus speaketh Christ generally to Christian men, and saith, *The lantern of thy body is thine eye.* And that is in double manner, for some men have *a simple eye, and that eye lighteth all the body*; and if thine eye be wayward, then *thy body shall be dark.* Here is the lantern called the light that should be in this lantern; for this light is the end wherefore God hath made this lantern. And if this light be of right intent, then is thine eye simple; as men that would be profitable to God's Church, after God's law, have a right eye, and a simple, even after God's will. But he hath a blind eye turned away from God that seeketh more his own winning than profit of Christ's Church. And so saith Christ, that simple eye maketh all the body shining, and an eye that is turned amiss maketh the body all dark. And the body may be called the multitude of man's works, or man's life that is medeful or sinful according to such intention; for by this man hath charity, or lacketh charity in his works. And thus the charity of Christ stretcheth directly, and without angle, to the profit of Christ's Church, and not to its own profit. And thus Paul sought many men's profit, and not his own worldly winning; for such an intention is always dark, and the light of God passeth not through it.

“ And therefore Christ biddeth us *that we should see that the light in us be not darkness*, through evil intention; for then it is an evil light. No man is here on earth to whom God giveth not some light: as some knowledge and some intention of coveting some good. And if his light be rightful,

and without angle of crookedness, then God's grace shineth with him, and else his light is darkness; for such crookedness bringeth again darkness of man's life."

*Extract from Sermon on LUKE ii. 33.*

"To some men it pleaseth to tell the tales that they find in saints' lives, or outside of Holy Writ, and such things often please the people most. But we hold this manner good—to leave such words, and trust in God, and tell surely His law, and especially His Gospels; for we believe that they came from Christ, and so God speaketh them all. And these words, since they are God's, should be taken for our creed; and more will they quicken men than other words that men know not. And thus these feasts of the saints have this good among the rest, that one may well expound the Gospel in them."

*Extract from Sermon on JOHN xxi. 15.*

"Christ taught the Apostles to feed His sheep in pastures of Holy Writ, and not in rotten pastures, as are fables, and leasings, and laws of men. The pasture evermore green with truths that nevermore fail is the law of Holy Writ, that endureth in the other world. But, because a good shepherd should keep his sheep from wolves, and defend them from scabs and from rending, therefore Christ bade Peter thrice that he should keep His sheep. Christ taught not His shepherd to raise a crusade and kill His sheep, with His lambs, and spoil them of their goods; but this is Antichrist's teaching, that the fiend hath now brought in, and by this it is known that these are not Peter's vicars."

Wicklif himself stood forth as a model preacher and pastor, and not only did he faithfully fulfil his personal duty in the pulpit, but both by word and deed he laboured to promote everywhere the right preaching of the Gospel. One of the most remarkable acts of his wonderful career was the institution

of a Preaching Itinerancy. At the end of May, 1382, the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Courtenay, in a mandate addressed to the Bishop of London, spoke of "certain unauthorized itinerant preachers who, as he had unhappily been compelled to learn, set forth erroneous, yea, heretical assertions in public sermons, not only in churches, but also in public squares and other profane places;" and "they do this," as he adds with special emphasis, "under the guise of great holiness, but without having obtained any episcopal or papal authorization." The lordly Primate no doubt here refers to Wicklif's "poor priests." Some have supposed that it was first at Lutterworth, in his quiet rural charge, that Wicklif began to send forth itinerant preachers, but Lechler is satisfied that Oxford was the cradle of the new institution. He supposes that Wicklif, while still in Oxford, entered into close relations to a number of young men who were in part graduates in Arts, and in part youths under age, who were still in their undergraduate course. "I have not a moment's doubt, that while he was still in Oxford, Wicklif sent out as voluntary itinerant preachers young men belonging to this circle, which had attached itself so closely to his person, and had embraced his theological views and convictions as well as his practical Church principles. Perhaps the entrance which the first preachers of his school found among the people, and the warm acceptance which their sermons obtained in the country districts, gave fresh courage to himself and his scholars, so that the first itinerants were followed by ever-

increasing numbers, and the whole undertaking gradually took root and extended itself. Wicklif, of course, when at a later period he withdrew entirely to Lutterworth, did not give up this agency, but carried it on with all the more zeal, the more painfully he felt that, by his dismissal from the University, a field of richly blessed work had been closed to his ministry.”\*

The sending forth of these itinerant preachers was a measure which seems to have passed through several stages of development. In its first stage, the preachers were exclusively men who had already received orders. But in the second stage of the matter, a step full of importance was taken in advance. The adoption of lay preaching was resolved upon. “That lay preachers appeared among the Lollards after Wicklif’s death does not admit of a doubt, but that even in his lifetime, and with his knowledge and approval, laymen were employed as itinerant preachers, I believe I am able to prove.”† When Wicklif refers to his beloved itinerants in sermons of his latest years, he no longer speaks of them as “poor priests,” but on all occasions applies to them the names of *evangelical men*, or “apostolic men.” And in one of his later sermons he shows with great emphasis that for a ministry in the Church the Divine call and commission are perfectly sufficient; there is an installation by God Himself, although the bishop has given in such a case no imposition of hands, in accordance with his traditions. These men went forth in long gar-

\* Lechler.

† *Ibid.*

ments of coarse red woollen cloth, bare-foot, and staff in hand, in order to represent themselves as pilgrims, and their wayfaring as a kind of pilgrimage; their coarse woollen dress being a symbol of their poverty and toil. Thus they wandered from village to village, from town to town, and from county to county, without stop or rest, preaching, teaching, warning, wherever they could find hearers, sometimes in church or chapel, wherever any such stood open for prayer and quiet devotion; sometimes in the churchyard, when they found the church itself closed; and sometimes in the public street or market-place.

Our readers will naturally revert to the institution of a similar order of Itinerant Preachers by the Wesleys; in fact, the order instituted by Wicklif and that called into existence by Wesley are strikingly alike. "Men are more than institutions," and when men arise with a burning love to their fellows, they are apt to rend institutions or modify them when they are found in the way of the practical well-being of the people. It was so with Wicklif as it was with Wesley in relation to an ordained ministry; they both believed in an ordained ministry, in men being called of God for the exclusive work of preaching the Gospel; but they both found that such ordained orders were failing to do their work, souls were perishing, and measures must be taken to publish salvation. "It is lawful to do good on the Sabbath-day." That is, the most sacred institutions are plastic to meet the exigences of human life and need. The Sabbath-day is not the

end, an ordained ministry is not the end : they are means to an end—namely, the service of souls ; and these institutions, and all other institutions, are consequently susceptible of limitation or variation, suspension or supplement, according to the supreme needs of the souls of men. One of the first evidences that a man is called to preach is, that he can preach. One of the Puritans says : “ God does not send forth dumb orators, blind seers, lame messengers ;” but Wicklif found hardly any other than these equivocal ecclesiastics ; and felt it high time to send forth orators with burning words, seers with sometimes flashing, sometimes weeping eyes, messengers with swift and beautiful feet, even if they did lack episcopal ordination. And the crowning evidence of a Divine election to the ministry is that a man preaches effectually to the conversion of souls and the building up of the Church. The “ poor priests,” with their coarse red garments and staff in hand, were sadly inferior æsthetically to the proud prelates of the day ; but just as much were they superior evangelically as they were inferior sartorially. “ What could I do more in royal robes, father, than in this plain garment ?” said Edward I. to a bishop who remonstrated with him on his attire as unkingly ; and Wicklif’s “ poor priests” and “ apostolic men” might justly argue, that seeing they worked the most bishoply effects in the hearts and lives of men, the sacerdotal raiment was the less necessary. { Valuable contributions to science are not rejected because the discoverer is not a member of the Royal Society ; splendid pictures are not less

prized because the painter was not a member of the Royal Academy ; and men who work grand effects with the Gospel of Christ prove their apostolical character and calling beyond all carping ; they belong to the highest hierarchy ; they are priests, as their Master was, after the order of Melchisedec.

The sermons of these itinerant preachers were, before everything else, full of Bible truth. They had all gone forth from Wicklif's school, had imbibed his principles, and had all formed themselves as preachers upon his model. Wesley sent forth his preachers "to spread scriptural holiness through the land ;" the preachers of Wicklif were charged with "the faithful scattering of the seed of God's Word." They taught with great simplicity, freedom and power, the law of God, and persuaded men to holiness of life. Wicklif greatly exerted himself to render these itinerant preachers as worthy and efficient as possible. Many of his tracts are addressed to them ; many of his sermons were preached for their benefit. Their enemies called them "stupid" and "uneducated," but we may be sure a great scholar and theologian like the Reformer would do his utmost to render them as able as possible. As might be supposed, these preachers encountered much ridicule and opposition, but they had a powerful advocate in their founder. When they were reproached with attacking the priesthood, Wicklif replied on their behalf : "Almighty God, Who is full of love, gave commandment to His prophets to cry aloud, to spare not, and to show to the people their great sins. The sin of the common people is great ;

the sin of the lords, the mighty, and the wise, is greater ; but greatest of all is the sin of the prelates, and most blinding to the people. And therefore are true men by God's commandment bound to cry out, the loudest against the sin of the prelates, because it is in itself the greatest, and to the people of greatest mischief."

Wicklif was a many-sided master, charged with a great message to his generation, and very fully was that message delivered. In Oxford he delivered his soul surrounded by scholars and philosophers ; in Lutterworth the same truth was made intelligible to simple rustics ; in the pulpits of London he spoke out boldly to crowded churches, and the stern high message was re-echoed to the most solitary parts of the land by the simple itinerant evangelist whose soul burned, as Wicklif's did, for the salvation of the people. It will be remembered, the press had as yet no existence. We recently heard that in a great blight it was found at last the plague was stayed by painting the trunks of the trees with printer's ink. Luther found printer's ink a grand auxiliary in his conflict with the many plagues which spoiled society, and since then great popular effects have been wrought with the same solution ; but in these early days the magical thing was as unknown as the philosopher's stone. Destitute of this grand agent for diffusion, we see all the more clearly the need and value of the preaching corps, organized and sustained by Wicklif for bringing Heaven's light into the obscurest corner and the lowliest home.





## CHAPTER V.

### WICKLIF AS CHURCH REFORMER.

**V**ERY worthily did Wicklif play his part as a patriot at a great crisis of the national history, but the time came when he more fully realized the need of a deeper reformation than was possible in the political sphere. Most reformers begin with the material and political aspects of society, and, working in the white heat of a youthful enthusiasm, soon expect to set the world in order; but the lapse of time usually persuades of the inefficacy of these swift superficial reforms, and demonstrates the necessity of the deeper and slower work of improving men themselves. John Stuart Mill, by severe disappointments in reforming enterprise, was driven back upon the mind of man as the grand starting-point of all secular amelioration. He writes: "I now looked upon the choice of political institutions as a moral and educational question more than one of material interests, thinking that it ought to be decided mainly by the consideration, what great improvement in

life and culture stands next in order for the people concerned, as the condition of their further progress, and what institutions are most likely to promote that."\* Wicklif began life with far deeper, truer views than the modern philosopher, and yet with the progress of events Wicklif addressed himself ever more closely to those religious reforms, without which all other reforms are unstable and fleeting. Mill hardly got farther than to feel the need for a larger intellectual education of the people, if their material interests and political conditions were to be brightened; but Wicklif went farther back still, and sought the renewal of the world in men's hearts. Wicklif had laid hold of one of the deepest truths, and proved himself a true Reformer, when he defined true charity as "beginning at the love of man's spirit." The Church proposed to itself the work of saving men, and saving society through the saving of men, and Wicklif fully appreciated this position; he entirely understood that the hope of society is in the Church of Jesus Christ. But when Wicklif turned to the Church, he found its glory dimmed, its strength impaired, its sphere of service grievously narrowed by many superstitions and great wickedness. The hope of society lay in the Church, but the Church itself first needed purging before it could become the purifier of the nation. Wicklif set himself the task of restoring the Church to her primitive purity. And here there are two distinct stages in his action: first he appears rather as a Reformer of the constitution of the Church, and in

\* *Autobiography*, p. 170.

the latest period as devoting himself exclusively to theology.

Lechler professes himself able to trace in Wicklif's writings a steady progress in his judgments respecting the Papacy. He distinguishes three stages in this development. These admit of being distinguished from each other both chronologically and substantively. In point of time, the first stage reaches down to the outbreak of the Papal schism in 1378; the second stage embraces the years from 1378 to 1381; and the third extends from thence to his death in 1384. In substance the successive stages may be clearly and briefly discriminated thus: first, the recognition within certain limits of the Papal primacy; next, emancipation from the primacy in principle; finally, the most decided opposition to it. It will occur to the reader how Luther's opposition to the Papacy passed through a similar development. In the period extending to the year 1378, there is a recognition of the Papal primacy within certain limits. He is far from attacking the Papacy as such in its very core and essence. It is true that Wicklif never seems to have admitted all the claims of the Papacy, and to have considered it beyond criticism. "There is a divinity that doth hedge a king," and in the Middle Ages it was felt a divinity hedged the Pope far more conspicuously and awfully than any monarch upon earth. Wicklif never seems to have felt this insane reverence for the Primate. He considered it right and patriotic to resist the Papacy on questions of finance and of civil jurisdiction. He denied the pretended necessity of the Papacy for

the ends of salvation. He could not concede the infallibility and the plenary power of the Pope in spiritual things ; but, on the contrary, he declares quite explicitly that the Pope may err in judgment.

And yet in this earliest stage Wicklif cherished a confidence toward the Pope which is really touching. Lechler has produced in proof of this an expression of Wicklif which has hitherto remained unknown. After the election of Urban VI., on April 8, 1378, the news of his first speeches and measures was quickly conveyed to England, and there evidently made upon Wicklif a quite extraordinary impression. How he rejoiced in every sign of good intention and moral earnestness in that quarter ! He conceived the hope that the man who had just ascended the Papal chair would prove a reformer of the Church. Under the fresh impression of the news he breaks out into the words : " Blessed be the Lord, Who in these days has given to His Church, in Urban VI., a Catholic head, an evangelical man, a man who in the work of reforming the Church, that it may live conformably to the law of Christ, follows the due order by beginning with himself and the members of his own household. From his works, therefore, it behoves us to believe that he is the head of our Church." Wicklif's soul is filled with true enthusiasm and joy. He believes that in Urban VI. may be recognized a Pope of evangelical spirit and true Christian earnestness, who has a clear knowledge of the moral disorders of the Church at the present time, and who possesses as well the courage as the self-denial to begin the necessary reform with

himself and the Curia. One might indeed be disposed to attach the less weight to this language, on the ground that it is only the presumed evangelical and reformatory spirit of Urban that he so joyfully salutes. But what fills him with such exalted feeling and hope is precisely this circumstance, that it was in a Pope that he saw such a spirit.

Great hopes have often been raised by the accession of a new Pope, hopes nearly as frequently destined to be utterly dashed. Milton reminds us that when the solemn council was held in Pandemonium, the vast hall was not vast enough for the great crowd of mighty spirits, and so as they entered they dwindled.

“So thick the æry crowd  
Swarm'd, and were straiten'd; till, the signal given,  
Behold a wonder! They but now who seem'd  
In bigness to surpass Earth's giant sons,  
Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room  
Throng numberless, like that Pygmean race  
Beyond the Indian mount . . . .  
Thus incorporeal spirits to smallest forms  
Reduc'd their shapes immense, and were at large,  
Though without number still amidst the hall  
Of that infernal court.”

The Vatican reminds the reader of history of this strange court; however great and promising those who enter the Papal palace, time has soon worked disastrous change, and reduced to smallest forms the shapes which loomed so large and bright on the eyes of a world wearied with evil and longing for deliverance. It was thus with Urban VI.;

all Wicklif's high hopes in his election were destined to bitter disappointment. Urban's efforts for reform gave offence to a portion of his cardinals in such a degree as not only to alienate them, but even to convert them into open enemies. In August, 1378, under pretence of doubts regarding the regularity and validity of his election to the See, the cardinals proceeded to the election of a rival Pope in the person of the Cardinal of Geneva, Clement VII. With this step began the Papal schism, which continued for nearly forty years. The consequences were that one Pope put the other to the ban, they fought each other with all the weapons they could think of, and the whole of Western Christendom was split asunder by a deep rent. France and her allies, including Spain, Sicily, and Cyprus, acknowledged the authority of Clement; while England and the rest of Europe adhered to that of Urban. "And which of these two," observes Mosheim, "is to be considered as the true and lawful Pope, is to this day matter of doubt, nor will the records and writings alleged by the contending parties enable us to adjust that point with any certainty."

But whatever were the *merits* of this controversy, its *effects* were by no means doubtful. Through the next half-century the Church had two or three different heads at the same time; each of the contending Popes forming plots and thundering out anathemas against their competitors. "The distress and calamity of these times" is said to have been "beyond all power of description; for, not to insist on the perpetual contentions and wars between the

factions of the several Popes, by which multitudes lost their fortunes and lives, all sense of religion was extinguished in most places, and profligacy arose to a most scandalous excess. The clergy, while they vehemently contended which of the reigning Popes was the true successor of Christ, were so excessively corrupt as to be no longer studious to keep up even the appearance of religion or decency; and in consequence of all this many plain, well-meaning people, who concluded that no one could possibly partake of eternal life unless united with the vicar of Christ, were overwhelmed with doubt, and were plunged into the deepest distress of mind.”\* Another historian writes: “Christendom was rent, and most ignominiously rent. There is no meaner or more miserable, there is no more unalluring or wearisome, passage in history, than this same schism of the West, this battle of the Popes. It was a wretched business from beginning to end, addressing no generous passions, proclaiming no lofty principles, calling forth no great men, inspiring no heroic deeds. The schism appealed to mean and malignant passions; it abounded in petty and painful incidents; its heroes were small, bad men. It is impossible to conceive of a more perfect engine for debasing and disabling the Papacy than this battle of the Popes. Rome thundered against Avignon; Avignon flung back the bolt at Rome. Urban damned Clement; Clement dealt back the damnation on Urban. Papal follies and crimes were in the mouths of all;

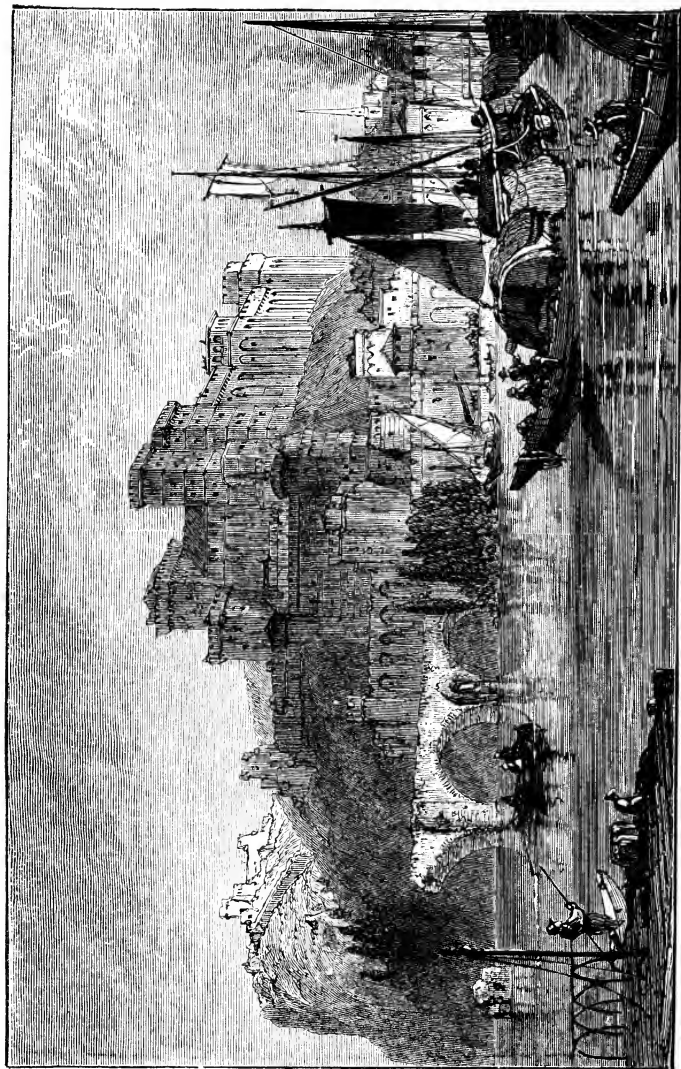
\* Mosheim.

sermons were fuller of the anti-Pope than of the devil. The partisans of the one Pope preached and formed crusades against the followers of the other. . . . Between the two rival Popes there was little to choose. Both were utterly unworthy of the stir and strife made about them; and their personal unworthiness lent a peculiar meanness and malignity to the contest. The butchery of Cesena remains the most conspicuous exploit of Clement; the torturing and strangling of five cardinals of his own following holds the foremost rank among the many atrocious extravagances of Urban. The pontiff of Avignon sank into a mere creature of France, and complied with all the rapacious demands of the French Court. The pontiff of Rome expanded into a universal hater and tormentor, pouring out the inexhaustible bitterness of his soul alike upon friends and foes, and showing himself, whether or not the legitimate Pope, the undeniable plague and fury of Christendom.”\*

The effects of this schism, powerfully felt on every side, produced a most powerful influence on Wicklif; and the event proved a most momentous turning-point in the internal development of Wicklif, and in his position as a Reformer. As Lechler goes on to observe, “His judgments concerning the Popes, the Papacy, and the right of the Papal primacy, from the commencement of the schism became always more keen, more charged with principle, more radical.” In the time immediately succeeding the outbreak of the Papal schism,

\* Gill.





VIEW OF AVIGNON.



Wicklif was still inclined to recognize Urban VI. as the legitimate Pope, and refused to recognize the French anti-Pope. But when Urban VI. allowed himself to adopt the extreme measures against Clement VII. and the cardinals and national churches that supported his cause, of not only laying them under the ban of excommunication, but also of using against them all other possible means of hostility, Wicklif went farther, and, casting off his allegiance to Urban, took up a position of entire neutrality. He now declared it to be probable that the Church of Christ would find herself in better case, and in particular would enjoy a greater degree of peace, than she did at present, if both the Popes were set aside or condemned, as it was a probable conclusion which many were drawing from the lives of both, that they had nothing in common with the holy Church of God. By the experience which resulted from the Papal schism Wicklif was brought step by step to the conclusion of cutting himself off from all moral connection with the Papacy as such.

Having already gone so far, Wicklif found it impossible to remain in a position of bare neutrality. Neutrality between the two Popes was converted into a renunciation in principle of the popedom itself, and ended in the conviction that the Papacy is the Antichrist, and its whole institution from the wicked one. From the year 1381 we find this judgment repeatedly expressed by Wicklif. The thought and the expression gradually became quite habitual with him. All the usurpations of the

Papacy hitherto censured and opposed by Wicklif were now seen by him, for the first time, in the light of a corruption of Christianity of the widest extent, and immeasurably deep, for which he could find no more appropriate name than Antichristianism. The systematic spoliation of the national churches—the haughty pride—the worldly character of the Papal government—the claims to hierarchical domination over the whole world—all these features of the degenerate Papacy were attacked by Wicklif after this date as well as before, but were now for the first time seen by him in their connection with what was the worst feature of all, with an assumption of Divine attributes and rights which seemed to him to stamp the Pope as the Antichrist.\* “The veneration, therefore, which is rendered to the Pope, appears to him to be an idolatry, all the more detestable and blasphemous because hereby Divine honour is given to a limb of Lucifer, who is an abominable idol, a painted block.” In the old story we are told of a prophet who always wore a veil over his face to temper, as he affirmed, the exceeding brightness of his countenance; but one day the veil was accidentally blown aside, and the prophet’s face was seen loathsome with disease. Wicklif now, as Luther at a later date, lifted the veil which had hitherto concealed the real lineaments of the Pope, and instead of a prophet’s face lit with heavenly splendour as the face of Moses, there was only the face of an impostor like that of Gehazi, white with leprosy.

\* Lechler.

The distractions occasioned by the Papal schism enabled Wicklif with considerable impunity to prosecute his attack on the authority of the Pope. There is one day in the week, we are told, when the vampire's devil-imparted strength forsakes him, and on that day he is easily put to death. The Papacy, which fed on the strength of nations and which long seemed invulnerable, had now a space of weakness and humiliation, and well did Wicklif seize the opportunity to inflict on the monster fatal wounds. The controversy had no sooner commenced than the Reformer published a tract, entitled, *On the Schism of the Popes*, in which he adverts to this dispute as having divided the hierarchy against itself, and as presenting a powerful inducement to attempt the destruction of those laws and customs which had served so greatly to corrupt the Christian priesthood, and to afflict the whole Christian community. The endowments of the Church, whether claimed by the Pontiffs or by the national clergy, he names as a principal cause of the degeneracy of both; and the property entrusted to the stewardship of churchmen he affirms to be capable, generally, of a more just and of a far less dangerous application. To effect this new appropriation of the wealth, which it is said had been frequently ill acquired, and as frequently worse employed, the appeal made is not to the passions of the few or the many, but to the sacred responsibilities of the sovereigns and rulers of Christendom. And that this exhortation might not be in vain, he renews his attack upon those

superstitions from which the undue influence of the clergy had derived its being and continuance. Instead of conceding that the power of the clergy, or of the Pope, over the disembodied spirit must ever regulate its destiny, he contends that, when correctly exercised, it is merely ministerial; and that inasmuch as the decisions of these men were frequently opposed to moral propriety and to the known will of God, they were frequently to be viewed as the mere assumptions of human weakness or passion, from which no evil should be apprehended. His advice therefore is: "Trust we in the help of Christ on this point, for He hath begun already to help us graciously, in that He hath clove the head of Antichrist, and made the two parts fight against each other. For it is not doubtful that the sin of the Popes, which hath been so long continued, hath brought in this division." As to the infallibility of the Popes, he remarks that there is nothing in the suffrage of princes or cardinals to impart any such attribute to erring man. On this point he observes, "The children of the fiend should learn their logic and their philosophy well, lest they prove heretical by a false understanding of the law of Christ." Except the person elected to an ecclesiastical office shall possess the virtues which bespeak him a servant of Christ, the most vaunted forms of investing him with that dignity are declared to be vain. Among heresies, he affirms, that "there is no greater than for a man to believe that he is absolved from his sin, if he give money, or because a priest layeth his hand on the head, and saith, 'I absolve

thee.' " "For thou must be sorrowful in thy heart," he adds, "or else God absolveth thee not." In the same treatise, the necessity of confession to a priest is denied no less distinctly than the received doctrine on the power of the keys. And having thus wrested the weapons from the hands of churchmen, which had been wielded with so much success against human liberty, he calls upon the secular authorities to attempt the long-needed reformation of the ecclesiastical body, both in its head and in its members.\*

In 1383, a crusade set forth from England which had no other object in view but to fight for the cause of Urban VI. against the supporters of the rival Pope in Avignon, Clement VII., and, if possible, to overthrow the latter. At the head of this crusade was a prelate of the Church, Henry le Spencer, Bishop of Norwich. Urban sent forth more than one Bull, in which he empowered the Bishop of Norwich to collect and take the command of an army which should wage a holy war against Clement VII. and his abettors on the Continent, especially in France. Extensive powers were conferred upon the bishop for this end, against Clement VII. and all his supporters, both clergy and laity. He was free to adopt all manner of measures against them—to banish, suspend, depose and imprison, and also to seize their estates. Whosoever should personally take part in the crusade for a year, and whosoever should provide a crusader at his own cost, or whosoever should even assist the undertaking

\* Vaughan.

with his purse and property, should receive a plenary absolution, and the same rights and privileges as a crusader to the Holy Land. And now commenced an agitation throughout the realm with the view of gaining the largest possible number to take a personal share in the crusade, and of inducing others to aid it, at least, with money or money's worth. By a special commission from the Bishop of Norwich, the Mendicants of different Orders put forth the most strenuous exertions in the pulpit and the confessional to awaken enthusiasm for the approaching crusade, and to call forth rich offerings in its behalf. They had in their hands one mighty key to the hearts of men—the promised absolution from all guilt and penalty; an absolution, however, which was only to be obtained at the price of contributions to the holy war. The undertaking was meant to be made the common affair of the whole English Church and nation, Archbishop Courtenay issuing various mandates to the whole parish clergy of the kingdom, to the effect that in all churches prayers should be put up at Mass and in sermons for the crusaders and the success of their enterprise. An extremely large sum was collected for the war-chest of the crusade. The sums obtained, not only in gold and silver, but also in money's worth, in jewels, ornaments, and rings, in silver spoons and dishes, contributed alike by men and women, and especially by ladies of rank and wealth, were incredibly great. One lady of rank is said to have contributed one hundred pounds of silver, and many persons gave far beyond their means, insomuch that even a clerical



chronicler is of opinion that the national wealth, in so far as it lay in private hands, was endamaged.

Wicklif energetically denounced this crusade. In the summer of 1383 he published a small tract in Latin, bearing the title, *Cruciata ; or, Against the War of the Clergy*. In this pamphlet he illustrates the subject on different sides, and condemns the crusade and everything connected with it in the severest manner ; first, because it is a war at all ; then because a war to which the Pope is the summoner is, under all circumstances, contrary to the mind of Christ ; and, further, because the whole quarrel between the contending Popes has to do at bottom only with worldly power and mastery, which is a thing entirely unbefitting the Pope, and wholly contrary to the example of Christ. But when it is even given out that every one who does anything to aid this crusade shall obtain remission from all guilt and punishment, this is a lie and “an abomination of desolation in the holy place.” Lechler proceeds : “I know no writing of Wicklif in which, with a greater absence of all reserve, and in more incisive language, he laid bare and did battle against the Antichristianism which lay in the great Papal schism in general.” How is this miserable mischief to be remedied which threatens in the end to bring the whole Church into confusion ? To this question Wicklif replies : “The whole schism is a consequence of the moral apostasy from Christ and His walk of poverty and purity.” If it is to be mended, the Church must be led back to the poor and humble life of Christ and to His pure Word.

Wicklif thinks that emperors and kings have done foolishly in providing the Church with lands and lordships ; this they must set right again to the utmost of their power, and so restore peace. He compares the schism of the two Popes to the quarrels of two dogs about a bone, and thinks that princes should take away the bone itself ; that is, the worldly power of the Papacy ; for surely they do not bear the sword in vain. In conclusion, he demands the whole of Christendom should take upon itself toil and trouble, in order to put down wickedness, and restore the Church to the condition of apostolic purity, and to put an end to the means by which Antichrist misleads the Church. Wicklif's remonstrance did not prevent the crusade. The Bishop of Norwich embarked in May, 1383, but, being worsted, returned to England in October, and the crusade came to an ignominious end. Wicklif saw a judgment of God in its utter failure.

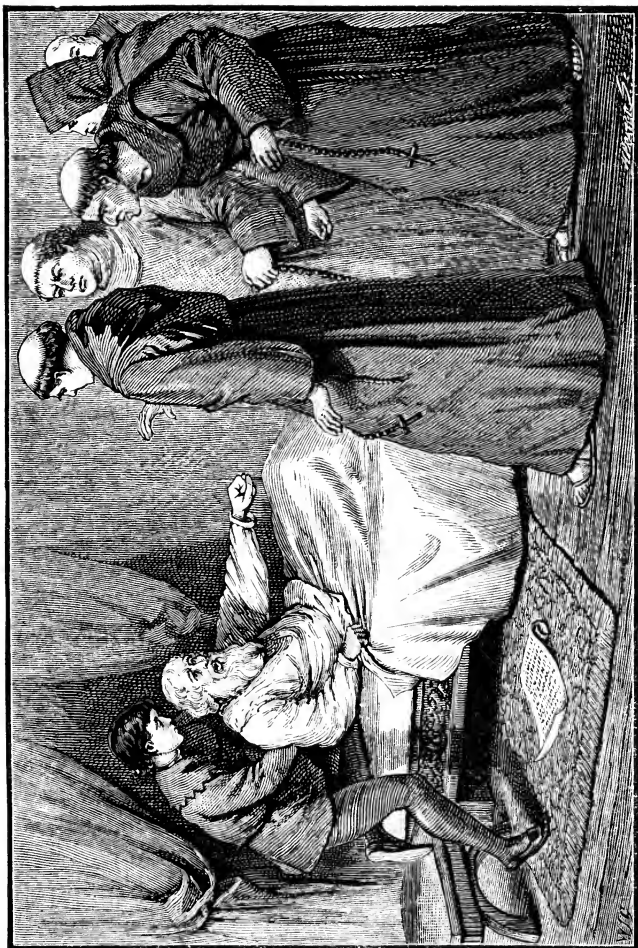
Long before Luther, Wicklif fully felt the whole mystery of iniquity involved in the dominion of the Pope. In the early part of his history, as we have seen, he regarded the Pope with sincere veneration ; then with suspicion ; until, in the latest of his known writings, he condemns both Popes as Antichrists, as monsters, as incarnate devils, and praises the Lord Christ, Who is the Head of the Church, that He has split the usurped head, the Pope, into two. There can be little wonder at the severity of the Reformer's language. The Oriental proverb says : " When elephants are thrusting each other with their tusks, the tender plant between them will

be crushed." Wicklif saw, whilst the rival Popes were thrusting at each other with mighty fury in their lust of power, the poor and humble populations of Christendom were wounded and bleeding, and there is no wonder that his wrath was hot and his denunciations severe. When a French historian was asked, Why he had painted Louis XVI. as a tyrant? he replied, "Wherefore was he one?" Those who object to the dark colours in which Wicklif and Luther painted the Popes of their times will do well to remember this reply. Wicklif's great merit, however, was not in his opposition to a vicious Pope, but in the fact that, fully realizing the spirituality of Christ's kingdom, he saw the false idea of the Papacy itself, with its worldly power and temporal sovereignty. He profoundly felt how contrary the whole idea of the Roman See was to the genius of the lowly Jesus and His spiritual mission, and battled with the false institution right manfully. We owe it largely to Wicklif that the once well-nigh omnipotent power of Rome has been broken, and that now the Pope, once so terrible,

"Placed like a painted Jove,  
Holds idle thunder in his lifted hand."

It was long thought that Wicklif was from the very first in conflict with the Mendicant Orders, but subsequent discoveries prove that this view is incorrect. In his earlier writings he regarded them with moral esteem and sympathy; it was at a later period that he became their antagonist. Wicklif came to recognize in the Begging Friars the most

zealous promoters of Papal absolutism and the most systematic defenders of Church errors and abuses. These appeared to him in that age nearly in the same light as that in which we regard the order of the Jesuits of the present day, as the most ready instruments of Papal despotism. In his earlier writings Wicklif keeps chiefly in view the endowed Monastic Orders, and in his later works powerfully exposes the Mendicants; he sees in Cain the Bible original of the four Mendicant Orders — the Carmelites, the Augustinians, the Dominicans, the Franciscans. Lewis tells of a dramatic scene in connection with Wicklif's controversy with the monks, which is now one of the best known incidents of the Reformer's life. Wicklif was in Oxford when sickness arrested his activity, and confined him to his chamber. From the four orders of friars, four doctors, who were also called regents, were gravely deputed to wait on their expiring enemy; and to these the same number of civil officers, called senators of the city, and aldermen of the wards, were added. When this embassy entered the apartment of the rector of Lutterworth, he was seen stretched upon his bed. Some kind wishes were first expressed as to his better health, and the blessing of a speedy recovery. It was presently suggested that he must be aware of the many wrongs which the whole mendicant brotherhood had sustained from his attacks, especially in his sermons, and in certain of his writings; and as death was now, apparently, about to remove him, it was sincerely hoped that he would not conceal his



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penitence, but distinctly revoke whatever he had said tending to the injury of those holy fraternities. The sick man remained silent and motionless until this address was concluded. He then beckoned his servants to raise him in his bed; and, fixing his eyes on the persons assembled, summoned all his remaining strength, as he exclaimed aloud, "I shall not die but live, and shall again declare the evil deeds of the friars." The doctors and their attendants retreated in mortification and dismay, and they lived to feel the truth of the Reformer's predictions.

That monasticism was not an unmitigated evil may be readily allowed. For more than ten centuries the monasteries were the schools, the archives, the hostelries, the studios, and the hospitals of Christian society. Some of the greatest scholars came from their ranks. To the monks we are largely indebted for our knowledge of literature and the fine arts. They have left us the finest monuments of religious architecture in the world. They were skilled as orators, physicians, chemists, astronomers, philosophers, and musicians. For sculpture and painting they were famed—the names of Fra Bartolomeo and Fra Angelico obtaining everlasting renown. The monks were the authors of great improvements in agriculture. They were the authors of many scientific discoveries. They were the patient transcribers of every religious work. But when these apologies for monasticism are urged, Lecky's objection is certainly not without force: "It is an undoubted truth that, for a considerable

period, almost all the knowledge of Europe was included in the monasteries, and from this it is continually inferred that, had these institutions not existed, knowledge would have been absolutely extinguished. But such a conclusion I conceive to be altogether untrue. If Catholicism had never existed, the human mind would have sought other spheres for its development, and at least a part of the treasures of antiquity would have been preserved in other ways.”\* Whatever intellectual services may, however, be placed to the credit of monasticism, the conventual system has been fraught in all ages with vast moral and spiritual abuses. Lacordaire has said, “Abuses prove nothing against any institution;” but in this institution the very principle and law are vicious, and the perennial abuses spring from the chronic defect. It is an injustice to human nature, places man and woman in a false situation, and such a system naturally breeds mischief, degeneracy and misery.

In Thackeray’s *Irish Sketch Book* is an article on Convents. Referring to the Ursuline Convent at Blackrock, near Cork, he says: “In the grille is a little wicket and a ledge before it. It is to this wicket that women are brought to kneel; and a bishop is in a chapel on the other side, and takes their hands in his, and receives their vows. I had never seen the like before, and felt a sort of shudder in looking at the place. There rest the girl’s knees, as she offers herself up, and forswears the sacred affections which God gave her; there she kneels

\* *History of Morals*, vol. ii. p. 220.



and denies for ever the beautiful duties of her being—no tender maternal yearnings—no gentle attachments are to be had for her or from her—there she kneels and commits suicide upon her heart. O, honest Martin Luther! thank God you came to pull that infernal, wicked, unnatural altar down—that cursed Paganism! I came out of the place quite sick; and looking before me, there, thank God! was the blue spire of Monkstown Church, soaring up into the free sky—a river in front rolling away to the sea—liberty, sunshine, all sorts of glad life and motion, round about; and I couldn't but thank Heaven for it, and the Being Whose service is freedom, and Who has given us affections that we may use them—not smother and kill them; and a noble world to live in, that we may admire it and Him Who made it—not shrink from it, as though we dared not live there, but must turn our backs upon it and its bountiful Provider. I declare I think, for my part, that we have as much right to permit Sutteeism in India as to allow women in the United Kingdom to take these wicked vows, or Catholic bishops to receive them." This vile system, so righteously and eloquently reprobated, is equally a wrong to male and female, and we cannot be too grateful to the English and German Reformers who exposed the great mischief, and through whose teachings the days of the evil have been numbered.

On the subject of the Celibacy of the Priesthood, Wicklif gives repeated expression to his views. In several places he characterizes the Church law which

enjoins it, as an ordinance plainly unscriptural, hypocritical, and morally pernicious. Neither Christ nor His Apostles have forbidden the marriage of priests; they have rather approved it. He points not only to the usage of the most ancient Church to consecrate married men as bishops, but also to the still existing practice of the marriage of the clergy in the Greek Church. And as concerns the present, he confesses himself unable to see why in all parts of Christendom allowance should not be given to married men to continue in the priesthood, especially if no candidates of equal qualifications for the priesthood should be forthcoming. In particular, he urges that it would undoubtedly be the lesser evil of the two, that men who are living in honourable matrimony, and who are ruling equally well the Church and their own houses, should be consecrated to the priesthood without disturbance to their married life, than that priests should be living, indeed, out of the married state, but should be practising unchastity in spite of their vows, with wives and widows and virgins. The hypocrites, it is true, he continues, who set the ordinances of men above the word of Scripture, abhor the marriage of a priest as poison, while allowing themselves in uncleanness of the most shameful kind.\*

Wicklif for a long time devoted his ardent attention to the doctrine of the Lord's Supper; and at length, in the year 1379 or 1380, he arrived at the result that the doctrine of Transubstantiation is unscriptural, groundless, and erroneous. This mysterious dogma of transubstantiation, which expressed the manner

\* Lechler.

in which the body and blood of Christ are present in the Eucharist, was first taught in the twelfth century. The decisive characteristic of the doctrine of transubstantiation is this, that by virtue of the consecration, bread and wine are alleged to be changed into the body and blood of Christ, so that now only the sensible properties of bread and wine are present—the whiteness or roundness of the bread, the sweetness or fragrance of the wine, the accidents, without the substance or their underlying basis. This eucharistic doctrine Wicklif felt to be perverted and corrupt, and set himself to oppose it with unsparing severity and indefatigable zeal. He wrote: “I maintain that among all the heresies which have ever appeared in the Church, there was never one which was more cunningly smuggled in by hypocrites than this, or which in more ways deceives the people; for it plunders the people, leads them astray into idolatry, denies the teaching of Scripture, and by this unbelief provokes the Truth Himself oftentimes to anger.”

He opposed the doctrine because of the idolatry which is practised with the consecrated Host, when men render to it truly Divine worship and devotion. He allows no force to the defence brought forward by some theologians, that the Host is not worshipped, but only venerated on account of the presence of the body of Christ. They must in reason admit that the people, who as a matter of fact worship the Host as the body of Christ, are destitute of the light of faith, and idolatrous. The indignation of Wicklif against the idolatry committed in the worshipping of the Host is all the stronger that he cannot avoid the

conviction that the authors of this deification of a creature are perfectly well aware of what their God really is. Such priests he calls plainly "Baal-priests." Last of all, the most emphatic protest is made by Wicklif against the delusion that the priest *makes* the body of Christ by his action in the Mass. This thought appears to him to be nothing less than horrible, first, because it attributes to the priests a transcendental power, as though a creature could give being to its Creator—a sinful man to the holy God; again, because God Himself is thereby dishonoured, as though He, the Eternal, were created anew day by day; and lastly, because by this thought the Sanctuary of the Sacrament is desecrated, and an "Abomination of Desolation is set up in the holy place." Wicklif held a real presence of Christ's body in the Supper; but that was not to be understood as if the body of Christ were present in a local or corporeal manner; it was a sacramental and spiritual presence.

The doctrine of transubstantiation—the doctrine that declares the priest has power, by uttering the words *Hoc est corpus*, to change the bread and wine into the veritable body and blood of Christ, and thus hold Christ visibly up before the people as their Saviour and God—is the most awful superstition the world has ever known, and its consequences have been proportionately dreadful. It gives the priest unparalleled power, and subjects the people to most abject slavery. Mr. Froude gives us an account of our good old word *hocus-pocus*. The priest muttered over the bread on the altar, "*Hoc est corpus*," but

clear-eyed men saw the abominable lie in the priestly assumption, and *hocus-pocus* became the graphic expression for pretentious fraud. None in ancient times saw the falsehood of the Mass with clearer eye than Wicklif: he was nearer the truth than Luther, and in his repudiation of transubstantiation and its related errors the older Reformer struck the key-note of Protestantism.

On many other points Wicklif sought to restore the doctrine and polity of the Church to primitive purity. Like all the great Reformers who departed from the Roman community or remained in it, like Bernard or Luther, Wicklif again and again censures the degeneracy of the Church in the direction of its extreme sensuousness. "Would that so many ceremonies and symbols," he exclaims in one place, "were not multiplied in our Church." "There lies a danger for the Church militant in the practice of Judaizing—*i.e.*, of valuing in a carnally sensuous spirit those symbols and the human traditions connected with them more highly than the spiritual things which they signify." When the monks appealed, in defence of the splendour of their cloister churches, to the glory of Solomon's temple, as a proof that the Basilicas ought to be more beautiful still in the period of grace, Wicklif replies: "One must marvel that the monks should imitate so closely that idolatrous and luxurious king in the Old Testament, and not the example of Christ, the Head of the Church and the King of kings, who also had foretold the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem."

He also denounced the numerous images in the

churches and the veneration paid to them. He acknowledges that images may be made with a good design, but insists that the use of images operates mischievously on men's minds in more than one direction. "By such delusions of an adulterous generation which seeketh after a sign are the people of Christ blinded more and more; and therefore must we preach against all such costliness, beauty, and other arts, which are employed more for the purpose of extracting gold from deluded strangers than to promote the religion of Christ among the people."

He most clearly and decidedly repudiated saint-worship. In his earlier writings are found ardent glorifications of Mary and her merits, but in his later writings his judgment was entirely different. On the subject of the moral value or the contrary of the devotions and festivals celebrated in honour of the saints, he laid down the principle that a devotion or a festival offered to any saint is only of value in so far as it is fitted to promote and to heighten the feeling of pious devotion towards the Saviour Himself. He says: "As the Apostles, without any such saints' days, loved Jesus Christ more than we do, it appears to many orthodox Christians a rash and dangerous thing to institute so many saints' festivals, and that it would be better not to have so many celebrations burdening the Church."

Wicklif also spoke with disapproval of the veneration of relics. When we remember the day in which he lived, we shall understand the caution with which he speaks; but the spirit of the man is

fully clear. "A culpable blindness, an immoderate and greedy worshipping of relics, cause the people to fall into gross error, as the punishment of their sin. Whence, in many countries, the love of money brings things to such a pass, that in numerous churches a portion of the body of some one who has been canonized as a confessor or martyr is more honoured with pilgrimages and costly oblations and ornaments of gold and precious stones lavished upon his grave than the body of the mother of God, or the Apostle Peter, or Paul, or any other of the acknowledged saints." "For my part I condemn no act of this kind; but at the same time there are few or none which I can positively commend, because those who go on pilgrimage, worship relics, and collect money, might at least occupy themselves more usefully if they omitted these practices. From the Word of God it even appears to be the duty of all such persons to employ themselves better at the present time, and consequently that they are guilty of great sin in failing so to employ themselves." In a sermon delivered in the last year of his life, on the feast of John the Baptist, Wicklif expresses the thought that God and the Church triumphant regard the worshipping of corporeal relics at large with no approbation; and then he continues as follows: "It would therefore be to the honour of the saints and the fit of the Church if the costly ornaments, so foolishly lavished upon their graves, were divided among the poor. I am well aware, however, that the man who would sharply and fully expose this error would be held for a manifest heretic by the image worshippers,

and the greedy people who make gain of such graves ; for in the adoration of the Eucharist, and such worshipping of dead bodies and images, the Church is seduced by an adulterous generation."

He acknowledged that confession made to a priest might be seemly, and in some cases highly commendable ; but his parting advice is, " Seeing that many men often confess themselves to their confessors in vain, confess thyself to God, with constancy and contrition, and He may not fail, He will absolve thee." In the following language he describes the impiety of the doctrine which made the pardon of sin to depend on the benediction of a priest, and to be in truth the act of a mortal: " Worldly prelates blaspheme against God, the Father of Heaven, by taking to themselves a power which is especially and only His—that is, a power of absolving from sins, and of giving a full remission of them. For they take on them *principally* the absolving from sin, and they make the people to believe this of them, when, in truth, they have only absolved as vicars or messengers, witnessing to the people, that, on their contrition, God absolveth them. Without the sinner be contrite, that is, fully have sorrow for his sins, neither angel, nor man, nor God Himself, absolveth him."

In quite a similar spirit Wicklif expresses himself on the subject of masses for the dead, and all that concerns them. He attaches little importance to them, and though he does not exactly deny that such masses and prayers for the dead, and foundations for their benefit, may be of some advantage to the



departed, he yet affirms with all emphasis the view that in all circumstances the good which a man does in his lifetime, should it be only the giving of a cup of cold water, out of love and for the sake of Christ, is of more use to him than the spending of thousands on thousands of pounds by his executors after his death, for the repose of his soul.\* "Follow we Christ in our life," said he, "and let the dead bury their dead."

With a deep intellectual nature, with a conscience tuned by the Scriptures, with a single purpose and holy life, there is little wonder that Wicklif realized vividly and painfully, one after the other, the many great errors which existed in the constitution, government, doctrine and worship of the Church of his day. From some of these errors he was only partially free, whilst from most of them he reached full emancipation. With a profound genius—rational, devout, sincere, courageous—he saw the falsities and iniquities of the age, and sharply rebuked them. To charge Wicklif, however, with having supplied the destructive and not the constructive element of Reform, is very inadequately to appreciate his service.

He lowered the pride of the Papacy, but it was only to bring into view Him who is the true Head of the Church. Says Lechler: "Wicklif's Christology has one remarkable distinctive feature, viz., that he always and everywhere lays the utmost possible emphasis upon the incomparable grandeur of Jesus Christ, as the only Mediator between God and men, as the Centre of humanity, and our one only Head.

\* Lechler.

He is in truth quite inexhaustible in the task of bringing these truths into full expression by means of the most manifold ideas and figurative illustrations. He loves especially to set forth Christ as the centre of humanity. Christ in His Godhood is an *intelligible* circle, whose centre is everywhere, and its circumference nowhere. In His Manhood He is everywhere in the midst of His Church ; and as from every point of a circle a straight line reaches the centre, so the Christian Pilgrim, in whatever position of life he may find himself, reaches straight to Christ Himself as the centre. Wicklif makes use of manifold figures to express the truth that Christ is the one incomparable Head of redeemed humanity. He calls Him 'our Cæsar,' 'Cæsar always Augustus.' But still more frequently does he derive his figures and descriptions from religious and Church life, when he would express the fundamental thoughts that Christ is the true Head, and the only authoritative Superior of redeemed, believing men. In this sense he calls Christ 'The Prior of our Order,' or 'The Common Abbot,' 'The Highest Abbot of our Order.' He even gives to the Redeemer, inasmuch as He is a Royal Priest, the title of Pope. Where the grand truth of 'salvation in Christ alone' is so consciously and clearly, as it is here, set over against the piebald variety of saint-worships, Church-authorities, foundations, and institutions in which men sought salvation, side by side with Christ, we find ourselves in presence of, and are able to recognize, a knowledge, a feeling, and an action truly reformational." Wicklif sought to do for the religious world what Copernicus did for the

scientific world—to give it a true centre. Instead of the worldly Papacy being the centre around which all revolved and on which all depended, the great Reformer showed the Heavenly Throne, on which sat the spiritual Mediator, was the true centre for the world's veneration, faith and love.

Wicklif dealt severely with the slothful, wicked priesthood, but he truly honoured all faithful priests, and brought into full and honourable recognition the universal priesthood of believers. He taught that the laity constituted the Church as much as the clergy. He humbled the proud, guilty priest, whilst he magnified the humble believer. The name of "the Church" had been transferred from the people to their spiritual guides. Wicklif restored it to the whole body of the saints. He contended for the liberty of conscience of the private members of the Church; that the private member is distinguished from the priest in office only, not in rank; that the laity are often more instructed and loyal to the truth than the ministry; that when the spiritual rulers fail to do their duty the people may withhold the Church revenues. His doctrine on this point is thus stated: "When men speak of holy Church, anon, they understand prelates and priests, with monks, and canons, and friars, and all men who have tonsures, though they live accursedly, and never so contrary to the law of God. But they call not the seculars men of holy Church, though they live never so truly according to God's law, and die in perfect charity. Nevertheless, all who shall be saved in the bliss of heaven are members of holy Church, and no more.

Many, on the contrary, who are called such are the enemies thereof, and the synagogue of Satan. . . . Christian men, taught in God's law, call holy Church the congregation of just men, for whom Jesus Christ shed His blood; and not mere stones, and timber, and earthly dross, which the clerks of Antichrist magnify more than the righteousness of God, and the souls of men." Our Reformer was not a small critic of superficial circumstantial errors which had crept into the ecclesiastical sphere, but a Christian thinker of deep, wide range, and he laboured to chastise a worthless priestly caste that he might restore the great ideas which had been so entirely lost, touching the rights, the privileges, the powers of the Christian brotherhood at large.

And it must be regarded as the conservative and constructive side of Wicklif's work that he laboured to extend the religious idea to the whole of life. So far from being any real foe to the Church, he sought to make the whole multitude live a really churchly life. Wicklif saw the secular parted by the whole diameter from the religious, and he exerted himself to correct this fundamentally false notion and bring sacredness into everything. His writings are often eminently ethical and practical, showing the bearing of Christian doctrine and principle upon all the manifold duties and relationships of daily life. He sought to make the Church large as the land, and every spot in Christendom holy to the Lord. "The principle, that the love of our neighbour should begin with what stands nearest to it, is connected with another held by Wicklif, that it is the duty of

every man to do what belongs to his position and calling, be that calling what it may. The more faithfully and conscientiously he fulfils his nearest duty, the more certainly, in virtue of a certain concatenation in things, will he be useful to others and advance their welfare. This thought stands in unmistakable opposition to the one-sidedness of a narrow, monkish mode of feeling and thinking on moral subjects, which considered the contemplative life and seclusion from the world as the surest means of virtue. Wicklif, on the contrary, sets out with the design of restoring the active life of the Christian man in the most different callings to its true moral rights, so often ignored in his day." \* Wicklif's work was both destructive and constructive—eminently the latter. He laboured mightily to destroy the falsities which had marred the Church of God, but, at the same time, with equal energy, he sought to restore the grand spiritual realities which had so long been in eclipse. That Wicklif was a mere heady iconoclast is a supposition utterly wide of the mark; he taught with clearness and power the glorious positive truth which gives vitality to whatever truly belongs to the Church, and which eventually regenerates the whole world.

That Wicklif's doctrine was defective, lacked fullness, in some particulars, and those particulars very important ones, may be granted. It would seem that he never fully and clearly seized the evangelical idea of faith. Lechler says: "Wicklif absolutely rejected, indeed, the notion that man is able to

\* Lechler.

acquire any moral merit in the full sense of the word, whether in order to make satisfaction for sin, or to attain thereby to conversion or eternal blessedness. On the other hand, it must be conceded that he recognized a merit bearing an improper sense, and so also some co-operation of man's own moral power, partly in the matter of forgiveness of sin, and partly in reference to the hope of eternal blessedness. When Melanchthon, in a short critique upon Wicklif, pronounces, among other things, the judgment that he was totally ignorant of the righteousness of faith—*i.e.*, of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, we cannot do other than acknowledge this judgment to be exact and just. It was reserved for Luther, first of all men, to be called of God to separate by felicitous tact this kernel of saving truth from the husk, and to make it the central doctrine of the Evangelical confession." \*

Shirley also is of opinion that there was a defect here in Wicklif's doctrine which limited the efficacy of his reform. This fine writer, speaking of the Reformer's great book *De Divino Dominio*, says: "It was indeed an attempt, from a feudal and scholastic point of view, to occupy the ground which was occupied, in the hands of the Reformers of the sixteenth century, by the doctrine of justification by faith. The emancipation of the individual conscience was the aim of both. In the fuller and more complete study of Wicklif's theory of dominion is to be sought, as I think, the explanation of his comparative failure. The strongly realistic feeling which led him

\* Lechler.

to centre everything so immediately in the Divine attributes led him to point to the very throne of God Himself, as the tribunal of personal appeal. That this was inadequate to the case, that a court of appeal was needed not merely in heaven but on earth, Wicklif may have been as sensible as the later Reformers, but he was not in a position to supply the deficiency. For the more general study of the Bible, to which he, like they, looked as the ultimate authority upon earth, Wicklif did more, perhaps, than any one; but the education of the individual conscience to independence could not be effected in a day. Upon the generality of thoughtful men in his day the external authority of the Church of Rome had a hold which they could not shake off."

Wicklif felt that the moral condition of the race was sinking lower and lower, and set himself valiantly to do battle with the overflowing wickedness. "O that God," he exclaims in one place, "would give me a docile heart, persevering steadfastness, and love to Christ, to His Church, and to the members of the devil who are butchering the Church of Christ, that I might out of pure love encounter and lay hold of them. What a glorious cause for me to give up the present miserable life for! For this same was the cause of the martyr-death of Christ." And again: "I am assured that the truth of the Gospel may indeed for a time be cast down in particular places, and may for a while abide in silence in consequence of the menaces of Antichrist; but extinguished it can never be, for the truth itself says, 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall never pass

away.'” With this sublime courage and hopefulness the great Reformer set himself to the terrible task of dealing with the gigantic sins of his age, and most eloquently did he summon all true men to aid him in the sublime crusade. Whatever may have been the errors and limitations of Wicklif’s creed, he was a true and mighty Reformer, and well does the German historian assign him a place as such: “Taking all this into one view—what Wicklif thought and said of the necessity of a reformation, of the ways and means by which it was to be effected, and of the personalities by whom it was to be introduced—it is impossible for us not to receive this as our total impression—that his soul is full of longing and pressure after a God-pleasing restoration of the Church’s purity; the vision of it is continually before his eyes; for this he engages his whole powers; for this, if it should be God’s will, he is resolved to endure persecution and even a martyr’s death. It cannot, therefore, admit of a doubt that Wicklif was a Church Reformer of the true evangelical type.”





## CHAPTER VI.

### WICKLIF AND THE BIBLE.



IF we wonder at the pure and elevated views to which Wicklif attained in so corrupt an age, and at the noble part he so bravely played for the enfranchisement of his countrymen, the secret is found in his constant and profound acquaintance with the Word of God; whilst the greatest service rendered to his country, and through his country to the race, is found in his great work of translating the same Word into the language of the English people. In the deep study of the Scriptures the Reformer's own vision was purged, his thought enriched, his soul filled with charity and courage, his lips touched with fire, his pen with light; and, translating the precious page into the common tongue, he unbarred to the nation the gates of the morning. The prime distinction of Wicklif must ever be found in the fact that he was the very first to give the whole of Revelation to his countrymen. A legend of Normandy tells of an old pilot who, unable longer to take the helm and

feeling the approach of death, prayed to God to send him a successor, whereupon the staff that supported him took root, and growing into a large and beautiful tree, became a beacon for generations on the dangerous coast. In stormiest days, on most dangerous seas, Wicklif was the daring and skilful pilot of his nation ; but when, in old age, he translated the Scriptures into the tongue of the people, the staff of his own glorious strength shot forth and became an imperishable beacon to the nation he loved so well.

That Wicklif did translate the Scriptures into the vulgar tongue is beyond question. Knighton, a chronicler of the period, in a passage which was probably penned before the year 1400, laments the translation of the Bible into English, and ascribes the translation to Wicklif. Adverting to the zeal of Wicklif in rendering the Scriptures the property of the people, he thus writes : " Christ delivered His Gospel to the clergy and doctors of the Church, that they might administer to the laity and to weaker persons, according to the state of the times and the wants of men. But this Master John Wicklif translated it out of Latin into English, and thus laid it more open to the laity, and to women, who could read, than it had formerly been to the most learned of the clergy, even to those of them who had the best understanding. And in this way the Gospel pearl is cast abroad, and trodden under foot of swine, and that which was before precious to both clergy and laity is rendered, as it were, the common jest of both. The jewel of the Church is turned into the sport of the people, and what was hitherto the prin-

cial gift of the clergy and divines is made for ever common to the laity." Thus a canon of Leicester bewailed the translation of the Bible into the language of his country.\* Archbishop Arundel of Canterbury and his suffragan bishops, in the year 1412, addressed a written memorial to Pope John XXIII., with the petition that in the exercise of his plenary apostolic powers he would pronounce sentence of condemnation on the heresy of Wicklif and his party. In this document Wicklif is charged among other things with having contended with all his power against the faith and the doctrine of the Church, and, to make his malice complete, with having devised the plan of a translation of the Holy Scriptures into the mother tongue. By the side of these testimonies proceeding from opponents may be placed the language of one of Wicklif's admirers—John Huss—who says, in a polemical tract of the year 1411: "It is plain from his writings that Wicklif was not a German, but an Englishman. For the English say that he translated the whole Bible from Latin into English."

And Wicklif was the very first who did thus translate the Scriptures. Efforts have been made to deprive Wicklif of the honour of being the first English translator of the Bible, but fuller research places it beyond question that this honour belongs to the divine of Lutterworth. Various portions of the Word had previously been translated by different hands at different times, but the translation and sending forth of the entire volume belongs indispu-

\* Vaughan.

tably to Wicklif. The following positions, as set forth by Lechler, concerning the priority of the Reformer in this work, may be regarded as established:—

1. A translation of the entire Bible was never, during the period prior to Wicklif, accomplished in England, and was never even apparently contemplated.

2. The Psalter was the only book of Scripture which was fully and literally translated into all the three languages—Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, and Old English.

3. In addition, several books of Scripture, especially Old Testament books, were translated partially or in select passages—*e.g.*, by Aelfric; laying out of view poetical versions, and the Gospel of John, translated by Beda, which celebrated work has not come down to us.

4. Last of all,—and this fact is of great importance,—in none of these translations was it designed to make the Word of God accessible to the mass of the people, and to spread scriptural knowledge among them. The only object which they had in view was partly to furnish aid to the clergy, and to render a service to the educated class.

Other translators had brought clusters of grapes from the fruitful lands of Scripture; it remained for Wicklif to lead the English nation into the full Canaan of scriptural blessing, and they have never permitted themselves to be dispossessed. It would be very easy for critics of the present day to indicate the imperfections of Wicklif's translation, but unique

honour attaches to all who first wrought in great undertakings. Rawlinson, speaking of those who in Egypt and Babylon led the way, and acted as the pioneers of mankind in the various untrodden fields of art, literature, and science, says justly : " The beginnings may have been often humble enough. We may laugh at the rude picture-writing, the uncouth brick pyramid, the coarse fabric, the homely and ill-shapen instruments, as they present themselves to our notice in the remains of these ancient nations ; but they are really worthier of our admiration than of our ridicule. The first inventors of any art are among the greatest benefactors of their race ; and the bold step which they take from the unknown to the known, from blank ignorance to discovery, is equal to many steps of subsequent progress. ' The commencement,' says Aristotle, ' is more than half of the whole.' " The incomparable honour belongs to Wicklif of translating the whole canon into the vernacular, and whatever might be the defects of his mighty service, he did more than half of all that has been done for the English Bible.

The exact period at which Wicklif began his great work is unknown, and the manner in which he carried it out is involved in much obscurity. A considerable number of his sermons and writings have come down to us, but they contain few allusions to this masterpiece of a distinguished life. The condition of the times explains this. To popularize the Bible was a heresy and crime in the view of ruling men and classes, and the translator who would give that truth to the people which is sweeter than honey or

the honeycomb, worked best in the dark, as the bees do. In the retirement of Lutterworth, in company with a few scholars who shared his piety and enthusiasm, he wrought out with glorious travail the immortal page. A unique joy must swell the soul of privileged men who are called of God to lift the curtain, and reveal to the wondering eyes of millions the sublime and saving imagery of Revelation ; and Wicklif was the man to taste this joy to the utmost. Our ignorance of the details of this translation leaves the simple but sublime phenomenon of the work itself to make all the fuller impression on us. Sterling was once pointing out what was to be remembered in St. Peter's at Rome, when one asked, "What is to be forgotten?" "Nothing but yourself," replied Sterling. In introducing us to the magnificent shrine of Revelation, and making manifest to us its multiplied glories, Wicklif has entirely suppressed himself, and we find ourselves suddenly in the most holy place undistracted by human presence.

The New Testament was naturally translated first. That the translation of the New Testament was Wicklif's own work, we may assume with a good degree of certainty, for this is the point upon which the testimonies of friends and foes most undoubtedly agree. The execution of the Old Testament was taken in hand either while the New Testament was still in progress, or shortly after the completion of the latter—and this not by Wicklif himself, but by one of his friends and fellow-labourers, most probably Nicolas of Hereford, who was interrupted by persecution when he had advanced as far as the Apocrypha.

The version itself affords proof that it was continued and finished by another hand; and it is not improbable that the continuator was Wicklif himself. It was probably in the year 1382 that the translation of the whole Bible was completed; and Wicklif did his utmost to multiply copies and put the work into the hands of his countrymen. No sooner, however, was the Bible thus issued than Wicklif exerted himself to remove its imperfections. Without doubt it was he who suggested a revision of the whole work, perhaps undertook it with his own hand. The revision was a work of time, and he did not live to see its completion. The revised Bible did not appear till several years after Wicklif's death, and the improved form which it then assumed was essentially the work of one man, who was a trusted friend of Wicklif, and in his last years his assistant in parochial work, John Purvey. The probable date of the completion of the revision was the year 1388—*i.e.*, four years after Wicklif's death.

Tycho Brahe made his great discoveries in the heavens without a telescope, the first telescope being constructed after his death; and Wicklif had to render the Word of God into English without any knowledge of the original tongues. It was only in the course of the fifteenth century that the study of the Greek language and literature was diffused. Being totally ignorant of Greek, Wicklif did not make his translation of the New Testament from the original, but from the Latin Vulgate, as he did his version of the Old Testament. On the defects and compensations of this translation, Dr. Moulton observes in his most

interesting and comprehensive work: "The fundamental defect of the Wickliffite versions is that they are derived from the Latin, not from the original Hebrew and Greek. The translators were not able even to consult the original texts. What they profess to do they do well, representing the Latin with great care and with general accuracy. Where the text before them was faulty, the error was faithfully reflected in their work. . . . But this dependence on the Vulgate was not without some compensating advantages. The English Bible, at this its first appearance, was seen to be identical with the 'common Bible' received by the whole Western Church: a version taken from the language of the Jews or of the Greeks might in those days have been suspected of some grievous taint. The translator moved freely amongst the well-known words and phrases, and his familiarity with the Latin text left him at liberty to expend his strength on the English: hence the force and the homeliness so often apparent in the style. In the New Testament, at all events, the Vulgate is often nearer to the sense of the sacred writers than are many of the later manuscripts of the Greek Testament. . . . Whilst, then, it is very plain that the *version of a version* is necessarily placed at great disadvantage, that the Latin language is incapable of representing the beauty and fulness of the Greek, and that the Vulgate is in some places disfigured by serious errors, we may thankfully acknowledge that the derivation of the first English Bible from the Latin was productive of good." \*

\* *The History of the English Bible.*



All critics acknowledge the superb execution of the work, from a literary point of view. Wicklif was a master of language and style. He ranks with Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton, as one of the four men who have produced the greatest effect on the English language and literature. Shirley, a most reliable judge of literary art, says of Wicklif's writings: "In his original tracts the exquisite pathos, the keen delicate irony, the manly passion of his short, nervous sentences, fairly overmasters the weakness of the unformed language, and gives us English which cannot be read without a feeling of its beauty to this hour." There is the purity, stateliness, largeness, the strength and grandeur in his diction which remind us of Bacon, Hooker, and the majestic school they represent. We can find space here for only one illustration. He is trying the religious and moral condition of Christendom by the standard of the first Commandment. He finds that idolatry and creature worship are in the ascendant everywhere. "It is as clear as day," says he, "that we so-called Christians make the creatures to be our gods. The proud or ambitious man worships a likeness of that which is in heaven (Exod. xx. 4), because, like Lucifer, he loves above all things promotion or dignity in one form or another. The covetous man worships a likeness of that which is in the earth beneath. And although, going in sheep's clothing, we hypocritically confess that our highest of all service is in the worship of God, yet it would very well become us carefully to inquire whether we faithfully carry out this confession in our actions.

Let us then search and examine whether we keep the first and greatest Commandment, and worship God above all. Do we not bend and bow ourselves before the rich of this world, more with the view of being rewarded for this obeisance with worldly honour or temporal advantage, than for the sake of their moral good or spiritual profit? Does not the covetous man stretch out now his arms and now his hands to grasp the gold, and does he not pay court with all his pains to the men who have it in their power to hinder or to help his gains? Does not the sensual man, as though he were making an offering to the idol Moloch, cast himself down with his whole body before the harlot? Does he not put upon such persons worldly honour? Does he not offer to them the incense of purses of gold, in order to scent the flow of sensual delight with the sweetest perfumes? Does he not lavish upon his mistress gift upon gift, till she is more wonderfully bedizened with various ornaments than an image of the Holy Virgin? And does not all this show that we love the flesh, the world, and the devil more than God, because we are more careful to keep their commandments? What violence do we hear of the Kingdom of Heaven suffering in our times (Matt. xi. 12), while the gates of hell are bolted? But, alas! broad and well-trodden is the way which leadeth to hell, and narrow and forsaken the way which leadeth to heaven. This it is which makes men, for lack of faith, love what is seen and temporal more than the blessings which they cannot see, and to have more delight in buildings, dress, and ornaments, and other things of art and men's inven-

tion, than in the uncreated archetypes of heaven." And Sharon Turner remarks that Wicklif's English style in his Bible-translation, compared with his other English writings, rises to an uncommon pitch of perspicuity, beauty and force.

Dr. Moulton reminds us that the indirect effect of the Wicklifite versions has been very great, both on the general style of Scripture translations and on the development of the English language. A very able writer on the English language, Mr. G. P. Marsh, considers it certain that "Tyndale is merely a full-grown Wicklif. . . . His recension of the New Testament is just what his great predecessor would have made it, had he awaked again to see the dawn of that glorious day of which his own life and labours kindled the morning twilight. Not only does Tyndale retain the general grammatical structure of the older version, but most of its felicitous verbal combinations, and, what is more remarkable, he preserves even the rhythmic flow of its periods, which is again repeated in the recension of 1611. Wicklif, then, must be considered as having originated the diction and phraseology which, for five centuries, have constituted the consecrated dialect of the English speech; and Tyndale as having given to it that finish and perfection which have so admirably adapted it to the expression of religious doctrine and sentiment, and to the narration of that remarkable series of historical facts which are recorded in the Christian Scriptures." Lechler concludes: "Wicklif's translation of the Bible marks an epoch in the development of the English language almost as much as Luther's transla-

tion does in the history of the German tongue. The Luther Bible opens the period of the new High German; Wicklif's Bible stands at the head of the Middle English. It is usual, indeed, to represent not Wicklif, but Chaucer—the father of English poetry—as the first representative of the Middle English literature. But later investigators of the history of languages—such as Marsh, Koch, and others—rightly recognize Wicklif's Bible prose as the earliest classic Middle English. Chaucer, indeed, has some rare features of superiority—liveliness of description, a charming way of clothing his ideas, genuine English humour, and a masterly command of language. But such qualities of style address themselves more to the educated classes; they are not adapted to make a form of speech the common property of the nation. That which has the destiny to promulgate a new language, must be something which concerns closely the weal and the woe of man, and which for that reason takes hold irresistibly of every man in a nation, the lowest as well as the highest. In other words, it must be moral and religious truths, grasped with the energy of a genuine enthusiasm, and finding acceptance and diffusion for themselves in fresh forms of speech. If Luther, with his translation of the Bible, opened the epoch of the High German dialect, so Wicklif, with his English Bible, stands side by side with Chaucer at the head of the Middle English. But in the latter dialect are already found the fundamental characters of the new English which reached its development in the sixteenth century."

The immediate influence of the issue of the new

translation was great. "The new version was eagerly sought after and read. Copies passed into the hands of all classes of the people. Even the sovereign himself and the princes of the blood royal did not disdain to possess them. The multiplication of copies must have been rapid. Nearly 150 manuscripts, containing the whole or parts of Purvey's Bible, the majority of which were written within the space of forty years from its being finished, have been examined. . . . Others are known to have existed within the last century, and more, there can be no doubt, have escaped inquiry; how many have perished it is impossible to calculate. But when it is remembered that from the first the most active and powerful measures were taken to suppress the version; that strict inquisition was made for the writings and translations of Wicklif, Hereford, Ashton, and Purvey; that they were burnt and destroyed as most noxious and pernicious productions of heretical depravity; and that all who were known to possess them were exposed to severe persecution; and then if there be taken into account the number of manuscripts which, in the course of four or five centuries, have been destroyed through accident or negligence, it is not too much to suppose that we have now but a small portion of those which were originally written."\* These versions, though never used in the public service of the Church, were widely circulated from the period of their completion until their place was occupied by the editions of the reign of Henry VIII.

\* Preface to Forshall and Madden's edition of *The Wicklif Versions*.

Wicklif vindicated the right of the people to read the Bible. We have seen already the deep dislike of the clergy at large to place the Bible in the hands of the people; they confidently predicted that any such act would bring in its train infidelity, heresy, blasphemy, and endless evils. To these dreary prognostications Wicklif replied: "Christians should labour day and night upon the text of Holy Scripture, especially upon the Gospel in their mother-tongue. And yet men will not suffer it that the laity should know the Gospel, and read it in their common life in humility and love. But pleasure-loving learned men of this world reply and say, laymen may easily fall into error, and therefore they ought not to dispute upon questions of Christian faith. Alas! alas! what cruelty it is to rob a whole kingdom of bodily food because a few fools may be gluttonous, and may do themselves and others mischief by their immoderate use of such food! Quite as easily may a proud worldly priest fall into error contrary to the Gospel which is written in Latin, as a simple layman may err contrary to the Gospel which is written in English. When a child makes a slip in his first day's lesson, would there be any sense in making that a reason for never allowing children to come to lessons at all? Who then in this way of it would ever become a scholar? What sort of Antiehris is this who, to the sorrow of Christian men, is so bold as to prohibit the laity from learning this holy lesson which is so earnestly commanded by God? Every man is bound to learn it that he may be saved, but every layman who shall be saved is a very

priest of God's own making, and every man is bound to be a very priest."

That the Bible is a book for every man is a thought Wicklif expresses often enough in the clearest manner. In the treatise *Of the Truth of Holy Scripture*, he writes: "Holy Scripture is the faultless, most true, most perfect, and most holy law of God, which it is the duty of every man to learn to know, to defend, and to observe, inasmuch as they are bound to serve the Lord in accordance with it, under the promise of an eternal reward." In the *Mirror for Temporal Lords*, he demands for all believing people immediate access to the Holy Scriptures, chiefly on the ground that Christian truth is made known more clearly and accurately there than the priests are able to declare it; while many of the prelates besides are quite ignorant of Scripture, and others of them intentionally hold back from the people certain portions of Scripture doctrine. And in his English tract, the *Wicket*, he exclaims with emotion: "If God's Word is the life of the world, and every word of God is the life of the human soul, how may any Antichrist, for dread of God, take it away from us that be Christian men, and thus to suffer the people to die for hunger in heresy and blasphemy of men's laws, that corrupteth and slayeth the soul?"

Again the Reformer wrote:—

"As the faith of the Church is contained in the Scriptures, the more these are known in an orthodox sense, the better. And since secular men should assuredly understand the faith, it should be taught

them in whatever language is best known to them. Inasmuch, also, as the doctrines of our faith are more clearly and precisely expressed in the Scriptures than they may possibly be by priests,—seeing, if one may venture so to speak, that many prelates are but too ignorant of Scripture, while others conceal parts of Scripture,—and as the verbal instructions of priests have many other defects, the conclusion is abundantly plain, that believers should ascertain for themselves the matters of their faith, by having the Scriptures in a language which they fully understand. Besides, it was by faith, as described by the apostle (Heb. ch. xi.), that the saints of old overcame kingdoms, and hastened to their own country. Why, then, should not the things of faith be disclosed to the people now, so that they may comprehend them more clearly? He, in consequence, who shall prevent this, or murmur against it, does his utmost to continue the people in a state of unbelief and condemnation. Hence, also, the laws made by prelates are not to be received as matters of faith, nor are we to confide in their public instructions, or in any of their words, but as they are founded on Holy Writ; for, according to the constant doctrine of Augustine, the Scriptures contain the whole of the truth; and this translation of them should therefore do at least this good—viz. placing bishops and priests above suspicion as to the parts of it which they profess to explain. Other means also, as prelates, the pope, and friars, may prove defective; and to provide against this, Christ and His apostles evangelized the greater portion of the world by making known the Scriptures in a



language which was familiar to the people. To this end, indeed, did the Holy Spirit endow them with the knowledge of all tongues. Why, therefore, should not the living disciples of Christ do as they did, opening the Scriptures to the people so clearly and plainly that they may verily understand them? since, except to the unbeliever disposed to resist the Holy Spirit, the things contained in Scripture are no fiction."

To deny the people the right to God's Word on the plea that its free unrestrained study might sometimes prove injurious to the unlearned student, is as rational, or irrational, as to deny the people their share in the sun, and to compel them to work in darkness, lest they should suffer from sunstroke. Wicklif well understood this in a day when it was understood by few. Taste regards with admiration the richly adorned missals which have come down to us from mediæval times; but the unadorned pages of Wicklif have a pathos all their own, as they brought the eternal beauty of truth itself before the eager eyes of the common people.

Wicklif also vindicated the right of the people to interpret the Bible for themselves. He came gradually to the conclusion that in the work of Scripture interpretation the tradition of the Church cannot have a decisive weight; that "the Holy Ghost teaches us the right understanding of Scripture, as Christ opened the Scripture to the Apostles." He decidedly objected to the doctrine that the Pope has any monopoly of the spirit of interpretation, and that we are bound to regard his verdict as final. Just as

boldly does he reject the infallibility of ecclesiastical councils. "Worldly prelates make of themselves a congregation, and of clerks assenting to them—some for worldly dread and worldly favours, some for gold and the hope of benefices, and some for fear of the curse, or of the losing of benefices, or for dread of slander, imprisonment, and burning:" but the conduct of such assemblies in vesting their own interpretations of Holy Writ with the authority due to the record itself, is described as involving the guilt of blasphemy. "The law of God and of reason," he observes, "we should follow more than that of our popes and cardinals; so much so, that if we had a hundred popes, and if all the friars were cardinals, to the law of the Gospel we should bow, more than to all this multitude." No man can understand the Scripture except he is first enlightened by Christ; but Christ is ready to enlighten us all; and private judgment thus directed is our final court of appeal. Wicklif thus concludes: "I am certain, indeed, from the Scriptures, that neither Antichrist, nor all his disciples, nay, nor all fiends, may really impugn any part of that volume, as it regards the excellence of its doctrine. But in all these things it appears to me that the believing man should use this rule—if he soundly understands the sacred Scripture, let him bless God; if he be deficient in such a perception, let him labour for soundness of mind. Let him also dwell as a grammarian upon the letter, but be fully aware of imposing a sense upon Scripture, which he doubts the Holy Spirit does not demand. For such a man, according to St. Jerome, is a heretic;

and much more he who rashly blasphemes by imposing a meaning on Scripture, which the Spirit itself declares to be impossible."

One of our science journals recently pointed out the value of "amateur astronomy," and reminded us "how much of the valuable work of late years has been done with optical power of a very insignificant kind. One of the greatest works that has ever appeared is the *Uranometry* of Dr. Gould, of Cordoba. We have in it a complete delineation of the southern skies. The wonderful convolutions of the Milky Way are all accurately laid down. The magnitudes of the stars have been determined with wonderful accuracy. All the naked-eye stars whose colour is remarkable are noticed particularly. And besides all this, ten or twelve new variable stars have been added to our catalogues, and suspicion of variation marked against some hundreds besides. And all the great work of Dr. Gould, we find, has been done with an ordinary opera-glass! Again, the valuable researches of Denning in reference to meteoric streams were carried on by determining the distance and direction of each meteor's motion by naked-eye estimations. Then again the finest photographs of the late comet were taken with an ordinary camera. In a word, it is the diligence of the observer that leads to great results, rather than the optical power at his disposal. Whatever branch of astronomy we turn to, we find that the distinguished men are those who have been painstaking and hard-working, and not those possessed of the largest telescopes." All this has an immediate meaning in relation to the

unfolding of Biblical truth. Whatever humble scientists have discovered or demonstrated with few and simple instruments, amateur expositors have rendered yet far more eminent service in bringing forth the glory that is above the heavens. Without any professional character, without any apparatus of scholarship, without any of the pomps of learned investigation, thousands of simple souls have come in sight of the hidden laws and lights of the spiritual firmament. Not that Wicklif despised the grammarian, the truly learned clerk ; on the contrary, as a scholar of large and profound erudition, he placed on learning a high value ; but he knew the value also of true supplication, of diligent reflection, of pure living, and was persuaded that if any man lacking wisdom besought the Father of lights, the saving knowledge would not be denied. Since Wicklif unsealed the Word, a great multitude of humble godly souls have seen deep things out of God's law ; and the theology of the Church has a life and fulness which would have been impossible with God's Word in an unknown tongue.

The right of private judgment is one not to be surrendered. Without it an enlightened faith is impossible ; our trust in that case is in men rather than in the truth itself. If the right of private interpretation involves possibilities of great danger, so all great privileges involve great dangers ; but the dangers attendant upon a servile submission to ecclesiastical arbitration, are more terrible still. If it be suggested that great variations may occur in the interpretations of the multitude, the answer is

pertinent: It is only through such variations that the infinite fulness of the truth finds expression, and that men come at length to a living unity. If it be objected, that the licence of private judgment gives room for heresy and scepticism, it must be remembered the same licence makes whatever there is of faith very real and deep, and in so doing provides the only trustworthy defence against error and unbelief. If it be argued, we do not pay any respect to the judgment of the common people in literature, or science, or art, therefore we can the less permit them to interpret the Scriptures which contain the highest truth of all; the rejoinder must be, there is an idiom in the highest truth which the ploughman can detect as swiftly as the philosopher; and when the common people heard Christ gladly, it proved their fitness to hear Him, then and always. A recent writer on sight declares, that "idleness of the eyes" is most injurious to the eyes, the vision is improved by constant exercise and the finest objects and shades justly discerned; so that "idleness of the eyes," to which the Papacy would doom the people, could only end in inner blindness, and when the blind lead the blind we know what happens. When the Romish Church grants to the people the right to read the Bible, but reserves to itself the right of interpreting the contents of the Bible, it takes back with one hand what it gives with the other, and makes possible the whole world of mischiefs which must arise when we place that confidence in man which we ought to place only in God's free, royal Spirit.

It will be proper for us to observe here some of

the views of Scripture truth entertained by Wicklif. The Reformer recognized with fulness and frankness the province and power of Reason. He had a conviction that the reason of man had within itself a certain ground-stock of truth in reference to the invisible, the Divine, and the moral ; and he frequently appeals to the law of Nature which has its seat in the conscience and the natural reason. And not only in matters of action and of duty, but also in matters of faith, Wicklif recognizes a *natural light* ; he credits reason with an independent power of its own of penetrating deeply into the knowledge of the mysteries of salvation. Wicklif was a deeply intellectual man, and he loved to set forth moral truth in a large intellectual presentment ; he says grandly, "The love of God is full of reason," and that reason which equally pervades God's truth and righteousness and universal government, Wicklif rejoices to discover and illustrate. He looked high and wide, and it was impossible for him to deal with any subject except in a strain of lofty philosophy. Yet with all his reverence for reason, he steadily maintained the principle that Holy Scripture is the only authoritative document of revelation, that it is the Rule and Standard of all teachings and teachers. The stock of intuitional truth in the mind of man has been unhappily dimmed and weakened, and is altogether inadequate to guide us into all truth ; yet these primary perceptions and persuasions prepare for the reception of that truth, and lend to scriptural doctrine valuable attestation. The colours of ancient draperies, long faded through years of neglect and

darkness, are sometimes restored by the action of light, the sun brings out the beautiful pattern and gorgeous tints which had so nearly vanished ; so, characters written in the soul by the finger of God, but which have through neglect and violation become faint and untrustworthy, glow out again brightly in the light of the Scriptures, and the inner revelation corroborates the written revelation. Wicklif, whilst an enthusiast in logic and philosophy, recognized ever more fully, as the years passed on, the supremacy of God's Word.

Apart from reason the scholastics of Wicklif's day set forth "authority" as a standard principle. Under this idea they ranged, in miscellaneous array, conclusions of Councils, decrees of the Popes, doctrines of the Fathers, Biblical statements. In their eyes Holy Scripture had no peculiar, exclusive, privileged position, no weight which is alone of its kind, and absolutely decisive. The Bible itself was regarded as only a part of tradition—a book handed down from one generation to another, just as the works of the Fathers were. Whenever the scholastic divines sought to bring in proof in support of any Roman dogma, traditional elements and Scripture proofs were all uncritically jumbled together. With Wicklif in this respect the case was essentially different. He draws a line of distinction so sharp between Scripture and Tradition that the two can no longer be confounded. He ascribes to Holy Scripture, and to it alone, the precise idea of "unlimited authority ;" he distinguishes in principle between God's Word and human tradition, and he recognizes

the Scriptures as, in and by themselves, the all-sufficing source of Christian knowledge.

Wicklif was accused by some of his contemporaries with doing what the "heretic" Occam and his followers had done before him—viz., he took his stand upon the literal sense of Holy Scripture, and would submit to no other judgment whatever. But, as Lechler points out, there is an important difference between Occam and Wicklif on the subject of the rank and prerogative of the Bible's authority: Wicklif was more scriptural than Occam. "The difference is this, that Occam always appeals to, and claims authority for, Scripture and Church-teaching *in combination*—always thinks of the two as being always found in harmony. Evidently he cannot for a moment reconcile himself to the thought that the sanctioned doctrines of the Church itself, as well as the teaching of the Fathers of the Church, must first be tested by the help of Scripture. Whereas Wicklif distinguishes quite clearly between Scripture and Church teaching, and recognizes the Bible as the supreme standard by which even the doctrines of the Church and the Fathers are to be tried. . . . Wicklif, in point of fact, took a decided step *in advance* to the truly evangelical standpoint, the standpoint of the Reformers of the sixteenth century. . . . With a clear consciousness of the whole bearing and extent of this truth, Wicklif lays down the fundamental proposition: God's law—*i.e.*, Holy Scripture—is the unconditional and absolutely binding authority."\*

It was in defence of the principle of the absolute

\* Lechler.



authority of Holy Scripture, as well as to illustrate and establish it to the utmost of his power, that Wicklif wrote one of the most important of his works under the title, *Of the Truth of Holy Scripture*. In establishing and proving the principle of the absolute authority of Holy Scripture, Wicklif first points to its *Author*. It is, as a matter of fact, the Word of God. This proposition he presents in various turns of expression ; at one time he describes Holy Scripture as the Will and Testament of God the Father, which cannot be broken ; and at another he asserts that God and His Word are one, and cannot be separated the one from the other. In other passages he is wont to describe Christ as the proper Author of Holy Scripture, and to deduce immediately from that fact its infinite superiority and absolute authority. As the person of one author is to another, so is the merit of one book compared to another : now it is a doctrine of the faith that Christ is infinitely superior to every other man, and therefore His Book of Holy Scripture, which is His law, stands in a similar relation to every other writing which can be named. This being so, Wicklif knows not how to give any other physiological explanation of the indisposition of many to acknowledge the unbounded authority of the Bible compared with every other book, in any other way than from their want of sincere faith in the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Holy Scripture with Wicklif is not only the work of Christ as its Author, not only a law by Him given ; it stands yet nearer to Christ : Christ Himself is the Scripture which we behove to know ; and to be ignorant of the Scripture is the

same thing as to be ignorant of Christ. A second argument in support of the unlimited authority of Scripture Wicklif found in the *contents* of the Bible. The Bible contains exactly that which is necessary and indispensable to salvation—a thought which Wicklif gave expression to in allusion to the saying of the Apostle Peter: “Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name given under heaven among men by which we can be saved but the name of Jesus Christ.” Last of all, he points to the *effects* of Holy Scripture as an evidence of its truly Divine and absolute authority. The sense of Scripture is of more efficacy and use than any other thought or language. The experience of the Church at large speaks for the sufficiency and efficacy of the Bible. Furthermore, all other forms of wisdom vanish away, whereas the wisdom which the Holy Ghost imparted to the Apostles on the day of Pentecost remains for evermore, and all its enemies have never been able effectually to contradict and withstand it.

This principle of the absolute authority of the Scriptures, which Wicklif knows how to confirm on so many different sides, immediately finds in his hands the most manifold applications. From the principle of the Divine origin of Scripture immediately follows its infallibility, its moral purity, and its absolute perfection in matter and form. But the chief inference which Wicklif deduces from the Bible’s Divine origin and absolute authority is its perfect and entire *sufficiency*. The Bible alone is the ground document of the Church, its fundamental law, its

charta. Evidently with allusion to the Magna Charta, the fundamental charter of the civil liberties of his nation, Wicklif loves to speak of the Bible as the charter of the Church's liberties, as the God-given deed of grace and promise. It is the kernel of all laws of the Church, so that every prescription profitable to the Church is contained in it, either expressly or by deduction. And Scripture alone and exclusively has this importance and authority for the Church. In comparison with it, all other writings, albeit they may be the genuine works of great Church doctors, are "apocryphal," and have no claim upon our faith for their own sake. But not merely in the ecclesiastical sphere and in that of religion and morals, but in the whole circle of human existence, including civil life and the State, all law, according to Wicklif, ought to order itself according to the Law of God.

From what precedes flows the rule—Put nothing, whatever it be, upon a footing of equality with Holy Scripture, still less above it. Wicklif lays down the proposition without reserve, "It is impossible that any word or any deed of the Christian should be of equal authority with Holy Scripture." And to place above Scripture, and prefer to it, human traditions, doctrines, and ordinances, is nothing but an act of blind presumption. A power of human appointment which pretends to set itself above the Holy Scriptures is only fitted to lame the efficacy of the Word of God, and to introduce confusion. Yea, it leads to blasphemy, when the Pope puts forward the claim that what he decrees in matters of faith

must be received as Gospel, and that his laws must, even more than the Gospel itself, be observed and carried out. Wicklif enforces the duty of holding wholly and entirely to Scripture, and Scripture alone; not mixing the commandments of men with evangelical truths. Men who practise such a mixture of God's truth and human traditions Wicklif calls "medley divines." Christian law should be only and purely the law of God, which is without spot, and giveth life to souls; and therefore a law of tradition ought to be repudiated by all the faithful, on account of the mixture of even a single atom of Antichrist.

No sooner had Luther translated the Word of God into German than the printing press gave wings to his work and carried it far and wide throughout Christendom. It was far otherwise, however, with Wicklif's similar service. The art of printing was invented fifty years later, and was not introduced into England until 1477, therefore the English Bible was only accessible in manuscript to its earliest readers. In point of fact the Wicklif versions never appeared in print until 1850. In that year the Oxford University Press issued a complete edition of the two versions in four volumes, under the title, "The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments with the Apocrypal Books, in the earliest English Versions made from the Latin Vulgate by John Wicklif and his Followers; edited by the Rev. J. Forshall and Sir F. Madden." The slowness and limitation of Wicklif's work, when compared with Luther's, may be explained to a large extent by the

fact that Wicklif's only instrument was the pen, whilst Luther sowed the living seed with the press. Yet for centuries the Bible work of Wicklif was leavening the spirit of the nation, and when his translation was superseded, we have seen how its spirit and felicities passed into the later translations. The Reformer's fame is indissolubly interwoven with the Scriptures, and such fame is peculiarly pure and lofty. The translator of the Scriptures shares, in a certain degree, the grandeur of the work itself; he becomes identified with the vastness, the solemnity, the purity, of the oracle he interprets; he is transfigured in the reflex glory of the eternal truth; he stands before the world like the angel in the sun, only it is a brighter, sublimer orb. The translator shares also the wide popularity of the Bible he interprets. He addresses a whole nation; he instructs generations. And this is peculiarly significant in relation to Wicklif. The translator sometimes addresses only a small nation; and it has happened even that a nation has died out and left a Bible which no living man can read; but Wicklif caused the Bible to speak the language of a people which spreads over the earth, and which promises to flourish for ages; his work speaks most eloquently throughout the whole world. And the translator of the Bible shares the immortality of the glorious pages he opens; he writes his name in the jewelled foundations of a city that cannot be moved. The work of other men disappears with the materials on which, or with which, they have worked—the painter's art with the fading pigments, the sculptor's masterpiece with the

crumbling stone, the patriot's sacrifice with the extinction of empire ; but the translator lives and abides in the perpetuity of the Truth itself : the angel standing in the sun shall disappear only with the sun, and that shall not be until all suns are lost in the glory of God and the Lamb.



## CHAPTER VII.

### WICKLIF'S CLOSING YEARS.

**T**HE closing years of the Reformer's life were marked by tribulations. Whilst he was quietly pursuing his great work of translation in the Rectory of Lutterworth, the country itself was in a state of fermentation. In the year 1381 the great insurrection of the peasantry in England took place. It was another example, of which history can furnish so many, of a wronged and long oppressed people rising at last in wrath to avenge themselves upon their oppressors. The peasantry had long groaned under the exactions of the tax-collectors, until finally a social revolution of a mixed democratic and socialistic character broke out. The outbreak seems to have taken place almost simultaneously both south and north of the Thames, in the counties of Kent and Essex. A baker at Fobbing, in Essex, was bold enough to resist the collector, and in Dartford a tile-burner murdered the insolent tax-officer with one of his tools. The first weak efforts of the authorities to

put a stop to such deeds of violence were not sufficient to strike terror, but only excited the rioters to still more outrageous measures. On May 30, when one of the King's judges and a jury were assembled to try some of the Essex insurgents, a mob rushed upon the jurymen, cut off their heads, and marched with these through the county. At the same moment the revolvers in Kent collected in a mob under Wat Tyler (Walter, the tile-maker), and broke open the Archbishop's prison to release John Ball, the priest, who thereupon became, along with another priest, who called himself Jack Straw, the leader, agitator, and mob-orator of the movement.

The rebel mobs of Essex and Kent united their masses and marched upon London in the beginning of June, with a strength, it is alleged, of 100,000 men. The neighbouring counties were infected by the movement, and everywhere mobs of rebels wasted the houses and lands of the nobles, burnt all deeds and documents, and put to death all judges, lawyers, and jurymen, upon whom they could lay hands. Every man was compelled to join himself to the peasants to assist in obtaining freedom, as they understood it. The worst outbreaks took place in London itself and its suburbs on Corpus Christi, June 13, and the following days. The mobs of peasantry, strengthened by the City populace, reduced to ashes the magnificent palace of the Duke of Lancaster in the Savoy, and destroyed all the valuables which it contained. On Friday, June 14, they seized the Archbishop of Canterbury, Simon Sudbury, who was also Chancellor of the kingdom, along with several



other high officers of State, all of whom they condemned as alleged traitors to lose their heads on the block ; and while these and other scenes of blood were enacted in London, the neighbouring counties were overrun, and numerous houses of the nobles and many rich religious foundations, including St. Alban's, destroyed. In a few days the revolt was suppressed, and not only the leaders themselves, but hundreds also of their misguided followers, were apprehended, and, after trial and sentence, punished with death.

Wicklif's adversaries sought to fix on him the responsibility of this uprising. They gave out that these were the fruits of his destructive opposition to the doctrines and institutions of the Church, and especially of the itinerant preachers, his adherents, who went about everywhere stirring up the people. His adversaries also appealed, at a later time, to certain alleged confessions of John Ball, in which it was pretended the leader of the revolt acknowledged himself as a disciple of Wicklif, and as inspired in his treasonable conduct by the Reformer's doctrine. Lechler shows very clearly the falsehood of this impeachment, and that Wicklif could not be held responsible for the grim and gory outbreak. Dr. Hook speaks of Wicklif's "republicanism," and yet no accusation could be more entirely unsupported. From his youth, Wicklif was a student of legal science ; he insists invariably on law and constitutional right ; he was at all times the advocate of order ; his patriotism had been illustrated on memorable occasions, and through a long life ; and there

is not a tittle of evidence to show that he had the least sympathy with republican or revolutionary programmes. The truth was, the popular discontent was created and fanned by the exactions of the Government, and the people becoming more conscious of their rights sought violently to assert them. Indirectly, the school of Wicklif may have contributed to the catastrophe by creating in the multitude the love of truth and liberty, but for such results of wider teaching the Reformer cannot be held chargeable. Christianity undesignedly sends forth from time to time a sword in the earth; and however much we may deplore savage scenes, yet bleeding slaves are nobler than happy slaves, and the compensation of dark days of civil strife is found in the larger liberty which sooner or later issues forth from wreck and blood. Intentionally and immediately, Wicklif certainly had no connection with the uprising; he greatly deplored it; and it cast another among the gathering shadows on his pathway.

The spirit of persecution which had hitherto been marvellously restrained, now began to assert itself. On the morrow of that dreadful Corpus Christi Day, June 13, 1381, when the insurgent peasantry perpetrated in London the worst misdeeds, they beheaded in the Tower the Archbishop of Canterbury, Simon Sudbury. In the following October, William Courtenay, Bishop of London, was elected his successor. He was the fourth son of the Earl of Devon, and was related in blood to several of the highest families in the realm. In spirit he was a genuine

hierarch—a zealot for the Papacy, and an energetic, domineering Churchman, and had already, in the year 1377, as we have seen—when Bishop of London—set on foot an inquiry against Wicklif. This “pillar of the Church,” as his admirers called him, was now Primate of all England. Since Courtenay, as Bishop of London, had exerted himself to suppress Wicklif, the Reformer had continued his evangelical career, and was fast penetrating the kingdom with his doctrine. The new Archbishop deemed it to be his imperative duty, without delay, to adopt measures with the view of breaking down the increased power of the Reforming party, and putting an effectual stop to their attempts.

He resolved, in the first instance, that the doctrines and principles of Wicklif and his adherents should be condemned by ecclesiastical authority. The Archbishop summoned an assembly of ecclesiastical notables for May 17, 1382, in London. This assembly consisted of ten bishops, sixteen doctors of laws, thirty doctors of theology, and four bachelors of laws. The Archbishop had selected at his own pleasure the men whom he could trust, to examine and decide the questions which he intended to lay before them—all men, of course, of acknowledged Roman orthodoxy and papistical views. The sessions took place in the hall of the Dominican Monastery in Blackfriars. During the sittings of the assembly, it happened that a terrific earthquake shook the city, and filled every one with consternation. The event made so deep an impression upon some members of the assembly that they looked upon it as an evil omen,

and advised that the design of the meeting should be given up. But Archbishop Courtenay was not the man to be so easily shaken in his purpose. He declared that the earthquake was rather to be regarded as a good and encouraging omen, and he knew how to calm again the minds of the assembly. He represented to the Churchmen that the earthquake was an emblem of the purification of the kingdom from erroneous doctrines. As in the interior of the earth there are enclosed foul airs and winds which break out in earthquakes, so that the earth is purged of them, though not without great violence, even so there have been many heresies hitherto shut up in the hearts of the unbelieving, but by the condemnation thereof the kingdom has been purged, though not without trouble and great agitation. Wicklif himself speaks of the earthquake as a judgment of God upon the proceedings of the assembly, which he was in the habit of calling the "Earthquake Council;" or, at other times, as a gigantic outcry of the earth against the ungodly doings of men—like the earthquake at the passion of the Son of God.\*

The conclusions of this assembly are known from the mandates of the Archbishop, which were published for the information and use of the Church. Twenty-four articles which had been in part publicly set forth in the University of Oxford, and in part spread abroad by itinerant preachers in the country, were condemned as being in part heretical, and in part erroneous. In the mandates issued by the

\* Lechler.

Archbishop on the basis of the conclusions of the Council, neither Wicklif nor any of his friends and adherents were mentioned by name. The mandates set forth simply that "men without authority, children of perdition, have usurped the office of preachers, and have preached, sometimes in churches, and sometimes in other places, doctrines heretical and unchurchly ; yea, and undermining the peace of the kingdom. To stem the evil, and to hinder its spread, the Archbishop had called into his counsels, with the consent and advice of several bishops, men of experience and ripe ecclesiastical learning, by whom the theses laid before them were maturely weighed and examined, and who had concluded that they were in part heretical, and in part, at least, erroneous and unecclesiastical." The articles condemned were, of course, the rational and scriptural positions of Wicklif and his party. In order to give greater publicity to the conclusions arrived at, and to engage the sympathy of the people upon their side, an extraordinary Act was appointed. On Friday of Whitsun week—May 30—a solemn procession passed through the streets of London, including clergy and laity, all arranged according to their several orders and conditions, and all barefoot, for it was meant to be an act of penitence. It concluded with a sermon against the condemned doctrines, preached by the Carmelite, John Cunningham, a doctor of theology ; who finished by reading in the pulpit the mandate of the Primate, whereby the twenty-four theses were condemned, and all men were threatened with the ban who should in future

adhere to these tenets, or listen to them when set forth or preached by others.

The help of the State was required in order to give practical effect to these mandates, and crush the Wicklifite party. In the Parliament which met in May, 1382, the Archbishop moved to obtain its consent that orders should issue from the Chancellor of the kingdom to the sheriffs and other royal officers to put in prison such preachers, as also their patrons and followers, as a bishop or prelate should indicate to them by name in this behalf. He represented to the House of Lords that it was a well-known fact that different ill-disposed persons were going through the realm, from county to county and from town to town, in a well-known dress ; and, under the aspect of great holiness, were preaching from day to day, without authority from the proper ordinary or credentials from any other quarter, not only in churches and churchyards, but also in market-places and other public thoroughfares, where much people are wont to resort. Their sermons were full of heresies and manifest errors, to the great injury of the faith and the Church, and to the great spiritual peril of the people and of the whole realm. These men preach also things of a calumnious kind in order to sow strife and division between different classes, both spiritual and secular, and they influence the minds of the people to the great danger of the whole kingdom. If these preachers are summoned by the bishops for examination, they pay no regard to their commands, do not trouble themselves in the least about their admonitions and the censures of the holy Church, but rather

testify their undisguised contempt for them. They know, besides, how to draw the people by their fine words to listen to their sermons, and they hold them fast in their errors with a strong hand, and by means of imposing crowds. It is therefore, he urged, indispensably necessary that the State should lend the assistance of its arm to bring to punishment these itinerant preachers as a common danger to the country.

The Lords in Parliament gave their consent to the statute proposed. The young King, Richard II., was also induced to issue an ordinance, wherein it was ordered that upon certification from the bishops the King's commands should issue from the chancellery of the kingdom to the sheriffs and other State officers of counties for the imprisonment of itinerant preachers, as well as their favourers and adherents. The Commons, however, did not sympathize with the movement. They were by no means disposed, either for themselves or their posterity, to consent to a greater dependence upon the prelates than their forefathers had known in past times.

Courtenay now set himself to crush the Reformed party in the University of Oxford. By various measures he secured the condemnation, and in some instances the recantation, of several of the more illustrious members of the Wicklif party. But not content with ecclesiastical measures, he used his influence with the King and Government to engage the power of the State in the affair, and to put down the heresy also with the temporal sword. On the same day on which the mandates of the

Archbishop issued to the Chancellor of Oxford and the preachers at St. Paul's Cross, a royal patent was drawn up, addressed to the Chancellor and Proctors of Oxford, by which the duty was imposed upon them of making an inquisition at large (*inquisitio generalis*) of all graduates of theology and law in the University, in order to discover such as might be attached to the condemned articles; and further, within eight days they were to drive forth and banish from the University and the city "every member who receives, bears favour to, or has any intercourse with Dr. John Wicklif, Nicolas Hereford, Philip Repington, John Aston, or any one else of the same party." Nay, more: search must be made without delay in all the halls and colleges of the University for books and tracts of Wicklif and Hereford; and all such writings must be interdicted and sent in without correction to the Archbishop; all which must be faithfully carried out, under pain of the loss of all the University's liberties and rights.

In the meantime the persecution of the itinerant preachers was proceeding, and of all the principal friends and admirers of Wicklif. The Bishops of London and Lincoln in particular distinguished themselves by their zeal in this work. But the chief instruments of persecution in both dioceses were the begging monks. Wicklif himself mentions this fact, with bitter complaints against the diabolical malice of these monks, who were unceasingly at work in London and Lincoln to extirpate the true and poor preachers, principally for the reason that the latter had dis-



covered and exposed their cunning practices to the people.

It is a matter of surprise that whilst persecution thus raged against the Wicklif party, the recognized head of the party should have remained unassailed. His enemies were fully aware of his personal importance and influence as the leader of his party ; they spoke of him as the Antichrist who was doing his utmost to undermine the faith : but personally he remained unmolested. The Duke of Lancaster was in no position to render Wicklif protection. The insurrection under Wat Tyler crippled for many years the political power of Lancaster, and rendered it necessary that the Reformed party should no longer reckon on his patronage. It seems most probable that Courtenay was compelled to proceed cautiously with Wicklif, in consequence of the attitude of Parliament and of the state of public opinion. To the Parliament which assembled in Westminster in 1382 Wicklif addressed himself in a Memorial which, it may be presumed, would not fail to attract some measure of public attention. At least Wicklif himself expressed the hope that it would lead to a discussion. In its whole substance the " complaint " was drawn up in such a way as to keep steadily before men's minds the legislative point of view. Four points were examined in it—1. Monastic vows ; 2. The exemption of the clergy and church property ; 3. What view was to be taken of tithes and offerings ; 4. That the pure doctrine of Christ and His Apostles touching the Lord's Supper should be allowed to be publicly taught in the churches.

The last point is handled in the briefest manner ; and it was good tact in Wicklif not to go any deeper into doctrine, for King and Parliament were not the proper authorities from which could come the decision of dogmatic questions. But all the more fully does the author examine the first point, devoting almost one-half of the Memorial to the proof of the proposition that monastic vows are nothing but inventions of sinful men, and are destitute of all obligatory force. A twofold ground-thought runs through the whole document—first, the conception of the pure religion of Christ, without any additions of men ; and next, the conception of Christian liberty. When the author claims the right of publicly setting forth the Scripture doctrine of the sacrament, and when, in opposition to the fetters of monastic vows, he desires for himself and others the liberty of following the pure and simple rule of the Redeemer ; when he contests the right of compulsory tithing, and on the other hand approves of tithes and offerings only as voluntary gifts, it is always a love of Christian liberty by which the writer is inspired. There can be no doubt that this Memorial, as a summary exhibition and defence of Wicklif's ideas, was well fitted to find acceptance among the representatives of the country.

The House of Commons was now a power in the land, and carefully guarded the rights and liberties of the nation. Throughout, the Commons were on the side of Wicklif ; that is, the nation at large recognized in the Papal dominion the chief curse of their country, and discerned in Wicklif the ablest oppo-

nent of that dominion, and therefore refused to allow his persecution. When, in the fable, the wolves counselled the flocks to deliver up their shepherd, the silly creatures perpetrated the act of folly which involved their destruction: the English nation, fortunately, had the wisdom to discern and to protect the great man who could best vindicate their rights.

For several years Wicklif, in his quiet cure of Lutterworth, pursued his pastoral and literary work; the devouring birds, by the providence of God, had been driven away, and most earnestly did the Reformer improve the propitious space. He found himself necessitated by age and declining health and strength to avail himself of an assistant pastor—a chaplain. The person who was associated with him for two years in this capacity was John Horn. In addition, John Purvey was Wicklif's constant attendant and confidential messmate—a helper of kindred spirit to his own, and a fellow-labourer in all his widely extended work. With these and other co-workers, the Reformer constantly wrought in the work of Bible translation and revision. It may also be assumed, with some degree of probability, that during these years the preaching itinerancy, although menaced by the measures of the bishops, was still carried on, though in diminished proportions and with some degree of caution; and so long as Wicklif lived, Lutterworth continued to be the centre of this evangelical mission. And during these years Wicklif wrote and sent forth a large number of tracts, many of which have come down to us. These tracts treat of a variety of subjects, some polemical, some

didactic—all directed, however, to the edification of the people. It is pathetic to contemplate the probable fortunes of these various writings. They were sent forth into the world in faith, and were soon lost in the darkness ; but, we may be sure, they ministered welcome light to solitary souls in unknown places. No doubt many of these manuscripts have been regarded as the treasures of those who possessed them, in days when such treasures were only to be possessed in secret. Soon Wicklif's writings were banned and burned, and many who loved those writings were banned and burned also ; in those days evangelical souls preserved these manuscripts in secret, and drew from them instruction, consolation, and hope. The ancients, we are told, kept lamps burning in sepulchres hermetically sealed ; in hidden places for generations copies of Wicklif's Bible and sermons continued to shed in the regions of death a welcome light, and make dry bones live.

During all this latter period Wicklif lived in jeopardy—he was always in danger. He was also well aware of this, and stood prepared to endure still further persecution for the cause of Christ, and even to end his life as a martyr. In one of his later works he says : “ We have no need to go among the heathen in order to die a martyr's death ; we have only to preach persistently the law of Christ in the hearing of Cæsar's prelates, and instantly we shall have a flourishing martyrdom, if we hold out in faith and patience.” Yet the gracious protection of God was over the man on

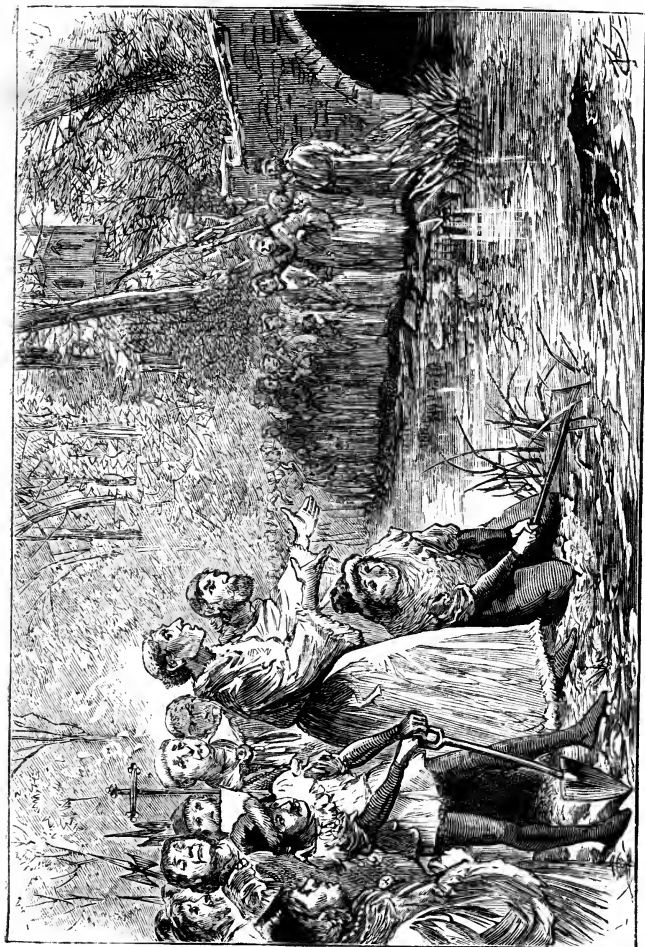
whose life depended largely the life of the nation. The light of the glowworm is its security, say the scientists, and its enemies may be seen eagerly watching it and darting around it, and yet afraid to attack the luminous thing; so, to a large extent, Wicklif's foes were held in check by the illustrious character of the man they hated; they felt the mysterious dread of doing violence to a more than kingly greatness. And, under the providence of God, Parliament protected Wicklif from the axe of the destroyer, until such time as he had sown the soil with living germs which should perpetuate a right seed, and bear fruit after many days. It is truly marvellous that Wicklif was preserved through such perils; and that he was permitted to end his days in peace can only be regarded as the act of Him Who says, "Touch not Mine anointed, and do My prophets no harm."

Wicklif, after having suffered for two years from the effects of a paralytic stroke, on Innocents' Day of the year 1384, while hearing Mass in his parish church at Lutterworth, sustained a violent stroke, at the moment of the elevation of the host, and sank down on the spot. His tongue in particular was affected by the seizure, so that from that moment he never spoke a single word more, and remained speechless till Saturday evening, December 31, 1384, when he was delivered out of this condition of paralysis by death. One of his enemies thus chronicled his departure: "On the feast of the passion of St. Thomas of Canterbury, John Wicklif—that organ of the devil, that enemy of the Church,

that author of confusion to the common people, that idol of heretics, that image of hypocrites, that restorer of schism, that storehouse of lies, that sink of flattery—being struck by the horrible judgment of God, was struck with palsy, and continued to live in that condition until St. Sylvester's Day, on which he breathed out his malicious spirit into the abodes of darkness."

Thirty years had passed over his grave, when, in the Council of Constance, more than three hundred articles, said to be extracted from his manuscripts, were condemned, and with them the whole of his writings. Nor was this anathema considered as an adequate expression of abhorrence. To the Council it appeared, and as the result of the strictest inquiry, that John Wicklif died an obstinate heretic. And it was accordingly further decreed that his memory should be pronounced infamous; and that his bones, if to be distinguished from those of the faithful, should be removed from the consecrated ground in which they were deposited, and cast upon a dung-hill. Tradition and history report that, in pursuance of this sentence, his remains were taken from their place, reduced to ashes, and thrown into the river which still passes the town of Lutterworth.

A later day pronounces upon Wicklif, and upon his work, another verdict. One of the extant portraits of Wicklif was found in Leicester; some other portrait had been painted over the original, and only a few years ago was the picture cleaned and the original image restored. Thus Wicklif's character was long obscured and misunderstood;



THROWING WICKLIFF'S ASHES INTO THE RIVER.

but in later times Lewis, Vaughan, Shirley, and especially Lechler, have brought out the Reformer's rich personality in strong, bright lines and colours. Few greater men have ever lived. His intellectual pre-eminence is unquestionable, full of knowledge and acuteness. "But in Wicklif, along with the intellectual element thus decidedly expressed, there is harmoniously combined a powerful will, equally potent in action and energetic in opposition—a firm and tenacious, a manly, yea, a heroic, will. It is impossible to read Wicklif's writings with an unprejudiced and susceptible mind, without being laid hold of by the strong manhood of mind which everywhere reveals itself. There is a force and fulness of character in his feeling and language which makes an over-mastering impression, and keeps the mind enchained. Wicklif sets forth his convictions, it is true, in a learned manner, with dialectical illumination and scholastic argumentativeness. And yet one finds out that it is by no means a one-sided intellectual interest which moves him. His conviction has unmistakably a moral source. He confesses openly himself that the conviction of the truth is reached much more in a moral way than in the way of pure intellect and science. . . . We recognise everywhere the moral pathos, the holy earnestness which wells up from the conscience and the depths of the soul. And hence the concentrated moral force which he always throws into the scale."\* And in all his work Wicklif had a sincere design to promote God's glory and Christ's cause. In face of a

\* Lechler.



reproach which one of his opponents had cast at him, that he set forth unusual views from a motive of ambition or of hostile feeling, he gives this solemn assurance: "Let God be my witness, that before everything I have God's glory in my eye, and the good of the Church, which springs out of reverence of Holy Scripture, and following the law of Christ."

Neither did Wicklif's work perish. Milton writes: "Had it not been for the obstinate perverseness of our prelates against the divine and admirable Wicklif, to suppress him as a schismatic and innovator, perhaps neither the Bohemian Huss and Jerome, no, nor the name of Luther or of Calvin, had been ever known. The glory of reforming all our neighbours had been completely ours."\* Although the glory of reforming all our neighbours was not completely ours, yet Wicklif's work had much to do with the triumph of the Reformation in the sixteenth century. In this country his disciples and doctrines lived on, despite cruel persecutions; and on the Continent, owing to a variety of circumstances, Wicklif's writings were largely distributed, and prepared the way for the eventual victory of the truth.

During his controversy with the Begging Friars, Wicklif made the following singular declaration: "I anticipate that some of the friars whom God shall be pleased to enlighten will return with all devotion to the original religion of Christ, will lay aside their unfaithfulness, and with the consent of Antichrist, offered or solicited, will freely return to primitive truth, and then build up the Church, as Paul did

\* *Areopagitica.*

before them." This thought of Wicklif was, indeed, a presentiment, a prophecy of the Reformation. In due time came the friar who returned to primitive truth, and who built up the Church, as Paul did. It is no part of our purpose to depreciate Luther. In some matters Wicklif was unquestionably superior to Luther, as in other points of character and doctrine the German Reformer was superior to Wicklif; but the greater truth to be remembered is, Luther brought to completion and final triumph the struggle Wicklif initiated, and so long carried forward with sublime courage and faithfulness. It remains now for all lovers of Christ to steadfastly maintain the great principles of truth and liberty against all those whose reactionary movements point back to the dark ages.

THE END.

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