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- Art. IX.—1. *John Wycliffe and his English Precursors.* By Professor Lechler. Translated by Professor Lorimer. London, 1884.
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9. *The Polemical Works of Wyclif.* 2 vols. *The Tractatus de Civili Dominio Liber Primus, the De Ecclesia, the Speculum Ecclesie Militantis, the De Benedicta Incarnatione, the De Compositione Hominis.* Edited by the Wyclif Society. London, 1883, 1885, 1886, 1887.
10. *Select English Works of John Wycliffe.* Edited by Thomas Arnold, M.A. In 3 vols. Oxford, 1869, 1871.
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12. *Joannis Wiclif Trialogus, cum Supplemento Trialogi.* Edidit Gotthardus Lechler. Oxonii, 1869.

THE interest still attaching to the life and labours of Wiclif is shown by the numerous works published within the last few years. Wiclif has frequently been misunderstood; and those inclined to do him justice have not always been in a position to form a correct estimate of his character and work. They have formed their estimate of him from the works of his opponents or from works incorrectly attributed to him; they have judged him by the language of the Scholastic Philosophy, well understood in his day, but now obscure; by 'Articles' unfairly taken from his writings by Synods or Councils; or they have had at their service very small portions of his own works; they have neglected to compare one work with another; the dates of many of his writings have been, till lately, uncertain; and attention has not been given to his progressive

gressive development. Dr. James, who wrote his 'Apology' in 1608, Dr. Vaughan and Mr. Le Bas, the authors of the 'Life of Wiclif;' Chancellor Massingberd in his 'History of the Reformation;' Dean Milman in his 'History of Latin Christianity;' Dean Hook, who has erred in following the Church historian Milner, are for one or other of these reasons, or from the want of information obtained since their time, no longer trustworthy authorities on the subject.\*

The late Professor Shirley, of Oxford, contributed to our knowledge of Wiclif by a catalogue of his works which he has ascertained to be genuine, with the dates of the years when some of them were written, as well as by an introduction to the 'Fasciculi Zizaniorum,' or 'John Wiclif's Tares,' a collection of documents, the work of T. Netter, of Walden, Wiclif's opponent. The 'Select English Works' have been printed by the University Press at Oxford, and have been edited by Mr. T. Arnold; and other English works, omitted by Arnold, have been published by Mr. F. Matthew for the Early English Text Society. A foreigner, Dr. Lechler, has also written a 'Life,' the result chiefly of an examination of the unpublished Latin manuscripts at Vienna. After the death of Aune of Bohemia, the wife of Richard II., these manuscripts were taken by her followers to that country, where they aided the Hussite movement, in the fifteenth century. A German Professor, wishing to revive this interest in Germany, is said to be engaged on a translation of Canon Peunington's 'Life of Wiclif' into German, a book that the Empress Frederick of Germany has placed in the hands of the gentleman charged with the religious instruction of her family. The manuscripts were afterwards kept in the Bohemian monasteries, until the abolition of these about a hundred years ago by Joseph II. They were then transferred to the Imperial Library at Vienna. Professor Lorimer produced out of Dr. Lechler's work just so much as comprises the biography of Wiclif and his predecessors in England, and enriched it with valuable notes. The Wyclif Society has been founded for the purpose of removing from England the disgrace of having left in manuscript the most important works of her great early Reformer.† One of the most valuable of these is the 'Summa in Theologia,'

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\* 'Wiclif's Place in History,' by Professor Burrows, pp. 3-4, 24-38, an instructive and interesting work, where we find an excellent sketch of Wiclif's biographers.

† We strongly urge the claim of this Society to the support which it needs for the completion of its work. The secretary is J. W. Standerwick, Esq., General Post Office, London, and the publishers are Trübner & Co.

containing

containing his Theory of Dominion, without which we cannot fully understand his position.

Leland, our only authority in the matter, gives two accounts of the origin and birth-place of Wiclif. He says that he was born at Spreswell, or Ipreswell, a good mile from Richmond in Yorkshire, and again that he 'derived his origin'—'*originem duxit*'—from the village of Wycliffe, ten miles distant from Richmond. After much research it seems that Wiclif was born a few years before 1324 at Hipswell (evidently the modern name for Ipreswell), and that he derived his origin from, or was a member of, the family of the Wycliffes of Wycliffe, who had been settled in the parish from the Norman conquest. Leland's two accounts thus seem to be reconciled.\*

We have no information as to Wiclif's early education, nor as to the exact time when he went to the University of Oxford. Dr. Lechler, assuming him to have been born in 1320, thinks that, unlike many of his contemporaries, who were mere boys when they entered Oxford, he could not have gone to it earlier than 1335, at the age of 15; because his parents would imagine that, on account of the great distance of Wycliffe from the University, and the danger of travelling in those days, he would pass for ever from their control. They would, therefore, wait till they had prepared him by proper teaching, to withstand the temptations of the University.

The common idea hitherto has been that Wiclif went first to Queen's College, that afterwards he was admitted to Merton, that from Merton he proceeded to Balliol, where he became Master in 1361, and that then he became Warden of Canterbury Hall. But his connection with three of these colleges has been disputed. The only point on which all are agreed is that he became Master of Balliol. If he went to Oxford in 1335, he could not have become a member of Queen's; for it was not founded till 1340. Besides, an examination of the bursar's rolls at Queen's College shows that no trace of his residence at Queen's is to be found till 1363, when he occupied rooms in the college. He continued to reside in Oxford in various years from 1363 to 1380.

We should like to know the influences at Oxford which served to mould his character and to develop his abilities. Mr. Anstey in his work, '*Munimenta Academica*,' enables us to a certain extent to trace them. He would be obliged to attend lectures. He must at first have dispensed with books, for they

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\* Lewis's '*Life of Wiclif*,' Oxford, 1820, first published in 1720, is still occasionally useful. He is wrong, however, in placing Wiclif's birth in 1324.

were

were a costly luxury. He would afterwards repeat what he had learnt. He would, in his third year, attend in the schools for the purpose of taking part in the public disputations. The course of study, through which he had to pass, consisted of logic, rhetoric, grammar, and arithmetic. At the end of four years came the 'determination,' or the examination for the degree of Bachelor of Arts. This name took its rise from the supreme importance attached to the science of logic and to disputations in those days, the candidate being expected to determine certain questions which were submitted to him. The studies for the degree of Master of Arts, which might be taken in three years from the degree of Bachelor of Arts, were geometry, astronomy, music, and natural, moral, and metaphysical philosophy. But they did not include a knowledge of Greek. We come to this conclusion from the frequent mistakes in the writing of Greek words to be found in Wiclif's works. We have no certain evidence as to his instructors in theology. He followed the course prescribed by the University, and attended, first of all, lectures on the Bible, and afterwards on the Scholastic Philosophy. So great was the importance attached to the latter, that Bachelors and Doctors of Theology were required to give lectures, first on the Sentences of Peter the Lombard, and afterwards on Holy Scripture.

Wiclif was the last giant among the Schoolmen. He associated, however, the study of the Scriptures so closely with the study of the Scholastic Philosophy, that he was known as the 'Evangelical Doctor.' We see in this preference for Holy Scripture the cause of his subsequent doctrinal development. The study of the Scholastic Philosophy would also, by developing his intellectual powers, prepare him for his future work as the Reformer of the Church. We must remember, likewise, in connection with this part of our subject, the high honour conferred on the successful students of the Scholastic Philosophy. A general returning, crowned with laurels from some well-fought battle-field, was not received with greater honour than the student who came off victorious from the combat in the Schools. Wiclif would thus, as the most distinguished student of that philosophy, gain great influence with his contemporaries, when he came forward to oppose first the abuses, and then the dogmas, of the Church of Rome.

Dr. Lechler conjectures, that Wiclif went to Balliol because it was founded by the noble family of Balliol, of Barnard Castle, not far from Wiclif's birth-place; and because two Fellows of Balliol were presented to the parish by John Wycliffe of Wycliffe as patron. If this supposition is correct, we might

suppose that his residence at it had been continuous, if we had not been confronted with an entry at Merton in 1356, that John Wiclif was steward of the week, which implies that he was, as Dr. Shirley states, a Fellow of considerable standing. Dr. Lorimer gives us the information from a memorandum among the archives, that Wiclif was certainly Master of Balliol in May, 1360.\*

After the completion of his academical course he remained at Oxford, engaged in the unostentatious discharge of University duties. From several passages of his writings, we gather that he gave lectures with great success on logic and philosophy. We cannot go into this part of his work, till all his philosophical treatises have been printed. At present we have before us only the 'De Compositione Hominis,' lately published by the Wyclif Society, consisting probably of lectures given before the University in 1360, which were written down by some scholar who heard them. This work could not have been much interrupted after his appointment to the living of Fillingham in 1361, when he resigned the Mastership of Balliol, for we find from an entry in the episcopal register at Lincoln in 1368, that the Bishop gave him leave of absence from his parish for two years, that he might devote himself to his studies at Oxford. Some time between 1367 and 1374 he became Doctor of Theology, and could, if he pleased, open a hall and give lectures to as many as chose to come to him.

A few dates and names, obtained from parchment rolls with some difficulty, and statements made by himself and others, with the inferences from them, alone enable us to trace him during this period. An inference may be fairly drawn from the following statement of Walsingham, the Chronicler of St. Albans, under the year 1377.

'About the same time arose in the University of Oxford, a certain Northernman, called Master John Wiclif.'

A division into 'nations' prevailed during the middle ages in the Universities of Europe. In Oxford the division was into the Northern and Southern 'nations.' The Northern 'nation' included generally the Scots and those who lived in the North of England, and the Southern 'nation' the Irish, the Welsh, and those who lived in the South of England. So fierce was the antagonism between the parties that they often disturbed the public peace by their bloody fights in the streets. On one occasion, as Wood informs us, on the election of a Chancellor,

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\* Lorimer's note to Lechler, vol. i., p. 186 (First Edition).



the Southern party forced their way into St. Mary's Church, kicking and cudgelling, and severely wounding those of the Northern party opposed to the Chancellor from Merton College whom the former party had selected.\* These fights do not represent mere frays or disputes of young men after a carouse, but important religious or political principles. We find that the resistance to the Papacy came from the Northern party; while the Southern party were its supporters. Wiclif, as a Northernman, had made common cause with the Northern party, and had thus become animated with that spirit which led him to stand forward in defence of civil and religious liberty and independence.

Wiclif was supposed for many centuries to have been the Warden of Canterbury Hall, and to have been dismissed from it by Archbishop Langham in favour of the monks. But in 1841, Mr. Courthope made the discovery, that a John Wycliffe was the Vicar of Mayfield, in Sussex, from 1361 to 1380. Now, as it was certain that the Reformer was never Vicar of Mayfield, and that the Vicar of Mayfield was never Master of Balliol, the question arose whether the Vicar might not have been the Fellow of Merton, and the Warden of Canterbury Hall. A controversy on the subject was carried on for some time, in which the late Professor Shirley took a prominent part. He wrote a long note in 'Fasciculi Zizaniorum,' in which he endeavours to prove that Wycliffe of Mayfield was the Fellow of Merton, and the Warden of Canterbury Hall. Dean Hook, following him, wrote in his 'Lives of the Archbishops of Canterbury':—'Canterbury Hall has a place in history from its connection with the great Reformer, John Wiclif, a notion which is now exploded.' He added in a note, 'I assume it as a fact, now admitted by all who have examined the subject, that the Warden of Canterbury Hall is a distinct person from the great Reformer.'† A strong argument against that view is supplied by the 'Chronicon Angliæ,' one of the original chronicles of the period, in the series of chronicles and memorials of Great Britain and Ireland in the middle ages, brought out under the direction of the Master of the Rolls. 'It contains,' as Mr. Thompson of the British Museum, who discovered and edited it in 1874, states, 'an important detailed history of the close of Edward III.'s and the beginning of Richard II.'s reign, which is now printed for the first time, and has hitherto been considered lost.' In it occurs the following passage:—

\* Wood's 'History and Antiquities of Oxford,' vol. i. p. 448.

† Hook's 'Lives of the Archbishops,' vol. iv. p. 158.

‘The Duke (John of Gaunt) had taken to his party a certain false theologian, a real fighter against God, who for many years in the Schools, in all his acts, had opposed the Church, *because he was justly deprived by the Archbishop of Canterbury of a certain benefice in the University of Oxford, of which he was unjustly the incumbent.*’

Dean Hook thought that this charge ought to be disproved, because, as he says, the disproof ‘frees the Reformer from the suspicion that his violence against Rome originated in personal feelings.’ We think that too much importance has been attached to the charge. We shall find that all his changes of opinion were the result of conscientious conviction. The light slowly and steadily increased in brightness.

Wiclif resided in Canterbury Hall from 1365 to 1367. His ejection in the latter year marks the commencement of a new era in his life. He had made a high reputation as a schoolman. But, if he had confined his attention to the scholastic philosophy and similar subjects, he would have shared the fate of John de Ganduno, Marsilius of Padua, and others, who have long been forgotten by the world. We have seen that his intellectual powers had now been developed. He was thus prepared for the work of the years from 1366 to 1378, which we may call the political period of his life, and for the work of the last six years of his life, which served to prepare the way for the emancipation of his fellow-countrymen from their spiritual thralldom.

His political career is one step in that progressive development which had been to some extent overlooked before Dr. Lechler called attention to it. If we are right in supposing the party contest between the Northern and Southern ‘nations’ to have a deeper meaning than the world commonly imagine, we may find in them a germ of his patriotic ardour. That ardour appears strongly in many of his unpublished works among the Vienna manuscripts. We had known indeed from the publication of Lewis’s ‘Life’ in 1720, that Wiclif had made the law of England a subject of study, in addition to the canon and Roman law. In the ‘*De Civili Dominio*,’ published in 1885 by the Wyclif Society, he distinctly preferred the English law to the canon law. When the unpublished manuscripts are before us, we shall see that he was quite familiar with the invasions of England by Britons, Saxons, and Normans; that he often speaks of Augustine, ‘the Apostle of the English’; that he often refers to the later Archbishops of Canterbury, especially Thomas à Becket; that he frequently speaks of our kings, as Edward the Confessor, and John; and that he mentions Magna Charta, to which, as he writes in the ‘*De Civili Dominio*,’

*Dominio* (ii. c. 5), monarch and nobles must render absolute obedience. We shall see too that he does not take the interest of a mere student in these subjects ; but of one who was full of zeal for the civil and religious liberties of his fellow-countrymen ; of one who must have witnessed with pleasure the establishment of the rights of Parliament in the reign of Edward III., and the development of our Constitution of King, Lords, and Commons.

Wiclif was born a few years before the beginning of the reign of Edward III., and he died seven years after its close. During many years of this reign, England was at the zenith of her glory. The victories of Crécy and of Poitiers, and the exploits of the Black Prince, have shed an imperishable glory upon her arms. In consequence of the treaty of Bretigny, concluded in 1360, one-third of the kingdom of France had been ceded to England. The existence of this kingdom within a kingdom was very galling to the pride of the French. The King of France determined to exert every effort to cast off the hated yoke. He, therefore, asked the Pope, who resided at Avignon, and who was a mere tool in his hands, to demand the payment of the arrears of tribute, which John had imposed on England when he knelt in abject submission at the feet of the imperious Pandulph. Edward had never allowed it to be paid. The Pope now demanded the arrears. The demand was ill-timed. The patriotic feeling of England rose very strongly against a French Pope. The result was that, in 1366, the Parliament in spirited language refused to impose on England this badge of an ignominious bondage.

The occasion was important, as it was the means of bringing Wiclif forward on the political stage. An unknown doctor of theology had challenged him to show, that the King had not forfeited the kingdom because he had not fulfilled the condition on which it was held. Wiclif, in his reply, does not seem to give an opinion on the subject, but refers his opponent to the opinion given by seven peers in the Council of Temporal Lords. We cannot deny that, at first view, there is some ground for the assertion of Dr. Lechler, that Wiclif heard these speeches as a member of Parliament.\* In one of the Vienna manuscripts, the '*De Ecclesia*,' lately printed, he remarks that the Bishop of Rochester had told him under great excitement, in open sitting of Parliament, that the propositions which he had set forth in controversy had been condemned in the Papal Court. He here refers to a Parliament held in 1376 ; but, if Wiclif

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\* Lechler's '*Life*,' pp. 130-133.

were a member of this Parliament, he may have been a member of the Parliament of 1366. The fact that his name does not occur in the list of *Magistri*, summoned to any Parliament during this period, seems to settle the point of actual membership. He may, however, have been summoned to attend the King's Council in 1376, when the Bishop of Rochester made this attack upon him. It is also quite possible that he may have attended Parliament on special occasions.

Dr. Lechler and Dr. Shirley accept the substance of the speeches of the seven lords, given in the tract, as an exact representation of the arguments on the occasion, and Dr. Shirley calls it 'the earliest instance of a report of a Parliamentary debate.'\* But this seems doubtful, especially as some of the sentiments are exclusively Wiclifian. We find here expressed the opinion of Wiclif, that the Pope may fall into mortal sin, which only men of the boldest minds had begun to entertain; that voluntary poverty is incumbent on the clergy; that 'it is the duty of the Pope to be a prominent follower of Christ, and that, as Christ refused to be a possessor of worldly dominion, the Pope is bound to make the same refusal.' We see then the use of this tract, in enabling us to discover his progressive development. While, therefore, we do not deny, that some speeches may have formed the groundwork of this tract, we must at the same time maintain, that Wiclif made them the vehicle of opinions, which he was not bold enough to express in the early part of his career.

We have, in the history of the last two years of the reign of Edward III., a great confusion of religious and political interests. The Parliament opposes John of Gaunt, the son of Edward III., who agrees with Wiclif in condemning the corruptions and abuses of the Church, and in advocating the exclusion of ecclesiastics from all share in the administration of public affairs. The opposition to the Church had for a time been successful. All ecclesiastical property had been hitherto regarded as sacred. But in 1371, a heavy tax was laid by Parliament on all lands which had passed into mortmain since the twentieth year of Edward I. Wiclif in a passage from a sermon in the '*De Civili Dominio*,' preached before the University of Oxford, which Dr. Shirley assigns to 1371, expresses his approval of the course taken by Parliament.† But it was obvious that there was no protection for the Commons as long as William of Wykeham, and other Bishops,

\* '*Fascic. Zizan.*,' p. 19.

† Lechler's '*Life*,' p. 135; and '*Fascic. Zizan.*,' p. xxi.

swayed the destinies of the country as Ministers of State. The King listened to the prayer of Parliament, and dismissed the ecclesiastics. The movement was, however, premature. The laity were scarcely as yet fit for the highest offices. In five years, the Bishop of St. David's became the clerical chancellor.

This failure did not improve the position of affairs. The Papal exactions and appropriation of livings continued. But these reforms might wait till the leading men in this country had done a duty of paramount importance. The evils which were the subject of complaint were the profuse expenditure of the Court, the usurious loans obtained from private persons, and other scandalous financial transactions. The infamous Alice Perrers, the King's mistress, was also by unlawful means obtaining enormous wealth. Now John of Gaunt, in order that he might hold the reins of power by her means, had given his sanction to this corruption and profuse expenditure. He was unpopular also on account of his disastrous failure in France, through his incapacity. A magnificent English army, after a marauding march through France, had perished from famine on the bleak and desolate mountains of Auvergne, and all the conquests of England in France but Calais had been wrested from her. Another cause of the feeling against him is to be found in the devoted attachment of the nation to the Prince of Wales. The latter had gratified their passion for military glory. He was remarkable also for his affability and courtesy. The people felt, from the progress of his disorder, that they would soon be called on to bend in anguish over his tomb. But they knew that his son ought to ascend the throne of his ancestors. Now John of Gaunt was credited with the design of depriving him of his paternal inheritance. Hence his unpopularity.

The people and their representatives could not, therefore, associate themselves with him. The ecclesiastics under William of Wykeham placed themselves, with the consent of the King, at the head of the 'good Parliament.' The Commons, though they objected to the employment of ecclesiastics as Ministers of State, joined them because they saw that this was the only means of removing the abuses in the Court and Government. The Parliament made a vigorous attempt to repress corruption and mal-administration. Wiclif may have exercised some influence on this Parliament. We may see it in a petition presented by the Commons to the King in 1377, in which it is stated that the usurpations of the Pope are the cause of the plagues and the poverty of the kingdom. This thought often occurs in the Vienna manuscripts. But Wiclif could not heartily sympathize with

with the Parliament. He could not associate with the Bishops, because he had always opposed their wealth, pomp, and luxury—the table piled with costly viands, the jewelled mitre, and the gorgeous robe—and had advocated their exclusion from offices of State. He would gladly have secured economy in the State; but he could not forsake John of Gaunt, who was his only hope of a permanent reform in the Church.

The ‘good Parliament’ proved a failure. Very soon there was a change of measures and of men. After the death of the Prince of Wales, in June 1376, the Duke of Lancaster was restored to power. On the 22nd of September, Alan of Barley was sent with a writ to Oxford, to summon John Wiclif to London.\* John of Gaunt hoped that Wiclif, who was a born leader of men, would aid him with the Parliament, many members of which were, like himself, opposed to the Papal claims. But it must be remembered that this was merely a political alliance. A man of unblemished character, like Wiclif, could not work heartily with a profligate and violent man like John of Gaunt. But he made common cause with him because he knew that he was a strong man, and that he could aid him in his desperate struggle with his adversaries. The Bishops saw their opportunity, and were determined to have their revenge. They would strike at John of Gaunt through Wiclif. Courtenay, Bishop of London, summoned him to appear before the Archbishop at St. Paul’s Cathedral. Dr. Shirley observes:—

‘How entirely the meaning of the prosecution was political may be gathered from the total omission in the articles of accusation of all matters not bearing on the question of the hour . . . . The object of the prosecution was to proclaim to the world that society was endangered by the political principles which John of Gaunt was putting in practice against the Church.’ †

This explanation is, to some extent, correct. But it does not appear to contain the whole truth. The writer of the ‘Chronicon Angliæ’ enables us to see that Wiclif may, in defending John of Gaunt, have expressed opinions which, by a subtle casuistry, the Bishops may have tortured into heresy. He tells us, that Wiclif ‘denounced the Papal power of excommunication; and asserted, that no king or secular lord could give any thing in perpetuity to the Church.’ He mentions some curious facts, which are new to history. We learn from him, that Wiclif was occasionally a

\* Devon, ‘Issues of the Exchequer,’ p. 200, quoted by Stubbs, ‘Constitutional History,’ vol. ii. p. 474.

† ‘Fascic. Zizan.,’ p. xxvii.

preacher in the pulpits of London, and that he must have spoken out as boldly in the capital of the kingdom as in the disputations in the University. He admits that Wiclif has many admirers, and he does so in the following words:—

‘Many great lords of the realm, or more rightly, I should call them devils, embraced his mad doctrines, and they hardened him in his effort to blunt the sword of St. Peter, and protected him with the secular arm, lest that same sword should cut him off. He drew after him many citizens of London into the bottomless pit of error. He was an eloquent man, and pretended to look down on worldly possessions as things transitory and fleeting, in comparison with the things of eternity. He ever ran from church to church, and scattered his mad lies in the ears of very many.’\*

We see then here that his influence with the Lords and the citizens explains the importance which John of Gaunt attached to his assistance. We learn also here for the first time, that the Bishops were led to take action against Wiclif, not so much by his quiet teaching at Oxford, or his judgments given to the King and Parliament, as by his eloquent sermons against the Church in the pulpits of the metropolis. This is distinctly stated as their reason for being urgent with the Archbishop on the subject.

We need not describe Wiclif's appearance with John of Gaunt at St. Paul's. We know that he escaped. But this dangerous enemy must not be left to himself. The Bishops, therefore, asked Gregory XI. to give them his powerful assistance. Five Bulls issued against the great controversialist exposed him to a danger from which it seemed impossible for him to escape. The King, the Royal Princes, the chief nobility, and the University of Oxford, were all to be employed as instruments of the vengeance of the hierarchy. That the bolt fell harmless at his feet; that the death of the old King invalidated one of the Bulls; that the University of Oxford treated another with contempt; that the citizens of London, with whom he had again become popular since their treatment of him at St. Paul's when he appeared as the ally of John of Gaunt, aided by the Princess of Wales, saved him from Archbishop Courtenay at Lambeth Palace—all these are matters of common history.

In the paper which he presented to Parliament containing his answer to the charges against him, we find a passage, which gives us the opportunity of a correct statement of his views as to endowments. ‘It is lawful,’ he writes, ‘for kings, in cases

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\* ‘Chronicon Angliæ,’ p. 116.

limited by law, to take away the temporalities from clergymen who habitually abuse them.' The expression 'in cases limited by law' shows that he does not advocate, as some have supposed, indiscriminate confiscation. We shall better understand Wiclif's feelings, if we remember that he laboured to show that endowments were held in trust for the spiritual interests of mankind; and that they are liable to forfeiture by such an abandonment of duties as would defeat the end for which they were given. He saw plainly that the obligations connected with this trust had not been fulfilled. His spirit was stirred within him, when he found that the endowments of the Church went to enrich foreign ecclesiastics; that the Pope openly sold the benefices of England to the highest bidder; and that simony, worldliness, and immorality prevailed among the clergy. Thus we see how it was that he was led to address vehement appeals to the ruling powers to cleanse the polluted sanctuary.

In referring to Wiclif's 'Theory of Dominion,' we must state that the publicists maintained that, according to the theory of the Holy Roman Empire, the monarchs of Europe were subject to the jurisdiction of the Emperor, and that to him belonged the supremacy in temporal matters, which they endeavoured to wrest from the hands of the Pope. But the Emperor was ill-fitted to bear the honour thus thrust upon him. He possessed only a nominal authority in Europe, especially since the day when the Emperor Frederick II. was beaten down in his conflict with the Pope. But some one must occupy his place as the chief lord, from whom all property and authority must be held both in England and the other countries of Europe. Wiclif, following Fitz Ralph, Archbishop of Armagh, asserted that God is the lord from whom every man holds his possessions; that He alone really has the dominion; that He assigns it or rather power, in various portions to men, which they forfeit if they fall into mortal sin; and that they are bound to render to Him dutiful service. The whole Theory is, in fact, feudal in its conception. The condition on which men hold, as it were, in fief from God, is obedience to His commandments. The ecclesiastical system has been carefully built into that feudal frame-work. Thus Wiclif settles the old dispute between the Pope and Emperor, by abolishing both as the fountain of jurisdiction.

This Theory is thus stated in one of his works\* :—

'God is and has dominion over all. Each man is bounden in his degree to serve God; and if he does not render this service, he is no lord of goods of true title, for he that standeth in grace is the true

\* 'Select English Works,' vol. iii. p. 88.



lord of things, and whoever faileth by default of grace, he falleth short of the right title of that which he occupieth, and maketh himself unfit to have the gifts of God.'

We might easily bring forward passage after passage from his writings, showing that this Theory did not in his own estimation affect the legal possession of property, and that he asserts the duty of obedience even to wicked rulers. That duty of obedience is expressed in the apparently irreverent phrase, 'God must obey the devil.' He is using the exaggerated language of the Schools, and means that, as Christ ministered to Judas Iscariot when Satan had taken possession of Him, as He submitted Himself to Satan on the mount of temptation, so we must submit to those rulers whose moral conduct we strongly condemn. He asserts the same duties as to property and obedience in the following passage in his tract, 'Of Servants and Lords':—'Some men slander poor priests with this error, that servants or tenants may lawfully withhold rents or service from their lords when their lords are openly wicked in their living.' In answer, it is stated that 'Men are charged of God by Peter and Paul to be thus subject to wicked lords, and that Christ and His Apostles paid tribute even to heathen emperors.' Similar passages may be found in the treatise on 'Seven Deadly Sins,' and in 'Great Sentence of Curse Expounded.'

We think, then, that it is clear that Wiclif did not intend to use this Theory for the disintegration of society. In bringing it forward, we believe that he was animated by the highest and purest patriotism. He and other men of thoughtful minds were becoming deeply impressed with the conviction, that a great principle was at stake. His object was to oppose, as strongly as possible, the claim of the Pope to exercise supreme control in the body politic. The matter has been well stated by Dr. Shirley in the 'Fasciculi Zizaniorum':—

'The doctrine of the Reformer was that the sovereignty thus claimed had never been delegated to any man; that God had allotted only portions of dominion, particular fiefs, so to speak, to each. And if any one were to be held to be Christ's vicar upon earth—a term which he did not refuse to apply to the Pope—the title was equally applicable to the temporal as to the spiritual chief. The King was the minister, the vicar of God in things temporal, and was, therefore, as much bound by his office to see that temporal goods were not wasted or misapplied by the clergy, as the clergy were to direct the spiritual affairs of the King . . . One step more and the outline is complete. The Pope and the King are indeed supreme each in their department,

department, but every Christian man holds, not indeed, in chief, but yet he holds of God; and the final, irreversible appeal is therefore, to the Court, not of Rome, but of Heaven.\*

Thus then we see that his object was to remove the foundation of a false and dangerous theory. The explanation just given enables us the better to understand the position which Wiclif assumed when, as we have seen, he asserted that the badge of a degrading vassalage should not again be imposed on England; that no Italian priest should 'tithe and toll in our dominions'; and when, advancing farther than the Hohenstaufens, and his contemporary, the Emperor Lewis, the Bavarian—who contended only for the autonomy of the State in purely civil affairs—he maintained that she had a perfect right to interfere in the internal affairs of the Church, when she can render her more subservient to the high and holy purpose for which she was originally established.

At the trial at Lambeth in February, 1378, Wiclif was not charged with departing from the doctrines of the Church; he had merely denounced the usurpations and corruptions of the Papacy. His indignation had been increased by his visit to Bruges in 1374, as a member of the Commission appointed to remonstrate against the appropriation of livings by the Pope. If he had died at this time he would not have rendered those vast services which give him an overpowering claim on the gratitude of his fellow-countrymen. But he was now to concentrate his attention on the dogmas of the Church of Rome. We have an intimation of the coming change in the speeches of the Lords as to the tribute; and in his defence at Lambeth, in which he assails the whole system of absolution and excommunication, and calls on the laity to exercise their private judgment in regard to the pretensions of their spiritual guides. We have been reminded of his love for Scripture at Oxford. Before 1378, as we find from his sermons among the Vienna manuscripts, he preached against the traditions of the Church, and carefully studied Holy Scripture for the explanation of his difficulties. We learn that he recognized its paramount authority in all his exhortations and instructions. We find also, from his writings, that he had an amazing knowledge of it. Thus we see the origin of his doctrinal development. He was now to make an appeal against the doctrines of the Church of Rome. For that appeal his education at Oxford and his political struggles had prepared him. He

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\* 'Fascic. Zizan.,' pp. lxx, lxxvi.

was now to lead the way to that assault on the Church of Rome, on the issue of which were suspended the spiritual destinies of many millions of his fellow-countrymen.

After 1378 the energies of Wiclif were concentrated on a reformation in doctrine. No doubt this development is due primarily to the study of the Scriptures; but the schism in the Papacy was the means of directing his thoughts to the subject. He had already maintained that the Pope might fall into mortal sin, that he might err in judgment, that his office is not necessary for the ends of salvation, and that he held *jure humano* and not *jure divino*.\* But he would not attack the Papacy as such in its essence. He would only resist it in its attacks on the State in matters of finance or of civil jurisdiction. He would not impugn the prerogatives of the Pope. He was very far from casting off his allegiance to him. This is justly distinguished as the first stage of his opposition to the Papacy.†

In August, 1378, the French cardinals, who were provoked by the reforming zeal of Urban VI., and were anxious to retain the Papal Court at Avignon, withdrew their allegiance from him, and elected a rival Pope, Robert of Geneva. With this step began the Papal Schism, which lasted forty years. Wiclif, with the rest of England, at first recognized Urban VI.; but at the end of 1378 he expressed his opinion that, if Urban should fall into evil ways, the Church should dispense with both Popes altogether. When Urban began to excommunicate his rival, Wiclif cast off his allegiance to him, and decided on remaining in a position of neutrality. This is distinguished as the second stage of his opposition to the Papacy.‡ He very soon found that to be neutral was an impossibility, and that he must altogether break away from the Pope. In this, the third stage of his development, he becomes more decided in his language. When he saw two Popes wandering about Europe, anathematizing one another; when he saw Bishop Spencer, of Norwich, girding on his armour, flinging wide his standard to the winds, in the name of one Pope invading the territories of those who supported the rival Pope, the cup of his indignation became full to the very brim. The Vienna manuscripts now enable us to trace him as he ascends from one to another stage of opposition to the Papacy. Thus his attacks become more intelligible. He gradually reaches the climax when he states, as we have heretofore known from the 'Supplement to the Trialogus,' that both Popes are 'monsters, incarnate devils,' that 'the Pope is

\* See the 'De Veritate Sacræ Scripturæ' and the 'De Civili Dominio,' quoted by Lechler, p. 313, from the Vienna manuscripts.

† Lechler's 'Life,' pp. 312-315.

‡ Ibid. p. 316.

the fountain and origin of all the wickedness in the Church, and that he is very Antichrist.'

We must now refer to Wiclif's celebrated contest with the Mendicant Orders. Richard Fitz Ralph, Archbishop of Armagh, had carried on a conflict with them for many years, and had arraigned them before the Pope. The general opinion hitherto has been that Wiclif continued this conflict. Mr. Le Bas in his 'Life of Wiclif,' writes:—'Nothing seems better ascertained than the fact that, about the year 1360, he was notorious for standing foremost in that warfare which had for some time been carried on vigorously against the Mendicant Orders.' This opinion owed its origin to Anthony Wood and Lewis. Dr. Shirley was the first to discover that this must have been an error. Referring to the statement made by William Wodeford, one of Wiclif's contemporaries, that he had never interfered with them till he had been publicly assailed by them as to the Sacrament of the Altar, but had since frequently attacked them, he observes:—'Of the story which connects him with the controversies of 1360, we are unable to trace the growth; it is implicitly contradicted by contemporary authority, and receives, to say the least, no sanction whatever from the acknowledged writings of the Reformer.\* He was, however, unable, from the want of information, to do more than prove a direct negative to the tradition.

A careful examination of the Vienna manuscripts has enabled Dr. Lechler to discover the missing link in the chain of evidence. This is one of the great services which he has rendered to students of Wiclif literature. He shows us that, so far from opposing the Mendicants, Wiclif entertained, at first, a favourable opinion of them. Thus in one place he writes that he considers that the Holy Spirit had inspired St. Francis and St. Dominic with the idea of establishing their Orders, in order that they might effect a reformation in the Church. This view is corroborated by the monk of St. Albans in the 'Chronicon Angliæ,' the contemporary authority already referred to. He writes: 'He would have nothing to do with the monks-possessors, but that he might more easily deceive the people, gave to the Orders of the Mendicants, approving their poverty, and extolling their perfection.'

We see then that, for a time, Wiclif might make common cause with the Mendicant Orders. But at length he came forward as their uncompromising antagonist. Lechler, however, does not seem to be quite right when, following Wodeford,

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\* 'Fascic. Zizan.,' p. xiv.

he writes that he did not begin the attack till he was in the thick of the conflict as to the Sacrament of the Altar. On the contrary, he made a fierce onslaught on the friars in the tract, 'De Officio Pastoralis,' the date of which cannot be later than 1378. But we can have no doubt, when we find him placing their heresy on the Sacrament of the Altar in the front of his accusations, that this controversy had greatly exasperated him against them.\* We think, however, that he was indignant against them chiefly because to them had been entrusted the administration of the funds for the crusade in Flanders on behalf of Urban VI., and because they were the most effective instruments of the absolutism of the Papacy. This burning indignation against them seems to be concentrated in the somewhat fanciful epithet, 'Caim,' written for Cain, which he now constantly applies to them. The word is formed from the initial letters of the four Orders, the Carmelites, Augustinians, Jacobites, and Minorites. The idea seems to be that as the blood of Abel cried against Cain from the ground, so the blood of the souls which they had murdered bears constant witness against them before the throne of Eternal Justice.

Wiclif now came forward as a Reformer in doctrine. He attacked the doctrine of Transubstantiation. With the aid of Scripture he had carefully studied the subject, especially since the Papal Schism gave him freedom of action. In the summer of 1381, he published twelve short theses on it in the Schools at Oxford. He at once roused opposition in the University. The officers of the Chancellor were sent to him with a mandate to desist from instruction in it. They found him propounding his views in the lecture-room of the beautiful Augustinian monastery. Wadham College stands on its site. Wiclif at once declared that neither the Chancellor nor his colleagues could refute his propositions. He appealed to King Richard. John of Gaunt came down to Oxford, and told him that the King could not listen to his appeal. Wiclif, however, presented an undaunted front to the adversary. He could no longer speak on the subject in Oxford, but he could educate the public. He published his tract called the 'Wicket,' expressed in strong nervous English, which had a rapid circulation over England; and his celebrated confession, the 'De Sacramento Altaris.' He proudly ends the last with these memorable words: 'I believe that in the end the truth will conquer.'

The publication of these theses at Oxford was the commencement of that great religious revolt, which, though checked for

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\* 'Trialogus' (Lechler's edition), iv. c. 34.

a time, broke out with increased violence in the sixteenth century, and robbed the Pope of one province after another of his spiritual empire. It has been compared to the nailing up of Luther's theses against Indulgences to the church door at Wittenberg. But Wiclif at this time occupied a more difficult and dangerous position than Luther. Frederick of Saxony was a far more effective defender than John of Gaunt. The former carried off Luther from his adversaries, and buried him in the Wartburg, in the gloomy recesses of the forests of Thuringia. John of Gaunt was quite willing to support Wiclif when he made his attack on the wealth, pomp, and luxury of the clergy, but he would not support him in his attack on the dogmas of the Church of Rome. A gradual preparation had been made in Germany through the ages for the attack on dogma. From father to son the sacred fire had been transmitted. Tauler, Gerard Groote, and the Brothers of Common Life, Thomas à Kempis, John of Wesel, John Wessel, and others, including, as we shall see, Wiclif, had prepared the way for Luther by leading men from a reliance on outward observances to the inward and spiritual life; and by asserting, that the intercession of the Virgin and saints is of no use to the unrepentant sinner. Erasmus, too, prepared the way for Luther by an improved version of the Greek Testament, and by a better translation into Latin; by pouring the shafts of ridicule on the monks and clergy, and by attacking the dogmas of the Papacy in his graver works. In Luther's time many were to be found in all lands who lifted up their voices against the corruptions of the Papacy. But no one had prepared the way for Wiclif's attack on the doctrines of the Church in England. He owed his views to the prayerful study of the Holy Scriptures, and of the writings of the best of the early Fathers of the Church, especially St. Augustine. William of Ockham, Richard Fitz Ralph, Archbishop of Armagh, and especially Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, had lifted up their voices against the Mendicants, or one or more of the following abuses and corruptions—the temporal power of the Popes, the simony, the usury, the venality, the worldliness, the vices and crimes of the Court and Church of Rome. But they did not assail the doctrinal system of the Papacy. Wiclif stood alone against England in arms. The people opposed him, for they shrank from doctrinal innovation. The clergy opposed him, because he denied them the power of working a miracle which placed them in their own estimation far above the highest and mightiest of this world's potentates. We admire Luther when we see him tossing the Papal Bull into the flames, and perhaps  
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some think of that hero in the Greek tragedy, who declared that if the bolt of Jupiter were to fall at his feet, he would still rush into the heat and sorest part of the battle. We ought, therefore, much more to admire Wiclif, when we consider the greater dangers, the greater difficulties, which he was called on to encounter.

Soon after the memorable events just described, occurred in 1381 that terrible insurrection among the peasantry, one of the most portentous phenomena in history. It spread like a conflagration among the trees of the forest. Wiclif's enemies at once attributed it to his supposed revolutionary principles. But the absence of the accusation from the articles officially charged against Wiclif seems to us to settle the question. We may, therefore, believe Wiclif when he calls it, in his treatise 'De Blasphemia,' 'a lamentable conflict,' and must attribute the rebellion to the determination of the people to shake off the yoke of the oppressor, and to obtain the liberty which was their inalienable birth-right.

William Courtenay, Archbishop of Canterbury, was one of those who had a strong dislike for Wiclif. He summoned a Council in the Convent of the Blackfriars, near Ludgate, on May 19, 1382, for the purpose of condemning him. An earthquake which interrupted the proceedings terrified every one but Courtenay, who, with ready wit, exclaimed that the earth was purging itself from noxious vapours, foreshowing that the Church must purge itself from heresy. He found, however, that he must rely on the arm of the State to give effect to the decree which the Council had pronounced against Wiclif. The decree which he obtained, directing the sheriffs to imprison the heretic preachers, was nothing more than a royal ordinance to which he had persuaded the King and the House of Lords to give their assent. It was not 'assented to' by the House of Commons. Courtenay, foreseeing that for this reason a remonstrance would be made, obtained from Richard II. an ordinance or patent, giving the Bishops power to incarcerate the preachers in their own prisons.

The bolt first fell on the University of Oxford.\* Robert Ruge, the Chancellor, was a strong partizan of the new opinions. He was supported by Dr. Nicholas Hereford, and by Dr. Philip Repyngdon, who had made common cause with Wiclif. Archbishop Courtenay, having heard that Philip Repyngdon was to preach at the cemetery of St. Frideswide on the Feast of Corpus Christi, and that the fear was entertained that he would allude

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\* 'Fascic. Zizan.,' pp. 296-329.

to Wiclif's dogma, issued a commission to Peter Stokes, the Carmelite, to publish before the sermon the sentence of condemnation of Wiclif's opinions. The Chancellor was afraid to oppose Courtenay, but he adopted an effectual means of defeating his object. As he knew that Stokes was a timid man, he played on his fears. Ruge paraded the streets with a hundred men in complete armour, summoned to protect the Chief of the University, who declared himself in danger from the Friars. The consequence was that Peter did not venture to obey the Primate, and that Repyngdon delivered his sermon probably to a crowded audience.

The Chancellor, however, kept up the appearance of deference to the Archbishop's mandate. He fixed a day on which Stokes and Repyngdon should dispute in the Schools. But when Stokes was preparing to defend the existing order of things, he looked up and saw before him twelve men in complete armour. The result was that Stokes, panic-stricken, went to Lambeth that night, and told the Archbishop that he did not dare to execute his commission. The Chancellor, apprehensive of the consequences, followed him to Lambeth. He was condemned for contumacy, and was obliged to beg pardon on his knees, which was only given on condition that he should not allow any one to teach in the University the doctrines condemned by the Synod. When he was told to search the colleges and halls for suspected persons and to publish the condemnation of Wiclif's views, he said that he could only do so at the risk of his life. 'Then,' said the Archbishop, 'the University also fosters heresy.' Ruge was strongly censured on his return by the party with which he had acted. In order to regain their favour, he suspended Henry Crump from teaching, because he called the Wiclifites 'heretical Lollards.' This name, of uncertain origin, began now to be applied to them. Crump lodged a complaint against Ruge with the Archbishop. The latter immediately procured an order under the great seal, directing the Chancellor and Proctors to make an inquisition for the disciples of Wiclif and Hereford, on pain of the forfeiture of the privileges of the University. The members did not dare to resist this invasion of their privileges. They might stand out against an Archbishop, but they bowed before the 'divinity' which 'doth hedge a king.' The University suspended Hereford and Repyngdon, who appealed in vain to John of Gaunt. The end was that Repyngdon and others recanted. Hereford's recantation was deferred for several years. Thus Courtenay was successful in his crusade against Wiclifism in Oxford. But his triumph was gained at the expense of the intellectual life of the University.



sity. The Wiclifite party had studied the precious remains of ancient genius, not on account of the 'thoughts that breathe and words that burn' in the works of those masters of poetry, eloquence, and song, who have shed an undying glory on the age and country in which they lived; but that they might strengthen their intellectual powers, and be better enabled to persevere in the investigation of truth. The victorious party might have made use of the same materials for the same purpose; but they would not do so, on account of their association with those whom they had crushed. The result was intellectual imbecility throughout the University. Thus, then, Oxford suffered at the hands of Courtenay and his party, until at length, at the time of the Reformation, she broke her fetters, and once more stood in the van of the great movement against ignorance, error, and superstition.

But now Wiclif himself was called to account. In obedience to a summons he appeared before a Provincial Synod in St. Frideswide's Church, at Oxford, on November 18th, 1382. The fact of his appearance has been called in question, but Knighton is so minute in his details that it does not appear that any doubt can be entertained on the subject. Some have asserted that he delivered to the judges a retraction; but it is an historical fact, that no sentence was passed upon him requiring it. Those who pretended that he had made it, were obliged to put forth the English Confession to be found in Arnold's 'Select English Works,' in which Wiclif expresses his rejection of Transubstantiation, while affirming the real spiritual presence of Christ in the sacred elements. The note of defiance to his adversaries rings out more loudly afterwards in all his works, but especially in his celebrated 'Trialogus,' written at some time in the two years before his death. He writes: 'Oh, that all could see how Antichrist and his instruments condemn sons of the Church! Truly aware I am that the doctrine of the Gospel may for a season be trampled under foot; that it may be overpowered in high places, and even suppressed by the threatenings of Antichrist; but I am sure that it will never be extinguished, for heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.'

He went forth unscathed from that tribunal. The probability is that the Bishops who sat on it were afraid of seizing him, because they trembled before the House of Commons, the members of which they had made their enemies by the high-handed manner in which they had dispensed with their consent to a Statute of the realm. He now retired to his parish of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, to which he had been appointed

by the Crown in 1374. He had previously held, as we have stated, the living of Fillingham, in Lincolnshire, which he resigned in 1368 on his appointment to the living of Ludgarshall, in Buckinghamshire. We have no record of his work in connection with these two parishes. During the first six or seven years after his appointment, he divided his time between Lutterworth and Oxford. Afterwards his only absence from it was when he appeared at Oxford in 1382.

This town is an object of interest, because his incumbency was signalized by that higher development and by those services which have made him the benefactor of his native country. Lutterworth was for four years the scene of those Herculean labours which began in 1378. We are disposed at first to be incredulous, when we hear of work which seems beyond the limits of human ability. But modern research has confirmed the accuracy of the statement. Dr. Shirley's catalogue contains a list of ninety-six Latin works, and sixty-five English works of a devotional, theological, and philosophical character. Of those works, forming a large number in the list, in which he attacked Romish doctrine, the greater part issued from his parsonage at Lutterworth. Most of his tracts, written in terse English, designed for the instruction of the English people after he left Oxford, belong to these latest years of his life. 'It is not,' as Professor Shirley writes,

'by his translation of the Bible, remarkable as that work is, that Wiclif can be judged as a writer. 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.\*'

We cannot give the same praise to his Latinity. It is base even when compared with that of such of his predecessors as Ockham; there is a wide gulf between it and that of St. Thomas Aquinas. Many of his Latin works were published during the last six years of his life. We are astonished when we see work after work, tract after tract, coming forth from his parsonage, in which he inveighs against the vices and crimes of the Bishops and clergy; or discusses the duties which men owe to God or to each other; or assails the doctrines of Romanism, as he discovers them, one after another; or lashes with his thrice-knotted scourge the Mendicant brothers; or, as increasing in energy in the last year of his life, he directs his most powerful artillery

\* 'Fascic. Zizan.,' p. xlvi.

against the Papacy, and assails the Pope as 'The Master Anti-christ.'\*

The wonder with which we view Wiclif's indefatigable work just described is increased, when we remember that the gigantic work of translating the Bible was quite enough to occupy his energies. The learned editors of the Wiclifite versions of the Scriptures, published in 1850, the Rev. Josiah Forshall and Sir Frederick Madden, have furnished us with much valuable information in regard to this part of the subject. They were engaged on the work for twenty-two years. We learn from them that Wiclif was the first to translate the whole Bible into English; that he probably began the translation after his banishment from Oxford in 1381; that he prepared himself for this work by previous attempts at translation; that the New Testament was translated by Wiclif from the Latin of the Vulgate; that the translation of the Old Testament, also made from the Vulgate, was begun by Nicholas Hereford, and was completed by Wiclif; that the translation of the New Testament was probably finished in June, 1382, and that the translation of the whole Bible was completed in that year.

The version thus completed, was not altogether satisfactory. Several blemishes were found in it, incidental to a work of this magnitude. Wiclif, therefore, may have suggested and perhaps commenced a new version. The learned editors of the Wiclifite versions have concluded, for sufficient reasons, that John Purvey was the translator. This version appears to have been completed in 1388, four years after the death of Wiclif. The volumes, edited by Forshall and Madden, give the two versions, column by column, in the same page. So little attention was paid to the manifest differences between the two versions that the New Testament, printed by Mr. Lewis, more than a century ago, does not give us the earlier translation by Wiclif, but the revised translation by Purvey. Mr. Baber, when he reprinted this edition, repeated the mistake. The discovery of it was one of the services rendered by Forshall and Madden to Wiclifite literature.

If we would have a full sense of the benefit thus conferred on his country, we must remember the great hindrances to the successful prosecution of this work, the slow process of transcription by which copies were produced, and the enormous cost of each copy, about 40*l.* of our present money. We have just seen that his work was for a time consigned to comparative oblivion. We are now, however, able to do him full justice.

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\* 'Polemical Works,' vol. ii. p. 396.

While we admit that Purvey's version is better suited than his own for general reading, we must never forget that to him pre-eminently our gratitude is due, because he originated the idea of a work of surpassing grandeur, and at length carrying it, amid great difficulties, to a successful issue, secured by means of it the spiritual emancipation of thousands of his fellow-countrymen.

But we have not yet been made acquainted with the full amount of his work. He was also constantly superintending the movements of that little band of 'poor priests' who were at this time engaged throughout the county of Leicester. This, as Dr. Shirley observes, 'was a remarkable attempt at a practical reform of the Church, which has attracted far less than it ought of the attention of his biographers.\* Oxford, and Ludgarshall, ten miles from it, were probably the cradle of this institution. He could not have sent them forth first from Lutterworth, because it appears from Courtenay's letter of May, 1382, that the system had been some time in operation.† We gather from his works that his design was not to carry on a systematic opposition to the parochial clergy. He has disavowed that design in various places, especially in the tract, 'Why Poor Priests have no Benefices.' One plain proof is that, as Dr. Shirley states, 'they were at first employed under episcopal sanction through what was then the immense diocese of Lincoln, and probably in others also.‡ His design in creating this body was, as he informs us in one of the Vienna manuscripts referred to by Dr. Shirley, to send forth good priests, not endowed, moving from place to place, living on alms in moderation as long as they behave well.§ His object was to supply the deficiencies of those priests who, after having said mass, utterly neglected the spiritual instruction of their parishioners. These 'poor priests,' having been trained, were sent forth by Wiclif to their work. He did not, however, leave them without his powerful aid to carry on that work. He issued various tracts designed to aid them with their opponents. We find from the 'Select English Works' that he endeavoured, by publishing sermons for their use, to impress his own mind on the movement. At first they must have carried on their work from Oxford and Ludgarshall. Afterwards, when he retired to Lutterworth, Leicester became the centre of this itinerancy.

We are informed that 'their coarseness and ignorance moved the laughter or wrath of their contemporaries.' Their work was very successful. All classes, from the nobleman to the

\* 'Fascic. Zizaniorum,' p. xl.

† Ibid. p. xl.

‡ Ibid. p. 275.

§ Ibid. p. xli.

peasant,

peasant, listened with eager attention to one of Wiclif's 'poor priests' as he endeavoured to minister to them sound nourishment out of God's word. They carried on their work within the Church. The charge that they opposed constituted authority, or bishops as such, was quite unfounded. He sent forth his 'poor priests' cheered with the hope that, though he should not live to see it, they might prepare the way for the coming of a time when the moral wilderness around him should rejoice and blossom as the rose.

We are now drawing near to the close of Wiclif's career. Our description of his indefatigable energy would be incomplete, if we omitted to state that tradition informs us that, after he had been engaged in exhausting work, probably like his preachers, in his russet gown, with sandals on his feet, he might be seen in Lutterworth, in the active discharge of his duties as a parish priest. On the Sunday he would address to his flock those earnest and heart-searching sermons, preserved probably by Purvey, which have been given in full by Mr. Arnold in the 'Select Works of Wycliffe.' Dr. Lechler regards as groundless Wiclif's alleged citation to Rome by Pope Urban VI., because he can discover no evidence of it in the chronicles of the period, and because it rests, he says, entirely on an alleged letter to the Pope in reply to the summons.\* He has been successful in showing that this is not a letter, and that it is not addressed to the Pope; but he has been mistaken in supposing that he was not cited to Rome. We have a distinct assertion in one of the polemical works, 'De Citationibus Frivolis,' recently published by the Wyclif Society, that he was summoned to appear before the Pope. His words are: 'Thus says a certain lame and infirm man, cited to this Court, that the royal command prevents him from going to Rome, that the King of kings plainly decrees that he should not go.†' This citation was followed in exactly a year by an attack of paralysis in his church at Lutterworth, on December 28th, 1384, and by his death on December 31st. The indefatigable work had worn out the material tabernacle.

Thus ended the career of one who has been justly described by Dean Hook as 'one of the greatest men our country has produced—as one of the very few who have left the impress of their minds, not only on their own age, but on all time.'‡ Much patient investigation has been required to enable his biographers to describe him. The first forty years of his life are involved in obscurity. Even during the last twenty years, the notices of him are so meagre that we cannot give a continuous history of him.

\* Lechler's 'Life,' pp. 415, 416. † Polemical Works, vol. ii. pp. 555, 556.

‡ 'Lives of the Archbishops,' vol. iii. p. 76.

We have only some scanty fragments as to his appearance and influence. We learn that he had 'a spare, frail, and emaciated frame, and a conversation "most innocent," the charm of every rank.' His personal character was unimpeachable. As a man of learning, he towered head and shoulders above his contemporaries. We observe too in his works, and especially in the Latin works among the Vienna manuscripts, an earnestness and an intellectual energy which carry him fearlessly onward in the investigation of truth. He speaks as if not to expose abuses would be an act of treason against God.

We must now consider the opinions of Wiclif which connect him with the Reformation. We must also describe his development in order to form a just estimate of him as a thinker and writer. His changes of opinion are brought before us especially in his unpublished writings at Vienna. Thus he says, 'Other statements, which at one time appeared strange to me, now appear to be sound and true, and I defend them.' But this is a matter to which his biographers have not paid proper attention.\* The common idea has been that, as Minerva issued forth armed from the head of Jupiter, so Wiclif stands before us, throughout his public life, a finished man, armed at all points for his conflict with the Papacy. This seems to have been the idea of his earliest biographer, John Lewis. We may add to him Mr. Milner, the author of the 'History of the Church;' who accuses Wiclif of having kept his opinions in concealment, from fear of persecution, because he does not, as on other occasions, call the Pope the proud priest of Rome, or Antichrist, in the document presented at Lambeth to the Papal Commissioners. Mr. Milner does not seem to have been aware of his development, or of the dates of some of his works. Dr. Shirley and others prove to us that the 'Trialogus,' the 'Sentence of Curse Expounded,' and other works, in which he made a fierce onslaught on the Papacy, were written during the last two or three years of his life; whereas Mr. Milner and some besides him supposed them to have been written previous to his appearance at Lambeth. The fact was that he did not express himself before 1378 as after 1381, and that he had not, in the former year, arrived at that stage of development in which he could show, by his language, his great indignation against the Papacy.

Dr. Shirley and other learned men have, by settling the works written by him with their dates, rendered a very great service to the memory of Wiclif. We are thus able, to some

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\* Lechler's 'Life,' pp. 222-225.

extent, to trace his progress. Take, for instance, the dogma of Transubstantiation. When we have before us all the Vienna manuscripts, many of which were written before 1370, we may, if we consider the assistance which they have already given to us, find in them the germ of his opposition to this dogma and the other dogmas of Romanism. The 'De Benedicta Incarnatione,' written about 1365, shows us that he was advancing towards his final views on the Eucharist. During the last four years of his life he was applying the whole force of his mind to the solution of an important and difficult question, and he never desisted till he had obtained a firm hold on the truth. When we compare one work with another, in that period, including the Vienna manuscripts, the only correct way of ascertaining Wiclif's opinions, we find that he gradually learnt to oppose the dogma of Transubstantiation, and to accept the real spiritual presence of Christ in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

We shall see that Wiclif was on other points in agreement with the Church of England.\* He anticipated Luther in his opposition to Indulgences, for he writes in his treatise 'of Prelates,' that 'Prelates foully deceive Christian men by feigned indulgences, and rob them of their money.' Of works of supererogation, condemned in the fourteenth Article of the Church of England, he writes in the same treatise, 'As to the holy merits of saints, that they did more than was needful for their own salvation, Christ never taught this in His Gospel, nor Peter, nor Paul, nor any other apostle.' So also he opposes the worship of the Virgin in a tract on the Ave Maria, and the Invocation of Saints in the 'Trialogus.' He brought forward too, but not so prominently as Luther, the doctrine of justification by faith. He was also in exact agreement with the Church of England as to baptism, penance, absolution, and confession.

We find, in fact, that Wiclif held all the truths stated, and that he was opposed to all the Romish doctrines condemned in the articles of the Church of England, with the exception of Purgatory, on which he speaks with a very hesitating utterance. The wonder is, when we consider the short time, six years, during which he was engaged in this work, that he should have made so much progress in the investigation of truth. The probability is, when we consider that progress, that, if his life had been spared, he would have been altogether emancipated from his bondage to Romanism.

The Vienna manuscripts are of very great importance.

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\* Canon Pennington's 'Life of Wiclif,' pp. 250-262.

‘Scientifically considered, it is only the Latin works which are of value. Wiclif’s philosophical and theological position can only be learned from them with certainty and thoroughness.’\* Without them, we should now have traced imperfectly Wiclif’s views and their development, and should have been unable to show fully that he had followed that law of slow, orderly, and healthy progress, which is one of the best tests of the reality of our Christianity.

We learn from Bishop Pecock’s ‘Repressor,’ written about 1449, that Wiclif’s followers, after his death, were divided into two parties—the precursors of the Puritans, and those of the Reformed Church of the reign of Elizabeth. Most of those who have examined carefully all his works have agreed to dissociate him from the former party. He was, however, undoubtedly the spiritual ancestor of the latter section. The ‘Repressor’ thus becomes a link in the chain of evidence by which we prove the continuance of Wiclif’s work during the fifteenth century. We have a series of cogent proofs that his influence was permanent, and that he prepared the way for the Reformation, not only in England, but in Germany.† We can trace only indistinctly the education of the people of England in the great truths which have come before us, ‘because, from fear of persecution, it was conducted in the secret chamber, or in the lonely valley among the hills, or around the pale watchfire in the bosom of some large forest.’ Wiclif’s influence is, however, made manifest by the continued circulation of his Bible, of which we may form some idea when we are informed that 150 manuscripts were found at the time of the preparation of the Oxford edition in 1850, and remember the search instituted for Wiclif’s writings, the burning of them when they were discovered, as well as the great destruction of ancient manuscripts. We may learn the continuance of his influence also from the persecutions in the first half of the fifteenth century, during which we see the funeral pyres blazing up amid the surrounding darkness; from the reading of his books at Oxford; from a statement of Leland as to the circulation of his books, and the known circulation of his sermons in England during the fifteenth century; and from extracts given by Foxe, in his ‘Acts and Monuments,’ found in episcopal registers, as to persecutions for holding his opinions in the early part of the sixteenth century.

We can trace also the influence of Wiclif on the Reformation in Germany. John Huss, the Bohemian martyr, derived

\* Lechler’s ‘Life,’ p. 483.

† Canon Pennington’s ‘Life of Wiclif,’ pp. 280–304. Professor Burrow’s ‘Wiclif’s Place in History,’ pp. 22–23, 123–128.



his opinions from Wiclif's works, which, as we have stated, after the death of Wiclif, were circulated in Bohemia. After a sanguinary war, the object of which was to avenge the death of Huss, the Taborites, the extreme section of his followers, founded in 1457 a Church, called the Church of the United Brethren. We learn that they zealously opposed Indulgences at the beginning of the sixteenth century; and that in a confession of faith sent to King Wladislaus in 1504, advancing further than John Huss, but agreeing with their other spiritual progenitor, John Wiclif, they declared themselves against the worship of the saints, prayers for the dead, and purgatory, and that they held the doctrine of the real spiritual presence of Christ in the Eucharist.\* We have evidence that, during the fifteenth century, their emissaries and adherents were in all parts of Germany, especially in Franconia; and that, about the middle of that century, their doctrines were preached with great success in Taubergunde and Würtemberg, Basle and Strasburg.† When Luther came forward to do battle with the Church of Rome he was welcomed by a numerous body of Hussites, who had thus prepared the way for him, and who now completed their emancipation by casting in their lot with him.

We see, then, that Luther was largely indebted to Wiclif for the preparation which contributed to the success of his work. He unconsciously acknowledges his obligations to him when he says that he had studied the writings of John of Wesel, for the latter was, through the Hussites, one of Wiclif's spiritual children. While, therefore, we cherish the memory of those who burst the bands of spiritual despotism, we should never forget our debt of gratitude to Wiclif and his successors, without whose previous work, carried on partly on the world's high stage, partly in silence and obscurity, no yearning for a truer and purer service to God would have existed in the minds of many, and no way of escape might have been found, for those conscious of their slavery, from the yoke of an intolerable bondage.

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\* Gieseler's 'Ecclesiastical History,' vol. v. pp. 90, 153, 163.

† Ullmann's 'Reformers before the Reformation,' vol. i. pp. 334, 337. A reference is given to Gieseler.