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ARTICLE VII.

JOHN WYCLIFFE.

BY REV. C. E. BARROWS.

THE life and times of John Wycliffe are, for several reasons, worthy of most careful study. The age was a formative one in English history. To this period we must trace at least three streams of influence most beneficial to the realm, and which have continued with augmented volume to the present time. Here it is we find the rise of English literature, of the English Parliament, and of English Protestantism. In these several movements, literary, civil, and religious, which had their origin in this century, Wycliffe bore no inconspicuous part.

His name must always stand by the side of those of Chaucer and Gower and the unknown author of "Piers Plowman," men who gave the first impulse and direction to English composition. Up to this time Latin was the language of the learned, of the schools, and of books, as it was that of the court until superseded by the French. The English was a barbarous tongue, used only by rustics and the illiterate. Intent on reaching this very class, Wycliffe ventured to make a new departure, and essayed to train this rough English speech to do service for the truth. He honored the despised vernacular by employing it in several of his treatises, and at the same time improving, elevating, and enlarging it, making its vocabulary more copious, by supplying it with words of French and Latin derivation. With Wycliffe and Chaucer the history of English literature begins. This was part of a more general movement known as the revival of learning, which had appeared in several countries of Europe, but more especially in Italy and France.

Previous to this time the government of the land was of the most arbitrary kind. The king's sovereignty was absolute, his will was law, his supremacy limited only by such checks as the great barons of the realm could impose. The government was at times little more than a system of checkmating; sometimes it was the king who was restrained by the nobles, and at other times the nobles who were thwarted by the king; and between the two the people at all times fared ill. They were beneath the iron heel, whichever party was in the ascendant. Their condition was in many respects quite abject—a kind of serfdom. Life itself was often precarious. As the king had the power of life and death over his great barons, they in turn had the same power over their dependents, and even the squires exercised the same over their tenants. The government centered in the king and his nobles. And so far from the people's having any voice in it, it was scarcely administered in their interest. It is true that the barons had, in order to enhance their own power or to insure the success of some cherished enterprise, occasionally taken representatives of the English gentry to councils called to consider questions of national importance. It was, however, as stated by one historian, in the reign of Edward III that the Commons are first mentioned as a constituent part of the English Government, as an integral branch of the Parliament. But from this time they steadily grew in importance and power. Various circumstances conspired towards this growth. Among other favoring circumstances were the labors of Wycliffe, which during the major portion of his life were largely directed to the enlightenment and elevation of the untitled and unprivileged masses. The system of feudalism slowly dropped in pieces, and the "third estate" emerged and assumed an important position.

Marked as was Wycliffe's influence in these directions, in the shaping of the English Government and especially in the formation of the English language, his influence was still more marked and powerful in England's religious his-

tory. The hierarchy of Rome was all but supreme in the land. It was during the preceding century that the Roman pontiff reached the height of his power. Innocent III had compelled John to surrender his realm and consent to hold it as a fief of the Vatican, and to pay a very large annual sum as tribute money into the papal treasury. And during several generations Rome was enriched at the expense of England. The statements made as to the amounts annually taken from England to Rome are almost incredible. The king's treasuries were impoverished, for his revenues were drained into the coffers of the Church. In retaining her supremacy in the land, and especially in drawing thence so much treasure, Rome was materially aided by her ever zealous agents, the mendicants, who were every-where present and every-where active. They had captured the Church and well-nigh the state. All ecclesiastical preferments were at their disposal. They made desperate efforts to gain control of the universities. They sought to absorb all the sources of influence and power. And what was true of them here was true of them also elsewhere. They overran Europe, and filled many of the highest offices. Some of the popes were mendicants, and many of the higher ecclesiastics, and not a few university professors. And so, also, were many of the schoolmen, who were divided between the black and the gray friars. While Anselm was a Dominican, Scotus was a Franciscan. These mendicants composed the aggressive portion of the Church and were chief agents in the aggrandizement of the Papacy. Their influence in England was far-reaching and still growing when Wycliffe was born.

In 1340 he became a student at Oxford University, when he was sixteen years of age, having been born in 1324, in Yorkshire, in the village of Wycliffe, whence his name; which, in the Norman dialect, was written John de Wycliffe. He first entered Queen's College, a new foundation; but soon removed to Merton, at the same university, founded the preceding century, and having already become very celebrated

by the number of eminent men it had attracted to itself. During Wycliffe's residence there, the divinity chair was filled by Thomas Bradwardine, a profound reasoner, and at one time confessor to the king, Edward III. And among the names enrolled as students were those of Simon de Islep, afterward Archbishop of Canterbury, and till his death a personal friend and patron of Wycliffe; of William Occam, subsequently a distinguished philosopher, and connected with the faculty of the University of Paris, and an opponent of Duns Scotus, who had a few years before begun his own brilliant career as professor at Merton; also of Geoffrey Chaucer, a name that was destined to become familiar in every English household.

The studies pursued by Wycliffe at the university had conscientious reference to the holy calling he had chosen. Latin he learned to write with as much correctness as the taste of the age demanded. And he acquired, what was much less usual at the time, an excellent English style. He paid considerable attention to both civil and canon law; but much more to philosophy, for which he had special aptitude. He became a proficient metaphysician, an adept scholastic, an earnest realist, a disciple of John Scotus and Anselm of Canterbury, whose opinions dominated in England at the time, and for a long period afterward. To Wycliffe's high attainments as a scholar the strongest testimony is on record, given by a contemporary writer who was a bitter opponent of Wycliffe's opinions on reform, and whose words are therefore all the more noteworthy: "As a teacher in theology, he was the most eminent of his time; in philosophy, second to none; in scholastic erudition, incomparable; in controversy, at once subtle and profound." Another writer adds—"almost more than human."

There was another class of teachers at the university, never large, but enrolling a few names of rare lustre, that had a great molding influence upon our scholar. This class refused to make philosophy supreme in the realm of morals and divinity; but insisted on making holy Scripture

co-ordinate authority, who were therefore styled, perhaps in derision, "Biblicists." Robert Grosseteste, during the preceding century chancellor of the university, was doubtless one of these "Biblicists;" although Mr. Hallam seems to think it absurd to reckon him among the precursors of our reformer. He has, nevertheless, left on record several strong testimonies to the value of the sacred oracles. Another of these "Biblicists" was the present divinity professor at Merton, who made the Scriptures prominent as authority for his instructions in theology. The Latin Bible must be regarded as one of the text-books carefully perused by Wycliffe during his residence at Oxford. It was this study that was to give him his clearness of vision and his directness of attack, in his subsequent encounters with the established Church. It was this study, pre-eminently, that was to render him the able champion of the government, the resolute defender of the rights of the people, and the formidable antagonist of the pretensions of Rome.

Thus was he qualified for his future work. The editor of Dr. Mosheim's history describes him as "a hard student, a profound scholar, a sarcastic writer, and a subtle disputant." Wycliffe's whole life was, either directly or indirectly, to be devoted to a reform of the Church. To this work he was providentially led, step by step. His studies at the university, all unknown to himself, pointed in this direction. He must stifle most sacred convictions, or he must protest; and protest conducted to conflict. Although the current of Church life was exceedingly strong, bearing down in its might all opposition, the volume of protest was already considerable. There was not an unbroken silence in regard to abuses. Strong efforts had been made to remove them, to lift the burdens which bore heavily, and with increasing weight, not only upon the industrial classes, but upon the gentry; and even upon the nobility and the king himself.

The opinions of those who pleaded for reform were, however, far from being harmonious; the ends sought were quite diverse. These may be considered under a fourfold

classification. 1. The cry was almost universal for a reform in the manners and morals of the ecclesiastics. All felt that the immoralities and vices tolerated if not fostered by the Church, yet so gross and notorious, ought by all means to be purged away. In this all sincere Christians and good citizens were agreed. 2. There were many in the land who would go much further, and curtail the temporal authority of Rome, and humble her proud pretensions. Here we find not only large numbers of the best citizens, but such men, also, as John of Gaunt, and Lord Percy, and the Earl of Gloucester, and perhaps a majority of the great barons of the realm. 3. Still others, a much smaller and even choicer company, dared to hope and even labor for a reform that should embrace doctrinal errors and corruptions. This was a long stride in advance of the other positions. It caused the more devout to stand aghast. It questioned the deliverances of the infallible Church. It "blasphemously" affirmed that the teachings of the Church contained somewhat that was wrong and pernicious. 4. A smaller and selecter number, gifted beyond all others with spiritual discernment, and deeply versed in the oracles of God, taking a profounder view of the whole subject, were eager for a far more radical reformation; a reformation that was equivalent to a revolution—the removal of the existing hierarchy and the substitution of a Biblical Church with a Biblical worship. These are some of the phases of dissent as it then existed. Wycliffe seems in the course of his ministry to have passed through them all; from the mildest form of reformation sought—the improvement of morals, to the very strongest, reformation at the roots of the system—the demolition of the Papacy and the building on its ruins of a New Testament Church.

These several currents of religious thought naturally resolve themselves into two: a superficial, and a deeper and broader one. As at a later day, in the reign of Henry VIII, and again in that of Charles I, and as, perhaps, in all reforms, every where and at all times, there were here to be observed two strongly marked movements; the one political

and the other spiritual; a reformation in the interests of the throne, and one in the interests of truth.

It is not our purpose to give a detailed account of Wycliffe's life, but to touch only the more salient points in his eventful career. He first drew public attention to himself in 1360, while still at Oxford, by a controversy in which he became involved with the mendicants; a controversy which was to be repeatedly renewed in subsequent years—which had, indeed, scarcely a cessation during his life. Richard Fitzralph, Archbishop of Armagh, had, during the preceding century, exposed with great boldness the glaring corruptions of these orders, and had called for a reform, carrying his case to the pope, but without success. Aware of these proceedings and of their miscarriage, Wycliffe determined to make his appeal at a different bar. He appeared before the people, and compelled them to know the facts and to pass judgment. It was a bold step to take, whether we consider the bar at which the appeal was made, or the object against which the attack was directed. "The controversy was one," says Vaughan, "conducted against some of the most powerful minds of that generation, involving principles of the highest importance, and leading to results the most momentous in the history of religion since the age of inspired teachers." He nevertheless preferred against the friars charges of the gravest nature. He accused them, and most publicly, of grossest corruptions; of double-dyed hypocrisy; of wantonly perverting the Gospel and hindering its progress. He held them up, indeed, to public odium and detestation. And these several charges he fully substantiated by facts of the most authentic kind. Though living entirely by mendicancy, these "brothers" had accumulated immense treasures, so that the Franciscans could offer, a half century before, forty thousand gold ducats to the pope for the privilege of violating one of their earliest rules—one with respect to property.

Armacanus and others would reform the orders; Wycliffe would abolish them. The evils connected with the system

he affirmed to be the necessary consequence of the mendicant discipline itself. The principle of mendicity on which these orders rested was itself false and pernicious. And celibacy, one of the corner-stones of monachism in all its forms, he assailed with peculiar vehemence. Monkery could never by any amount of pruning be made beautiful, or agreeable to truth. It was itself an ugly deformity; an unsightly excrescence upon the Church of God. It was more; an impertinence, a lie, outraging the strongest and purest instincts of our nature, and trampling on the laws God has given for the government of his creatures in their social relations.

The boldness of the reformer will be the better appreciated if we recall the fact that monasticism had now existed for centuries; that in the popular estimation it was closely identified with the Church itself; that to touch it was to lay hands on the foundations of the hierarchy; that among its votaries and adherents had been many whom the faithful had delighted to honor; that members of these "religious" orders were invested with peculiar sanctity, and seemed the special favorites of heaven; that to be buried, indeed, in the cast-off clothes of a monk was a privilege earnestly coveted even by princes and kings, since, thus robed, the departed were assured of a heartier welcome to the land of the blest; that, in fine, it was the sentiment of such men as Bonaventura that there is greater merit in the fulfillment of monastic vows than in common morality. The position of our reformer was not only unprecedented, but perilous. To the claim that these orders had a divine origin, and were a special gift of God to his Church, Wycliffe retorted that if it be true, the gift must have been bestowed for the same reason that God gave to his people a king, as a chastisement because of their sins.

Made master of Balliol College in 1361, perhaps in some sense as a recognition on the part of the university of these services; and four years later of Canterbury Hall, by the appointment of his old-time and intelligent friend,

Simon Islep, now Archbishop of Canterbury, Wycliffe was led into still further complications with the mendicant orders, since almost immediately after the appointment Islep died, and his successor in the primacy, Peter Langham, himself a monk and hence a patron, removed Wycliffe to make room for one of that order. It was an aggravated case of tyranny and oppression; the expressed will of the founder, the late archbishop, was ruthlessly set aside, and his benefactions perverted and turned from their rightful channel. Wycliffe sought redress by an appeal to the pope, Urban V, who, after a delay of four years, authorized his exclusion from the wardenship, and confirmed the incumbency of Woodhall, the monk. In the meanwhile, Wycliffe wrote vigorously in defense of the university and against the further encroachments of these aggressive orders. He did not, however, confine himself to the evils thence arising; there were others needing to be removed, and among them was the secularizing of the clergy. This evil was twofold. It appeared, first, in their excessive wealth, and secondly, in the almost exclusive attention they gave to secular affairs.

While insisting that the poverty of Christ gives no support to the miserable system of beggary which the friars inflicted on the people, he maintained most zealously that the lowly condition of Christ and his apostles was a severe rebuke to the wealth accumulated by the clergy and to the luxury in which they indulged. The higher dignitaries had annual incomes that rivaled the king's. They lived in opulence, maintaining great establishments which became an end in life, to which all else was subordinated and their spiritual offices were made directly to minister. It was a gross departure from the example of the great Bishop of souls, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for others.

The clergy, moreover, neglected the duties properly belonging to their office to engage in work that should be left to laymen. All the high offices at court were filled by ecclesiastics, a fact which Wycliffe deeply deplored. Eccle-

siastics governed in the state as well as the Church, in civil as well as religious affairs. This condition of things had a very natural growth. For generations the clergy had a monopoly of education, and they were looked to for counsel, especially in all the more difficult and important matters, whether of a private or a public nature. They were the natural leaders of the people. Wise sovereigns drew clergymen around them because of their intelligence and wisdom. This is one side of the question. For quite other reasons ecclesiastics often sought and obtained these appointments. They thus gratified both their personal ambition for promotion and their ambition for the aggrandizement of the Church. By virtue of being rulers in the Church they had the right to rule in the state, because the latter was subordinate and subsidiary to the former. The state was regarded, perhaps, as a department of the Church, or more properly, as a kind of police regulation, to do its police work. Wycliffe had wholly different views of the ministry. "Neither prelates," he observes in a work on the government of the Church, "nor doctors, priests, nor deacons should hold secular offices—that is, those of chancery, treasury, privy seal, and other such secular offices in the exchequer; neither be stewards of lands, nor stewards of the hall, nor clerks of the kitchen, nor clerks of accounts; neither be occupied with any secular office in lords' courts, more especially while secular men are sufficient to do such offices." The persistent advocacy of these opinions was followed by the most serious consequences. Parliament, under the inspiration of his thoughts, took action looking towards the exclusion of its clerical members. The powerful William Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester, was forced to resign the office of chancellor of the realm, and the Bishop of Exeter that of treasurer. These efforts to check the ambition of the prelates awakened their deepest animosity towards our reformer, which soon involved him in a perilous conflict with them.

We have abundant testimony, however, that in these

attacks upon their worldliness he was moved by no narrow jealousy, but rather by a high regard for their good name and character as ministers of Jesus Christ. He was willing and desirous that they should receive the honor due both to their office and to their good works. He even urged upon the Churches the duty of loving and reverencing their pastors, who labor for their spiritual welfare. "Thy second father," so he counsels the disciple of Christ, "is thy spiritual father, who has special care of thy soul, and thus thou shalt worship him. Thou shalt love him especially before other men, and obey his teaching as far as he teaches God's will. And help according to thy power, that he have a reasonable sustenance when he doth well his office. And if he fail in his office by giving evil example, and in ceasing from teaching God's law, thou art bound to have great sorrow on that account, and to tell meekly and charitably his default to him between thee and him alone." This instruction significantly implies the right of private judgment, the right to appeal from the teaching of the priests, and of the Church, to a higher and an ultimate standard, even "God's law." As long, however, as the minister approves himself to be a true servant of the Lord Jesus, he would have him loved and obeyed. And such approval he would have every minister seek to receive, by "a holy walk and a godly conversation." This wholesome advice he gives to him who ventures to minister in holy things: "If thou be a priest, and by name a curate, live thou a holy life. Pass other men in holy prayer, holy desire, and holy speaking; in counseling and teaching the truth. Ever keep the commandments of God, and let his Gospel and his praises be ever in thy mouth. Ever despise sin, that men may be drawn therefrom, and that thy deeds may be so far rightful that no man shall blame with reason. Let thy open life be thus a true book, in which the soldier and the layman may learn how to serve God and keep his commandments. For the example of a good life, if it be open and continued, striketh rude men much more than open

preaching with the Word alone. And waste not thy goods in great feasts for rich men, but live a frugal life on poor men's alms and goods." The latter sentence suggests that the minister is not to look to the state for support, but that he is, nevertheless to be supported, and by the voluntary offerings of the saints.

The questions thus far discussed had a wider reach than at first appeared. Wycliffe was being prepared to take still bolder steps, and to challenge the temporal authority claimed by the hierarchy. He had, also, a growing influence in his university and in the Parliament, and even over the higher nobility. When Pope Urban demanded from the king the payment of England's annual tribute to the papal see, which had been neglected for more than thirty years, the demand was submitted to the Parliament, in accordance with a law already enacted, that no tax should be imposed on the people without the consent of their representatives, the Commons. The Parliament refused, with great spirit, to acknowledge the indebtedness, and pledged the resources of the realm to maintain the decision. England had grown since the reign of John; the battles of Cressy and Poitiers had given her a renown second to no country in Europe. The attitude assumed toward Rome ill pleased the clergy; but their attack upon the action of Parliament was successfully repelled by Wycliffe. The king expressed his gratitude by conferring upon him the title of "Royal Chaplain." He was honored by his Alma Mater, also, in 1372, with the title of Doctor in Divinity, and still further by a call to the chair of theology in one of her colleges. Oppressed with a sense of the moral corruptions which prevailed in society at large, he made it one of his first duties to expound the decalogue. He also continued to direct his attention to the abuses which had crept into the Church. A large proportion of the benefices of the realm were in the hands of foreigners, French or Italian, who knew nothing of the English language, and many of whom never took the trouble to visit the island. These

rich livings were bestowed by the pope, either as rewards for past services, or to purchase future favors. Upon representations made by the Parliament to the king, commissioners were appointed to visit Pope Gregory XI, but with very unsatisfactory results. A second embassy, Wycliffe being one of the number, succeeded, after delays continued through two years, in obtaining assurances that the cause of this grievance should be removed.

While engaged in these negotiations Wycliffe, being brought nearer to the head of the Church, was led to study his character more closely and to examine anew the grounds of his authority. He discovered in the pontiff the same corruptions as in the bishops, the same greed for money, the same thirst for power, the same chicanery in the conduct of his government. The effect of the study was deep and lasting. The reformer was filled with disgust and loathing. Henceforth he attacked the head of the Church with unsparing severity. On his return from Bruges he was presented by the king with the rectory of Lutterworth, with which name his own was to become indissolubly associated. The Parliament which next assembled was dominated by his principles. "The attack conducted by the House of Commons," says Vaughan, "during this session, on various branches of official corruption, is one of the most determined efforts in the cause of religion and of general freedom to be found in our Parliamentary annals."

While influential in the last Parliaments of Edward III and the first of Richard II, and having many friends among the nobles, and a numerous following among the people, there was a growing animosity toward him on the part of the clergy, who made several ineffectual attempts to secure his downfall. They sought to alienate the university, which, however, from the beginning to the end, through all his troubles remained loyal and true to him. The city of London was permeated with his teachings. When William Courtney, a man of imperious will and a devoted son of the Church, became Bishop of London, he at once instituted

proceedings against this troubler of Zion, and summoned him to attend a synod at St. Paul's. But the accused was delivered by the friendly interference of the Duke of Lancaster and Lord Percy. Courtney was not the man, however, to be discouraged by trifles. The authority of the pope was invoked, who issued mandatory letters to the Archbishop of Canterbury, to the Bishop of London, to the University of Oxford, and to the king. While the king and the university treated their letters with indifference, the prelates proceeded to action. Simon Sudbury, the archbishop, summoned a convocation to meet at Lambeth. Wycliffe was cited to appear before it, where he was examined as to his teaching—especially as to the limits of the papal authority. In the paper presented by him to the body he maintained the separation and independence of the state from the Church. He put limits to the power of the Church that seemed little short of blasphemy, in that age of churchly arrogance and priestly assumptions. His opinions were, of course found worthy of condemnation. But the joy of the prosecutors was not unalloyed. During the progress of the examination they were compelled to witness the gathering of admiring crowds, and to hear their shouts of attachment to the reformer and to his sentiments. And the inquisitors were finally to be circumvented in their plans by a mandate from the queen mother, forbidding any definite sentence being passed, either on the person or the doctrines of the accused.

His protracted and arduous labors began seriously to affect his health. After presenting an elaborate reply to several questions of gravest moment proposed to him by one of the early Parliaments of Richard, he was entirely prostrated and seemed near his end. But he had no regrets for any steps he had taken in the direction of reform, nor did he soften at all towards his old antagonists, the mendicants. Visited by them to obtain from him a confession and a recantation of his opinions, he gathered up all his strength and exclaimed, "I shall not die, but live; and shall again declare the evil deeds of the friars." Events proved

the reformer to be a true prophet; he was raised up, and was permitted to deal some heavy blows for the truth. He took still higher and bolder ground. There was growth in his opinions; a growth constantly away from the hierarchy and towards Scriptural views of the Church, the ministry, the sacraments and worship. He observed that many were intimidated from avowing their convictions of truth through fear, not of persecution, not of being impoverished, not of physical tortures, but of incurring the displeasure of the hierarchy. They had a pious horror of being excommunicated from the Church, and so shut out of heaven. Their minds were held in the thralldom of a hoary superstition. Upon this point, therefore, the spiritual power claimed by the Church, he now turned all his heaviest enginery.

When Wycliffe entered the spiritual domain of the Church and began to destroy images, many of his more powerful friends fell away from him. They were deeply interested in delivering England from the dominion of Rome, but they had no desire to liberate souls from her toils. When there was no political capital to be made out of his labors, they deserted him. In his further endeavors Wycliffe was not as powerfully supported as was Luther, subsequently, in his work. He proceeded nevertheless without wavering, fearlessly urging his principles to their logical consequences, following the teachings of the Book he had made his study through the years and his supreme guide in all his controversies. He wrote much and elaborately upon the power of "the keys," upon spiritual censures, and upon transubstantiation. "We ought to believe," he says, "that then only does a Christian priest bind or loose, when he simply obeys the law of Christ; because it is not lawful for him to bind or loose but in virtue of that law, and, by consequence, not unless it be in conformity to it." The reformer sought not only to correct improper uses of the power, but to show that the power itself, as generally understood, was fictitious. "Let it once be admitted," he observes, "that the pope, or one representing him, does indeed bind or loose when-

ever he affects to do so, and how shall the world stand? For if, when the pontiff pretends to bind, with the pains of eternal damnation, all who oppose him in his acquisition of temporal things, either movable or immovable, such persons assuredly are so bound; it must follow, as among the easiest of things, for the pope to wrest unto himself all the kingdoms of the world, and to subvert, or to destroy, every ordinance of Christ. On the ground of this impious doctrine, it would be easy for the pope to invert all the arrangements of the world; seizing, in connection with the clergy, on the wives, the daughters, and all the possessions of the laity, without opposition; inasmuch, as it is their saying, that even kings may not deprive a churchman of aught, neither complain of his conduct, let him do what he may, while obedience must be instantly rendered to whatever the pope may decree." This doctrine, he further declares, gives to every obscure parish priest almost unlimited authority to invade the most sacred rights and privileges of his parishioners. It was no small matter to incur the displeasure of a priest clothed with such power, the power to open and shut the gates of heaven to waiting souls. And this terrific power was often employed on trifling occasions and for trivial offenses, and even to gain secular advantage. Wycliffe sought to break the spell of this power—to disenchant the minds of men.

His doctrine, that the pope was fallible and peccable, received most substantial indorsement, in 1378, from an unexpected quarter. In the attempt to remove the papal residence from Avignon to Rome a division was produced, and the head of the Church was cleft violently asunder. The monstrous spectacle thus presented was improved by the reformer to advance the interests of the truth. He made it the occasion of powerful invectives against the hierarchy, and of earnest appeals to his fellow country people. He counseled them to trust in Christ for succor, who, he continued, "hath begun already to help us graciously, in that he hath clove the head of Antichrist, and the two parts

fight against each other." While he was thus busy, the clergy were not idle. His denial of the real presence in the eucharist became ground for fresh hostilities against him. In a short treatise he explained the phrase, "This is my body;" but the explanation was not satisfactory. Courtney, now raised to the see of Canterbury, commenced vigorous proceedings against the reformer. His high office invested him with great authority—next, perhaps, to the king. He succeeded in compelling the chancellor of the university to bend to his will. He obtained the sanction of the king to a statute, "the first in England's Parliamentary history, providing for the punishment of the variable crime designated heresy." Thus a weapon was forged that was to have a conspicuous place in subsequent events. Courtney was proud to describe himself as "chief inquisitor of heretical pravity for the province of Canterbury." The university made a noble defense for Wycliffe, who was regarded as one of its brightest ornaments; but the power of the primate secured his withdrawal. In the Parliament to which his case was carried he had numerous friends, but not a few felt that he was now overstepping the bounds of propriety, if not of truth. Wycliffe therefore retired from the university and took up his abode at Lutterworth. But he receded from no doctrinal position he had assumed. He still maintained, not only that the pope was corrupt, but that his office was a usurpation.

During his residence at Lutterworth he preached constantly and wrote much. He did not cease entirely from controversy, because he could not. While, therefore, some of his writings were polemical, more were practical, designed to instruct the people in godliness. Most of the sermons or homilies he has left to us were penned during this period. It was in 1384, while in his pulpit, discoursing on the Gospel of Christ, which was so precious to him, that he was stricken down, and his spirit passed from earth.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]