

# WICKLIFFE

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AND

## HIS TIMES.

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WICKLIFF.

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## P R E F A C E.

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WICKLIFFE was one of those extraordinary characters with which God has been pleased, at long intervals, to visit and bless the world. Living in an age of deep darkness and abounding superstition, and encompassed with difficulties that would have appalled and confounded almost any other man, he rose superior to them all, and persevered, to the end of his life, in judicious, effective, self-denying labours to enlighten and bless his dying fellow-men. Nor did he labour and suffer in vain. The light which he exhibited has never been extinguished: we trust it never will be. It continued to shine upon the nations till its beams were lost in the brighter light of the Protestant reformation; and, mingling with that brighter light, it continues to shine to the present day.

To assist the youth of our country in improving their acquaintance with such a man, has been my principal motive to the preparation of the following work.

Among the numerous volumes which have been consulted, I am chiefly indebted to the Memoirs of Wickliffe, by Mr. Vaughan and Professor Le Bas.\*

I am sensible that this work has been too hastily prepared, and that it is chargeable with many imperfections. Such as it is, however, I cheerfully commit it to God and his people, trusting that the deep interest of the subject may compensate, in some degree, for any apparent failures in the mode of presenting it.

*Bangor, April 1, 1841.*

\* The little volume lately published, in Ohio, I had not seen or heard of till my own was ready for the press.

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# WICKLIFFE.

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## CHAPTER I.

State of the religious world in the time of Wickliffe—  
Papal power at its height near the commencement  
of the fourteenth century—Events tending to diminish it—Removal of the seat of the popedom from Rome to Avignon—The great schism of the west—Uneasiness in different countries under the exactions of Rome—Abuses of the mendicant orders—State of the church as to doctrines and morals—Prevalence of the scholastic mode of reasoning—England most obsequious to the pope, previous to the time of Wickliffe—Thomas Brodwardine—Bishop Greathead—Richard Fitzralph, Archbishop of Armagh.

IN presenting to the public a sketch of the life and labours of Wickliffe, it will be necessary to exhibit something of the state of the religious world at the time of his appearance.

About the commencement of the fourteenth century, that monstrous compound of impos-

ture, superstition, and usurpation, commonly denominated "Popery," had been fully consummated. It had reached its height. For not less than a thousand years the way had been preparing—at first by slow and almost imperceptible degrees, but more recently by bold and rapid strides—for such an issue. In the seventh century the popes of Rome first claimed to be *universal bishops*; and from the eleventh century to the fourteenth, these arrogant claims had been more than verified.

The aspiring Gregory VII. assumed to be, not only the supreme ruler of the church, but the sovereign disposer of thrones and empires. He would be acknowledged as literally "king of kings, and lord of lords." He reminded the King of France that "both his kingdom and his soul were under the dominion of St. Peter, who had power to *bind* and *loose*, both in heaven and on earth." He compelled the Emperor of Germany to stand three days and nights, bareheaded and barefooted, at his gate, in the dead of winter, waiting the opportunity of being admitted to the presence of "his holiness," to submit himself, and supplicate his pardon.

Pope Alexander III. required another Emperor of Germany to perform for him the office of groom, and hold the stirrup while he mounted his horse. At a later period he placed his foot, it is said, on the neck of the same emperor, repeating, "Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder; the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under foot." Ps. xci. 13.

Innocent III., adopting the principles of his predecessors, claimed an absolute dominion, not only over the church, but also over religion, and over the whole world. In Asia he gave a king to the Armenians. In Europe he conferred crowns or took them away, according to his pleasure. The story of his contest with King John of England, and of the disgraceful termination of it, is familiar to every reader of English history. He compelled the humbled monarch to resign his crown into his hands, and receive it again as a *present* from "his holiness;" to declare his dominions tributary to the holy see; and to do homage and swear fealty to the pope, as a vassal and a feudatory.

Boniface VIII., who occupied the pontifi-

cal chair at the commencement of the fourteenth century, so far from abating aught from the lofty claims of his predecessors, seemed rather (if possible) to go beyond them. From his first entrance into office, he arrogated sovereign power over all things, sacred and secular; overawed monarchs and nations by the terror of his bulls; and decided, as supreme arbiter, the controversies of kings. He insisted that all persons whatsoever owed a perfect obedience to a Roman pontiff; and this, not merely in religious matters, but in secular and human affairs. "We declare, determine, and decree," says he, "that it is absolutely necessary to salvation, that every human being should be subject to the Roman pontiff." He further declared, that, "As vicar of Jesus Christ, he had the power to govern kings with a rod of iron, and to dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Ps. ii. 9.

Human language could assert no more than this. Human pride and arrogance could proceed no farther. Here is a vain mortal "exalting himself above all that is called God, or is worshipped, sitting in the temple of God, and showing himself that he is God." 2 Thess.

ii. 4. But, like others who have assumed divine prerogatives and honours, "his end; it is nigh at hand, and his judgment, it will not tarry." In the midst of his blasphemy, Boniface is taken prisoner by an emissary of the King of France, by whom he is treated with the utmost indignity and rudeness, and in the extremity of his rage and mortification he dies. His appearance and manner at the last are thus described: \* "His eyes were haggard; his mouth white with foam; and he gnashed his teeth in silence. He passed the day without nourishment, and the night without repose; and when he found that his strength was failing, and his end was nigh, he removed all his attendants, that there might be no witness to his final feebleness and parting struggle. After some interval, his domestics burst into the room, and beheld his body stretched on the bed, stiff and cold. The staff which he carried, bore the marks of his teeth, and was covered with foam; his white locks were stained with blood; and his head was so closely wrapped in the counterpane, that he

\* Sismondi, *Rep. Ital.* cap. xxiv.

was believed to have anticipated his impending death by violence and suffocation."

In the person of Boniface, the power of the popes seems to have passed its zenith. Almost immediately after his death it began sensibly to wane. A series of events took place, in the course of the century, tending to weaken the strength of the pontiffs, and to detract from that awe and veneration with which they had been previously regarded. One of these events was the removal of the seat of the popedom from Rome to Avignon, in France, where it remained for the next seventy years. In consequence of this removal, the revenue of the pontiffs was materially diminished; and not only so, their enemies in Italy assumed greater boldness than before. They invaded and laid waste the territories of the church, and assailed the pontifical authority in their publications. Hence, a number of cities revolted from the popes: Rome itself became the fomentor of cabals and civil wars; and the laws and decrees sent thither from France, were often treated with contempt. No small part of Europe followed the example of Italy; and numerous instances show, that people

generally attributed far less power to the fulminations and decrees which issued from France, than to those which used to proceed from Rome. Various seditions were raised, in one place and another, against the pontiff, which they were but poorly able to put down and subdue.

Scarcely had what the Romanists call their "Babylonish captivity" terminated, and the throne of the pontiffs been restored to Italy, when another event occurred, of most disastrous influence upon their pretensions and claims. I refer now to what has been called the "great *schism* of the West." During the next fifty years, the church had two or three heads at once; and the rival popes assailed each other with excommunications, maledictions and all sorts of hostile measures. By this means the nerves of the pontifical power were cut and could not afterwards be restored. Kings and princes, who before had been, in some sense, the servants of the pontiffs, now became their judges and masters. Moreover, great numbers, despising and disregarding those who could thus fight for empire, committed themselves and their salvation



into the hands of God, acknowledging that religion might remain and the church be safe, without any visible earthly head.

Other causes might be mentioned which contributed, at this time, to render the nations of Europe, both sovereigns and people, uneasy and restive under the tyranny of the popes. Their past high pretensions, though at present a little relaxed, were still freshly remembered; and it was well understood that they waited only for favouring circumstances to return to them with new vigour. Besides, by their numerous exactions and extortions, growing out of the sale of benefices and indulgences, annats, Peter's pence, and other modes of collecting money, these ghostly prelates were enriching themselves, while those on whom the burdens fell, in many instances, were sorely oppressed. To show the extent of these exactions, it may just be mentioned, that in the coffers of one of the popes of the fourteenth century was found, after his decease, no less a sum than *twenty-five millions of florins*, all which had been extorted from the people, and the inferior clergy, during his pontificate.

Another source of uneasiness, at the time we are now considering, was the influence and interference of the *monastic orders*. There had been monks and monastic establishments from an early period of the church's history : but these professed recluses had been confined chiefly to their own peculiar employments, in their cells ; and though a useless, and, in some respects, worse than useless, class of the community, they had not, as a general thing, been troublesome. But in the twelfth century, several new orders of monks were instituted, whose object and manner of life were, in some respects, peculiar. They were, for the most part, itinerant preachers ; who, being under a solemn vow of poverty, subsisted, as they travelled from place to place, on the charities of the people. They were called *mendicants* ; and also *preaching friars*, or *brothers*. They were exempt both from civil and episcopal jurisdiction, being subject only to the pope ; and were, at that period, the most obsequious of all the minions of pontifical power. The principal orders of mendicants were the Dominicans and Franciscans. These were exceedingly numerous ; and, not-

withstanding their perpetual quarrels with one another and among themselves, were in the highest repute for learning and sanctity. So holy were they esteemed by some, that persons of both sexes, some while in health, and others when sick and in the near prospect of death, wished to be received into their orders, for the purpose of securing the favour of God. Many carefully inserted in their wills, that they would have their corpses wrapped in a sordid Dominican or Franciscan garment, and be buried among the mendicants. For the amazing superstition and ignorance of the aged people to believe that those would find Christ a gracious judge at the last day, who should appear before his tribunal associated with the mendicant monks.

During the three following centuries, these monks had the direction of nearly every thing in church and state. They held the highest offices, both ecclesiastical and civil; taught, with almost absolute authority, in the schools and churches; and defended the authority and majesty of the Roman pontiffs against kings, bishops and heretics, with surprising zeal and success. What the Jesuits were after the re-

formation by Luther commenced, the same were the Dominicans and Franciscans from the thirteenth century to the times of Luther: the soul of the whole church and state, and the projectors and executors of all enterprises of any moment.

But in rising to this height of power and influence, the mendicants rendered themselves exceedingly odious to almost all classes, except the pope and his cardinals, the immediate court of Rome. The older orders of monks hated them, because they had risen up in their places, had usurped their authority and influence and eclipsed their glory. The bishops and secular clergy hated them, because they interfered, often, with their prerogatives, diminished their revenues, and, being subject only to the pope, set them at defiance. The universities hated them, because they enticed away their scholars, and crowded themselves into the professors' chairs. The civil authorities were jealous of them, on account of their sworn allegiance to the pontiffs: while the people, who were under a necessity of supporting them, and from whom, notwithstanding their vows of poverty, they were exacting

money in a thousand ways, were oppressed by them, almost beyond endurance. The Dominicans, for a long period, were the most successful retailers of indulgences. They were principally concerned in originating and conducting the Inquisition. They were ever ready to run on the pontiffs' errands, to do his business, and promote his designs, in any way that he should prescribe.

I have been the more particular in my account of these mendicant orders, because they had come to be a general source of uneasiness in the times of which we speak; and because, as we shall see, Wickliffe, in the fourteenth century, like Luther in the sixteenth, was roused to resist the tyranny of Rome, chiefly in consequence of the proceedings of these men.

The state of the church as to doctrines and morals was not materially different, in the fourteenth century, from what it had been in the ages preceding; certainly it was no better. Some of the leading doctrines of Christianity were, indeed, retained, at that time, in the Romish church, as they are now; but retained in such connexions, and with such accompani-

ments; as in great measure to neutralize their power. Thus, the inspiration of the Scriptures was still an article of belief; but the Scriptures could be received only as interpreted by the church; and even then they were not admitted to be more than a *joint* rule of faith, in connexion with the canons of councils, and traditions of the elders. The divinity of our Saviour was retained; but he was associated with so many other mediators and intercessors—the Virgin, the angels, and the saints—that, practically, his divinity amounted to but very little. The great doctrine of the cross, too, was retained; but so many other things were added to it as constituting the foundation of hope, that the doctrine itself was, in effect, nullified; and another hand was needed, like that of Paul, to sweep the rubbish of forms away, and bring back the grand idea of justification by faith alone. The sacraments of the church were nominally retained; but they were encumbered with such a mass of superstitious observances, that both the nature and design of them were lost.

The immorality of the age, both among the

clergy and laity, was deplorable. The deep corruption of the head flowed down through all the members, and poisoned the entire social and ecclesiastical system. Almost every thing was venal. Ecclesiastical benefices, spiritual gifts, the pardon of sins, a title to heaven, all were to be sold and bought for money. Ignorance and superstition, brutish sensuality, gross imposture and daring impiety everywhere prevailed. As an instance of the latter sin, I may refer to the pretence of the Franciscans, that the founder of their order was *another Christ*, or in all things *like to Christ*. The gospel of Christ, they said, would soon be abrogated, and a new and eternal gospel—the gospel of St. Francis, would take its place.

The mode of discussing religious truth, at this period, was peculiarly unhappy. The subtle, scholastic, hair-splitting method was in the highest repute. Aristotle was the great philosophical luminary. Lombard, Aquinas, and Duns Scotus were the principal theological guides. By the learned men of the age, the *seraphic, angelical, irrefragable doctors*, as they were termed—these writers were vastly

more studied than the Scriptures, and were regarded, probably, as of higher authority.

Previous to the time of Wickliffe, the Roman see had been accustomed to consider the English as the most obedient and exemplary among its subjects. They received with reverence every innovation on their belief, every demand upon their credulity, which proceeded from the unerring oracles of Rome; while they faithfully discouraged every new opinion which came from any other quarter. The heresies which had disturbed different portions of the continent—those of the Albigenses and Waldenses, the Paulicians and Paterines, the Cathari and Lollards, had not been allowed to defile the English sanctuary. Much less had it been profaned by any weeds of indigenous growth. The land in which Wickliffe was about to arise, and prepare his immortal weapons for the contest, was that on which the pontifical regards were fixed with the deepest complacency, and the most unsuspecting confidence.

Still, there were the remains of true piety in England, and occasional *appearances* of it, even in high places. Thomas Bradwardine,



who was consecrated Archbishop of Canterbury, in the year 1349, seems to have been a truly humble and devoted Christian. He was tinctured, indeed, with the superstitions of the times; but his doctrinal views were, in the main, evangelical and his religious experience highly satisfactory. His principal work was against the Pelagians, and was designed to counteract what he conceived to be the errors of the times.

A prelate yet more distinguished, especially on account of his opposition to popery, was Robert Grosseteste, otherwise called Great-head, Bishop of Lincoln, who flourished in the early part of the thirteenth century. As Wickliffe seems to have studied the character of this great man, and to have made him, to some extent, his model, it will be proper to dwell a little on his history.

He was born about the year 1175, at Stradbrook, in the county of Suffolk, and appears to have been a person of obscure parentage. His studies were prosecuted at the University of Oxford, where he acquired an intimate acquaintance with the Hebrew and Greek languages. Afterwards he went to Paris, at that

time the first seminary in Europe, where he made himself master of the French language. Here also he studied philosophy and theology; and such were his attainments, as to confer on him, for a time, the dangerous renown of a magician. Returning to his native country, he was, in the year 1235, promoted to the see of Lincoln. He seems to have possessed, from his youth, much seriousness of mind; and though immersed in the darkness and superstitions of the age, he was no sooner inducted into office, than he began to reform abuses. He convened the clergy of his diocese at stated times, preached to them, and urged upon them the duties of their office. Many of these, however, were not at all disposed to be benefited by his supervision or instructions. They were lazy Italians, whom the pope had introduced into the more opulent benefices, who neither understood the language of the country, nor had the ability or the inclination to instruct the people. Disgusted with the ignorance and dissoluteness of his clergy, the bishop attached himself, for a time, to the mendicant preachers, and encouraged his people to attend upon their labours. But

he lived long enough to repent of his generous confidence in the sanctity and disinterestedness of these papal auxiliaries. In 1247, an incident occurred, which must have awakened his suspicions (if they were still sleeping) respecting the spiritual usefulness and efficacy of the new orders. Two Franciscans were despatched to England, armed with a formidable apparatus of credentials, for the extortion of money on behalf of the pontiffs. Six thousand marks, equal to 50,000 pounds sterling, or 250,000 dollars, was the moderate sum demanded from the clergy of the diocese of Lincoln. The enormity of the impost, and the pompous insolence of the exactors, filled the honest prelate with indignation and amazement. "Friars," said he, "with all reverence to his holiness be it spoken, the demand is as dishonourable as it is impracticable. The whole body of the clergy and people are equally concerned in it with myself. To give a definite answer to such a demand before the sense of the nation is taken upon it, would be, on my part, rash and absurd."

Notwithstanding this intrepid repulse of the mendicants, Bishop Greathead succeeded, the

next year, in obtaining authority from Innocent IV., to reform the religious orders in his diocese. The letters conferring this authority cost him a large sum; and the event shows that their *price* was the chief motive which reconciled the pontiff to such an appearance of concession. In pursuance of this commission, the bishop determined to take into his own hands the rents of the religious houses, in order that he might appropriate to the services of piety, the wealth which had hitherto been wasted in luxury and display. Enraged at this proceeding, the monks appealed directly to the pope; and the bishop, in his old age, was obliged to travel to Lyons, where Innocent resided. Roman venality was now at its height, and (as might have been expected) the pope determined the cause in favour of the monks. Grieved and astonished at so unexpected a decision, Greathead said to Innocent, "I relied on your letters and promises, but am entirely disappointed." "What is that to you?" answered the pope. "*You* have done your part, and *I* am disposed to favour them. Is your eye evil because I am good?"

The bishop, in a low voice, but so as to be

heard, said, with indignation, "O money, money! How great is thy power, especially at the court of Rome!" To which remark the pope replied, "You English are always grinding and impoverishing one another. How many religious men—men of prayer and hospitality, are you striving to oppress, that you may sacrifice to your own tyranny and avarice." This language from the most notorious plunderer in Europe, almost drove the good bishop to despair. He was, nevertheless, resolved to leave behind him his testimony against these iniquities; which he accordingly did, by delivering to the pope and two of his cardinals, copies of a long protest against the flagitious practices of the pontifical court. In this paper, he plainly tells "his holiness," that the Son of God died for the redemption of souls, which, without mercy, were delivered over to wolves and bears.

A few years after, the pontiff put the courage of the bishop again to the test, by a scandalous exercise of what was called the prerogative of *provision*. He addressed a letter to the bishop, requiring him to confer upon his nephew, an Italian youth, the first vacant

canonry in the cathedral of Lincoln; accompanying his injunction with a menace that excommunication should be the penalty of disobedience. To this demand Bishop Greathead returned an answer, which has rendered his name immortal. "It is impossible," says he, "that the sanctity of the apostolical see can be repugnant to the authority of Jesus Christ. But next to the sin of antichrist, nothing can be more contrary to the doctrine of Christ, than to destroy men's souls by defrauding them of the benefit of the pastoral office. Those who minister to their own carnal lusts by means of the milk, and wool of the sheep of Christ, and do not strive to promote the salvation of the flock, are guilty of destroying souls. Two atrocious evils are in this way committed. They sin against God himself, who is essentially good; and against the image of God in man, which, by the reception of grace, becomes a partaker of the divine nature. For the holy apostolical see to be accessory to such wickedness would be a monstrous abuse of power, an entire separation from the glorious kingdom of Christ, and a participation with the powers of darkness.

**No man, faithful to the apostolic see, can obey such mandates, even though they were seconded by the high order of angels themselves. On the contrary, every faithful Christian ought to oppose them with all his might."**

When this faithful epistle was read to the pope, it roused his indignation to the highest pitch. "Who," said he, "is this old dotard, that dares thus to judge my actions? By Peter and Paul, if I were not restrained by my generosity, I would make him an example to all mankind. Is not the King of England my vassal, and my slave? And if I gave the word, would he not throw him into prison, and load him with infamy and disgrace?" The cardinals strove to moderate the anger of the pontiff, and to convince him of the danger of proceeding to extremities; but his wrath was not to be restrained. He excommunicated the rebellious prelate, and appointed Albert, one of his nuncios, to succeed him. But the thunderbolt fell harmless at the feet of Greathead. The pope's decree was universally neglected, and the bishop remained in quiet possession of his dignity.

But this venerable prelate was now fast

advancing towards the end of his labours. In October of the same year, he was seized with a disorder which speedily terminated all his conflicts. On his death-bed, the burden of his lamentations was, the positively *antichristian* character of the Romish hierarchy: "For by what other name," he asked, "but that of *Anti-Christ*, are we to designate a power which labours to destroy the souls which Christ came to save and redeem?" In the midst of these lamentations, his voice failed him, and soon after he expired. When the pope heard of his death, he exultingly exclaimed, "I rejoice, and let every true son of the church rejoice with me, that my great enemy is removed."

The following character of Greathead was given by Matthew Paris, one of the monks of St. Albans; and it is the more remarkable, since Paris was not a little prejudiced against him, on account of the severity with which he had treated the monastic orders. "The holy bishop, Robert," says he, "departed this world, which he never loved, and which was always to him as a place of banishment. He was the open reprover of my lord the pope,



and of the king, as well as of the prelates. He was the corrector of monks, the director of priests, the instructor of the clergy, the patron of scholars, a preacher to the laity, the punisher of incontinence, the diligent investigator of various writings, and the scourge of lazy and selfish Romanists, whom he heartily despised." "In regard to temporal concerns, he was liberal, polite, cheerful, and affable; in spiritual things, he was devout, humble, and contrite; in the execution of his episcopal office, he was diligent, venerable, and indefatigable."\*

Having dwelt thus long on one of the prototypes of Wickliffe, especially in his opposition to the pope and the monks, I shall have time to devote but a few words to a second—I mean Richard Fitzralph, Archbishop of Armagh. This eminent confessor was bred at Oxford, where he had abundant opportunities of observing the mischief and confusion occasioned by the predominance of the mendicant orders. He charges them with encroaching on the rights of the secular clergy, and preventing

\* Mat. Paris, p. 876.

them from the exercise of godly discipline. "I have," says he, "in my diocese of Armagh, about two thousand persons, who stand condemned by the censures of the church; of which number scarcely fourteen have applied to me or my clergy for absolution. Yet they all receive the sacraments, as others do, because they have been absolved, or pretend to have been absolved, by friars." He also charges them with troubling the universities, and seducing into their number the most promising students; and with so much success, that parents at length became fearful of sending their sons to the universities, lest they should eventually be consigned to a life of wandering beggary. The consequence of this alarm was so great, that within the recollection of Fitzralph himself, the number of students had been reduced from 30,000 to 6,000. He further withstood the course of life pursued by the mendicants, especially their practice of begging; maintaining that it is every man's duty to support himself by honest labour; that it forms no part of Christian wisdom and holiness for men to profess themselves mendicants; that to subsist by begging ought to be

a matter of necessity, never of choice; that the Son of God, as he never taught such a doctrine, so he never practised it in his own person; that though he was always poor, when on earth, he never was a beggar. This was to strike at the root of the pretended sanctity of the friars, who were enraged to find the very practice in which they gloried as the height of virtue, represented as, in its own nature, unlawful. Fitzralph was, therefore, cited by the friars to appear before Pope Innocent VI., and give an account of the doctrine he had maintained, both in the pulpit and in conversation. The archbishop obeyed, and in the presence of the pope and his assembled cardinals, defended the rights of parochial ministers against the intrusion of the mendicants, and exposed the various enormities of the latter. From this period, the remainder of his life was grievously embittered by persecution. After passing seven or eight years in painful and dangerous exile, he expired at Avignon; and was honoured in his death by the acknowledgment of a cardinal, that on that day, a mighty pillar in Christ's church had fallen.

The following are the opening words of a prayer of the archbishop, which Fox has preserved to us in the original Latin: "To thee be praise, glory and thanksgiving, O Jesus, most holy, most powerful, most precious; thou who hast said, *I am the way, the truth, and the life*; a way without error, truth without a cloud, and life without end. For thou thyself hast shown me the way. Thou thyself hast taught me the truth. And thou thyself hast promised me the life. Thou wast my way in exile, my truth in counsel, and thou wilt be my life in reward."\*

\* Fox, p. 472.

## CHAPTER II.

**B** th and family of Wickliffe—A member of Merton College, Oxford—His proficiency in scholastic learning—Devotes himself to the study of the Bible—His first publication—Opposes the mendicants—Is promoted in the church—Is president of Baliol College, and of Canterbury Hall—Is ejected from Canterbury Hall—Defends England against the demands of the pope—Practice of conferring civil offices on clergymen.

In the preceding chapter, I have endeavoured to exhibit something of the state of religion, external and internal, in the Romish church, and more especially in England, in the age immediately preceding that of Wickliffe. This seemed necessary, in order that the reader might be prepared to appreciate the circumstances of the case, the formidable difficulties with which he had to contend, and the strength of that genius which could force its way through so much darkness, and so great difficulties, till it not only rose into the light

of truth itself, but became the instrument of diffusing that light to distant lands and remote generations.

John Wickliffe (or *de Wickliffe*) was born in the small village of Wickliffe, near the town of Richmond, in Yorkshire, about the year 1324. His family seems to have been one of distinction and wealth, who were lords of the manor, and patrons of the rectory. Owing probably to the reproach growing out of his defection from the predominant religion, the name of John Wickliffe is not to be found in the extant records of the household. There is a manifest allusion to the disgrace which his family conceived he had entailed upon them, in one of the publications of Wickliffe; in which he says, "If a child yield himself to meekness and poverty, and flee covetousness and pride, from a dread of sin, and to please God; by so doing he getteth many enemies to his elders, and *they say that he slandereth all their noble kindred, who were ever held true men and worshipful.*" In our own times, the most distinguished families would be as proud to claim consanguinity with

Wickliffe, as the obscurest in his days may have been anxious to disclaim it.

Of the childhood of Wickliffe, nothing is certainly known. We first hear of him as a member of Queen's College, Oxford. He shortly removed from Queen's to Merton College, at that period the most celebrated of all the English seminaries. No less than three of the English metropolitans were educated here, during the fourteenth century; Thomas Bradwardine, Simon Mepham, and Simon Islep. Here Walter Burley acquired that solid erudition which obtained for him the title of the "*Perspicuous Doctor*," and qualified him to become the preceptor of Edward IV. William Occum, the poet Chaucer, and, as some will have it, the renowned Duns Scotus, are also to be numbered among the sons of Merton.

In this venerable and distinguished seat of learning, it was the lot of Wickliffe to be placed; where he devoted himself, with intense application, to the scholastic writers, and to the study of civil and canon law. He is said to have committed to memory some of the more intricate portions of Aristotle; and

one of his bitterest enemies has described him as "second to none in philosophy, and in scholastic discipline, *incomparable*." His favourite theological writers, among the ancients, were Augustine, Jerome, Basil and Gregory. Of more modern divines, the two that stood highest in his estimation, were bishops Greathead and Fitzralph, of whom some account was given in the previous chapter. But the studies of Wickliffe were nobly distinguished from those of his contemporaries, by his ardent devotion to the sacred volume; on which account he received the title of the "*Evangelical Doctor*," and by which means he laid a solid foundation of future usefulness. It is not easy for us, in these times, to conceive the vigour, the courage, the independence of soul, required in a teacher of theology in the fourteenth century, who, discarding every other standard, should place himself on the foundation of the Scriptures, and regard all human commentaries as mere subordinate outworks and defences. On the one hand, such an instructor must expect to encounter the frown of papal infallibility, which forbade all appeal to the Scriptures



from the authority of the church. On the other hand, there awaited him the scorn of the whole tribe of scholastics, who disdained every guide but Aristotle, and looked with contempt on those shallow spirits who resorted directly to the sacred text for the knowledge of salvation. I have spoken, in the previous chapter, of the paramount influence of the scholastic philosophy, in this age. The following testimonies will give us some farther impressions in regard to this subject. "The graduate," says Roger Bacon, "who lectures on the text of Scripture, is compelled to give way to the lecturer on *the Sentences*,\* who everywhere enjoys honour and precedence. He who expounds the Sentences has the choice of his hour, and ample entertainment among the religious orders. He who ex-

\* The "Sentences of Lombard," which was principally a compilation from the Fathers, and was designed to fortify religious faith, by the aid of scholastic metaphysics. Theology was first taught *scholastically* by Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, Peter Abelard and his disciple Lombard. It enjoyed its highest reputation in the next age, under Albertus Magnus, Thomas Aquinas and Durandus; the last of whom died, A. D. 1333.

pounds the Bible, is destitute of these advantages, and sues, like a mendicant, to the expounder of the Sentences, for the use of such an hour as it may please him to grant. He who reads the Sums (i. e. Systems) of Divinity, is everywhere allowed to hold disputations, and is venerated as a master: he who only reads the sacred text, is not permitted to dispute at all; *which is absurd.*" Thus writes the illustrious Friar Bacon, in the thirteenth century. John of Salisbury, in the preceding century, speaks in still stronger terms. He tells us that the more scriptural teachers were "not only rejected as philosophers, but unwillingly endured as clergymen: nay, were scarcely acknowledged to be men. They became objects of derision, and were termed the bullocks of Abraham, or the asses of Balaam." If, as some have supposed, the Old and New Testaments are the two Apocalyptic Witnesses,\* they may well be said to have prophesied in sackcloth, in these dark times. They bore, indeed, a perpetual testimony to the truth of God; but their language was heard with irreverence and suspicion.

\* Rev. chap. xi.

They were regarded as being little better than impostors and deceivers. It was in this state of the public mind, that Wickliffe had the independence to associate the study of the Scriptures with the keenest pursuit of the scholastic metaphysics, and to assign to the former their full supremacy, as unfolding to us *the way, the truth and the life.*

Wickliffe's first publication was put forth, A. D. 1356, and was entitled "the Last Age of the Church." He was led to prepare this work, in consequence of a series of calamities, as earthquakes, pestilence and inundations, which desolated Europe about the middle of the fourteenth century. So dreadful was the havoc, that by many it was regarded as the almost immediate precursor of the day of doom.\* Most writers sought for the procuring,

\* The pestilence here spoken of was one of the most frightful and desolating that the world ever saw. It commenced in central Asia, A. D. 1345, and having passed over the intervening countries, soon made its appearance in Egypt, Greece, Italy, France, and in almost every part of Europe. It has been computed that a full third of the existing inhabitants of the globe fell victims to this terrible scourge.

or rather *provoking*, causes of these calamities, in the vices and general corruptions of the age; but Wickliffe regarded them as the just judgments of God upon the hypocrisy and wickedness of the clergy. Like Jeremiah of old, he proclaimed, that from the prophet to the priest, every man dealt falsely; that by their rapacity, they ate up the people as it were bread; that their sensuality sent up a savour, which infected earth and "smelt to heaven." He speaks of more terrible judgments as impending; of "the pestilent smiting together of people, and hurling together of realms, because the honours of the Holy Church are given to unworthy men; mischiefs so heavy, that well will it be for that man who shall not then be alive." "Both vengeance of sword, and evils unknown before, shall in those days befall men, because of the sins of priests. Hence men shall fall upon their priests, and cast them out of their fat benefices, and shall say, 'This man came into his benefice by his kindred; and that by a bargain made before: this for his worldly service; and that for his money.' Then every such priest shall cry, 'Alas! alas! that

no good spirit dwelt with me at my coming into the church of God.' ” This work is chiefly interesting, as it shows the early bent of the reformer's mind, the direction of his thoughts, and the way in which God was training and preparing him for those more vigorous onsets upon a profligate priesthood, which were soon to be made.

About four years from the date of this first publication, we find Wickliffe standing foremost in that warfare which, for some time, had been vigorously carried on in opposition to the mendicant monks. The courage and talent displayed in this conflict, first elevated him to that commanding rank in public estimation, which he never afterwards lost.

I need not here repeat what was said in the last chapter, respecting the origin, character and influence of the mendicants. They first appeared in England about one hundred years before Wickliffe, and shortly multiplied to such a degree, and descended to such practices, as to become a general nuisance. Good Bishop Greathead at first patronized them, but soon repented of what he had done; and afterwards denounced them as a curse to

**Christianity.** Archbishop Fitzralph, we have seen, was their uniform opposer, and fearlessly arraigned them before the bar of the pontiff himself. It is not certainly known in what manner Wickliffe first employed his pen against them; but the pith and marrow of his controversy with them may be found in a small treatise, published full twenty years after his opposition commenced, in which he arranges his charges and objections under fifty distinct heads or chapters. He here charges the monks with persecuting, imprisoning and even murdering such persons, not of their order, as they found travelling about, seeking "to sow God's word among the people." He also charges them with deceiving and pillaging the people by what were termed their "Letters of Fraternity;" which he describes as "powdred with hypocrisie, covetise, simonie, blasphemie and other leasings." These precious documents, it seems, were written on fine vellum, splendidly illuminated and covered with sarsnet; and they conveyed to the faithful and wealthy purchaser, an assurance of his participation in the masses, vigils and other religious exercises of the holy brotherhood, both

during his life and after his death. Thus they provided the sinner, who was able to purchase them, with a sort of running dispensation, which always kept pace with the utmost speed of his transgressions. In this method of insuring impunity for crime, as Wickliffe observes, "they passen bishoppes, popes and eke God himself. For these grant no pardon, except men be contrite, and shriven, and in merite of Christ's passion: but they make no mention, nether of contrition, ne shrift, ne merite of Christ's passion; but onely of ther own good deeds."

The whole life of Wickliffe, from the commencement of his opposition to the mendicant orders, may be regarded as one continued protest against their iniquities. He seems never to have lost sight of the subject. He preached against them, wrote against them, and acted against them, whenever providence gave him an opportunity. To his latest breath, he ceased not to denounce them, as the pests of society; the bitter enemies of all pure religion; as monsters of arrogance, hypocrisy and covetousness; as the very tail of the apocalyptic dragon, which was to sweep away a

third part of the stars from the firmament of the church.

It will be easily believed, that by his persevering exertions against the mendicants, Wickliffe was treasuring up for himself a formidable accumulation of wrath, which in due time would be poured upon his devoted head. Meanwhile, he was recommending himself to the friends of the university, as well as to many of the nobility and the king. In 1361, the Society of Baliol College presented him with the church of Fillingham, a living of considerable value in the diocese of Lincoln. Seven years after, he exchanged this for another living of less value, but of more convenient situation, as being nearer Oxford. In the same year (1361) he was promoted to the wardenship of Baliol; which dignity he resigned, some four years afterwards, for the presidency of Canterbury Hall, a society founded, about that time, by his particular friend, Archbishop Islep. This prelate was distinguished for his generous attachment to learning, and for the salutary vigilance of his ecclesiastical administration. The selection of Wickliffe by such a man, to be the head



of his new foundation, must have been a signal and very gratifying honour.

In 1366, only one year after Wickliffe's appointment to the headship of the new college, Archbishop Islep died, and was succeeded in the primacy by Simon Langham, who was originally a private monk, and afterwards Abbot of Westminster. It is not surprising that one whose discipline and life had been among the religious orders, should entertain a prejudice against such a man as Wickliffe, who had been for years their most strenuous opposer. Langham took it upon him to remove Wickliffe from his high office, and to substitute a monk in his place. Against this proceeding of his metropolitan, Wickliffe appealed to the pope. A tedious process of between three and four years followed. At length the papal decree came forth, which not only ratified the doings of Langham, but virtually consigned over Canterbury Hall to the use and behoof of the monks forever. And what may be thought more strange, in consequence of a bribe of two hundred marks, this decision of the pontiff was afterwards approved and confirmed by the king.

That Wickliffe should be indignant at the iniquity of a transaction so disgraceful, both to the court of Rome, and to the government of his own country, may very readily be imagined; but that his opposition to popish authority was enkindled by resentment on account of the treatment now received, as all the Papal and some Protestant historians have represented, is utterly without foundation. For, in the first place, as a recent elegant biographer of Wickliffe\* has well remarked, not the slightest allusion to the subject has yet been discovered in any portion of his writings. So far as they have been examined, they furnish not a fragment of evidence to prove that the matter dwelt upon his mind, or raised a spark of worldly resentment. In the next place, it must be recollected, that his deep sense of ecclesiastical abuse and corruption had, long before, found utterance in his tract on the last age of the church, published in 1356. It is well known, also, that he had openly committed himself to decided hostilities against the mendicant orders, those minions of Rome,

\* Professor La Bea.

*previously* to the commencement of the dispute relative to the headship of Canterbury Hall; and that those hostilities were continued with unabated vigour, even while his appeal to Rome was pending. Nor is this all that he did, in opposition to Romish claims, during the pendency of his appeal. About this time, the papal claim of sovereignty over the realm of England, founded on the shameful surrender of King John to Innocent III., was revived, and the annual tribute of 1000 marks, which for more than thirty years had not been paid, was demanded. On failure to comply, King Edward III., the reigning monarch and the hero of his age, was apprized that he would be cited to appear at the papal court, there to answer for the default to his spiritual and temporal sovereign. The conduct of Edward, on this occasion, was precisely such as became a king of England. He laid the insolent demand of the pontiff before his Parliament, to which was returned, the next year, the following stirring and spirited answer: "Forasmuch as neither King John, nor any other king, could bring this realm and kingdom into such thralldom and subjection, but by

common consent of Parliamént, the which was not given, therefore, that which he did was against his oath at his coronation. If, therefore, the pope should attempt any thing against the king, by process, or other matters, the king, with all his subjects, should resist the same, with all their force and power."

This solemn legislative renunciation of servitude and vassalage, must have smitten with sore amazement the faithful adherents of pontifical supremacy. Their displeasure was speedily expressed by the pen of an anonymous monk, who, immediately on the promulgation of the above resolution, published a vindication of the papal claims; in which he challenged Wickliffe *by name*, to refute his arguments, and to maintain the recent decision of Parliament. Is it not perfectly evident, from this fact, that Wickliffe was generally known, at that time, the *time of the pendency of his appeal*, as the determined adversary of papal encroachment; the champion whom, of all others, an advocate of the Romish power would be most anxious to overthrow; and, consequently, that his opposition to Rome could not have been excited on account of the

1369  
pope's decision, by which he was ejected from Canterbury Hall?

The performance of Wickliffe's antagonist in this controversy has not been preserved. His reply to it is, however, extant; from which it appears that the *object* of the monk, as might have been expected, was, in the first place, to ruin Wickliffe; and, secondly, to advance the interest of his own order. The argument of the monk in support of the papal claim, is all condensed in the following notable syllogism: "All dominion, granted under a condition, is, by the violation of the condition, dissolved. But the Lord Pope granted to our king the realm of England, under the condition that England should pay, annually, a thousand marks, which condition has, from time to time, been disregarded. Therefore, the King of England has long since fallen from the sovereignty of England, which sovereignty has reverted to the pope." In replying to this argument, Wickliffe undertakes to show, that the condition in question was one which the pontiff had no right to impose, or the king, without the consent of his Parliament, to accept; consequently, that the transaction was

void from the first, and all that the pope had ever received on the ground of it, was no better than extortion and robbery.\*

To conduct an argument such as this, and still retain his standing and character, as a true and obedient son of the Romish church, required no little adroitness and skill. In managing the matter, Wickliffe transfers the scene of controversy from his own study to the Parliament house, and puts, whatever he might wish to have said on the subject, into the mouths of speakers there. The first of them, he tells us, declared, "that tribute could be due only by right of conquest; and that it should be altogether refused, unless the pope could extort it by strength of hand." The next of these senators observed, "that the pope ought to be foremost in the following of Christ, who had not where to lay his head; that, by the nature of his office, he was absolutely incapacitated for receiving any such impost as he now demanded; that it was their duty to confine the pope to the observance of his spi-

\* In this reply, Wickliffe styles himself "the king's peculiar clerk;" which expression has been understood to imply that he was now chaplain to Edward III.

ritual function, and therefore to resist the exaction of civil homage or tribute." "If," said the third speaker, "the pope be *the servant* of the servants of God, nothing but the performance of service can entitle him to any payment. Service, however, whether temporal or spiritual, we have received none at the hand of his holiness. His demand of payment must, consequently, fall to the ground." "A third part, or more, of the land of this kingdom," said the fourth speaker, "is held in mortmain by the church; that is, by the pope, who claims to be lord of all the possessions of the church. It follows, then, that he must hold these lands, either as tenant and vassal of the king, or else as his liege lord and superior. That the king can have any superior within this realm, is contrary to the spirit of all feudal institutions; since, when lands are granted in mortmain, the rights of the original lord are invariably reserved. It follows, that the pope must be the king's vassal; and having continually failed to render homage and service, has unquestionably incurred the forfeiture appropriate to such default." "On what ground," demanded the fifth speaker, "was

it, that this impost was granted by King John? Was it for the benefit of personal absolution granted to himself, or for the removal of the interdict laid upon his kingdom, or for any forfeiture incurred by the monarch? If for either of the two former reasons, the transaction was basely simoniacal and iniquitous. It was *simoniacal*; for it savoureth not of the religion of Christ to say, *I will absolve thee, on condition that you pay me so much money, annually and forever.* It was grossly *iniquitous*; for what could be more shameful, than to burden the unoffending people with a penalty due only to the sins of the monarch? But if this mark of servitude were imposed for the *last* of the above reasons, it must follow that the pope is, in the most intolerable of all senses, the liege lord of our king. For any pretended forfeiture, and at any time, he may pluck the crown from the head of our sovereign, and place it on the brow of a creature of his own. And who is to resist the beginnings of such encroachments, if we do not?" "The goods of the church," said another, "cannot be lawfully alienated, without an adequate and reasonable consideration. It



is, therefore, monstrous that the pope should pretend to dispose of a realm so broad and rich as this, for the paltry rent of a thousand marks a year." Another speaker insisted, that "the pope could not be the sovereign lord of this land, above the king, because he is liable to sin; and by actually incurring mortal sin, he would, according to the doctors of theology, forfeit all title to dominion." It was very forcibly urged, by the last of the speakers, "that an improvident stipulation of the king, the result of his own judicial infatuation, and affecting the rights and interests of a whole people, could never be held perpetually binding, unless confirmed by the formal and solemn acquiescence of all orders and estates of the realm. Such plenitude of authority and consent was, in this instance, wanting. The whole transaction, therefore, must be utterly null and void."

From these considerations, thus solemnly urged by the secular counsellors of the nation, Wickliffe conceives himself entitled to conclude, that the condition imposed by the pope, and accepted by King John, was altogether a *vain thing*; and he commends to his

monkish adversary the task of proving it to be otherwise. "But if I do not mistake," he adds in conclusion, "the day of doom will first arrive, when every exaction shall cease, before my adversary, will be able to establish, that a stipulation such as this can ever be consistent either with honesty, or with reason."

In reviewing this argument, we hardly know which most to admire, the ingenuity of the author, in thus keeping his own head out of danger, and throwing the responsibility of the reasoning upon members of Parliament, or the force and conclusiveness of the reasoning itself. It is not improbable that some of these arguments had actually been used in Parliament; but it admits not of a question, that the composition and arrangement of them, as they stand in the writings of Wickliffe, are to be ascribed to the Reformer. It is not known that any reply to them was ever attempted; or that the pope's demand of tribute, on the ground of the concession made by King John, was further pressed. The tribute, at any rate, was no longer paid.

At the period of which we write, and for ages previous, most of the high *civil* offices in

England, as well as in other parts of Europe, were held by clergymen. The only rational apology for such a state of things is found in the fact, that the clergy, ignorant as they confessedly were, embodied nearly all the learning and intelligence then existing. The coarse and ignorant heroes of the feudal ages positively gloried in their utter destitution of all *clerk-like* qualifications. To write and read were regarded by them as despicable vanities, which dishonoured a warrior, and degraded him to the level of a monk. They cherished a feeling of disdain for arts, the *want* of which kept them in a state of humiliation, and placed them at the mercy of a profession, alternately the object of their derision and their fears. While this habit of thought and feeling prevailed, the highest secular responsibilities would almost necessarily devolve upon the clerical orders. But in the fourteenth century, these days of ignorance and weakness were evidently passing away. It was impressed upon Wickliffe, and perhaps upon others, that to impose civil offices and the cares of state upon an order of men, whose appropriate business was to take charge only of man's spiritual and

eternal interests, involved a monstrous inconsistency. In the treatise termed "the Regimen of the Chutch" (commonly regarded as Wickliffe's) he says, "Neither prelates, nor doctors, nor deacons, should hold secular offices; that is, those of chancery, treasury, privy-seal, and other such like offices in the exchequer; neither be land-stewards, nor stewards of hall, nor clerks of kitchen, nor clerks of accounts; neither be occupied in any secular office in lords' courts; more especially while secular men are able to do such offices." In another of his compositions, he complains, that "prelates and great religious professioners are so occupied in heart about worldly lordships, and with pleas of business, that no habit of devotion, of praying, of thoughtfulness on heavenly things, on the sins of their own hearts, or those of other men, may be preserved. Neither may they be found studying and preaching of the gospel, nor visiting and comforting of poor men." The consequence, he says, is, that those churchmen who become "rich clerks of chancery, of the common bench, of the king's bench and the exchequer; justices, sheriffs, stewards and bailiffs," contract such

habits of worldliness, as must utterly disqualify them for rebuking with authority the worldliness of other people.

In this plain and faithful manner did Wickliffe persist in arraigning what he conceived to be one of the evils and inconsistencies of his age, to the no small annoyance of those titled monks and professed ministers of Christ, who had literally sunk the sacred office in the business and emoluments of the world. Nor did he remonstrate without effect. In the year 1371, a petition was presented by the Parliament to the king, requesting the *exclusion* of ecclesiastical persons from offices of state; which petition the king promised to dispose of according to the advice of his council. In the course of a few weeks, the celebrated William of Wykeham, Bishop of Winchester, resigned the great seal, and the Bishop of Exeter retired from the office of treasurer. This success, however, was but partial and temporary. It seems to have commenced with Wickliffe, and to have died with him. The obnoxious practice continued, with slight interruption, till nearly the middle of the seventeenth century. Of the ecclesiastics who sat

in the court of chancery, Bishop Williams is said to have been the last. Of clerical statesmen and prime ministers, no instance occurs subsequently to that of Archbishop Laud. Since his time, no high political function has, in England, been intrusted to an ecclesiastic. On the continent the usage survived for a longer period.

## CHAPTER III.

Wickliffe becomes a Doctor of Divinity, and is promoted to the theological chair at Oxford—His scholastic exertions—His exposition of the decalogue—His "Pore Caitiff"—Is sent on an embassy to the pope—His preferments in the church—Is arraigned on a charge of heresy—His manner of escape—Again defends his country against the exactions of Rome—Four bulls issued against him from Rome—Is arraigned at Lambeth palace, but escapes—His confessions examined, and he vindicated from the charge of cowardice—His answer to the "Motley Theologue"—His interview with the monks, in time of sickness.

IN the year 1372, Wickliffe was promoted to the degree of Doctor of Divinity, and raised to the Theological chair of Oxford. It was while he retained this commanding position, that he delivered his *scholastic exertions*; a considerable number of which are extant among his unpublished writings. But as these were written, chiefly, after the scholastic method, the fashion of the times, they are not now regarded as of great value.

A more important work, which engaged his attention about this time, was his "Exposition of the Decalogue." A plain scriptural commentary on the laws of the two tables may seem to us no mighty achievement for so renowned a doctor. But in those times, there can be no doubt, such a work was a phenomenon of great rarity and importance. In his preface, he tells us, that it was then no uncommon thing for men to call God, Master, forty, sixty, eighty years, and yet remain ignorant of his ten commandments." And when the commandments were known, the priestcraft of the age was generally at hand, with some scholastic distinction or quibble, some *refuge of lies*, in which the transgressor might be safe from the penalty. To lay the divine law before the world, in all its purity and sovereignty, was, in such an age, one of the noblest services which a teacher could render to the church.

The following extracts from Wickliffe's comments on the law, will give the reader some idea of his spirit and manner, especially in his practical works. In his exposition of the first and second commandments, he says,



“ Let each man look into his own conscience, upon what he most sets his liking and thought, and what he is most busy about to please; and what thing a man loveth most, *that he maketh his god*. Thus, when a man or woman forsakes meekness, and gives himself to highness and pride, he maketh *the fiend* his god; for he is king over all proud folk, as we read in the book of Job. And so the envious man or woman have hatred and vengeance for their god. And the idle man hath sloth and slumber for his god. The covetous man and woman make worldly goods their god; for covetousness is the root of all evils, and serveth to idols, as St. Paul saith. Gluttonous and drunken folk make their belly their god, for the love and care they have for it. And so lecherous folk make them a false god, for the fond delight and lust that reigneth in them. Thus, every man and woman, using deadly sin, breaks this first commandment, worshipping false gods.”

Among the most crying enormities of Wickliffe's age, may be reckoned the habitual *profaneness* which infected the language of the laity, and which received no effectual discour-

tenance from the higher dignitaries of the church. In his treatise of prelates, he describes the abbot or prior, riding "with four-score horse, with harness of silver and gold, and many ragged and fittred squires, and other men, *swearing* by the heart, nails, bones, and other members of Christ." The poet Chaucer, who lived in the same age, says, that men seemed to glory "in *swering*; and held it a gentry, and a manly deed, to swere great oaths, albeit the cause be not worth a straw." Against this odious abomination, Wickliffe most vehemently protests, in his comment on the third commandment. "For the love of Christ, who for you shed his blood, beware henceforth, night and day, of your oathe's swearing." To infer from the mercy of God, says he, that "he will not damn men for a light oath, is to forget, that only for eating an apple, against the forbidding of God, Adam and all mankind were justly condemned, until Christ bought them again with his precious blood and hard death upon the cross."

In enforcing the tenth commandment, Wickliffe says, "Count not thy neighbour's goods; despise him not; slander him not; deceive

him not; scorn him not; belie him not; backbite him not; the which is a common custom now-a-days. And so, in all other things, do no otherwise than thou wouldst reasonably that he did to thee. But many think, if they give a penny to a pardoner, they shall be forgiven the breaking of all the commandments of God; and, therefore, they take no heed how they keep them. But I say to thee for certain, though thou have priests and friars to sing for thee, and though thou each day hear many masses, and found chauntries and colleges, and go on pilgrimage all thy life, and give all thy goods to pardoners; all this shall not bring thy soul to heaven. While, if the commandments of God are revered to the end, though neither penny nor half-penny be possessed, there shall be everlasting pardon and bliss in heaven." This was strange doctrine to be sounded forth from the divinity chair of Oxford, in the middle of the fourteenth century. The religious community in England, or a great portion of it, could hardly have been more startled by the clang and thunder of the last trumpet.

At this time, or near it, Wickliffe published

a collection of *small tracts*, written in English, for the purpose, as he says, of "teaching simple men and women the way to heaven." This, doubtless, was the first collection of religious tracts that was ever published in our language. The work was entitled "the Pore Caitiff." I give the following extract, as a specimen of the author's talents for popular exposition and illustration. "Man's body is as a horse, that bears its rider through many perils. But it were great folly for any man to fight upon an unbridled horse; and if the horse be wild and ill-broken, the bridle must be heavy and the bit sharp, to hold him in. This bridle is *abstinence*, with which his master shall restrain him to be meek, and bow to his will. The bridle, however, must be managed by wisdom; for else the horse will fail at the greatest need, and harm his master, and make him lose the victory. Further, this bridle must have two reins, both strong and even, so that neither pass the other in length. The one rein is too loose, when thou lettest thy flesh have its will too much. The other is held too straight, when thou art too stern against thine own flesh; for then thou de-

stroyest its strength and might, so that to help thee as it should, it may not. Therefore, sustain thy horse, that he faint not, neither fail thee at thy need ; and withdraw from him that which might turn thee to folly.

“ That thy seat may be both steadfast and seemly, thy horse needs to have a saddle ; and this saddle is no other than *mansuetude*, or *meekness of spirit*, whereby thou mayest encounter all the roughness and peril of the way, with the semblance of ease and mildness. This virtue of mildness makes one gracious to God, and seemly to man’s sight, as a well fitted saddle maketh a horse seemly and praiseable.

“ Two spurs it is needful that thou have, and that they be sharp, to prick thy horse, if needful, that he loiter not by the way ; and these two spurs are *love* and *dread*. The *right* spur is the love that God’s dear children have for the weal that shall never end. The *left* spur is the dread of the pains of hell, which are without number, and never may be told out. And if the right spur of love be not sharp enough to make him go forward in his journey, prick him with the left spur of dread, to arouse him.”

It will be readily conceived, that this sort of homely, familiar imagery, followed up, as it is in the tract, with all the urgency of solemn exhortation, is admirably adapted both to gain and fix the attention of plain unlettered men. We have the best evidence that "the Pore Caitiff," at the time when it was published, and for a long period afterwards, was highly prized as a work of popular usefulness.

The testimony which Wickliffe was incessantly lifting up against the Romish oppressions and corruptions, was at this time in full harmony with the tone of public feeling throughout the nation. From the time of King John, the encroachments of the pontiffs upon the prerogatives and revenues of the people of England had been constantly increasing; and they had, at length, become intolerable. They could be patiently submitted to no longer. According to the saying of one of the bishops of Rome, "England was the pope's garden of delights." By another, the nation was more appropriately exhibited under the semblance of "a strong ass, crouching between two burdens." Resolutions and acts of Parliament had been repeatedly passed, with a view to

restrain pontifical encroachments and prevent the annual draining of so much money from the realm ; but these paper enactments were, to the giant strength of Rome, as a thread of tow when it toucheth the fire.

In the year 1373, an embassy to Avignon, where the pope then resided, was determined on, with a view to present existing grievances, and, if possible, to obtain redress. This first embassy having failed of its object, another was projected the following year, and Wickliffe was appointed one of the commissioners. The place of their meeting, in this instance, was Bruges, a city of great extent, and (at that period) of high commercial importance, where Wickliffe was detained no less than two years.

As a means of accomplishing the particular object in view, this embassy, like the preceding, amounted to but very little. The abuses complained of, continued afterwards much as they were before. But an incidental good effect to the Reformer, resulted from his visit to the pontifical court. It opened his eyes, and made him more distinctly acquainted with the crooked, time-serving policy which there prevailed. It showed him, by a nearer

inspection, the deformities of the professed Queen and Mother of all the churches, and moved his spirit to a sterner conflict with her abominations. It was on his return from this embassy that he openly denounced the pope, calling him "*Anti-Christ*, the proud and worldly priest of Rome: the most accursed of clippers and purse-cutters."

In November of the same year, while Wickliffe was absent on his mission to the pope, he was presented, by the king, with the prebend of Anst, in the collegiate church of Westbury; and shortly afterwards with the rectory of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, a living which he retained till his death.

In the year 1377, Wickliffe began to feel what he might have anticipated long before, the pressure of the hard hand of ecclesiastical power. The process against him was commenced by the hierarchy of England. In the convocation, held on the third of February, a citation was issued for his appearance at St. Paul's on the nineteenth day of the same month, on a charge of maintaining and publishing erroneous doctrines. The doctrines complained of, according to Walsingham, a



popish writer, were the following: "That the Church of Rome is not the head of other churches; that St. Peter was not superior to the other apostles; and that the pope, in the power of the keys, was only equal to a common priest."

On the day appointed for his appearance, Wickliffe was attended to St. Paul's by Lord Henry Percy, the earl marshal, and by John of Gaunt, who was Duke of Lancaster, son of the king, and, at that time, the most powerful personage in the kingdom. The scene which ensued was exceedingly tumultuous. An immense concourse was collected in the church to witness the proceedings; and it was not without the greatest difficulty that a passage could be made through the crowd for Wickliffe and his distinguished patrons to approach the spot where the prelates were assembled. When, at length, they had struggled through and Wickliffe had come into the presence of his judges, the earl marshal desired him to be seated, remarking that, "as he had many things to answer for, he would have need of a soft seat." "This interference," says Fox, "cast the Bishop of London into a furious

chafe." He declared that Wickliffe "should not sit. It was not according to law or reason that he who was cited to appear before his ordinary, should sit, during the time of his answer. He should stand." Other angry words passed between the Duke of Lancaster and the Bishop of London; in consequence of which some of the Londoners present began to cry out, that they would sooner lose their lives, than see their bishop so contemptuously treated. Instantly the uproar became general; the assembly was broken up; and the process against Wickliffe was, for the time, suspended.

On the 21st of June, 1377, Edward III. died, and left the kingdom to his grandson, Henry II., who was a minor. The country was now, and had been for some time, distressed and impoverished by its wars with France. It was also drained of its treasures, year after year, to meet the ceaseless exactions of Rome. In these circumstances, the question had been raised in Parliament, "whether the kingdom of England, on an imminent necessity of its own defence, might lawfully detain the treasure of the kingdom, that it be not carried out of the land, although the lord pope

required it, on pain of censures, and by virtue of the obedience due to him." The decision of this question was referred, at once, to the intrepid casuistry of Wickliffe. And in considering it, he rejects, as worthless, all merely human authorities, and appeals directly to the divine law. In the first place, he affirms that, "by the ordinance of God, the principle of *self-preservation*, which belongs to individual creatures, is likewise extended to communities; and that, consequently, our kingdom may lawfully reserve its treasure for its own defence, whenever its exigencies shall render that measure necessary." "The same conclusion," he further asserts, "may be drawn from the law of *the gospel*. The pope cannot challenge the treasure of this kingdom, but under the title of *alms*, and, consequently, according to the rules of *charity*. But it were no work of charity, but rather madness, to waste our resources upon foreigners, already wallowing in opulence, while the realm itself is sinking under domestic taxation, and in danger of falling into ruin." Wickliffe further illustrates this idea of alms, by appealing to the *example of Christ and the apostles*.

“Christ himself, the Head of the Church, whom all Christians ought to follow, lived by the *alms* of devout women.\* And in the first endowing of the church, whosoever he were of the clergy that had any temporal possessions, he had the same as a *perpetual alms*. And thus it appears that the pope hath not power to occupy the church's goods, as lord thereof, but as *minister*, and *servant*, and *proctor for the poor*. And would to God,” he adds, “that the proud and greedy desire of rule and lordship, which this see doth challenge unto itself, were not a preamble to prepare the way unto Anti-Christ.” Thus, for the second time, did Wickliffe stand up as the public advocate of his sovereign and his country, to plead their cause against the merciless exactions of a foreign potentate and priest.

There is one idea in this defence, and it occurs often in the subsequent writings of Wickliffe, which has been to him the occasion of much reproach. It has been said, that he makes *beggars* of the clergy; that he reduces them to a situation precisely similar to that of the mendicant orders. But this, obviously, is

\* Luke viii. 3.

not his meaning. He represents their temporal possessions as an *alms*, but then it is "a *perpetual alms*;" not a contribution to be solicited by them day by day, or year by year, from the members of their flocks; but an *endowment*, originating in voluntary benevolence and piety, and to be equitably and faithfully continued to them upon the same kindly principle. According to his views the clergy may be considered as holding their property in *perpetuity*, or so long as they continue, with some good fidelity, to discharge the duties of their stations; and liable to forfeiture only by such gross abandonment of duty as must defeat the purposes for which the Christian ministry was instituted. Such is the *proper* meaning of the language of Wickliffe in regard to this important matter; and that it is the intended meaning, is evident from his own example and life. The rectorship of Lutterworth he held, without compunction, till his death. And that he had no intention of making mendicants of the clergy, is evident from his incessant opposition to the existing mendicant orders, and to the very principle of their institution.

The foregoing answer of Wickliffe to the

query of Parliament was carried immediately to Rome, and produced an effect *there*, if nowhere else. It seems to have enkindled the furnace of pontifical wrath seven times hotter than before. In the month of June of the same year, (1377,) four bulls were issued forth, for the suppression and punishment of the audacious heretic. In these instruments, the pope "laments that England, illustrious for its wealth and grandeur, but still more so for the purity of its faith, should now be overrun with the tares of a pernicious heresy; and (to complete the affliction and the shame) that the evil had been felt at Rome, before it ever had been resisted in Britain. His holiness had been credibly informed, that John Wickliffe, rector of the church of Lutterworth, and professor of the Sacred Page, (it were well if he were not a master of errors,) had broken forth into a detestable insapity, and had dared to assert, and to spread abroad opinions utterly subversive of the church, and savouring of the perversity and ignorance of Marsilius of Padua, and John of Garduno,\* both of accursed

\* The individuals, whose names are here mentioned, denied the supremacy of the pope, and maintained the

memory." For this cause it was enjoined, that inquiry should secretly be made; and if it should turn out to be as represented, then the said Wickliffe should forthwith be apprehended and imprisoned; that his confession should be taken, kept strictly concealed, and transmitted, under seal, to Rome; and the offender himself be detained until further directions should be received. It was also enjoined, that due vigilance should be exercised to preserve the king and the royal family, together with the nobles and counsellors, from the defilement of these pestilential perversions. A paternal epistle was also addressed to the king, requesting that he would extend his gracious support to the contemplated proceedings, as he valued his good name on earth, his bliss in heaven, and the benediction of the holy see. A similar mandate was addressed to the University of Oxford, commanding them, on pain of forfeiting all their privileges, to suppress the doctrines imputed to Wickliffe, to seize the doctrine of justification by grace. They declared that works are not the *causes* of our salvation, but only a condition *sine qua non*. They were condemned by the pope in 1330.

person of the heretic, and to deliver him to the custody of the Archbishop of Canterbury.

Enclosed with the above documents was a schedule, containing nineteen erroneous conclusions, said to be maintained and taught by Wickliffe, of which the following were the principal: "That there is one universal church, consisting of the whole body of the predestinate;—That the eucharist after consecration, is not the real body of Christ, but only an *emblem* or *sign* of it;—That the church of Rome is no more the head of the universal church, than any other church is; and that St. Peter had no greater authority given to him than the other apostles;—That the pope has no more jurisdiction in the exercise of the keys, than any other priest;—That if the church misbehave, it is not only lawful, but meritorious, to dispossess her of her temporalities;—That when a prince or temporal lord is convinced that the church has made an ill use of her endowments, he is bound, under pain of damnation, to take them away;—That the gospel is sufficient to direct a Christian in the conduct of his life;—That neither the pope nor any other priest or prelate, ought to



have prisons for the punishing of offenders against the discipline of the church."

Such are the alleged errors which the pope and his adherents had drawn out from the writings of Wickliffe; and with some slight allowance on the score of phraseology, (which is that, not of Wickliffe, but his enemies,) it is manifest at this day, that the most of them are great and important truths. If Wickliffe had thus far emerged from the mists of superstition and come to the knowledge of such truths as these, it is evident that he had not studied the word of God in vain. The confirmed Papist, however, must have regarded them with utter abhorrence; and the hierarchy of England immediately set about accomplishing the odious task which its Romish master had enjoined. The primate and the Bishop of London declared, that neither entreaties, nor menaces, nor gifts, nor the imminent terrors of death itself, should divert them from their duty in this righteous cause.

At Oxford the reception of the papal mandate was exceedingly different from what might have been expected from true sons and champions of the church. It was even de-

bated, whether the bull should be honourably received, or disdainfully rejected. It was, however, at last received; and early in the next year, Wickliffe appeared before the synod of papal commissioners, assembled in the primate's chapel, at Lambeth palace. But here, again, disappointment was in store for the inquisitors. At the time of the meeting, the place was besieged by multitudes of Wickliffe's friends, some of whom broke into the chapel, and clearly showed by their words and demeanour, that they were prepared to resent effectually the infliction of injury on the person of the reformer. At the same time a message was received from the queen-mother, positively forbidding the delegates to proceed to any definite sentence against Wickliffe. The effect of this mandate upon the inquisitors is thus described by Walsingham, the popish chronicler: "As at the wind of a shaken reed, their speech became softer than oil, to the public loss of their own dignity, and the damage of the whole church. They who had sworn that they would yield no obedience even to the princes and nobles of the realm, until they had chastised the excesses

of the heresiarch, conformably to the papal mandate, were smitten with such terror by the message of the princess, that you would have thought their horns were gone, and that they had become as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs."

And thus was the prey once more rent from the jaws of the lion. The whole scene furnishes a curious indication of the turbulent spirit of the times. The presence of the mob, on the one hand, and the message from the royal dowager on the other, prove that the influence of Wickliffe had made formidable incursions into almost every region of society, from the highest to the lowest.

At this meeting, Wickliffe delivered to the commissioners a paper, containing an answer to the charges of heresy, and an explanation of the opinions contained in his conclusions. This, however, was not satisfactory to the commissioners; as they admonished him to abstain from repeating such propositions, either in the schools or in his sermons, lest the laity should be made to stumble by his perversions. Besides this paper, he presented to the Parliament, which assembled in April of the next

year, another document of a similar import, though with some variations, and in several parts more diffuse and explicit than the former.

In reference to these papers, the conduct of Wickliffe has been severely censured, not only by Papists, but by some Protestant writers, who have been blinded and deceived by popish authorities. The following statement of Dr. Lingard, a Papist, may be found in his history of England.\* “To prepare for trial, Wickliffe *first* published a defence of part of his doctrine, in language the most bold and inflammatory. Soon afterwards, he composed a *second* apology, in which, though he assumed a moderate tone, he avowed his willingness to shed his blood in defence of his assertions. There is, however, reason to believe that he was in no haste to grasp the crown of martyrdom; for, at his trial, he exhibited the same paper with numerous corrections and improvements.” In this statement the writer intends to represent Wickliffe as maintaining the port of heroism, when danger was at a distance, but as lowering his tone, and explaining away

\* Vol. iv. p. 256.

his meaning, in proportion to the nearness of its approach.

So confidently were representations of this kind made, and so often repeated, that the most respectable Protestant historians, such men, for example, as L'Enfant and Milner, were deluded by them. In the chapter which Milner devotes to Wickliffe, I am sorry to say that I think he does great injustice to the memory of this distinguished man. He represents him as not only "sinking into timidity," but descending to "artifice and dissimulation," on finding himself in danger. But later biographers, particularly Mr. Vaughan and Professor Le Bas, have searched more deeply into this matter, and have thoroughly vindicated the intrepid reformer from the charge of weakness or timidity. It now appears, that what Dr. Lingard calls Wickliffe's *first* paper, and which he says was drawn up in "language the most bold and inflammatory," was the *last* published of the three. It was not submitted to the commissioners at all, or intended for them, but was a reply to an anonymous popish adversary, whom Wickliffe designates as a "mixtus theologus," or motley theologue.

It farther appears, that what Lingard regards as Wickliffe's *third* paper, containing his "numerous *softening* corrections and improvements," was not intended for the eye of the commissioners and was not laid before them; but was prepared to be submitted to Parliament, after the commissioners were dispersed, and when his danger was, in a great measure, past. It was *then* that he lowered his tone, if he did so at all, and not while he stood in judgment before the legates of the pontiff.

It is not to be understood, however, from what has been said, that the document which Wickliffe exhibited to the commissioners was such a one as, with our ideas of things, we might think altogether the most desirable. There is, in some parts of it, a seeming obliquity and scholastic intricacy, which weakens its force and detracts from its dignity. We must remember, however, that the only copy of this paper which has reached us, is that transmitted by the popish historian, Walsingham, who was Wickliffe's bitterest enemy. We must remember, too, that a perfectly honest and fearless mind, after having been

subjected, like Wickliffe's, to the scholastic discipline, would be likely to deal in subtleties and intricacies, when plainer language would be more to the purpose. Two or three things, however, are certain, in regard to this paper. The first is, that it contains truths, which, of all others, would be most offensive to popish ears. It asserts, not only the fallibility of the pope, but his liability to mortal sin, and utter apostacy; and urges that, whenever he does fall into error or sin, it devolves on the church to correct or depose him. It represents the temporalities of the church under the condition of an alms and asserts their liability to forfeiture, in case of habitual perversion and abuse.

It is certain, in the second place, that this paper was by no means satisfactory to the papal commissioners. For, notwithstanding their affright on account of the mob, and the message of the queen, they ventured to disapprove of it, and to enjoin upon its author to abstain from all such teachings in future.

Another thing is also certain: while the doings of these commissioners were under consideration at Rome, and Wickliffe was in

hourly expectancy of excommunication, he wrote, what Lingard calls his first paper, but what was in reality the *third*—his answer to the “motley theologue,” in which he arraigns the whole popish system, in severer terms than he had ever used before. His adversary had affirmed that, from the moment any one becomes pope, he is incapable of mortal sin; “which is equivalent to asserting,” says the Reformer, “that whatever he ordains must of necessity be just and rightful. The pope might expunge any book from the canon of Scripture, or might add any book to it, or alter the whole Bible at his pleasure, and turn all the Scriptures into heresy, and establish as catholic a scripture that is repugnant to the truth. It is my opposition to these monstrous notions, that has called forth the papal fulminations, and armed the hierarchy, the university, and the throne against me.” He proceeds to denounce, as blasphemous, the assertion of his adversary, that the pope or the clergy can bind or loose, as effectually as God himself. “Whoever makes such an assertion,” says he, “is both a heretic and a blasphemer; one that should not be endured by



Christians, much less allowed to be their leader and captain; since his guidance can only conduct them to a precipice. Such usurpation ought to be resisted by the secular authorities, not only on account of the heresy which denies to them the power of withdrawing their alms from a delinquent church, but because it imposes an Egyptian bondage on the laity, and takes from them the liberty of the law of Christ. If the lord pope himself, at the suggestion of a Sergius, or an apostate Julian, or of his own heart, or at the instigation of the devil; nay, if an angel from heaven, were to promulgate such blasphemous opinions, the faithful, who hear the honour peculiar to their Lord thus wickedly usurped, must make resistance to it, for the preservation of the faith. For if it were once established that the pope, or his vicar, does really bind and loose, whenever he pretends to do so, how shall the world stand? If, when the pope pretends to bind, with the pains of eternal damnation, all persons who oppose him in the acquisition of temporal things, those persons are actually bound, what can be easier than for him to seize on all the kingdoms of the earth, and

subvert every ordinance of Christ? For a less crime than this, Abiathar was deposed by Solomon; Peter was reproved to the face by Paul; and pontiffs have been unseated by emperors and kings. What, then, should hinder the faithful now from complaining of much deeper injuries offered to their God? You are told, that secular men must not lay a finger on the possessions of the clergy; that ecclesiastics are placed beyond the reach of secular justice; that if the pope issue his decree, the world must instantly obey his pleasure. If this, indeed, be so, what follows but that your wives and your daughters and your worldly substance are all at the mercy of the pontiff and his priesthood; yea, that the whole order of the world may be subverted! And is impiety like this to be endured by Christian men?"

An argument like this may not sound so strange to us, in this nineteenth century, and in this Protestant land; but let us throw ourselves back between four and five hundred years, and place ourselves in the situation of this solitary and single-handed clerk, in the midst of popish England and priest-ridden

Europe, with no human protector on whom to rely, and the thunderbolt of excommunication levelled at his head, and we shall better appreciate the independence, the conscious integrity, the moral courage of him who could lift up such a voice, to break the stillness of the long gloomy night, and could hold up such a light to dissipate the darkness. That the expected bolt of excommunication did not strike him at this time, is not to be imputed to the lenity or forbearance of Rome, but solely to the interposition of Providence. At this critical moment Gregory XI. died, and of course the commission against Wickliffe, which he had instituted, died with him. And before the process could be renewed, there occurred what has been called *the great schism of the West*, one pope reigning at Rome, and another at Avignon, by which public attention was diverted from England, and Wickliffe was left to pursue his schemes of reformation in comparative peace. 1372

Worn out with the toil of incessant composition, and the anxieties occasioned by his recent prosecution, Wickliffe was seized, early in the next year, (1379,) with an alarming

sickness. The mendicants seized this opportunity to send a deputation to him, to see if they could not obtain from him some reparation for the numberless reproaches which he had cast upon them. The monks, finding him stretched upon his bed, reminded him, that, to all human appearance, his last hour had come, and expressed the hope that he would seize the opportunity thus afforded him, of making them the only reparation in his power, and penitently revoking, in their presence, whatever he might have said or published to their disadvantage. The Reformer heard them through in silence; and then ordering his servants to raise him on his pillows, and fixing his eyes upon his visitants, he said, with a firm voice, "*I shall not die, but live, and declare again the evil deeds of the friars.*" The consternation of the company may be easily conceived. They retired hastily and in confusion, and Wickliffe, happily, was raised up and spared for several years, during which he amply redeemed his pledge of renewed hostility to the mendicants.

## CHAPTER IV.

The grand schism in the popedom—Wickliffe writes upon it—His work on “the Truth and Meaning of Scripture”—His preaching and manuscripts—His pastoral character—Character of the clergy of that age—His translation of the Scriptures into English—How this work was regarded by the Romanists—Its circulation—Insurrection of the peasants falsely ascribed to Wickliffe.

NEAR the close of the last chapter, I spoke of the schism in the Romish church, and of the probable effect of this in the continued preservation and liberty of Wickliffe. The fury of the rival popes was wasted upon each other; and in the midst of their unhallowed contentions, the delinquencies of the English heretic seem to have been well-nigh forgotten. To him, however, this providential reprove brought no thoughts of relaxation from duty. No sooner had the papal schism occurred, and the conflict consequent upon it commenced, than Wickliffe was ready with a treatise on the subject, in which he calls upon

the sovereigns of Europe to seize the occasion which Providence had sent them, and shake to pieces the whole fabric of Romish dominion. "Trust we in the help of Christ," he exclaims, "for he hath begun already to help us graciously, in that *he hath cloven the head of Antichrist asunder*, and made the two parts to fight against each other; for it cannot be doubtful that the *sin* of the popes, which hath so long continued, hath brought in this division." "The time has now come for emperors and kings to help in this cause, to maintain God's law, recover the heritage of the church, and destroy the foul *sins* of clerks, *saving their persons.*" "Of all heresies," he says, "none can be greater than the belief that a man may be absolved from sin, if he give money; or because a priest layeth his hand on the head, and saith, *I absolve thee*. Thou must repent in thy heart, or God absolveth thee not." He goes on to deny the necessity of confessing to a priest; and concludes with calling on the secular powers to gird themselves to the great work of ecclesiastical reformation.

About the same time with the tract here

noticed, appeared a much larger work from the pen of Wickliffe, "On the Truth and Meaning of Scripture." By some of his biographers, this is regarded as the most important of all his original performances. In it we find asserted nearly all those great principles, which lie at the foundation of the Protestant reformation. The entire sufficiency and supreme authority of the Holy Scriptures, and the right of the people to read them, in their own vernacular tongue, and to form a judgment for themselves as to their meaning,—these truths did not originate with the reformers of the sixteenth century, but were strenuously insisted on by Wickliffe, a hundred years before Luther was born.

Among the voluminous remains of Wickliffe are found numerous specimens of his instructions from the pulpit; delivered probably during the last eight years of his life, while he had in charge the rectory of Lutterworth. The preaching of that day was chiefly of two kinds. The one was purely *topical*, consisting in the annunciation and discussion of a subject; and this was called *declaring*. The other was the *expository* kind, consisting in the reading

and exposition of some select portion of Scripture; which was called *postillating*. This last was the method in which Wickliffe was accustomed to address his congregation. His manuscripts—some of which are little more than brief notes, while others are more fully drawn out, and of which more than three hundred still remain—are denominated *postills*. We learn from Mr. Vaughan, who has laboriously examined the whole of them, that “there is scarcely a peculiarity of opinion adopted by Wickliffe, the nature or the progress of which might not be illustrated from these voluminous remains.” In them, the Holy Scriptures are everywhere represented as the only infallible standard of faith, and rule of life. The great truths of the gospel are prominently set forth; such as the frailty and depravity of man; the sufferings and merit of Christ, as constituting the only ground on which a sinner can rest the hope of pardon; and the necessity of the Spirit’s influences, in order to the recovery and sanctification of the soul. Nor did the Reformer consider it as any departure from the fit offices of the pulpit, to assail the abuses of the hierarchy, and de-



nounce them to his people, as the grand impediment to their moral and spiritual prospects.

It is evident that Wickliffe set a high value on the *public ministrations* of the gospel. This is manifest from his own example, and from that of his followers, many of whom, both during his life and after his death, were indefatigable preachers. It is possible that he learned a lesson on this subject from the successes of the mendicants, whose influence in deluding the people was in great measure to be attributed to their perpetually *preaching* the doctrines and superstitions of popery. It is more likely, however, that Wickliffe acquired this important lesson from the gospel itself. In that New Testament, for which he had so much reverence, and with which he was so familiar, he learned that *preaching* was one of the institutions of Christ. He learned also, that the apostles, and their coadjutors, were, all of them, faithful preachers of the word. And having learned as much as this, he would naturally become such a preacher himself, and leave it in solemn injunction to his followers to do the same.

The Reformer's sentiments on the subject of preaching are expressed in the following extracts from his writings: "The highest service that men may attain to on earth, is to *preach the word of God*. This service falls peculiarly to priests, and therefore God most straitly demands it of them. Hereby should they raise up children to God; and that is the end for which God has wedded the church. Lovely it might be to have a son that were lord of this world; but fairer much it were to have a son in God, who, as a member of the holy church, should ascend to heaven. And for this cause Jesus Christ left other works, and occupied himself mostly *in preaching*; and thus did his apostles; and for this God loved them." "Jesus Christ, when he ascended into heaven, commended it specially to his apostles *to preach the gospel freely to every man*. So also, when he spoke last with Peter, he bade him, as he loved him, *to feed his sheep*. And this a wise shepherd would not have done, had not he himself loved the service well."

Of the *pastoral* character and labours of Wickliffe, we have no certain information.

There is a tradition still current in the town of Lutterworth, that he was accustomed to devote a portion of each morning to the relief of the poor, to the consolation of the afflicted, and to the discharge of his duties to the sick and the dying. Every thing which is known respecting Wickliffe, combines to render this story probable. It is in strict accordance with his ministerial character in other respects, and with all that he has written on the subject. "Good priests," he says, "*live well*, in purity of thought, and speech, and deed, and in good example to the people. They teach the law of God, up to their knowledge, openly and constantly, and labour fast to learn it better. These are very *prophets* of God; *holy angels* of God; and the spiritual *lights* of the world."

As Wickliffe was the companion and particular friend of Chaucer, it has been supposed that he was the original of that poet's celebrated Picture of the Village Priest. If so, (and the conjecture is very likely to be true,) his character as a pastor was inimitable. It could hardly be improved.

"But rich he was of holy thought and work;  
He was a learned man, also a clerk,

That Christ's gospel truly would preach ;  
His parishioners devoutly would he teach."

• • • • •  
"Wide was his parish, and houses far asunder ;  
But he ne'er left, neither for rain nor thunder,  
In sickness, nor in mischief, for to visit  
The farthest in his parish, great or light.

• • • • •  
And this figure he added thereunto,  
That if *gold* rust, what shall iron do ?  
For if a *priest* be foul, on whom we trust,  
No wonder 'tis that a layman should rust.  
And shame it is, if a priest take keep,  
To see a foul shepherd, and a clean sheep.  
Well ought a priest *example* for to give,  
By his cleanness, how his sheep should live.

He set not his benefice to hire,  
Nor left his sheep encumbered in the mire,  
And ran to London, to St. Paul's,  
To seek himself a chantery for souls."

• • • • •  
"A better priest, I trow, no where there is ;  
He waited after no pomp nor reverence ;  
He made himself no spiced conscience ;  
But Christ's lore, and his apostles' twelve,  
He taught ; but first he followed it himself."

It adds not a little to Wickliffe's character as a preacher and pastor, to look at it in contrast with that of the parochial clergy gene-

rally, by whom he was surrounded. He has himself furnished us the means of doing this, in his little tract, entitled, "The Office of Curates Ordained of God." He begins by saying, "The office of curates is ordained of God. Few do it well, and many full evil. Therefore, test we their defaults, with God's help."

Immediately follows the catalogue of their misdoings; and if the representation does not outrageously exceed the truth, the clergy of that period were little better than pests to society, very "angels of Satan, to lead men to hell." They "haunted taverns out of measure, and stirred up laymen to excess, idleness, profane swearing and disgraceful brawls." They "wasted their time in gambling and revelry; went about the streets roaring and outrageous; and sometimes had neither eye, nor tongue, nor hand, nor foot to help themselves, for drunkenness." And so far from being ashamed of such enormities, they were ambitious of winning, by means of them, a reputation for "nobleness, courtesy, goodness, freeness and worthiness." Still, through the power of superstition, and the terrors of spiritual censures, they extorted the money and

the obedience of their enslaved congregations. In some instances, they entered into a sort of partnership with the itinerant mendicants and pardoners. "For," says Wickliffe, "when there cometh a pardoner to rich places, with stolen bulls and false relics, granting more years of pardon than come before doomsday, for gaining worldly wealth, he shall be received of curates, to have a *part* of that which he getteth. O ye curates!" exclaims at length the indignant Reformer, "see these heresies and blasphemies, and many more which follow from your wicked life, and wayward teachings. Forsake them for dread of hell; and turn to good life and true preaching of the gospel and ordinances of God, as Christ and his apostles did, for reward of heavenly bliss."

The labour which, beyond every other, has conferred immortal honour on the name of Wickliffe, was his translation of the Holy Scriptures into English. Particular portions of the Bible had been translated before, and abstracts of other portions had been made; so that people were not without the means of forming some slight acquaintance with the

word of God. But to Wickliffe belongs the honour of having given to the English nation the *first* translation of the entire Scriptures in their own mother tongue. The importance of this work was such as, in our present circumstances, can hardly be conceived. Suppose our own nation, at this day, were entirely destitute of the word of life; that there was not a Bible in the land which the people, generally, were competent to read, how great would be our indebtedness to him who should take up the heavenly roll, and break the seals! who should unlock for us the sacred word, so that we could look into it, each for himself, and learn for ourselves the way to heaven! But such was *the work* which the immortal Wickliffe performed for our fathers and mothers of the fourteenth century; and so great are the obligations which they were under to him.

It may give us some idea of the importance of this great work, to know how it has been regarded by learned Romanists. The historian Lingard, thus speaks of it: "There was another weapon which the Rector of Lutterworth wielded with equal address, and still

greater efficacy. In proof of his doctrines he appealed to the Scriptures, and thus made his disciples judges between him and the bishops. Several versions of the sacred writings were then extant;\* but these were confined to the libraries, or only in the hands of persons who aspired to superior sanctity. Wickliffe made a new translation; multiplied the copies with the aid of transcribers; and by his poor priests recommended it to the perusal of their hearers. In their hands it became an engine of *wonderful power*. Men were flattered with the appeal to their private judgment; the new doctrines insensibly acquired partisans and protectors in the higher classes, who alone were acquainted with the use of letters; a spirit of inquiry was generated; and the seeds were sown of that religious revolution which, in a little more than a century, astonished and convulsed the nations of Europe."

Less candid and sensible is the language of Knyghton, another zealous Romanist. "Christ committed the gospel to *the clergy and doctors of the church*, that they might

\* If he speaks of English versions, his words are not true.



minister it to the laity and weaker persons, according to the exigency of the times, and the wants of men. But this Master John Wickliffe translated it out of Latin into English; and by that means laid it *more open to the laity, and to women who could read, than it used to be to the most learned of the clergy, and those of them who had the best understanding.* And so the gospel pearl is cast abroad, and trodden under foot of swine; and that which used to be precious to both clergy and laity, is made, as it were, the common jest of both. Thus the jewel of the church is turned into the sport of the people; and what was before the chief talent of the clergy and doctors of the church, is made forever *common to the laity.*"

A higher commendation of the labour of Wickliffe could hardly be given, than is conveyed in this intended bitter censure. He made the Divine Word "*forever common to the laity.*" He "*laid it more open to them than it used to be to the most learned of the clergy, and those of them who had the best understanding.*" In another particular, Knyghton speaks truly. The translation of Wickliffe

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was not made from the original Hebrew and Greek, but from the *Latin text*, the only one at that time in use.

In answer to the objection of the Romanists, that it was grossly to *profane* the Scriptures to give them to the common people, it is proper that we hear the Reformer himself. In the preface to his translation he says, "They who call it heresy to read the Holy Scriptures in English, must be prepared to condemn the Holy Ghost, who gave it in tongues to the apostles of Christ, to speak the word of God in *all languages* under heaven." "The apostles converted the world by making known the truths of Scripture in a language familiar to the people. Why then should not the disciples of Christ, at the present day, take freely from the same loaf, and distribute to the people."

"Besides, according to the faith which the apostle teaches, all Christians must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, and be answerable to him for *all* the goods wherewith he has intrusted them. It is, therefore, necessary that the faithful should know these goods, and the use of them; for an answer by

prelate or attorney will not avail in that day, but every one must answer in his own person. Since, then, God hath given to both clergy and laity the knowledge of the faith, to this end, that they may teach it more plainly, and may faithfully work by it; it is plain that God, in the day of judgment, will require a true account of the use of these goods, how they have been put out to usury."

It is evidence of the zeal with which Wickliffe's Bible was transcribed and circulated, that notwithstanding all the fulminations of the Catholics against it, and their persevering endeavours through the long course of more than a hundred years to suppress it, the ancient manuscript copies of it are to this day considerably numerous in England. The pious Christians of that age were literally starving for the bread of life; and they were willing to make any sacrifice, and subject themselves to any inconvenience, in order to obtain it. The cost of a Bible, at that period, was not less, probably, than five hundred dollars of our money. It must be remembered, too, that the transcribers, vendors and possessors of the holy treasure were all the while watched by a

sleepless and blood-thirsty hierarchy. The eyes of a thousand-headed monster were ever upon them, ready to pluck the sacred word away. And yet, under all these disadvantages, the circulation of it moved steadily on. In place of every copy that was seized and burnt, several new copies were prepared. And thus the stream continued to force its way, in a sort of subterraneous course, till the season arrived when it should burst forth and refresh the land with its fruitful inundation. "Then," to use the language of Milton, "*then* was the sacred Bible sought out from dusty corners. The schools were opened; divine and human learning was raked out of the embers of forgotten tongues; princes and cities trooped apace to the newly erected banner of salvation; martyrs, with the unresistable might of weakness, shook the powers of darkness, and scorned the fiery rage of the old red dragon."

In the year 1381, occurred the memorable insurrection of the peasantry in England, under Wat Tyler, Jack Straw and others. By some Catholic historians this has been ascribed to the influence of Wickliffe's writings; just as the insurrections in Germany, in the time of

Luther, were, by many, ascribed to him. But no one has yet been able to trace the slightest connexion between these insurgents and Wickliffe, or any of his followers; and several circumstances may be mentioned, which go to render any such connexion in the highest degree improbable. In the first place, Wickliffe was strictly a *loyalist*. Much as he was dissatisfied with the ecclesiastical constitution of the church of Rome, he had no fault to find with the civil institutions of his country. These he loved and laboured to sustain. More than once had he risked his life in defence of them, against the absorbing exactions of Rome. It is not likely that he would arm a mob for the destruction of that which he had so earnestly supported.

In the second place, the leading insurgents claimed no connexion with Wickliffe; and had they succeeded, they would have shown him no favour. According to the confession of Jack Straw, just before his execution, their determination was to exterminate all churchmen, saving only the *begging friars*. These, they supposed, would be amply sufficient for all the purposes of religious ministrations.

Another circumstance, showing that Wickliffe and his followers had no concern in this insurrection, is, that John of Gaunt, the great patron of Wickliffe, was one chief object of the fury of the insurgents. They fired his palace, destroyed his furniture, and intended to have taken his life. In fact, there were causes enough for this war of the peasants, without ascribing it to the writings of Wickliffe. The intolerable burdens imposed upon the labouring classes by a grinding priesthood, a proud nobility, and a prodigal, wasteful court, were enough to drive them to desperation, and put them upon any method of bettering their condition, being assured that no change could make it worse. This is the cause assigned by a committee of the House of Commons at the time; and no other causes need be sought for. "To speak the real truth," say this committee, "the *injuries* lately done to the poorer commons, *more than they ever suffered before*, caused them to rise, and to commit the mischief done in their late riot; and there is cause to fear still greater evils, if a sufficient remedy be not timely provided."

## CHAPTER V.

Wickliffe attacks transubstantiation—This doctrine exposed—He is condemned by his colleagues at Oxford—Appeals to the king—His friend, the Duke of Lancaster, in vain attempts to silence him—His “Ostiolum,” or “the Wicket”—His doctrines condemned by a synod in London—His followers persecuted—He presents his appeal to the king and Parliament—Is summoned before the convocation at Oxford—Presents two confessions to the convocation—Examination of these—Wickliffe vindicated—He is banished from Oxford—Retires to his parish at Lutterworth—Is summoned to meet the pope—His reply—His “Objections to the Friars”—Writes against the crusade—His “Iriialogus”—His death—Reproaches of his adversaries—Testimonial of the University of Oxford—His books and bones burned—Estimation of Wickliffe by the English nobility, and royal family.

HITHERTO Wickliffe had been chiefly engaged in exposing the *moral* and *political* perversions of popery: things palpable to the sight and sense of all men, and in reference to which he might expect the sympathy and

co-operation of no small portion of the English nation. The university would stand by him while he raised his voice in defence of her immemorial usages and privileges. The crown would support him while he stood up as the champion of its prerogatives and rights. The people would assist him while he strove to unloose their heavy burdens, and deliver them from those exactions by which they were oppressed. Even the secular clergy would not desert him, so long as he pleaded their cause against the friars, and asserted for them their parochial claims. Our Reformer must have been aware of the vantage-ground which he thus occupied, and if he had been governed by mere worldly inducements, no consideration whatever would have led him to abandon it. But he loved and had diligently studied his Bible. He loved the doctrines of the Bible, and the souls of men; and could not endure those perversions of truth by which the interests of the soul were endangered. He loved the precious institutions of Christ; and when he contemplated the idolatrous profanation of one of these institutions, which the church of Rome had sanctioned, he felt his spirit stir-



red within him. He felt constrained to enter the secret chambers of the great Mystery of Iniquity, and, at the hazard of forfeiting all worldly favour and protection, to engage in a doctrinal, metaphysical controversy. :

The first object of his attack was the grand Romish perversion of the Eucharist, commonly called *transubstantiation*. This doctrine asserts that, in the sacrament of the supper, after the bread and wine have been consecrated by the priest, the *substance* of these elements is totally changed. It is mysteriously but actually transmuted (to use the language of the council of Trent) into "the *body* and *blood*, together with the *soul* and *divinity* of our Lord Jesus Christ; and therefore the *whole* Christ;" so that, following the consecration, there is naught but the *form* of bread and wine remaining. Such is the doctrine; the gross and revolting absurdity of which is only equalled by its horrible impiety. It supposes the priest to possess the power, instrumentally, not only of creating his Saviour at will, but of numerically *multiplying* him at will, and to any extent he pleases; so that while there is but *one* Lord Jesus Christ

there shall be, at the same instant, ten thousand different Christs, in different places throughout the world. The belief of such a doctrine, as Dean Swift has well said, "makes every thing else, of an outward nature, unbelievable." For this contradicts the testimony of all our senses; and when we have been schooled to disbelieve our senses, in what can we longer have any confidence in the world around us?

The first fruit of this enormous error, to him who receives it, is *idolatry*. He kneels down and *worships* the breaden god. The second result, if not more impious, is more stupidly monstrous, exceeding in absurdity the grossest superstitions of the heathen. The suppliant votary, having adored his god, takes it into his mouth and *eats it!!* He *eats*—in the language of his confession and belief—not only "the body and blood," but "the *soul and divinity* of the Lord Jesus Christ"!! The third result of this most nefarious doctrine is of more hazard to the soul of the recipient than either of the preceding. Because, having adored and swallowed his Saviour, he now *trusts* implicitly to what he has done for sal-

vation. He feels that he needs no other ground of hope. He has literally *received* Christ. He has eaten the flesh of the Son of man. Hence, whatever his character and life may be, he has no longer any cause to fear.

There is still another result of transubstantiation, which makes it of the utmost importance to the Romish priesthood. It puts a great deal of money into their pockets. There can be no salvation, on this ground, without their aid; and they cannot afford to work for nothing; especially to perform such work as that of turning a little bread and wine into the body and blood, the soul and divinity, of the Saviour. It was the foreseen gainfulness of the doctrine in question, to the priesthood, which led to its original adoption—which has continued it in the church of Rome for so long a period—and which is likely to continue it there, till the last vestige of superstition shall have passed away.

I hardly need say that the doctrine of transubstantiation has no countenance in the Scriptures. It was not taught or believed by the early Christian fathers. It was long before it was heard of in the church of Rome; and

after it had been broached, it continued to be more or less disputed, until the pontificate of Innocent III., in the early part of the thirteenth century. It was introduced into England in the eleventh century, and probably by Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury. At the time of Wickliffe, it had long been an undisputed article in the faith of the English church.

Considering the nature of this doctrine, and the fearful results of it, it is not strange that such a man as Wickliffe should have attacked it. He seems to have meditated his purpose for a considerable time, and to have counted the cost; till he felt that he could not be faithful to the high trust reposed in him as a professed teacher of God's truth, and be longer silent. Accordingly, in the lectures delivered by him in the university in 1381, he put forth twelve conclusions, in which he maintained that "the consecrated host which we see upon the altar, is neither Christ, nor any part of him, but an effectual *sign* of him; and that transubstantiation, identification, or impation rest upon no Scriptural ground."

By a majority of his colleagues at Oxford,

this was regarded as a declaration of war ; and a convention was immediately summoned by the chancellor, for the purpose of stopping the mouth of the heretic, and putting an end to the discussion. By this assembly, consisting chiefly of monks and friars, the doctrine of transubstantiation was solemnly affirmed, and imprisonment, suspension of scholastic exercises, and the greater excommunication were denounced on all who should teach or hear the opposite doctrine ; nor was the instrument thus prepared permitted to remain, for an hour, in the hands of its framers. It was despatched at once to the lecture-room of Wickliffe, and there promulgated in the hearing of his pupils. The suddenness of the affair, it is said, threw the Reformer into a momentary confusion. He, however, soon recovered himself, defied his adversaries to refute his opinions, and proclaimed his determination to appeal to the king.

This determination was regarded, not only as a strange thing, but as a new and high offence against the spiritual powers. That a clergyman and theological professor, charged with heresy, should think of appealing, not to the pope, or

a general council, or even to his ecclesiastical ordinary, but to *the king*, was an outrage unheard of, and not to be borne. The strangeness of the measure offended even John of Gaunt, who had hitherto been the protector and patron of Wickliffe. For no sooner did he hear of what had been done, than he hastened to Oxford, with a view to urge Wickliffe to desist from the controversy and to submit himself to his natural judges. His admonitions, however, were comparatively fruitless. The only effect of them was to induce the Reformer to keep silence till the opportunity should arrive for removing his cause to what he conceived to be the proper tribunal.

Meanwhile, his pen continued active, although his tongue was restrained. He employed the interval which elapsed, before the next meeting of Parliament, in the composition of a little work which he denominated "*Ostiolum*," or "*the Wicket*," the object of which was to expose the manifold contradictions and absurdities of transubstantiation. "It is pretended by the clergy," says he, "that, in virtue of their sacred office, they are enabled to *create* God, their *Creator* ; from

whence it follows, that they must not only be elevated far above all earthly jurisdiction, but must wax great masters above Christ himself; so that, since it is written, 'Thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother,' Christ would be bound to honour, with filial reverence, the priests, who thus become the fathers and creators of himself"! He further exposes the absurd pretence, that each individual portion of the sacramental bread becomes the *undivided body of Christ*. This position had been illustrated by the Mendicants, by referring to a mirror broken into a multitude of pieces, each of which would still retain the power of reflecting the same countenance. But Wickliffe ingeniously turns their favourite illustration against themselves. "For as each fragment of the glass," he says, "can present to the eye nothing more than the *image* of a face, and not the very face itself; so each portion of the broken bread might *shadow forth* the body of Christ, but could do nothing more." Again he triumphantly asks his adversaries, "Why do ye not worship the *wine* for God, as ye do the bread? For Christ as expressly affirmed that he was a vine, as he did that the bread was his

body, and the cup his blood." He adds, that "literally to identify the bread with Christ's holy body, is no less irrational than the foul misunderstanding of the Jews, who perverted the figurative words of Christ, respecting his body, into a boast, that he could destroy the temple of Jerusalem, and build it in three days."

In the month of June, 1382, an ecclesiastical process was commenced against Wickliffe and his followers, by William Courtney, Archbishop of Canterbury. An assembly of divines was convened in London, before which were produced twenty-four conclusions, which, it was affirmed, had been publicly preached among the nobles and commons of England. Of these conclusions—which imbodyed, with some colouring, the known sentiments of Wickliffe—ten were condemned as *heretical*, and the remaining fourteen were declared to be *erroneous*. Instructions were immediately given to the Bishops of London and of Lincoln, enjoining them to suppress the dissemination of these doctrines; and by the latter of these prelates, letters were forwarded, not only to the abbots and priors, but to all the clergy and ecclesiastical functionaries, throughout the arch-



deaconry of Leicester, within which the rectory of Lutterworth was situated, charging them with the execution of the decree; so that, in all probability, Wickliffe himself was personally visited with these paternal admonitions. Similar instructions were forwarded by the archbishop to one of his divines at Oxford, requiring him diligently to publish the decisions of the synod throughout the university. At the same time, several of the followers of Wickliffe were summoned before the synod in London, where they were obliged, either to recant their opinions, or to suffer a formal excommunication. The fact that Wickliffe himself was not also summoned, can be accounted for only from the circumstance that he had before appealed to the king; for, however offensive such an appeal might be, it was thought scarcely respectful to the royal authority wholly to disregard it.

While these things were transacting under the sanction of the archbishop, Wickliffe was preparing a formal complaint to be laid, not before the king only, but also the Parliament; which, accordingly, was presented in the autumn of the same year, 1382. It was his de-

sign, in this paper, to bring before the legislature, not merely the sacramental question, but the substance of that whole cause which it had been the labour of his life to support. The work is divided into four parts. The first is aimed at the *religious orders*, complaining of their undue authority and influence, and upturning the very foundation on which their towering superstructure was built. In the second is considered the claim of the church in that day, that its possessions were held by an inviolable tenure and were beyond the jurisdiction of the state. The third part contains the favourite theory of the author, that the income of the clergy is to be regarded as an *alms*, and is liable to forfeiture in case of misdemeanour or abuse. The fourth is devoted to the sacramental question; and it is remarkable that, on this point, he abstains from all diffuseness and intricacy, either of statement or argument. He simply asks that "Christ's teaching and beleave of the sacrament of his own body, as it is plainly taught in the gospels and epistles, may be taught openlie in the churches of Christian people; the contrary teaching and false beleave being

brought up by cursed hypocrites and heretics, and worldly priests unkenning in God's law, which seem that they are apostles of Christ, but are fools." He foresaw, no doubt, that an elaborate discussion of this question, involving the necessity of deep metaphysical research, would be quite out of place before the barons, knights, and burgesses of the realm, who might yet be qualified to estimate the more popular topics upon which he had enlarged. He closes his "Complaint" with an earnest protest against the selfishness of the priesthood, who, he says, "are so busie about worldlie occupation, that they seemen better bayliffs or reves, than ghostly priests of Jesus Christ."

Wickliffe derived less advantage from this appeal, than, probably, he had anticipated. A movement in his favour was attempted, in the House of Commons, but nothing effectual was done; and he was almost immediately summoned to answer before the convocation at Oxford respecting the opinions expressed in his "Complaint," and the doctrine propounded by him respecting the Eucharist.

Wickliffe was now placed in circumstances

of severer trial than ever before. The Duke of Lancaster, who had hitherto protected him, refused to stand by him in this hour of conflict, and he was left to face his prejudiced and exasperated judges alone. Nevertheless, the Lord stood by him, and supported him, and he was delivered out of the mouth of the lion. The fidelity and courage with which he acquitted himself may be learned from the words of his enemies themselves. According to their account, "He produced a confession, containing, substantially, all his former errors; and, like an incorrigible heretic, refuted all the doctors of the second Millenary on the question of the sacrament of the altar, affirming that, with the exception of Berengarius,\* they were involved in error; nay, that Satan was loosed, and had put forth his power in the person of the Master of Sentences," (i. e. Lombard,) "and of all who had preached the Catholic faith herein."

Knyghton, indeed, another popish historian,

\* An eminent divine and confessor of the 11th century, who opposed the doctrine of transubstantiation, and on this account suffered much persecution. He died in voluntary exile, A. D. 1088.

gives a different account of this matter. He insists that Wickliffe, being now deprived of the protection of the Duke of Lancaster, "instantly laid aside his audacious bearing, put on the breastplate of dotage, attempted to disclaim his extravagant and fantastic errors, and protested that the follies he was called upon to answer for, were basely and falsely ascribed to him, by the malicious ingenuity of his enemies." This calumny was so often repeated, that for a time it obtained belief, even with some who ought to have been better informed. But happily, we have the means of judging, in regard to this matter, for ourselves.

When Wickliffe appeared before the convocation, he presented two confessions; the one in English, and the other in Latin. In the former he affirms, that "the sacrament of the altar is very God's body, in *the form of bread*; and that it is heresy to believe that this sacrament is God's body, and *no bread*; since, in truth, it is both together; *in its own nature, it is very bread*; but SACRAMENTALLY, it is the body of Christ." He also declares his belief, that, during the session of the late synod in London, before which some of his followers

were called, "the very earth trembled\* in testimony of God's anger at the heresies maintained by his adversaries in that assembly."

Here, surely, is no evidence of cowardice or equivocation; unless it be thought that there is a designed ambiguity in the representation, that, "the sacrament of the altar is *very God's body*, in the form of bread." In regard to this expression, and others like it, which occur in these Confessions of Wickliffe, as also in his other writings, it may be necessary to remark, that although he openly rejected and detested transubstantiation, it is not quite certain what theory, in regard to the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, he embraced. He may have believed, with Luther, in *consubstantiation*, or that "the *real body and blood of Christ are truly present in the Eucharist*, under the elements of *bread and wine*;"—or with Calvin, that "there is, in the sacrament, a *spiritual* presence of Christ's body and blood, of which the faithful become the partakers." Or he may have felt justified in adopting a phraseology on the subject, very

\* He refers to an earthquake, which actually occurred during the sessions of that assembly.

like to that of some of the early Christian fathers. They did not dream of transubstantiation, or that there ever could be such a doctrine in the church; and yet, in their endeavours to set forth the awful mystery of the sacrament, they often use language which, to our ears, would seem exceptionable. Take the following, for example, from one of the homilies of Chrysostom. "When you see *this body* before you, say to yourself, *this* is the body which was nailed to the cross, but which death could not confine. It was *this* which the sun beheld fixed to the accursed tree, and instantly veiled his light. It was *this* that rent the veil of the temple, and burst the rocks, and convulsed the earth." In using language such as this, the good father was perfectly understood by his hearers. He did not say, nor did they understand him to say, that the *literal* body of Christ, the *same* that was extended on the cross, was broken before them on the sacramental table; but it was there broken *in a figure*. It was there, as Wickliffe expresses it, *sacramentally*. The opposers of transubstantiation in the eleventh century, Berenger and his followers, were ac-

customed to use language in the same way. And yet they were sufficiently understood. And I know not why the same liberality of interpretation should not be extended to Wickliffe, which is freely accorded to those who preceded him on the same side of the question ; especially since, taking his whole testimony together, there is no possibility of mistaking his meaning.

The Latin confession presented by Wickliffe to the convocation, is much longer than the English one, and more deformed with scholastic subtleties. He commences it by stating, that "the body of Christ is truly and really the sacramental bread;" and then proceeds to define the sense in which this phraseology is used. The two things, he says, are not the same "*essentially, substantially, corporeally, identically;*" but "*virtually, spiritually, sacramentally.*" After a good deal of intricate, metaphysical argumentation, and various distinctions which are scarcely intelligible at the present day, he comes, at length, to this conclusion, "that the venerable sacrament of the altar is, *naturally*, bread and wine ; but, *sacramentally*, the body and blood of Christ;"



and that the notion of the Papists, that the Eucharist is a mere *accident*, separated from its proper subject, involves both absurdity and heresy. He concludes by affirming, that the priests of Baal, emulating in falsehood the very father of lies, magnify the consecration of these *accidents*, reckon all masses but their own unworthy to be heard, and denounce and persecute those who dissent from their impositions.

And here it may well be asked again, where is the evidence of defection or cowardice on the part of Wickliffe? Where are his retractions or recantations? He explains his views of the sacrament in his own way; but in such a way as to show conclusively that he had abated nothing of his abhorrence of transubstantiation; and closes with openly stigmatizing his persecutors as *priests of Baal*, and *ministers of the father of lies*. If an apology is needed for him in this matter, it should rather be for his severity than for cowardice.

That the confessions of Wickliffe were not such as to satisfy his inquisitors, appears sufficiently from the fact, that shortly after their publication, he was assailed by no less than

six several antagonists. The same also appears from the *result* of their proceedings against him. They did not, indeed, consign him to martyrdom. Considering his advanced years, and great public services, and the high estimation in which he was held, not only by the people, but by many of the nobility, and some even of the royal family; this was hardly to be expected. But they procured letters from the king which condemned him to perpetual banishment from the university of Oxford. The remainder of his days was, therefore, spent among his people, at Lutterworth, publishing to them the truths of the gospel, and labouring with his pen for the advancement of that cause, which was now dearer to him than his life.

It was about this time, that Wickliffe received a summons from the pope, commanding him to appear before him *in person*, and answer to the charge of heresy. The Reformer was then suffering from a palsy, and of course was not able to perform such a journey. In his reply, he not only excuses himself from obeying the injunction, but seizes the opportunity to impart to his holiness some very salutary advice. He reminds

him that his greatness is not to be estimated by his worldly pomp, but by his more eminent conformity to the law of Christ, who, while on earth, was one of the poorest of men. He counsels this pretended Vicar of Christ, therefore, to leave his worldly lordships to worldly lords, and to move all his clergy to do the same; and "if in this opinion," adds the venerable man, "I am found erroneous, I am willing to be amended even by death." In conclusion, he repeats, that Christ had disabled him for undertaking the required journey; and "to the will of Christ," says he, "it becomes both me and you to submit; unless, indeed, you are willing to set up openly for Antichrist."

The disease which prevented Wickliffe from visiting the pope, was, fortunately, not of a nature to suspend at all the free and laborious exercise of his mental powers. He lived, subsequent to his banishment from Oxford, about two years, during which, in addition to his labours for the pulpit, he composed some fourteen or fifteen separate treatises; some of which are among the most important of his publications.

The spectacle which he presents to us at this period of his life is singularly interesting and instructive. Here we behold "a man worn down by a life of toil and anxiety, smitten with a malady which might seem to require a cessation of all harassing exertion, just escaped from the very jaws of destruction, and constantly expecting (as his latest writings plainly indicate) that persecution would soon be ready to do her worst upon him, and yet learning no lesson of indolence or cowardice from these perils and troubles. On the contrary, his energies appeared, if any thing, to gather strength and brightness as the shadows of death were thickening round his temples. Never, perhaps, since the commencement of his warfare, was Wickliffe more formidable to the Romish hierarchy than during the season of his banishment to Lutterworth. Never was his voice more loudly raised in the cause of scriptural truth, and in opposition to popish errors, than at the approach of that hour which was to silence it forever."

We have before spoken of the grand schism in the popedom, in consequence of which two rival popes were reigning, and by all possible

Edw III  
d 1377

means annoying each other, at the same time. Of these two, England espoused the cause of Urban, whose seat was at Rome, in opposition to that of Clement, who resided at Avignon. And in order the more effectually to promote the interests of Urban, a crusade was at this time got up in England, with a view to weaken, and, if possible, annihilate the French pontiff. An army was raised for this purpose, and placed under the command of the warlike Bishop of Norwich, and the territory of Flanders was invaded. It is amusing and instructive, (as it goes to illustrate the spirit of the age) to read the account given by Walsingham of this Bishop of Norwich. He is represented as "armed to the very nails, grasping his lance in his right hand, burying his spurs in the flanks of his charger, and rushing with the fury of a wild boar into the midst of the rascal crowd, dealing confusion and havoc around him." He proved, however, but a sorry captain, and the expedition, as might have been expected, soon came to naught. The crusaders, driven back from their work of waste and bloodshed, were compelled to return, to the unspeakable mortification of those who had

sent them forth. I allude to this subject here, only for the purpose of saying, that this providential diversion of papal interest and power proved highly favourable to the repose of Wickliffe. God suffered his enemies to be so busy in biting and devouring one another, that they had little time or thought to bestow upon him. The crusade also furnished him with a fine subject for sarcasm and ridicule, and an excellent opportunity of presenting, in contrast, the spirit of popery and that of Christianity.

Among the works published by Wickliffe at this period, was his "Objections to the Freres," or friars, in which, under fifty heads, or chapters, he sums up nearly all the censures which he had ever advanced against the opinions and practices of the Mendicants.

In another of his tracts, sent forth at this time, he makes a direct attack on the insatiation of the crusaders. He complains that the pope brings "the banner of the cross, the token of peace, mercy, and charity, for to slay Christian men; and all for love of two false priests, that be open Antichrists, and to maintain their worldly state." And then he asks

indignantly, "Why will not the proud priest of Rome grant full pardon to all men to live in peace, charity and patience, as he doth to all men to fight and slay Christian men?"

Another work published by Wickliffe, during his retirement at Lutterworth, and that by which he is now most generally known, is his "Trialogus." It was written in Latin, in four books, and was *printed* in 1525. It is in the form of a dialogue, or rather trialogue, between three speakers, whom the author calls 'Truth, Falsehood and Wisdom. The subjects treated of in the discussion are various; though, in general, they may be comprised under the heads of *Philosophy* and *Theology*.

The death of Wickliffe was sudden and unexpected. On the 29th of December, 1384, while in the church, and while engaged in the celebration of the Eucharist, he was visited with a renewed attack of palsy, which instantly deprived him of speech, and rendered him completely helpless. In this condition, he lingered two days, when he was taken to his rest, on the last day of December, and in the sixty-first year of his age.

His days were not extended to the length

often allotted to the temperate and exemplary of our species. His earthly tabernacle, in all probability, was worn out by the intense and fervid energy of the spirit within. But if his mortal existence be measured by the amount of his labours and achievements, his must be regarded as a *long life*. He went down to his grave full of days, as he was of more than earthly honours.

The sensations occasioned by the death of Wickliffe were, doubtless, of very different kinds. There were those not only in his household and among his people, but in all parts of England, and in every grade of society, whose hearts ached and bled, when it was announced to them that he was gone. There were those who were ready to exclaim, at his departure, "My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" and who were ready to pray, that at least his mantle might descend and rest on some young and vigorous Elisha. There were others, however, who felt differently—who rejoiced exceedingly at his death, and spoke of the manner of it as indicating a special divine judgment in the case. The following is the en-



venomed language of the popish chronicler, Walsingham: "On the day of St. Thomas à Becket, the martyr, that organ of the devil, that enemy of the church, that confusion of the populace, that idol of heretics, that mirror of hypocrites, that instigator of schism, that sower of hatred, that fabricator of lies, John Wickliffe, when on the same day, as it is reported, he would have vomited forth the blasphemies which he had prepared in his sermon against St. Thomas, being suddenly struck by the judgment of God, felt all his limbs invaded by the palsy. That mouth which had spoken monstrous things against God, and the saints, and the holy church, was then miserably distorted, exhibiting a frightful spectacle to the beholders. His tongue, now speechless, denied him even the power of confessing. His head shook, and thus plainly showed, that the curse which God had thundered forth against Cain, was now fallen upon him. And that none might doubt of his being consigned to the company of Cain, he showed, by manifest outward signs, that he died in despair. He breathed out his malicious spirit to the abodes of darkness."—Language like that here quoted,

needs no comment. It is altogether honourable to the character of Wickliffe, and evinces, duly, the imbittered spirit, the diabolical hate of his traducer.\*

Although Wickliffe had not been at Oxford for several years previous to his death, still, he had left there, in many hearts, a solemn witness to the truth of his doctrines and the purity of his life. And in the year 1406, the sentiments of the University in regard to him were imbodied in a formal testimonial, which was published under the common seal. In this instrument, after speaking of Wickliffe as a "child of this our university, and professor of divinity," they proceed to say, "that all his conduct, through life, was sincere and commendable: that his conversation, from his

\* Three years previous to the death of Wickliffe, when he commenced his attack upon transubstantiation, Walsingham thus poured forth his invective against him: "At this time, that old hypocrite, that angel of Satan, that emissary of Antichrist, the not-to-be-named John Wickliffe, or rather *Wick-believe*, continued his ravings, and seemed as if he would drink up Jordan, and plunge all Christians into the abyse, by reviving the damnable heresies of Berengarius," &c.

youth upward to the time of his death, was so praiseworthy and honest, that never, at any time, was there a particle of suspicion raised against him; and that he vanquished, by the force of the Scriptures, all such as slandered Christ's religion. God forbid," adds the University, "that our prelates should condemn such a man as a heretic, who has written better than any others among us, on logic, philosophy, divinity, morality, and the speculative arts." If sentiments such as these were cherished at Oxford, full twenty years after the Reformer's death, it is easy to account for the complaints of heresy which were so often urged against the University, during most of the intervening period. Thus, Archbishop Arundel affirms, on one occasion, "Oxford is a vine that bringeth forth wild and sour grapes, which, being eaten by the fathers, the children's teeth are set on edge; so that the whole province of Canterbury is tainted with novel and damnable Lollardism." And again; "she who was formerly the mother of virtues, the prop of the Catholic faith, the singular pattern of obedience, now brings forth only abortive or degenerate children, who encourage contu-

macy and rebellion, and sow tares among the pure wheat."

It was the extended prevalence of Wickliffe's opinions, not only in England, but on the continent of Europe, which enkindled afresh the rage of the Romanists, and led them, since *he* was no longer within their power, to wreak their vengeance upon his books and his bones. In the year 1415, the great council of Constance signalized its orthodoxy and zeal, not only by burning John Huss and Jerome of Prague, but by ordaining that "the body and bones of Wickliffe, if they might be discerned and known from the bodies of other faithful people, should be taken from the ground, and thrown far away from the burial of any church." "And here," exclaims Fox, "what Heraclitus would not laugh, or what Democritus would not weep, to see these sage and reverend Catoes occupying their heads about a poor man's body so long dead and buried? And yet, peradventure, they were not able to find his right bones, but took up some other body; and so of a Catholic made a heretic." But whether the right bones were discovered or not, the grave was actually ransacked; the

remains of Wickliffe, or of what was supposed to be Wickliffe, were disinterred and burned; and the ashes were cast into an adjoining brook, one of the branches of the Avon. "And thus," says Fuller, the historian, "this brook did convey his ashes into the Avon; the Avon into the Severn; the Severn into the narrow sea; and this into the wide ocean. And so the ashes of Wickliffe are the emblem of his doctrine. It is now dispersed *all the world over.*"\*

\* This beautiful sentiment of Fuller is thus expressed in verse, by Mr. Wordsworth.

"His dry bones to ashes are consumed,  
 And flung into the brook that travels near:  
 Forthwith, that ancient voice which streams can  
     hear,  
 Thus speaks—(that voice which walks upon the  
     wind,  
 Though seldom heard by busy human kind:)  
 'As thou these ashes, little brook, wilt bear  
 Into the Avon—Avon to the tide  
 Of Severn—Severn to the narrow seas—  
 Into main ocean they—this deed accurst  
 An emblem yields to friends and enemies,  
 How the bold teacher's doctrine, sanctified  
 By truth, shall spread, throughout the world dis-  
     persed.'"

Of the estimation in which Wickliffe was held by the common people of England, we have had some proofs already ; and more will be exhibited when we come to speak of the results of his labours. I shall close this chapter with briefly noticing the interest which he excited among the nobility, and even in the *royal family*.

The brave Edward III. regarded him with so much favour, that, by some Catholic historians, he has been thought to have incurred, on this account, the severest displeasure of heaven. That this monarch cherished a worthy estimate of Wickliffe's talents and accomplishments there can be no doubt ; for he not only constituted him one of his chaplains, but employed him in matters of the deepest national importance, involving his own royal prerogative, and the most vital interests of his kingdom. But that, in so doing, he called down the divine wrath upon his head, he was probably quite unconscious. With the varieties of theological opinion it is not likely that Edward troubled himself. It was enough that he found in the Reformer what the exigencies

of his affairs required—an able servant and an enlightened counsellor.

It is certain that Johanna, the widow of the Black Prince, and mother of Richard II., was deeply interested for the honour and personal safety of Wickliffe. It was her interposition which terrified the popish prelates, and arrested the stroke of ecclesiastical power, when it was just ready to fall upon him in the synod at Lambeth.

The celebrated John of Gaunt, though he refused to accompany Wickliffe in his controversy respecting the sacrament, is yet to be regarded as his great patron and friend. He extended over him an efficient protection in most of his earlier conflicts; and years after Wickliffe's death, he strenuously resisted an attempt which was made to deprive the people of their English translation of the Scriptures, affirming, with a mighty oath, that he would "maintain their right to read the law of their God, in their own language."\*

\* This right, however, after a few years, was taken away. It was decreed in convocation, in the year 1408, that "henceforward no one should translate any text of sacred Scripture, by his own authority, into the Eng-

2394? Another of the royal family, who may safely be regarded as the friend of Wickliffe, was Queen Anne, the wife of Richard II. This excellent lady was daughter of the Emperor Charles IV., and sister to Wenceslaus, King of Bohemia. She read the Scriptures in several languages, and was much pleased with the new translation of them by Wickliffe. She encouraged the study of his books in her house; and it was by means of her attendants, after her decease, that his writings were circulated in Bohemia.

Among the *nobility* and *gentry* of England Wickliffe had many zealous friends. It will be remembered that the Earl Marshal of English, or any other tongue, in the way of book, tract, or treatise; and that no publication of this sort, published in the time of John Wickliffe, or since, or thereafter to be composed, should be read, either in part or in whole, either in public or in private, under pain of the greater excommunication, until such translation should be approved by the diocesan of the place; or if the matter should require it, by a provincial council." In view of a statute such as this, who would not exclaim with Wickliffe, "O Christ! thy law is hidden! When wilt thou send thine angel to remove the stone, and show thy truth unto thy flock!"



land, in connexion with the Duke of Lancaster, accompanied him, when first summoned before the prelates, at St. Paul's in London. In one of his homilies he declares that he had great comfort of certain *knights*; that they favoured the gospel; and were disposed to read it in English. Of these several are named expressly by the popish historians, who, "having a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, surrounded the false preachers with a military band, that they might not suffer reproaches or losses, on account of their profane doctrine."

But the most illustrious of all the nobility, who, by their faith and virtue, rendered the principles of Wickliffe honourable, was Lord Cobham. He was much younger than Wickliffe, though, in all probability, he had been a hearer of him in his youth. Most certainly, he was a strenuous and consistent supporter of his opinions, both as a private individual, and as a member of Parliament. When on his trial, before the archbishop and clergy, at the house of the Dominican friars in London, he bore the following testimony to the excellence of his master's doctrine: "As for that virtuous

man, Wickliffe, whose judgments ye so highly disdain, I shall say here, in the presence of God and man, that before I knew that despised doctrine of his, I never abstained from sin ; but since I learned therein the fear of God, it hath, I trust, been otherwise with me. So much grace I could never find in all your boasted instructions." A testimony like this to the principles of our Reformer, borne by such a man, and in such awful circumstances, is too precious to remain unrecorded. It infinitely outweighs all the reproaches of his adversaries.

It is no part of my present object to write a history of the religious experience and most cruel sufferings of Lord Cobham : suffice it to say, that having been abandoned by his sovereign, and hunted down by the fury of his persecutors, he was at length condemned to be hung in chains upon a gallows, and there burned to death. And in this manner the illustrious nobleman actually perished—with the praise of God in his mouth, and the Spirit of his Saviour in his heart.

## CHAPTER VI.

Character and opinions of Wickliffe—Charges against him considered—Political management—Coarseness and severity—His views of church property—Want of orthodoxy—His opinions on various subjects—Lawfulness of war—Use of pictures and images—Intercession of saints—Auricular confession—Excommunication—Church order and government—Celibacy of the clergy—Church music—Astrology—Purgatory—The sacraments, &c.—Comparison of Wickliffe with Luther—Piety of Wickliffe.

It is proposed, in this chapter, to give some account of the *character* and *opinions* of Wickliffe. This is necessary in order to form a just conception of the man, and of the extent to which he contemplated a reformation in the church.

Almost our only means of forming an estimate of the character of Wickliffe are furnished by his own writings. His friends, who were capable of performing such a service, were too much occupied with other things, to permit their writing his personal history.

And the prejudiced accounts of his persecutors and enemies are not worthy to be believed. That they have been so much consulted, and have obtained, among Protestants, so ready a credence, has been no little injury to the memory of the Reformer. It follows that the attempt at the present day to give a *complete* character of Wickliffe, must be fruitless. The materials for such a labour do not exist. The leading vicissitudes and transactions of his *public* life are indeed known; but when we essay to go beneath these, and inquire as to the details of his private and social life—his personal peculiarities—his manners and habits—the general style of his conversation—his intercourse with friends and enemies; our utmost scrutiny can avail us nothing. We must be content to remain, as we are, in hopeless ignorance.

Respecting the character of Wickliffe as a *preacher* and *parochial minister*, nothing remains to be added to the account which was given in a previous chapter.\*

The general character of his *mind* and *heart* is pretty clearly developed in his writings.

\* Chap. iv.

He had a quickness of apprehension which enabled him easily, almost intuitively, to distinguish between popular superstitious, prevailing errors, and hidden and forgotten truths. At the same time, he had an independence of soul which raised him above the delusions of his age—which sustained him erect and alone in the midst of a current which prostrated almost all others—which would yield to no sinister influences and endure no restraint, in the investigation and discussion of what he conceived to be the great truths of the Bible.

The constitutional temperament of Wickliffe was rather ardent than patient; and the decision of his judgment rather hasty than profound. Still, owing to the singleness of his aims and the light and vigour of his understanding, he seldom wandered far from the truth. His conclusions in general, though reprobated in his own age, have borne the test of time and are received with great respect by those who, at the distance of centuries, are following after him.

A strongly marked trait in the character of Wickliffe was *perseverance*. When he had fairly engaged in the pursuit of what he deem-

ed an important object, it was vain to think of diverting him from it. Difficulties, which would have appalled and discouraged other men, served only to invigorate him. We have an illustration of this, in his treatment of the sacramental controversy. His old friend and patron, the Duke of Lancaster, came to him in kindness, warned him of the perils that awaited him, threatened him with the loss of his protection in case he pursued the subject farther, and urged and commanded him to desist. But Wickliffe's purpose had been formed in the fear of God; it had been nurtured and fortified by prayer; and he was now immovable. Come favour or disfavour, life or death; he must obey God, rather than man.

As might be expected from one of such a temperament, Wickliffe was *prompt* as well as persevering. He generally anticipated, not only the movements of his adversaries, but their expectations and designs. He was ahead of them, and in their path, before they were aware of it. He saw readily the bearing of providential occurrences, laid hold of them quickly and strongly, and was able to turn them to the best account.

The writings of Wickliffe indicate, that his disposition was not only ardent and decided, but also *cheerful*. He had a buoyancy of spirit which inclined him to look on the bright side of things, and to anticipate a happy issue, where others would have expected nothing but defeat. He had a vein of *humour* in his mental constitution, which continually shows itself in his controversial writings. The superstitions of his age were many of them of a nature to provoke his wit, and he seldom failed to treat them according to their merits. His irony and sarcasm were often more desolating to his opponents than even his arguments.

As a scholar, Wickliffe stood pre-eminent among his contemporaries. He won the meed of distinguished praise even from his enemies. Archbishop Arundel acknowledged him to be "a mighty clerk;" and Knyghton, one of his bitterest adversaries, says, "as a teacher of theology he was most eminent in his day; in philosophy he was second to no one; in scholastic discipline incomparable." This *last* accomplishment was of service to him, as it gave him a reputation, and made him re-

spected, in the age in which he lived. But in its real effect upon his own mind, the scholastic discipline, I have no doubt, was an injury. Certain it is, he wrote and reasoned much the best when he had the least to do with it. When he addressed untutored minds, he spoke plainly and drove his ploughshare right onward; but when he undertook to write for the learned and adopted the scholastic mode of reasoning, there was an intricacy and seeming obliquity about it, which gave his adversaries at most their only occasion to charge him with artifice, if not cowardice.

This charge of cowardice has been sufficiently refuted in the preceding pages; but several other charges have been urged against Wickliffe, to which it may be proper to give a moment's attention. By some, he has been represented as rather a *political* than a *spiritual* man—one who mingled needlessly and to his own detriment in the affairs of state. This is virtually the charge which Mr. Milner prefers against him. But that there is any just foundation for it, I have not been able to perceive. It is true, as we have seen in the



previous narrative, that he performed certain important offices for the state ; but they were such, in every instance, as grew out of the connexion of the state with the church, and such as most properly devolved on him, in his character as an opposer of the papal corruptions. Nor does it appear that these ecclesiastical-political services were more than short episodes in his personal history. He returned from them as soon as accomplished, (and they occupied him but a little time,) to the more delightful performance of his appropriate spiritual duties.

Wickliffe has often been charged with *coarseness* and *severity* in his attacks upon the Romish hierarchy. And if, judging from our present standard, this allegation shall be to some extent admitted, still, several things, by way of palliation, require to be said. In the first place, the corruptions which he assailed were so gross and detestable, so revolting to all reason and taste, that he could hardly speak of them as they deserved, or draw down upon them that reprobation which he desired, without seeming to be severe. Then the language of Wickliffe, however severe, was mildness,

gentleness itself, compared with that of his Romish adversaries. Some instances of the ribaldry of such men as Walsingham have been already adduced, and need not be again repeated. In short, the fault complained of was rather one of that and the succeeding ages, than of any single individual. Not only in the fourteenth century, but for the next several hundred years, urbanity and courtesy found but little favour among men engaged in theological conflict. Wickliffe might well have gone to school to some of the reformers of the sixteenth century, had he been desirous to perfect himself in the accomplishment of railing.

Again: Wickliffe has been charged by his adversaries with teaching that *all things of right belong to the saints*, and that it is lawful for them to rebel against their temporal sovereigns, and take what belongs to them into their own hands. But it appears, on examining the passages referred to, that he did little more than reiterate the sentiment of Paul; "*All things are yours, whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come, all are yours.*" And Wickliffe immediately

adds, what Paul does not, "With this title of *grace* the just must rest content. They may be satisfied that the world is theirs; but *they must, on no account whatever, presume to enforce their right by any worldly means; for the law of Christ expressly forbids his disciples to contend for temporal things.*" Surely, an adversary must be hard pushed to find any ground of objection or complaint in a passage such as this.

As has been stated already, not a little reproach has been cast upon Wickliffe, in consequence of his sentiments relative to *church property, tithes, &c.* He has also been charged with palpable *inconsistency* in retaining possession of his own preferments till his death. But what were his actual sentiments in regard to the subjects here referred to? And how do they compare with the views of enlightened Christians at the present day? I the more readily propose these inquiries, because I am persuaded that he has been misunderstood. He held, undoubtedly, that the wealth which had been lavished on ecclesiastical institutions and persons in that age, and the enormous endowments which were in some instances en-

joyed, were a curse, rather than a blessing, to the church. He held, too, in opposition to the demands of his Romish adversaries, that the property of the church was not exempt from civil jurisdiction: that, like all other property, it was protected and should be regulated by the laws. He insisted that wealth bestowed on the church for pious and charitable purposes ought to be used for such purposes; and that when not thus used, when palpably perverted from its specified end, it was justly forfeited. He sometimes spoke of the livings of clergymen as "*alms*," "*perpetual alms*," meaning, as I have before remarked, not that the clergy were to be dependent on the daily charity of their people, but that their livings were eleemosynary in their origin and character, and should be disposed of by them according to their intended use. In regard to these several topics, as he was opposing what he conceived to be an enormous evil, he may have indulged, at times, in some extravagance of language. But in the general conclusions to which he came, I can see no essential error. And the more nearly the church returns to its primitive, apostolical character, the more

nearly, I doubt not, will it come to coincide with these conclusions.

As to the charge of *inconsistency* in retaining his own preferments, as soon as his sentiments are rightly appreciated, it falls to the ground at once. There is every reason to suppose (for his enemies have not hinted the contrary) that whatever of the church's bounty came into his hands was appropriated by him in the most faithful manner. He needed and he used but little for himself; and whatever remained after his own wants had been scantily supplied, was sacredly devoted to religion and charity: the most of it to relieving the necessities of the poor.

With regard to the *theological* opinions of Wickliffe, he has been complained of by some Protestants, as being not full and decided on the subject of the sinner's *depravity* and the ground of his *justification* with God. "He neither understood nor believed," says Melancthon, "the righteousness of faith." Mr. Milner thinks it "nearer the truth to say, that in an accurate knowledge of that important article, he was defective." But I can discover no ground even for this latter statement. The

doctrines of depravity, and of gratuitous justification by faith in Christ, were evidently *vital principles* in Wickliffe's theology. "Human nature," he says, "is wholly at enmity with God. All men are originally sinners, not only from their mothers' womb, but in their mothers' womb. We cannot think a good thought unless Jesus send it. We cannot perform a good work unless it be properly his work. His mercy prevents us, so that we receive grace, and it follows us, so as to help us, and keep us in grace."—"The merit of Christ is of itself sufficient to redeem every man from hell. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is sufficient for salvation; and without faith it is impossible to please God." It was the labour of Wickliffe's life, says Dr. James, to persuade men "to trust *wholly to Christ*; to rely *altogether upon his sufferings*, and not seek to be justified in any other way than by his justice."

It appears that Wickliffe received not only the doctrines above noticed, but those which, in all ages, have commonly been associated with them. To those who said that God did not do every thing for them, but their own

merits contributed in part to their salvation, he used to reply with a short prayer, "Heal us *gratis*, O Lord." In regard to the *love* and *atonement* of Christ, his language is often touching and beautiful. "Thou shouldst think constantly, how, when he had made thee out of naught, thou hadst forsaken him and all his kindness, through sin, and hadst taken thee to Satan and his service, world without end, had not Christ, God and man, suffered this hard death to save thee. And then see the great kindness and all the other goodnesses which Christ hath shown thee, and thereby learn thy own great unkindness. And then thou shalt see that man is *the most fallen of creatures*, and the unkindest of all the creatures that God ever made. It should be full sweet and delightful to us all, to think thus on this great kindness, and this great love of Jesus Christ." Surely, no man ever uttered sentiments such as these, whose heart had not been melted at the cross of Christ; and who did not, with Paul, count all things but loss, for the excellency of this knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

The scruples of Wickliffe were about the

same as those of Luther in regard to *the lawfulness of war*. A war of conquest, he decides, should never be undertaken, unless (as in the case of Joshua, when he invaded the Canaanites) by the express command of God. "A fighting priest" he describes as "no better than a fiend, stained foul with homicide." "The knight, who derives his honour from the slaughter of his fellow-creatures, is frequently outdone by the hangman, who killeth many more and with a better title." "Sometimes the law of the land will enable us to resist our adversaries: and at all times men of the gospel, by the spirit of patience and of peace, may be conquerors, through the suffering of death."

In regard to the errors and superstitions of popery, although the mind of our Reformer was not enlightened to reject them all alike and at once, yet gradually he came to see the character of most of them, and put them from him as an unclean thing. With regard to the idolatries of the Romish church, he thinks it a shallow pretence for the Papist to say, "We worship not the image but the being repre



sented by the image." The idolatrous *heathens* said the same.

In one of his latest works, he dissuades in the strongest terms from any reliance on the *intercession of saints*. "Our Redeemer Jesus Christ is very God, as well as very man, and therefore must infinitely exceed any other man. What folly, then, to apply to any other person to be our intercessor! Would any one choose the king's buffoon to be an intercessor? The saints in heaven are not indeed buffoons, but in dignity they are less, compared with Jesus Christ, than a buffoon is, when compared with an earthly king."

His opposition to *auricular confession* and *papal indulgences* is set forth everywhere in his writings, in the strongest terms. These indulgences, he says, are mere "forgeries, whereby the priesthood rob men cursedly of their money. They are nothing but a subtle merchandise of Antichrist's clerks, whereby they magnify their own fictitious power, and instead of causing men to dread sin, encourage them to wallow therein like hogs." And as for the despicable pretext that payment was not demanded, as the price of the *pardon*, but only

of the *instrument* by which the pardon was conveyed ; “ this,” he says, “ is no less impudent than it would be to offer a fatted goose for nothing, but to charge a good round sum for the garlic with which it was seasoned.”

Not less determined was the opposition of this admirable man to the terrors of *excommunication*, as wielded by the church of Rome ; terrors which, in his day, were of the most frightful and oppressive character. In his work entitled “ The Great Sentence of the Curse expounded,” he exclaims, “ Why do our wayward curates curse the souls of men to hell, and their bodies to prison, and doom them to forfeiture of goods, and loss of life ; and all for the sake of paltry gain ? And this, too, while they themselves are accursed of God, for entering on their office by simony, and for betraying it by abandonment of duty, and unholiness of living ? The pains of hell, rather than tithes and offerings, are their proper recompense. They are malicious tormentors, rather than spiritual fathers, to the souls of men. Pagan tyranny and persecution confined its rage to the body ; but these

children of Satan seek to plunge the soul into everlasting pain. Yea, they are worse than the fiends themselves ; for the fiends torment no human soul, but for the measureless enormity of *sin* ; while these clerks of Satan doom souls to hell for some trifling due, which poverty may disable them from paying, and which after all is no lawful debt, but a mere fraudulent exaction, founded on usages that have no warrant in the commandments of God." Truly that man ought not to be suspected of cowardice, who, in the fourteenth century, and amid all the terrors of excommunication, could arraign the prevalent abuses of the times in language such as this.

In reference to the *church*, Wickliffe makes the common distinction between the church *visible* and the church *invisible*. The former he calls the *very body* of Christ ; the latter his *medlied* (or mixed) *body*, including, not only men ordained to bliss, but hypocrites doomed to perdition. The decisions of the church he regards as of no account, unless conformed to the rules of the gospel. " Though we had a hundred popes," says he, " and all the friars in the world were turned

into cardinals, yet should we trow more *the law of the gospel*, than all this multitude." "As long as Christ is in heaven," says he, "the church hath in him the best pope; and no true man will dare put *two* heads on the church, lest it be monstrous."

The compulsory *celibacy of the clergy* and the forcible imposition of *monastic vows*, Wickliffe reprobates in the strongest terms, as practices tending to a flagitious corruption of manners.

Prudent and "measurable" *fasting* he held to be salutary. But abstinence from flesh only to indulge in fish, he derides as *fool-fast-ing*, and as nothing better than another form of gluttony.

He deprecates the "pride, pomp, and circumstance" of the existing Romish *ritual*, and complains that the slightest neglect of these beggarly elements was more severely punished than the breach of God's commandments.

The *music* of the church in the time of Wickliffe seems to have been of a light and worthless character. The performers, too, he describes as "proud and lecherous lorels, strumpets, and even thieves." This circum-

stance seems to have given him an utter distaste of church music, and to have made the impression on his mind that it had better be laid aside. "It stirs vain men to dancing," says he, "more than to mourning;" and he warns "the fools" who delight in it, that "they should dread the sharp words of Augustine, who saith, As oft as the song liketh me more than the sentence sung, so oft I confess that I sin grievously."

Wickliffe lived in an age when the reputed science of *astrology* was in the highest estimation. "It was prosecuted," Mosheim tells us, "to madness, by all orders, from the highest to the lowest." It is highly creditable to our Reformer, and a new evidence of his sagacity and independence, that he condemned this delusion in the strongest terms, declaring that it had no foundation: that all its boasted maxims and conclusions "rested on no substratum of knowledge."

On two or three points which may be mentioned, the mind of Wickliffe seems not to have worked itself perfectly clear from the errors and superstitions of popery. One of these is the doctrine of *purgatory*. In his earlier

publications, he makes express mention of the pains of purgatory. Later in life, he speaks of purgatory as a sort of intermediate state or place, where departed souls *rest* until the resurrection. The methods invented by the Romish clergy to rescue souls from purgatorial pains, he uniformly denounces as a gross fraud. He says the clergy "invent pains horrible and shameful, to make men pay a vast ransom;" and describes "all masses for which money is taken, as an artifice of Satan, and a contrivance of hypocrisy and avarice."

Wickliffe also speaks in one of his latest publications, of *seven* sacraments; though he evidently uses the word sacrament in a wider and looser sense than is common at the present day.

Of *penance*, one of these sacraments, he makes nothing more than repentance and confession of sin; and declares that absolution must come from God alone. To make the *priest* the principal party in absolving the sinner, he affirmed, was to "usurp God's majesty, deceive the people and encourage vice."

*Ordination* Wickliffe recognises as a sacramental ordinance; but respecting the mystical,

indelible character alleged to accompany it, he stands in doubt. He prays that God would be pleased to confer on the clergy some *further* grace, the character in question being found in such a multitude of cases to be useless and ineffective.

Wickliffe conceives *matrimony*, another of the sacraments of the Romish church, to have been ordained, not only for the perpetuation of mankind until the day of doom, and for the suppression of licentious intercourse, but for the continuance of the church on earth, and the completion of the number of the saints in heaven,

In the age of Wickliffe, the opinion was somewhat prevalent among serious Christians, those who deplored the wickedness of the times, and almost despaired of reformation, that the Millenium predicted in the Apocalypse was already past, and that Satan was now loosed for the last time, previous to his final condemnation and punishment. To this opinion there are repeated allusions in the writings of Wickliffe. He seems to speak of it as a thing beyond all controversy, and regards the Christian community as specially

suffering from the malice of its invisible persecutor and adversary. This opinion, though of no great importance in itself, had considerable influence on the general character and the writings of the Reformer. It led him to ascribe nearly all the corruptions which deformed the church, and the multiform oppressions which burdened society, to preternatural and infernal instigation. Arbitrary kings, tyrannical and profligate nobles, selfish and worldly ecclesiastics, all were regarded as so many agents of the Evil Potentate. Corrupt priests were the clerks of Antichrist, and the mendicants were the very "tail of the Dragon, which drew a third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth."

In closing the investigation through which we have passed, I can hardly refrain instituting a moment's comparison between Wickliffe and the great German Reformer. In many respects, their doctrines were alike. It devolved on each to break in upon the stillness of the papal night with loud notes of remonstrance, and with a trumpet-call to repentance and reform. It was the glory of each to give the Holy Scriptures to his countrymen in



their own tongue. Each laboured continually in the very fire, exposed to all the terrors of persecution and martyrdom. And each, having endured to the end, having "fought a good fight, finished his course, and kept the faith," was permitted to lie down and die in peace.

These great men resembled each other not only in destiny, but in character. Both seem to have been raised up in providence, and to have been remarkably qualified, by nature and education, by gifts and grace, for the works to which they were appointed. Both were sagacious, prompt, energetic, persevering: ardent in spirit, bold in action, and unflinching in what they considered as the cause of truth. Both had an unshaken confidence in God, which raised them above despondency and fear, even in the darkest times. Both had not only the tongue of the learned, but also the pen of a ready writer, and knew how to arraign without softening or ceremony, the corruptions of an apostate church.

As to immediate and invisible results, Luther had many advantages above Wickliffe. He lived a hundred years later, when the human mind was more awake, and when light

and knowledge were more widely diffused. He lived at a period when the leaven of Wickliffe's doctrine had been long at work, not only in England but on the continent of Europe, so that the very atmosphere was impregnated with the spirit of reformation; whereas it devolved on Wickliffe to infuse the leaven *into* the dormant mass, and prepare the elements of fermentation, which ultimately were to move the whole body. Both the Reformers were favoured, to some extent, with political support; but then that of Luther was incomparably the more powerful and abiding. Luther had the great advantage of the art of printing, for the multiplication of his books: whereas Wickliffe was obliged to rely on the slow and toilsome labour of the transcriber. It may be added, that the field of the German Reformer was wider and more exciting than that of Wickliffe, having "a kingdom for a stage, princes for actors, and monarchs to behold the swelling scene." Yet, notwithstanding all the disadvantages under which Wickliffe laboured, "he continued urgent and faithful to the very last; differing from his former self, at the close of his days, in nothing but the larger

extent of his views, the deeper intensity of his convictions, and the more exalted daring of his purposes.

There is one point in the character of Wickliffe which I have intentionally reserved for the last: I mean his *piety*. And this I regard as the crown of all his other accomplishments and excellences, the most essential ingredient in his whole character. He had felt the power of religion in his heart, and knew, in his own experience, the supports of faith, and the blessedness of communion with the Father of lights. His piety, indeed, was different from the most of that which existed in his age. It was not of the monkish, contemplative cast, like that of Bradwardine and Thomas à Kempis. It was rather of the modern stamp: stirring, cheerful, active, useful. It prompted him not to seclude himself from the haunts of men, but to mingle with them, that he might do them good. It prompted him to gird on the armour, and contend for the honour of his degraded Lord, and for what he conceived to be the truth of the gospel. His numerous conflicts with the Romanists were engaged in, not from the love of fighting, but from the love of truth. It was his love for the Bible, which led him

to study, translate and defend it. It was his love for truth and for the souls of men which arrayed him against those multiform superstitions by which so many were led blindfold to perdition. His controversies, we have seen, related to the most vitally important subjects; and he seems to have mingled with them all an humble, teachable, prayerful spirit. We are entitled to regard Wickliffe, therefore, not only as the lofty champion of truth against abounding superstitions and corruptions, but, what is a much higher honour, as *the beloved and devoted disciple of Christ*; who, in an iron age, and amidst a thousand disadvantages and discouragements, *laboured and fainted not*, till his Master was pleased to come and take him to his rest. Yes, while his *name* is embalmed with fresh and increasing honours in the heart of a grateful church below, we are entitled to regard *him* as constituting a part of that noble band of confessors and martyrs, who, with God the judge of all, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and with an innumerable company of angels, and with all the perfected spirits of the just, dwell in the mount Zion above, the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.

## CHAPTER VII.

Wickliffe's followers—His "poor priests"—William Thorpe—Wickliffe's apology for his "poor priests"—His followers called Lollards—Persecuted unto death—William Sautre—John Badby—Lord Cobham—Other martyrs—Influence of Wickliffe's labours in Bohemia, and on the continent generally—Precursor of the Reformation.

WICKLIFFE had too deep a sense of the value of truth, and of the importance of his own efforts in promoting it, to be willing that the cause in which he had suffered so much, should die with him. He took care that the results of his labours should remain; that the cause itself should be perpetuated. It was for this end that he so vigorously tasked his pen, and poured forth his tracts and books in such rapid succession. For this end, too, he educated a great number of evangelical preachers, denominated by him "poor priests," and established an extended system of itineracy.

This system was in full operation several

years previous to the Reformer's death. As early as the year 1382, the "poor priests" had become so numerous as to attract the notice of Archbishop Courtney, and a royal ordinance was procured for their suppression. 'This ordinance speaks of numerous "evil persons, under dissimulation of great holiness, preaching in churches, churchyards, markets, fairs and other open places." In general, these "poor priests" were not laymen or illiterate persons, but those who, in some form, had received ordination, and who, by personal intercourse with Wickliffe, and by reading his books, had come to a knowledge of the gospel. Their labours and mode of life are, to some extent, indicated in the phraseology of the ordinance above quoted. They travelled, for the most part, on foot, with their staff in their hand, and were in continual circuit among the parishes in every part of the kingdom. They were almost entirely regardless of personal comforts, having no home, and no support, other than the voluntary alms of those to whom they ministered. When persecuted in one city, they would flee into another. They claimed the liberty to dwell in any place

where their ministry was blessed, and for such a length of time as they thought convenient "after the moving of the Holy Ghost." They were compared by their adversaries to bees, who were perpetually on the wing; or to the watch-dog, in constant readiness to start from his repose, and bark at the slightest sound. In short, they seem to have taken the apostles and primitive evangelists for their model, and to have been (with some few exceptions) a most devoted, indefatigable, self-sacrificing class of preachers. I say *with few exceptions*; for under the heavy hand of persecution which ever and anon was pressing upon them, some two or three of them apostatized, and afterwards became persecutors themselves. A few others shrunk from their steadfastness for a time, but were afterwards recovered to the faith of the gospel. But the great body of them remained inflexible amid all the terrors which surrounded them. Many of them, in the next age after Wickliffe, sealed their testimony with their blood. As a fair specimen of this class of preachers, I select a single individual from among them—William Thorpe.

Thorpe was intended by his parents for the sacred office, and was educated accordingly ; but having many scruples as to taking upon himself so great a responsibility, he consulted with some of Wickliffe's priests in regard to it. And finding that " their honest and charitable works exceeded the fame which he had heard of them," he resolved to join them in their pious labours. And not only was he " right homely \* with these men," (I use here the phraseology of Fox,) " and communed with them long time and oft;" but he also sought the truth at the lips of their great master himself, John Wickliffe. Wickliffe, Thorpe says, was " holden of full many men to be the greatest clerk then living, and withal a passing *ruly†* man, and innocent in his life ; for which reason great men communed oft with him ; and they so loved his learning that they wrote it down, and busily enforced it, to rule themselves thereafter." Being thus captivated with the teaching and character of Wickliffe, as " most agreeable unto the living and teaching of Christ and his apostles, and most openly showing and declaring how the

\* Familiar.

† Orderly.



church of Christ had been, and yet should be ruled and governed," Thorpe devoted himself, for more than thirty years, to the work of spreading the knowledge he had attained through various parts of England, especially in the northern counties. At length the hand of persecution fell upon him. He was imprisoned, in 1407, at Saltwood Castle, in Kent; and on his examination before Archbishop Arundel, maintained his cause with a modest but inflexible constancy.

When the archbishop reproached him with holding that he might lawfully preach without the authority of any bishop, his reply was, that by the authority of *God's law*, it was the priest's office to preach busily, freely and truly, the gospel of Christ: that no man should take the priesthood upon him without a hearty good will to preach, or without competent learning for the work: and that he who became a priest was under the most awful obligations to make known the gospel to the people when, where, and to whom he best might. The archbishop next pressed him with the question, *How shall priests preach except they be sent?* and added, *I never sent you to preach.* To this

Thorpe replied, that he well knew no license would be granted to him, or to any of his brethren, except upon conditions to which they could not in conscience submit. But still, he added, "Though we have not your letter, sir, nor letters of any other bishops written with ink upon parchment, we dare not, therefore, leave the office of preaching; to which all priests are bound, according to their ability, by divers testimonies of *God's law*." The archbishop referred to some of his brethren who had deserted him, and taken benefices in the church; and urged him to follow the same example. To this Thorpe replied, "Their example would have been good had they persevered in a life of simplicity and poverty; but since they have shamefully done the contrary, consenting to hold temporal benefices, and conforming themselves to the manner of this world, I forsake them herein, and in all their foresaid scandalous proceeding." The mildness, independence and truly Christian spirit manifested by Thorpe on this occasion, were not sufficient to procure his enlargement. He was still retained in prison, where, in all probability, he ended his days.

Wickliffe published an apology for his preachers, entitled, "Why Poor Priests have no Benefices." The reasons which he assigns, and on which he enlarges, why they have no benefices, are chiefly three. In the first place, they cannot obtain benefices without simony. They must submit to conditions, and make presents and payments which would give to the transaction a most unholy and mercenary character. Secondly, they cannot hold benefices without being in constant danger of misapplying and wasting what belongs to the poor. Every portion of clerical emolument which remained, after supplying the most moderate exigencies of nature, was regarded by Wickliffe and his followers as the rightful patrimony of the indigent; whereas the usages of those days almost compelled the clergy to waste this sacred residue on the rich, the worthless, and the idle. "So many cursed deceits," to borrow the language of Wickliffe, "hath Antichrist brought up, to make curates mispend poor men's goods, and not truly do their office."—The third reason has been hinted at already, in describing the course of life pursued by the "poor priests." They

insisted that the want of a benefice afforded no dispensation from the duty of preaching; but that their commission required them to be instant in season and out of season, in publishing the gospel of the grace of God, wherever their labours might be useful.

The system of itineracy established by Wickliffe was attended with great and speedy results. So widely and rapidly were his principles dispersed, that Knyghton compares them to "suckers from the root of a tree, which everywhere filled the compass of the kingdom:" and says (somewhat extravagantly I presume) that "a man could not meet two people on the road but one of them was a disciple of Wickliffe.

It is amusing to read the character given by Knyghton of some of the more active of the followers of Wickliffe. He represents them as wordy and disputatious, out-talking all who venture to contend with them, and as exhibiting a wonderful agreement among themselves. He charges them with a *Saracenic* pugnacity, the opposite of that meekness and patience which the gospel enjoins. "Our Saviour said, *If any one will not hear you, when you*

*depart out of that house, or city, shake off the dust of your feet for a testimony against him.* Not so the Wickliffites. Their language is, *If any one will not hear you, or shall say any thing against you, take the sword and smite him, or wound his reputation with a backbiting tongue.*" Knyghton did not think, perhaps, that he was here charging upon the Reformers one of the *acknowledged* maxims of the Romanists: "Never," says St. Lewis, addressing good Catholics, "never argue with a heretic. If such an one presume to assail your faith, make him no other reply but to draw your sword and drive it as far as it will go into his belly."

Knyghton has another charge against Wickliffe's preachers which is more likely, at least in some instances, to have been true. He represents them as "guarded by their hearers, armed with sword and target for their defence, that no one might attempt any thing against them or their doctrine; or might dare, at any time, to contradict it." When we consider the state of society at that period, the constant exposure of these congregations to the assaults of the Romanists, and the fact that there were

among them many knights and squires who always went armed, it is not unlikely that there was some foundation, at least on particular occasions, for the above representation of their popish adversary.

During the latter part of the reign of Richard II., various means were used to repress and extirpate the followers of Wickliffe, who, by way of reproach, were denominated Lollards. Conclusions drawn from the writings of Wickliffe were publicly condemned: all persons were prohibited, under severe penalties, from reading them: and orders were issued for the seizure and destruction of his books and tracts. But notwithstanding these precautions, the hated doctrine continued to prevail, and the number of those who embraced it was vastly increased. The whole University of Oxford was charged, at one time, by Archbishop Arundel, with heretical pravity. Many of the nobility were in the interest of the Reformers; and it was thought by some, that a majority of the house of Commons was in their favour. Certain it is, that in the year 1394, a petition was presented to Parliament, denouncing the abuses of the church, and demanding its re-

formation, in language of greater boldness than had ever before been hazarded in the legislature.

Such was the state of things when, at the very close of the fourteenth century, Richard II. was violently deposed, and Henry IV. was placed upon the throne. As he owed his elevation in no small degree to the influence of the clergy, he felt under obligations to consult their wishes. The consequence was, that he became at once a bloody persecutor. On the name of Henry IV. rests the eternal infamy of having passed the first law in England *de comburendo heretico*, for the consigning of heretics to the flames.

A law more abhorrent to the feelings of a large portion of the English people could hardly have been placed upon the statute-book; and the manner in which it was put in execution was as unwise and cruel, as the law itself was hateful and unjust. The individuals arraigned under it were not charged with sedition, or treason, or any offence directly against the state, but simply with *heresy*; and with heresy on a point of all others the most absurd and unintelligible. The murderous question

first urged by the inquisitors was uniformly this, "Do you believe that material bread remains in the sacrament after the words of consecration have been uttered?" and if the answer was in the affirmative, nothing could save the miserable confessor. He was doomed at once to suffer death by the most excruciating tortures.

The first victim of this detestable law was William Saktrè, parish-priest of St. Osyth, in the city of London; who has the honour of being the proto-martyr of England. With respect to the sacramental question, he admitted that the consecrated element was the *Bread of Life which came down from heaven*; but insisted that, subsequent to consecration, it remained *very bread*, as it was before. He was, therefore, consigned to expiate his heresy at the stake. He was first divested of all his ecclesiastical functions, from the order of priest to that of sexton. The cap of a layman was next placed upon his head, and he was then committed, with the usual disgusting and hypocritical recommendation, to the *tender mercy* of the secular arm. By the secular arm the accursed pile was lighted, and,

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for the first time in England, the flames of persecution arose towards heaven, to outrage and insult the God of all grace.

Another of the sufferers under Henry IV. was an illiterate but holy man, whose name was Badby. Archbishop Arundel took much pains to persuade this man that the consecrated bread was really and properly the body of Christ. But Badby persisted in rejecting such an idea. "After the consecration," said he, "it remaineth the same material bread that it was before. It is not God, but a *sign* or *sacrament* of the living God. I believe the omnipotent God in the Trinity to be *one*. But if every consecrated host be God's body, then are there twenty thousand gods in England." After this worthy confessor had been delivered over to the secular power, he was, by the king's writ, condemned to be burned. The Prince of Wales, afterwards King Henry V., had a mind to be present at his execution. When the flames began to scorch the body of the victim, he involuntarily exclaimed *Mercy!* The prince, supposing that he was entreating the mercy of his judges, ordered the fire to be instantly quenched. "Will you forsake he-

resy," said young Henry, "and conform to the faith of the holy Church? If you will you shall be spared, and shall have a yearly stipend out of the king's treasury." But Badby refused to comply with the offer. He remained unmoved. Whereupon Henry, in a rage, declared that he should now receive no favour. The fires were rekindled, and the martyr gloriously finished his course in the flames.

In the year 1413, King Henry IV. died. His son and successor, Henry V., trod in his father's steps, and countenanced Arundel in all his plans for extirpating the Lollards. One of the first, and, altogether, the most distinguished victims in the early part of this reign, was Sir John Oldcastle, Baron of Cobham. Allusion has been made to the sufferings and death of this illustrious nobleman, in a previous chapter; but the subject requires to be touched upon here. He was not only suspected of heresy, but was understood, in various ways, to favour and promote the designs of the Lollards. He employed scholars from Oxford to propagate the obnoxious opinions, and assisted the preachers whom Wickliffe

had raised up, in their arduous and self-denying labours. By these means Lord Cobham had greatly incensed the hierarchy, and his destruction was determined on as an event necessary to the church. Accordingly, he was cited before Archbishop Arundel and his court, where he underwent a long and severe trial, at the close of which he was pronounced to be "an incorrigible, pernicious and detestable heretic," and as such was delivered over to the secular jurisdiction.

On hearing his sentence, this inflexible nobleman and Christian replied, "Though ye condemn my body, which is but a wretched thing, I am well assured ye can do no harm to my soul, more than Satan could to the soul of Job. He that created it will, of his infinite mercy, save it. Of this I have no manner of doubt. And as to the articles of my belief, by the grace of the eternal God, I will stand to them even unto death." He then turned to the people, and stretching out his hands, said, "Good Christian people! for God's love beware of these men; else they will beguile you, and lead you blindfold into hell with themselves." Then kneeling down, and lift-

ing up his eyes to heaven, he prayed for his enemies in the following words: "Lord God Eternal! I beseech thee, of thy great mercy, to forgive my persecutors, if it be thy blessed will."

From the place of trial he was taken to the Tower of London, and there imprisoned, to await his execution. But before the appointed day arrived, he effected his escape, and retired into Wales, where he concealed himself for several years. During the time of his concealment, his persecutors continued, by false and malicious statements, to draw upon him the suspicion of *treason*; a suspicion which also rested upon not a few of the innocent Lollards in and around London, and brought them to a terrible end. At length, Lord Cobham himself was retaken and brought back to London, where his fate was soon determined. He was dragged into St. Giles's fields, with all the insult and barbarity of enraged superstition, where he was hanged up by the waist, with a chain, and, as before recited, burned to death. By a slight degree of dissimulation this excellent man might have softened his adversaries and effected his escape: but he chose rather

to die, as he had lived, in the faith and hope of the gospel, and bearing testimony to its truth and its power.

Henry Chicheley succeeded Arundel in the see of Canterbury, A. D. 1414, and continued to occupy that exalted station for almost thirty years. He has been well denominated the firebrand of the age in which he lived. To subserve the purposes of his own pride and tyranny, he engaged the king in his famous contest with France, by which a prodigious carnage was made of the human race; and the most dreadful miseries were brought upon both kingdoms. And while these things were carrying on in France, the archbishop at home, partly by exile, partly by forced abjurations and partly by the flames, domineered over the poor Lollards, and almost effaced the last vestige of godliness from the land.

This was one of the most gloomy seasons which the true church in England ever experienced. The strictest search was made after Lollards and their books, and no quarter was given, anywhere, to those who professed the pure religion of Christ. There were a few souls, indeed, dispersed through various parts,

sighing in secret, detesting the reigning superstition and idolatry, and worshipping God in spirit and in truth; but they found no *human* consolation or support whatever. The diocese of Kent was particularly exposed to the bloody activity of Chicheley. Considerable numbers were destroyed, and whole families were obliged to relinquish their homes and go into exile for the sake of the gospel.

In the midst of these distresses, Henry V. died, A. D. 1422, and was succeeded by his son Henry VI., an infant not yet a year old. During the whole period of the young king's minority, the persecution of the Lollards was vigorously continued. William Taylor, a priest, was burned, because he had asserted that prayer should be directed only to God. William White, who, by writing and preaching, had done much to promote the gospel in Norfolk, was condemned to the stake in 1424. His holy and useful life and blameless manners had rendered him venerable in all that county. He attempted to speak to the people before his execution, but was forbidden.

The civil wars between the houses of York and Lancaster, with which the kingdom was

convulsed during the next several reigns, though they diverted attention to some extent from the Lollards, and in this way mitigated their sufferings, still did not end them. A person named John Gooze was burned at Tower Hill, in the reign of Edward IV., in the year 1473. The victim was delivered to one of the sheriffs in the morning, with an order to have him executed in the afternoon. The officer, out of compassion, took him to his house, and endeavoured to prevail on him to retract. But the martyr, after listening to him a while, told him that his efforts were vain, and desired him to desist: at the same time he asked him for something to eat, saying, "I must eat a good dinner now, for I shall have a brisk storm to pass through before supper." After he had dined, he gave thanks to God, and then desired to be led forth to the place where he should give up his soul to his Creator and Redeemer.

The civil contests which had so long distracted England, were terminated at the accession of Henry VII.; but the church of God was still an object of unremitted persecution. The sufferings of the Lollards were even greater, under Henry VII. and Henry VIII.,

than they had been during the civil wars. No regard was had either to age or sex. All who were convicted of what was then called heresy, and adhered to their opinions, were first condemned in the ecclesiastical courts, then delivered over to the secular arm, and then burned to ashes without exception and without mercy.

The extent of the havoc during these terrible persecutions may be learned from the language of one of the correspondents of Erasmus, who declared that the frequency of the executions at Smithfield had advanced the price of firewood in the neighbourhood of London. Mr. Fox has collected a most shocking catalogue of the victims who suffered in a single year (1521) under the persecutions of Bishop Langland, the king's confessor. There were wretches in those days who bore the title of bishops, who could, even sport with these calamities and make them the subject of their coarse and vulgar wit. We are told particularly of a Bishop Nix, of Norwich, who, when speaking of persons suspected of heresy, used to describe them as men who savoured of the *frying-pan!*



Nor was the treatment of those who, through infirmity or fear, abjured their profession in the near prospect of death, much better than that of the martyrs who perished. With a fagot on their shoulder, they were compelled to witness the dying agonies of their more faithful brethren. With the likeness of a fagot painted on their sleeve, and the mark of heresy branded on their cheek, they were sent forth to public scorn and to an almost inevitable destruction. They who wore this badge of infamy were nearly sure to perish for want of employment and support. They who laid it aside so much as for an hour, were certainly committed to the flames. Thus, the horrible fate which awaited them passed into a proverb: "*Put it off and be burnt; keep it on and starve.*"

"But," in the language of another, "the soul sickens at the recital of these enormities, and finds no relief but in the recollection that the church which perpetrated them was heaping up to herself wrath against the day of wrath. The hour of vengeance was in the heart of the Almighty. It was drawing on, with a noiseless and stealthy pace. Retribu-

tion, it has been said, hath *a foot of velvet*, but *a hand of steel*. In the midst of the cries of perishing innocence, the approach of ruin was unheard and unsuspected. But the arm was even then uplifted which was to smite the scalp of this gigantic and godless oppression. The trumpet was at the mouth of the angel, and the blast was ready to go forth, which, in England at least, was to level its battlements in the dust." The glorious reformation was at the door, which was to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that were bound—which was to quench the fires of papal persecution, and bring forth the hidden disciples of Wickliffe, the secluded friends of religion and the Bible, into that light and liberty for which they had so long and so bitterly sighed.

It has been intimated already, that the influence of Wickliffe's labours was felt, not only in England, but on the continent of Europe. It remains that a few words be said as to the extent and direction of this influence.

The Queen of Richard II. was a Bohemian princess of excellent character, and much addicted to the study of the Holy Scriptures. On

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the death ~~of her husband~~ <sup>was</sup> she returned, with a train of attendants, ~~to~~ her native land. It is commonly believed that these persons introduced the writings of Wickliffe into Bohemia. Others have given a different account of the manner of their introduction there; but as to the main fact, viz., that the writings of Wickliffe were carried into Bohemia, and there kindled the flame of gospel truth, there can be no doubt. Not less than two hundred copies of the different works of the English Reformer, the most of them finely written, and decorated with splendid bindings and costly embossments of gold, were afterwards seized and burned by the Archbishop of Prague. Doubtless many others were so concealed as to elude the search of the inquisition, and remained to scatter the light of truth upon the surrounding darkness. These works were read by not a few of the Bohemian nobility and gentry. They were pondered by such men as John Huss and Jerome of Prague, who imbibed from them those holy principles which were their support in imprisonment and at the stake.\* Through the influence of Huss,

\* Mr. Jones, in his Church History, (p. 395,) has a

the doctrines of Wickliffe were widely diffused in the University of Prague; so that when the books above referred to were seized and burned, the measure was most strongly reprobated.

The trial of Huss and his friend Jerome before the council of Constance, the treachery practised upon them, their long confinement and cruel sufferings, need not be related here. Suffice it to say, that these men perished heroically in the flames, and their names stand enrolled in the goodly company of martyrs.

But the flames which consumed them, lighted up a fiercer flame, which continued to rage with terrific power, through the greater part of the fifteenth century. A long and bloody war was the consequence, which was carried on in Bohemia with dreadful carnage, and with various success, till all parties were comparatively exhausted under it.

In the latter part of the fifteenth century, we first hear of the "United Brethren of Bo-

long and *pious* letter from Wickliffe to Huss; but it is no better than a *pious fraud*; since Huss could not have been more than eight or ten years of age when Wickliffe died.

hemia," a body composed of the better sort of Hussites, the remnant who had not perished by fire and sword. It was this body which, at the commencement of the Reformation under Luther, sent messengers to him, soliciting his friendship, and proffering to him the hand of Christian love. A part of this interesting body afterwards became incorporated with the different Reformed churches. Another portion of them continued their separate existence longer, and at length fell into the connexion of the Moravian brethren who settled at Herrnhut, in 1722.

We have before seen that the followers of Wickliffe had an existence in England, notwithstanding all the efforts made to destroy them, till the time of the Protestant reformation. We here trace another line of them in Germany, stretching on through tedious ages of conflict and darkness, till it meets in the same glorious event. And how much the labours of Wickliffe contributed to this event, to prepare the way for it and hasten its approach, can never be known till it is revealed in eternity. Certain it is, however, that he stands connected with the reformation in many

points of view : and that his name should be a cherished one by every lover of the Bible and friend of man. His life and labours, his sufferings and successes should be recorded, that coming generations may know what he did, and may learn the amount of the world's indebtedness to the renowned English reformer, **WICKLIFFE.**

**THE END.**

