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Fourth Annual Report of the Manuscripts Commission. Correspondence
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XIII.—THE POOR PRIESTS; A STUDY IN THE RISE OF
ENGLISH LOLLARDRY.

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THE POOR PRIESTS; A STUDY IN THE RISE OF ENGLISH LOLLARDRY.¹

By H. L. CANNON, Ph. D.

Of the Poor Priests, mention of whom is made so frequently in the literature relating to English history of the latter part of the fourteenth century, we possess a surprisingly small amount of exact information. According to the best light we have they appear to have been a loosely associated body of men drawn from the various walks of life who, awakened by Wiclif to a sense of the great need of the English people for religious instruction and somewhat trained by the influences he brought to bear upon them, and supplied moreover by him with matter for their sermons, zealously set out to evangelize all England.

THE DATE OF THE RISE OF THE POOR PRIESTS.

The date of the rise of the Poor Priests of Wiclif is clouded in the obscurity natural to the humble beginnings of such an institution. Perhaps the best way to determine it would be to start with an assured date and work backward.

It is clear that in the year 1382 their preaching was in full swing. Walsingham said that during that time Wiclif strove to spread his opinions both by his own means and by means of his followers; and that not being satisfied with sermons declaimed among the common people, he wrote to the lords and magnates. And again, that he sent out apostates most evilly disposed to the Catholic faith for dogmatizing and preaching.² The chronicler of the *Continuatio Eulogiarum* wrote under the same year that Wiclif's disciples were preaching the doctrine of their master throughout England, weaken-

¹ For bibliography, see appendix.

² II, 50, 53.

ing the faith of many persons not only among the laity but also among the noble and the learned. The friars that year in consequence had a hard time, being refused alms and bidden to work.¹ Thirdly, in the letter of William Courtenay to Peter Stokys, dated May 28, 1382, the archbishop wrote that through frequent complaint and common report it had come to his hearing that some evil persons were going about in the province of Canterbury without official license, spreading broadcast doctrines which threatened the position of the whole church and the tranquillity of the realm.² As the doctrines condemned in this letter were those of Wiclif, it is clear that Wiclif's preachers were the offenders.

Since it was in 1382 that Wiclif left Oxford for the retirement of Lutterworth, if the Poor Priests were notorious at that time they must have received their first impulse from Wiclif while he was at Oxford. This conclusion also agrees with what one would naturally suppose an earnest teacher would do in the way of interesting young men in his plans. Still, it might be hard to point to any particular men and say with certainty that they became Poor Priests from studying under Wiclif at Oxford. According to his confession, reported by a hostile chronicler, John Ball was a pupil of Wiclif for two years, but it might be questioned if Ball would possibly come under the category of Poor Priests.³ William Thorpe, however, was one, and had studied under Wiclif, Hereford, and others; where, is not stated.⁴

In support of earlier dates we find interesting evidence in the writings of Wiclif and other Lollards.

Wiclif's Sermon for the second Sunday in Lent appears to belong to 1380, or to come but a little later. It contains plain directions to his hearers or readers concerning the delivery of the sermon, such as he often in later times was accustomed to give his Poor Priests.⁵

Again in the Dialogus, believed by the editor, A. W. Pollard, to have been written in 1379, we meet this passage: "Through this (i. e., desire for temporal possessions) the incompetent aspire to the superior ranks of the priesthood and

¹ Con. Enl., III, 354-355.

² Fasc. Z., 275.

³ Id., 273.

⁴ Cf. Lechler, I, 413-415; II, kap. 5, II.

⁵ I, Sermones, Intro., xxxiii-xxxiv; Sermon xix, p. 130; II, 330-331.

hinder the preaching of the word of God among the people. Those who strive for this they persecute as being heretics, and this persecution is a manifest proof of their own heresy. Nor do the poor faithful priests¹ suffice to resist unless God, by means of the secular arm or by some other means, shall quickly offer helping hands."²

This and other passages in the *Dialogus* almost lead Mr. Pollard to the conclusion that "Wiclif's Poor Priests must have both begun their work and met with resistance much earlier than is supposed."³

In the tract which begins "The first general poynt of pore prestis that prechen in engelond is this," ascribed by the editor, F. D. Matthew, to the year 1377, the writer complains of hindrance from preaching suffered by the clergy, and of lack of safeguards against arbitrary imprisonment by ecclesiastical authorities: (Points by which the land would be strengthened.) "That non of the clerגיע be lettid to kepe trewely & frely the gospel of ihu crist in good lyuyng & trewe techyng, for no feyned priuelegie or tradicions founden vp of synful wrecchis." "That no prest or religious in oure lond be prisoned with-oten opyn dom & trewe cause, fully knowen to oure kyng or his trewe conseil: for ellis worldly prestis & feyned religious may stoppe trewe men from prechyng of holy writt & magnyfyng of the kyngis regalie, & murthere the kyngis lege men with-ouden answe."⁴

Wiclif's tract *De Daemonio Meridiano* mentions that the faithful in the Lord are prohibited, through imprisonment, privations, and other censures, from declaring the law of Christ openly to the people; and that a false friar preaching manifest heresy will be licensed by the bishop and defended by the secular arm, but that a faithful priest (a common designation for Poor Priests) wishing to preach the gospel gratis will be instantly forbidden to preach in that diocese.⁵ R. Buddensieg, the editor, would like to date this tract within a short time after the death of the Black Prince, which he mistakenly ascribes to June 8, 1377, instead of June 8, 1376, but he leaves the date uncertain in deference to "All par-

¹ A common designation for Poor Priests. See Lechler, I, 417.

² *Dialogus*, Intro., xx, pp. 10, 11.

³ Intro., pp. xiv, xv.

⁴ Matthew, p. 279.

⁵ II, *Polemical Works*, pp. 424-425.

ticulars hitherto known of the institute of Wiclif's itinerary preachers,"¹ a consideration which has led to the dating by Lechler of the *Trialogus* and by Loserth of Part I of *Sermones*.

It should be noted that the dating of these tracts has been done by four different editors, Loserth, Pollard, Matthew, and Buddensieg, and that their constant tendency has been to date these tracts earlier than the accepted belief as to the date of the rise of the Poor Priests would warrant. The tracts referred to apparently belong to the years 1380, 1379, 1377, 1376. Even the two tracts earliest in date speak strongly, as of well-known evils, of hindrances to preaching and of imprisonment for ecclesiastical offenses. One is therefore led to infer that as early as 1376 or 1377 the Poor Priests were rich in experience of opposition, and that consequently the seedtime of their earliest training must lie back of that.

What light do the chroniclers throw upon the possibility of Poor Priests existing in notable numbers in 1376-77?

The *Chronicon Angliæ*² merely hints at Wiclif having helpers in recording the injunction of the archbishop in 1377 to the effect that not only Wiclif should not touch upon forbidden topics, "*sed et omnes qui communicarent eidem.*"

The manuscript in the appendix to the *Chronicon Angliæ*³ of the fourteenth century contains a notice under 1377 to the effect that Wiclif gathered to himself many disciples living together in Oxford, clothed with long vestments of russet, all of one cut, going about on foot ventilating his errors among the people and preaching publicly in sermons. After a statement of these errors, the chronicler continues to relate that they asserted and affirmed these so much that lords and magnates of the land and many of the people regarded and honored them as holy prophets. Furthermore, that although the archbishop laid silence upon Wiclif and all others in regard to the forbidden doctrine, and that in no manner either Wiclif or others thereafter or elsewhere [sic] should treat of the matter; yet they did not long keep silence.⁴

Walsingham,⁵ apparently working over this or a related

¹ Page 414.

² Pages 115-117.

³ MS. 13, D. 1.

⁴ Page 391.

⁵ Writing before 1388, see *Chron. Ang. Intro.*, xxxii.

text, embellishes the account so far as to say that it was in order to spread his heresy the more cautiously, and under an exquisite coloring to spread it the wider, Wiclif gathered his companions and allies, who stayed at Oxford and elsewhere. Wiclif was forbidden to permit others to teach the matter.¹

These chronicles, supplementing each other, from the circumstantial nature of their accounts seem hardly guilty of anachronisms; and, moreover, they harmonize with the other testimony given above. If it be contended that the allies of Wiclif referred to were merely the Oxford doctors, like Hereford and Aston, attention might be called to the many disciples, to the garb worn by enough men to become distinctive as the uniform of a sect, to the statement that they stayed both at Oxford and elsewhere, that a deliberate intention is attributed to Wiclif of gathering companions and allies to spread his heresy, that Wiclif was forbidden to permit others to teach.

A curious bit of evidence bearing on the date of the rise of the Poor Priests may be offered for what it is worth. The chronicler, Knighton, treating of the wide spread of Lollardry in 1382, wrote that the principal false Lollards at the first introduction of this horrible sect wore for the greater part garments of russet.² But it was under date of 1377 that the chronicler quoted above mentioned the teachers of Wiclif as at that time wearing russet gowns. Slight as this thread may be, to the extent that it holds it binds the rise of the Poor Priests to the period in or just preceding 1376-77.

WICLIF'S VIEW OF THE NEED FOR POOR PRIESTS.

To state the various evils that must have operated to lead Wiclif to originate the Poor Priests would be to review the whole series of complaints which he had to make against the abuses of the times. He set the highest estimate upon the value and importance of preaching. "Evangelization is the supreme work pertaining to the ecclesiastical hierarchy."³ "Right preching of Goddis Word is the mooste worthy dede that prestis don heere among men."⁴ And yet the people for

¹ Wals., I, 324-326.

² II, 184.

³ *Opus Evangelium* (1384), p. 4, ll. 13-15. For a collection of quotations on this point see I, *Sermones*, Intro. lii, ff.

⁴ Matthew, *De Officio Pastoralis*, p. 441

lack of sound preaching were falling into evil ways. "Indeed, (as I have often said) this preaching in which the preachers put aside the Gospel and tell the people what is false, ludicrous, and profane is the greater part of the cause of the perturbation of the church. For if the people should hear regularly the word of God in such preachings, and should somewhat attend to and observe it, the law of Christ would not be sterile as it is now."¹

How had the Gospel come to be so neglected? "Ant thus ther ben many causis that letten goddis word to renne, * * * o caus is dowing of the chirche & riching ther-of ouer cristis' wille, for bi this prelatiis slepen in synne & ben to fatte to preche the puple, * * * & heere breken out thes freris ordriis, for al yif thei han no worldly lordchip as han prestis that ben dowid, yit thei spyulen men of moebliis & wasten hem in noumbre & housis, & this excess is more synne than synne of the fend in o persone. & thus they turnen the ende of ther preching for-to gete hem sicke godis. & this entent mut nedis make falsed in maner of ther preching, for thei shapen ther sermons more to gete hem good than to profite to the chirche: & as the firste wile of the fend bigan soone in siluestris tyme, so this secound wile bigan in grounding of thes newe ordriis." "the thridde cause that lettith trewe preching is appropring of chirches. for whanne chirches ben approprid, thes curatis tellen not bi this preching, as munkis or chanouns or othere collegies, but bi gederung of godis: & thus they ben maad slowe to preche & stronge to gedere dymes to hem." * * * "the fourthe cause is bringing in of false freris bi many cuntreys: for, as it is seid bifore, thei letten trewe preching to renne & maken curatis bi many weyes to leue this moost worthy offiss. First they robben hem many weyes & maken hem bisy for to lyue, for they deprauen hem to ther parischens bi floriyshid wordis that they bringen yn; & no drede they shapen ther sermons bi dyuy siouns & othere iapis that they maken moost plese the puple. & thus they erren in bileue & maken the puple to trowe to hem that sermons ben nought but in ther foorme & thus thei stoppen symple curatis that thei doren not preche to the puple, & this defaute of preching of crist is more than defaute in hereris."²

¹ III, Sermones, p. 385, ll. 34-35, l. 38; p. 386, l. 7.

² Matthew, De Officio Pastoralis, pp. 445-446. Written not later than 1378. See p. 405.

As proofs that friars preach only for gain, Wiclif said: "Friars (i. e., the orders of friars) select as preachers those that can get the most goods from the people. These gloss the sins of the people. They go not where sin is greatest, but where they can gain most. They do not disclose the sins of prelates and great men for fear of losing their favor. They do not preach at times most favorable for edifying the people, but at seasons the most profitable for themselves. When they get rich enough not to need more goods they do not preach. They do not preach to the very poor. They are far more interested in gathering the collection than in confirming the weak faith of the people."¹

As though this were not enough: "Friars pursue with lies and many fallacious indictments the faithful who in charity expose their defects."² As for the prelates: "They scorn the preaching of the gospel as being in the highest degree hateful to them, for its teachings and their lives do not accord. Hence they wish it should be left undeclared to the people."³

WICLIF'S AIMS FOR POOR PRIESTS.

Wiclif's Poor Priests were designed to remedy just these evils, so clearly recognized. "Simple Priests should not cease to evangelize on account of excommunications or other censures of Antichrist."⁴

"And if it be asked to what degree we ought to press on to evangelization and the passion of martyrdom, the answer is the same as before, that just as a man should exert all his strength upon cherishing God, thus also he should exert all his strength upon preaching Christ. Nor should he mingle in a consideration of self-love, nor strive to introduce novelty or subtle speech into his sermons, but should consider purely in what manner he can best avail the honor of God and the utility of the people."⁵

This preaching was to consist not of soft flattery, but of hard truth. Evangelical men needed to uncover the sins of the people, and to persist in doing so.⁶

¹ II, Sermones, No. VIII, pp. 57-59.

² IV, Sermones, No. 63, p. 499.

³ Dialogus, p. 17, ll. 18-26.

⁴ III, Sermones, No. 10, p. 73, ll. 29-32.

⁵ II, Sermones, No. 38, p. 279, ll. 1-8.

⁶ I, Sermones, No. 42, p. 281, ll. 1-9.

And since the monks and friars were blinding the people to the rule of God, it would be especially the work of an evangelist to destroy those sects.¹

That Wiclif's Poor Priests were designed to give the people not merely sermons in English, as the friars had done, but were intended to present to the people the gospel itself as clearly as possible, and hence in English, as the other preachers had not done, goes almost without argument.

Wiclif said the clergy feared to give in English the whole gospel, because it would prove themselves to be followers of Antichrist.² To him, who as a crowning work presented to Englishmen the Bible in English, it was a commonplace to say: "The wit of goddis lawe shulde be taught in that tunge that is more knowun."³ "There is no one so simple as not to be able to learn the evangelical words to the extent of the rudiments that will suffice him for salvation."⁴

SELECTION OF POOR PRIESTS.

In the selection of men to perform the work of preaching Wiclif does not appear to have shown any preference.

Of the Oxford doctors that were repressed in 1382 John Aston took up the life of an itinerant Wiclifite preacher, and it would appear likely that others did the same. There appears to be no specific reference to any young Oxford student becoming a Poor Priest unless we take William Thorpe, but such a body of suitable material at hand could hardly have been neglected.

Besides students and doctors there must have been many humble curates scattered about England to whom Wiclif's appeals for gospel reform came in one way or another. It was not a rare thing for curates to leave their benefices for a time in order to study the gospel. "Also yif siche curatis ben stired to gone lerne goddis lawe & teche here parischenys the gospel, comynly thei schullen gete no leue of bischopis but for gold: & whanne thei schullen most profite in here lerynyge than schulle thei be clepid hom at the prelatis wille."⁵

¹ I, Sermones, No. 27, p. 179, ll. 8-12.

² I, Polemical Works, cap. iv., p. 126, ll. 4-15.

³ De Officio Pastoralii, Matthew, cap. 15, p. 429.

⁴ Opus Evangelicium, p. 92, ll. 5-8.

⁵ Matthew, Why Poor Priests have no Benefice: author and date uncertain, p. 250.

Wiclif himself held the rectorship of the church at Lutterworth while teaching at Oxford.¹ Curates accordingly may well have heard Wiclif teaching. That curates were often not desired to preach the gospel has already been noticed. Consequently, such as did become desirous to preach the gospel were apt to lose their benefices, and these would go to swell the ranks of the Poor Priests. Such a view of the case is supported by the declaration of Wiclif that a simple curate who is deprived of his benefice for preaching is all the better off, for then he can preach the more freely.²

Did Wiclif attempt to draw monks and friars into his ranks? The editor of *De Apostasia*, M. H. Dziewicki, believes that the first two chapters of that treatise were written largely with that design. He writes: "Both these propositions (i. e., A man may, without apostacy, leave any of these private religions, and a man may, without leaving any private religion to which he belongs, incur apostacy) seem intended to bring over to Wiclif's band of 'poor priests' some wavering Franciscans or Dominicans, who, struck and attracted by his austere doctrines, were yet held back for fear of apostacy. This hypothesis is strengthened, first, by the comparative moderation in tone to which Wiclif keeps all through the book; second, by several passages that we shall notice as we go on; and third, by the general tendency and evident *à propos* of the arguments." Also, "From some passages in *De Blasphemia* it appears that Wiclif's propaganda amongst the monks was very active at this time (i. e., 1383³). He avails himself with much skill of every motive that they could have to be discontented with their superiors."

The passages from *De Apostasia* referred to are especially two: one in which Wiclif states that some of the more religious and intelligent friars, speaking in reference to the perfidy of the orders, quote the Psalmist: "Let us break their bonds and cast their yoke from us;" and another to the effect that there are many saintly and intelligent clerics among them who do well to flee, despairing on account of the hardened malice of those sects. They do well to flee because otherwise as apostates they are killed or committed to perpetual prison.⁴

¹ Fasc. Ziz., pp. 242-243; Bull of Gregory XI, Cf. *Matthew*, p. 141.

² *Opus Evang.*, p. 375, l. 82; p. 376, l. 1.

³ See vi-vii.

⁴ P. 24, ll. 8-12; p. 41, ll. 35-37; p. 42, ll. 1-5.

We have now to consider the question of how far Wiclif drew upon the laity to secure Poor Priests. And here for the sake of clearness it may be well to explain the meaning of certain terms as used in this paper. Whenever the writer wishes to refer to priests regularly ordained according to the rules of the church of that day, he will use the term "regularly ordained;" whenever he refers to men ordained in a fashion that would have been regarded as irregular by the church of that day, he will use the term "irregularly ordained." By "lay preachers" he wishes to signify men who have been neither "regularly ordained" nor "irregularly ordained."

Wiclif set slight value upon episcopal ordination. "Sensible consecration avails little, and thus if the divine ordination be present any priest can confer the ecclesiastical sacraments equally well with the Pope, just as the other apostles ordained bishops equally well with Peter." "Indeed, I suppose, as far as concerns these two ordinations (i. e., sacraments), namely, confirmation and ordination, there is no reason why inferior priests could not give them."¹

Not only was this doctrine held theoretically by Lollard preachers, but it was actually put into practice. Witness Walsingham under date of 1389: "The Lollards, followers of John Wiclif, at this time seduced very many to their error and acquired so great audacity that their priests, after the custom of pontiffs, created new priests, asserting, as we have frequently told above, that every priest had as great power of binding and loosing and of performing other ecclesiastical functions as the Pope himself gives or can give. They practised this perfidy in the diocese of Salisbury. And they who were thus ordained by the heretics, thinking all things were permitted to them, did not fear to celebrate mass, to treat of divine affairs, and to confer the sacraments. This baseness was disclosed by one who had been ordained by them, but who, pricked by conscience, confessed the error to the Bishop of Salisbury at his manor of Sunning."²

In John Balle's confession, according to the Fasciculi Zizaniorum, the followers of Wiclif by 1381 were ordaining one another, "*se ordinaverant*."³

¹ Polemical Works, I, De Quattuor Sectis Novellis, pp. 259-260.

² Wals., II, p. 188.

³ Fasc. Ziz., pp. 273-274.

If the Poor Priests thus believed and practiced ordination among themselves, it follows that it would have been an easy matter for such laymen as joined this group of teachers to become irregularly ordained priests, and thus laymen could have been drawn upon as recruits.

But did Wiclif countenance as preachers laymen who had never become irregularly ordained? Contrary to received opinion as it may be, all the evidence that the writer finds goes to prove well nigh conclusively that Wiclif had no lay preachers, and moreover had no place for them in his scheme for reform. As this point deserves careful consideration, let us first notice what parts Wiclif considered the church properly to be divided into.

In Sermon No. LX, of the First Part, he outlines his ideal church militant: "The church should be divided into these three parts: All members of the church ought to be shepherds or sheep. The shepherds ought to be priests or deacons, teaching the sacred conversation of Christ; and the sheep, which are the people or laymen, are in a twofold function, because they are either defenders or workmen. The defenders are the secular lords, who ought powerfully to defend the church; the workmen are the people, who should minister to the church in the more humble duties. And if this third part performs its office heartily and faithfully then mother church will prosper. * * * But although by reason of haughtiness or avarice of Antichrist ministers are multiplied among the clergy, even beyond the order of the Old Testament, nevertheless priests and deacons would suffice, just as it was at the time of the Apostle."¹

From this outline one can see that Wiclif had a clear conception of the parts of the church militant, and of the duty of each part. It is to be observed how clearly he lays it down that all members ought to be shepherds or else sheep, that the shepherds are to be priests or deacons, who are to preach; while of the layman, those who are not secular lords are to perform the more humble duties. There certainly appears to be no place in such a system for the lay preacher.

If we follow Wiclif a step farther we shall find him arguing that a certain office can be filled by laymen for the specific

¹ P. 401, 11, 2-20.

reason that such offices do not require preaching. Continuing the line of thought he had presented, Wiclif showed how in his opinion there were six superfluous orders among the clergy. Of the archdeacons he said: "In the second rank archdeacons have been introduced, more clearly superfluous (i. e., than the bishops), since if they avail for anything they avail for that infamous twofold duty of burdening, of plundering, poor subject churches, and of calling attention to the ease of the superior bishop." "The faithful therefore should notice that their ministry, and the whole of it, can be prudently filled by a layman, and if the bishop would fully and duly perform his office the ministry of each would be more perfectly executed. For our archdeacons do not preach as did Stephen, nor living without property, as the apostles, do they minister to the poor."¹

If Wiclif argues that a layman can fill the archdeaconry because it involves no preaching, does he not take for granted that a layman ought not to preach?

On the other hand, where does Wiclif mention or recognize the need for lay preachers? The arguments usually put forth in support of the idea of lay preachers turn out, upon examination, to be without foundation. As these arguments are presented in the greatest array in the writings of Lechler, the writer craves the privilege of taking up seriatim the three arguments whereby Lechler 'believes he can prove that in the lifetime of Wiclif, and with his knowledge and approbation, laymen worked as traveling preachers.' The point of Lechler's arguments is not that Wiclif thought that his irregularly ordained preachers had sufficient authority, but that Wiclif was consciously sending out laymen.

First (Lechler): "The circumstance is plainly not accidental that Wiclif, in the sermons of his later years, when he speaks of his beloved traveling preachers, calls them less and less often 'poor priests,' or 'simple' or 'faithful priests,' but refers to them by the name 'evangelical men,' or 'apostolic men.' That is, he purposely avoids in such places the term priests, because that now was less and less applicable to all traveling preachers." The references given to support this proposition are limited to the Three Festival Sermons, numbered 31, 37, 53, in MS., No. 3928, and presumably now

¹Ibid., p. 402, ll. 11-21.

published under the same numbers in II Sermones. But II Sermones, according to the editor, Loserth,¹ group around 1382, and precede Sermones, III and IV, which remained to be written or revised before Wiclif's death, in December, 1384. If the sermons referred to all come within about a year the proposition is hardly supported. Since these references fail it becomes necessary to make such comparisons of the varying use of these terms as the incomplete indexes of Wiclif's published writings, supplemented with further search, will permit. After the elimination of writings of doubtful date or authenticity, as far as Wiclif is concerned, the following table of the use of these terms appears:

| " Priest." | Approximate date. | Approximate date. | More comprehensive term. |
|--|---------------------|-------------------|--|
| Sacerdos fidelis. De Daemon. Merid. Pol. W., 424. | 1376-7 | | |
| Pauperes et pauci | 1379 | | |
| Fideles sacerdotes | | | |
| Sacerdotum simplicium | 1381 | | |
| Dialogus, II, 54. | | | |
| Pore prestis | 1381-2 | | |
| Of Servants & Lords, Matthew, 229. | | | |
| Sacerdotes simplices | 1381-2 | 1381-2 | Viri evangelici. I Sermones, No. 62, p. 281. |
| I, Sermones, No. 63, p. 289. | | 1382 | Viros apostolicos. Viri evangelici. II, Sermones, No. 31, pp. 227-229. |
| | | 1382 | Viri evangelici. II, Sermones, No. 38, p. 282. |
| Simplices sacerdotes | 1382-3 | | |
| III, Sermones, No. 6, p. 43. | 1382-3 | | |
| Sacerdotes simplices | | | |
| III, Sermones, No. 10, p. 74. | 1383 (close of). | | |
| Sacerdotes fideles | | | |
| De Triplice Vinculo Amoris, Pol. W., p. 172. | 1383-4 | | |
| Nos simplices | | 1383-4 | Nostri predicantes. IV, Sermones, No. 59, p. 462. |
| (Filios domini, genus sacerdotium.) | 1384 | | |
| IV, Sermones, No. 56, p. 437. | | | |
| Sacerdotes simplices | 1384 | | |
| Opus Evang., Pars I, p. 35. (Wiclif died soon after this work.) | | | |
| Sacerdotes Christi | 1384 | | |
| Op. Ev., Pars I, p. 175. | | | |

The just conclusion seems to be that any argument based upon the supposed gradual abandonment of the term "priest" is without foundation. At all times, it should be noted, it would be perfectly natural for a speaker to use the terms "evangelical men," etc., as synonymous with "priests."

¹I Sermones, Intro., xxxi-xxxii.

The second argument is based upon the argument in the *Dialogus*, which reads: "And as for the fruit it seems certain that an ignorant person, by mediation of God's grace, avails more for building up the church of Christ than many graduates of schools or colleges, because he sows the law of Christ more humbly and more abundantly in works as well as in speech."¹ At first glance this passage would seem to refer to lay preachers. But a closer examination, together with that of the context, shows that Wiclif is here comparing only ignorant men and learned men to the disadvantage of the latter, so far as preaching is concerned. He is censuring scholastic learning. No comparison is instituted between priests and laymen.

That Wiclif is here comparing learned and simple priests is conclusively shown by the next few sentences of his argument. He goes on to explain that the scholastic studies breed heresies, such as that of the nature of the host. The fourth sentence after the one quoted above reads: "And thus it is concerning other heresies newly arising against the faith; for the inspiration of the simple priests, both in knowledge and willing work, will be of more profit to the capacity of the faithful laymen than all the said universities with their studies pertaining or their privileges hypocritically introduced and depressing the laity."²

Thirdly, there is the passage in Sermon No. IX, *Secunda Pars*, quoted to support the theory of lay preachers: "It seems, therefore, that for the existence of such a minister of the church there is required the authority of divine acceptance, and consequently the power and knowledge given of God for the performance of such ministry. When one has these, even though the bishop has not imposed hands upon him according to his traditions, God through himself has established him, and thus it seems (as is expressed in the utterances of Saint Paul and Saint John) that to become such a prelate there is required the effective following after Christ and the due renunciation of all the goods of the world."³ The context shows that Wiclif was bent upon proving that Pope and prelates had no especial authority as to ordination given

¹ *Dialogus*, p. 54, ll. 6-10.

² *Ibid.*, ll. 25-30.

³ *II*, *Sermones*, p. 64, ll. 25-34.

them by virtue of the gift of the keys. Accordingly he concludes, in the passage quoted, that one needs not the ordination of bishops; that if the ordination of bishops was not requisite, no ordination from human hands was required does not follow. As noticed some time ago, Wiclif held that "If the divine ordination be present any priest can confer the ecclesiastical sacraments," and that there was no reason why inferior priests could not confer ordination. His whole position was that any priest had as full powers as any prelate. The passage in the *Dialogus* therefore can not be used to prove that Wiclif believed in lay preachers.

THEIR PREPARATION BY WICLIF.

Wiclif gave considerable attention to the preparation of the Poor Priests, supplying them with great numbers of model sermons, and attempting to train them in their character and behavior as well. These points can be determined from his Latin and his English sermons. In both, but with greater frequency in the latter, are found various directions in regard to the proper use of the sermon.

In the Latin references like these appear: "The preacher can expand the matter of the exhortation according to its applicability to the audience." "The matter of the sermon is to be expanded according as it will benefit the audience." "Since the people are commonly accustomed to receive the Eucharist on this day, the sense is to be adapted pertinently to their instruction."¹ Considerations like these have led the editor of the Latin sermons, Dr. Loserth, to say without qualification that "The Latin sermons belonging to the Lutterworth period) and these form a large proportion of the whole number of sermons) were all composed by Wiclif as model sermons for the use of the 'poor priests,' or the 'wandering' or 'traveling preachers'".²

The references to the English sermons are similar,³ but the

¹ I, Sermones, No. 18, p. 128, ll. 3-4; I, No. 19, p. 130, ll. 30-31; I, No. 19, p. 133, ll. 21-22; I, No. 24, p. 164, ll. 1-3; I, No. 24, p. 165, ll. 1-3; I, No. 39, p. 260, ll. 9-12; II, No. 30, p. 226, ll. 30-31.

² I, Sermones, Intro., xvi.

³ Sunday Gospels: I, Arnold, No. 1, p. 3; No. 2, p. 6; No. 3, p. 9; No. 4, p. 12; No. 5, p. 14; No. 21, p. 53. Gospel Sermons: II, Arnold, No. 147, p. 45; No. 50, p. 53; No. 154, p. 60, following No. 178, p. 116; following No. 178, p. 117; No. 204, p. 168; No. 205, p. 169; No. 207, p. 172. Epistle Sermons: II, Arnold, No. 6, p. 240; No. 7, p. 244; No. 9, p. 249; No. 13, p. 259; No. 14, p. 264; No. 15, pp. 271-272; No. 55, p. 376.

additional important feature is that long passages from the New Testament are often quoted in English, thus putting it in the power of any preacher who could read at all to present to the people not merely an exposition of the Gospel, but the Gospel itself in a good translation.

These model sermons would naturally, in an indirect way, instruct the preachers who used them. Wiclif, however, did not stop with that, but also frequently directed his attention to the special edification of priests and preachers. Thus, for instance, sermon No. 31 in *Secunda Pars* begins: "This Gospel directs apostles and apostolic men in what manner they should conduct themselves in the office of preaching." And No. 31 in *Quarta Pars* consists of a long disquisition upon the points of good and bad sermons and the character needful for preachers. In the notice of the Wiclifites made by the author of the *Continuatio Eulogii* under the year 1382 occurs the remark that "The disciples of the aforesaid John studied in the compilation of sermons and gathered the sermons of (their) brothers."

One would much like to know whether Wiclif at times gathered his Poor Priests around him and face to face with them uttered his sermons, or whether his sermons to them and for them were disseminated in written form. Any attempt to answer this question leads only to inconclusive and therefore unsatisfactory results, the reason for which is clear. In the *Præfatio* to the Latin Sermons, as we have them, Wiclif explained that he had been collecting these sermons with some idea of revision: and at the close of the English Sermons—that is, in the last paragraph of the fifty-fifth of the Epistle Sermons—he apparently so wrote of the Gospel and Epistle Sermons as to indicate that, as we now have them, they had been issued all together.

Consequently, one who should favor the idea that they were issued first in written form may not claim in his favor that they lack the directness which one should expect in them if they were first issued orally, for the revision may have changed the phraseology in this respect. And, too, the cross references from one sermon to another¹ may similarly be explained. On the other hand, he who would favor the idea of their first being issued orally to groups of priests can not

¹ I, *Sermones*, No. 39, p. 260, ll. 9-12, II, *Arnold*, No. 50, p. 531, No. 204, p. 168.

deny that such passages as point that way (leaving out of view the forty sermons *dum stetit in scholis*¹ which supposedly the Poor Priests could not have heard when first issued) may be merely instances of vivid writing. Or if the passages seem to be particularly addressed to the priests themselves, one can not deny that such sermons, as well as the others, may have been passed from hand to hand.

REASONS FOR THEIR ITINERANCY.

In discussing this question we are fortunate in having peculiarly satisfactory material to draw upon for information. We possess the valuable tract *Why Poor Priests have no Benefice*,² which shows what considerations actually led them to become itinerant; and as further material to draw upon, in the second part of the *Sermons* (composed 1382+), and in the *Dialogus* (composed 1379), and in the tract *De Officio Pastoralis* (Wiclif, not later than 1378),³ not to mention other places, we find fully explained the underlying principles that gave those considerations their vitality.

These underlying principles or desirable ends are three in number, namely: to preach in the place and manner most profitable to the people, to live modestly by work or free alms, to avoid simony. In regard to these points Wiclif had strong convictions.

He called it one of the errors of the disciples of Antichrist that they chose places productive to themselves rather than with the view of being the most useful.⁴ He likewise used the same phrase "to be most useful" (*plus prodesse*) in rebuking the system whereby bishops established limitations for preachers and thus "Imply that the region of their jurisdiction is exempt from the dominion of God to be a principality of the devil."⁵ Still more clearly did he express himself upon another error of these disciples of Antichrist who believed that they should not preach outside of their own cure. "For it often happens that a preacher is more bound to another people (i. e., than the people in his own jurisdiction); indeed, just as the law of charity and of love requires one to

¹ IV, *Sermons*, Intro., v, etc.

² Probably written by a Poor Priest?, *Matthew*, p. 244.

³ *Matthew*, p. 405.

⁴ II, *Sermons*, p. 277, ll. 23-26.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 278, ll. 1-9.

love everyone, so the law of the gospel requires one to preach to whomsoever he may be able to give the most help (plus prodesse).¹

He believed that priests should live modestly, limiting their wants to moderate supplies of food and raiment only,² the latter to include the protection of dwellings; that they should not hesitate to earn their support by work, provided that it be of a suitable character;³ that such support as they received from others should be from alms⁴ and from alms alone.⁵

Of simony Wiclif said that in the conferring of benefices it should be understood that the goods received were pure alms, not one's own, but belonging to God and the people. And accordingly patrons should look to God, not to the recipients, for their reward.⁶

Coming now to the tract *Why Poor Priests have no Benefice*, we find that the writer offers at least five reasons why the Poor Priests should not have a benefice, all more or less directly based on the assumption of the duty of preaching in the place and manner to obtain the best results.

If a priest has a benefice he daré not speak out boldly in reproof of sin wherever he may find it. If he reproves sinful prelates and false religions, or exercises the censures of the church against sinful men who, for the revenue they afford, enjoy prelates' protection, he is quickly brought to order.⁷ If priests do not bind themselves to a single place, "as a tey dogge," they can not be hindered from speaking out, "for now thei ben free to flee fro o cite to a nother whanne thei ben pursued of antieristis clerkis, as biddith crist in the gospel." Secondly, as an evil incidental to the holding of a benefice, small curates are often in receipt of letters from their ordinaries whereby they are compelled to summon and curse poor men for no reason but the covetousness of Antichrist's clerks.⁸ Surely not Gospel preaching nor conducive to the spread of the Gospel. Thirdly, if curates are stirred to get a leave of absence for study of God's Word,

¹ *Ibid.*, Sermones, p. 278, ll. 23-29.

² Matthew, *De Officio Pastoralis*, pp. 410, 411.

³ *Dialogus*, p. 51, l. 12; p. 52, l. 2.

⁴ Matthew, *De Officio Pastoralis*, p. 414.

⁵ *Dialogus*, p. 79, l. 31; p. 80, l. 3.

⁶ *Dialogus*, p. 80, l. 3; l. 10.

⁷ Matthew, *Why Poor Priests have no Benefice*, p. 249.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

thus to bring the Gospel back to their parishoners, they can not get leave of absence but for gold.¹ Fourthly, "also nowe thei may best with-oute chalyng of men goo & dwelle among the peple where thei schullen most profite, & in couenable tyme come & goo aftir stiryng of the holy gost, & not be bounden bi synful mennus iurddiccion fro the betre doynge."² Fifthly, the care of a benefice brings in much worldliness and needless business. Priests need more time for prayers and the study of the Scriptures, and ought not be hindered by new songs and more sacraments than Christ and his apostles used. And lords who present clerks to benefices are prone to divert the efforts of the curates entirely from their duties, and employ them for scribes and architects or other worldly offices.³

In consideration of their duty to live by alms rather than by tithes the Poor Priests saw that without a benefice this was a simple matter, for thus they were unhampered by any ecclesiastical system of tithes and customary offerings, and the people they taught might give them only what they wished to give freely.⁴ Closely connected with this thought was the one that they feared to misspend poor men's goods, gathered by tithes and offerings, in feasting prelates, patrons, and idle vagabonds, and, upon occasion of institution and induction, in feeing bishops' officers, archdeacons, and other officials.⁴

As for simony, "for yif men schulde come to benefices be gift of prelates ther is drede of symonye: for comynly thei taken the firste fruytis or othere pensions, or holden curatis in office in here courtis or chapelis or othere veyn offices,⁵ fer fro prestis lif taught & ensaumlid of crist & his apostlis." "And yif lordis schullen presente clerkis to benefices thei wolen haune comynly gold in grett quantite."³ "for thes dredes & many thousand mo," the writer concludes, "& for to be more lich to cristis lif & his apostlis, & for to profite more to here owene soules & othere mennus, summe pore prestis thenken with goddis helpe to traueile aboute where thei schulden most profiten by eydence that god geueth hem, the while thei han tyme & litel bodily strengthe & youthe."⁶

¹ Matthew, Why Poor Priests have no Benefice, p. 250.

² Ibid., p. 252.

³ Ibid., p. 246.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 248-249.

⁵ Ibid., p. 245.

⁶ Matt., p. 253.

Did they look down upon curates? Not at all; "netheles thei dampnen not curatis that don wel here office, so that thei kepen liberté of the gospel, & dwellen here thei schullen most profite, & that thei techen trewly & stabely goodis lawe agenst false prophetis & cursed fendis lymes."¹ One may see that in this tract it is not even implied that all Poor Priests were itinerant. The first sentence declares that "Summe causes meuen summe pore prestis to resceyue not benefices."² This is the same phrase as that employed in a closing paragraph just quoted. The thought that some held benefices agrees, too, with Wiclif's teachings, which nowhere, as far as known by the writer, condemn Poor Priests holding benefices provided they do it honorably, and, too, with the last paragraph of this tract, which shows great respect for curates.

The foregoing paragraphs throw a strong light upon the question as to whether the itinerant character of the Poor Priests, considered as an association, was in its nature permanent or temporary. The charms of their life were great. Accountable to no prelate, to no ordinary, to no ecclesiastical system that might thwart their plans of evangelizing, free to live without worldly cares, without routine work, and thus free to study and work where and when they should deem it best, they were certainly in many ways to be envied by the earnest curate, however fortunately he might be located, and the peculiar advantages they enjoyed clearly led them to envy no curate. This itinerant mode of life had at least sufficient inducements to lead to its becoming a characteristic of the typical Poor Priest.

DID THE POOR PRIESTS CONSTITUTE AN ORDER?

Had not Dr. Shirley, in 1858, in the twilight of knowledge preceding the publication of Wiclif literature, declared himself so emphatically on the affirmative side of this question, it never perhaps would have been seriously broached. He stated that "Wiclif was the founder of a new order," compared him to Loyola and Francis of Assisi, and declared that these "'simple priests' were employed under episcopal sanc-

¹ Matthew, *Why Poor Priests have no Benefice*, p. 253.

² *Ibid.*, p. 245.

tion, through what was then the immense diocese of Lincoln, and probably in others also."¹

Now, that for various reasons the Poor Priests would naturally tend to form some sort of an organization, though it might go no further than a thorough good understanding, would not be denied. That they were charged with forming organizations is well known. The Fasciculi contains an account of a confession of John Balle,² wherein it is stated "He also said there was a certain company of the sect and doctrine of Wiclif who had formed a confederation (*conspiraverant confederationem*), and had ordained themselves to go about all England to preach what Wiclif had taught"³ * * * And in the mandate of the Bishop of Worcester, of August 10, 1387, it is charged that Hereford, Aston, Purvey, Parker, and Swinderby are "*conspirati in collegio illicito * * * ritu Lollardorum confederati*."⁴ These charges of association should not be confounded with the open establishment of an order approved by the church—such as Dr. Shirley believed to have been established. The episcopal sanction which Dr. Shirley claimed for the Poor Priests was deduced by him from very narrow reading of a simple statement made by Wiclif when outlining the treatment to be accorded good priests in general.⁵

Certainly all the Wiclif literature that we now possess indicates that a new order or sect would have been the last thing that Wiclif would have desired, and nowhere does he give any indication of a close organization, an oath, a particular rule, for his Poor Priests. He simply pointed his followers to Christ as their pattern.

It will readily be seen from the examination just made that no cut-and-dried rule can be applied to determine whether this man or that was or was not a Poor Priest, for, as we have reason to believe, the Poor Priests did not form a sharply defined body. John Purvey, the "simple chaplain," who

¹ Fasciculi Zizaniorum, Intro., p. xl.

² Before his execution, which occurred July 15, 1381; Stubbs, Const. Hist. of Eng., 3d edition, ii, p. 471, note.

³ Fasc. Ziz., pp. 273-274.

⁴ Wilkins, Conc. III, p. 202.

⁵ "Videtur meritum bonas colligere sacerdotes, cum Christus exemplar cujuslibet boni operis ita fecit. Sed eleemosynantes caverent de talibus sacerdotibus præcipue in his tribus. Primo quod sint amovibiles et non hæredati, cum jam non sint immerito confirmati. Sed sub conditione quod vivant digne et juste, habeant de temporali eleemosyna in mensura." Fasc. Ziz., Intro. xii, note 1, MS. Denis, cccix xviii, fol. 52, v°.

was the intimate friend of Wiclif,¹ and whose version of the English Bible was so successful as to replace the version of Wiclif and Hereford,² may be said to have been a Poor Priest. And there was John Aston, the Oxford scholar, who likewise recanted and relapsed again, so active on his feet as to call forth Knighton's simile of being like a dog ready to leap from his couch and bark at the slightest sound.³ William Swin-derby, whose early life was so remarkable, was among the itinerant Lollard preachers; and William Thorpe, who, as a young man, studied under the three men just named, might be termed a Poor Priest. There is no special need of giving their biographies here, however, for their characteristics have been brought out in two recent writings—in G. M. Trevelyan's *England in the Age of Wycliffe*,⁴ and in Prof. Edward P. Cheyney's article, "The recantations of the early Lollards."⁵

DRESS OF THE POOR PRIESTS.

It is noteworthy that in the writings of Wiclif, of the probable date of 1383, are found expressions indicating that he believed that the dress of men was of little importance. Such passages occur when he is attacking the religious orders. "It seems, however, probable to me that neither rite nor bodily habit is essential to any good religion or order, but to every good religious (i. e., a person belonging to a religious order) the rite or bodily habit should be a matter of indifference."⁶ "Nor does it seem that variation of habits in color and figure has a probable reason except for prognosticating that these are of an adulterous generation which seeks such signs. * * * At any rate that fiction is to be derided, that black signifies sorrow for sins; white, purity of heart; and russet, assiduous labor in the church militant."⁷ If this were Wiclif's position how came it that—as will be seen in a moment—his Poor Priests, and the Lollards generally, adopted a more or less peculiar garb? I should say a key to the explanation lies in another passage of Wiclif's writings, of

¹ Knighton, II, pp. 178, 179.

² Forshall & Madden, § 69.

³ Knighton, II, pp. 176-178.

⁴ N. Y., Longmans, Green & Co., 1899, 8°, pp. 380, indexed.

⁵ *American Hist. Rev.*, Vol. IV, No. 3, pp. 423-438.

⁶ *De Apostasia*, p. 5, l. 38; p. 6, l. 14.

⁷ *De Fundatione Sectarum, Polemical Works*, I, p. 26, ll. 10-12; p. 27, ll. 2-4.

about the same date, where he quotes with approval a passage from Augustine, who condemned certain men who went barefoot "not because they walked thus for the sake of afflicting the body, but because they were of the opinion that they should do thus from Divine command."¹ That shows that while Wiclif thought a peculiar dress of no Scriptural authority, still he believed it might be justified on other grounds.

In the discussion of the date of the rise of Poor Priests, the writer noted the mention made of "many disciples of depravity dwelling together in Oxford, clothed in long vestments of russet of a single cut, going on foot, etc.," an account of which appears in Walsingham expanded to "companions and allies of a single sect dwelling both at Oxford and elsewhere, clothed in vestments of russet reaching to the ankle, in sign of greater perfection, going barefoot, etc."² Knighton wrote: "The principal pseudo-Lollards at the first introduction of this horrible sect wore for the most part garments of russet, displaying outwardly as it were simplicity of heart, so that they subtly attracted the minds of the onlookers to themselves and the more securely entered upon the task of teaching and sowing their insane doctrine."³

In a poem "Against the Lollards," supposed to have been written soon after the rebellion of 1381, it is taken for granted that the Lollard preachers go barefoot, but it is charged that they do so only when they will be seen: "They take off their shoes at the entrances of the villages when they deceive the people. They go barefoot when they approach the doors of places in which they preach. They make much of their punishments."⁴

The conclusions to be drawn from these passages, that Lollard preachers, including the Poor Priests, went about barefoot and wore clothes that were simple and quiet in tone and apt to be similar, though not necessarily of one cut or color, are supported by the descriptions given by Knighton and Walsingham of John Purvey, William Swinderby, and William Smith. John Purvey was the "simple chaplain, mature in carriage and appearance, * * * like a common man in

¹ Freely translated. Sermones, VII, Quarta Pars. Sermones, p. 141, ll. 18-21.

² Wals., I, p. 324-326.

³ Knighton, II, p. 181.

⁴ Pol., P. I., p. 233.

clothing and habits."¹ William Swinderby is described as having the appearance and habits of a hermit (*vultum et habitum praeferens heremitaе*.)² William Smith was the fanatic who joined the Lollards (described by Knighton) who, from disappointment in a love affair, renounced the world, wore no linen, ate no fish nor flesh, drank no wine nor beer, and went barefoot for many years.³

METHODS.

In the discussion of the Poor Priests given above attention was called to the itinerant tendencies of the Lollard preachers and of the Poor Priests in particular. In Ball's so-called confession, it is recalled, the Lollards were said to have made a conspiracy to go about all England to preach the doctrines of Wiclif.⁴ Purvey, it will be remembered, put aside ease of body for the labor of journeying about.⁵ Swinderby was always a restless wanderer, and when silenced in one diocese stole off to another.⁶ Ball's wanderings were notorious.

Quite in keeping with these facts are the notices in the ecclesiastical documents. Thus in his letter to Stokes, dated May 29, 1382, Archbishop Courtenay complains that the Wiclifites—he really says "*quidam filii damnationis*"⁷—do not hesitate to publicly preach within his diocese, both in churches and on the highways and other profane places. The mandate of the Bishop of Worcester, August 10, 1387, forbidding Lollards to preach within his diocese, after naming several of the chief Lollards, as I have stated elsewhere, speaks of them as preaching publicly in churches and cemeteries, in the streets, and many profane places; also as secretly reaching the ears of the people in halls, chambers, inclosures, and gardens.⁸

As has already been hinted, these preachers were by no means confining their efforts to secret teaching. Wiclif would not have approved such a limitation to their activity, for he said that evangelical men should put aside fear and persist even to death in exposing the sins of the people and in rectifying the church.⁹ It may have been some such spirit as this

¹ Knighton, II, p. 178.

² Wals., II, p. 53.

³ Knighton, II, p. 190, 191.

⁴ Fasc. Z., p. 274.

⁵ Knighton, II, p. 176.

⁶ Knighton, II, p. 198.

⁷ Fasc. Z., p. 275.

⁸ Wilkins, III, p. 202-203.

⁹ I Sermones, p. 281, II, 1-9.

that actuated Swinderby when he made a pulpit of the millstones at Leicester and declared the bishop could not hinder him from preaching in the King's highway.¹

In addition to their own determination to spread their teachings the Lollard preachers were supported in their efforts by temporal lords.²

Apart from the knights, the people sometimes took a hand in favor of the Lollard preachers, as in the instances of the Londoners impeding the trial of Aston in 1382,³ and, again, of the London Lollards attacking the friars who sought to silence Patteshulle when denouncing them at St. Christophers in 1387.⁴ At Leicester, in 1382, Swinderby was for a time left unmolested, because the bishop of Lincoln feared the crowd, "who heard heard him very willingly and were willing to expose themselves to peril for him before he should be prohibited from preaching or before anything should be done against him in the way of justice."⁵

The force of public opinion was further made use of by the Lollard preachers to win over the weak-kneed who did not dare to belong to a party which the Lollards charged to be composed of people "impious, depraved, malignant, and perverse, worthy of all vituperation, and (living) contrary to the law of God."⁶ Knighton asserts: "And thus very many simple ones they perverted and compelled to adhere to their sect. They did so that they might not seem alienated from the law of God and the divine precepts. And many of the weaker ones were seduced, some through fear, others through timidity, that they might not be attacked by them with opprobrious words."

SUCCESS.

One can not estimate the success met with by the Poor Priests apart from the general Lollard movement. Of this a few words might be added relative to the first wave of Lollardry.

¹ Knighton, II, p. 192.

² For this and related topics see Trevelyan, p. 318, *passim*.

³ Wals, II, pp. 65-66.

⁴ *Ib.*, II, p. 157.

⁵ *Ib.*, II, p. 55.

⁶ Knighton, II, p. 185-186.

Walsingham writes that in 1377 the lords and magnates of the land and many of the people favored the Wiclifites.¹ In the poem of 1381, "Against the Lollards," the author says: "A greater pestilence never existed in the church." "This pest now in England, and in no other nation, reigns without remedy." "O land now pestiferous, you were formerly the mother of all sound knowledge, free from the stain of heresy, without share in any error or fallacy. Now you stand forth our standard bearer of schism, discord, error, and madness. You are the faithful patron of every nefarious sect, of every varying doctrine."²

In the *Continuatio Eulogii* it is written under 1381 that the Wiclifites were preaching through all England, seducing many laymen as well as nobles and great lords.³ Under 1382 it is stated that the Wiclifites corrupted the faith and devotion not only of many (common) people and laymen, but also of nobles and scholars, so that in that year the alms of the friars were taken away, the mendicants were ordered to labor, they were not permitted to preach, and were called penny preachers and creepers-in of houses.⁴

Knighton was impressed with the increase of Lollards in 1382: "The body of believers in this sect increased, and germinating, as it were, they were greatly multiplied and filled the whole circle of the Kingdom, and members of this household were made as though they were procreated in one day." "So much did they (i. e., Lollard preachers) prevail in their laborious teachings that they gained a half part or even a majority of the people to their sect." "That sect was held in the greatest honor in those days, and was multiplied to such a degree that you would scarcely meet two men upon the highway of whom one would not be a disciple of Wiclif."⁵

The author of the *Chronicon Angliæ* notes, under the year 1382, that Parliament made a grant to the King on the condition that he would give aid to the church to depress the heretical Wiclifites, "who by their depraved doctrine had deeply infected the whole realm."

These general statements show that the writers of the time

¹ Wals., I, p. 325; Appendix Chron. Angl., p. 396.

² Pol., P. I., p. 132.

³ Continuatio Eulogii, III, p. 351.

⁴ Ibid., III, pp. 354, 355.

⁵ Knighton, II, pp. 183, 185, 191.

regarded Lollardry with great apprehension, and believed it to have had great success among the people. The estimate of one-half the population made by Knighton may be regarded as possibly true for only very limited areas, perhaps those falling under his personal observation. An indirect indication of the number of the Lollard converts which may be regarded as significant is that contained in an item of Lollard preaching of the time reported by Knighton.¹ He says of a certain Lollard whom he had heard preach: "He was also accustomed to assert frequently that scarcely every tenth man will be saved."² As Lollards would be apt to think their own numbers saved, it would appear from this that this particular Lollard, if thinking of Englishmen only, estimated that the Lollards formed something less than that fraction of the whole population.

In concluding this paper a summary of results arrived at may be acceptable.

The Poor Priests who entered into the light of history about the year 1376 or 1377 had been established by Wiclif in view of the great ignorance of the people, in order to preach plainly to them and to awake the clergy to their duty. Recruited from all classes, the Poor Priests, if not already ordained, conferred what they considered ordination upon each other, so that none within their ranks were what they would have considered laymen. They were prepared for their work largely by means of Wiclif's sermons, and possibly enjoyed the oral instruction of that great teacher. The most of them, but not necessarily all, led an humble, itinerant life, supported by voluntary alms, because thus they thought to have the most freedom and time for their chosen work. They did not form an order, at least not at the time of the first wave of Lollardry, but undoubtedly enjoyed a thoroughly good understanding among themselves. Good illustrations of the character and life of the Poor Priests are afforded from the accounts of John Purvey and John Aston.

The dress of the Lollard preachers was not considered important, but they appear to have preferred subdued colors, and, possibly out of a feeling of fellow sympathy and cooperation, they adopted a somewhat similar garb.

¹ Knighton, 176.

² *Ibid.*

Their methods of evangelizing were to go wherever and to preach whenever their preaching would be most effective. This led them into unaccustomed places, especially when the clergy exerted their influence against them.

The number of converts they made was certainly large, but of course unknown, and it is safe to say that the fears of opponents led to exaggerated estimates, based upon observation extending over only limited areas. The results of the rapid rise of Lollardy seemed to the chroniclers to forbode evil without limit, and they drew harrowing pictures of the confusion that ensued within the realm as a result of its propagation.

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Fasciuli Zizaniorum Magistri Johannis Wyclif cum Tritico. Ascribed to Thomas Netter of Walden, provincial of the Carmelite order in England and confessor to King Henry V. Edited by the Rev. Walden Waddington Shirley. 8°. 1858.

The editor's introduction is a valuable contribution to Wiclifite literature.

* * * "It seems probable that Patryngton wrote the narrative as far as page 359 of this volume in the course of the years 1392-1394, and subsequently, perhaps, collected the tracts as far as page 411, up to which point they form a nearly regular chronological sequence; that he then abandoned his plan of writing, and some years afterwards gave his papers to Walden. To these, which extend to the year 1400, were added some collected by Walden himself after his return from Pisa, during the years 1414-1428, and the materials thus accumulated were abridged and arranged by another hand after his death." Pages lxxvii-lxxviii.

* * * "Patryngton was * * * an early friend and patron of Walden, and his predecessor as provincial of the Carmelite order; he was also the successor of Cunningham in the same office, circumstances which tally well with the undue prominence given to Cunningham in the narrative and with the papers having passed into Walden's possession." Page lxxvii.

"As the only contemporary account of the rise of the Lollards it well deserves the attention which it has received, but it can scarcely be called a regular chronicle, still less a history of the sect. The documents relating to the lifetime of Wiclif are indeed connected by a narrative which, though broken and inconsecutive, is evidently authentic and of great value, but from the death of Wiclif, or more strictly from the Council of London

to the close of the book in 1428, the original papers are given without comment or correction." Page x.

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The *Chronicon Angliæ* is printed from the Harleian Manuscript, No. 2-3634. Walsingham's chronicle has been traced back to the Old Royal MS. 13, E. IX, in the British Museum (*Chron. Ang.*, Intro., xxi). The text of the Harleian and Royal Manuscripts at an early point agree, and run side by side to the year 1369. From that time on the parts in the *Chronicon Angliæ* which cast reflections upon John of Gaunt are replaced by less offensive expressions in Walsingham. From 1382 the two in the main part company. See *Chron. Ang.*, Intro., xxi-xxiv. According to evidence presented by Thompson (*Chron. Ang.*, Intro. ca., xxxii), Walsingham had written up the rebellion of 1381 before 1388, and so the portions useful for the early history of the Lollards is strictly contemporaneous. Walsingham is regarded as the author of all that is similar in the *Chronicon Angliæ* and the *Historia Anglicana*; hence the small type in the edition of the former.

The bitter hatred toward the Lollards felt by Walsingham is shown by his account of Wiclif's death (Wals. II, pp. 119-120).

Chronicon Henrici Knighton, vel Cnithon monachi Leycestrensis. Edited by Joseph Rawson Lumby. Vol. I. 8°. xx-479. 1889. Vol. II. 8°. ciii-354. 1895.

Knighton begins his account back of the Norman Conquest, and stops in 1395. "The independent, and therefore the valuable, portion of his Chronicle commences only with the last chapter of Book III." (Vol. II, Intro., xcvi.) Book V., beginning with Volume II, page 124, 1377, covers the part useful for the history of the Lollards. As to the author of this book there is some doubt. The editor writes: "With reference to Book V, I incline to the opinion expressed by Dr. Shirley in a note to page 524 of the Fasciculi Zizaniorum, that it is not by the same hand as the rest." (II, xcvi.) Thomas Arnold, however, believes Knighton to have been the author of Book V (Wiclif's English Works, III, pp. 525-527). Even if Knighton be not the author of this portion, it is agreed that the writer "appears, like Knighton, to have known a great deal about Leicester Abbey and the country round about." (II, xcvi.) As Leicester was only 14 miles from Lutterworth and was a center of Lollard activity, this writer is of prime authority. But it is to be remembered that in Book V Knighton groups in one place and under one date, 1382, most of what he has to say about the Lollards. "The Chronicler hates Wicliffe and his followers with a bitter hatred." (II, xcix.)

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The introduction contains valuable information not otherwise obtainable from printed sources. Purvey's Prologue to his Bible is also in this volume.

Lechler, Gotthard: *Johann von Wiclif und die Vorgeschichte der Reformation.* 2 vols. bound in one. 8°. xxii-743; viii-654. Leipzig, Friedrich Fleischer. 1875.

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