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THE
L I F E
OF
JOHN WYCLIFFE, D. D.

BY MARGARET COXE,
AUTHOR OF "THE YOUNG LADY'S COMPANION," "BOTANY OF THE
SCRIPTURES," "WONDERS OF THE DEEP,"
"VISIT TO NAHANT," &c.

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P R E F A C E .

IN the present age of Christianity, there is reason to fear that the youthful members of our Protestant communities, receiving their privileges as it were by inheritance, and with little personal effort, may become unmindful of their own great advantages, and lose much of the interest which they would otherwise have felt in the trials and conflicts of those, who were the honoured instruments in God's hands, of delivering their church from the cruel bonds of popery, simply because, never having studied the subject, they have been unable to realize the extent of that tyranny, or the character of their spiritual deliverers.

For these and other reasons, it has been thought advisable to commence for

the benefit of our youthful readers, a series of biographical sketches of the most conspicuous actors in that great contest, which was for a long period carried on openly between the disciples of a corrupted, and of a purer form of Christianity.

Circumstances have greatly changed since the subject of the following memoir appeared on the stage of life, but we apprehend the contest between Romanism and Protestantism has not passed by, though it is at present waged more quietly and secretly, for "the spirit of Romanism is substantially the spirit of human nature. Its errors will be found to be the natural and spontaneous growth of the human heart; not so much the effect as the cause of the Romish system of religion." *

John Wycliffe is generally regarded by Protestants as the father of the English reformation, and his title to that honour will be found abundantly con-

* Archbishop Whately on the Origin of Romish Errors.

firmed in the following pages. Such being the general opinion, it seems unwise and unjust to leave the youth of our community to form their judgment of him, chiefly from the narratives of those who have misrepresented and calumniated his character in many important particulars.

In preparing this volume, by the advice of able and impartial judges, the author has compiled chiefly, from the valuable memoir of Wycliffe by Vaughan, and sometimes has used his very words, and incorporated them into her narrative. This biographer "prepared himself for his task," says Le Bas, "by a more complete and scrupulous examination of Wycliffe's writings than has probably ever been undertaken before." He devoted himself unreservedly to this object, and spared neither labour nor time in its accomplishment. Of course his work must ever rank as a standard to succeeding biographers of the English reformer,

Reference has also been had to "Wordsworth's Biography of Wycliffe;" to the "Life of Wycliffe by C. Le Bas," &c.

It has been thought expedient to throw into an Appendix, certain information as to the character of individuals mentioned in the memoir, which though desirable, would have broken in too much on the thread of the narrative, had it been introduced into the work itself.

With grateful acknowledgments, for the favour hitherto extended to her other publications, the author would present the following biographical sketch to her readers, in the hope that it may not prove altogether unacceptable either for the family library or for that of the Sunday School.

AUGUST, 1840.

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LIFE OF WYCLIFFE.

CHAPTER I.

IN the North Riding of Yorkshire, (England) upon the beautiful banks of the river Tees, and about six miles from the town of Richmond, is a village which still retains the name of Wycliffe, and which from the time of the conquest in 1066, to the year 1606, was the residence of a family of the name of Wycliffe, who were lords of the manor, and patrons of the rectory of Wycliffe.

In this village, and as far as can be ascertained, in the year 1324, was born, the celebrated John Wycliffe, the Father of the English Reformation. The county of Durham (Eng.) which, in the venerable Bede,* produced the founder of English learning, has been sometimes considered as the birthplace of Wycliffe, but the county first named, appears to have the clearest title to this honor. In modern times, surnames are de-

* See Appendix A.

rived from parents, but such was not the custom in the early ages of English history. After the Norman conquest, the practice of attaching surnames, came into use, and they were in many instances determined by the places of residence of the respective families who adopted them. Such undoubtedly was the origin of the name of John de Wycliffe; and as the village we have mentioned, is the only one in England which bears this name, so it must consequently have been the one which furnished the surname. As no researches have discovered any family which bore this name, except that of the lords of the manor, it is more than probable, that John de Wycliffe was descended from this noble stock; and no satisfactory evidence to the contrary can be furnished by the fact of the omission of his name in the record, of that household; since they continued devoted disciples of the Romish Church, and as such, could have felt no desire to perpetuate the memorial of one of their blood, whom they probably considered as a faithless renegade.

Were it in our power, which alas! it is not, to collect information respecting the early life of Wycliffe, we should doubtless find much to interest us in the detail, and should see much light thrown upon the origin of those peculiarities of character, which especially fitted him to discharge

the duties of the station for which he was raised up by God. Wycliffe appears to have been destined by Providence, to be a leading instrument in teaching his countrymen, how to throw off the shackles of Popery and to obtain religious independence.

All that we can glean of his juvenile history amounts to this,—that being designed by his parents for the church, his attention was early directed to such studies, as were considered preparatory to higher attainments in the university. The character of the instructions delivered to the youthful student of the fourteenth century is sufficiently ascertained. An improvement had taken place in the opinions of the public with regard to the proper means of education, and the task of instruction was no longer confined to the walls of the monastery, or the cloisters of the cathedral. Not only in the larger cities, but in every borough and castle, schools are said to have been established, in which the Latin language was industriously taught to the pupils. From this study, they passed on to that of grammar, rhetoric and logic; music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy, completed the list of the seven sciences, which were thought to contain within their mystic circle, whatever was important or even possible to be known.

Wycliffe having completed his preparatory course of studies, entered upon collegiate life, as a student of Queen's College, Oxford, which at the time of his entrance, had been but recently founded by Queen Philippa, the wife of Edward III. of England. There are disadvantages inseparable from an infant literary institution, which will be deeply felt by a mind, earnestly intent on the acquisition of knowledge; this circumstance accounts for Wycliffe's speedy removal from Queen's College to Merton College, an institution, which was more distinguished at that period than any other in Oxford. It had sent forth from its halls, some of the most learned men of the age, and its chair of divinity had recently been filled by the celebrated Bradwardine.*

At the time of Wycliffe's boyhood, Oxford numbered thirty thousand students, but when he took his station as a commoner of Queen's College, this number had from peculiar circumstances been greatly reduced. But during his residence at Merton, a seminary yielding in fame only to the university of Paris, an important influence appears to have been exercised over his mind, which was characterized by an ardent thirst for knowledge, and a great capacity for its

* See Appendix B.

acquisition. He did not consider himself at liberty to neglect any important branch of study required at the university, while at the same time, he desired to regulate his literary pursuits by a conscientious regard to such qualifications, as would be especially demanded in the discharge of the duties of that sacred office to which he contemplated devoting himself. His own style of writing is far from being highly polished. This did not arise, however, from ignorance of the rules of rhetoric then so sedulously taught, but was owing to the circumstances in which he was placed. His vigorous and energetic mind was so filled with a sense of the enormity of the errors of the Romish Church, that when he came to refute them, or to suggest a mode of deliverance from their power, he could not afford to spend any of his mental strength in polishing and refining his diction. His main design appears to have been, to break down the entrenchments of superstition and religious corruption; and provided this object was effected, he cared not whether the instruments employed were of a rough, or of a more sightly appearance. Strength of expression, and clearness of meaning, were considered by him, as far more important, than elegance of style, or harmony of sound; though at the same time it has been affirmed on good

authority, that his writings contributed, far more than those of any other man, to form and invigorate the dialect of his country. In the time of Wycliffe, the language of Greece was almost unknown, while that of Rome was no where written in its purity; an imperfect knowledge of the latter, being the only attainment in grammatical learning, requited of candidates for the ministry.

With the classical studies, it was customary to associate that of the civil and canon law. Wycliffe, however, was not satisfied with having made these attainments merely, but pursued his enquiries into the study of English law, and by doing so, was enabled to become far more effectively useful to his country, than he otherwise could have been, in the cause of national, no less than of religious freedom.

It was also important for one, who was desirous of proving the absurdity, as well as unscriptural character of many of the tenets and usages of the Romish Church, that he should become familiar with the modes of argument, and with the metaphysics of the schoolmen of those days, among whom Aristotle was considered as the only safe guide to the meaning of St. Paul. Questions on law, morals and religion were supposed to be capable of a proper solution only, when the en-

quiries into them, were conducted according to the forms laid down by the Grecian sage; and proficiency in such discussions, was considered the most decided proof of a vigorous and gifted intellect; while the subjects involved in them, had often little connexion with improvement in true knowledge or piety of heart. It should not be a matter of surprise, when Wycliffe is found, adopting in a measure such sentiments, and conforming to the practices of the age in which he lived. In these scholastic exercises he soon became unrivalled, so that his genius extorted from one of his most relentless foes the acknowledgment, that his powers of debate were almost super-human.

While Wycliffe was thus rendering himself conspicuous for his attention to his secular and philosophical studies, he was also distinguishing himself in a more remarkable manner, by devoting much time and labour to searching the Holy Scriptures. In our own times, when the volume of inspiration is open to every Protestant Christian, the study of it requires little sacrifice of ease or comfort, and with a large portion of our community, ignorance of scripture is considered disreputable. But the case was far different in the age of Wycliffe, when the avowal of one's attachment to the Bible was attended with immi-

nent peril. While at Oxford, he acquired the name of the "Gospel Doctor," an appellation, which will ever render his memory dear to christian hearts; more especially when it is recollected, that in gaining it, he must have risked his reputation as a scholar. For such was the prevalent contempt of the sacred writings, or the mistakes of men induced by the papal doctrine of infallibility, as to the uses to which the scriptures should be applied, that an adherence to that volume, even as a text book, was sufficient to induce the leading universities of Europe to exclude those thus offending from their walls.

Roger Bacon,* one of the most learned men of his age, and Grosstete, Bishop of Lincoln,† honored the cause of these persecuted teachers by their pleadings, but their influence was exerted to no purpose. Another writer of the twelfth century, when alluding to this subject, asserted, that those who made use of simple scripture truth, as the basis of their lectures, were not only rejected as philosophers, but hardly endured as clergymen—nay, were scarcely acknowledged as men. They became objects of derision, and were termed "bullocks of Abraham," or "the asses of Balaam." The universal hostility which exis-

* See Appendix C.

† See Appendix D.

ted at that time towards the Bible, must ever be borne in mind by us, while we are seeking to form our opinion of the character and conduct of Wycliffe. To act, as he did, would perhaps not be extraordinary, under the circumstances in which we are placed in the nineteenth century, but in the thirteenth or fourteenth was heroic, and could only have been the conduct of an individual, possessing an unusual degree of moral courage, and acting under a solemn sense of duty.

In order to form a just estimate of the peculiarities of the reformer's mental and moral character, it is necessary to acquire accurate views of the circumstances of the times in which he lived, and of those preceding, which so far from fostering, had a direct tendency to oppose the formation of these particular traits. It is also essential in endeavoring to measure our obligations to his generous labors, that we should clearly perceive the distinctive features of the system he was called to oppose, together with the degree of resistance which it had previously encountered.

We shall endeavor to condense the information we have been able to collect on this subject, in the following chapter.

CHAPTER II.

WE have expressed our belief, that Wycliffe was raised up by God to be a leading instrument in His hands, in freeing the people of England from the shackles of a slavish superstition, and of guiding them to religious independence.

The papal system exhibited every where, such a corruption of Christian doctrine and practice, and in the religious rites and ceremonies which it enforced, presented such a striking contrast to the simplicity of the primitive church, as to render the traces of genuine christianity which were discoverable in Europe during the middle ages, but so many exceptions to the faith and customs which every where prevailed.

The advent of the Messiah had introduced an entirely different state of things from what had prevailed previously, either in the Jewish or Gentile world; for the Redeemer designed his kingdom to be a spiritual one, and wished not to allure into it, the worldly or ambitious. If this had been desirable in his eyes, it might undoubtedly have been effected with ease, and all the kingdoms of the world could have been immediately made to be, the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ. To the Romish Church it

was left, so entirely to alter the principles of the christian economy, as to make it subservient to the very passions it was intended to subdue and destroy. As we read her history we should not be led to believe that the kingdom of Him whom she professes to recognize as her Lord, was not designed to be of this world.

When she found pagan customs which gave the promise of adding to her power, or strengthening her hold on the popular mind, then were they almost uniformly transferred to her ritual, or enforced on her members as obligatory. Among the heathens it had been no uncommon spectacle, to behold the priests in the exercise of their judicial power, separating those who came under their displeasure from civil and religious privileges; and with them to be accounted impious, was to be exposed to the miseries of an outlaw. So after the age of Constantine, the successors of the apostles, found it convenient to follow the example thus set by the pagan priests, and not unfrequently were to be found pronouncing a sentence, which they knew would be followed by confiscation or imprisonment. The principle once admitted, that a failure in religious duty was punishable by a suspension of civil rights; it was no difficult matter to extend the pastoral prerogative, until monarchs were de-

pastoral prerogative, until monarchs were deposed from their thrones, and kingdoms were bartered by a race of haughty pontiffs. The curse with all its consequences, was gradually extended from the individual to his family and adherents, and became the groundwork of the well known sentence of interdict, which for centuries, was one of the most effective weapons in the hands of the pontiffs, wherewith to punish nations for the iniquities of their kings.

The papal system not only presented a striking contrast to that, introduced by Christ and his apostles, in the unjust and crooked policy by which an increase of temporal and spiritual power was attained, but also in the eager adoption of every means by which the riches of the church might be increased. In the primitive church, no feature was more striking, than her disregard of wealth. The revenue arising from the voluntary contributions of the faithful, was devoted to the support of the ministry, and the relief of the poor. It was not until the third century, that any serious complaints were made of injustice or mismanagement in the distribution of the revenues of the church; and it is worthy of remark, that the period in which these complaints were first openly uttered, was that in

which the earliest attempts were made to exact as a right, those contributions, which had been hitherto yielded as freewill offerings.

That St. Peter possessed a sort of precedence among the apostles, and that a certain pre-eminence should in consequence be assigned to the Bishop of Rome, is a doctrine which seems to have been partially adopted by the clergy of the third century, and is known to have been advocated in a modified manner, by such an eminent personage, as Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage.

A cardinal of Rome however, acknowledges that before the council of Nice, held A. D. 325, very little deference was paid to the Church of Rome. From that time until the close of the seventh century, there was a growing increase in the power claimed by, and conceded to, the pontiffs.

In the year 590, Gregory the Great was called to the papal chair, and the period in which he filled it, became one of the most eventful in the history of the church. There was much in the circumstances in which Rome was placed during his pontificate, which had a tendency to strengthen the determination of Gregory in seeking to obtain temporal power, and he was not slow in availing himself of these advantages. Indeed the substance of almost every claim preferred

by succeeding pontiffs, was virtually advanced by Gregory the Great. Before that period, neither the temporal dominion nor spiritual supremacy of the pope had been established, nor had his opinion been decided to be infallible in the church. Whatever defects obscured the character of Gregory, and however great the evils which he was the means of bringing on the church at large, it must be conceded, that England is indebted to him, for the re-introduction of Christianity within her borders.*

It is impossible to say precisely when Christianity had been originally introduced into Britain, but there are good reasons for supposing, that it was to the missionary labours of St. Paul, that this island was indebted for the first tidings of the gospel. Britain had shared with other portions of the vast Roman Empire, in the disastrous consequences resulting from the fierce persecutions carried on by her emperors, and especially by Diocletian, against the Christian Church, and various places throughout England still perpetuate by their names, the history of some of these martyrs.† But the Romans abandoned their possessions in Britain early in the fifth century, and the inhabitants

* See Appendix E.

† See Appendix F.

becoming a prey to intestine commotions, and being greatly harassed by the barbarous Picts and Scots, were induced to call to their assistance, certain warlike tribes inhabiting the country now known as Northern Germany, and the peninsula of Jutland. These various bodies of warlike men, designated generally by the name of Saxons, came originally as friends, but soon made themselves masters of Britain, and finally established within her borders, seven kingdoms, to which the name of the Saxon Heptarchy was given. The Saxons were heathens, worshipping idols, and practicing many bloody rites. After they became masters of Britain, Christianity disappeared from the kingdoms of the Heptarchy, for more than one hundred and fifty years. It was in the reign of Ethelbert King of Kent, the most powerful of these princes, that Gregory made the attempt to Christianize Britain, which we have just referred to, and Augustine, the missionary despatched by him for that purpose, landed with forty bishops, his associates in the work, in the Island of Thanet in Kent.

The alphabet was unknown to the Britons at that time, and they were in point of civilization but little removed from the condition of the rude tribes of our American Indians. Ignorance

and superstition, combined to blind their eyes and pervert their judgment, so that if the gospel had ever been preached in its simplicity to them, they were incapable of appreciating its excellence, or with the exception of a few remarkable individuals, of desiring to embody it in practice. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that the papal power took advantage of the favorable opportunity presented to them, and used every effort to subject the ecclesiastical establishment to their authority.

Not a few of the Saxon monarchs whose characters were stained with deeds of blood and violence, sought to appease the reproaches of conscience, on the approach of disease or death, by making concessions to the pope which were fraught with the most disastrous consequences to their country in succeeding ages. Thus the guilty Offa, king of the Mercians, fettered his kingdom with the payment of a debt of homage to the court of Rome termed Peter-pence, which was a pledge of a penny yearly from all his subjects to one of the Roman colleges, which though originating in a freewill offering, continued to be wrung from the English, from time to time, until the Reformation.

Soon after this period, the peace of England was interrupted by hordes of Danish pirates,

who for more than a century harassed the country with continual incursions. Those of the clergy who possessed artful and designing characters, took advantage of circumstances, to augment their power, and Britain soon appeared to be sinking as low in religious degradation as during the time of Saxon Paganism.

The Providence of God had however, in an unexpected quarter provided means for her recovery, and raised up a deliverer for her in the hour of need. This was no less a personage than the famous Alfred, King of England,* who through a life of extreme bodily suffering, and in defiance of formidable obstacles, exerted himself to elevate the character of his subjects, in a religious, moral, intellectual and political point of view. This excellent prince laboured especially to protect the religion of his country; and amidst the great tribulations through which his Lord called him to pass, there is every reason to hope, that he derived continual support, from faith in the promises of God. Many of the gross errors of the Romish Church he was ignorant of, and the opponents of some of them he publicly patronized. We have reason however to fear, that in common with others of his countrymen at that period, his views with regard to

* See Appendix G.

image-worship were very erroneous, and differed decidedly from those expressed by the clerical council, whom Offa, King of the Mercians, had summoned in 792 to consider the expediency of conforming to that practice, then recently introduced by Pope Adrian to the churches under his control. To this proposal of Offa, a most peremptory refusal of non-conformity had been given, though on another occasion, the clergy when assembled by him, conceded other privileges to the Pope, and permitted him to abridge their religious liberties, and to assume the right of creating new offices at his pleasure in the kingdom.

After Alfred's death, the Danes continued their incursions into England to the great annoyance of its inhabitants, and finally seated a race of monarchs of their own to the throne; the seven kingdoms of the Saxons having been in 827, united into one kingdom, under Egbert. While these intestine disturbances continued, the hostilities between the pontiffs and people of England for a time yielded to a more powerful excitement; but this only continued so long as they were under dread of the usurpation of the Danes. The latter threatened the whole church establishment of England with destruction, and converted the clergy whom Rome designed to

rule the country, into their submissive servants—a proof both of the mercy and justice of God.

From this period, which forms an era in British history, the Roman pontiffs were successively engaged in making attempts to increase their power, both of a temporal and spiritual kind in England. William the conqueror was resolute and energetic in opposing every thing that threatened to interfere with his prerogatives; William Rufus was self-willed and obstinate and would not brook the guidance of others; while Henry I. was too sagacious a sovereign not to perceive the evils that would ensue, should the Pope succeed in obtaining the supremacy in his dominions. Thus the efforts of the Romish Church were repeatedly baffled, but more favourable opportunities for accomplishing their darling project were presented during the reign of Stephen. This monarch was not the rightful heir to the English crown, and on this account, the period during which he held it, was one fraught with disastrous consequences to his people. He was well aware of the insecurity of his situation, and tried to strengthen his tottering power by courting the favour of the Pope. There was scarcely any proof of obedience which could have been required of Stephen by his spiritual head, short of the resignation of his

regal power, to which he would not have been willing to submit, because he knew that the forfeiture of the Pope's good will, would most probably, have been speedily followed by the loss of his kingdom. The opportunity thus presented to the Romish Church for strengthening the chains by which she was seeking to bind England in spiritual slavery, was too tempting to be resisted; accordingly, we find the reign of Stephen was a period of rapid increase of papal power in that island.

When Henry II. ascended the throne in 1154, he found himself placed in a far more delicate situation with regard to the Pope, than had been the case with his predecessors, and he was soon involved in an open contest with that power, or rather with the aspiring clergy of his kingdom, represented in the person of the ambitious and haughty Thomas à Becket.

In the beginning of the thirteenth century the people of England were called on to witness a spectacle of the most humiliating kind; that of their sovereign John, resigning formally the whole of his dominions into the hands of Pope Innocent and his successors, and consenting to hold them from that time forward, by the payment of a disgraceful tribute of one thousand marks annually.

This was but a prelude to still farther exactions on the part of the Pope, who continued from time to time, to extort large sums from the English nation for the furtherance of his own designs. On one occasion, a tenth of the moveables of the kingdom was demanded and obtained by him, for the purpose of carrying on a war with the empire; then again, a fifth of the revenues of her clergy was exacted for a somewhat similar object. The practice of filling the rich benefices of England with needy Italians, had become so common, as to excite great discontent and open murmurings among the people. The revenues thus raised for the support of foreigners, is stated by a contemporary writer, as having exceeded that of the crown by two-thirds.

The abuses of this kind which prevailed in the reigns of the first and second Edward, and of Henry III. were equally flagrant with those we have noticed; and on the accession of Edward III., the patron and friend of John Wycliffe, the English nation was closely fettered with popish trammels.

This thralldom had not however been unselt, either by the sovereigns or people of England, and many and resolute had been their efforts, to loosen their galling chains. On one occasion,

during the reign of John, the Pope had ventured to pronounce an interdict on the city of London, as a punishment for her rebellion against his requisitions. The Londoners however, contemned his authority, and openly denied his right to exercise temporal jurisdiction over them; when the interdict was announced, they went so far, as to ring the bells of the city, to show that they were not to be forced into an expression of those signs of contrition usually exhibited at such seasons. Similar manifestations of opposition to papal control were frequently shown by the people, during the reigns of succeeding monarchs, and it is probable some decisive measures would have been taken to check it effectually, had the sovereigns been wiser in seconding the efforts of their subjects.

Before the close of the seventh century, a lamentable corruption in christian doctrine and practice prevailed generally in the church; nevertheless even in that period of spiritual darkness, the Almighty left not himself without a witness to the truth, in a remnant of faithful worshippers, who professed to derive their only assurance of religious confidence, from their firm belief in the sacrifice of a Divine Mediator, and the promised grace of the Eternal Spirit. These servants of the God of Heaven were

sometimes found detached from the nominal churches of their respective countries, while in other instances, they were to be seen consulting their personal safety by an adherence to certain of her forms.

The purity of manners and scriptural principles of these faithful worshippers, as might have been expected, roused the opposition of that corrupt body of the clergy, whose viciousness of life and ignorance of true religion, were rendered more conspicuous by the force of contrast. Measures of the most atrocious kind, were accordingly resorted to on many occasions, to quench the rising flame of a purer christianity, and a spirit of persecution directed its attacks against those who protested against the accumulated errors of the Romish Church. So malignant were the efforts thus exerted, and so well were they sustained by the civil power, that we should be constrained to feel astonishment at their final failure, did we not believe the persecuted disciples of the Lord Jesus, to have been in all ages of the Church, the objects of his peculiar favour and especial protection.

While engaged in the attentive perusal of church history, one fact is especially pressed upon our notice, viz:—that while numerous devout religionists of the Christian Church in

every age, have blended ingenious error with truth, yet that most of what was erroneous has been permitted to die a lingering death, while that which was essentially true has continued to survive to later ages.

In the seventh century, a large body of these dissenters was proscribed under the name of Gnostics or Manicheans, which title had become odious; they were expelled from Rome and Constantinople, stripped of wealth, power, and, as far as possible, deprived of the means of acquiring knowledge, and then dispersed among the villages and mountains bordering on the Euphrates. Their silence and obscurity formed their protection for a considerable time; but Constantine, one of their number, coming in an unexpected manner into possession of a copy of the New Testament, his own mind became enlightened by the power of divine truth, and as a natural consequence, he was led to consider it his duty, to seek to diffuse the same blessings among his fellow disciples.

It is supposed that the people subsequently derived their true name of Paulicians, from their preference to the writings of St. Paul. Though their enemies branded them with the name of Manicheans, it appears from good authority that they were not infected with that her-

esy.* It is sufficiently evident that it was by the diligent study of the Word of God, that the Paulicians were taught to know and reject the errors of papacy, and steadfastly to refuse conformity to her idolatrous worship. And though it appears not improbable, that Constantine and some of his adherents, may have originally imbibed some of the errors of the Manicheans, yet it is manifest that the zeal which provoked the most powerful hostilities of the papal power, was the offspring of a purer faith.

From the death of Constantine to the middle of the ninth century, the history of the Paulicians, presents a continued effort on their part, to preserve their religious independence; and as strenuous a determination, on the side of the established authorities, to convert what might have served as an alluring example, into a beacon to warn others of the danger of striking on the same shoals.

The names of a number of the Emperors of the West, are stained with the blood of these unhappy sectaries, though it was left for the heart of a woman, that of the Empress Theo-

* The doctrine of Manes represented the visible system and the scriptures of the Old Testament, as originating in a malignant being, who shared the government of the universe with the God of the New Testament, a being of infinite benevolence.

dora, to carry to the highest pitch, this spirit of ferocious persecution. The inquisitors in her employ, were wont to boast, that "a hundred thousand Paulicians had been dispatched by the sword, the gibbet, or the flames." But here as elsewhere, the demon of persecution was defeated with his own weapons, for teachers and churches rose from the ashes of the slain, and such as could sometimes extort a degree of praise, even from their cruel enemies.

Their progress westward, is a subject of interesting inquiry, on account of the influence which they thus exerted over European Christians, but we are not warranted in believing, that to them alone, is to be traced the origin of the opposition to the papal power, which we have stated as existing in different parts of Europe, and among various orders of society, before the age of Wycliffe: To him it was left, as the champion of religious liberty, boldly and openly to stem the tide of papal oppression, and to show forth to the world, her manifold corruptions of doctrine and practice.

In the latter part of the eighth and in the commencement of the ninth century, two other distinguished witnesses to the truth arose, in the person of Paulinus, Bishop of Aquilina, and Claude, of Turin, who boldly denounced the

idolatry of the Romish Church—their veneration of relics—and their prayers for the dead. The doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone, was enforced by the latter, with a clearness and faithfulness not unworthy of Luther. The episcopal authority of Turin, extended over the vallies of Piedmont, and it is a fact, admitted even by Romish writers, that the doctrines which Claude preached so faithfully and zealously, were preserved by the people inhabiting that interesting region, during the ninth and tenth centuries. Before the close of that period, the fires of persecution were kindled among the Piedmontese, in the vain hope of quenching in its flames, both the name and doctrine of the distinguished reformer. But the trials they were called on to endure in the cause of the Lord, served but to confirm the faith of the sufferers, while the zeal of those who were expelled from their homes, never failed to convert the fact of their dispersion, into a means of extending the influence of the obnoxious doctrines more widely.

Towards the close of the twelfth century, another celebrated witness for the truth appeared, in the person of Peter Waldo, an opulent merchant of Lyons, in France, who became known in that city, as an opposer of Romish

superstition, and a zealous advocate of what has since been called the reformed faith. His superior education enabled him to study the Latin version of the Scriptures, and being thus made aware of the dangerous errors of the Romish Church, he determined to separate from her communion. There was much in the character and conduct of Waldo, to endear him to the community of which he was a member, and for a season he found protection in his rank, connections, and the grateful attachment of the multitude. At length the papal power thought it prudent to seek to root out a heresy which threatened to sap the foundations of their authority and influence. Waldo and his followers were cut off from all communion with the faithful, unless they would renounce their creed. Such of the Lyonese as should venture to offer them shelter, were threatened with the vengeance of the Church. The expelled Waldenses, did not, however, desist from their labours, but continued to propagate their doctrines through various parts of Europe, into which they had been driven by the violence of their enemies, and though harassed in all quarters, they nevertheless continued to exist as a faithful remnant, until the age of Luther.

To check the progress of opinions which were

in such direct opposition to the policy of the Romish Church, was an object too important to be overlooked. As scriptural piety declined, it had long since been deemed expedient to supply a substitute, in a species of ceremonial sanctity, and thus the clergy had become distinguished by certain peculiarities which were intended to deceive the credulous and superstitious, and draw forth their homage. Celibacy had been introduced among them, though unwarranted by Scripture, in order that they might be presented to the eyes of the laity, as a body detached from the weakness and partialities which were declared inseparable from the ties of family affection, and the claims of domestic duty. Monastic life had also been advocated, and an example set, in the person of Anthony, an illiterate youth of Thebais, in Egypt. In the fourth century, he had voluntarily separated himself from all the ties of domestic affection, and after reducing himself to great poverty, had passed twenty years of his life in one solitary abode or another;—he afterwards formed a monastic establishment, and collected around him a number of devoted disciples, who emulated his example. After his death, structures were multiplied through the East, for the reception of his followers, while, in the West, many were soon

found treading in his footsteps, and becoming the founders of new societies. For a while, the Pontiffs considered it a matter of policy, to encourage these habits of seclusion, and often called the members of monastic establishments to important offices in the Church, but after the lapse of some centuries, they learned to regard with jealous eyes the increasing power and influence which they obtained over the public mind, and used considerable efforts to deprive them of their fame.

The papal power had recourse to another expedient, in the vain hope of counteracting the influence exerted by the elevated tone of principle and practice, which prevailed among the dissenting sects. It was for this purpose, that the order of preaching or begging friars was instituted. It was hoped, that the vows of poverty, assumed as a mark of distinction by the monks of the orders of St. Dominic and St. Francis, would secure them from the corruptions which so extensively prevailed among the regular clergy, and that by this means they would be invested with a reputation for sanctity, which would in a measure neutralize the influence obtained by the reformers.

This profession of poverty, proved, however, a frequent cover for the grossest sensuality, and

the orders which adopted it, were, of course, far from being effectual agents, in accomplishing the designs of those by whom the project had been devised. The mendicant orders had soon another office assigned them. They were with little difficulty placed at the head of that political machinery known by the name of the Inquisition, recently framed by the authority of Rome, for the rooting out of heresy, and which, for the malignant spirit which first suggested it, or for the despotism and persevering cruelty which have characterized its operations during its whole existence, has never, perhaps, been equalled, and certainly not surpassed, in the annals of mankind. The mendicants were now sent forth, as the tools in the hands of the papacy, and were directed to search for, and apprehend, the persons of heretics, wherever concealed, or suspected of being concealed. In the cells of their doleful prison-houses, the unhappy victims of cruel bigotry, suffered every species of torture; and from thence, were often conducted to the stake, ignorant alike of their crime, their accusers, or the evidence by which they were condemned. Within the limits of Castile and Arragon alone, eighteen courts of inquisition were established, each with its prisons and its gradation of officers; while, from the whole,

not less than twenty thousand of the mendicants were sent forth, as spies, or as ravening wolves, among the various folds of Christ's flock, scattered through the country, in order to detect, punish, and, if possible, extirpate, the seeds of heresy.

But the signs of a more open and universal opposition soon became so apparent, that the haughty Innocent III. determined, in the commencement of the thirteenth century, to proceed to still more summary methods of dealing with the audacious heretics. He scrupled not to seek their destruction, by fire and by the sword; and in order to further his plans, he promised indulgences to all such as should distinguish themselves in this bloody and impious cause. Crusades were proposed and carried on, against the unhappy Albigenses and Waldenses, headed by cruel bigots; among whom, the most distinguished for his unrelenting spirit, was Simon de Montfort, an English nobleman. Cities and fortresses were besieged and taken, and their inhabitants indiscriminately murdered, in defiance of the claims of youth or sex, and often in the face of the most solemn promises of safety and protection. On one occasion, when a city was conquered by the crusaders, and the question was raised, how should the faithful be

distinguished from the heretics? the Abbot of Citeaux gave the memorable answer, "Kill them all, the Lord will know well, those who are his." This is but a specimen of the combined cruelty and bigotry which actuated these furious zealots, and urged them on to such deeds of violence, as make us blush, for our common nature. This system of outrage extended over the southern portion of the kingdom of France, where it was perpetuated for more than twenty years, and at an expense of a million of human lives.

More than a century elapsed, from the commencement of these bloody crusades, to the time of Wycliffe's public appearance; and during this period, the sky of the Christian firmament was thickly overspread with dark and ominous clouds. The attempts of the Waldenses and Albigenses to restore a purer faith, to human eyes, appeared a total failure. The appalling cruelties by which the doctrines of these reformers had been met and crushed, seemed to have paralyzed the public mind, and made it tremblingly alive to the danger of broaching such again. The few who still dared to think of openly opposing the corruptions of the Romish Church, were looked upon as little removed from the mental weakness which characterizes childhood, while they were accused of

being animated with a malignant impiety, and of tampering with evil spirits. In the continental states, this appears to have been the light in which they were regarded by sovereigns, nobles, and the majority of the clergy, during the century which preceded the appearance of Wycliffe. It is therefore probable, that whatever, in the outward circumstances of society, was influential in the formation of his character, was peculiar to the institutions of his own country.

When William of Normandy came into possession of the English crown, he found his subjects in the habit of referring the decision of all causes in dispute among them, to a bench of judges, composed of the clergy, and secular magistrates. He soon, however, effected a change, and decreed, that such causes as were merely civil, should be reserved to the jurisdiction of the secular magistrates alone, for consideration; while to the clergy should pertain the cognizance of all such offences as were committed by, or charged upon, their own order, or on such of the laity as had violated any of the canons of the Church. This separating line between the civil and ecclesiastical power, was, however, never very clearly defined, nor were the consequences resulting from this state of things seriously felt, until the reign of Henry

II. That monarch had incautiously appointed the most luxurious churchman of his age, to the highest office in the English Church, in the hope, that as he had been raised to this distinction by court favour, so would he use his influence, as Archbishop of Canterbury, to further his master's wishes, by subjecting clerical offenders to the judgment of the civil tribunal. But in the case of Becket, as of others before, and after him, change of circumstances led to the adoption of an entirely different line of conduct. As a courtier, and his monarch's favorite associate in business or pleasure, he had been willing to conform his habits to the wishes of his master, but when elevated to the primacy, a new sphere was opened for his ambition, and he soon became distinguished as the champion of the rights of the priesthood, and the determined opponent of Henry's measures.

Years of conflict passed away; and finally, Becket fled to France, to escape the vengeance of Henry; there, sheltered by the political rival of the English monarch, the primate was enabled to maintain a disastrous struggle with his royal master, the issue of which is familiar to every reader of English history. Henry declared his innocence of Becket's murder, and expressed deep lamentations at his imprudence

and hastiness of speech, which had caused such violent proceedings, and even put on sackcloth and ashes, as a token of humiliation; he yet, however, contrived to retain the substance of the power which had occasioned this protracted and angry dispute. It was left to the more vigorous policy of the first Edward, to bring this matter to a decided issue. He reserved the final judgment of every clerical criminal to the authority of the Church; but he also provided that this decision should be preceded by an investigation before a legal tribunal, where the conviction of the accused, should be followed by a forfeiture of his entire property to the King, excepting in certain specified cases. To prevent the increase of power and wealth, arising from the large landed property, held by the clergy of England, Edward I. framed his celebrated statute of Mortmain, which, while it secured to that order their present estates, prevented any further increase to them. More than one occasion was offered, during the reign of this monarch, to test the comparative strength of the civil and clerical influence in the nation, and by his vigorous and summary conduct on such occasions, Edward continued to decide the contest in favour of the crown.

Thus, before the time of Wycliffe, the usur-

pations of the papal power had been deeply felt by the sovereigns and nobility, as well as by the clergy and people of England; and numerous, but not very effectual attempts, had been made, to establish a power, which should have the precedence over the Church. An influence was thus excited, which was calculated strongly to foster the spirit of reformation which was latent in the hearts of the English nation, and which was destined to be called out, and quickened into a flame, by the instrumentality of the subject of this memoir. Men were every where to be met with, who reprobated the conduct and spirit exhibited by many of the Pontiffs, and other influential personages in the Romish Church, who could yet stigmatize with heresy, any attempt that might be made, openly, to separate from her communion. To believe that spiritual blessings might be obtained, apart from the established sacraments of the Romish Church, or that such rites could be administered by any but her authorized clergy, demanded habits of systematic enquiry, and of mental and moral courage, which had not been manifested in England, before the latter half of the fourteenth century.

The situation of that kingdom, was somewhat peculiar, during the period in which these

persecutions were carried on against the continental sectaries which are elsewhere described. The tenets of the Albigenses and Waldenses, appear, not even to have been definitely known, in that island, and her most enlightened historians of that age are found giving credence to the calumnies of their enemies, and expressing approbation at the conduct of their cruel persecutors. The fact, that these unhappy people did not seek a lodgment from the oppressions under which they were groaning, within the borders of England, cannot be accounted for alone, on the ground of her insular position, since a communication might have been opened, through the provinces then held by the English monarch, in France. We must seek for an explanation elsewhere. In the year 1159, a band of zealous religionists, to the number of about thirty, under the guidance of Gerard, their pastor, had sought refuge in England, and were there convicted of an attempt to spread doctrines in opposition to the creed of the Romish Church. By the orders of Henry II. of England, they were publicly whipped, and branded on the forehead, and interdicted from all intercourse with others. Gerard and his followers endured the tortures of persecution, with the spirit of the primitive martyrs. Despairing of

subduing them by any other means, their cruel enemies deprived them of shelter and food, and exposed them, with their lacerated bodies, to the fury of the elements, by which means, it is believed that most of them were destroyed by a miserable death. Another small body of sectaries, who arrived in England in the reign of John, were burned at the stake. The report of these proceedings spread over the continent, and the name of England becoming thus associated with ideas of cruelty,—more especially after the crusaders were headed by a nobleman of that nation, the Earl of Leicester, it is not a matter of surprise, that the unhappy Albigenses and Waldenses learned to dread her shores. Thus, owing to peculiar circumstances, for centuries preceding the age of Wycliffe, England was separated from intercourse with foreign sectaries, and the spirit of reformation was destined to originate by the instrumentality of agents, peculiarly her own.

The state of society, during that period, also lent its influence, in giving a colouring to the religious condition of the nation. The nobles and the people, stood at such an immeasurable distance from each other, that, by some of the former, the fact was called in question, of the lower orders being the inheritors of immortal

natures. Commerce had yet not created that wholesome intervening influence, which is at present felt, in its practical effects, throughout the community; neither had literature exerted her power, in elevating the condition of the lower orders; on the contrary, she helped to separate the rich and the poor still more widely, for the facilities of obtaining an education were then utterly beyond the means of the latter. The Scriptures were unknown to the people, and the clergy dreamed not of enlightening their minds by means of preaching. Near the close of the thirteenth century, an English Archbishop complained, in a clerical assembly, that this part of pastoral duty had been so widely neglected, as to reduce a large portion of the English nation to the state of "the poor and needy, who seek water and there is none, and whose tongues fail for thirst." To remedy this dreadful evil, the primate enforced upon his parochial clergy, a regular system of instruction, to be pursued by them. Certain deadly sins were to be denounced, and specified acts of mercy were to be commended to the consciences of their people, to whom they were severally urged to preach, four times a year, which was the extent of the improvement contemplated.

While a large proportion of the English cler-

gy, from the time of the conquest, to the age of Wycliffe, appears to have been actuated by low and grovelling motives, and to have been little sensible of the deep responsibility attached to the sacred office, there had been some exceptions, not a few of whom had been found among those holding the highest offices in the Church. Such were Anselm* and Bradwardine,† who at different periods filled the Archbishopric of Canterbury, and Fitz Ralph,‡ Archbishop of Armagh, to whose piety, as well as learning, the most authentic testimony is furnished in the annals of church history.

The commercial spirit, which, during the middle ages, was gradually diffused over the countries of Europe, produced, in time, a great change in the aspect of society; and though for a season its progress was more inconsiderable in England, than in many parts of the continent, yet about the time of Wycliffe, it was beginning to exert a marked influence. Trade brought wealth into the country, and this led to increased refinement of society; the art of war, lost a measure of its attractions, while a taste for literature, and a spirit of political improvement, were substituted in its place.

* See Appendix H.

† See Appendix B.

‡ See Appendix I.

During many centuries, the only means of acquiring knowledge, had been found within the walls of monasteries, and these advantages had been almost exclusively confined to those who were candidates for the sacred office. Alfred and Charlemagne, had been ardently desirous to diffuse more widely, among their subjects, the benefits of instruction; but after their death, the learning of their respective countries, was, for ages, almost wholly derived from the ranks of the clergy. The leisure which was enjoyed by the inmates of monastic establishments, gave them facilities for the multiplication of books, which enabled them to confer benefits on society at large.

As the clergy became enervated by luxury and improper indulgences, the credit of their schools gradually decreased, but their pupils had acquired such a spirit of improvement, that they were not inclined to suffer the literary institutions of their country to be destroyed, on account of the incompetence of those, who had been heretofore their supporters and official superintendents.

The consequence of this increased stimulus to literary effort, was, that in the twelfth century, schools had multiplied so greatly in England, that they had become the boast of numerous

towns, and even of villages. It is true, that many of them imparted only the mere rudiments of learning, while others aspired to teach the same branches as formed the subject of instruction at Oxford and Cambridge. The history of the former,—it being the principal scene of Wycliffe's labours, and closely connected with the formation of his peculiar opinions, must, from that circumstance alone, ever be an object of interest to Protestant Christians. Alfred has been generally considered as the founder of this University, which continued to be a place of instruction, until the time of the conquest, though for a century after, its existence as a literary institution, is not accurately ascertained. In 1086, it consisted of less than two hundred and fifty buildings; in 1141, it was destroyed by fire; and in 1191, it was nearly consumed again, in the same manner. The town, from this latter period, assumed a more imposing appearance; its houses, which had heretofore been of wood, with thatched roofs, were now re-built of stones; and tiles, or lead, took the place of the more humble covering of straw. Lectures on civil law, were delivered there, during the reign of Stephen, by the fame of which, pupils were attracted, even from Paris; and some years later, the students collected there, amounted to

four thousand. Previous to the thirteenth century, the pupils had been scattered about, among the inhabitants; but in 1249, they were all collected under one roof. This plan appears to have succeeded admirably, since at the time of Wycliffe's boyhood, which was about a century after, Oxford contained several collegiate establishments, of established reputation, and numbered thirty thousand students.

We have briefly described, in our first chapter, the circle of sciences which formed the subject of academical instruction in the time of our reformer, which must be borne in mind, while seeking to form a just estimate of his character. The undue importance attached to the philosophy of the schoolmen, was the prominent feature in the learning of those days, and it has been pronounced, by good judges, decidedly unfriendly to the formation of the character of a statesman, and a patron of learning. When Wycliffe, however, entered upon his destined vocation, in working out, under providence, the religious emancipation of his country, by daring boldly to advocate the right of private judgment, and the duty of freely circulating the Scriptures among the people of his country; when he stood forth, as the champion of his country's civil freedom, against popish

exaction and oppression, and when he sought, though as a subordinate advantage, to elevate and purify the dialect of his country, he was, at that time, a resident of the University of Oxford, and ardently attached to those studies, whose tendency has been pronounced decidedly unfriendly to the formation of such a character as he subsequently exhibited. It may have been, that his naturally ardent character required some such process, to temper its zeal, and impart a more cautious spirit, in dealing with crafty and designing adversaries; but that he was not unfitted, thereby, for his work, will be evident to all dispassionate readers of his life.

CHAPTER III.

WYCLIFFE had scarcely entered on manhood, when a dark cloud cast its shadow over the whole face of European society, obscuring the light of the divine countenance, and causing trembling and astonishment to take hold of the hearts of men. To a mind, constituted like that of our reformer, a judgment, so severe in itself, and so deplorable in its effects on the bodily and spiritual condition of his countrymen, could not have been contemplated without deep emotion.

It was in the year 1345, that a pestilence, more direful in its consequences than any other recorded in history, broke out in Tartary, and from thence passed, with fearful rapidity, over many of the countries of Asia, into Egypt. It was wafted across the Mediterranean, to Greece, and the other countries of Europe bordering on that sea; and having reached Italy, it scaled the Alpine summits, and from thence proceeded, on its commissioned work, into almost every portion of Europe; destroying, it is computed, on an average, one-third of the inhabitants. Even the island of Iceland, was not shielded, in its northern latitude, and by its insular position.

The Rev. Mr. Henderson informs us, in the journal of his travels through that island, that he found one desolate spot, still bearing the name of "the valley of the shadow of death," in commemoration of its desolation by the fearful pestilence of the fourteenth century. For the space of two years, the work of destruction went on, with little abatement; and during its continuance, various parts of the European continent were severely shaken by earthquakes. From the latter calamity, England was exempt; but she experienced, in its stead, another, of a different kind, in the shape of violent rains, which continued, with scarcely any cessation, to deluge the kingdom, from the month of June to that of December. In the August following, the long-dreaded malady which had been devastating the rest of Europe, broke out, in the island, at Dorchester; and by November, extended its ravages to London, where, in the space of a few months, it destroyed many thousands of its inhabitants.

At this time, Wycliffe had reached his twenty-fifth year; and his mind, naturally disposed to reflection, began seriously to enquire wherefore the Lord was thus dealing with his creatures. He saw the pestilence passing from man, to the brute creation; the accused criminal and his

prosecutor, the debtor and his creditor, passive alike, under the unnatural excitement; the ground, no longer tilled, left to bring forth its produce spontaneously; the timid, ignorant, and superstitious, having recourse to such vain devices as were suggested by their own disordered minds, or by their crafty priests, who, even in such awful seasons, forgot not their love of lucre, but sought to take advantage of the favourable opportunity for adding to their worldly stores. Rumour, as usual, magnified the evil, and reported that one-tenth, only, of the human family had escaped destruction, whereas the most authentic statements represent those spared, as amounting to at least a half of the population of the globe. Even admitting the most moderate calculations to have been the most correct, we shall be convinced that Wycliffe must have seen sufficient, deeply to affect his mind, and to account for the solemnity of feeling, with which he was ever wont, in after life, to retrace these scenes. He looked upon this judgment, as having been sent, as a chastisement for the crying sins of that generation; and he earnestly desired and hoped, that it might not have been sent in vain, but that it might be made the means of exciting the clergy to a more faithful discharge of their

duty, and of better preparing the minds of the people to listen to their instructions. In both respects, he was disappointed; for in both instances, the depraved only became hardened in iniquity. Even while the country was being swept by the Almighty, as with the besom of destruction, the dwellings into which the messenger of divine wrath had entered, were frequently plundered, by fearless ruffians; while, in others, the victims of contagion were left, by husbands, or wives, parents, or children, (as the relative situation of the diseased happened to be,) to die solitary and cheerless deaths. It was at this period, when death had entered into almost every dwelling, and when, as in Egypt of old, from the palaces of the rulers and nobles of the land, down to the lowly dwellings of the peasant, there were scarce any in the which there was not one stricken victim of pestilence;—it was then, that the rank and beauty of England were assembled, by her monarch, Edward III., to witness his institution of the “Order of the Garter.” The labouring classes became inspired by the demon of avarice, and demanded, in their several vocations, the most exorbitant compensation for every service performed, however trifling, or necessary to be discharged; until, at length, royal proclamations were issued and en-

forced, to check this serious evil; but even these measures, in many instances, proved ineffectual.

Wycliffe was led to conjecture, that these fearful visitations of God's providence, were intimations, that the day of the second coming of the Lord Jesus was near at hand; and he was induced to believe that the fourteenth century was to be "the last age of the Church." Influenced by these impressions, he desired to lead his countrymen to the consideration of those things which should tend to ensure their everlasting happiness, that so that day might not overtake them, as a thief in the night. Actuated by these motives, the subject of this memoir first appeared before the public, in the character of an author,—as the writer of a tract, entitled "the last age of the Church," published in 1356, when he had entered on his thirty-second year.

It was natural that men of a serious and reflecting cast of character should have been led seriously to inquire, what were the probable reasons, which had induced the Divine Being to send this severe judgment upon the world. The mass of the population of Britain, however, at that period, were still under the bondage of superstition and ignorance, and knew little of the simple and holy precepts of the Bible.

Instead, therefore, of searching into their own hearts, and seeking to detect what there existed which was displeasing to God, and likely to have provoked his just indignation, they contented themselves with looking only at the surface of things; and, while conscious that they were suffering under the effects of God's displeasure, foolishly imagined it to have originated wholly in certain practices, which had reference chiefly to the external deportment; thus, they considered the most crying sins of the age, to be the wearing of silken hoods, bushy beards, and especially the long-toed shoes, which were then in vogue. So much easier is it, for the depraved heart of man, to "make clean the outside of the cup or platter," than to purify the inner man.

With Wycliffe, the case was far different; he had diligently studied the Bible, and called to mind the express declaration of Him who knew what was in man, and who had said that it was "that which cometh out of the man, from within, out of the heart of man, that defileth the man." He therefore sought to lay bare to public view, those sins, on account of which, he supposed God's displeasure to have been excited. He hesitated not, to tell his clerical brethren, that he considered the main cause

of that chastisement, under which Europe was groaning, to have been, the vices of their order. He declared, that "from the prophet to the priest, every man dealt falsely—that they had been eating up God's people, as it were bread—and that the cry of their sins had risen up to heaven." And he warned them of the probability of heavier approaching judgments, in case they did not repent. He reminded his readers, that when the Redeemer was about entering upon his ministry, he began first to purify the temple, marking, by his conduct on that occasion, that the main cause of the iniquity of the Jewish nation, was furnished, by the fact that their priests, as a body, had become so corrupt.

We are led to believe, from this tract of Wycliffe's, that a lamentable defection had taken place in the general character of the priesthood, and from henceforth, he seems to have taken his position, as a devout opponent of those corruptions. Some years elapsed, before he again appeared publicly, as an author; but we cannot suppose that they passed unimproved, or without his making strenuous efforts to correct the evils of the times, and to diffuse the knowledge of those precious truths, which he had himself acquired, by the faithful perusal

of the Word of God. He had, at this time, but lately entered upon life; and his sentiments, opinions, principles, prejudices, and habits, were yet to be settled, and rectified from error, by that course of severe moral discipline through which his Lord had designed him to pass. His mind was already so far raised above the ordinary level, as to unfit him to adopt the habits, and to conform to the views, of the mass of society, by whom he was surrounded. But years of arduous exertion,—the rude conflict of man with man,—the storms of human life, bodily infirmities, disease, and old age, yet remained, to exert their hallowed influence, in purifying and ennobling him, and elevating his nature, to that lofty stature and fulness in the divine life, to which he was destined to attain.

At the period of the publication of this tract, which contained the first public exposure by Wycliffe, of the gross corruptions of the Romish Church, an open conflict was commenced between him and that mighty power, which was destined to terminate only with his life, and the results of which, were to be of infinite importance to the Church of God, to remotest generations.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN noticing the disastrous consequences which resulted from the pestilence which devastated England in the fourteenth century, we remarked that a proclamation was issued, by royal authority, in order to remedy the evils which had thus been brought on the English nation. Some parts of this edict were intended to check the extravagant demands of the labouring classes, who presumed to take advantage of the circumstances in which the higher orders of society were placed. Another evil, however, was deemed deserving of remedy, which sprang from the large body of mendicants, who were thrown upon the public, for relief. The English monarch prohibited the succouring of all such as should be pronounced capable of servitude. He was well aware, however, that there was one numerous class in his kingdom, who, though strangers to labour, and depending, for support, on the alms of others, were yet out of the reach of his proclamation; for, with them, the habit of begging was assumed, as an essential feature of their religious profession.

In a previous chapter, we noticed the institution of the order of mendicants or begging friars, as

a matter of papal policy. In the fourteenth century, this class had so greatly multiplied, as to form a striking feature in the religious system of the age; and their history is too strikingly associated with that of Wycliffe, to be passed over without some comment, by his biographers. In the year 1360, the subject of this memoir became distinguished, at Oxford, by publishing his censures on the evil practices of the begging friars; and, from this period, he was ranked, by them, as one of their most powerful and detested opponents.

Wycliffe, however, was not the first individual of eminence, who had presumed to call in question the principles and practices of this body.

In the latter end of the thirteenth century, the celebrated Grosstete, Bishop of Lincoln,* had ventured to denounce the profession of poverty made by the Dominican and Franciscan monks, as being a mere cover to a system of fraud and extortion. Still later, and just prior to the public appearance of Wycliffe, we find Richard Fitz Ralph, Archbishop of Armagh, engaged so warmly in a contest with the mendicants, as, in consequence, to be summoned by the pope, to answer for his conduct, at the papal

* See Appendix D.

court. When called before the presence of the pontiff and his assembled cardinals, he did not hesitate to repeat his former charges against the character of this religious body. But his enemies, though unable to silence him, found means to embitter the remainder of his life, which was passed in hardship and danger, brought on him in consequence of his opposition to, and exposure of, the scandalous practices of the begging friars. One thing, which especially excited the indignation of Fitz Ralph, against the mendicants, was, the evils which he saw resulting to the University of Oxford, from their malign influence. Not content with seeking to thrust themselves into official stations in that great literary institution, they had industriously employed every means in their power, to seduce the most promising students to renounce a collegiate life, and to enrol themselves in the ranks of their order. So successful were they in these attempts, in many instances, that at length a panic was thereby created in the hearts of parents, who shrunk, tremblingly, and not unnaturally, from sending their promising sons to the halls of the university, lest by so doing, they might be lending their efforts to consign their children to lives of beggary, which would separate them from the ties of home and kindred.

So widely did this alarm spread, among the higher classes, that in consequence of it, within the recollection of Fitz Ralph himself, the number of students at the university had diminished from thirty thousand, to six thousand.

Wycliffe's residence at Oxford, must have afforded opportunities for remarking the unfortunate influence exerted upon the condition of the university by this same cause, and he soon undertook to open the eyes of the public, and convince them of the deception under which they were labouring. It was no light or short-lived controversy in which he was now engaged; some of the strongest minded men of the age, appeared as his opponents; the principles involved in the contest, were fraught with interest to the spiritual welfare of mankind at large, and led to results more momentous to the well being of the Church, than any which had engaged her attention since the age of the apostles.

So successfully did Wycliffe handle his arguments, that the mendicants, foiled and irritated, appealed to the pope, who, as might naturally have been expected from the policy common to the court of Rome, readily listened to the pleas of those, who for so long a period had been ready to further the schemes of aggrandizement

which had been devised and carried on, by a succession of pontiffs.

Fitz Ralph, in the course of his controversy with the mendicants, had drawn up a list of the points of doctrine and practice, in which he considered them to be the most defective; these were entitled his "Conclusions," and were maintained boldly by him, in the very presence of Innocent VI. and his assembled cardinals. These "Conclusions" of Fitz Ralph were published by him, at Rome, and have been handed down to the present age. They must necessarily have been known to Wycliffe; and it is a matter of regret, that among the voluminous writings of this great adversary of the mendicants, there should not have been hitherto found, any composition of his, on this particular subject, to which we can, with certainty, affix so early a date as that of 1360. It seems, however, to be a point unanimously agreed on, both by his friends and his enemies, that that was the period of his entrance on his contest with that formidable body, with respect to whom, his extant compositions furnish but one unvarying opinion. His chief grounds of opposition to them, were summed up by him, in a treatise, entitled, "Objections against the orders of Fri-

ars," the re-publication of which, was among his latest labours. The advocates of the mendicants contended that the institution of this order was a blessing, conferred by Providence, on the Church. Wycliffe, on the contrary, maintained that if it had originated in the wisdom of the Almighty, his design in its bestowment must have been, as a chastisement to the people; in the same way that a king had been given to the Israelites of old. The ostensibly self-denying habits of the begging friars, and their renunciation of the world, were professedly in imitation of the example of our Lord and his chosen disciples. This assertion insensibly led to the habit of appealing to the Scriptures, in order to obtain such a knowledge of the precepts there embodied, as might serve the purposes of argumentation or confutation, and also for the purpose of obtaining the sanction of their authority. The motives which thus impelled a certain class to search the Scriptures, were certainly far from being such as the Word of God requires as impelling to the exercise of this duty; nevertheless, one important point was hereby gained; the oracles of divine truth were once more brought forth from under the dense covering by which they had been so long shrouded, and were elevated before the eyes of

the world, as entitled to a certain degree of homage. Those who were displeased with the novel services or habits of life assumed by the friars, were very naturally led to enquire whether any warrant was to be found for them, in the book of inspiration; and it not unfrequently happened that those who went to the study of Scripture, in order to ascertain what foundation existed there, for the principles and practices enforced by the mendicant clergy, came away from the task, fully armed with arguments to refute them. It is more than probable, that it was by continually repeating this process of investigation, that Wycliffe's mind became fully convinced of the sufficiency of Scripture to enlighten the understanding of every sincere and faithful enquirer, as to the points of faith and duty. This habit of enlightened dependance on the teaching of God's Word, was no ordinary attainment in that age, when the right of private judgment was so generally drawn in question, and we must not suppose that our reformer had so far thrown off the shackles of superstition, as to believe it fully, when he first appeared as the opponent of the corruptions of the Romish Church.

We shall not pretend to enter into a detail of Wycliffe's treatise against the mendicants, but

shall content ourselves with noticing some few of his objections. He hesitated not, to assert plainly, that they hindered the progress of the gospel, and were frequently very defective in their moral conduct; that they were in the habit of persecuting, imprisoning, and even of putting to death, such persons, not of their order, as they found travelling about, seeking "to sow God's Word among the people;" that they publicly taught, that without a license from the secular authorities, no man ought to be suffered to preach the gospel to the people, although "the preacher possess never so much knowledge of God's law, and power and will to work after that knowledge; and the sovereign be never so depraved of life, ignorant of God's law, and a foe to the souls of Christian men." He farther accused them, of craftily dealing with young people, in order to persuade them to assume the habit of their order; of shamefully violating the self-denying habits which had been established by their founders, and of living in actual voluptuousness, while they professed to adopt a life of poverty, and to renounce the world. He declared, that the authority of the pope was considered by them as paramount to that of the Redeemer, and the laws of the land as of inferior obligation to those of the court of Rome.

It will be readily imagined, that the friars were startled by hearing their opponent come out so boldly, and denounce their errors, in the face of the public. Others, indeed, had previously sought to reform the body in certain particulars, but Wycliffe contended that the whole institution was radically corrupt, and the design of it fraught with evil to the religious community, and therefore was to be lopped from the body of the Church, at whatever sacrifice, as an offending member. Many, indeed, have endeavoured to cast opprobrium on the conduct of the reformer at this crisis,—accusing him of colouring his statements through the violence of his passions, and of representing the vices of the mendicants thus strongly, not from their errors really conflicting so much with the truth, as because their opinions and prejudices were diametrically opposed to his own. But it is important to observe, in reply to these charges, that Wycliffe's statements were grounded on facts, which, as they were professedly of public notoriety, could have been contradicted, if misstated; and of course, as a natural consequence, we may presume to decide upon his assertions being veritable, since no one has arisen to confute them.

As the University of Oxford had found its prosperity materially affected by the machina-

tions of the mendicants, who had been the means of greatly diminishing the number of her students, it will not be a matter of surprise to find her ready to award preferment to him, who had distinguished himself so greatly in the contest, as the advocate of her rights. The year 1360 has been mentioned, as that in which Wycliffe rendered himself conspicuous, by his zeal in opposing the begging friars. It was in the year subsequent, that the society of Baliol College presented him to the living of Fillingham, a benefice of great value, situated in the diocese of Lincoln. By so doing, a public testimony in his favour was awarded, which manifested the sense entertained of the obligations conferred by him, on the university to which the living was attached. In the course of the following twelve-month, he was promoted to the wardenship of Baliol College; at the expiration of four years, he appears to have resigned this situation, and accepted a similar office at Canterbury Hall, in the same university. This latter society was at that time of recent foundation, having then been lately instituted, by Simon Islep, Archbishop of Canterbury, to whose friendship Wycliffe was indebted for his call to that honourable post. This prelate appears to have formed a happy exception to what may be con-

sidered the general character of the higher orders of the Church, at that period. He was celebrated for his attachment to the cause of morality, and of sound learning; was, from principle, and in practice, opposed to the luxurious habits, common at that time among dignitaries of the Church, and was, indeed, so little disposed to be lenient in his judgment of clerical delinquents, that, by all such, who came under his supervision, he was regarded with a fear, which, in some cases, amounted to terror.

The appointment of Wycliffe to the presidency of Canterbury Hall, must have afforded no small gratification to his feelings, and it may be considered as a public testimony to his learning and worth, which was very honourable to him, when we recollect the character of the primate by whom the selection was made. Like most other distinctions of this world's bestowing, it was not to be enjoyed without considerable alloy; for by his promotion to this very dignity, he was exposed to no small inconvenience and vexation. Canterbury Hall, which, as has been remarked, was of recent institution at the time of Wycliffe's appointment, had been designed by its founder, Islep, the Archbishop of Canterbury, for the benefit of eleven scholars, of whom three, exclusive of the warden, were to be selec-

ted from the monks of Canterbury, while the other eight were to be chosen from the ranks of the secular clergy. The office of warden of this institution, was first conferred on a monk, by the name of Woodhall, whose turbulent and restless spirit was the means of producing great commotions in the university. Islep now saw the error he had committed in selecting such a character as that of Woodhall, to fill the responsible post assigned him; and in the hope of rectifying his mistake, determined to make a change in the officers of his institution. Woodhall and the three monks who were his adherents, being accordingly displaced, Wycliffe, and three of the secular clergy, were appointed in their room. These changes had scarcely taken place, when Islep died, in 1366, and the vacant Archbishopric was filled by Peter Langham, who, previous to his elevation to the primacy, was the occupant of the see of Ely, but had originally been a private monk. The displaced monks of Canterbury Hall, taking courage from the fact of the new primate having once belonged to their order, determined to make a vigorous effort to re-occupy their former places. Although, at the time of Wycliffe's appointment to his new office, the most honourable testimony had been borne, by Islep, to his fitness

for the post, yet it was now found convenient by Langham and the adherents of Woodhall, to maintain that when the late primate had made these changes in the institution, his faculties were not in a state to render him competent to make a new election. Under this plea, therefore, the election of Wycliffe was pronounced void by Langham, and Woodhall was restored to his former office.

Wycliffe was conscious of the justice of his cause, and desirous of proving to the world, that he had not reached the post of distinction by the crooked paths of intrigue and dissimulation. He therefore submitted his present suit to the arbitration of the pope, although fully aware that he was not disposed to view his claim with partial eyes. The pontiff, foreseeing considerable difficulties in settling the point in dispute, prudently transferred the investigation of its details, to one of his cardinals. Wycliffe was kept in a state of tedious suspense for nearly four years. When the decision of the pope was finally made known, it was found not only that the conduct of Langham was sanctioned and his proceedings confirmed, but that the court of Rome had even presumed to issue a decree in total opposition to the designs of the founder of Canterbury Hall, by which it was de-

cided that *none but monks* had any right to a permanent place in the institution ; that all the secular clergy should be forthwith removed, and Woodhall, with his partisan monks, restored.

From the fact that Wycliffe voluntarily submitted this matter to the arbitration of the pontiff, we cannot but feel assured that at that time he had neither relinquished his sentiments of deference towards the court of Rome, nor learned to question the integrity of purpose of her spiritual head, as he did in later years. The firmness and christian simplicity which he exhibited at this trying period of his life, are deserving of our attentive consideration, and have called forth commendations from those who do not profess to be admirers of his character. He could not be ignorant that his behaviour, during the time in which his suit was pending, would be narrowly watched, and reported at the papal court, by some of the numerous emissaries who were employed by that power ; consequently, had he wished to bribe the pontiff to a favourable decision of his cause, he would undoubtedly have at least refrained from expressing his sentiments with regard to a class of men recognized as the agents of the court of Rome. We find, however, that it was during this period he rendered himself conspicuous as the enemy of papal cor-

ruption, whether exhibited by the head of that Church, or by the inferior orders of her priesthood. His pen was still employed, and his voice heard, advocating the claims of the university, and defending her rights against the aggressions of the mendicants. Neither was it as the champion of Oxford merely, that he came forward, in opposition to this order. He also supported the cause of the parochial clergy, against the same designing class of men, who scrupled not, to make attempts to supplant the pastors of flocks, in the affections of their people, if, by so doing, they could make themselves able more effectually to advance the interests of their mother, the Church of Rome.

It is about this period, that we hear of Wycliffe again, as a party in a controversy which had recently arisen, between Edward the third and Pope Urban the fifth. This pontiff had, in 1365, revived the papal claim of sovereignty over the English realm, and by virtue of it, demanded the annual payment of a thousand marks by the English monarch, into the treasury of Rome; the kingdoms of England and Ireland being, it was said, held in fee of the successors of St. Peter. Our readers will, of course, recollect, that the origin of this claim, so galling to the British nation, was the shameful surrender

of the crown, made by King John, to Innocent the third. So odious had this stipulation ever been to the successors of that monarch, and to their subjects, that the formality of homage had been continually evaded, and the payment of the tribute repeatedly interrupted, from the time of the accession of Henry the third, the son and successor of John. In 1365 however, Pope Urban the fifth bethought himself of reviving his claim, which he enforced in a peremptory manner. He not only required the payment of that year's tribute, but also the settlement of the heavy arrearages, due, as he contended, for the last thirty-five years, that being the time which had elapsed since the last payment. As if determined to render himself obnoxious, in the highest degree, to the English nation, Urban saw fit to accompany the enforcement of this claim, with another, of a still more galling nature;—he required the formality of homage to be tendered to himself, by the high spirited Edward III. On failure to comply with these requisitions, the king was threatened with a citation before the papal court, to answer for such neglect to Urban, who declared himself to be his civil and religious superior.

The conduct of Edward, on this occasion, was such as might have been expected from a

high-minded and martial prince, who was then flushed with the victories of Cressy and Poitiers. He submitted the insolent demands of the pontiff to his parliament for their consideration, and requested their opinion as to the course advisable for him to pursue, on the occasion. The influence of this branch of the English government had rapidly increased during the progress of the fourteenth century, and the commons had become an important portion of the national legislature; no statute affecting the interest of the kingdom, could be considered valid, without the sanction of the two houses of parliament. The claim now submitted to them, was one in which the national dignity was deeply concerned. After a short season of deliberation, the bench of bishops, with the peers and commons, returned a unanimous answer to their sovereign, which was as follows: "Forasmuch as neither king John, nor any other king, could bring this realm and kingdom in such thralldom and subjection, but by common consent of parliament, the which was not done; therefore that which he did was against his coronation-oath. If, therefore, the pope should attempt any thing against the king by process, or other matters in deed, the king, with all his subjects, should, with all their force and power, resist the same."

Urban and his adherents were, doubtless, struck with amazement, at this noble stand made against their encroachments, by the sovereign and parliament of England; and from this period the successors of Urban, learning wisdom by his experience, prudently waived their claim of sovereignty over that high minded people. However, there were not wanting individuals weak enough to plead the cause of the pontiff, and attempt to establish the legality of his claims. A tract soon appeared, from the pen of an anonymous monk, in which the writer challenged Wycliffe, by name, to prove the fallacy of his arguments in support of the pretensions of the pope, and to maintain the recent decision of parliament. The party challenged, hesitated not, to reply to his antagonist, though fully aware that the anonymous writer had been influenced by very questionable motives, in entering on his work.

Wycliffe, at this time, had recently numbered his fortieth year, and it is important to mark the position which he occupied, at this period, in the religious community. Does not the fact of his having been singled out, as the adversary of papal encroachments—the Goliath, on whose overthrow so much was depending, undeniably prove, that the features of his character were

then not only formed, but publicly known. If this be a fact, as it undoubtedly is, what shall be said to those who uncharitably and rashly maintain that Wycliffe was driven to extremities against the papal power, by the vehemence of feeling, excited by the publication of the pope's decision against him? How can the evidence of facts be withstood by an unprejudiced mind? The case stands thus, as far as we have been able to ascertain it:—In 1365, Wycliffe appealed to Rome, when deprived of the wardenship of Canterbury Hall by Langham; in 1367, while his suit was still pending, he received and answered the challenge of the anonymous monk; in 1370, the pope issued his decision against him. This is a point which should be steadily maintained by the biographer of the reformer, since on it the estimate formed of his character, must materially depend. Had he, under the influence of chagrin, and when soured by disappointment in his worldly prospects, been driven to the work of reformation by the impulse of resentment, we should regard him personally, with comparatively little interest, however deeply we might realize the value of the work achieved by him; but when we contemplate him as engaged in the attentive perusal of the Word of God, and while thus occupied,

finding the darkness of his natural mind gradually dispelled by the bright shining into it of that light, which is above the brightness of the firmament, and by the blaze thus enkindled, discovering the gross errors prevalent around him; when we find him, after having discovered them himself, proceeding to the task of reformation, in the face of all the dangers which he knew inseparable from the work; are we not constrained to view the patriarch reformer with reverential respect and homage; more especially, when we remember that the eminent religious privileges enjoyed by us at the present day, are in a great degree referable to his laborious efforts in the cause of truth.

The anonymous tract published by his monkish antagonist, has not been preserved, but the substance of it is to be collected from Wycliffe's reply. The writer seems to have been influenced by various motives, all of which were of a very questionable character. His first object appears to have been to asperse the character of the reformer, and thus deprive him of favour at Rome, and prevent all hope of a favourable decision of his cause; the second, to purchase the favour of the pontiff, to himself and his order; the third, to establish the papal authority in a more unlimited manner, to the end that the reli-

gious orders might enjoy a greater accumulation of worldly property.

Wycliffe, in reply, described himself as the king's peculiar clerk, by which expression it is understood, that he had been recently appointed chaplain to Edward the third. From this circumstance, in connection with others, we learn that the person as well as character of the reformer was henceforward known at the English court. He maintained, in answer to his antagonist, that it was a doctrine established by the law of the land, and sanctioned by usage, that the king and parliament of England might deny the tribute claimed by the pope, and likewise subject all clergymen to trial for a breach of the civil law, and even proceed so far as to alienate the possessions of the Church. These measures, he admitted, were opposed to certain canons of the Church, but denied their being contrary to the maxims of civil law, or the precepts of Scripture. In order to substantiate these assertions, he laid before his readers the substance of several speeches delivered in a certain assembly of secular lords, in reference to the claim lately advanced, by the pope, on the English sovereign. One of these, he informs us, declared that the tribute could be exacted only by right of conquest, and might therefore be refused, unless

the pontiff resorted to force, to obtain it; if this attempt should be made, the speaker expressed his resolution to appeal to the same weapons, in his turn. The next speaker maintained, that it was incumbent on the successor of St. Peter, to follow the example of the Saviour; and since he, when on earth, had not where to lay his head, so should his ministers abstain from seeking earthly power and possessions. Such being the conduct required by Christ, of his clerical-servants, it was contended there would be a propriety in seeking to limit the influence of the pope, to spiritual concerns, and in openly resisting his efforts to obtain temporal sovereignty. A third lord declared, that no plea for this obnoxious claim of tribute could be advanced, on the ground of alleged religious advantages having been conferred on the English nation, by her papal head—inasmuch as it might be confidently affirmed, that the influence of the court of Rome had been exerted to little purpose, except to amass treasures, at the expense of the kingdom, and thus further the cause of her enemies. A fourth speaker asserted, that one-third of the property of England had been appropriated by the Church; that over this property the pope had long claimed the right of lordship,

and in consequence, exacted his first-fruits from every vacant benefice. This interference in temporal things, the nobleman urged, must have been made, either as a vassal to the king, or as his superior; if the pontiff should indignantly object to the former supposition, so would the English nation spurn the admission of the latter. Another of the noble lords expressed himself curious to know, on what condition the stipulation between the pope and sovereign of England had first been made. Did John consent to the payment of tribute and the rendering of homage to the court of Rome, as a return for the absolution which he had received from the pope, or for the removal of the interdict from his kingdom? Then had his Holiness been guilty of simony, a crime which was deserving alike of the reprobation of the clergy and laity.

Other speeches were quoted by Wycliffe, but those which have been already particularized, will give an idea of the manner in which the intelligent and patriotic legislators of that day were accustomed to treat the questions submitted to their consideration. To the modern reader, this paper will be more especially valuable, as embodying the views of Wycliffe himself, since

he would not have adopted the views of others, and constructed his argument upon them, had not his opinions harmonized with them.

It is not a matter of surprise, that a parliament influenced by these sentiments, and within whose halls such debates were encouraged and sanctioned, should have silenced, henceforward, by their proceedings on this occasion, the claim of the court of Rome, to sovereignty over the English realm. Having legislated on this matter, the same body was required to interpose its authority, as the arbiter of the differences existing between the mendicants and the universities. Each party was permitted to argue its cause before parliament, and although we are not positively informed, as to the names of the advocates, on either side, we have good reasons for supposing that Wycliffe was the individual selected, to plead in the name of the universities. In the progress of the discussion, evidence appeared, of the friars being still guilty of making unjustifiable efforts to draw into their ranks, the youthful members of the universities, in opposition to parental wishes. They were likewise charged with making the interests of their king and country subordinate to those of the court of Rome. After listening to the argument of both parties in dispute, parliament urged, upon each,

the exhibition of courtesy and respect, in their mutual intercourse; they also resolved, that no scholar under the age of eighteen, should be admitted, henceforth, into any mendicant order; that no document calculated to discredit the universities, should be received from the pope; and finally, that in case of any future differences arising between the parties at issue, the matter should be decided in the court of the king, and without farther appeal.

The reign of Edward III., was, to England, an important era, both for the cause of civil and religious freedom. During the fifty years of its continuance, we find more than seventy parliaments were assembled; the cause of liberty became established, on firmer and more rational principles, and the English constitution was fast advancing towards that perfection to which it has since attained. We have satisfactory evidence, in the nullification by parliament, of the papal claim of sovereignty over the king and realm of England,—in their settlement of the controversy existing between the universities and the order of mendicants,—in the refusal of Edward III., either to submit to the formality of homage to the Roman pontiff, or to tender to him the tribute of Peter's pence—and last, though not least, in the honourable distinction

awarded, both by the sovereign and his people, to Wycliffe,—the bold opponent of papal corruption, that the progress made by the English nation, in religious freedom, during the fourteenth century, was nearly coincident with that which had obtained in her civil relations.

Doubtless there had been, for a long period, certain principles at work in the elements of society, whose tendency was, to carry forward the human mind, both in an intellectual and religious progression; yet then, as at other *crises* in this world's history, some master spirit was needed, to kindle the latent energies of others, and to take the lead in the onward march of public opinion. Such a station did Wycliffe assume in the English nation, at this present period; and having discharged the duties of his post, should be considered as having been a benefactor to the human race, to remotest generations. By him, the Church was taught to recognize the sufficiency of Scripture, in determining every point of moral or religious obligation—to consider the spiritual head of the Romish Church as merely mortal, and, therefore, liable to sin, and as unwarrantable in his assumption of sovereignty.

Wycliffe seems, also, to have been gifted with somewhat of a prophetic vision of the future

emancipation of the Church whose interests lay so near his heart, for in the conclusion of this memorable treatise, he thus expressed himself:—

“If I mistake not, the day will come, in which all exactions will cease, before the pope will prove such a condition to be reasonable and honest.” At the present moment, when the temporal authority of the pope has long ceased in England, such a supposition as that expressed in the words we have last quoted, may seem to have required no great penetration or forethought, but it must be remembered, that when the idea was first publicly avowed by the reformer, the sovereignty of the papal power was openly maintained in every country of Europe.

CHAPTER V.

WYCLIFFE's appointment as chaplain to Edward III., necessarily brought him, from that time, more into contact with the members of the royal family, some individuals of which are associated closely with certain periods of his history. From this circumstance, as well as from the fact, that Edward's peculiarities of character and habits of life were highly influential in their effects on the English constitution, and on the Anglican Church, (which fact will be necessarily developed in the progress of our reformer's history;) it seems desirable, if not necessary, to give a brief sketch of that monarch's characteristic traits, and of the influence he was exerting on the intellectual and religious condition of his subjects.

When Edward III. ascended the throne, he found himself involved in difficulties, the result of his unfortunate father's weaknesses and misfortunes. The youthful monarch, however, soon evinced a martial spirit and energy of purpose, which was calculated to restore confidence to his dispirited subjects, and to check licentiousness in such as were unruly. During the earlier years of his reign, it is true, his love

of military exploits was productive of little honor or advantage to his people. His wars with Scotland and France, drained his kingdom of much treasure, and stirred up discontent among his subjects, and roused the animosity of his antagonists abroad, while they added nothing to his dominions.

The year 1346 was signalized by a striking change in Edward's fortunes. He again invaded the French dominions, with a formidable army; and marching through them with great rapidity, caused his light troops to approach the capital of France. Being pressed subsequently by the French monarch, he took an advantageous position near the village of Cressy; an engagement ensued, which resulted in complete victory to the arms of Edward, by the lustre of which, both he and his subjects became so dazzled, that, during the remainder of his reign, a love of military exploits became the predominant feature of the English court. The effects of this victory, were not, however, confined to that generation, but are felt even at the present day. A martial spirit was further strengthened and confirmed by the subsequent battle of Poitiers, the termination of which, served to exasperate the French nation still farther. Thus, national animosity was enkindled, and disorder

spread among some of the fairest of the French provinces. Thus, to the contemplative reader of English history, this period is fraught with deep interest.

In carrying on his wars with France, Edward was necessarily obliged to demand from his parliament, supplies to meet the expenses incident to foreign warfare. These subsidies, granted to their monarch, were, however, obtained, most generally, in virtue of certain concessions on his part, the effect of which was to augment the power of the parliamentary body, and to increase the liberties of the nation at large.

From the period of the conquest, prejudices, of an inveterate kind, had rankled in the bosoms of two classes of the subjects of this realm; now, however, the conflicting claims of Saxons and Normans seemed suddenly to be forgotten;—intestine dissensions, concerning minor points of interest, being merged in the stronger excitement of national animosity. While observing these changes of public feeling in England, effected by the victories obtained by her monarch on the continent, we feel as if constrained to admit the fact, that the civil condition of the kingdom was improved gradually, but materially, by the martial spirit engendered during this reign. Nor do the civil liberties

alone, of this great nation, appear to have been augmented at this period. The emancipation of the English Church from the thralldom of popery, seems to have been accelerated likewise, by the same means. This assertion may, at first glance, apparently require an explanation. Is it not however manifest, that if the encroachments of the Romish Church were as decidedly unscriptural, as Protestants of the present day aver, then would the checking of them, not have been displeasing to the divine mind; in accomplishing his purposes, he ordinarily however works by the instrumentality of human means, and will sometimes effect his object, by overruling the evil designs of men, to the advancement of his own glory; in the present instance, then, is it not highly probable that he did so, and thus, as we shall endeavour to show, "made the wrath of man to praise him."

During the reign of Edward, the pontiffs resided at Avignon, a city of France, and their cardinals were commonly selected from this nation. It was a very obvious consequence, resulting from this state of things, that the politics of the courts of Rome and France should have been very much identified. This being a fact, it was natural for the sovereign and people of England to infer, that their interests, as those of

a rival nation, would ever be subordinate, in the estimation of the pontiffs, to those of France. The vacancies in the English Church, were frequently conferred on foreigners, and the property of the nation was conveyed in a fraudulent manner, to aid the resources of the rival kingdom, by the instrumentality of the pope. Owing to this combination of circumstances, the English Parliament learned to regard the encroachments of the papacy with most jealous and watchful eyes, as being directed by a spirit essentially opposed to their civil as well as religious improvement. While we therefore regard Wycliffe with deep interest, as a master spirit, appointed by Providence, to lead onward the cause of truth and religious freedom, we cannot but admire the wisdom of that Almighty Being, who so over-ruled the designs of the men of that age, as to make the very dissensions in the human family, growing out of their corrupt natures, instrumental to the advancement of the best interests of his Church.

While we are constrained to admit, that the martial achievements of Edward were probably the means, under the guidance of an over-ruling Providence, of improving the situation of his subjects, both in respect to their civil and religious condition, we have no reason to imagine

that these consequences were anticipated by him; neither would we, by any means, be supposed to imply, that had they been, the end to be obtained, would have sanctioned the means made use of in effecting it. This monarch took very little interest in the progress of literature or the advancement of true religion. His refusal to sanction Urban's claim of sovereignty over his kingdom, his withholding of the payment of Peter's Pence, and his promotion of Wycliffe, may therefore be considered as several acts dictated by his sovereign will and pleasure, and not as resulting from any conscientious motives.

Edward III. was the father of five sons, who reached the age of manhood, the two elder of whom, died before him. Of his eldest son, commonly known by the name of the Black Prince, historians are accustomed to speak in strains of the warmest commendation. He was the pride of knighthood, and as such, has been usually regarded with the deepest interest, though the principles on which he acted, in his treatment of the inferior classes of his prisoners, are not such as commend themselves to the hearts of Christians of the present day. With this prince, our narrative has little connection, and we shall not pause, or delay our readers, by seeking to form an accurate estimate of his mer-

its. We pass on, to his younger brother, John, Duke of Lancaster, more generally called John of Gaunt. The character of this illustrious personage, has been variously depicted by historians. Whatever may have been his excellencies or defects, it is certain they were of a different stamp from those common to the times in which he lived. The age of Edward was, as we have observed, the era of chivalry. The strictest attention was paid to the cultivation of the bodily powers, and the fitting of them to withstand the vicissitudes of seasons, and the effect of bodily sufferings. Little regard was, however, directed to the culture of the mind, or the advancement of religion, though there were still some individuals who took a lively interest in one, or both of these subjects.

Among the names which have been handed down to posterity as friends to the literature of that age, we find that of the noble personage to whom we have just referred—John of Gaunt—the patron of Chaucer and Wycliffe, and the only one of Edward's sons, who was connected with the religious history of that period.

This prince was born at Ghent, in the year 1340, at the time when Wycliffe had reached the age of sixteen. In his boyhood, he is said to have formed an intimate acquaintance with

the poet Chaucer, from which friendship, probably originated the love of literature which characterized his more advanced years. This passion appears to have checked in his energetic mind, to a certain degree, that love of chivalry, which was the predominant feature of Edward's court; and although his courage was never called in question, yet was it never signalized by such splendid achievements as covered the person and memory of the Black Prince with the laurels of knighthood. He had married, in early life, a daughter and heiress of the Duke of Lancaster, to whose estates and title he succeeded on the death of the latter, and thus became one of the most wealthy subjects of the crown.

Various reasons have been assigned for the intimacy which existed between Wycliffe and this noble personage. Some historians have not hesitated to attribute it to motives of a very questionable kind, and such as are calculated to throw discredit on both parties; but as these assertions have been disproved by other good authorities, and moreover, as the mystery has not been solved by any of the researches of the most industrious of Wycliffe's biographers, we shall not presume to undertake the task. It is sufficient for our purpose, to know that such an

intimacy did exist during a considerable period of the reformer's life, and that he was indebted to this distinguished nobleman, for public support, at a crisis of his history, to which we are rapidly approaching, but which it will be necessary to preface by some remarks, called forth in accounting for certain peculiarities which existed in society at that period.

During the dark ages of European history, so great had been the ignorance which prevailed among the laity, even in the ranks of the wealthy and the noble, that they were almost uniformly uninstructed in the arts of reading and writing, and these accomplishments were confined to the clerical orders. At the present day, such habits would be considered highly discreditable and injurious in their effects, even on the lower orders of society; but for several centuries preceding the age of Wycliffe, the arts of reading and writing were deemed not only undesirable attainments, but knowledge came to be considered, among the laity, as a proof of effeminacy and unfitness for the active duties of life.

Such a state of public opinion led to very unfortunate results, both in the civil and religious condition of society. The ignorance of the laity, necessarily excluded them from the offices of state, or from judicial functions, since even in

the estimation of the coarse and ignorant heroes of the feudal ages, a certain amount of knowledge was considered requisite to the discharge of these official stations. The most important and responsible offices in the kingdom, were consequently filled by the clergy. Throughout many generations, and for a long period, the impropriety and inexpediency of this practice, appeared to have been unperceived.

In the fourteenth century, these prejudices against learning, had begun to yield to more enlightened views, of what was demanded for the promotion of the welfare of communities and individuals. This improvement in public opinion was made apparent by the proceedings of a parliament assembled in 1371, in which a change of policy on this point was decidedly recommended. It was declared improper for that class of men who professed to renounce the cares of the world, and to devote themselves to spiritual concerns, openly to assume such offices, the concerns of which were entirely of a secular nature. These matters, it was now argued, properly came under the direction of the laity, nor was it any longer admitted that their capacities were unequal to such a charge, or that it was in any degree derogatory to the dignity of the noble and the gifted, to possess

the proper literary qualifications requisite for the discharge of these official functions. The effort to produce this important revolution in the character of government, is generally ascribed, by historians, to the influence of John of Gaunt. The power which this prince possessed at this time, and his known dislike of the ambitious spirit with which the higher ranks of the clergy sought for stations of official dignity, warrant the supposition that this measure met with his decided approbation, if it did not originate with him. Such being the case, we should not be guilty of rash presumption, (had we no other ground for the opinion) in conjecturing, that the duke's views on this important subject, had been materially affected by conversation with, and a perusal of the writings of Wycliffe, whose talents and acquirements were considered by Lancaster as unrivalled.

By the latter, this evil had been often and deeply deplored. He expressed his desire that all churchmen might be made to vacate secular offices, from that of the exchequer and of the privy seal, down to those filled by clerks of the kitchen, bailiffs and stewards, which latter occupations were not at that time deemed incompatible with clerical duties. Such employments, he wisely contended, so engrossed the time and at-

tention of men, as to leave them little space for private devotion, the preaching of God's Word, or the visiting and comforting of poor men.

Wycliffe had seen these practices confirmed by men who had been honoured in their generation, and who had been accustomed to consider the union of clerical and secular duties as by no means incompatible. There are many minds who are satisfied in seeking, however, to conform their opinions and their estimate of duty, to the standard erected by others; but Wycliffe's character was too elevated in its aims and purposes, to rest content with this negative sort of virtue. He possessed sufficient discernment to detect error when not palpable to others, and the requisite moral courage to make it known, in opposition to prevailing prejudices, and at the risk of personal sacrifice.

Why is it, that so much less sympathy is manifested with the zealous attempts of the Christian reformer, than is extended to those who are seeking to improve the literature of their country, or to such as are aiming to ameliorate the civil and political condition of their fellow creatures? Surely, the purification of national literature, from the corrupt idioms which offend refined taste, is not deserving of more praise, than the attempt to free religion

from superstitious tenets, or corrupt practices. The enemies of Wycliffe are content, however, to load his memory with reproach, and to criminate his motives, because, after having detected the errors of the Romish Church, he proceeded boldly to the arduous task of refuting and overthrowing them.

When the parliament of 1731 petitioned Edward III., that from that time, clerical men might be excluded from offices of state, the only reply which the monarch gave, was, that he would advise with his council on the subject. In the course of a few weeks after the presentation of this petition, two of the king's most influential ministers, of the clerical order, retired from office; the celebrated William of Wykeham, resigned his station of chancellor, and the Bishop of Exeter, that of treasurer of the realm. This attempt to exclude churchmen from offices of state, was but partial and temporary; for the evil was too deeply rooted, to be eradicated by any sudden change, and we find it a subject of lamentation with good old Latimer, more than a century after this public protestation was issued against it, by the parliament of 1371. Nevertheless, the practice was so far broken up, that the chief officers of state were not, after this period, uniformly selected from the clerical or-

ders. As Wycliffe had publicly uttered his protest against the union of secular and clerical offices,—and furthermore, as he held, at the time, the post of chaplain to the king, and was openly patronized by John of Gaunt, the papal power henceforth regarded him with increased resentment.

It was about this time, that Wycliffe's dispute respecting the wardenship of Canterbury Hall, came under the notice of his sovereign, as we are informed on good authority. It will be remembered that the decision of his cause had been, under various pretexts, delayed by the pontiff, until 1370. His enemies appear to have been conscious of having proceeded unjustly, and therefore determined to render their victory secure, by seeking the sanction of the king's authority to the decision of the pope. Edward III. had been dispirited by various occurrences, and embarrassed by debts which he had contracted in his unfortunate attempts to obtain the crown of France. Aware of his pecuniary perplexities, Woodhall and his associates accompanied the presentation of their petition, by the gift of two hundred marks, which is equivalent to four or five thousand dollars at this time; and which, according to the valuation of money at that period, was a considerable sum. We cannot

but fear that the mind of the English monarch was swayed, on this occasion, by the desire to obtain that gift, which too often blinds the eyes, and leads the judgment astray; since we cannot otherwise account for his sanctioning the illegal proceedings of those who were seeking to crush the worldly prospects of one, with whose talents, learning, and piety, he had ample opportunities of becoming acquainted, both by public report and by the intercourse which must necessarily have subsisted between them, through Wycliffe's relation to him, as chaplain.

All hopes of being restored to his rightful dignity, appear, from this time, to have vanished from the mind of the ex-warden of Canterbury Hall. But disappointment in one quarter, only led his active mind to seek out other channels of influence. Accordingly we find him, in 1372, receiving the degree of doctor in divinity, after having gone through the prescribed novitiate. His elevation to the chair of theology at Oxford, opened an important field for the exertion of influence to him, since he was thus enabled to diffuse far more widely than he could otherwise have done, his peculiar views of gospel doctrine and practice, and to lay open the hidden corruptions of papacy—two objects which lay very near his heart.

It was at this period of his life, that Wycliffe is supposed to have written his exposition of the ten commandments, some extracts from which, may not be unacceptable to the reader; especially, as he will be enabled, hereby, to judge of the spirit and sentiment which characterized the professional dissertations of this great man.

At the present time, treatises on, and expositions of, selected portions of the Word of God, and commentaries on the whole of the sacred volume, have been so prodigiously multiplied, that among them, such may be found, as are only adapted to the understanding of the educated portion of the community,—while others are suited to the capacities of the poor, and within their ability to purchase. But in the days of Wycliffe, the state of things was very different. To a certain extent indeed, yet glossed at times, by much corruption, the ten commandments had formed a subject of instruction for the authorized teachers of the church, through every age, but the superstitious and corrupt dogmas of papacy had been, for centuries preceding the period of which we are now writing, so mixed up with the milk of God's Word, as to divest it of nearly all its power. So gross was the ignorance which actually prevailed in the fourteenth century, on this point, that our

reformer, in his preface to his exposition of the decalogue, asserted that it was no rare event for men "to call God, master, forty, threescore, or fourscore years; and yet to be ignorant of his ten commandments." The priests who were the agents appointed to explain God's Word, were, generally, utterly negligent of their duty, and indeed, were too often ready to blind the eyes of those whom it was their duty to have enlightened.

Under such circumstances, with what amazement must the people of England have been filled, and how startled and confounded must the corrupt and ignorant clergy of those days have been, by hearing such sentiments as the following, proceeding from one, who at that time was holding the honourable office of theological professor at Oxford:—"Poor and helpless as man entered the world, so must he soon depart from it, having *nothing with him but his good deeds or his wicked.*" When explaining the first commandment, "if a man will keep this precept, he must believe steadfastly, that Almighty God in Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons in one God,—are the noblest object that may have being;—all power, all wit, all wisdom, all mercy, all charity, and all goodness, being in him, and

coming from him." "Thou must fear God above all things in this world, and break his commandments for the sake of no worldly good; also thou must love God above all things, and thy neighbor as thyself." With equal force, he pressed home the truths inculcated by another precept of God's law;—"All who would be called Christians, take God's name in vain so long as they live contrary to the living and teaching of Christ and his Apostles." Again; "for the love of Christ who for you shed his blood, beware henceforth day and night, of your oath's swearing." "Since God is so great a Lord, and commandeth his liege man, on pain of hell without end, to keep so easy a command as refraining his tongue from vain and false swearing, is he not worthy to be damned if he break it? It was little in Adam to eat an apple in Paradise, considered apart from the bidding of God. Nevertheless for the eating of it against the forbidding of God, he and all mankind were justly condemned, until Christ bought them again, with his precious blood and hard death upon the cross!" We cannot forbear directing the attention of our readers to this last quotation, and calling upon them to admire the moral courage of him, who dared thus boldly to utter his protest against a crime, which

though, alas! too fearfully common in all ages, was in that in which he lived, almost universal; when scarce a sentence was uttered which was not deeply interlarded with gross profanity, and when even bishops and dignitaries of the Church, were found conforming unblushingly, to this practice. He was no less decided in his reprobation of Sabbath breaking, and in his directions for the proper observance of that holy day, which he declared should be spent in "three manner of occupations"—these were, devout meditations, public worship, and the fulfilment of works of charity.

Extracts might be made from Wycliffe's exposition of the other commandments, the effect of which would be, to increase our admiration of his Christian simplicity and purity; but our limits forbid our entering too much into detail. We should be convinced while reading them, that the work of the Holy Spirit is essentially the same, whether the subject of it be living in a corrupt age, and at the time of his conversion, be attached to a Church defective in its organization, and vitiated in its doctrines,—or whether his previous career may have been passed under more favourable auspices. The agency of the sanctifier, will in both cases be

manifest,—convincing the heart of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment to come, and in leading it to forsake whatever is opposed to the holy law of God, though in the former the work to be performed, will be more arduous, and the sacrifices to be endured, will be unspeakably greater than in the latter.

Such was the situation of Wycliffe, when his mind became sufficiently enlightened in the reading of the Scriptures, by the Holy Spirit. He saw the beauty and excellence of the divine law; and in seeing it, felt constrained to make known its holy requirements, to the deluded multitude around him. He must have been, however, well aware of the host of bitter enemies he was stirring up, and of the consequences which must ensue to him, personally. But none of these things appear to have been able to swerve him from what he considered the path of duty, and as if anticipating some of those trials which were coming upon him in the cause of truth, he concluded his comment on the decalogue, by admonishing his readers, that suffering is what the Saviour declared should come on his people,—and what they should be willing cheerfully to encounter, when they recal his life of sorrow, and the deep acquaintance which he

had with grief;—and when they recollect that it was a rough and thorny road which the apostles and martyrs traversed, to reach their present abode of blessedness.

There were certain remarks in this treatise, which must have pressed home with deep power on the covetous clergy of his time, who were labouring to extort money from the multitude, to pamper their corrupt natures, under the plea, that the treasures thus bestowed, would be highly instrumental in obtaining for the giver, the pardon of sin, and everlasting life.” “But,” said the bold reprovcr of such errors, to the unhappy being who might have been deluded by them, “I say for certain, though thou have priests and friars to sing for thee, and though thou each day hear so many masses, and found chauntries and colleges, and go on pilgrimages all thy life, and give all thy goods to pardoners; all this shall not bring thy soul to heaven. While if the commandments of God are revered to the end, though neither penny nor half-penny be possessed, there shall be everlasting pardon and the bliss of heaven!”

Were this comment, the only portion of Wycliffe's writings that had descended to us, we should nevertheless have had, in it alone, conclusive evidence, that the grand and charac-

teristic doctrines of our blessed Redeemer, were not only faithfully received by him, but also conscientiously exhibited to those who were privileged to attend on his divinity lectures at Oxford, and on his other ministrations. He zealously inculcated the lessons of inspiration, respecting the fall of our first parents, and the consequent depravity of human nature; the doctrine of salvation by faith in Christ's atoning sacrifice, and by that alone; the necessity of a renewal of the heart by the Holy Spirit, and the obligations resting on every convert of the gospel, to maintain a holy and consistent Christian walk; and the excellency and perpetual obligation of the divine law. Neither were these important doctrines regarded by Wycliffe, in the light of mere speculative truths; his readers were made to feel instinctively, that with him "it was full sweet and delightful to think on the great kindness of God, and the great love of Jesus Christ to man, the most fallen of his creatures." It should be here remarked, that the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone, which was strenuously insisted on by St. Paul, and which Wycliffe regarded as infinitely important, is nevertheless entirely opposed to the spirit of papacy, especially at the period in which he lived, when men were accustomed to

think of heaven, and even to hear it spoken of by others, as a thing to be purchased by their own exertions, or at the cost of some offering thrown into the treasury of the Church.

CHAPTER VI.

AMONG the evils resulting to the kingdom of England, but more especially to her Church, from the usurping spirit of papacy, there was one, which in every age of her existence, both before and after the conquest, until the age of Wycliffe, had been most severely felt, in its oppressive power;—this arose from the exercise of that prerogative claimed by the pope, by virtue of which he could confer vacant benefices in the kingdom, at his own will and pleasure, either on foreigners, or on any of his worthless dependents. The resolute spirit of some of the English monarchs, had to a certain degree resisted this encroachment, while others had passively yielded to it, so that the matter remained a fruitful subject of dispute, long after the accession of Edward III.

This monarch and his parliament, attempted in 1350, to protect their country from this system of exaction and fraud, by two celebrated statutes; one of these declared the collation to any dignity or benefice in opposition to the rights of the king, or its patrons, void—subjecting the parties concerned in every such offence, to fine or imprisonment, and prohibiting all

appeal beyond the court of the sovereign. The second statute was intended to check the growing habit of transferring questions touching property, to the court of Rome, for settlement; the penalty here imposed, was heavy fines and imprisonment at the king's will. The latter statute had been enforced, and proved beneficial to the country, but the former had been so inefficacious as to require farther exertions to check the evil which it was designed to remedy.

In 1373, we find the English parliament still complaining grievously of the evils arising from papal provisions, which are declared to have been more than usually oppressive. Edward fearing, probably, that he might forfeit the affections of the people, if he turned a deaf ear to their remonstrances on this subject, appointed an embassy to Avignon, the object of which was, to desire Gregory the eleventh, in the name of Edward and his subjects to desist henceforth from the presumptuous task, of appointing occupants to the vacant benefices of the kingdom. Very little advantage appears to have resulted from this first embassy, and accordingly a second was resolved on, in the hope that it would accomplish more than the one which had preceded it. We find the name of Wycliffe, standing second on the list of those appointed

by parliament to convey its remonstrance to the pontiff. This furnishes a decisive proof of the estimation in which he was held, both by his sovereign and parliament.

The place of conference was fixed at Bruges, a city of great extent, and beyond the sphere of the Pope's authority. There were peculiarities in the situation of Bruges which especially adapted it for the present purpose. In the year 1370 it was considered the most important member of the Hanseatic league, which at that time numbered sixty cities. It had long been a commercial emporium of Europe, and its numerous merchantmen, like those of ancient Tyre, were not unfrequently as princes of the earth in opulence. A spirit of civil freedom had grown up with their love of commercial enterprise, and her citizens exhibited a hardy confidence and a resolution in maintaining their own rights, which rendered them fit supporters to one who was prepared resolutely to withstand the encroachments and domineering ambition of the papacy. Wycliffe was detained at Bruges for two years, and while there, it became the seat of a negotiation between the ambassadors of France and England, and the representatives of the pope. England had deputed two of her nobles to support her claims in this assembly, one of

whom was John of Gaunt. From the friendship entertained by that prince for the reformer, it appears more than probable that he obtained an introduction to the other ambassadors, and in his intercourse with them learned to know more of the principles on which the crooked policy of this world's doings is generally regulated, a species of knowledge, which while it is very frequently acquired by painful experience, is in some respects important when gained.

The information which we are able to collect with regard to the progress of the negotiation at Bruges, is not as satisfactory as could be desired. Wycliffe appears to have been detained in that city nearly two years,—it being a maxim of papal policy, that every controversy or negotiation in which the court of Rome was a party, should be protracted by every possible means, if there was a probability of its terminating unfavorably to her authority. The concessions made by the papal ambassadors in the present instance, were few and unsatisfactory. Urban and his successor, Gregory the eleventh, took advantage of the diminished influence of the English monarch, arising from increasing infirmities and advanced age, and contrived to maintain their authority almost wholly unimpaired.

It was, indeed, agreed that for the future, the reservation of benefices should not be insisted on by the pope, but at the same time it was required that they should not either henceforward be conferred by the writ of the king.

Wycliffe returned from the embassy, more than ever decided as to the necessity of a reformation in the affairs of the Church; since the effect of his observation during his residence on the continent, was to confirm him in his opinion of the anti-Christian character of papacy. He had hitherto directed his rebukes in an indirect manner against the head of the Romish Church, but from this time we find him attacking these corruptions in a decided and pointed manner. He had learned from his experience abroad, that the pontiffs too generally exerted the influence arising from their elevated station, for the sole purpose of spreading more widely the spirit of avarice, ambition, and sensuality. From henceforward he appears to have been confirmed in the opinion that the head of the papal power was the antichrist of Scripture, and as such, entitled to the reprobation of all sincere and simple minded Christians.

During the absence of Wycliffe from England, he received gratifying proofs of the undiminished confidence with which he was regarded

by his sovereign. In November, 1375, while yet at Bruges, he was presented by Edward, to a prebend in the collegiate Church of Westbury, in the diocese of Worcester, and shortly after, to the Rectory of Lutterworth, in Leicestershire, at that time in the gift of the crown by the minority of its patron, Lord Henry de Ferrars. Soon after the date of these events, he was called on, to take a still more prominent part in the affairs of his country.

At that period, the Duke of Lancaster was involved in a severe political struggle which gave a colouring to his future life. While Edward and his sons were glowing with the flush of their continental victories, the current of popular feeling had been strong in their favour; but when, from the pressure of various causes, the scale of prosperity was turned against them, then was the voice of the multitude often raised in dissatisfaction against the royal family. The Duke of Lancaster, on whom the cares of government chiefly devolved after his brother's death, in consequence of his father's infirmities and the youth of the Prince of Wales, became especially obnoxious. The parliament then assembled, commenced an investigation of various branches of official corruption. Charges were preferred against several servants of the

crown, which in some instances were followed by confiscation of their property, or by imprisonment, and one of the members of the royal council was expelled. But it was not only with Edward and his ministry, that this parliament was disposed to contend. They proceeded to the task of exposing those grievous disorders in the Church, which were stated to be universally prevalent through all the ranks of her clergy, from the highest to the lowest. In the course of these parliamentary proceedings, various facts were adduced to prove the evils under which the English realm was suffering from the encroachments of the papacy, but our limits forbid their being noticed in the present work.

So agreeable to the public feeling was the course adopted by this assembly in checking the evils adverted to, that on it was conferred by the people, the appellation of the good parliament. We are unable to account for the mystery connected with its history, viz: that it should have been at the same time, the organ of opposition to the usurping spirit of papacy, and yet decidedly hostile to the administration of the duke of Lancaster. If this assembly hoped, by such a method of procedure, to drive this illustrious individual to an opposite line of conduct towards the pontiff, from that which he had hitherto

pursued, the object was defeated, for the duke continued his accustomed course, and by so doing, may be considered as having proved himself a sincere, though not always a judicious politician.

John of Gaunt left Bruges, on his return to England, in July, 1376. Before his arrival, the parliament, which had acted in such a hostile manner towards him, was dissolved, but not before it had excluded him from a place in the government as well as divested him of his functions as ambassador. Edward, though greatly enfeebled by age and affliction, was not however disposed passively to submit the management of his affairs to the dictation of his prelates or commons; he therefore expressed his dissatisfaction with the committee who had been selected to act as his advisers, and forthwith recalled the duke of Lancaster, his eldest surviving son, to a participation of the cares of government. In about six months after the dissolution of the good parliament, another was called, the members of which were more disposed to further the designs of John of Gaunt.

The bishops were considerably chagrined at certain of the king's measures, touching some individuals of their own body; and the people, on their part, manifested dissatisfaction with the

imprisonment of one of their nobles. Under these circumstances, we find the clergy first adverting to the doctrines of Wycliffe, as calling for official interference. This, it is more than probable, was intended quite as much to resist the power of his patron, as to attack the rector of Lutterworth. The see of London was at that time filled by Courtney, a son of the noble house of Devonshire, and one of the most arbitrary churchmen of his age, and withal, a decided opponent of John of Gaunt. The zealous bishop used his utmost efforts to excite the indignation of the clergy against Wycliffe, and so successful was he in his attempts, that in the next convocation, which took place in February, 1377, a few days later than the opening of parliament, the reformer was cited to appear before his ecclesiastical superiors, to answer certain charges brought against him, as the setter forth of novel, erroneous and heretical doctrines. The nineteenth day of the same month was appointed for hearing his defence—the place nominated being St. Paul's Church, London, which, at the time fixed on, was crowded with the populace. The enemies of John of Gaunt, who were the prosecutors of Wycliffe, finding themselves greatly in the minority in the new parliament, had endeavoured to strengthen their cause

by courting the favour of the body of prelates, and also that of the citizens of London. They endeavoured to alienate the affections of the latter from the Duke of Lancaster by representing him as intending to abridge their liberties. Under the excitement of feeling consequent on this rumour, the Londoners were prepared to take their part in any tumult which might be stirred up by the retainers of the clergy, who probably formed no inconsiderable part of the audience assembled to hear the defence of the accused.

There appears little reason, however, for supposing that the citizens of the metropolis were personally inimical to Wycliffe, since the principles publicly maintained by him were calculated to increase both the civil and religious liberties of the people—who are not generally wont to regard such attempts unfavourably; indeed there is positive evidence that the doctrines inculcated by him were acceptable to the citizens of London, as well as to the students of Oxford.

On the day appointed, such a crowd assembled, that when Wycliffe was about to proceed to St. Paul's, it was found necessary by his friends to have recourse to the civil authorities, and the support of his patron, the better to ensure the safety of his person. He was accordingly accompanied to the place of meeting by

the duke of Lancaster,—four friars appointed by the duke,—and Lord Henry Percy, the earl marshal of England: the latter going before, to make room for the passage of the accused. Some disturbance arising among the populace, it drew the attention of Courtney, bishop of London, the prelate appointed to conduct the prosecution. We may presume that his placidity was in no wise promoted by observing the individual who was about to be brought before him to answer the charge of heresy, thus powerfully protected from the meditated vengeance of his enemies, by two of the most illustrious nobles of the realm. Under the impulse of chagrin, Courtney hastily accosted the lord Percy, saying, “that if he had known before what masteries he would have kept in the church, he would have stopped him out from coming there.” Lancaster resented these words, as an intended insult to him and his noble companion, and quickly replied that he should not be deterred from doing as he wished, by the authority of the bishop of London. Lord Percy was also prepared to maintain his own dignity and that of the prisoner, and accordingly desired Wycliffe to be seated, saying that he would find such indulgence necessary, as he had much to say in his defence, and would be wearied by making it

in a standing posture. This advice of the lord marshal, roused still more deeply the hasty spirit of the prosecutor, and he declared it to be a contempt of court. The duke, as may be imagined, supported his friend, and the narrators of the scene aver, that in doing so, he hesitated not to make use of language alike ungentlemanly and impolitic. How far soever the dispute may have been carried, it is difficult to say precisely,—this much is certain, however, that a tumult ensued, and both parties being compelled to separate in disorder, the council was dissolved, and the prosecution against Wycliffe was temporarily suspended.

The reformer appears, himself, to have taken no part in these disorderly proceedings, but to have retired as soon as an opportunity for so doing was offered him. The popular mind had previously been in a state of fermentation, and needed but a small additional excitement to make it overflow in violent proceedings. The palaces and costly dwellings of many of the nobles, who were attached to the party of the crown, were assaulted at this time, and one clergyman, whose person was mistaken for the lord Percy, was slaughtered, but the rioters were at length dispersed by the exertions of the bishop of London. The mayor and aldermen of the

metropolis were deposed from their offices, and those substituted in their places, are said to have been favorable to the interests of Lancaster.

From February, 1377, to October of the same year, Wycliffe appears to have divided his time between his parochial duties at Lutterworth, and the cares of his professional office. This interval was however productive of great changes to the English nation. On the twenty-first of June, Edward the third breathed his last, and on the following day, his grandson, Richard the second, then in his twelfth year, made his public entry into London. Though in the day of his prosperity Edward had been popular with his subjects, yet did his sun set under a cloud; and after death, his memory was little cherished by his people. The influence of the duke of Lancaster was greatly diminished after the accession of his nephew; but while the opposite party continued unfriendly to him, they nevertheless remained as decided as ever in their opposition to the papal claims.

On the 13th of October, 1377, the first parliament of the young monarch was assembled, and being composed principally of the same elements as had constituted *the good parliament*, it is not surprising to find that body unfriendly in its proceedings towards John of Gaunt, and

jealous of his influence over Richard. In the course of their deliberations, a violent clamour was raised against the exactions of the Pope and his agents, and the question was seriously agitated, whether it would not be lawful for the kingdom, in case of necessity, and for the means of defence, to detain its treasure, that it be not conveyed to foreign nations, though the pope himself should demand the same, under pain of his censures, and by virtue of obedience said to be due to him. At the present day, such a question would be readily and speedily solved, but at the time at which it was propounded, it was thought to require great wisdom and judgment to answer it aright.

In this dilemma, we find Wycliffe again appealed to for his opinion. In his reply, he professed to attach but little importance to the opinions of the learned, the decisions of civilians, or indeed to any merely human authorities. He professed to ground his decision "on the principles of the law of Christ" alone; and such being the course he pursued, the result of his appeal may be easily imagined, more especially, as the character of the pope's demands at that time were expressly in opposition to the spirit of the gospel.

CHAPTER VII.

THE charge of heresy, brought against the reformer by those of the English clergy inimical to him, appears in no wise to have intimidated him, or disposed him either to modify his obnoxious opinions, or to renounce his self-denying habits of life. After being released from his enemies in the sudden and unlooked-for manner which was noticed in the preceding chapter, he still continued resolutely to persevere in what appeared to him the path of duty, and he might be seen going about with his disciples in his frieze gown and uncovered feet, preaching diligently the doctrines of the gospel to the common people and such others as were disposed to attend on his ministrations.

His enemies however, though foiled in one attempt, were not to be deterred from making another effort to ruin his earthly prospects, and to shorten his career of usefulness. The repulse which they had received through the power of Lancaster, appears to have had scarce any other effect than to quicken their resentment. What they had been too feeble to accomplish by their own unaided strength, they

now determined to effect through the instrumentality of the papal power.

Emissaries were employed, whose work was, to glean heretical doctrines and obnoxious sentiments, either from the private conversation, divinity lectures, or from the writings of Wycliffe, and the joint product of their labours was transmitted to Rome. In the course of a few months after his citation at St. Paul's, we find the pope issuing sundry bulls, addressed to the archbishop of Canterbury, the bishop of London, the king, and the university of Oxford. These letters were severally prefaced by eulogiums on the character of the English nation; and those addressed to the prelates, contained in addition, commendatory notices of many of the clergy of the kingdom, who had flourished at an earlier period. The pontiff, after dealing out his panegyrics, proceeded to express his deep regret, at learning that the once pure faith of England had become grievously corrupted by the springing up of certain tares of a most pestilent heresy, the report of which had reached Rome, before the work of plucking them out had been attempted in the country where they existed. The parties addressed were then severally required in the name of the pontiff, forthwith to seize and imprison John Wycliffe, rector

of Lutterworth and professor of divinity in the university of Oxford, he being accused of setting forth doctrines subversive of the authority of the Church. It was also enjoined, that his confession should be received, distinct information of his tenets obtained, and both transmitted to the pope by a trusty messenger, while the person of the accused was to be detained in custody until farther information could be procured concerning him. If they failed in apprehending him, citations were to be issued, demanding the personal appearance of the said Wycliffe before the pope within three months of the date of the document.

The utmost vigilance was also recommended in shielding the king and the nobility from the noxious effects of the pestilent errors adverted to in the papal letters.

These various epistles, when compared, were found to be little more than transcripts of each other, some slight difference being made, to adapt them better to the particular persons addressed, and to the special service required of each. One circumstance is worthy of especial notice, while speaking of these papal missives. There was no longer any mention made of a public citation of Wycliffe, or of an opportunity being offered him for confronting his accu-

sers; on the contrary, all the information requisite was to be obtained secretly, and the result was directed to be privately conveyed to the ears of the pontiff. The agents employed on this occasion, had been too long habituated to the dark designs and crafty policy of the papal court, to see in the present proceedings any thing which infringed on the rights of human nature. Wycliffe, however, often complained of these inquisitorial practices, which, by sheltering the unprincipled informant when in quest of another's opinions and private sentiments, frequently placed the innocent at the mercy of the crafty and malevolent.

The epistles of the pope were dated June, 1377, but they were not made public in England until after the first parliament of Richard II., whose acts in reference to papal claims are noticed elsewhere. It is not improbable that the attitude in which he was at that time placed, as the public adviser of the king and parliament, may have given fresh alarm to the papal power and induced her to regard Wycliffe as an enemy who was becoming increasingly formidable; more especially after his decisive answer had been given to the appeal put to him, which proved that he was not to be

silenced without strong and decided efforts on the part of his enemies.

The university of Oxford debated seriously whether the bull addressed to her, should be received or not, and although the former alternative was at length reluctantly embraced, not the smallest intention was ever manifested by the heads of that literary body, of placing the person of her professor of divinity in the power of his enemies. This reluctance to accede to the wishes of the court of Rome, was probably in a measure referable to that jealousy of papal interference, which was commonly entertained by the literary establishments of that age. It is however evident that this was not the sole ground of her opposition to the papal mandate, for there were many adherents of Wycliffe to be found within the halls of the university, who regarded him as one of her brightest ornaments. Archbishop Sudbury however, wrote to the chancellor of Oxford, reminding him of the bull issued by the court of Rome, and insisting on its being faithfully executed. He also enjoined him to make use of the skill of all the most orthodox divines, in obtaining accurate information as to the existence of the obnoxious heresies, and forthwith to convey all such mat-

ters, with his judgment upon them, under the university seal, to the papal authority. He was likewise required to enjoin upon Wycliffe to obey the summons of his ecclesiastical superiors, and accordingly early in the following year the reformer appeared before a synod at Lambeth.

When the rector of Lutterworth stood before this assembly, he was not as formerly, supported by his once illustrious patron, John of Gaunt. That prince no longer swayed the councils of his country; but while his countenance was wanting, the reformer had obtained other and powerful friends. His doctrines had not only made a deep impression on the hearts of many of the populace, but had likewise been favourably received within the precincts of the court. Large numbers of the former becoming alarmed for his safety, surrounded the place of meeting, openly declaring their attachment to his person and opinions.

The consternation of the assembly excited by the proceedings of the populace, was still farther increased, when Sir Lewis Clifford unexpectedly made his appearance in the meeting, with a message from Joanna, the queen mother, commanding the bishops in an authoritative manner, not to proceed to any definitive sentence against Wycliffe. The effect produced upon his

judges, on hearing the royal message, is acknowledged even by a zealous Roman historian, who declares that their stern determination to discharge their duty, and their resolution to withstand all threats and violence, even unto death, faded away before the words of Clifford, and "their speech became softer than oil, to the public loss of their own dignity, and the damage of the whole Church."

Thus by the providential interposition of Him, to whose control the hearts of all men are subject, was the reformer once more delivered from his enemies, for the panic into which the assembly was thrown by the manifestation of interest in behalf of the accused, both by the crown and the people, effectually stopped all farther proceedings against him. Wycliffe had not been intimidated by the conduct of the pope and the English bishops towards him; he had obeyed their summons to appear at Lambeth; he had while there, been protected both by the voice of the multitude and the countenance of the great and powerful; but he rested not his safety on such a precarious foundation; he rather thought it due to himself to deliver to the assembled commissioners his solemn protest against the charge of heresy, and a written statement of his opinions. As his conduct on

this occasion has been unfairly represented by various modern writers, it seems but just to him to refute their imputations. It has been asserted, that in attempting to explain his peculiar views, for the specific purpose of freeing him from the charge of heresy, he was tempted through timidity, to dissemble and misrepresent his religious opinions.

If we endeavour impartially to scrutinize his conduct at this time, we shall find most satisfactory evidence that he was not influenced by such unworthy motives. It will be necessary for us in the first place, briefly to notice some of those accusations brought against him by his enemies. One of the most severe among them, the Romish historian, Walsingham, affirms, that "by his artful statements he deluded his judges, and threw some meaning into his nefarious propositions, though if these were simply taken as he taught them in his schools and public sermons, they would furnish abundant evidence of his departure from the faith of the Romish Church."

In reply to this, it may be said, is it not in accordance with the rules of justice, that when an individual is on trial for sentiments said to be expressed by him, the nature of his opinions should be gathered from his own written or

printed composition, and not from a statement of what he is said to have maintained, drawn up by his enemies, at their own pleasure? If this be admitted, we shall then be ready to listen to the assertions of Wycliffe, that many opinions had been attributed to him, which had never either been preached or even held by him; that others, though under certain modifications embodied in his writings and maintained by him in conversation, had never been so prominently and openly set forth as represented by his enemies.

In endeavouring to clear him from the charge of an artful attempt at evasion at this present crisis, we should not fail to remember that some allowance is to be made for his lingering partiality to the scholastic forms of argument, by which the strongest minds of that day were kept in thralldom. In the formation of our opinion of his conduct at that eventful moment of his life, we must not forget that the paper which records his alleged attempt at dissimulation, if it could be proved to be such, has been transmitted to us by his bitterest enemy, the historian Walsingham; and that notwithstanding all the defects charged upon it, it contains the bold declaration of certain truths which must have been peculiarly offensive to the papal power. One

article for example, asserted the liability of the pope to sin and error, and likewise maintained the power possessed by the Christian community of "reproving, impleading, and reducing him to a better life." This bold and explicit avowal of sentiments, so obnoxious to the claims of infallibility arrogantly advanced by the whole race of pontiffs, would seem to exonerate Wycliffe from the charge of pusillanimously lowering his opinions when danger threatened him from their public announcement. The reformer, in his statement, likewise denied to the Romish bishops the sovereignty which they had so long claimed over the property of the religious establishments of Europe; and these assertions were never either modified or explained away, but remained a standing memorial to impeach the validity of such practices, then of frequent occurrence.

The chief points of controversy acknowledged in this protest, as existing between the writer and the Romish Church, related to the limitation of the despotic power usurped by the papacy, and the scarcely less extravagant pretensions of the whole body of the clergy at large; the defining of the authority of the magistrate as compared with that of churchmen; the setting forth of a proper and allowable method of

securing to the clergy their appropriate revenues; and the denial of the power claimed by the priests of the Romish communion over the present character and future condition of the worshipper. Little reference, except in an indirect manner, was made to the great truths of the Christian system; but this will excite less surprize when we recollect the habits of the Romish controversialists who were opposed to him in argument. The points which were contended for by ecclesiastics of that age, were generally such as had a reference to the distinctive features of their own communion, especially those which regarded her external organization; while the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, if admitted in form, were too generally either denied explicitly, or explained away in a manner to neutralize their practical power. While seeking to demolish the huge fabric erected by superstition, the reformer probably considered it expedient, first to attack the outworks, and doubtless intended, when this object should be effected, to continue his work by laying bare still more and more the gross corruptions and idolatrous abominations which had defiled the professed Church of God.

It is not surprising that the second escape of Wycliffe from the hands of his bitter perse-

cutors, and the reiteration of his most obnoxious opinions, should have called forth from them fresh exhibitions of rancorous feelings. We accordingly find an anonymous writer, standing forth to refute the avowal made by him, as to the pope's liability to sin, and maintaining the justice of whatever regulations, either for doctrine or practice, which his holiness might ordain. To this statement, Wycliffe replied, that this was a bold assertion, since if it were substantiated, the pope might exclude any portion of the scriptures, and substitute what he pleased in its place; that he might thus alter the whole Bible, and make the gospel itself a heresy. He adverted to the strong measures taken by the court of Rome, to destroy him, because he had ventured to question this assumed and unscriptural right arrogated by that power, and concluded his tract, by an energetic exhortation to the influential classes of the community, to throw off the shackles by which the papacy had long tried to bind them, both in spiritual and civil bondage, and at the same time expressed his determination to exert his influence for the preservation of the true faith, "although the lord pope, or even an angel from heaven, should promulgate the doctrine, which

would confer on a weak creature a power which belonged only to the Godhead."

Opposition to such arrogant claims of the head of the Romish Church as the anonymous writer advocated, Wycliffe proceeded to state, was absolutely necessary on every account. If no barrier were to be erected at that moment, then would the tide of civil and religious oppression, gathering strength as it moved onwards, set in with fresh violence, and would soon break down every vestige of liberty which remained. The sacred enclosure of the domestic circle would be no longer safe from its intrusive power—neither would the worldly professions of the laity—since whatever imposition pontiffs were disposed to practice, unhesitating submission must be rendered to their demands, should the principles laid down by his opponent be once firmly established.

CHAPTER VIII.

ALL our young readers who are at all versed in the history of Europe, must be aware that early in the fourteenth century, the residence of the pontiffs was removed from Rome, to Avignon, in France. The first of the popes whom we find locating himself at a distance from the seven hills, on which the Romish Church had so long proudly seated herself, was Clement the fifth, a native of France. His motives in thus migrating, were suggested by a short-sighted policy. He had been elected principally through the influence of the French monarch, and therefore considered it prudent to accede to his earnest solicitations, that the seat of the papal power should be within the dominions of France.

For seventy years, Clement and his successors resided at Avignon, which period the Italians were accustomed to speak of, as a second Babylonish captivity. This comparison, though probably originating in the contemptuous arrogance of the Italians, was nevertheless not ill-suited to convey an idea of the disastrous consequences which resulted to the papacy from the transfer of its seat from Rome to Avignon. The absence of the pope from his Italian domin-

ions, at once gave the reins to the factious and discontented, and was the means of weakening so greatly the power of the subjects of the papal government, that they were left exposed to the ravages of hostile invaders. There was in the eyes of the multitude, something of sanctity in the very atmosphere, and a majesty in the appearance of the proud hills of the ancient metropolis of the world, which added no inconsiderable weight to the voice of the pontiffs when sending forth their mandates from the city of the Cæsars; but all these accompaniments were wanting, when they were issued from the walls of a French city.

Disastrous as were the consequences of their removal to France, to the race of pontiffs, still more calamitous was the termination of what they called their period of captivity. On the death of pope Gregory the eleventh, in March 1378, a schism took place in the Church. The people of Rome becoming disgusted by the consecration of a long succession of popes of the French nation, tumultuously surrounded the conclave, demanding that the new pontiff should be an Italian, while the majority of the cardinals being Frenchmen, wished to elect one of their own nation. Under the influence of fear, the conclave nominated Urban the sixth, a

Neapolitan, to the pontifical chair; but the French cardinals subsequently assembling at a place beyond the confines of the papal dominions, declared their former election invalid, and selected a successor to Gregory, who assumed the title of Clement the seventh. The cause of the latter was maintained by France, Spain, Scotland, Sicily and Cyprus. The rest of Europe submitted to the authority of Urban, and thus for a long period, was the Church of Rome, to use the language of Wycliffe, "cloven in twain, and the two parts were made to fight against each other."

The distress and confusion incident to this period, are described by historians in glowing language. The factions between the popes caused perpetual contentions and wars, destructive to the lives and fortunes of many. Religion appeared almost wholly extinguished,—profligacy abounded,—while the clergy, though bitterly contending for the claims of "one or other of the rival pontiffs, lost all regard to the interests of true religion, or the safety of their flocks, and became grossly corrupt and vicious in their lives. While many who had been accustomed to consider their eternal safety as dependent upon their union with the head of the Romish Church, became overwhelmed with

anxiety and dismay, from their total inability to determine which of the two claiming the title, was the true successor of St. Peter.

But the Almighty Head of the true Church of Christ was graciously over-ruling these events to her good, and preparing the minds of men to question the supremacy claimed by the pontiffs, and to doubt their infallibility. Wycliffe, whose escape from the vengeance of his enemies, is referable, in a great measure, to the distractions in which the religious community were at that time involved saw the period to be a favourable one for exposing the vain and unchristian pretences of the papacy, and was immediately prepared with a tract to meet the exigencies of the times. This was entitled, "On the Schism of the Popes," and contained a direct attack on papal usurpations. He adverted to the dispute, as presenting a favourable opportunity to the powers of Christendom, for attempting the destruction of those laws and customs by which the clergy had become corrupted, and the whole religious community afflicted. In this tract, he exposed most of the grossest errors of the papacy. Among other strong assertions contained in it, is the following, which grievously offended the ears of his adversaries: "Of all heresies none can be greater, than for a man to

believe that he is absolved from his sin, if he give money, or because a priest layeth his hand on the head, and saith, I absolve thee. For thou must be sorrowful in thy heart, or else God absolveth thee not." He also proceeded to deny the necessity of confession to a priest, and concluded by calling on the secular powers to commence the long needed reformation of the ecclesiastical body, both in its head and members.

It was about this time, that Wycliffe completed his work "On the Truth and Meaning of Scripture," which is said to be one of the most extended and important of all his productions. A copy of this treatise is in the Bodleian library, and another in the library of Trinity College, Dublin; and it is well worthy of attentive consideration, since it embodies almost every sentiment peculiar to the mind of the reformer. The supreme authority, and the entire sufficiency of scripture, and the necessity of a version of them being made in the English language, are discussed in this treatise. In it the right of private judgment is enforced, the sacraments of the Church explained, and the moral obligations growing out of man's various relations are set forth plainly. One such work is alone sufficient to enrol its author among the

class of public benefactors to his country, the Church, and the world at large.

The mental exertions necessary in preparing these compositions, in addition to the high degree of excitement naturally resulting from the conduct of his enemies towards him, appears to have been more than the frame of Wycliffe could withstand. He was assailed by an alarming illness while at Oxford, in 1379, which threatened his speedy dissolution. From this attack however, he recovered so far as to be able to resume his duties, but his constitution received a shock from which he never entirely recovered. During the period when the violence of his malady confined him to his chamber, reports of the probability of his approaching dissolution were circulated in Oxford. His old enemies the mendicants, heard them, and appeared in no wise reluctant to entertain the hope, that the man who had so boldly ventured to attack the papal power in the days of health and vigour, might be terrified by the near approach of death, into a recantation of his errors, for it must be remembered they considered the dogmas of the reformer as having arisen from the suggestions of the great adversary of souls. A deputation was accordingly appointed to wait on their dying antagonist, composed of a doctor

from each of the four orders of begging friars, attended by an equal number of civil officers of the city. When this embassy entered the sick chamber of Wycliffe, finding him extended on his bed, they began by expressing some sympathy in his sufferings, and some wishes for his recovery. They then reminded him of the many wrongs which the mendicants had received from him, both in his sermons and by his writings. They admonished him of the probability of the near approach of death, and expressed their confident assurance that he would now be willing to confess his misdoings, and penitentially to recant whatever he had said against them.

The sick man permitted them to go through with their exhortations, without making any reply; he then directed his attendants to raise him in his bed, and fixing his eyes upon his visitors, summoned all his remaining strength to pronounce the following words: "I shall not die, but live; and shall again declare the evil deeds of the friars!" The consternation produced in the minds of the embassy, by this resolute language, from one whose heart they had hoped was gradually quailing at the approach of death, may be readily imagined. They retreated in mortification and confusion,

and lived to see the reformer's prediction verified.

While Wycliffe was ever ready to censure the corrupt practices, and refute the unscriptural dogmas of the friars, he was also found prompt and conscientious in the improvement of those means of usefulness, which they either neglected or misapplied. He was as faithful in the discharge of the duties of the pulpit, as he was ready and able in the use of his pen. In the fourteenth century, the exercises of public worship consisted of little besides a routine of mechanical occupations, such as the apostle describes as a "bodily exercise." These nevertheless, with such a formal ministration of the sacraments as were deemed within the ability of any of the authorized clergy, however incompetent or unworthy they might be, were generally considered sufficient to secure to those who availed themselves of them, a right and title, to all that christianity was designed to impart. Wycliffe saw and felt the danger to which his countrymen was exposed by these defective views. He knew that the word of God recognized the preaching of the cross, as the effective and divinely appointed instrument by which the hearts of sinners were to be reclaimed from sin and ignorance, and brought

to the knowledge of the truth. It had been ~~the~~ chief instrument made use of in leading the idolatrous Anglo-Saxons to renounce the error of their ways, and to embrace the gospel; but from that period to the age of Wycliffe, the practice of preaching had very much fallen into disuse among the English clergy, and it was in order to supply the deficiency, that some of the most able and pious among the divines of the kingdom, had advocated the institution of the order of preaching friars. But this body had grievously disappointed the hopes of those, who expected to find in it a remedy for the evils, which had arisen from the indolence and vices of the secular clergy. The friars had indeed assumed the office of preaching, but the subject of their discourses was too generally such, as to preclude the hope of any good being produced by them. Instead, however, of rashly deciding upon the inexpediency or unprofitableness of pulpit ministrations, because such employments had been perverted to an improper use by the faithful mendicants, Wycliffe became only more and more convinced of the importance of preaching, by witnessing the influence which had been exerted by those who misapplied their functions. He was himself possessed of learning such as the mendicants had em-

ployed in acquiring their reputation, and was besides, no mean proficient in the art of oratory, to which they specially applied themselves. Thus was he gifted with all those qualifications which could best have fitted him for the office he undertook, that of loosing the chains by which his beloved country was bound in spiritual and intellectual bondage; and these advantages he failed not to improve, but devoted himself to his work, with all the energy of an ardent and generous nature.

It is not certain how many sermons were written by Wycliffe, but the fact that near three hundred of them should have escaped the vigilance of his enemies, who were intent upon destroying whatever productions of his which came in their way, is sufficient to convince us that in the discharge of this part of his ministerial functions, he was most industrious. Accordingly, when seeking to form our estimate of his character, we must not make a partial inspection of his labours as a reformer. We must not think of him alone as the advocate of his monarch's claims before the papal delegates,—or the able counsellor of the parliamentary body,—or the champion of civil and intellectual freedom,—but we must also remember him as faithfully discharging the more humble duties

as rector of his flock at Lutterworth. When there, his venerable form was regularly to be seen in his retired pulpit, breaking the bread of life to a circle of rustic parishioners;—or under the roof of the poor and illiterate, soothing the dying bed of the humble inmate, regardless whether he were either bond or free, and only intent upon the charitable work of conveying religious instruction or consolation to the sufferer, in his native tongue. He expressly designated it as the office of the christian man, “to visit those who are sick, or who are in trouble, especially those whom God hath made needy by age, or by other sickness, as the feeble, the blind and the lame, who are in poverty. These thou shalt relieve with thy goods after thy power, and after thy need, for thus biddeth the gospel.” He defined true charity, to be that which had its origin in the love of man’s spirit, and declared that “men who love not the souls, love little the bodies of their neighbours.” Those priests who were unfaithful to their high vocation, and were to be found in the practice of open sin, he denounced as the “foulest traitors,” since they violated the most solemn duties that can be imposed on man.

Wycliffe always expressed a deep sense of the importance of the art of preaching, which in

that age must have been invested with even greater power than it claims at the present day, when the advantages of education have become so widely diffused, and the art of printing has so greatly multiplied the means of imparting and receiving religious instruction. The reformer's sentiments on this subject, 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 straightly 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." "Idleness in this office, is to the Church its greatest injury, producing most the children of the fiend, and sending them to his court." "Jesus Christ, when he ascended into Heaven, commended it especially to all 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 would not a wise shepherd have done, had not he himself loved it well. In this stands the office of the spiritual shepherd."

From these various extracts it will be manifest, that the opinions of Wycliffe were far removed from the errors of the Romish Church, which instructed her votaries, to rely on the sufficiency of the sacraments, as a means of salvation.

The preachers of that age had two methods of addressing instruction to the flocks committed to their charge. These were technically termed "declaring" and "postillating." In the former case, they announced some particular subject, and enlarged upon it after the manner of a modern oration; in the latter, they commenced by reading a portion of scripture, and afterwards proceeded to the exposition of its several parts, and a practical application of it to the varying circumstances of their hearers. The latter was the method of conveying religious instruction, selected by Wycliffe in the discharge of his duties as a parish priest. Some three hundred of his postils are still preserved in the libraries of the English and Irish universities, as well as in other collections. They were composed from the year 1376 when he

took charge of the parish of Lutterworth, to the year 1384. In some instances, they consist of little more than brief notes, while in others, they approach more to the length of a modern sermon, and there is scarce any opinion assigned peculiarly to Wycliffe, which may not be found explained in some portion of these voluminous manuscripts. The corruptions of papacy are boldly attacked in them, as forming the chief barrier to religious improvement; the social obligations of men are also frequently discussed and plainly enforced on scriptural principles, while the great doctrines of the gospel are proclaimed with faithfulness and zeal. A few extracts will be sufficient, to give an idea of the manner in which he was accustomed to address his flock at Lutterworth.

“The gospel teacheth us the duty which falleth to all the disciples of Christ, and also telleth us how priests, both high and low should occupy themselves in the church of God and in serving him. And first, Jesus himself did enforce indeed the lessons which he taught by his example. The gospel relates how Jesus went about in the places of the country both great and small, as in cities and castles, or small towns, and this to teach us to profit generally unto men, and not to forbear to preach to a people

because they are few, and our name may not, in consequence be great. For we should labour for God, and from him hope for our reward."

"There is no doubt that Christ went into small uplandish towns, as to Bethpage, and Cana in Galilee; for Christ went to all places where he wished to do good. And he labored not thus for gain, for he was not smitten with pride or with covetousness." In another discourse he said, "It was ever the manner of Jesus to speak the words of God, wherever he knew that they would be profitable to others who heard them: and hence Christ often preached, now at meat, and now at supper, and indeed at whatever time it was convenient for others to hear him."

When speaking of the corrupt practices of the papacy, he hesitated not to apply the epithet Antichrist to the head of the Romish communion, and observed, "Stewards of the church should not judge merely according to their own will, but always according to the law of God, and in things of which they are certain. But the laws and judgments which Antichrist has brought in, and added to the law of God, mar too much the church of Christ. For with the stewards of the church, the laws of Antichrist are the rules by which they make offices therein; and to deceive the laity, Antichrist challengeth

to be, in such things fully God's fellow; for he affirms that, if he judgeth thus, his will should be taken for reason, whereas this is the highest point that falleth to the Godhead. Popes and kings therefore, should not seek a reason above their own will, for such blasphemy often bringeth to men, more than the pride of Lucifer. He said he would ascend and be like the Most High, but he challengeth not to be fellow of God, even with him, or passing him! May God bring down this pride, and help that His word may reverse that of the fiend! Well indeed I know, that when it is at the highest, this smoke shall disappear."

In the conclusion of the same discourse, the reformer exhorted his hearers to study the will of God, as revealed in Scripture, which he constantly maintained, to be sufficient to enlighten the judgment and direct the conduct, irrespective of the decisions and interpretations of popes and prelates.

We shall do injustice to Wycliffe's piety and to his views of pastoral duty, if we suppose that controversial themes, or animadversions on the crying evils of papacy, formed the chief subject of his pulpit instructions, as rector of Lutterworth. He loved to dwell on the blessings conveyed to fallen man by the gospel of salvation.

He was explicit in his avowal of the deep corruption of our nature, and of the necessity thereby existing, for some atonement to be provided for the sin of our first parents, and for our transgressions; "and since this must be done," he remarks, "the person to make the atonement must be God and man, for then the worthiness of this person's deeds were even with the unworthiness of the sinner." The doctrines of scripture, with regard to the person of Christ, and his sufferings considered as the price of our redemption, are of frequent occurrence in these discourses; so is also that of salvation through faith and by grace only. He was also careful in pointing out to the attention of his hearers, the close connection which exists between the faith of the gospel and holiness of heart and life, or rather how the one is the necessary and inevitable consequence of the other. "If thou hast" he says, "a full belief of Christ, how he lived here on the earth, and how he overcame the world, thou wilt also overcome it as a kind son. For if thou takest heed how Christ despised the world, and followest him here, as thou shouldst by the faith of the Father, thou must needst overcome it. And here it is manifest, what many men are in this world. They are not born of God, nor do

they believe in Christ. For if this belief were in them, they would follow Christ in the manner of his life; but they are not of faith, as will be known in the day of doom. What man should fully believe that the day of doom will be anon, and that God shall then judge men, after what they have been in his cause, and not prepare to follow Christ for this blessing thereof? Either the belief of such men sleepeth, or they want a right belief; since men who love this world, and rest in the lusts thereof, live as if God had never spoken in his word, or would fail to judge them for their doings."

The above extracts will be sufficient to give the reader a just idea of the spirit which animated the rector of Lutterworth, in his ministrations in the pulpit. When this is borne in mind, in connection with the account given in this chapter, of his deportment to the poor, afflicted and dying members of his flock, we cannot but acknowledge that in that corrupt and superstitious age of the church, Wycliffe must have been a man after God's own heart, and one to whose care he was not afraid to commit the feeding of the sheep and lambs of his flock.

CHAPTER IX.

WE have now approached a period of Wycliffe's life to which no small degree of interest is attached. It was in the year 1383 that he completed his translation of the scriptures into the English language—a work that occupied him for many years, and which is alone sufficient to entitle him to the gratitude of every Protestant heart. Of all the weapons made use of, in defeating the designs of that dark and mysterious power which had so long been hovering over the Church of God, none could have been so effectual as the sword of the Spirit.

It had been for ages the policy of the Romish Church, to keep it sheathed in the scabbard, that so its point might not be directed to the work of laying bare the “thoughts and intents of the heart.” The repose of ignorance, and the vassalage of the bodies and minds of the multitude, were favorable to the retaining of that implicit hold on the conscience, which they desired. To this end they contended that Christ had delivered his gospel to the doctors of the Church, that they might administer such portions to the laity, as the state of the times and their own ignorance might render desirable.

In the progress of our narrative, we have however had occasion to see how lamentably defective these stewards of God's word had been in the discharge of their allotted work, and how great had been the evils resulting to the world, from their neglect of duty.

Wycliffe's strong and discriminating mind, enlightened by the Spirit of God, saw and deeply felt the evils under which his countrymen were suffering. He was also aware of the remedy which their circumstances required; he had tested its excellence in his own happy experience. He knew that to render the scriptures familiar to the people, was to introduce a light which must impart a faithful colouring to the actions of men; and that ignorance and error would never be so fully exposed, and therefore never so likely to lose their hold on the minds of the people, as when irradiated by these heavenly rays. Nearly twenty years had passed since his controversy commenced with the mendicant friars. Time had only strengthened his conviction, of the sufficiency of scripture and the right of private judgment; and his previous discussions had, by engaging public attention to the subjects involved in them, been the means of preparing the minds of many, for the reception of the truths of the gospel.

It may be interesting and instructive for us to pause for a short time in our narrative, and enquire what attempts had been made previous to the age of Wycliffe, to present the scripture to the English nation, in their own language. We have before noticed the early introduction of christianity into Britain, but there is no reason to suppose that any portion of the sacred volume was given to the inhabitants, otherwise than as it was possessed by those who introduced it, viz: in the Latin version. After the departure of the Romans, the islanders under the dominion of the Saxons relapsed into idolatry; and when the doctrines of christianity were again preached among them in the sixth century, their reception of them in their purity, was as we have before remarked, hindered by many obstacles.

In the seventh century, Cedmon, a Saxon monk, gave to his countrymen a poem, in which an attempt was made for the first time, to embody sacred subjects in Saxon poetry. He drew his materials from scripture, and described the leading incidents related in the first books of the Bible. In the same age the venerable Bede attempted his translation of St. John's Gospel,* which was completed under peculiarly affecting

* See Appendix A.

circumstances. The illustrious Alfred, whose name is endeared to our memory by so many interesting associations, is also said to have made a considerable progress in a Saxon version of the Psalms, when his labours were interrupted by the hand of death.*

But Elfric, a learned and pious Saxon monk, who lived near the end of the tenth century, in the reign of Ethelred, did more than any other individual towards supplying his countrymen with the word of God in their own language, since he translated the Pentateuch and some other detached portions of the sacred volume.

The Norman clergy were better qualified in some respects, to fulfil this important task; but they did not improve their advantages. Two attempts were made, between the time of the conquest and the fourteenth century, by natives of the kingdom, to furnish their countrymen with a sort of scriptural history in verse; but these productions were little calculated to produce any practical benefit. Until the middle of the fourteenth century, no effort appears to have been made to produce a literal translation even of detached portions of scripture. At that period a certain monk, named Richard Roll, called the hermit of Hampole from his

* See Appendix G.

residence in a nunnery of that name near Doncaster, rendered into English prose half the book of Psalms, to each verse of which he added a sort of commentary. About the same time certain devout men among the clergy, were in the habit of translating for the use of their people, certain portions of scripture which were introduced into the service of the Church, while others ventured farther, and completed versions of some of the gospels or single epistles—which versions were uniformly guarded by commentaries.

From the above details, which comprise all the information we are able to collect on this subject, it appears evident that a literal translation of the entire scriptures was an undertaking, the honour of completing which, clearly belongs to the subject of this memoir. Indeed the idea of investing the people in general with such a precious privilege as that of being able to study the word of God in their own language, must have originated in a mind far more comprehensive in its views, than were those of the generality of the age in which he lived.

There have not been wanting, individuals who, in opposition to the most authentic testimony, have endeavoured, or at least attempted, to rob Wycliffe's memory of that claim to

originality in this undertaking, contended for by his friends, and acknowledged by some of his enemies. A passage from Knighton, a contemporary historian, contains information, which to unprejudiced minds furnishes evidence of the most conclusive kind, and which should not be omitted here. He says, "Christ delivered his gospel to the clergy and doctors of the Church, that they might administer to the laity and to weaker persons, according to the state of the times and to the wants of men. But this master John Wycliffe translated it out of Latin into English, and thus laid it more open to the laity, and to women, who could read, than it had formerly been to the most learned of the clergy, even of them who had the best understanding. And in this way the gospel pearl is cast abroad, and trodden under foot of swine, and that which was before precious both to clergy and laity, is rendered as it were the common jest of both. The jewel of the Church is turned into the sport of the people, and what was hitherto the principal gift of the clergy and divines, is made forever common to the laity." We cannot but consider the historian as here expressing, not only the opinions current among his countrymen, with regard to the place assigned in their estimation to the holy scriptures, but as likewise

designating correctly the man who had been courageous enough to attempt to give the Bible to the multitude in a language, which would enable them to comprehend and profit by its perusal.

A modern Romish historian* also furnishes testimony to prove, that Wycliffe is entitled to the honor of first translating the word of God into the English language, in the following passage, extracted from his history: "Wycliffe made a new translation of the scriptures, multiplied the copies with the aid of transcribers, and by his poor priests, recommended it to the perusal of the hearers. In their hands it became an engine of wonderful power. Men were flattered by 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 little more than a century astonished and convulsed Europe."

To this testimony may be added that of Wycliffe himself, who in his homily on Matt. xi, 23, speaks of the persecutions he had endured, because he had enabled the people to read the

* Lingard.

scriptures in their mother tongue. His translation of the Bible, it should be remembered also, is uniformly enumerated in all the lists of his works, which have reached the present age.

The advocates of the Romish Church have in all ages contended warmly, that no attempts should be made to give the scriptures to the common people in their own language. They endeavour to find some plausible pretexts for such conduct, but none of these can stand the scrutiny of such, as desire impartially and honestly to bring every motive to the test of truth. Their real ground of objection is too apparent. The chains with which the papal power has so long sought to fetter her votaries, have been forged and can only be so, under the shades of ignorance and error. The full blaze of gospel light and knowledge will ever effectually quench the unhallowed flame, by whose instrumentality they have been wrought into form and solidity. "Christ and his apostles," said Wycliffe in defence of his conduct on this point, "evangelized the greater portion of the world, by making known the scripture in a language familiar to the people. To this end, did the Holy Spirit endow them with a knowledge of all tongues. Why therefore should not the living disciples of Christ do as they did, opening the

scriptures to the people so clearly and plainly, that they may verily understand them, since except to the unbeliever disposed to resist the Holy Spirit, the things contained in scripture are no fiction."

It is hard to tell what assistance Wycliffe had in this great work. It is not probable that he would decline any proper offers of help in a work which must have been Herculean to any single individual, whatever might have been his peculiar adaptation for it; — especially one who was already encumbered with duties of so arduous a character as those in which the reformer was engaged, as professor of divinity in a flourishing university, and as a diligent pastor of a village congregation.

From an ecclesiastical register of 1429 we find that the cost of a testament of Wycliffe's version was £2 16s. 8d. — equal to £20 of present English money, or \$88.90, of our money. At that time five pounds were considered sufficient for the annual support of a curate, tradesman or yeoman.

Wycliffe's translation was made from the Latin version, there being few persons capable at that time of studying the scriptures in any other form. He took considerable pains to collect various copies and to compare them

carefully, in order to discover any discrepancies. There are numerous manuscript copies of his version existing at the present day, both in public and private libraries, notwithstanding all the efforts made by his popish enemies to suppress and destroy them. By the Romish clergy his version was denounced and proscribed, and his attempt to lay open its contents to the gaze of the multitude, was represented as a scarcely less grievous profanation than that of him who sought to unveil the sanctuary of the Jewish temple to the surrounding multitude. So offensive to the English clergy was Wycliffe's endeavour to circulate the scriptures freely, that in 1390, about six years after his death, a bill was brought forward in the house of lords, to forbid the use of his translations by the laity. This measure was opposed by John of Gaunt, who boldly declared, "We will not be the dregs of all, seeing that other nations have the law of God, which is the law of our faith written in their own language." He continued to maintain his determination to support this claim, whoever might oppose it, and by his exertions the bill was thrown out at that time. In a convocation held in 1408 at St. Paul's, the proceedings of the duke of Lancaster were virtually overborne, for by a decree of that body, it

was enacted, that from that time forward "no one should translate any text of sacred scripture, by his own authority, into the 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 Wycliffe, 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; every one who should act in contradiction to this decree, to be punished as an abettor of heresy and error."

The consequences likely to result from such a prohibition, are easy to be imagined; and our readers who are conversant with the historical details of that, and subsequent periods, will readily recal to memory the persecutions and severe sufferings which were the portion of those, who ventured to stand up as witnesses for the truth of scripture, and claimants of the privilege of reading its sacred pages. May we not venture to hope that some youthful mind hitherto indisposed to avail himself of those blessings which he enjoys, in the possession of the precious word of God, and the liberty of

access to it as the fountain of life and light, may be stimulated to greater diligence in improving his inestimable privileges, by the perusal of this short account of the labours of him, who endured so much in order to procure for his countrymen the blessing of the word of God, in a language which could be understood by them.

The year 1381 is memorable in the English annals, for the insurrection which broke out among the commons, headed by Wat Tyler and others, threatening in its progress to overturn the foundations of all established power. The enemies of Wycliffe, ever ready to cast opprobrium on his memory, hesitate not to say, that the sentiments he advocated in conversation and in his writings, were in no slight degree influential in producing this excitement in the middle and lower orders of society. But this accusation is most unfounded, for though the decided advocate of reform, both of civil and ecclesiastical abuses, he was ever ready to urge the duty of proper subordination among all ranks of society. If the insurrection of the English commons is solely to be traced to him as the originating mind, then how shall we account for the nearly simultaneous and still more sanguinary commotions in France and Flanders? Is it not more probable that one

and all of these tumultuary scenes were rather produced by convulsive heavings in the public mind of that age, labouring by some instinctive impulse, and directed in its workings, by providential guidance, to throw off that heavy and benumbing load under which it had so long been groaning?

The relations which existed between the aristocracy of that age and the lower orders of society, were most unfortunate. The reign of Richard had been far from a happy one for his people. Being a minor when he came to the throne, he had been necessarily dependent upon other and stronger minds, for counsel and guidance in the administration of government, the direction of which, devolved principally upon his three uncles, the dukes of Lancaster, York and Gloucester, each of whom, by his peculiar cast of character, served as a partial check on the dangerous ambition of the others. The system of taxation which then prevailed, was so exceedingly burdensome and oppressive, that the landed proprietors had been greatly impoverished by it, and were driven, in their extremities, to harass and exact from their dependents, to a degree which appears to have goaded the latter to make some desperate effort to lighten a load which they felt to be beyond their powers

of endurance. Under the plea of retaining certain cities on the coast of the continent as "barbicans of England," and of paying debts of the king, large ~~grants~~ of money were demanded by the ministry, from the impoverished commons, who, though firmly resisting for a time, at length reluctantly voted a subsidy to the crown. This proving insufficient, fresh demands were made on them, and at length the warm debate which followed, was closed by the adoption of a poll tax, a mode of contribution which fell on each person according to their rank. The collectors of this tax, in the enforcement of their claim upon the lower orders, descended to such acts of brutal violence as exasperated the multitude to the highest degree; and at length, on the occasion of a more than wonted provocation, Wat Tyler, a tradesman of Kent, headed a rebellion against the government. The insurgents openly expressed their dissatisfaction with Lancaster, while they manifested attachment to Richard, personally. They sought an audience of their sovereign, to which Richard and some of his counsellors seemed disposed to accede. It was however, violently opposed by Sudbury, archbishop of Canterbury, who spoke in contemptuous language of the malcontents.

The wrongs offered to them by the primate could not be forgiven, and while the leaders of the insurgents were engaged in conferring with their sovereign at Mile end, a large body of the rabble seized the persons of Sudbury, — the treasurer, — and the chief commissioner of the poll tax, and cutting off all their heads, bore them in triumph through the streets of London.

From this time, violence and disorder characterized the proceedings of Tyler and his associates. Three times they made demands on government, which were all complied with, although no cessation was caused to their tumultuous doings. Richard appears personally to have been disposed to adopt lenient measures towards them, but his wishes were overborne by his ministry, and several hundreds of the offenders were put to death by the executioner.

The body of clergy opposed to Wycliffe, made every effort to represent his doctrines as having been the fountain from which had issued those streams which had spread disaffection and disorder over the whole face of society; but the impartial reader of his writings and memoirs, is made to feel that the influence of his principles when carried out fully, would have been

rather to restrain the violence of the insurgents, than to incite them to resist the claims of lawful authority. Violence, whether of a civil or religious nature, was always in opposition to the wishes of the reformer, whose efforts appear uniformly to have been directed to the checking of the evils which existed in the state of society, and not to the fomenting of discord. And his endeavours to promote a reformation in church or state, arose not from a restless love of change, but from an impelling sense of duty resting on him. He had a commission to execute, and he was straitened until his work was accomplished.

CHAPTER X.

THE position in which Wycliffe was placed with regard to the Romish Church, was soon to undergo a change. He had hitherto been principally engaged in detecting the abuses of ecclesiastical power, and as the defender of the rights of the crown, the university and the people, against the encroachments of the papacy. He was now about to unfold the mysteries of iniquity and corruption, which were concealed within the more secret recesses of the spiritual Babylon, who had set herself in opposition to the will and people of God.

Among the doctrines of the Romish Church which he considered erroneous, that of transubstantiation appeared to him especially fraught with impiety and contradiction. He therefore devoted himself resolutely in opposing its progress, and in seeking to expel it from the creed of his countrymen.

While tracing the history of this doctrine, we are made to see that this and other articles of belief held by the popish communion in opposition to the faith of protestants, are in reality heretical additions, grafted on to the creed of the primitive Church in comparatively modern

times. Instead therefore, of the boasting enquiry, "Where was the Protestant Church before the reformation?" so often made by Catholics, being incapable of receiving a satisfactory answer, Protestants may with the records of the Church in their hands, and with the words of inspiration engraven on their hearts, confidently assert, that their beloved Church is the one instituted by Christ and his Apostles, while the Romish creed is the accumulated product of subsequent and corrupt ages.

The doctrine of transubstantiation was first openly taught in the Church in the ninth century, by Radbert, a French monk, who maintained that after the consecration of the sacred elements in the Lord's Supper, nothing remained of the symbols but the outward figure; under which form, the very same body that suffered on the cross was really and locally present. This opinion was quickly opposed by certain divines, but the voice of the Church was not definitely heard on the subject until the eleventh century. At that time, Berengarius, a Gallic bishop, boldly stood up to confute the error of transubstantiation. His doctrines harmonized with the creed of the Apostles, and with the articles of belief held by Protestant Churches of the present day. The zeal and

ability with which he defended his opinions, arrested public attention, and the clergy of the western Churches soon arrayed themselves as his decided supporters or opponents. The papacy seems to have become early sensible of the additional power with which the doctrine of transubstantiation was designed to invest the sacred order; and accordingly, Berengarius had no sooner explicitly avowed his sentiments, than he was assailed by the censures of the pontiff, and the forfeiture of his episcopal revenues. He was three times compelled to appear at Rome and make an avowal of his faith. Under the influence of fear, he wavered in his confession; but subsequently in the retirement in which his later years were passed, he humbly bewailed the indecision and disavowal of his real sentiments to which he had been driven for a season, through dread of his enemies.

With regard to the opinions entertained by the Anglo-Saxon Church on the doctrine in question, it is evident, that while it was not altogether unknown to her divines, neither was it recognized as an article of her creed previously to the tenth century.

One of the Saxon homilies supposed to be translated from a Latin original by Elfric, abbot of St. Albans, in the tenth century, states the

doctrine of the early English Church upon this subject. "Much" [difference] it says, "is betwixt the body in which Christ suffered, and the body which is hallowed to housel. The body truly in which Christ suffered was born of the flesh of Mary, with a reasonable soul; his ghostly body, which we call the housell, is gathered of many grains, without blood, bone, limb or soul. And therefore nothing is to be understood therein bodily, but all is ghostly (or spiritually) to be understood." And again, "The apostle has said of the Hebrews, that they did all eat the same spiritual meat, and that they did all drink the same spiritual drink. And this he said, not bodily but spiritually, Christ being not yet born, nor his blood shed when the people of Israel ate that meat and drank of that stone."

It is a fact well attested by history, that notwithstanding the tyranny which the Danes had exercised over the Saxon clergy, yet that it was from this body of his subjects that the conqueror experienced the most determined opposition. They paid a severe penalty for their obstinacy, for they were driven from their Churches and saw foreigners substituted in their places. The most distinguished of these was Lanfranc, whom William in opposition to

his own wishes, elevated to the see of Canterbury. He was one of the most celebrated opponents of Berengarius, and from that time until the age of Wycliffe, the faith in the real presence appears to have been generally, and with little opposition, received by the clergy of the island, and inculcated by them on the minds of the people.

The reformer in attempting to refute this erroneous but prominent doctrine of the Romish Church, must have been fully aware of the danger and suffering to which he was exposing himself. But he considered that there were interests at stake, of too momentous a kind to permit him to be deterred from duty by any fears of a personal nature. That he did not enter lightly or unadvisedly on this important work, but had weighed well its cost, and counted the probable sacrifices he would be called on to endure in its prosecution, we may gather from the following extract, which forms the introduction to one of his most popular pieces on the subject. "Forasmuch as our Saviour Jesus Christ, with the prophets who were before him, and the apostles who were presently with him, whom he also left after him, and whose hearts were mollified by the Holy Ghost, — have warned us, and given us know-

ledge, that there are two manner of ways, the one to life, the other to death; therefore pray we heartily to God, that he, of his mere mercy, will so strengthen us with the grace and steadfastness of the Holy Spirit, as to make us strong in spiritual living according to the gospel, that so the world — no, not the very infidels, papists, nor apostates, may gather any occasion to speak evil of us; that we may enter into that straight gate as Christ our Saviour, and all that follow him have done, not in idle living, but in diligent labouring — yea in great sufferance of persecution, even to the death."

The sentiments of Wycliffe in regard to the doctrine in question, occupy so prominent a place in his sermons, that there can be scarce a doubt entertained, whether they were not familiar to his flock, as well as to his friends at large. Nevertheless, he does not appear to have formally attacked the absurdities of the doctrine of transubstantiation, or to have called on its advocates to refute the charges he brought against them on this head, until in the course of delivery of his spring lectures at Oxford, in 1381. He then published a list of conclusions, in which he called the attention of the members of the university to the subject. In these, while he admitted that the words of consecra-

tion conferred a peculiar dignity on the symbols made use of in the sacramental feast, he yet especially stated, that "the consecrated host which we see upon the altar, is neither Christ or any part of him, but an effectual sign of him."

At this period the religious orders possessed a majority both of numbers and influence in the university, and indignant at an attack thus boldly made on a doctrine the belief in which they considered highly subservient to their interests, they determined to use every precaution to subvert the influence of the reformer's sentiments. They persuaded the Chancellor William de Berton, to summon a convention of twelve divines, for the purpose of considering the erroneous doctrines of the professor of divinity, and of publicly condemning and refuting them. The convention accordingly denounced Wycliffe's opinions on the sacrament of the Lord's Supper as highly erroneous, and stated what the Romish Church recognized as the true doctrine of the eucharist, "that by the sacramental words, duly pronounced by the priest, the bread and wine upon the altar are transubstantiated, or substantially converted into the true body and blood of Christ—so that after consecration, there is not, the material bread and wine which before existed, but only the

species of the same, under which are contained the true body of Christ, and his blood, not figuratively, but essentially, substantially and corporally—so that Christ is verily there present in his own proper bodily presence.” As a further guard of these doctrines from the touch of heretics, sentences of excommunication and imprisonment, were denounced against all members of the university who, either in the schools or out of them, should venture to inculcate the obnoxious sentiments of the reformer, or should even be found guilty of listening to arguments in favor of them.

This convention held its sitting privately, but no sooner was its measures determined on, than they were carried into execution. Wycliffe was at that time in the school of the Augustinians, lecturing to his pupils on this very doctrine. He paused for a few moments on the entrance of the messenger, who then proceeded to pronounce the decree of the convention which had been assembled by order of the chancellor. He however soon recovered his presence of mind, and complained of the substitution of brute force instead of reason, and challenged any, or all of his opponents to a discussion of the subject. He expressed his determination to c with firmness and resolution and since they

had given him the choice of but two alternatives — silence or imprisonment, he appealed from the decision of his present judges to the king for protection.

By the decree of the chancellor, the reformer was forbidden to speak any further on the obnoxious subject, but no restriction was laid on the use of his pen, and as considerable time must elapse before the next meeting of parliament, he determined to take advantage of the interval to compose a short treatise on the eucharist. The fruit of these labors was entitled the *Wicket*, the object of which was, to expose the numberless absurdities and contradictions, to which the human mind would be led, in embracing the views of his adversaries.

Our readers will readily recal to memory, the murder of Sudbury archbishop of Canterbury, in the course of the tumultuary proceedings of 1381. In October following, the vacant see was filled by Courtney, previously bishop of London, who has been formerly introduced to our notice as acting a conspicuous part, in the assembly collected for the trial of Wycliffe. Certain insignia of his office, could not however be obtained by Courtney, until May 1382, and until then, the jurisdiction of his see was declined.

In two days after he entered upon the duties of his new office, he summoned a convention of divines at a residence of the Grey Friars, London; the object of this meeting appears to have been, to procure a formal condemnation of Wycliffe's opinions, and to make arrangements for the prosecution of all such as should hesitate to renounce them. The meeting had however, scarcely commenced its deliberations, when the city was shaken by an earthquake, by which circumstance, the courage of some of the divines was so far shaken, that they even ventured to express some uneasiness, lest they might be entering on a work displeasing to God. But the primate with ready ingenuity suggested a different explanation of these appalling phenomena. He reminded the assembly, that the earthquake was produced by the escape of noxious vapours from the earth, which if retained within her bosom, would have proved destructive to her; so likewise he argued would they find the peace and prosperity of the Church promoted, by the forcible removal from within her precincts of all such heterodox and malign spirits, as was he, whose opinions they were about to bring under consideration.

The courage of the assembly, being thus restored, they proceeded with the business before

them. Twenty-four conclusions were read as those which had been "preached generally, commonly, and publicly, through the province of Canterbury and the realm of England." After deliberating on these conclusions for three days, the divines agreed that ten of them were heretical and the remaining ones erroneous. Those articles which were pronounced heretical, related chiefly to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper — to the forfeiture by priests and bishops of their sacred functions by occasion of deadly sins — to the needlessness of auricular confession — to the unlawfulness of clerical documents — and to the claims of a depraved pontiff in virtue of authority conferred by the emperor; the statements of Wycliffe which were pronounced to be erroneous, were affirmed to teach, that it was heretical, for a prelate to excommunicate an individual without knowing whether he was condemned by God, and treasonable to forbid appeals from clerical tribunals to the authority of the king — that the gospel might be preached without waiting for the sanction of pope or prelate — that tythes are merely alms due to the clergy, only provided they are devout men — and that the institution of the religious orders, is unwarranted by Scripture and injurious in its tendency.

Some of these doctrines had been unquestionably inculcated by Wycliffe, both in his preaching and by his writings, but others, appear to have been strained from their original meaning by the industry and ingenuity of his persecutors. Courtney speedily issued letters addressed to the bishops of London and Lincoln, exhorting and commanding them, to forbid the heresies and errors of Wycliffe, to be held, preached, or defended by any of the clergy within their respective dioceses. Similar instructions were also sent to one Peter Stokes, a Carmelite monk, and a doctor of divinity in Oxford who had become distinguished as an opponent of the reformers.

In order that these proceedings for the suppression of heresy, might be rendered more solemn and impressive, it was determined on the ensuing Whitsuntide, to call the attention of the citizens of London to the subject, by a religious procession. On the day appointed, a long train of clergy and laity were seen moving bare-footed toward St. Paul's cathedral. When the solemn train reached the sacred building, a Carmelite monk ascended the pulpit, and addressed the people on the dangers to which their faith was exposed at that time, from the dangerous designs of certain crafty enemies.

Notwithstanding all these exertions of the Archbishop to destroy the influence of Wycliffe, he still continued to retain many friends within the halls of the university. The Chancellor Berton had been superseded in his office by Robert Rigge, who was not only an advocate of the reformer's opinions, but had suffered considerably in the maintainance of them. A certain Dr. Hereford whom the primate had "vehemently suspected of heresy," was at the same time called on by the chancellor to preach before the university, as if to prove his steady determination to support the cause of the reformer. Courtney however was not to be swerved from his purpose; he advised the chancellor to alter his course of proceedings and to give his countenance in bringing to destruction a sect, against whom he avowed both the king and lords had promised to unite their authority.

In making this assertion, the primate had not spoken without authority. The youthful and feeble-minded Richard, had become already involved in that train of difficulties, from which, though never destined to be free, he was ardently desirous of extricating himself. He saw that the commons were disaffected towards him, and as a substitute for the loss of their affection, his counsellors, several of whom were ecclesias-

tics, advised him to endeavor to propitiate the clergy. Under these circumstances the English clergy united in preferring to their sovereign and his ministers, a series of complaints against the doctrines and practices of Wycliffe and his followers, to whom in contempt they now for the first time gave the appellation of Lollards, a name which had been appropriated hitherto to certain continental secretaries, on whom in accordance with the spirit of the Romish Church, great and unjust abuse had been heaped. Various obnoxious sentiments, and heretical doctrines were attributed to the Lollards, the effect of which was designed to bring them under the will of the king and nobles.

The design of Wycliffe's enemies succeeded so far, as to obtain the sanction of the king and certain of his lords, to a parliamentary statute which is memorable from being the first enactment introduced into the Parliament Roll, for the suppression of heresy. This document was in point of law invalid, as it contained no intimation of an assent having been given to it, either by the Lords or Commons, nevertheless it was highly influential in accomplishing the object of those who proposed the measure. The purport of it was, to direct public attention to certain evil persons, who were in the practice of

going from place to place "under dissimulation of great holiness and without the license of civil authority, preaching daily, not only in churches, but in churchyards, markets, fairs, and other public places, divers sermons, containing heresies and notorious errors, to the great blemishing of the Christian faith, to the destruction of the laws and estate of holy church, to the great peril of the souls of men." &c. "It is" says the document "ordained in this present parliament, that sheriffs and other ministers of the king shall be empowered to arrest all such preachers, and also their maintainers and abettors, and hold them in arrest and strong prison, till they will justify themselves according to the law and reason of holy-church."

Although this ordinance was, as we before said, literally invalid, yet Courtney ventured to avail himself of it, and assumed the office of "chief inquisitor of heretical pravity throughout the province of Canterbury." His attention was first directed to Oxford, from which he earnestly desired to root out the pestilential tares of heresy. He again summoned the synod which had been dispersed at Grey Friars, to a meeting on the 12th of June, and issued orders, for Robert Rigge the Chancellor of the University, and William Brightwell a doctor of divinity, to

appear before him and answer for their late conduct, and for their opinion respecting the disputed articles. Although Rigge had coincided with Wycliffe in the opinion, that the university was an establishment less amenable to the ecclesiastical than the civil power; and although he was an admirer of the reformer's character and assented to many of his tenets; yet either from an unwillingness to advocate all his opinions, or perhaps from a fear of the consequences which might result to him, from placing himself unreservedly in the ranks of one now proscribed for heresy, it is certain that when summoned before the synod to answer for his conduct and opinions, he did declare his assent to the judgment passed on the twenty-four articles, in a previous meeting; and his companion, Brightwell after some hesitation followed his example.

After this acknowledgment had been made on their part, the archbishop delivered a letter to "his well beloved son in Christ, the chancellor of the university," requiring him to publish the proscribed articles, and to suspend from the exercise of scholastic duties, or from preaching, those persons within the university who had been accused of heresy; among these names were those of John Wycliffe and several of his most prominent disciples. Notwithstanding the pub-

lic protestation which had been given by the chancellor before the synod, Courtney's suspicions of the soundness of his religious views, revived soon after he left the assembly, and he proceeded to enjoin on him immediately after in a still more direct manner, the duty resting on him of suppressing the progress of heresy.

The synod continued its deliberations from time to time, through June and the early part of July; and during its whole session it was occupied with the cases of Hereford and his associates, while Wycliffe appears never to have been openly molested.

This forbearance may have been owing to the determination expressed by him of making an appeal to the crown, or from some lurking fears of the Duke of Lancaster, who had not at this time entirely renounced the cause, of the reformer.

Wycliffe during this period resided at Lutterworth, but in his retirement he failed not to raise his voice, in condemnation of the unjustifiable attempts which had been of late made, to silence the defenders of truth, and to stamp them with the approbious name of heretics.— We find him in one of his parochial discourses evidently referring to these persecutions, and the most prominent instigators of them. Courtney

is especially pointed out, as "the great bishop of England, who is incensed because God's law is written in English to unlearned men;" and as having pursued, "a certain priest because he writeth to men this English, and summoneth him and travaileth him, so that it is hard for him to bear it."

Wycliffe was at this period advancing in the vale of years; the cares incident to his eventful life, — the painful conflict of feeling occasioned by the malicious designs of his enemies, — the hardships and exposure to which his itinerant labours exposed him, — had all concurred to undermine his constitution, and weaken his physical and intellectual energies. Under such circumstances our sympathies become strongly awakened, and we feel indignation stirring within us, at the pertinacious efforts of his enemies, and are constrained to express our astonishment at their continuing to follow one of his age and infirmities, with the spirit of persecution. But we should ever remember our Lord's declaration, that as an ungodly world had persecuted him, so would it continue to exhibit the same spirit towards his disciples; "yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus, shall suffer persecution." But while the Almighty Ruler of the world, in his own wisdom permits for a season the designs

of unholy men to proceed to a certain length, he yet, almost uniformly, so contracts the evil, as to render ineffectual the malice of the persecutor, or else graciously overrules it for the spiritual and eternal good of the victims of it.

Thus in the present instance, we find the reformer, endeavouring to turn his sufferings to a means of spiritual improvement. In one of his sermons composed at this period he devoutly alludes to the subject, and compares the ineffectual attempt of our Lord's enemies, to confine his body to the tomb, and thus to prevent his resurrection, to that employed by the Romish Church in the fourteenth century in shielding those scriptures from the eyes of the laity, which with prophetic eye he saw were destined to be raised from obscurity, to illuminate the church and restore her primitive beauty — "Oh! Christ," he exclaims, "thy law is hidden — when wilt thou send thine angel to remove the stone, and show thy truth unto thy flock? Well I know that knights have taken gold in their case, to help that thy law may be thus hid and thine ordinances consumed. But well I know that at the day of doom it shall be manifest, and even before, when thou arisest against thy enemies!"

While Wycliffe in the retirement of Lutterworth had considered it expedient to present his

case to the consideration of his parishioners, he did not rest contented with the effort to enlist merely their sympathies, in his behalf. His enemies had made his case public, by obtaining the concurrence of the king and parliament to the plan which they had devised for suppressing the progress of his opinions, if not of crushing him personally. As they had "appealed unto Caesar" in the first instance, so did he think it expedient to do so likewise, and for this purpose presented a summary of the most important of his tenets, embodied in an appeal to the crown and parliament. He availed himself of this opportunity to bring before the authorities to whom his petition was addressed, nearly the whole substance of that cause, to the promotion of which, his whole energy of mind and body had been devoted. There were four chief articles contained in this document; the first of which related to the vows of the religious. He endeavoured to divest them of that power over the sympathies of men, with which the papacy had long sought to invest them, by proving them to have originated in the wisdom of men, and not in that of God. He next endeavoured to prove the right which the civil power possessed over the temporal property of the church, and consequently, the propriety or lawfulness of

their alienating it under certain specified circumstances. In the third article, he enlarged upon an opinion frequently advocated by him, "that the tythes and other voluntary offerings of the Church, may be withdrawn from the bishops and other clergy, on occasion of their falling into great sins, and thus cancelling their right to the enjoyment of them. In the last, he prayed that the same doctrine of the eucharist, which was taught by Christ and his apostles, might be openly set forth in the churches of his time."

The first article was enlarged upon much more at length, than were any of the others; and this is not surprising, when we recollect what a mighty influence his enemies exerted in their attempts against him, through the agency of the body of monks, and the mendicants especially.

It would seem that parliament was not unmoved by the appeal of the reformer, since we find soon after, that the commons presented a petition to their sovereign, protesting against the validity of the late statute for the suppression of heresy, and praying for its repeal. The monarch in reply, granted a formal assent to their request, but his subsequent conduct rendered his promises null and inefficacious.

The parliament and convocation, to whom

Wycliffe's opinions were referred, met at Oxford. The primate informed his assembled clergy, that the business before them, was to grant a subsidy to the crown, and to remedy certain disorders which had too long disgraced the university, and were spreading rapidly through the religious community. Wycliffe was summoned to appear to answer for his opinions.

The peculiar circumstances, in which some of the parties concerned were now placed, called for circumspection on the part of Courtney. The commons had felt themselves aggrieved by the late encroachments on their privileges, and a repetition of such proceedings was therefore cautiously to be avoided: the nobility were alive to any measure on the part of the clergy which threatened to conflict with their worldly interests, and were ready to lend their countenance to the reformer in his opposition to the prelates, when the advantages to be gained were of a secular kind. Under these circumstances Courtney considered it expedient, to select as the particular subject of his inquisition, the tenets of the accused on the eucharist. This was a critical period not only in the history of Wycliffe but in that of his former distinguished patron, John of Gaunt, who owing to the peculiar situation in which he was now placed, as re-

spected his political relations, considered it injudicious to provoke any farther the ill will of the clergy towards himself. Accordingly, the duke advised the rector of Lutterworth to submit in all such doctrinal matters, to the judgment of the prelates. But Wycliffe felt, that acting as he had done, avowedly from principle, he had gone already too far to recede, without incurring the charge of palpable inconsistency and departure from strict integrity.

This period is one of deep interest to those who are studying his true character. The world, the flesh, and the great adversary of souls stood leagued together, tempting him to make a compromise of principle; for had he but consented to deny those opinions on the eucharist which he had previously maintained, or even promised to abstain from preaching them, he would at once, most probably have been sheltered from the resentment of the clergy, under the covert of the duke of Lancaster's protection. Doubtless there may have been a conflict between principle and natural feeling in the bosom of the reformer, but the former obtained the victory. His enemies indeed, while they bear testimony to his firmness on this occasion, seek to represent his steadfastness as originating in a natural obstinacy of temper, and not as flowing

from christian motives; but the disciples of Christ in every age have been compelled to bear reproach for his sake, and to have their most holy actions branded as evil, by the opponents of vital religion.

Lest our young readers may be tempted to concur in the opinion of Wycliffe's adversaries, and to attribute his steadfast adherence to the doctrine of transubstantiation to improper motives, we would remind them, of the light in which he was accustomed to regard that tenet of papacy. He considered it idolatry, to bestow upon a piece of mere bread, that adoration which was alone due to God our Creator, and the obvious tendency of receiving such doctrines into the Church, was, he thought, to invest the priesthood with a power of palming the grossest errors upon the community, in opposition to the dictates of reason or of the senses, or to the words of revelation. If the authority of the Church be sufficient to compel men to submit to one such dogma, then he argued, is it impossible to define the limits to which the clergy may carry their schemes for blinding the eyes, and imposing on the consciences of men. He sought the overthrow of this doctrine therefore, not only from a belief that it was in its nature false, but also

because he considered it as being directly or indirectly, the parent of innumerable falsehoods, and as such, essentially opposed to the liberty of the human mind.

The assembly convoked at Oxford for the purpose of ascertaining and pronouncing on the opinions of Wycliffe, consisted of many distinguished prelates and other persons of rank and eminence, around whom a crowd of the laity stood waiting in deep anxiety the progress of the discussion. The spot where they were collected, was consecrated as it were, in his eyes, by the most interesting associations of more than forty years. Not only was it endeared to him as the nursery in which his intellectual character had been formed and matured, and probably hallowed by the circumstance of his spiritual nature having been there renewed and sanctified: but its walls had also, during many years, echoed to the sound of his voice as the advocate of religious and civil liberty, and the resolute defender of their rights against foreign encroachments, and the machinations of papacy. At this moment however, all the obligations he had conferred on the university and his country, would seem to have been for a season forgotten. Before this imposing assembly the reformer stood alone, or at least unsupported by any

human protector — with a head silvered by time, but still more by mental anxiety, and bodily toil. He was however, so nerved by principle and his confident assurance in the goodness of his cause, that his heart quailed not, nor did his presence of mind forsake him. He delivered two confessions, one in English and the other in Latin, which contained the substance of his defence before the assembly at Oxford, and the former of which was written in such a manner as to be intelligible to the assembled multitude.

In these confessions Wycliffe delivered his opinions upon the eucharist, and asserted, that of all the anti-christian delusions which had been poured on the earth since the time of Satan's enlargement, the doctrine of transubstantiation was the one most repugnant to the religion of the Bible, and to the dictates of sound reason.

Notwithstanding the great preponderance of power on the side of Wycliffe's accusers, they seem to have been somewhat perplexed as to the proper method of dealing with him. They were well aware that he had enlisted in his behalf not only the affection of the populace, but had awakened deep sympathy in the bosoms of many of the powerful and learned.

This will most probably account for their not proceeding any farther against him at that time, than to dissolve his connexion henceforth with the university of Oxford. But though the parent tree was thus removed from the walls of the university, it had previously dispersed its seed so widely, that every subsequent effort to uproot it entirely, appeared ineffectual.

A mandate was however issued by his sovereign, ordering the reformer and his adherents to be expelled from Oxford within seven days. He then retired to the shades of Lutterworth, and once more renewed his efforts to diffuse abroad his principles, in spite of age and infirmities, and the opposition of his enemies.

It was about this period that Pope Urban VI. issued a mandate, requiring Wycliffe to appear in person at Rome, there to answer in presence of the pontiff, to the charges of heresy brought against him. At the time when the reformer received this summons, he was disabled by paralysis, from undertaking a journey so fatiguing as was that to Rome, but had he not been incapacitated by this affliction, there seems to have been no sufficient reason to have warranted, or at any rate to have obliged him to expose himself to a conflict of so unequal a kind, as would have been presented had he in his own

person — unaided by any human supporter, confronted himself with the whole array of papal power, and that too in the seat of her dominion.

Although he declined to obey the citation in person, he still deemed it advisable to address a letter in reply to the pope, in which he gave his reasons for his non-appearance, and then took an opportunity for offering some “wholesome counsel,” as he called it, to the head of the Romish Church, advising him to “leave his worldly lordship to worldly lords, as Christ had enjoined him, and speedily move all his clerks to do the same, for thus he said Christ himself, and his disciples also had done, until the fiend had blinded this world.” He then proceeded to express his readiness to retract his opinions, should they be proved erroneous; and stated in conclusion, that as it was by the providence of God that he was prevented from visiting Rome, so he trusted the pope would not prove himself to be indeed Antichrist, by openly insisting on his doing what was in direct opposition to his will, which had been plainly manifested in the providential infliction of the disease by which he was at that time kept a prisoner at his own home.

CHAPTER XI.

It would not have been a matter of surprise in perusing the life of Wycliffe, had we found him when excluded from Oxford, and in the retirement of his parish, yielding so far to the dictates of natural feeling, as to have desisted from any further acts of open opposition to papacy, or from the public reiteration of the views which he entertained of her corrupt doctrines and practices. The infirmities incident to his advanced age and shattered constitution, would, we think, have been considered a sufficient apology for his silence, when retired behind the scene, over which the papal authorities had so unceremoniously dropped the curtain. But the mind of the reformer was one of no common order, and his zeal and energy of purpose, relaxed not with the decay of his physical powers,—on the contrary, he seemed to have been quickened to a brighter and more enlivening display of his powers when they were about to be quenched in death, as a taper when it has reached its socket, will send forth a more vivid and intense flame than at any previous moment.

About two years intervened between his exclusion from Oxford and his death, and though at

that time on the verge of three score, yet we find him during that brief space, in addition to his ordinary parochial labours, composing and giving to the public, fourteen or fifteen important tracts or treatises, some of which, present a more clear exhibition of his intellectual powers and peculiar opinions, than any of his previous publications. It is not possible to say whether these treatises had been partly composed previously, but they were then brought to maturity, and first given to the public, and as bearing the impress of the great intellectual and spiritual champion of his age and country, they will be regarded, to remote ages, with intense interest, however they may have been maligned, misrepresented or undervalued by his enemies. Indeed he appears never to have been more formidable to them, than during these two closing years of his life, when worn with toil and anxiety, — with his physical powers prostrated and impaired by paralysis, — just released as it were from the mouth of the lion, and while in continual expectation, as we learn from his writings, of being again subjected to his attacks.

Among the most important of the works which he completed at this period of his life, we may first notice that entitled his *Dialogus*. It is written in the form of a dialogue, that style of

composition having been selected by him, in the belief that it would be more attractive to general readers, than that of a dissertation. Truth, Falsehood and Wisdom are personified in it, and he is thus enabled, when discussing the great controversial points of doctrine which were agitated at that time in the religious community, to propose each one severally as a question by the first of the characters, the second of whom undertakes to answer the objections made to it, while the third acts as umpire. Though written in a style, made offensive to modern ears, by the barbarism of the age, and notwithstanding the reasoning partakes strongly of the peculiarities of scholastic disputants, it has nevertheless been pronounced by competent judges, one of the most valuable productions of the age, from the clear exposition which it gives of some of the most important truths of the gospel. The doctrine of the Trinity is set forth plainly, and the author endeavours to illustrate this great truth of revelation, by showing the analogy existing between it and certain appearances of nature. He refutes the error of those, who pretend to say that the light of faith is contrary to nature, and contends, that "God teaches us the truth, and nothing but the truth, and what may be known by us as such." After having

established the correctness of this position, he proceeds to expose the falsehood of transubstantiation, and to maintain the orthodox opinions with respect to the eucharist. The writer does not content himself however, with discussing doctrinal points alone, but goes on to prove the necessary connection which exists between the faith of the gospel, and the morality of the gospel. Sin is portrayed in its true colours, and its remission is represented as only to be obtained through faith in the atonement and intercession of the Redeemer; the doctrines of grace are maintained; the love of God is represented as the only sure foundation of a holy life; and in short, the fundamental points of doctrine held by protestant believers of the present day, are boldly taught through the whole of the *Triologus*.

Among the other treatises of Wycliffe which were prepared by him subsequently to his exclusion from Oxford, was that entitled "On Obedience to Prelates." The poor priests appear to have been held up to public odium, by the ecclesiastical authorities, as being disobedient to their sovereign, and deficient in proper deference to the dignitaries of the Church. Wycliffe undertook, in this tract, to refute this calumny; — he professed his own readiness ever to

honor and obey his superiors in the Church, whenever their requirements were not in opposition to the commands of God. To demand more than this, was, he thought, to depart from the rules of apostolic enactment, and therefore not to be submitted to by the community. "Let bishops" he said, "emulate the zeal of the apostles, and the dutiful submission both of the priesthood and of the laity, would be readily yielded. Let them but regulate their censures by the will of the Supreme Lord, and true men would be the last to despise one or the other."

He had not only a word of friendly advice to offer to the prelates on their unscriptural assumption of authority;—he likewise undertook, in another tract, to prove to the community, how the priests, and especially those connected with the religious fraternities, deceived the people by their false pretensions and by hypocritical practices, thereby destroying "all good living and maintaining all manner of sin," instead of employing their time and talents in the furtherance of true godliness.

Lest while undertaking the office of reformer of the sins of his clerical brethren, he might be supposed to be actuated by uncharitable motives, he brings forward as his apology, the example of the prophet Isaiah, who under the immediate

direction of Him who is love itself, "cried, and ceased not, to show forth to the people of Israel their great sins."

On the same principle, he considered it as his duty, while time and opportunity were vouchsafed to him, to appeal to the secular lords in a tract published about this time, in which he urged them in the most energetic manner, to exert all their influence, to correct the prevailing religious abuses, and "to constrain the clergy to live in meekness, poverty, and self-denying labours."

The other most important publications given by Wycliffe to the public at this period, were tracts entitled, "Duties of Servants and Lords;" "Of Good Preaching Priests;" "On the Four Deceits of Antichrist;" "On the Prayers of Good Men;" "On the Seven Deadly Sins," &c.

We cannot read the list of these numerous compositions of the reformer, which he sent forth in those closing years of his life, without being constrained to yield our tribute of praise and admiration, to the untiring zeal and mental energy, which characterized their author even when walking on the verge of the grave, and while encompassed with more than the usual infirmities incident to that period of life.

He seemed to feel, like the prophet of old,

that he was almost the sole watchman of his Lord, left on the battlements of the spiritual Zion, by whom she might be warned of the numberless enemies who encompassed her without, or that were concealed within her walls. He probably was aware also, that his own voice might at any moment be stifled by the hand of death, or the violence of his enemies, and was therefore reluctant to leave any class of men unaddressed, or any species of religious error unproved. His feelings at this time have been forcibly described, as having been probably to this effect. "To live and to be silent, is, with me impossible—the guilt of such treason against the Lord of heaven is more to be dreaded than many deaths. Let the blow therefore fall! Enough! I know of the men whom I oppose—of the times on which I am thrown—and of the mysterious providence which relates to our sinful race, to believe that the stroke may ere long descend. But my purpose is unalterable. I wait its coming!"

These anticipations were not however, realized; though the cause of their non-fulfilment requires some explanation. We have seen that the Duke of Lancaster refused to uphold him publicly in his opposition to the papal authorities, when the points at issue came to be merely

of a doctrinal kind, and especially such as conflicted with the current opinions respecting the eucharist. But it was notwithstanding generally understood, that this nobleman entertained a high opinion of the reformer's character, and a lively admiration of his talents, and would have most probably resented any open act of aggression upon his person.

It is also well known that Joanna, the widow of the Black Prince, and mother of Richard II., uniformly exhibited a lively interest in the character of Wycliffe, and an anxious concern for his personal safety. Our readers will remember that it was by the orders of this illustrious personage, that Sir Lewis Clifford appeared before the Synod at Lambeth, and peremptorily forbade any further proceedings against the accused. The character of Joanna is described by historians, as having been rendered popular by her natural graces of sensibility and amiability, while from a certain dignity and energy of purpose, she was qualified both to command and ensure respectful attention to her requirements. It is probable that she exerted for a time, an influence over the mind of her son, in disposing him to treat the reformer with leniency, but the feeble monarch subsequently yielded himself too passively to the guidance of the

more designing among his clergy, and thus aided them in their bigoted and intolerant measures in opposition to his duty as a sovereign, if not of a son.

But his amiable queen, Anne of Bohemia, daughter of the emperor Charles IV., ventured notwithstanding, to appear as the patroness of Wycliffe, and the uniform exemplar in her own person of the cause of true piety. The reformer, when speaking of her, expresses himself thus:—"The noble queen of England, the sister of Cæsar, may hear the gospel written in three languages, Bohemian, German, and Latin; and to hereticate her on that account, would be Luciferian folly." She survived Wycliffe about ten years, and then left her exalted station on earth, which, notwithstanding, was chequered with many sorrows, to enter upon a nobler and happier existence. Her funeral discourse was delivered by the primate Arundel, who though a popish prelate, thought fit to notice this excellent queen's strict attention to her religious duties. "Notwithstanding her foreign extraction," he remarked, "yet she constantly studied the four gospels in English, with the exposition of the doctors; and in the study of these, and in the perusal of godly books, she was more diligent than the prelates themselves, although

their office and calling required it." This illustrious lady is rendered doubly interesting by other circumstances. She became as it were a link of communication, between the Church of God in England of her own day, and that which was to appear subsequently in Germany as the spiritual mother of the Protestant Church. On her death, it is asserted that her attendants returned to Bohemia, carrying back with them, the writings and opinions of the great English reformer, thus scattering the seed of God's word, and paving the way more plainly than had previously been done, for the introduction of the pure light of the gospel by Luther and his followers. While these different members of the royal family avowed themselves the friends and advocates of Wycliffe, it will not be a matter of surprize that others among the ranks of the noble and the learned became his partizans. He expressed his thankfulness that "many knights favoured the gospel, and had a mind to read it in English." Among the distinguished persons who favoured the doctrines of the reformer, were the earl marshal Lord Percy, Sir John Pecche, Sir Reginald Hilton, Sir John Trussel, Sir William Neville, Sir John Montague, Sir Lewis Clifford, Sir Thomas Latimer and Sir Richard Sturry.

Chancer, the father of English poetry, has also been reckoned among the admirers of Wycliffe, but it is to be feared that he did not emulate the reformer in the purity of sentiment in regard to the regulation of morals, and in the energy and zeal he displayed in the setting forth of religious doctrines in truth and gospel simplicity.

We have thus seen, that the patronage of many of the noble and the learned of the realm, was enlisted in favour of the reformer; and this is one very probable reason, why his enemies did not obtain the power to execute that vengeance, which it is to be apprehended would have been in accordance with their unholy designs. There were however, other reasons besides those which we have already mentioned, which had their origin in the peculiar state in which the political concerns of the country were at that time placed, and which we shall proceed briefly to state.

The papal schism had for a long season distracted the attention of all Christendom. Among the powers of Europe, which supported the claims of Urban VI., England took the lead, and the manner in which she executed her authority at this time, must have been peculiarly grievous to the reformer, inasmuch as it evinced

what a slender hold his principles and opinions had obtained, on the great body of his countrymen. Clement V., it will be remembered, had fixed his seat at Avignon, in France, and his interest was considered as identified with that of the monarch and people of that kingdom. Each of the popes had endeavoured to further their cause by the use of warlike weapons, and had urged their followers to take up arms in their respective ranks, by lavish promises of spiritual blessings to all who should be zealous in the cause, and threats of divine vengeance against such as should oppose them, or even remain neutral. These military expeditions were pronounced to be equally meritorious in the eyes of Heaven, with the ancient crusades undertaken for the recovery of the holy land; and to such as would contribute the smallest portion of their property for the furtherance of the cause, a remission of all their sins was promised, even if death should overtake them before they had entered on their martial expeditions. Urban deemed it expedient for the honor of the Church, that the crusade which he was about to send forth against his rival, should be headed by an ecclesiastic; and this honor he conferred on Spencer, bishop of Norwich, (England) a prelate, who in the insurrection of

the commons in 1382 had given proof of his love of military exploits. In order to secure the approbation of the English parliament, or at any rate to silence their objections, Urban suggested that the clergy of the kingdom should furnish one-tenth of the sum necessary to cover the expenses of the war, and further advised, that all which might be obtained from the laity should be voluntarily given, as an alms to the Church. So zealous was the pontiff in the promotion of his cause, that he dispatched more than thirty bulls to England on this subject, and the prelates and inferior clergy of the kingdom, showed themselves in many instances very zealous in furthering his object. "All who should die at this time," says the historian Froissart, "and who had given their money, were absolved from every fault, and by the tenour of the bull, happy were they who could now die, in order to obtain so noble an absolution."

The bishop of Norwich was of an age and character, which peculiarly fitted him for the post to which he had been advanced by the wily pontiff. He was young, ardent, of noble birth and enamoured with the pomp and pageantry attached to martial enterprises, and which in those days were considered as being in no degree incompatible with the discharge of the

sacred functions. He was moreover, very staunch in his attachment to the Romish Church, and ready to concur in any measures that might be devised for suppressing heresy. He accordingly entered with eager zeal into the designs of Urban. By means of the bulls which that pontiff had sent abroad into England, he raised a formidable military force with which he determined to invade the dominions of the French monarch. He landed at Calais, there purposing to wait farther reinforcements of English troops. Wearying however of delay, Spencer, in opposition to the dictates of prudence and the advice of his friends, entered the dominions of the Earl of Flanders, and assailed and subdued the tower of Gravelines. Here he committed the most cruel havoc, sparing neither age nor sex, and from thence he continued to mark his footsteps through Flanders with blood and rapine, although its prince was supposed to be a friend of Urban, and as such, should have been exempt by Spencer, from any aggression, since before leaving England, this bishop had sworn to confine his attack to the enemies of that pontiff whose cause he espoused. He was however, soon obliged to return to England, and all his premature exultation was soon checked by the cen-

sure and contempt with which he found himself subsequently loaded, and which, to one of his vain and irritable temper, must have been peculiarly mortifying.

It will be readily imagined that Wycliffe lent all his energies to check the torrent of public feeling which Urban had so sedulously endeavoured to enkindle. "Christ" said he, "is the good shepherd, for he puts forth his own life for the saving of his sheep. By forsaking things which Christ has bid his priests forsake, the pontiffs might end this strife. If manslaying in others be odious to God, much more in priests, who should be vicars of Christ." More especially did he take occasion in his treatise on the seven deadly sins, to express his condemnation of all warfare, unless in self-defence. "As to the title of conquest," he said, "we should understand that if God enjoin conquest, it may then be lawful, as in the case of the children of Israel. When a kingdom has been forfeited by sin against its chief Lord Christ, in punishment of such trespass, he may give it to another people. But men should not dream that a people have so sinned, and that God will thus punish them, except God tell it them."

But while he thus continued faithfully to expose the errors of the times, he was as we

have seen, upheld by the avowed favour of some high in state, and secretly countenanced by others, and was moreover sheltered by these very billows which were overspreading the religious community, whose influence he so much dreaded. Thus his bark, though its rigging had been shorn and tattered in the many storms which he had been called to weather, was permitted to reach its destined haven in peace and safety.

We have good reason to believe that "as the evening of life was felt to be descending on him, his devout contemplations of future blessedness, his zeal in the cause of Christian reformation, and his feelings in anticipation of the sufferings which his persecutors might be allowed to inflict on him, were all greatly purified and elevated." The desire of his heart seems to have been that in the employment of the varied talents committed to his stewardship, — whether as the reprover of sins or as one of the faithful shepherds of Christ's great flock, — he might be found occupying with those talents while life and energy remained to discharge his allotted work.

Towards the close of his long and arduous ministerial career, he was obliged to employ a curate, in the discharge of his parochial duties:

he however still continued to officiate when his strength permitted, and is said to have been engaged in the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, when the last great enemy laid his iron grasp upon him. In maintaining the gospel doctrine of the eucharist, he had laboured indefatigably, not counting his life dear unto him, if so be, that he might set forth the truth to others, and while thus showing forth his Lord's death in obedience to his commands, he was found by the messenger of his Saviour, and after a short mortal conflict, conveyed to that world, where he was no more to see through a glass darkly, but face to face.

His naturally vigorous constitution had, as we have seen, rallied under the former attacks of paralysis, but the last was so severe, as to deprive him at once of consciousness, though he survived two days. His fatal illness commenced on the 29th of December, and he expired on the 31st day of the same month, in the sixty-first year of his age.

This extraordinary man reached not the allotted age of our race, which might have been reasonably expected from his temperate habits, and naturally vigorous frame; but the strong excitement, both of body and mind, under which he passed so many of his years, very probably ten-

ded to wear away his physical strength, and caused his sun to set, ere that event might naturally have been expected; but says one of his biographers, "if his mortal existence be measured by the amount of his labours and achievements, he must appear to us as full of days, as he was of honours."

We have now, though in a brief manner, inspected the details which have been handed down to us, of this illustrious and remarkable individual. It remains for us, to endeavour to the best of our abilities, to attempt an estimate of his character, at least so far as circumstances will permit us so to do.

CHAPTER XII.

IN endeavouring to form an estimate of the character of Wycliffe, we are at once conscious of difficulties existing which have a tendency to prevent our forming so clear and accurate judgment as we should desire. We have no traditions handed down, no record given, by a faithful friend, by which the veil would be uplifted which hangs over him in his daily walk and conversation. We can read indeed the workings of his vigorous mind, in his voluminous writings which have survived to the present time. We can measure the strength and purity of his principles to a great degree, by weighing well the temptations, both of the world, the flesh and the devil, which he withstood in urging his onward course,—and while courageously proclaiming himself the reprover of a mighty phalanx of spiritual corruptions, and continuing unwaveringly to the last hour, to maintain the conflict which to human eyes seems to have been unequal; but we instinctively look for more; we feel a continual and craving desire to push aside as it were the haze and mist which encompass the object of our admiration, and to come into contact with him

as a creature partaking of our flesh and blood, feeling convinced that by so doing, our sympathies would be exceedingly drawn out, and our interest in his character greatly enhanced. We want to know Wycliffe as he was in his intercourse with society; — how that energetic mind conducted itself in its hours of retirement and of conversation; what were his habits, both religious, intellectual and moral; — how he behaved himself in private towards his friends, and how he exemplified his Master's precepts in his conduct towards his numerous, implacable and virulent enemies. All minutiae in respect to these numberless particulars which give such a charm and zest to the details of the biographer, are wanting in the present case, and we must be content to make our estimate of him under great disadvantages; as the traveller when surveying the ruins of Balbec, endeavours to form an idea of the original grandeur of the whole, from the fragments that still survive.

If there is any one feature of his character which arrests our attention more than another, it is his untiring energy of purpose and action. No sooner did his acute and comprehensive mind seize on the truth, whether in doctrine or practice, however encumbered it might have been with disfiguring errors, and however dan-

gerous might have been the task of separating them, than immediately with energy and decision of action,—not for a moment conferring with flesh and blood,—did he proceed in his work of reformation. Unawed by threats, and shrinking not from death, if that was to be endured in the discharge of duty, his watchword seems to have been, “onward!” and like the courageous soldier, if a breach was to be carried, or a wall broken down, he was ever ready to be the leader of “the forlorn hope” of religious patriots,—lending his arm to the dangerous work, even till the fumes of death came over him, to blind his vision and arrest his tottering step.

If his character was admirable for its energy, so was it for its consistency of purpose and of principle. When once convinced of what was the path of duty, he hesitated not to follow the dictates of conscience, and enter upon it; and having done so, he was not to be swerved to the right or to the left by the persuasions of others, or by selfish motives. For an example, let us instance his behaviour, when tempted by his illustrious patron, to a compromise of principle, by his command to abstain from any further pressing of doctrinal points. Wycliffe did not

persevere in setting forth the gospel doctrine of the Lord's Supper, without having courted the cost. He knew well that earthly friends would forsake him, but he consoled himself in thinking of one, "whose love sticketh closer than a brother's." He was no less consistent in the performance of duty, than strenuous in the enforcement of it upon others. He had asserted that the office of the ministry, when faithfully discharged, was the most honourable that could be conferred on man, inasmuch as he was thereby made an ambassador of God. And we find that the traditionary reports which are still preserved in Lutterworth with regard to the character of Wycliffe, and the only ones which are considered entitled to much credit, represent him as most exemplary in the discharge of his parochial duties,—devoting the early hours of every day to visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction,—to feeding the hungry, and to instructing the poor and the aged, and to tending the death-bed of saints and sinners. He had asserted that "if we hope to be rewarded in this life, our hope of heavenly bliss perisheth;" so did the doctrines which he enforced with respect to offices and emoluments in the Church, at once place a bar in the way to his

attaining wealth, or acquiring any authority, except such as must have been gained by his commanding character.

He is accused by his enemies, of being rancorous and abusive in his language and deportment, to all who differed from him. But before we condemn him for this violation of the precepts of the gospel, we must remember what were the habits and manners of the age in which he lived. It will be sufficient to call to mind the language made use of by his Romish adversaries, whom we shall find far exceeding him in the use of these carnal weapons. Such being undoubtedly the case, it would seem manifestly unjust to attribute to him as a personal defect, what was unquestionably in a great degree referable to the character of the age in which he lived. It is one thing to admit a fact painful and humiliating to human nature, and another to attempt to justify it.

With regard to Wycliffe's intellectual character, we must remark that it was eminently distinguished by originality. Standing aloof, as we have shown England to have done at this period, from intercourse with foreign sectaries, it appears that he became acquainted with the corruptions of the Romish Church, and prepared for the office of a reformer of them, by a

slow and gradual process of mind, and one in which he was little indebted to human aid. He saw no precedent for the office he undertook, in the history of his country. Grosstete and Fitz Ralph had indeed gone so far as to attack the outworks of the Romish Church, but they had not ventured to lay open, or rather were most probably not aware, of the abomination lurking within. He looked around him, and beheld the pure faith of the gospel almost wholly superseded by a mass of superstitious tenets and corrupt practices, bearing the name of religion; but wholly devoid of self-giving power. The simple rituals of purer days, had given place to heathenish and childish ceremonies, and its ministers no longer were to be found fulfilling the duties to which they had been set apart by their Master, the Great head of the Church. Neither were these evils of recent origin; but the lapse of centuries had tended to strengthen and confirm them. He therefore stood forth as the fearless reprovcr of all, to which time and habit, combined with natural corruption, had served to give permanence, and ventured to draw off the covering with which the oracles of truth had so long been shrouded, and with the words of inspiration on his lips, proceeded to declare what was truth, both in faith, morals, and reli-

gious rites and ceremonies. Neither did he do so, only when flushed with the novelty of the undertaking, but persevered in the work with a constancy which gathered strength as age advanced.

In judging of his literary attainments also, we are constrained to rank him high among the men of his age, though he could not of course compete in learning, with scholars of the present time. His election to the chair of theology at the most distinguished university of his country, and his appointment as the representative of his sovereign in so important a negotiation as that at Bruges, sufficiently attest the light in which his abilities for the discharge of duties, either of a civil, religious or literary kind, were regarded by his country.

Wycliffe was also eminently a patriot. His enlightened mind was not content with endeavouring to obtain for his country, a partial or temporary improvement in her condition. With a comprehensive glance he seems to have discovered what was defective in her civil and political, as well as in her religious affairs, and with him, seeing an evil, was but preparatory to making an attempt to remedy it. We have had occasion to observe in how many instances, Wycliffe's energies of mind were productive of ben-

efit to the cause of civil, as well as of religious freedom. Especially was he a benefactor to his country and the Church, in presenting the word of God to the English people in their mother tongue. He was accustomed to enforce upon the clergy, the responsibility which rested on them as ministering servants to the human race. They were by virtue of their office, he said, put in charge with the care of the sheep of Christ's flock, and bound to labour in season and out of season to promote their best interests; instead of doing so, the reformer contended that the clergy were the greatest obstacles in the way of social and religious improvement. He asserted that the papal power had strenuously laboured to effect one great object, and that they had not laboured in vain, for that the human mind in the commencement of the fourteenth century, and long previous, had been fettered in a state of degrading and most oppressive vassalage. With all the energy of thought and purpose by which he was ever characterized, he therefore called on the enslaved to arise and be free.

Wycliffe's personal piety has been rather uncharitably questioned by certain modern Protestant writers, as well as by his numerous enemies; but how can his undeviating consistency of character,—his laborious devotion to the

most self-denying and humble duties, equally remarkable in those degenerate days, with his zeal in attacking the corruptions of the wealthy and the powerful, — be accounted for except as flowing from deep religious principles? His numerous sermons which have come down to us, more especially when we consider the character of the times in which he lived, were exceedingly practical and spiritual in their tone of sentiment. He rarely concludes any composition however brief, without imploring the blessing of the Lord upon it, and he seldom alludes to his sufferings, without accompanying these expressions with some corresponding acknowledgement of mercies received, more especially of the great gift of God's love to man, the redemption of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. His piety appears to have been somewhat tinged with gloom, which is not to be wondered at, when we recollect how often his path was hedged with thorns, and clouds and darkness obscured his dwelling, which was never enlivened by an affectionate and sympathizing family, since in common with the clergy of his age, he lived a life of celibacy.

While contemplating all the claims which Wycliffe's character undoubtedly presents to the gratitude and respect of his country, as well as

on mankind at large, we feel as if it might have been rationally expected, that after the personal feelings of his cotemporaries had subsided, and the object of their enmity had descended to the silent tomb, that Time, the great healer of all human disturbances, might have exerted its influence in teaching the opponents of the reformer, to regard him with calmer and more unprejudiced feelings, if not to do full justice to his memory.

Very painful is it then to find, thirty years after the earthly career of this illustrious man had closed, the council of Constance, in 1415 collecting a number of obnoxious articles said to be contained in his writings and condemning them most unsparingly with his other publications. Not content with this manifestation of abhorrence of his heretical sentiments, the papal power proceeded still farther, in wreaking its impotent vengeance on one whose voice while living no threats or persecution on her part could ever silence, for in 1428 by the commands of the pontiff, his remains were disinterred.

“His dry bones to ashes are consumed
And flung into the brook that travels near;
Fortwith 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 dispersed.' "

WORDSWORTH.

Forty-four years intervened between his death and the offering of this contemptible and ridiculous insult to the ashes of our reformer, but during that half century a great change in the civil and religious condition of England had taken place, which it is not within our present design here to relate. It will be sufficient merely to state, that owing to the peculiar situation of affairs which followed, resulted from the long and bloody wars between the rival houses of York and Lancaster, and the accession of Henry IV. to the throne, the clergy became invested with increasing power and influence in the kingdom. Presuming on these advantages, they ventured for the sake of augmenting their power, to encourage the superstitious tendencies of the public mind, and at the same time to introduce a system of persecution more daring, more open, and more unrelenting, than any which had been previously known or felt in the English kingdom. But these violent measures,

wherever recorded in the history of the Church of Christ, are uniformly found to have ultimately defeated the object of those who employed them, since those who protest against erroneous doctrines from principle, will only become more decided in their opposition, the more they are convinced of the reality of the evil against which they are contending.

The persecutions which embittered, and most probably shortened the life of Wycliffe, were succeeded by others of a more sanguinary kind. The feeble-minded Richard lent the sanction of his authority to the efforts of the dignitaries of the Church, in correcting "all who should obstinately preach or maintain, whether publicly or privately, any conclusion, as from the sacred scriptures, contrary to the determinations of the Church, and who by the sharpness of their sufferings may be brought to repentance."

Among the sufferers from these legal enactments, the disciples of the reformer bore a distinguished part. These were generally designated by the opprobrious name of Lollards, and appear to have been very numerous, both at the time of his death and through succeeding ages. For, says Knighton, a cotemporary of the reformer, "they every where filled the kingdom ;

so that a man could scarcely meet two people on the road, but one of them was a disciple of Wycliffe."

Neither were they confined to the more humble walks of life. The illustrious queen of Richard II., Anne of Bohemia, as we have previously stated, countenanced Wycliffe while he lived, and after his death, extended her protecting care to his persecuted disciples. Many among the nobility emulated her example, while others from the ranks of the titled, the learned and the powerful, were found willing to lay down their fortunes, and even their lives, not counting these dear unto them, if they were to be purchased by the sacrifice of those principles, for which Wycliffe, their spiritual father, had been ready and willing to peril his own.

Among the most illustrious of this latter class of Wycliffe's disciples, was Lord Cobham, who suffered martyrdom for his attachment to those principles which the reformer had inculcated. This nobleman possessed superior talents and an unblemished reputation, and was highly esteemed by that sagacious monarch, Henry IV., notwithstanding this nobleman never attempted to disguise his religious sentiments. When that monarch was succeeded by his son Henry V., Lord Cobham's situation

became most critical. The new king had, while prince of Wales, been remarkable for his dissipated habits; but when seated on the throne, he had wisdom enough to see the fatal consequences which must ensue to his kingdom, were he to persist in his former course of life. He therefore, it is to be feared from motives of policy alone, and not under the impulse of sound and enlightened principle, determined to leave the ranks of dissipation, and from being one of the enemies of the established Church, became one of her most zealous advocates, and the upholder of all her tenets and practices, however corrupt.

Lord Cobham had excited the enmity of the clergy, as one of the leading men among the Lollards, and by the disinterested devotion of his wealth to the purpose of multiplying copies of Wycliffe's writings, as well as by the zeal with which he laboured to disseminate the principles of the reformer in every possible manner, in contempt of those solemn decrees which had condemned these writings and those instrumental in spreading them, to the flames.

Henry V. appears to have been at first reluctant to proceed to extremities with a nobleman of Lord Cobham's rank and character, and insisted that milder efforts should be used in the

first instance, and reasoning should be employed to detach him from the heretical party; if these failed, then the sovereign expressed his willingness to leave the accused to be dealt with, according as the wisdom of the Church might suggest.

Henry was deeply incensed at finding all his efforts ineffectual, in inducing Lord Cobham to return to the bosom of the Romish Church. He accordingly without any more apparent compunction, resigned his illustrious servant to the hands of those, whose authority was now equal to what their most implacable enmity could have desired.

Cobham was committed to the Tower, and subsequently brought before the Archbishop of Canterbury and the bishops of London and Winchester, in the chapter-house of St. Paul's, London. Even in this trying moment, when abandoned by all human aid, the courage of the illustrious sufferer did not forsake him. "You see me in your power," said he to his enemies, "and do with me as you please." He witnessed a good confession before many witnesses, and bore the following noble testimony in favor of the superior excellence of his master's doctrines: "As for that virtuous man Wycliffe, whose

judgments ye so highly disdain, I shall say here, of my part, both before God and man, that before I knew that despised doctrine of his, I never abstained from sin, but since I learned therein to fear my Lord God, it hath otherwise, I trust, been with me. So much grace I never could find in all your glorious instructions."

This speech called forth a number of abusive and angry retorts from his enemies, which Cobham bore with the utmost patience. He was again appealed to, and warned that the day was waning, and that it behooved him to make instant and implicit submission to the authorities of the Church. To all these threats and insulting speeches, he only replied in the same clear and dignified manner as before, "Do with me as you will."

The Archbishop of Canterbury then pronounced sentence upon Sir John Oldcastle, Lord of Cobham, as "a most pernicious and detestable heretic." The undaunted sufferer replied with calmness, that the punishment to be inflicted upon him could only affect his body; his soul he trusted was perfectly safe in the hands of Him who had created it, and who, he doubted not, would in His infinite mercy, and in the fulfilment of his promise, save it. He

spent the few moments which remained to him, before his recommittal to the Tower, in imploring the divine forgiveness for his persecutors.

By some means or other, Lord Cobham escaped this time from the vengeance of his enemies, and for a season found an asylum in a foreign land. The most odious reports were then circulated, by which, among other offences, he was charged with being accessory to treasonable designs against his sovereign. Even his most implacable enemies, in endeavouring to substantiate these charges, have had recourse to the most evident absurdities. However clumsy their tale may appear to the impartial reader of the nineteenth century, it answered the purpose of those who invented it. An act was passed evidently to meet his case, which identified treason with heresy; and when Lord Cobham was retaken about three years after, he was sentenced to die according to the mode prescribed under this bloody statute.

The courage of the sufferer had not lost strength by time, neither did it fail under the prospect of the ignominious and fearful death which now awaited him; — again he was heard interceding for his enemies. He was hung in chains as a traitor, and at the same time slowly consumed to ashes as a heretic. The spectacle

thus presented, aggravated as it was by the acknowledged worth and high rank of the martyr, served but to imprint on the hearts of those who were already favourably disposed to the reformer's doctrines, a more lively conviction of their truth and purity, and a deeper detestation of the cruel policy and unchristian principles of that Church — which could not only sanction, but enforce such cruel treatment of those who were merely guilty of non-conformity to her doctrines and ritual.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE OPINIONS OF WYCLIFFE.

MANY of the doctrines which distinguished the creed of Wycliffe, have been noticed in the records of his life. It is desirable however to give a brief summary of them in our concluding chapter, since they have been not only misrepresented by his popish enemies, but misunderstood by some Protestants, and wrested to his disadvantage.

It is important, in the first place, to remember that Wycliffe was designated as the Gospel Doctor, that is, a teacher who professed to draw all his doctrines from the oracles of divine truth. His faith therefore was derived from the scriptures. He maintained that "the law of Jesus Christ infinitely exceeds all other laws;" and that in the revelation of it, "all truth was either expressed or implied;" that each christian hath a right of private judgment, and that to him who seeks in the spirit which the Saviour hath enjoined, to know God's will, in order that he may faithfully fulfil it, that to him, but only to him, the scriptures will ever be a sufficient and unerring guide, in doctrine and in practice. He considered the canonical scriptures as alone

entitled to be received by the Church, and asserted that as all truth is contained in the Bible, so should no conclusion be admitted, unless it rests for support on that only sure foundation.

The authority assumed by the pope, by which he became invested with a right to interfere in temporal concerns, Wycliffe, as we have had occasion to see, wholly rejected; and in spiritual matters he would allow him no farther influence or power than could be proved conformable to scripture. He denied the infallibility claimed by the pontiffs, and proved that as inheritors of a fallen and corrupt nature, they were like all other men, liable to fall into error in doctrine, and into viciousness of life.

The prelates of that age contended, that they were not subject to the secular lords, so as to pay them taxes, and to aid the commons; and also that they were not amenable to any laws but those of the pope, who they said was their only sovereign. Wycliffe boldly taught that this was an unscriptural doctrine, and that to maintain it, was to magnify the decrees of man, above the commands of God, since the pope had been frequently known to grant his clerical servants indulgences by which they were excused from obeying certain commandments of Christ,

or granted absolution when they had transgressed them.

The Church of Christ, he taught, was "the congregation of just men, for whom Jesus Christ shed his blood; and not mere stones and timber, and earthly dross, which the clerks of Antichrist magnify more, than the righteousness of God and the souls of men." The Romish Church he considered entitled to no peculiar authority, neither did he admit that the pope was the head of the Church, and opposed extravagant claims to spiritual supremacy, whether in the persons of the pontiffs, the bishops, or the inferior orders of the clergy; while he uniformly declared in conformity with the scriptures, that the faithful ministers of Christ should be treated with peculiar respect, as the chosen ambassadors of God, and should be "cherished in love very highly for their work's sake." He asserted that the authority of popes and cardinals, of patriarchs and archbishops, and other dignitaries of the Church, was not recognized in the primitive Church. In his views of church government, he seems to have inclined rather to the opinions maintained by non-episcopal churches at the day, and in that respect differed widely from the German reformer.

Some of the enemies of Wycliffe charge him

with making the most flattering appeals to the secular authorities, in the hope of gaining them as his partizans, in waging his warfare against the power and possessions of the clergy: others, in opposition to these, have endeavoured to represent him as the abettor of doctrines unfriendly to the influence of the civil power. But these assertions, which would seem to contradict each other, have both been disproved by the most faithful and authentic statement of his sentiments on these disputed points, given by his biographer Vaughan, and substantiated by his own words. To the impartial reader of his writings, it will be manifest, that he set forth no doctrines which affected the legal rights of property. He maintained the supremacy of the regal authority over all persons in temporal concerns, even in the case of the clergy." "Prelates" he says "slander poor priests and other christian men, saying they will not obey their sovereigns, nor fear the curse, nor keep the laws, but despise all things that are not to their liking; and that they are therefore worse than Jews or Pagans." In reply to these charges, he admitted the fact that all men would not be servants to heathen lords, as being less worthy than themselves; neither would they be to christian lords, since they say that Jesus Christ

made all men free; "but," said the reformer, "these notions spring not from christian hearts, but are infused into the minds of those who entertain them, by the great adversary of souls, for the word of God uniformly teaches obedience to those in authority, whether to "the king as supreme, or unto governours, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evil doers, and for the praise of them that do well."

He maintained that the relation subsisting between the governing and the governed implied mutual obligations. The latter were cautioned against indulging a spirit of insubordination, or from seeking to redress any grievance by unconstitutional or unjust means; so on the other hand, were those entrusted with authority strictly cautioned against abusing their power in any degree.

Wycliffe also taught that the clergy should be subject to the magistrate in every thing which affected the social interests of the laity, and that the possessions of the Church not being held of the pontiff, but entirely of the crown, so was the sovereign at liberty to call on those invested with them, to give their share towards aiding the resources of the state.

The reformer has been much censured for the sentiments which he entertained with respect

to the system of tything and church endowments. He considered it to be a positive duty for the members of the Church to provide for the support of their pastors, but contended that this obligation might be cancelled by the clergy failing in their duty and falling into deadly sins. The custom of tithes had, he said, passed away, it being only a part of the Mosaic economy. He exhorted his hearers, in providing for their priests, "to do *their alms* for the love of God and for the help of their souls, and for the help of christian men." While to the clergy he said, "think ye then on this noble office, and honour it; and do it cheerfully, according to your knowledge and power."

It seems more than probable that Wycliffe continued to the close of his life, in common with the Church of Rome, to admit the sacraments to be seven in number, while he does not allow every one of them to be generally necessary to salvation. Baptism and the Lord's Supper he considered to be so. Transubstantiation, it is scarcely necessary to say, he denied. Of baptism, his views may be gathered from the following extract from his writings: "Baptism with water, is significant of baptism with the Spirit. In the latter, God christeneth the souls of men; that is to say, washeth their souls from

the uncleanness of all sin." Again; "Bodily washing of a child, is not the end of baptizing; but baptizing is a token of the washing of the soul from sin, both original and actual, by virtue taken of Christ's death."

With regard to image-worship, which the enlightened Protestant of the present day is accustomed to regard with so much dread, we find the reformer's views far less freed from the shackles of popish superstition, than might have been expected from the enlightened state of his mind on other points of religious doctrine. While acknowledging the God of the Bible to be the only proper object of man's devotion, and by setting forth the Lord Jesus Christ as the only Mediator between God and sinners, he did in fact condemn the invocation of saints, yet we find him for a long time cleaving so far to this error of the Romish Church, as to call in as a stimulant to his devotion, the visible representations of our Lord's crucified body, though this remnant of a corrupt faith, we have reason to believe he discarded before his death, since his followers were condemned for refusing to conform to the practice of bowing down before the crucifix. Moreover we find him late in life contending, that to gaze on an image was an act

very nearly approaching to actual idolatry, and not to be excused on the ground of the worship being rendered to the Being represented and not to the image itself.

He allowed the memory of the faithful to be cherished as incitements to virtuous living, but positively denied the doctrine which represented weak and fallible beings as having performed meritorious acts over and above what was necessary in confirmation of their faith, thus constituting a fund of good works available to the salvation of other of their fellow-beings.

There was one doctrine maintained by the popish clergy at that period, which gave them an immense hold, not only over the minds of the ignorant, superstitious and feeble in intellect, but over others, more enlightened in understanding and conscientious in practice, and who were found apparently reluctant, and without the moral ability, to shake off a chain which having been fastened on them in early life, adhered with exceeding tenacity. This was the doctrine of purgatory, which extended the influence of the clergy into another and untried state of being, by representing the state of the departed as not being in conformity to scripture, determined at the moment of their dissolution,

but as capable of being improved by the efficacy of prayers and other religious services performed by the clergy in their behalf. In the earlier writings of Wycliffe, his mind was evidently labouring under considerable obscurity on this point, since he quotes on one occasion with evident approbation some remarks of St. Augustine, the purport of which was that there was a purgatory out of which souls may be helped by the *alms and prayers of holy men*. But even then, he viewed with abhorrence the idea of the worldly and unfaithful clergy having any power to effect a change in the state of the departed, and represented the bestowing and receiving of money for masses for the dead, by the corrupt priests of the day, as a most "base merchandise." In the latter period of his life, his views became gradually clear on this point, and "for many years before his death, his allusions to this tenet are few and cautious, tending almost invariably to separate it from its corruptions, rather than to define its import or uses."

While he acknowledged that confession might properly be made to a priest, and when made in a contrite frame of mind and accompanied with the fruits of repentance, would constitute in his eyes a profitable religious duty, he yet ever averred, that to the Lord our God alone belong-

eth real absolution or forgiveness of sins, and that it was blasphemy in any priest to take upon himself the power of remission of them.

Fasting, when used in a proper spirit, and not carried too far, or presumed on as a meritorious act, he considered salutary; but that abstinence which subjects the body to severe suffering, he considered as a self-righteous attempt to emulate the life of angels, while as man there was still an allotted work to discharge, and a proper sphere prescribed by God. He declared the Romish Church unjustifiable in imposing arbitrarily upon all her clergy, lives of celibacy, while he yet never availed himself of the liberty to which he considered himself justly entitled, that of entering the married state.

We now pass on to a brief view of the reformer's doctrines on the fundamental truths of the gospel. No language can be more decided than that in which he expresses his full belief in justification as alone obtained by faith in the obedience and death of Christ. He declares that to that one only and all sufficient sacrifice offered on the cross, must every descendant of Adam be indebted, not in part merely, but entirely, for the removal of his guilt.

A prominent article in his creed was, the election of grace. "We are predestined," he

remarks, "that we may obtain divine acceptance and become holy; having received that grace through the humanity of Christ, by which we are rendered finally pleasing to God."

Dr. James says, "In the doctrine of merits, Wyclife was neither pelagian nor papist; he beateth down all of those proud pharisees who say that God did not all for them, but think that their merits help." Wycliffe says, "Heal us Lord for nought, that is for no merit of ours; but for thy mercy, Lord, not to our merits, but to thy mercy give thy joy. We are all originally sinners, as Adam, and in Adam; his leprosy cleaveth faster to us than Naaman's did to Gehazi; for according to God's teaching we are all sinners from our birth, so that we cannot so much as think a good thought unless Jesus the Angel of good counsel send it; nor perform a good work unless it be properly a good work. His mercy comes before us, that we receive grace, and followeth us, helping us, and keeping us in grace. So then it is not good for us to trust in our merits, in our virtues, in our righteousness; but to conclude this point, good it is only to trust in God." "As a right looking on the brazen adder saved the people from the venom of serpents, so a right looking by full

belief on Christ saveth his people. 'The righteousness of God therefore, and his grace, and the salvation of men, all thus moved Christ to die.'

While this illustrious reformer was thus explicit in the expression of his views on the great and fundamental doctrine of justification by faith, which has been most happily denominated the key-stone of the Christian arch, he was no less decided in his views of the progressive sanctification, which is ensured to the people of God by Him who has engaged to be to all who receive Him as a Saviour from the guilt of sin, a Saviour likewise from its power and dominion. "It is not enough" he says, "to bear the cross of a painful life, except we follow Christ in meekness, love, and heavenly desire. They are but scorers who to-day turn to God, and to-morrow turn away; who to-day do their penance, and to-morrow turn to their former evils. What is turning from God, but turning to the changing things of this world, to delight in the creatures, the lust of the flesh, and the works of the fiend? To be turned from the world, is to set at nought its joys, and to suffer meekly, all bitterness, slanders and deceit for the love of Christ. To leave all occupations unlaw-

ful and unprofitable to the soul, so that man's will and thought become dead to the things which the world loveth and worshippeth."

He warned his hearers, that in seeking and striving after lives of holy obedience to the will and commandments of God, they must expect to be much oppressed and hindered by him, who through all ages of the Church has ever been the adversary of our fallen race, and whose malignity and craftiness seem to be only increased the more his objects of enmity become aware of his designs, and desirous of frustrating them. "He [that is Satan] studieth to bring against us all manner of temptations and tribulations, according as he seeth that by the mercy of God we are escaped out of his power. For he seeketh nothing so much as to separate men from the pure and the everlasting love of Jesus Christ, and to make them love perishing things, and the uncleanness of the world."

This brief statement of the opinions of the illustrious reformer, and with it our present biographical sketch, we would conclude in the words of Mr. Vaughan: — "I have ventured to remark, that had Wycliffe been a less devout man than such passages show him to have been, he would not perhaps have been deserted by certain of his political adherents. It is equally

probable, that had his zeal been directed to devotional topics alone, as was the case with Bradwardine, St. Edmund and others, his days might have passed in comparative tranquility. But he extended the range of his theological inquiries much farther than such persons had done, and applied his doctrine so as to destroy the papal scheme of merit. It was thus he sought the religious improvement of mankind; and it was in doing this, that he wittingly braved the worst evils which the malice of his opponents could inflict."

THE END.

APPENDIX.

[A.]

Bede, the ancient English historian, to whose name, the appellation of *venerable* is usually prefixed, was born in the county of Durham, (Eng.) about the middle of the seventh century. From early youth, he was devoted to literary pursuits; and his most delightful employment, was the study of the Holy Scriptures. For a considerable time previous to his death, he was engaged in translating the Gospel of St. John, into the common language of Britain.

His death took place on Ascension day, under particularly interesting circumstances. On that morning, he expressed a wish that all his pupils might be collected around his bed, in order that they might write as he dictated. His youthful friends continued mournfully to discharge their allotted duties, until the afternoon; at this time, all of them left his apartment, to attend to the public religious services, with the exception of one young man. One chapter yet remained, and his attendant hesitated, at one moment swayed by an ardent desire to accomplish so precious a task — at another, overpowered by a sense of the solemnities attending the chamber of death, and feeling reluctant to disturb his beloved preceptor, when the sands of life were so fast ebbing away. The latter feelings were triumphant in his mind, and he tenderly suggested the propriety of laying aside the translation.

The dying man replied, "By no means; take your pen, but write quickly."

They proceeded in their work — after a while, Bede requested that his brother priests might be summoned. "I

would fain," said he, "distribute among them, such little marks of my kind regard, as God has given me. Rich men's presents are gold and silver, mine are only valuable from the affection which leads me to bestow them."

His couch was soon encircled by weeping friends, who each received in his outstretched hand, the memento deposited in it, by the dying man.

"You will soon," said he, "see my face no more in the flesh. It is time that my spirit should return to him who made it. The time of my departure is now at hand: I have a desire to depart, and be with Christ."

His pupil gently interrupted him by saying, that one sentence had not yet been written. "Make haste and write it then," he replied. When this was done, the expiring believer expressed his gratitude for being permitted to complete his work, making use of those remarkable words of our dying Lord—"It is finished!" He then continued, "Take my head, and turn it to the spot where I have been accustomed to pray. Glory to the Father, to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost." With these words he expired. His death took place in the year 735. His writings were in Latin. The most celebrated and valuable of his works is his Church History, embracing the period from the time of Julius Cæsar to his own age, "the only British monument of the Church in the seventh century." He also wrote commentaries on the Scripture, &c. &c.

[B.]

THOMAS BRADWARDINE was the chaplain and confessor of Edward I. of England, and for seven days, the Archbishop of Canterbury. He was one of those characters who appear especially sent forth by their divine master, to bear the symbols of peace to an ungodly and rebellious world, and carry as the insignia of their commission, the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit.

To such an one, the office of chaplain to a monarch possessed of the impetuous and warlike spirit which characterized Edward I., must have been peculiarly trying, and his gentle spirit appears to have found the path of duty strewn with thorns, and these often of the most formidable kind. Nevertheless we have honorable testimony, to prove that he shrank not from his allotted work, as spiritual counsellor of his monarch, and even when his royal master was glowing with the victor's pride, could venture gently to remind him, in the language of the prophet, that "cursed is he who maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord." It is equally honourable to the head and heart of Edward, that he received in good part, the faithful remonstrances of his chaplain, and instead of showing resentment at the conduct of Bradwardine, only redoubled the demonstrations of his kindness and affection. Indeed, so ardent was the friendship of the English monarch for his spiritual adviser, and so unwilling was he to lose his personal services, that for a time he refused to confirm the election of Bradwardine to the Archbishopric of Canterbury, and finally yielded only a reluctant consent.

"Bradwardine," says Le Bas, "was consecrated at Lambeth, in 1349: but yet can scarcely be numbered in the catalogue of English Prelates; for no sooner was he seated in his dignity, than he was removed, as we may humbly presume, to that blessedness of which his walk on earth was, to all appearance, one continued antepast. He expired only seven days after his consecration; and he is now known to us, not as the primate of England, but as the champion of the cause of God against Pelagius."

[C.]

ROGER BACON was born near Ilchester (Eng.) in 1214, of a respectable family. He received his education at the University of Oxford, and after completing his collegiate course,

went to Paris, which was at that time the resort of the learned of all countries. He took the degree of Doctor, and became a monk of the Franciscan order, after which he returned to England. His mind was of a high order, and his taste led him to the selection of philosophical studies. In this science, as well as in others, he soon so far outstripped the age, that he was accused of magic. His brother monks became jealous of one, who threw their meagre attainments so completely in the shade; they loaded his character with opprobrium—rejected his works from their libraries—and finally prevailed on the papal authority to imprison him.

During his confinement, Bacon composed one of his works, addressed to the pope, in which he used every argument which his sagacious and enlightened mind could suggest, to prevail on the head of the Romish Church, to attempt the work of reform, and to check the growth of scepticism. After the lapse of ten tedious years, a new pontiff was raised to the chair of St. Peter, who was prevailed on to release the imprisoned votary of science and human improvement. Bacon then returned to Oxford, where he passed the remainder of his life, in the enjoyment of his literary pursuits, and died there, on the 11th of June, 1294. His writings, which amount to more than eighty treatises, prove that he anticipated to a certain degree, many of the most important modern discourses, both in mental and natural philosophy, as well as in chemistry.

[D.]

THE commencement of the thirteenth century, was a dark period of church history, and the lurid glare, thrown over the moral landscape, by the horrid fire of the inquisition, (at that time recently introduced,) served only to make the surrounding gloom more dismal. Nevertheless

even then, some glimpses of a brighter day might be detected. There was one individual whose eminent piety and learning served to throw a mellow light over this otherwise dark period of British Church history; this individual was Grosstete, Bishop of Lincoln.

This extraordinary man was born in the county of Suffolk, (Eng.) about the year 1175. His parents are supposed to have been of humble origin, but by some means he was enabled to pursue his studies at the University of Oxford, where he acquired a thorough knowledge of the classical literature of the day, which was then in an imperfect state; indeed, so eminent did he become, in this respect, that he, like Bacon, became accused of dealing in magic. At one period of his life, he was an ardent friend of the mendicant orders; but after he was made Bishop of Lincoln, he had an opportunity of seeing his error of judgment respecting them. Towards the middle of the thirteenth century, two Franciscan monks were sent by the pope, to England, under a charge of raising money to a large amount, for the court of Rome. When these men appeared on their errand, in the diocese of Grosstete, he was greatly disgusted, not only with their grievous exactions, but with their insolent and shameless manner of proceeding. He reproved them to their faces, and would not give them the smallest countenance in their labours.

He endeavoured to take into his keeping, the large rents of the religious establishments in his diocese, in order that he might expend them in the cause of piety, instead of permitting them to be wasted in riot and extravagance. These well meant endeavours only provoked the ill will of the monks, and excited the displeasure of the pope. Grosstete was cited to answer for his conduct, before the pope—he obeyed the summons—as he withdrew, he was heard to exclaim, “O money! money! how vast is thy power every where! how irresistible at Rome!”

This good bishop was, on his return to England, excom-

municated by the pope; the blow, however, harmed him not, since he continued, until his death, in peaceful possession of his bishopric. His spiritual views became gradually more and more enlightened, as he advanced in his Christian course; and before his death, he was heard to express, as with a prophetic spirit, his firm conviction that nothing but the power of the sword would ever free the Church from her Egyptian taskmasters. Sighs and tears choked his powers of utterance, and immediately after, his breath and voice failed him. He died at the episcopal palace of Buckden, October 9th, 1253.

When Pope Innocent heard of his death, he expressed his pleasure, by exclaiming, "I rejoice, and let every true son of the Romish Church rejoice with me, that my great enemy is fallen."

—
[E.]

It is related that the interest of Gregory the Great, in the spiritual welfare of the Britons, was first excited by the following circumstances. He was, on one occasion, prior to his elevation to the papal chair, walking through the streets of Rome, and passing near the market house. His attention was arrested by a quantity of foreign merchandise, which had been recently received, and was then exposed for sale.

Among the articles, he observed a collection of youths, who were also for sale. In appearance they were so unlike the boys of Italy, that Gregory's attention was immediately rivetted by them; their fair and blooming complexions, their flaxen hair and blue eyes, excited his admiration and aroused his sympathy. "From whence come these fair strangers?" he anxiously inquired. He was informed they were Angles—"Angles, indeed they are," said he, "and should be admitted to the celestial company." He next asked from what province of Anglia they came;—

"from Deira," his informant replied. "They may rightly be said to come from thence," said he, for "*de Deira*, — from the wrath of God, — we should seek to deliver them."

It is said that Gregory's desire to evangelize the Britons was so ardent, that had he not been prevented by circumstances, he would himself have entered on the office of missionary to them. After his elevation to the pontificate, tidings reached him, that Ethelbert, King of Kent, had espoused a christian princess, Bertha, daughter of Cherebert, King of the Franks; and moreover, that the king, in compliment to his bride, had fitted up one of the churches of Canterbury which had been defiled by idol worship, and prepared it for her use.

Gregory eagerly availed himself of this intelligence, to despatch to Briton a missionary band of forty priests, headed by the celebrated St. Augustine. They landed in the Isle of Thanet in Kent, and being favourably received by Ethelbert, soon entered upon their appropriate work.

[F.]

THE illustrious Alfred was son of Ethelwolf, King of England, and was born at Wantage, Berkshire, in 849. He was blessed in having an excellent and pious mother, of whom however he was early deprived. This affliction, which is ever severe, was peculiarly so in his case, inasmuch as he appears from childhood to have been the victim of a most painful malady, supposed to have been an internal cancer; the sufferings incident to this disease, would of course have been greatly mitigated by those tender attentions, which can be bestowed by none so well, as by a beloved mother.

Thus did God see fit to imprison in a diseased body, an intellect, whose fame was destined to continue unimpaired after the lapse of centuries, and whose wise regulations introduced into the civil, literary and naval affairs of his

kingdom, are felt in their beneficial effects to the present day. The extreme bodily sufferings of this eminent prince, were mercifully over-ruled to the everlasting good of his soul, and we have reason to hope that when called on to resign an earthly and perishing crown, he entered on the enjoyment of another that is heavenly and enduring; but it was through much tribulation that he entered into the kingdom of Heaven. As he grew into manhood, he was continually harassed by the idea of becoming either a leper, or blind, or the victim of some malady that would banish him from the pleasures of social intercourse.

It does not appear to have been the selfish dread of personal suffering which pressed continually upon his mind, but the fear that he might by disease be prevented from discharging to his beloved subjects the duties of an affectionate sovereign, the desire of which lay near his heart.

Alfred's character is interesting, not only as an example of patient endurance of severe bodily affliction, but also as a most assiduous improver of time and talent. So great was his dread of illness, that to guard against it, he provided systematic employment for every hour. He divided his day into three equal portions—one was especially devoted to the service of God, and to such literary pursuits as he considered best fitted to qualify him for glorifying his Master;—another was set apart for the refreshment of his bodily powers by sleep and the taking of necessary nourishment;—the third was passed in attendance on his public duties. In order to maintain this accurate measurement of time, when clocks and watches were unknown, Alfred had wax candles made of equal weight, each measuring twelve inches in length, every inch being distinctly marked and measured. Six of these were provided for every twenty-four hours; and by their successive burning, Alfred measured his time. With all his care however, he found obstacles in the way of the systematic improvement of his hours; for although a prince,—yet living in a very rude age,

and at a time when glass was unknown, his residence was inferior in comfort to the cottages of the poor at the present day; he had no windows by which he could shut out the wind, and prevent that continued flaring of his taper in tempestuous weather, which would make it burn with unwonted quickness; he therefore bethought himself of shielding his candle in a lantern, in which thin plates of horn supplied the place of glass.

So little attention was paid to letters in that age, that Alfred, although the son of a prince, reached his twelfth year ignorant of the alphabet. He took however a lively interest in hearing the poems which it was then customary to recite in the royal presence. On one occasion, his step-mother, Judith, who was a French princess, produced a beautifully written poem; holding it up before the eyes of the young people of the court, she declared that the manuscript should be the property of that individual among them, who should first learn it by heart. Alfred eagerly inquired if she was in earnest. She replied in the affirmative. "Nothing more was needed by the resolute and intelligent boy. He applied himself instantly to learn his letters; nor did he rest until he was able to repeat accurately the poem that had attracted his gaze. He soon found his eager thirst after knowledge, met by a mortifying hindrance. Reading to any extent required a knowledge of Latin. Upon the conquest of this difficulty he soon determined. Instruction, even for a prince, was not readily to be obtained. Alfred's energetic character set ordinary obstacles at defiance; and feeling ignorance to be insupportable, he diligently set himself to work to procure instructors; and his literary labours fully attest, how effectually he profited by their assistance. When it is remembered that he was ignorant of his alphabet until twelve years of age, and grew into manhood before he became acquainted with Latin, his works will claim a distinguished place among efforts of the human intellect."*

* Soame's Anglo-Saxon Church History.

It has been asserted, but not on satisfactory evidence, that he attempted to bestow upon his subjects, the Bible in their mother tongue. The probability is, that his translations of scripture were not intended so much for the public, as for his own instruction and comfort, from time to time. He was, when seized with his last illness, engaged in making a regular version of the Book of Psalms.

This excellent prince endeavoured to protect the religion of his country, and we have reason to hope, that under his aggravated trials, he found faith in the Redeemer to be to him "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast." Many of the gross errors of the Romish Church he was ignorant of, and the opponents of some of them, he publicly patronized. With regard to image worship, we cannot but fear his views harmonized too much with those entertained by his countrymen at that period — a great change having taken place during the century or two preceding his birth, on that point. This excellent prince distinguished himself likewise as a legislator.

After a life of fifty-two years, most of which were embittered by extreme anguish of body, he expired in the year 901.

[G.]

THE first individual recorded as having laid down his life in Britain, for the cause of Christ, was St. Alban. During the persecution of the Christian Church, known by the name of the tenth, or that of Diocletian, the Roman possessions in Britain were brought under its cruel ravages. In the course of its progress, a Christian priest being pursued by his persecutors, came to the city of Verulamium, and obtained shelter under Alban's roof. The latter in receiving his guest, had been merely moved by pity and the desire to shelter an innocent man from oppression. These feelings however soon gave place to other and stronger

motives of action. The fugitive priest so faithfully fulfilled his duty, both in adorning the doctrine of God his Saviour, and in speaking of the blessed tidings of salvation, that the heart of his host was touched and softened, and in time he became himself a disciple of the faith which he had probably once despised. Soon the persecutors of the Christian Church learning where the object of their enmity was secreted, — entered the house of Alban. He in the mean time attiring himself in the garments of the priest, suffered himself to be taken, while the original object of pursuit escaped. Alban was carried before the public authorities, and because he refused to betray his guest, or conform to the heathen rites of the Romans, was scourged, and finally led to execution. The place on which he suffered death, became in after times a consecrated spot, and subsequently, one of the British kings erected on it an abbey, which still bears the name of St. Alban's, in the vain hope of atoning for a life stained by many crimes, by the erection of a religious edifice.

[H.]

ANSELM was born in Aoust in Piedmont, near the middle of the eleventh century. In early life, he was strongly disposed to religion, but afterwards became for a season entangled in the vanities of the world. He was first a monk, and then prior of Caen in Normandy. Being drawn over to England by his regard for Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, he became known to the monarch William Rufus, by whom on the death of Lanfranc, he was strongly importuned to fill the vacant primacy. Anselm's character was naturally mild and free from love of ostentation, and being moreover upright and conscientious in his religious feelings, it should not be a matter of surprize, that he for a time most resolutely resisted all attempts that were made to induce him to accept the chief station in the Romish

Church, under the reign of such a prince as William Rufus. "The Church of England" he said, "was a plough which ought to be drawn by two oxen of equal strength; would they then yoke him to it, an old feeble sheep, with a wild bull?"

After his elevation to the see of Canterbury, Anselm pressed the king to correct various abuses in the Church, and to call councils, and urged various other matters, the tendency of which was to enlarge the power of the Church, while Rufus was only desirous to abridge it, in order to augment his means of tyranny and oppression. This provoked the king, and he was still farther exasperated when Anselm demanded leave to proceed to Rome, to receive the insignia of his office from the pope. A contest was then carried on for a season between the monarch and this chief dignitary in the Church, and finally the latter retired to the continent, where in a retired monastery he devoted himself to writing and to his religious duties. He entreated the pope's leave to resign his archbishopric, but in vain. He pleaded that he could be more useful in a retired than in a public situation, but the pontiff would not listen to his reasoning. He continued on the continent until the accession of Henry I. This monarch made various attempts to conciliate the clergy, and invited the primate to return to his vacant see; he did so, and was received with great expressions of kindness and respect. When required to do homage to the new monarch, as was usual on such occasions, he refused, on the plea that he held his see from Rome, and not from the sovereign of England. The ecclesiastical dignitaries took Anselm's part, who retired once more to the continent, and there however Henry subsequently came to solicit a reconciliation. Anselm returned to England, where he died in 1109, in the seventy-sixth year of his age.

[I.]

RICHARD FITZ-RALPH was one of the most eminent men of his age. He was educated at Oxford, and by Edward III. raised to the archbishopric of Armagh. While resident at the university, he had occasion to see much of the wickedness and effrontery of the mendicant orders, and after his removal to Armagh, his further acquaintance with their evil practices served but to strengthen his prejudices against them. "I have," said he, "in my Diocese of Armagh, about two thousand persons who stand condemned by the censures of the Church, denounced every year against murderers, thieves, and such like malefactors, of all which number, scarcely fourteen have applied to me, or to my clergy for absolution; yet they all receive the sacraments as others do, because they are absolved, or pretend to be so by friars."

On one occasion, when he happened to be in London, he had entered so heartily into measures which had for their object the diminution of the power of the mendicants, that he was summoned to answer for his conduct at Avignon in France, which was at the time of which we speak, the residence of the pontiffs.

Fitz-Ralph was however, strong in the Lord, and fully conscious that he was in the path of duty. He therefore hesitated not to declare his real opinion of these miserable priests, even in the presence of the pope and his cardinals.

We are assured that from the time that he made this bold assertion, his life was one continued scene of hardship and suffering, the blessed effect of which was, to lead him from the studies then most in vogue, to an humble, habitual and childlike, searching of the holy scriptures. He passed seven or eight years of his life in exile, exposed to afflictions of various kinds, and expired at Avignon. When his death was announced, a certain Romish dignitary of the Church exclaimed, "a mighty pillar of Christ's Church is fallen!"

A precious testimonial to his purity of faith, has been

handed down to us, in one of his prayers, which is couched in the following language: "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 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 death!"

